

Dramaturgies of Mobility: On the road with Rob Drummond's *Bullet Catch*

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Abstract

Focussing on the author's recent journeys to the USA and Brazil as co-director of the touring production of *Bullet Catch* by Rob Drummond (the Arches 2012), this article draws on the insights and methodologies provided by John Urry's 'mobilities paradigm' in order to develop a dramaturgy of international touring. An autoethnographic methodology is employed as a way of mobilising this discussion, bringing theoretical reflection together with embodied, experiential travel. Building on existing 'mobile methods', autoethnography is presented as a model for researching this subject 'on the move', revealing the ways in which a performance can be shaped and interpreted in different ways depending on the conditions and processes of mobility.

Keywords

Mobilities Paradigm, Touring Theatre, *Bullet Catch*, Rob Drummond, Mobile Autoethnography

Introduction

When a theatre production goes on tour, it enters into a complex system of mobilities. Multiple factors become part of the process of cultural production including ‘ticketing, oil supply, addresses, safety, protocols, station interchanges, web sites, docks, money transfer, inclusive tours, luggage storage, air traffic control, barcodes, bridges, timetables, surveillance and so on’ (Urry 2007: 13). Objects, information and people are moved around the world as part of a vast mobile production economy, which relies heavily on information and communication technology along with the transport infrastructures that make such mobilities possible. This article draws attention to the *dramaturgy* of these elements of touring theatre, which are not always given critical attention due to a tendency to focus on ‘the raw theatrical event’ rather than the “‘material conditions” that shape both what appears on stage and how it is read, or understood’ (Knowles 2004: 3). Traditional scholarship tends to be limited to only one iteration of an individual performance, which is all too easily considered exemplary of increasingly far-reaching and diverse touring schedules. Broadening this field of research to account for multiple reiterations of a specific touring production is an opportunity to reflect on the ways in which a performance can be shaped and interpreted in different ways, depending on the conditions and processes of mobility, both at the level of production and reception. My key argument is that the mobile practices of international touring have a dramaturgical influence on the work that is produced and promoted to international audiences, and on the ways that audiences encounter and interpret those performances.

The centrality of mobility to various aspects of contemporary society has been recognised across several disciplines in recent years, from geography (Cresswell & Merriman 2011) to anthropology (Elliott & Urry 2010). John Urry’s *mobilities paradigm* offers an influential grounding for much of this work, providing ‘a wide-ranging analysis of the role that the *movement* of people, ideas, objects and information plays in social life’ (2007: 17). Developing this paradigm, a putative ‘mobility turn’ has now also established itself in theatre and performance (Wilkie 2014). This has most frequently been developed in regard to performances that literally travel within and between sites (Overend 2013; Wilkie 2012). Work in this area has tended to focus on ‘the embodied activity of movement itself and the experiential opportunities that open up’ through mobilising performance (Birch 2012: 199). However, less critical attention has been given to the dramaturgical implications of mobility for theatre-based productions. This article therefore aims to consider some of the ways in which the ‘mobility turn’ can offer insights into touring theatre.

Using an autoethnographic methodology, I present a personal perspective on international touring. Since 2012, I have worked with the Glasgow-based writer and performer Rob Drummond as co-director of *Bullet Catch* (the Arches 2012). During a four-week run at the Traverse Theatre for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, the performance won prestigious awards, received favourable reviews and played to sell out audiences. Subsequently, the Arches received numerous offers from international promoters and the production has been touring ever since. My focus here is on the first stage of this tour - a period of three months in 2013, during which *Bullet Catch* was performed at 59E59 Theatres in New York, the Famous Spiegeltent at the Brighton Festival, the National Theatre in London, the Spoleto Festival in Charleston and the Cultura Inglesa Festival in São Paulo. This was my first major experience of international touring and it revealed to me the complexity (and fallibility) of mobility systems and networks. My aim is to situate the first hand experience of the travelling practitioner at the centre of an enquiry into the ways in which touring theatre can be shaped and determined by these systems. This research is prompted by my direct experience of travelling with *Bullet Catch*, but my hope is that it will speak to the wider practices of international touring, prompting further reflection on this important dimension of contemporary theatre.

Martin Welton argues that much of the ‘work’ of touring theatre is carried out with the aim of producing ‘an event of place that elicits feelings experienced and initiated elsewhere’ (2007: 48). For some critics, this condition of reproduction leads to a problematic disconnection from the places on tour itineraries as theatre becomes a globalised commodity; the sort of work that is subject to the constant transportation from designer’s model box to rehearsal room, and from theatre to theatre, despite the show itself ‘deemed throughout to be an ontological constant’ (Wiles 2003: 1). For David Wiles, theatre has to connect to its space and become rooted to its site if the artform is to avoid commodification. Similarly, Ric Knowles warns against the ‘placelessness of disembodied festivals and touring circuits’ (2004: 91). However, these notions of disconnection and placelessness do not adequately account for the specificities of the relationships between the touring company and the people and places that are visited on the international festival circuit. Acknowledging the sense of ‘displacement’ that can result from a busy touring schedule (Knowles 2004: 89), this article argues that it is possible for meaningful relationships to be generated ‘on the move’ as a sense of community no longer relies on propinquity. I therefore consider the ways in which *Bullet Catch* responds to and generates relationships as it travels, mapping the specificity of individual encounters against what is frequently seen as ‘the depersonalised mobility of supermodernity’ (Germann Molz 2004: 179). This is one of the key ways in which a performance aesthetic is determined by the conditions of mobility. I suggest that *Bullet Catch* can be considered as ‘relational theatre practice’ as the performance text is flexible and can change significantly

depending on the relationships that are developed during, and around, the performance, as the production is reiterated under different conditions and in new contexts (Overend 2012; 2013).

It is important to acknowledge that there is a darker side to international touring practices and that the sector may be approaching a crisis of sustainability (Julie's Bicycle 2010). The experience of touring discussed here, and the particular circumstances that afford this mobile lifestyle, derive from a 'series of transformations' in professional and personal spheres due to the 'mobilisation' of contemporary social practices (Elliott & Urry 2010: 3). The environmental impact of such large-scale international travel is wide-ranging and severe and it is possible that we are now reaching a peak in dominant mobility systems with global oil supplies in decline and radical new transport infrastructures in development (Urry 2007: 278-285; 2013). Baz Kershaw argues that theatre has generally remained ambivalent to the potential for ecological disaster and its place within the systems that contribute to climate change, global inequality and environmental instability (2007: 10). International touring theatre can easily be accused of such ambivalence - the product of a 'compulsion to *mis-perform* ecologically' that may result from an increasingly uncritical position in relation to our climate (Kershaw 2012: 5). This article therefore concludes with a consideration of the dramaturgical effects of the impending changes in the mobility systems that touring theatre currently relies on and moves within. While the impact of mobility systems on touring theatre has received little critical attention to date, the material conditions of our touring practices are complex and changeable and they have a significant effect on the performances that tour within them. The ultimate aim of this article, then, is to prompt more research in this area, which moves beyond the personal case study outlined here in order to develop a clear understanding of the ways in which a contemporary mobile society shapes and determines the theatre that is produced and circulated within its systems.

Mobile Methods

In a previous article on mobility in the work of Kieran Hurley and Lone Twin, I discussed an emerging trend in contemporary performance to utilise and respond to the ideas and practices of journeys and travel (Overend 2013). I termed my research methodology 'travel ethnography' to describe a process involving 'numerous journeys to attend performances and meet practitioners, and [responses] to the people, places and events that I have encountered using a variety of research methods, from interviews to textual analyses' (Overend 2013: 371). This approach falls within the emerging field of 'mobile methods', as discussed by Monika Büscher and Urry, 'methods that plot,

document, monitor and juxtapose places on the go' (2009: 108). The mobilities paradigm constitutes a shift in the subject of social science, and correspondingly, a range of new methods are now used by researchers in this field as existing methods are no longer considered to be adequate tools to fully account for the systems and processes of mobility:

They deal, for instance, poorly with the fleeting - that which is here today and gone tomorrow, only to reappear again the day after tomorrow. They deal poorly with the distributed - that is to be found here and there but not in between - or that which slips and slides between one place and another. They deal poorly with the multiple - that which takes different shapes in different places. They deal poorly with the non-causal, the chaotic, the complex. And such methods have difficulty dealing with the sensory - that which is subject to vision, sound, taste, smell; with the emotional - time-space compressed outbursts of anger, pain, rage, pleasure, desire, or the spiritual; and the kinaesthetic - the pleasures and pains which follow the movement and displacement of people, objects, information and ideas. (Law & Urry 2004)

Büscher and Urry (2009) therefore present a review of emerging 'mobile methods', which can more effectively address the 'fleeting', the 'multiple' and the 'emotional' elements of mobility. These methods are ethnographic and include strategies such as following, walking alongside and travelling with people and groups in order to understand the patterns of behaviour and social practices associated with journeys and travel. Furthermore, the research process of 'following the object, the people, memories, ideas or information reveals the intertwining of diverse mobilities' (Büscher & Urry 2009: 108). This allows a systems-oriented approach that recognises specific mobile practices as part of a vast, global network of computers, digital storage and mobile technology (Elliott & Urry 2010: 22-23). This provides a valuable framework for a consideration of the diverse mobilities of a touring theatre production such as *Bullet Catch*, which opens up analysis to account for the material conditions surrounding the performance text.

As co-director of *Bullet Catch*, I travelled with the production after its initial run with the primary role of redirecting the performance for each new venue. Along with Rob Drummond and our stage manager, Deanne Jones, I arrived at each venue a few days before the performance (ranging from a large-scale proscenium arch theatre to a cabaret tent). While Deanne worked with the venue technicians, Rob and I made decisions on any changes that would be required for the staging, identifying any issues with sightlines or Rob's use of the stage and the auditorium. During the production work in the venues, Rob and I often worked with local education or artists' groups,

delivering workshops or talks. I would then lead a technical and dress rehearsal before the opening night and I would give notes at the end of each performance. This pattern was repeated several times on the tour and the number of performances ranged from three to thirty. For longer runs, such as the National Theatre in London, I was able to return home after the first few performances. At other times it was impractical for me to return to Scotland between venues and this meant my time was freed up to develop my research alongside the tour. As co-director I had a direct insight into the processes of production and reception surrounding the tour, as well as first-hand knowledge of the creative decisions that resulted from the context. Apart from Rob and Deanne, who were performing and operating the performance, I was the only person to experience *Bullet Catch* numerous times in different venues. This placed me in a unique position to analyse multiple reiterations of the performance, and to see these in the context of the mobile practices of the wider tour.

Whereas my previous research has focussed on the mobilities of others, this article shifts the focus of my enquiry to my own direct experiences. My previous ethnographic research into travelling performance becomes a 'mobile autoethnography'. For Tami Spry, the use of autoethnography as a research methodology is an opportunity to 'articulate the intersections of histories, cultures and societies through the critical representation of a researcher's experience' (2011: 33). Building on existing 'mobile methods' (Büscher & Urry 2009; Büscher, *et al.* 2011; Fincham, *et al.* 2010), this approach uses my own mobile practice as a method of enquiry, reflecting on my experiences and analysing the records, documents and objects of my journeys in order to develop a diachronic analysis that considers the ways in which the performance differed from performance to performance, and venue to venue, depending on its context.

Personal experiences of journeys have frequently been used to prompt theoretical insight, and have often drawn heavily on autobiographical details. Examples include Doreen Massey's train travel between London and Milton Keynes (2005: 117-125), and Nicolas Whybrow's flight to Berlin (2005: 27-40). Gayle Letherby reviews some of the ways in which autobiography can prove 'an illuminating methodology for studying mobility' (2010: 152). As Letherby's research and these examples indicate, the experience of being in transit often leads to critical insight and a productive work ethic (Letherby 2010: 167). Increasingly aware that my own most productive work was generally undertaken while moving between cities, or waiting to depart, the routes of my journeys began to work their way into my research notes. Without meaning to, I realised that I was writing a kind of travel diary that interweaved my abstract, theoretical reflections with the tangible experiences of my moving body.

Employing an autoethnographical method is an opportunity to instantly consolidate this creative, exploratory research process. Büscher and Urry do not give much attention to the autoethnographic approach - perhaps due to the 'risk of collapsing arguments into anecdote' (Welton 2007: 47) - but they do recognise the possibilities, suggesting that 'the researcher's own trajectories of travel and affordances may also be interrogated through diary research in order to examine how they are generated on the move and how they move along with those others that are being researched' (Büscher & Urry 2009: 106). While 'anecdote' is used sparingly in this article, there is an argument to be made for its value. The personal narrative presented here attempts to draw together my notes and diaries into a critical reflection on the practices of touring theatre. By allowing autobiography to coexist with a critical register, touring is presented as a personal and embodied activity which offers a range of pleasures, opportunities, frustrations and challenges that are not dissociated or separable from the performance itself. Furthermore, anecdotes allow for an acknowledgement of what David Bissell refers to as 'sensibilities of quiescence' (2010, p.65). This allows the recognition of 'periods of not working, of boredom or leisure time, which are as much a part of [the routine of touring theatre] as is performance *per se*' (Welton 2007: 47). This is a holistic approach to analysing touring theatre that recognises the importance of immobility, of waiting and dwelling, as important components of international travel.

My use of anecdote and autobiographical reflection has its roots in established social science methods of 'thick description', which aim to open up a space in descriptive accounts of cultural phenomena for 'the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals' (Denzin, 1989, p. 83). This methodological approach has to be flexible and open enough to capture a range of factors. Responding to a dynamic subject, mobile researchers need 'presentational styles that are responsive to the unfinished complexity of matter unfolding' (Bissell 2010, p.68). The life of the contemporary travelling practitioner is complex and heterogeneous and has a lot to tell us 'about the relationships between authenticity, originality, sites, spaces, places, languages, translations, transports, training, environments, and ecologies' (Rae & Welton 2007: 3). Inevitably, in responding to an international tour, this article will identify and respond to some, if not all, of these areas to different degrees. There are many more opportunities for future research here, but this autoethnographic account offers the first-hand experience of the travelling practitioner, and a direct insight into the multiple iterations of the performance text, as informative starting points.

Multiple Reiterations

Knowles discusses the itinerant lifestyles of touring theatre companies, identifying ‘a kind of healthy dislocation’ that results from the lack of a permanent venue (2004: 88). This ‘homelessness’ ensures that ‘in at least some of its senses space cannot be taken for granted, and it virtually guarantees, on some level at least, *engagement* with space’ (Knowles 2004: 89). In the case of *Bullet Catch*, the conditions of each new venue had a significant impact on the type of relationship that Drummond, in the role of the Edwardian magician, William Henderson, was able to create with both our audiences, and the volunteer assistant who shares the stage with him during each performance.

Bullet Catch is essentially a magic show that relies on a different audience volunteer for each performance. Early on, Drummond selects an assistant from the auditorium and the majority of the performance is presented and structured as Henderson’s final performance, interspersed with conversations with the assistant and the audience. Rob moves from ‘set pieces’ to sections where he is clearly playing himself (‘Rob’s my real name’ he clarifies after reading a health and safety briefing from the venue (Drummond 2013: 108)). The lines between fiction and reality are constantly blurred, but there are significant parts of the text that rely on a relationship building between Rob and his assistant. While this is clearly theatrically framed and contained within the structures of the narrative, the main enquiry of the performance is whether it is ‘possible to get a stranger up onstage and create a relationship with them in an hour’ (Drummond 2014). The high degree of input from the audience member means that *Bullet Catch* always contains unexpected occurrences and that the text is never the same for each reiteration of the performance. However, the specificities of each venue, and the conditions and influences of the touring schedule, mean that variable conditions of production and reception can have a significant impact on the content of the show. One version of *Bullet Catch* can be significantly different from another, and the dramaturgical influence of the tour can only be understood by considering a range of ‘iterations’ of the performance in different countries and venues.

For example, in Brighton, we had to use radio microphones in the Famous Spiegeltent to compete with sounds from nearby events and traffic outside the venue; in London at the National Theatre, there was an upper level of seating, which changed audience sightlines for many of the magic routines; in Charleston, the show was performed on a proscenium arch stage in a much larger theatre than previous locations, which changed the way that Rob was able to address the audience and move within the auditorium; and in São Paulo we used Portuguese surtitles, which limited the amount of ‘off-script’ improvisation that was possible. While *Bullet Catch* was created as a touring

theatre production rather than a site-specific performance, the specificity of each new venue has significantly impacted on the performance text, and the different conditions of reception have required a constant process of re-direction in response to specific cultural sites. This has kept the show fresh and unpredictable despite over a hundred performances.

However, for Knowles, there is also a negative side to perpetually touring work - a 'displacement' that inevitably impacts on the quality of the work due to the 'exhaustion' that arises 'from the constant need to find or create new places to perform' (2004: 89). Lacking a permanent home results in a 'constant, healthy, but nevertheless debilitating starting-from-scratch in which even the performance space isn't given or known' (Knowles 2004: 89). With the added pressures of long distance travel, and extended periods of time away from friends and family, travelling theatre companies are subject to the physical and emotional toll of a busy touring schedule. This condition is identified by Elliott and Urry, who identify the pressures and challenges in the lives of globals: 'whatever the more positive aspects heralded by mobile lives (and we do not deny that they are many and varied), we emphasise that life "on the move" is also bumpy, full of the unexpected and unpredictable, involving considerable ambivalence' (2010: 34). In the case of touring theatre, the challenge is to effectively negotiate the 'ontologically constant' performance text with the 'unexpected and unpredictable' aspects of the touring schedule and the company's 'ambivalent' relationship with a performance that is presented over and over again for months, or sometimes years.

Relational Touring Practice

Some practitioners and companies, such as Kieran Hurley and Lone Twin, have directly explored the ability of travel to engender relationships with the people and places that are visited, through the form and content of their work (Overend 2013; Williams & Lavery 2011). In these examples, the 'relationality' of the work directly influences its aesthetic, operating as it does within 'the realm of human interactions' (Bourriaud 2002: 14). However, the relationships generated through the wider processes of touring theatre are also key factors in determining the conditions of production and reception that surround the performance text. As Knowles points out, 'a wide range of material factors frame, contain, and contribute to the ways in which audiences understand theatrical productions' (2004: 5). Knowles therefore advocates a *materialist semiotic* approach that acknowledges that the meaning and reception of a theatre show can be significantly affected by its material conditions.

In this section, which begins with a descriptive account of my time in São Paulo in June 2013, I discuss how the relationships of international travel can have a dramaturgical effect on the toured performance text. *Bullet Catch* employs what Nicolas Bourriaud (2002) refers to as a *relational aesthetic*, as Drummond's connection with a volunteer assistant significantly influences the outcome of each new performance (to the extent that the climactic bullet catch stunt has not always taken place). However, the performance is also affected by the conditions of its production in each new cultural context, and to a great extent, this depends on the people that we meet and work with at each new venue, along with the briefer moments of connection with the audience, collectively and individually.

São Paulo, June 2013

After a particularly uncomfortable and severely delayed two-day journey from Charleston to São Paulo, we slump down with a beer in a hotel bar and attempt to relax. This is the reality of touring theatre – far from home, exhausted and disoriented, desperate for a drink. We have been travelling from place to place for almost three months now. For a few weeks in May, I returned to Scotland to direct another play, but Rob and Deanne have been on tour the whole time. As we adjust to our new surroundings, a television screen above our heads plays footage of police in riot gear closing in on a group of protestors. It looks like a scary and volatile situation.

Picking up on the clues of translation – a few familiar phrases and recognisable images – we soon realise that these scenes are unfolding as we watch and that we are only a few streets away. Nobody in the bar speaks English well enough to explain what is happening and our beginners Portuguese is limited to asking for directions and ordering food. Thankfully, smart phone technology brings Google to our aid. We learn that a few days before our arrival, the municipal government raised metro fares to 3.20 Brazilian reals – a raise of twenty cents (around five pence). This seemingly innocuous decision fuelled an emerging protest movement that rapidly spread throughout the country becoming one of Brazil's largest protests in decades. From the ostensibly clinical universality of airport lounges and hotel foyers, we have unwittingly stumbled into something real and urgent.

Figure 1: Protests outside the Catedral da Sé de São Paulo

Later, from the safety of a hotel room with views over concrete tower blocks and building sites to Ibirapuera Park, I watch hundreds of people drift by on their way to the centre of the action. I decide to follow them but soon feel out of place – an imposter in somebody else’s revolution. I see nothing of the burning cars and police brutality that is currently being streamed across the globe. Instead, there is a tangible optimism driving this mass gathering. Alongside political slogans and chanting, I see samba bands and dancers, balloons, costumes and masks. And everywhere, on walls, pavements, banners and clothes, the phrase ‘320 não!’. Someone holds up a sign, ‘Brazil Woke Up’.

At the Teatro Cultura Inglesa for the next few nights our audience is noticeably depleted. The theatre is not empty and our performance is well received but this is a very different experience to the tour so far. As millions take to the streets in a historically significant movement against the corruption of their government, we diligently plough on with a theatre show that we have performed countless times before in venues from London to New York. For now, we are culturally and politically disconnected from our environment. The most urgent theatre is not happening in this building – it is playing out in public spaces nearby.

At the beginning of the second performance – the first time on the tour that empty seats outnumbered occupied ones – the lighting closes in on the stage and the opening music begins. I watch from the back of the auditorium, waiting for Rob’s entrance. But it doesn’t happen. Turning to see an anxious Deanne in the tech box, I guess that the Brazillian Stage Manager must not have given Rob his call to the stage. I sneak out of the auditorium, run down two flights of stairs and along a corridor and find Rob, who has misinterpreted his call five minutes earlier. I tell him that the show has already started and calmly, slowly, he walks out to begin the performance. We are getting away with it, but I can’t help but feel that we’re struggling to keep up here.

By the time we got to São Paulo, after a long night’s travel, exhaustion had started to affect my mood. After the affluence and luxury of Charleston, the vast expanse of grey concrete that would be our home for the next ten days had little immediate appeal. While the hotel was reasonable, it lacked many of the home comforts that help ease the despondency that comes with being six thousand miles away from loved ones. This was compounded by an overcast sky and a noisy building site outside, despite the laminated information folder that boasted of the hotel’s sound proof windows ‘providing the choice for quiet moments and keeping our guests from being harmed by outside noises’. On arrival, I immediately accessed the free wifi and contacted home using

FaceTime. Not for the first time, I found myself relying on micro technology to connect me to people and places that were no longer proximate (Elliott & Urry 2010: 33-42).

Over the course of the next week, a small community materialised around the Cultura Inglesa Festival. As well as spending time with local artists and producers, a member of the Arches' programming team flew out to join us, and the cast and director of another Scottish production shared the same hotel. In São Paulo, the festival staff looked after us well. We visited local theatres and ran workshops for Brazilian students and practitioners; we were taken to a samba bar and out for meals. We spoke to protesters and learned about the situation in Brazil that led to more than a million people taking to the streets. Although the protests impacted negatively on the size of our audiences, it was a privilege to be there during what felt like a significant moment in Brazilian history, and to be experiencing everything side by side with the local people.

The people that we met during this leg of the tour made a big impact on us, and many of the relationships that we formed will continue to develop. Workshops and outreach activities are an important part of the Cultura Inglesa Festival and our work was extended beyond the presentation of *Bullet Catch* in order to engage directly with theatre makers, students and educators. Our experiences in São Paulo were a clear reminder of Urry's argument that mobility on its own means very little without the social relations that it facilitates, and that the purpose of international travel is often to 'engender and sustain social relations with those people (and to visit specific places) who are mostly not physically proximate, that is, to form and sustain networks' (Urry 2007: 196). Unsurprisingly, the networks of touring theatre often exist around international festivals and often the same people will reconnect in different countries on a regular basis.

This dimension of touring theatre is criticised by Knowles, who argues that international festival audiences represent 'no actual community or society in any recognisable "real world"' (2004: 89). A significant problem is identified with work that is programmed for these contexts, concerning 'actors and audiences losing cultural specificity, and with the generalising wash that can happen when work is too often or for too long removed from the specificities of its context and begins to develop a fuzzy universalism' (Knowles 2004: 89). The risk is that extensive touring, especially within 'the festival circuit', leads to companies 'losing touch with place'. Knowles (2004: 90) therefore advocates 'cultural interventions with particular, grounded meanings for specific audiences'. The international festival circuit is not considered an appropriate context for 'fruitful meetings across cultures and societies' (Knowles 2004: 91). In São Paulo, such meetings were certainly limited. Despite attempts to understand and engage with the protests and meet with local

people, we were ultimately experiencing the city as theatre professionals and spending a lot of our time with theatre makers, producers and funders. However, perhaps the audiences of the festival circuit do represent an ‘actual community’ in a very ‘recognisable “real world”’ that has been brought to critical attention through the mobilities paradigm. A form of communal itinerant spectatorship may emerge, in which groups of audience members engage with touring theatre through ‘a practice that can be as intuitive, cumulative and crafted as that of making performances, of directing and writing’ (Skantze 2010, p.7). In this sense, the audiences of international festivals may be reconceived as itinerant communities – temporary and fleeting, but something more than the generalised non-communities alluded to by Knowles (2004, p.89).

Rather than a ‘fuzzy universalism’ resulting from a disconnection from place, productions such as *Bullet Catch* aspire to a different sort of universalism that seeks points of connection and common ground with people from different places and different cultures while on the move. Dan Rebellato discusses various ways in which theatre is well placed to respond to this ‘cosmopolitan community’ (2009: 71). In *Bullet Catch*, the search for a shared sense of humanity is central to the narrative, as indicated by the final text in the form of a letter by Charles Garth – Henderson’s original assistant: ‘There is a point to all this isn’t there? And it’s each other’ (Drummond 2013: 125). These final lines comment on the relationship that Drummond has built with his assistant over the course of the performance, but they also reflect a key concern of the creative team as we tour the show, to build meaningful connections with the people who encounter and take part in our work.

My own experiences of international travel have revealed that important personal and professional relationships do not rely on prolonged dwelling in specific places, but rather can be created, developed and maintained ‘on the move’. Ultimately, sociability is now played out on a global scale as communities form across international borders, and ‘it seems implausible to argue that trust and reciprocity is only generated within propinquitous communities’ (Urry 2007: 200). This phenomenon is a key feature of our mobile society as living in proximity of the same community is no longer necessary for the acquisition of social capital. Rather than relying on localised communities, mobility is now generative of specific social relations as ‘the widespread *growth* of longer range mobility especially by car and air, as conferences, holidays, family connections, diasporic relations, and work, are increasingly internationalised’ (Urry 2007: 200). As with other areas of mobile life, touring theatre has been ‘internationalised’ for a long time now and a rich history of international touring and presentation includes the World Theatre Season in the 1960s (Knowles 2004; 89-90; Petherbridge 2002, pp.4-8) and Peter Brook’s International Centre for Theatre Creation/Research in the 1970s (Chambers 2002, p.384-5). However, the contemporary

scale and speed of mobile life is unprecedented and ‘people today are travelling further, faster and (for some at least) more frequently (Elliott & Urry 2010, p.ix). Our society has been mobilised on a global scale and it is within this dynamic, exciting and disorientating context that touring theatre now takes place.

In Transit

The logistics of touring *Bullet Catch* had become particularly challenging after the producers realised that it would be necessary to build multiple versions of the set. Tight transfer times between venues, along with carnet restrictions (the licence to transport goods between countries), meant that touring the set required a range of approaches. A duplicate set was built in Glasgow, which was used for rehearsals before touring the UK to venues in Brighton and London. Meanwhile, the original set was freighted to the USA for performances in New York and Charleston. Additionally, a third set was constructed in Brazil for our performances in São Paulo. Smaller items of the set, props and costume travelled with the team in suitcases and we also sourced expendable props in each new location. The complexity of these touring arrangements led to numerous challenges throughout the tour and problem-solving was a constant requirement. Repairs to the set and props were ongoing due to the wear and tear of regular travel, and this often relied on the support of the receiving venues’ staff. In transit, we constantly had to negotiate the transportation and storage of bags and boxes.

Figure 2: Rob Drummond on the set of *Bullet Catch*, New York 2013

Travelling to, and spending time in New York, Charleston and São Paulo, I became aware of the extent to which our mobility is predicated on other people’s immobility. All too easily, the cleaners, security guards, administrators, and bar and kitchen staff, who make international travel a possibility, fade into the background of our journeys, along with countless theatre technicians, ushers, caterers and managers. This is not to mention the illegal forms of mobility and immobility that are hidden from the ‘legitimate’ commuter. Urry discusses the airport-city as ‘the largest and most extensive immobility’, which can only operate due to ‘tens of thousands of workers, helping to orchestrate millions of journeys by air’ (2007: 54). It is worth remembering that without these temporarily immobile people and systems, our own international lifestyle, along with the audiences and practitioners that comprise the entire international touring circuit, would be impossible.

Mobile societies rely on complex systems running smoothly and individual travel is an act of trust that these systems will not fail. However, as any regular traveller will attest, these systems are not always reliable and personal schedules are often required to adapt. As a result, ‘movement capacities’ are necessary:

to walk distances within different environments, to be able to see and to board different means of mobility, to be able to carry or move baggage, to read timetabled information, to be able to access computerised communication, to arrange and re-arrange connections and meetings, the ability, competence and interest to use mobile phones, text messaging, email, the internet, skype, etc. (Urry 2007: 197-198)

For audiences and practitioners alike, the ability to move (or to choose not to move) now constitutes a ‘major source of advantage’ in a society that relies, more than ever before, on systems and processes of mobility (Urry 2007: 52). These important dimensions of ‘network capital’ were required time and time again throughout the *Bullet Catch* tour as we constantly made adjustments to the original plans of our journey. Dramaturgically, the effect was that of compromise on the original aesthetic of the production. When mobility systems let us down (a lost bag in Miami; a delayed flight in Charleston), and when the cost and practicalities of travel limited our choices (the loss of a floor cloth in São Paulo; the availability of a suitable firearm for the climactic bullet catch stunt), we were forced, often at very short notice, to make changes in the performance that required a high degree of network capital to find solutions and alternatives, solve problems, and maintain artistic integrity.

Decarbonised Touring?

My intention so far has been to draw attention to the systems and networks that facilitate the practices of touring theatre, highlighting the rich potential for new relationships and cultural exchange. However, while an expansion in the possibilities of international travel affords new opportunities for touring, there are also many problems and challenges to acknowledge and negotiate as we travel. Elliott and Urry refer to such contemporary mobile practice as ‘a mixed blessing’ as ‘experimentation and danger, possibility and risk, jostle uneasily in the making of mobile lives’ (2010: x). The choices available to us ‘within, or despite, the constraints of society and geography’ are many and varied (Cresswell & Merriman 2011: 5). This final section addresses some of the ‘bleak dilemmas’ bequeathed to us by a carbon-guzzling twentieth century (Elliott &

Urry 2010: 131). As we enter a new phase of mobilities, in which oil supplies are in decline and transport systems enter a process of radical reinvention, it is necessary to consider alternative futures. The main question to address is whether to adopt an uncritical position in relation to our touring practices, maintaining our current patterns of behaviour because *that's just the way it is*, or rather to consider alternative models of touring, aspiring towards an ecologically responsible, culturally sensitive approach to mobility.

In many ways, the choice may not be ours to make. If we have now passed the peak of global oil supply, the transport infrastructure that facilitates our international travel will necessarily change. Concurrently (and interrelatedly), climate change is leading to a new form of capitalism and the prospect of a culture of *decarbonisation* is becoming a reality as 'societies collectively [seek] a dramatic transformation of the entire global economy' (Newell & Paterson 2010: 1). While the exact nature of these changes is not yet clear, the mobilities system as we know it is clearly unsustainable. As a result, for Urry, 'the only possible way forward is through a pervasive powering down to a low-carbon civil society' (2013: 240).

How can touring theatre 'power down'? To some degree, this is already happening. It could be argued that whether by design or necessity, one-person, low cost productions such as *Bullet Catch* represent a shift in the touring economy. Are we now scaling down operations towards a 'decarbonised' society? (Newell & Paterson 2010: 7). If this is the case, then the ability to move becomes one of the key material conditions that effect the production and reception of contemporary theatre. Network capital therefore functions in a dramaturgical capacity as work is developed that is suitable for circulation within emerging low-carbon mobility systems. Decarbonisation of touring theatre has been strongly advocated and supported by organisations such as the British Council (Julie's Bicycle 2010). However, it is recognised that this will not occur automatically, but that 'reducing the environmental impacts from theatre touring will require the development of new touring models' (Julie's Bicycle 2010: 6). *Bullet Catch* does not address these concerns directly, and to date there has been no attempt to measure greenhouse gas emissions from the tour. However, certain features of the production (for example, a small company, an easily transportable set, and a personal connection with the audience) mean that the form and structure of the work offer a model for sustainable touring practices.

Perhaps touring theatre can 'root' itself more firmly in the places that it visits at the same time as it perpetually moves on? This is the model for Bourriaud's (2009) 'radicant' aesthetics; artworks that make multiple anchor points as they move. While Bourriaud presents 'where should we go?' as the

modern question *par excellence* (2009: 40), another pertinent question might be ‘what do we do when we get there?’ The *quality* of the time spent at each location is an important consideration as we adapt to, or prepare for, a shift in touring practices. Alongside performances of *Bullet Catch*, we have been involved in post show discussions, workshops and outreach work in various places on the tour itinerary. While this work does not guarantee *tout court* a positive relational engagement with the people and places that we have visited, it does at least indicate an attempt to move beyond ‘the totalising network of globalisation’ that determines some aspects of the international festival circuit (Knowles 2004: 188). In the case of *Bullet Catch*, the involvement of a volunteer for the audience for the duration of each new performance could also be argued to ensure that the performances are ‘culturally *productive* (rather than *reproductive*)’ (Knowles 2004: 188). While Knowles’ emphasis on the ‘local’ might be usefully reframed in the context of mobile communities of arts festivals, these aspects of our touring practice represent an aspiration towards radicant rooting or ‘meaning-making at the point of reception’ (2004: 188).

There are many different ways in which touring theatre could change in the relatively near future. I do not wish to claim the touring practices of *Bullet Catch* as prophetic or exemplary of these changes. However, some aspects of this production may be indicative of some possible shifts in the touring industry towards smaller-scale, culturally ‘rooted’ and relational performance events. In 2014, *Bullet Catch* continued to tour without me as the production visited Michigan, Wellington, Sydney, Hong Kong and Toronto. This model of intercontinental touring may not be sustainable for much longer but it will almost certainly change. Perhaps some of these issues will therefore come to be seen as more important in performance research and practice in coming years, and perhaps more research will start to pre-empt this shift? I am hopeful that others will take up this line of enquiry in productive and creative ways.

Conclusion

In 2013, I visited more places than during my entire previous career in theatre and academia. My journeys have resulted in the formation of ‘real world’ opportunities and relationships, many of which will continue to develop. Taking place against the backdrop of the mobilisation of contemporary society, and afforded by an increase in my network capital, the boundaries of my academic and artistic practice have expanded rapidly. I have now taken my place in a vast international network of mobile cultural practice. In this article, I have reflected on my experiences as a travelling practitioner in order to closely examine the practices and processes involved in

touring theatre. My intention has been to locate performance within the mobilities paradigm, considering the ways in which the mobilisation of contemporary society has impacted on touring theatre practice. I have also attempted to highlight key problems with this culture of large-scale international touring.

I have employed an autoethnographic methodology as a way of mobilising this discussion, bringing theoretical reflection together with embodied, experiential travel. My journeys to the USA and Brazil are offered as typical examples of contemporary mobilities. Building on existing 'mobile methods', travel autoethnography is presented as a possible model for researching this subject 'on the move', revealing the complex systems and processes that determine the practice of touring theatre companies. The *Bullet Catch* tour has revealed a challenging and disorientating landscape that can only be accessed through the acquisition and accumulation of network capital. The relationships and networks that I have formed during my travels have afforded me a range of experiences that would be unavailable to me without the opportunities of mobility. However, these journeys have also revealed the degree to which this mobile lifestyle is reliant on the systems of international travel, and when these systems break down, the ability to solve problems while on the road (or in the air) becomes paramount. This is a key aspect of network capital that cannot be bought or exchanged, but has to be learned and developed over time.

In the case of touring theatre, mobile cultural products such as *Bullet Catch* are subject to the complexity of mobilities systems. The conditions of production and reception that international touring creates can significantly affect the performance, which has to respond to the specific situation of each new venue. Nonetheless, my own experiences suggest that sociability is no longer reliant on propinquity, and that international networks and global communities now provide an important new context, and audience, for touring cultural products such as theatre. We now need to think carefully about how to develop an ecologically responsible, and culturally sensitive, approach to engaging with this mobile, cosmopolitan community.

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