

## **'If they can't come to you, go to them': Pivot-Spaces and Kinesthetic Spectatorship in Back Alley Parade Performances for Young Audiences**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The COVID-19 pandemic forced many theatre companies and buildings to reconsider how they approach engagement with audiences (Turner, 2021; Braidswood, 2021). Street performance became one of the go-to choices for reaching audiences and engaging them in a space that was available to practitioners. However, street performances could not guarantee reaching a large audience. Barbican Theatre Plymouth looked to challenge this by bringing a live performance to the homes of a community and young people to engage them in a theatrical event. Back alleys have been a site of historical play since the 1970s (Cowman, 2017) but this has shifted in recent decades. The question arose if this site could be reactivated as a site of play if it would reach a large audience of young people. This article looks to analyze this practice as a research project, looking at the Barbican Theatre Plymouth's second Back Alley Puppetry Parade*

*in June 2021. Building on McKinney's (2013) definition of a scenographic spectacle, this paper argues that the use of a pivot space became vital in establishing a different spectatorship, based on unruliness and kinesthetic experience. It generates ownership as young people choose where they would engage in the performance.*

## INTRODUCTION

Accessibility to theatre and young people engaging with theatre has been on the decline in the United Kingdom since 2009 with a decrease of 23.3% in young people engaging in theatre from 2010–2020 (Statista, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic held the potential to increase this decline further. The lockdown caused all traditional theatres to close, causing theatre industries' economic turnover in 2020 to drop 90% across Europe compared to 2019, thus causing a reduction equivalent to £32 billion (Lhermitte, 2021, p. 3-4). Due to this, industries and theatres looked at more cost-effective and COVID-safe ways to enable access to theatre and performances. With the potential to reach community safety and even challenge the engagement decline, many companies focused on street performance and alternative open-air performance sites to reach communities. Many companies became key components for many theatre companies to survive the closure of theatre buildings (Giley, 2021). Whilst outdoor performance has always been part of the theatrical ecology (Mason, 1992; Ferdman, 2018; O'Malley, 2018) conditions of the pandemic show greater light on the 'potential to reimagine what 'open-air performance' might be (Turner, 2021).

Clive Lyttle, who directed the Newham Unlocked festival, noted he is a 'big advocate for outdoor arts anyway. It is a democratic way of presenting art. That's one of the things about being able to perform in areas where people don't usually go to theatres' (Braidswood, 2021). Lyttle indicates that performing outside and in public spaces especially means you can directly form a link with audiences that usually do not engage with the theatre. David Calder (2020, p. 324) argues that performance in public space, especially street theatre, relies on the 'suspension or overturning of everyday rules.' Excitement comes from

performances in unconventional spaces by changing the use of an everyday space. Using performance to alter how a space is perceived or used can, in Calder's view, draw greater excitement from those engaging. It draws people's eyes and can encourage those who were not actively looking to participate in a theatre event to engage with the performance. Public space performances allow for accidental attendance, increasing the chances of access for communities underrepresented in theatre.

However, audiences are more transient with performances in a public space. Lyttle continues to note that 'when you're in a theatre, you've paid for your ticket and it's noticeable if you get up and leave. Whereas, when you're performing outdoors, the audience can just drift' (Braidswood, 2021). Lyttle argues that performance within a public space does not have the same hold over an audience. They might not have planned to engage with the work or may become distracted by something else. Long-form narratives might work, but you are not guaranteed that audiences will stay for the whole piece and thus receive the payoff from the production. Cordileone and Whorton (2015, p. 300) agree with Lyttle, stating that 'the informality of the proximity eases tensions and promotes an atmosphere of play rather than performance.' Public spaces fundamentally shift the audience experience to something different, something that requires even more engagement, and even more co-creation.

## **BACK ALLEYS AS A SITE OF PLAY**

For a long time, the back alleys that ran behind Victorian-Edwardian terrace housing were a site of play and socialization. Many families saw these spaces as key places for 'play, or chatting to neighbours', slowly becoming a safe social place for the communities that occupy them (Cowman, 2017, p. 234). Back alleys help generate social networks without having the implications that inviting someone into your house poses. Later in the 20th century, however, with car ownership on the rise, back alleys became threatened as town planning shifted in favour of the car under the name of economic profitability (p. 234). This was coupled with society starting to call children who were playing in their physical space behind their house gutter children or talking about gutter play (Read, 2011, p. 421). Read (*ibid.*, p. 425) argues that many families used this term as they 'were

more often concerned with [children's] presence as a theatre, prefiguring their later street lives as thieves and beggars, than with their safety.' Societies of play in back alleys led to children starting not to play in their local space. As priorities shifted to focus on motorization and the growing use of these spaces for refuse storage, the focus changed to moving childhood play to parks or what was termed 'safe play space' (p. 431) leading to a decline of back alleys these traditional play spaces.

Cowman noted (2017, p. 247), however, that back-alley spaces were an important space for mothers and children to socialize and play with their neighbours and friends whilst being close to home. Mothers in different cities fought for the right to create a play street, free from traffic and a place for the children to play safely. This shows that back alleys were always vital public community spaces and place for play. Paul Simpson notes (2011, p. 422) that street performance can and do change 'something to the way people relate to each other, even if this something is only fleeting and ephemeral.' Thus street performances could reactivate the history of play, imagination and community gathering in back-alley spaces. Simultaneously, the back-alley space brings a performance into these spaces to reach young people directly in their homes. It could be a rich performance space in which you could target and challenge access issues for a specific community.

This practice as a research article will analyze how taking performance to back-alleys would generate genuine engagement from young audiences. It aims to investigate if families are interested in being involved in a performance even if it comes to their literal back door. How do creative practitioners enhance a site that is mainly used for refuse into something performative? It uses a case study of the Back Alley Puppetry Parade which took place in Keyham, Devon on the 10<sup>th</sup> June 2021. A qualitative approach was undertaken for this puppetry parade, using practitioner interviews and audience notes to analyze and understand the creative potential of the back alley as a site of performance.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Using an exploratory case study methodology, this qualitative paper examines one performance of Back Alley Puppetry to analyze back alleys as a site of performance. As Arya Priya (2021, p. 96) notes,

exploratory case studies illuminate ‘phenomenon with the intention of ‘exploring’ or identifying fresh research questions which can be used in subsequent research studies in an extensive way.’ Interviews act as the backbone of the methodology, using reflective and rapid response techniques to understand their approach in generating work for a back alley space and their reflections on the performance. Consent for recordings were sought in advance and re-confirmed before the recorded interview. Four fixed questions were used for reflective interviews to gain insight into the creative approach for generating work for this space and considering audience engagement. Follow-up questions were left fluid to allow me as the researcher to respond to queries raised. Each interview lasted between thirty minutes to one hour. These were further supported by rapid response interviews which took place straight after the performance.

Practitioner insights are supported by noted observation and photography of the event. Houses along the parade route were sent both promotional and research information. Further verbal consent was sought from audience members directly and their carers, if applicable, to use certain observations. Where consent was not granted, photos and observation data were either destroyed or not collected.

## **BACK ALLEY PUPPETRY PARADES**

The original back-alley puppetry parade was a concept I had proposed in the summer of 2020 as a potentially safe performance site to reach communities and was performed in September 2020 in St Jude’s, Plymouth, UK. Puppetry has been used in recent history to diminish separation in defined spaces. Ana Diaz Barriga (2009, p. 146) used giant puppets at the US/Mexico border as the scale of the puppet diminished ‘the importance of the border wall and believed puppets could be a useful means to achieve this.’ The monumental scale of this puppetry allows to potentially distort spaces, especially space which have been clearly defined be that by a border rule or government rules that define your house as one of the only designated “safe” earlier. The parade combined community members, professional performers, and dancers alongside the creators to generate the event. The creative team, which was the same between the two parades, was led by me as producer and Ruth Webb as lead designer. Multiple other artists contributed to the delivery of the parade including Charlie Ranken as Movement Director, Zenna Tageny as Assistant Designer, Ben Isabel

as Junk Band Leader, Chloe Benbow as Jellyfish Designer and Maker, Vick Horan, Finely Newbury, Charlotte Kransmo and Helen Bov as Puppeteers for the event. The parade would walk 2.2 kilometres worth of back alleys, starting the event in the park next to the houses.



**Figure 6:** Back-alley Puppetry Parade Full Cast. Credit: Josh Marsh



**Figure 7:** Parade in Back-alley. Credit: Josh Marsh

Community members made up the majority the performers. Most of these performers were Keyham residents, complemented by young people who engaged in other Barbican theatre activities. Community

members were engaged throughout outreach workshops which took place on the 15th and 16th of May 2021. These workshops led to the creation of the prawns for the parade. Within the workshops, community members helped create the prawn design from scratch based on a simple design created by Ruth Webb. Each community member built their costumes. We wanted to give them a sense of ownership over what they were creating and performing, to encourage them to be able to engage in play with performers and spectators.



**Figure 8:** FishGo Disco & Jellyfish Puppets. Credit: Josh Marsh

Further performers came from the ReBels programme, the youth engagement arm of the Barbican Theatre Plymouth. I was the coordinator for these groups and had designed specific topics that would feed into the performance. The first group was focused on puppetry, which ran in Autumn 2020. As the performance was originally meant to take place in January 2021 the group schedule would have concluded with the performance. However, due to the second COVID lockdown which moved the performance, the group had an extra rehearsal scheduled in May to help get them coordinated as an ensemble. The second rehearsal, Junk Band Music, ran from April–July 2021. The puppet parade was their first performance.

The parade was configured in the following order from front to

back; *Fish Go Disco* fish, jellyfish, junk band, prawns and finally the seven-metre-tall giant fisherman. Whilst the parade did have a very strict distancing system to ensure alignment with COVID restrictions (including masks as part of all costumes), playfulness was brought in through a non-narrative. Person to person interaction was prioritized to enable creative interplay with spectators. Puppeteers were encouraged to interact and respond to what the spectator offering generating small moments of uniqueness. Street performance is built on flexibility of script as it allows performers to deal disruptions and turn them 'into entertaining diversion' (Harrison-Pepper, 1990, p. 114).

Conversely, as a creative team we wanted singular cohesive moment that brought performance together. This then acts as point of differentiation from the individualistic encounters between spectators and puppets that dominated the parade. The choreographed movement phrase that was performed at unspecified times throughout the parade, launched by a specific drum roll from the band. At this moment, the fisherman called for the parade to halt in the nets, with all sea creatures shouting "No" back to the fisherman. The giant fisherman would then lean forward to try and grab the prawns in front of him. This movement sequence added group cohesion in most of the improvised interactions with spectators along the route as captured in [this video](#).

## **DISCUSSION: PREPARING A SITE FOR CREATIVE ACTIVITY**

My main concern when first proposing using back alleys as a performance space was how we as practitioners could generate a vibrant enough feeling that challenges the dominant narrative of it being a refuse space. Whilst there is a history of these spaces being used as a site of imaginative play, there has not been a recent history of them as a performance site. The site has been used as an incidental space, where neighbors might greet each other, but no substantive play occurs. It can be both a social space, but it is usually encountered as an individual one. Some streets along the route even had 'No Ball Games' signage as you entered each road. Compounding these issues was the pandemic lockdown itself, which further distanced residents from the back alley as a social space as they complied with lockdown restrictions. At this time, it truly became a site where either people transitioned to their homes or a place to store refuse.



To understand the space, the full production team did six walks of the area, with two extra walks to remove discarded nappies, broken glass and other refuse. Whilst on these walks before the performance we only had one instance of seeing young people playing. Zenna Tagney, design assistant on the project, noted many audience members saw this space as ‘their back- alley, which is normally full of junk...they don't think about [it] on a daily basis’ (J. Woodhams, Personal Communication, 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2021). It is a public space that is used by residents mainly as a transition space. It is a place where residents move from one area to another. Figure 4 shows the space had become a space where bins are kept out constantly. The space is a functional extension of the home. Mason notes that many walkabout performances have a great ‘disruptive essence’ (Mason, 1992, p. 166). Even though the parade itself was transient, it held the potential to subvert the act of transitioning it by adding color, music and giant puppets.



**Figure 9:** Back-alleys of Keyham. Credit: James Woodhams

Walking around the space for the original parade route in September 2020, it became clear that the back-alley occupies a duality

that balances between a public and private space. I have named this duality a pivot space. Even if the resident owns or rents, the idea of a home or a home space embodies purely private space. People occupy and behave in their home space very differently than the public spaces. The vast majority of the back-alleys in Keyham are publicly accessible and do not have exclusive access for residents. This makes them a public space in which a different set of norms and behaviors are embodied by people within it (Simpson, 2011; Laurier & Philo, 2006). However, the back-alleys are not purely a public space, as there is an ownership of the space from the houses that back onto it. Cowman (p. 247) indicates these spaces were once seen as an extension of the home, a place of collective gathering. The back-alley space then embodies a pivot space. The communities that owned the houses around it claimed these spaces as their own, thus providing a sense of private space in which a young person has the potential for increased comfort in the space. However, as it is publicly accessible, it still holds some societal norms that you would find in play parks and high streets. The duality of types of space generates greater room for manipulation and change within a space. It became clear the space being so close to people's houses could lead to a dynamic engagement with the right stimuli as the production enters "their space." The pivot space's potential to generate an atmosphere of imaginative inclusivity and openness was an interesting area to investigate.

Seeing this potential within back-alleys enabled a clear approach for the creative team of what theatrical techniques deployed were key to accessing this duality. For both parades, we sought a creative subversive approach to manipulate the space into a site of imaginative play. Laura Kriefman, CEO of Barbican Theatre, noted that the space chosen determined the very nature of the performance itself:

With the puppets in the back-alley, [the] fundamental thing was being visible over their back fences as much as possible. And therefore, the scale of this thing is massive...that's where I think we started [...] I think [it] is a very interesting way of making, because we are not limiting any of our creatives and any of our young people, we're showing that creative storytelling or creative making is not limited to a nine-by-eight black box. (J. Woodhams, personal communication, 25<sup>th</sup> May 2021)

Kriefman is arguing using the performance space as the stimuli enabled a production design that would manipulate dimension of the back ally. The space presented the opportunity to choose giant puppetry that could reach over the walls to reach spectators' back gardens or even bedroom windows encouraging the performance to exploit pivot-space features, to actively subvert the space to help play with the public/private tensions that the space holds.

However, we did appreciate this subversion might not have been welcomed without warning. If the performance had just turned up without prior notice, it would have been very disruptive for the residents. Emma Miles points out that for young audiences 'it is not just the performance itself that is significant, but the rituals of theatre-going and the social meanings made by children about and through the theatre space' (Miles, 2018, p. 37-38). Miles argues that the act of theatregoing helps to lay the groundwork for the imaginative experience to occur and for young people to get prepared for the imaginative spectatorship. However, Miles notes that 'our understanding of 'the theatre' is as geographic as it is temporal' (Miles, 2018, p. 28). With theatre associated with a building even if the act can be performed anywhere.



**Figure 10:** ReBels Junk Band. Credit: Josh Marsh

Further to this, if the audience is not going to a production and staying at home, does this affect the ability to build excitement? The creative team thought it was important to generate a sense of theatre-going experience through excitement at the parade coming to the local area. To generate this theatre-going feeling, the practitioners devised three approaches to help ensure the community knew of the performance and how to engage with it.

The first approach was co-creating the performance with the community. Having community investment was vital to the rationale of the performance, a way to celebrate together safely within slowly relaxing COVID-19 restrictions. This meant we could start to embed the performance as community members could see their neighbors perform and give a sense of the upcoming performance. This community focus led to one community performer using the performance to help integrate themselves into the community, even stopping mid-parade from having a chat with their new neighbor.

Marketing ensured the community knew the performance and research would take place. We delivered flyers to every house on the parade route the week of the performance to let them know this was happening, with further posts on community social media pages. This generated excitement and interest from people on social media. The initial advertisement of the parade route even generated some inter-street rivalries, with some community members asking why the parade wasn't coming down their street or asking to come back to their side of the park next time.

Whilst the above measures laid the ground for anticipation, they did not generate that direct excitement of gathering for the experience. To generate this effect, the creative team knew we needed to signal of our arrival intimate arrival to the community. This was both a practical and theatrical choice as it both acted as the call to gather for the performance and warned spectators that the parade was coming down their street, as the advertisement could only offer a start time for the parade. It decided music was needed to help prepare and announce the parade's arrival. Due to this, a Junk Band was formed which was made up of the Barbican Theatre's youth theatre program. Beyond the practical effect of gathering spectators to watch the parade, the band provided performers with a rhythm and energy for the hour of the parade and helped to signal the joint 'haul in the net' moments. To help manage the parade they were placed in the middle to have an equal

sound to all performers. The need to increase the sense of a theatre-going event generated a greater richness to the sensory texture of the parade.

### Enabling Individual Spectatorship

Deploying an artistic form that could reach beyond the boundaries of the space helped initiate engagement for young spectators. Figure 6 depicts the way the puppetry took advantage of the pivot space to form an engagement with spectators.



**Figure 11:** Attendees Sat on Garage Roof Interacting with Giant Fisherman. Credit: Josh Marsh

The figure shows how a giant puppet was able to reach some young audience members watching the parade on top of a roof extension. The young audiences are smiling with one reaching for the puppets and others giggling at the sight. This shows the excitement at the strangeness of the theatrical event. As the parade entered the back alley it caused enough intrigue to not only pull families to their windows but for them to want to come closer to the event itself, to appreciate the tactility of the puppet. The puppet was able to bridge the gap between the functional space of the alley with the home space, playing with the



pivot-space nature to heighten this theatrical moment. Figure 6 was indicative of many moments of the audience coming to the parade throughout the parade.

Throughout the parade's procession, each spectator chose their view and style in which they engaged the parade. The variety of sites to engage the parade is clearly shown in Figures 7 watching from their windows in their homes.



**Figure 12:** Audience Watching from Home Windows. Credit: Joanna Cann

Figure 8 shows people watching from their back garden wall, being as close to the parade as possible. Laura Kriefman noted that 'it was amazing to see 1,000 people feeling safe and able to enjoy giant performance that came to them, and could reach them at their bedroom windows, their balconies or their back gates' (Giley, 2021).

The act of bringing a performance to the homes of young audiences gave them agency over their spectatorship, allowing each spectator to choose how they would want to engage. This not only provided an accessible safe Covid-19 approach but gave greater flexibility and ownership to individuals in engaging or not engaging with the performance.

This offer to take ownership of their spectatorship led some young audiences to using local knowledge to continue their viewing experience. Charlie Ranken noted that spectators chose to follow the



**Figure 13:** Spectators at Back Door Interacting with FishGo Disco Puppet. Credit: Josh Marsh

parade, 'running between alleyways to get ahead (J. Woodhams, personal communication, 18<sup>th</sup> June 2021) to see it again. Other spectators chose to first watch in their homes, and then walk to the 'crossroad bits, where there were lots of [spectators] standing and waiting' (J. Woodhams, personal communication, 18<sup>th</sup> June 2021). These crossroad sections in the parade were usually the spaces where the rehearsed section of the parade was performed. Ranken stated she was surprised at the spectators' desire to come to different sections of the parade to watch more. They said 'it was a bold move. Like, they wanted it, there was this desire to be part of this parade. And I think that comes from like a year and a half of, obviously, being in lockdown and not being able to engage with anything. But again, I think it just comes back to just feeling mentally safe' (J. Woodhams, personal communication, 18<sup>th</sup> June 2021). Spectators wanted to generate a unique interplay with the puppets and wanted the puppet to respond. This desire, enhanced by the pivot-space nature of the alley, enabled the young people to feel mentally safe to engage with the parade and respond the stimuli it was providing. The pivot-space enabled young people to actively choose how much and where they engage the parade, be that watching from their windows or actively following between streets.

## COMBINING OWNERSHIP AND SUBVERSION

Charlotte Kransmo, one of the puppeteers in the parade, noted that for spectators the spectacle was about 'bringing something like joy and something spectacular to an everyday place' (J. Woodhams, Personal Communication, 10<sup>th</sup> June 2021). Kransmo's statement acknowledges that the act of bringing a performance to a public space holds the potential to generate greater joy and engagement. Bringing a production to an unconventional space is an act of subversion, reconfiguring what happens in the space for the audience. Ruth Webb, the lead designer of the parade, agrees with Kransmo stating that:

...by [it's] very nature, [it] will be something that's unusual to face, which is, they have great ownership over it, especially children...we're somewhere where they play and walk down every day, I think they very much have a sense of ownership as a, you know, a street behind their house or street that where they walk to a shop. And suddenly, you've added this whole entire other layer to it. Yes, they're already in their comfort zone...what also works really well in the surprise element, where it's once again, it's that space, and then this event space, [then back to] being what their space always is. And suddenly, their status transforms. So, I think both meet them in a way that hopefully they feel relatively comfortable with. (J. Woodhams, personal communication, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2021)

Webb is astutely noting the benefits of using a space a young spectator has ownership over enables agency and heighten the usual with an overt colorful stimuli. This agency is enhanced as the performers were actively told to hold individual moments with spectators, to create an interplay with each of them. Being in a young person's home space, a place where they potentially feel comfortable allows them to dictate their experience and their encounter with the performance.

Boel Christensen-Scheel et al (2013, p. 128) agree with Webb noting that productions generate a deep engagement from spectators by 'both respecting and manipulating the exciting physical, social and psychological conditions' of the performance site. Understanding the usual use and conditions of a space, and then designing a production to juxtapose this enables a greater response from residents who are



shocked to see their local space being used differently; seeing a site they have ownership over change albeit briefly. Creatives further disrupt the nature of the performance by using puppets that reach over usual boundaries to maximize this engagement. It gave agency to the young person to choose how or where they wanted to engage where they saw fit and with minimal effort. Productions that use a public space that is known by young spectators increase the accessibility for audiences. David Micklem (2021, p. 7) states, 'this work is made for familiar spaces—urban and rural, public and private—it is better placed to respond to the landscapes, environments and the people who live and work within them.' The back-alley space was chosen due to the fact it could engage its audiences from their homes, their gardens, their local corner and their windows. They did not have to move to see the performance, the performance came to them.

Combining the ownership of the space and allowing the young spectators agency in the production gave the young people the confidence to explore a unique creative interplay with the puppets. Figures 9 and 10 depict young people interacting with the giants.



**Figure 14:** Participant Engaging Fisherman Puppet. Credit: Joanna Cann

Each figure shows the young person looking and reaching out to the fisherman puppet, aiming for some kind of connection with it. They both show a different engagement, but a shared joy from being around

the parade and the larger than life technique that they have encountered so close to home.

The ability of the giants to form these smaller personal interactions with young spectators impacted their response to the performance. Marc Estein (2010, p. 26) notes that for puppetry to be successful 'many minds are needed...to invent the performance details that make the shows so wonderful.' Engaging with spectators in places in which they already engage their imagination is thus key for spectators to see their giant as full living beings, that are evocative and stir emotion (p.28). These unique interplays were undoubtedly a key factor in the



**Figure 15:** Reaching Up to Fisherman Puppet. Credit: Josh Marsh

enjoyment of seeing, as shown in the figures above. I believe that this agency over the experience could only have been as successful as spectators had ownership of the space. We had designed the production to encourage these types of spontaneous engagement. However, just because the offer was presented to young audiences, did not mean it would be engaged with in this manner. The comfort of knowing space allowed combined with puppets allowed for their responses to be more spontaneous. I believe that to elicit this kind of response in a street performance would require greater amount of offers from the performer. Being in a pivot space, a space they already have a sense of ownership over, enabled a comfortability that enables

more spontaneous engagement without persistence from performers. Combination of the pivot space and subversion of the giant puppetry opened accessibility, comfortability and ownership of this different type of spectatorship experience to young person and their family.

## **A KINESTHETIC EXPERIENCE**

Figures 8, 9 & 10 illustrate how each young spectator was embodying a kinesthetic response whilst embodying spectatorship of the performance. Generating a performance that enhances the nature of a pivot space led us as a creative team to give performers creative freedom to form more spontaneous, natural and creative interplay. This, in turn, generated a different type of spectatorship. Joslin McKinney has described such spectatorship and events as a scenographic spectacle. McKinney (2013, p. 63-64) describes this theatrical experience as a production 'where visual images are the main focus of the audience experience.' McKinney (p. 68) continues to argue that spectacle performances generate an 'intense encounter between individual spectators and the construction [i.e., puppet]' that provides a stimulus for a kinesthetic empathic engagement. Kinesthetic empathy is a way to describe a spectator's engagement that is predominantly a physical response. Dee Reynolds (2012, p. 30) describes this effect in the following way: 'through embodiment, multi-sensory engagement both with the environment and with each other, participants...learned new ways of behaving and new ways of knowing.' The spectacle produces kinesthetic embodied response in response form the performative stimuli physicality within the space.

This embodied response is keenly shown in Figure 11. Figure 11 shows a young spectator and their caregiver being shocked as the giant bends down to them trying to catch them. Before this situation, the young person was calling out to the giant to try and reach him. As it got closer the sheer scale of the giant caused a small fight or flight response, an embodied primal emotion, that caused the spectator to recoil slightly. This then produced a fit of giggles from both spectators. Both spectators indicate pleasure with the playful shock of the giant scale. The joint visceral response increased their enjoyment as they were within the knowledge that they were always safe. It has been noted that 'children need opportunities to do things that are exciting and adventurous...in a safe environment' (Spencer & Wright, 2014, p.

30). Again, the comfortability for the spectator being in their home space, and the performers using pivot space increased the enjoyment of the kinesthetic spectatorship.

The pivot-space environment is a key part of a kinesthetic response. McKinney (2013, p. 70) argues the 'conditions for kinesthetic empathy are based on a tacit and embodied knowledge of the world.' Delivering a production in a space in which young people live day in day enables a greater response to this scenographic spectacle. Bringing in big puppets to an area young people use daily alters their usual kinesthetic experience of that space. The production prompted a different embodiment in the space thus generating a greater imaginative and kinesthetic response. McKinney (p. 74) continues to argue that 'the way a spectacle generates multiple fertile associations,

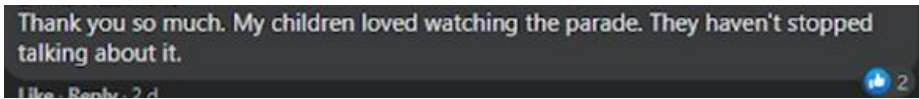


**Figure 16:** Spectators React to Fisherman Puppet Getting Close to Them. Credit: Josh Marsh

feelings and memories' is 'through unruliness that scenographic spectacle might be capable of deconstructing our relationship to the world at the same time as drawing upon it.' A spectacle provokes an embodied emotive experience based on a shared unruliness. Spontaneous moments and unrehearsed audience interactions based on shared unpredictability enhanced in spectacle through dynamic creative interplay. Ownership of the pivot space intersected with stimuli of the performance to generate a kinesthetic connection between performer and spectator which increases inhibitions to spontaneity laying the foundations for sustained playful encounter.

These conditions led to interactions to become more complex interplays. Performers and young spectators following the parade started to create a game where they and the prawns would go hiding from the giant, and hide behind bins, running behind the giant, pulling faces at the giant and shouting "behind you." These spontaneous games generated a carnivalesque feel to the parade, a joyful unruliness to the production. Comfortability in the space reduced the usual time that 'sort of contact and negotiation to take place' which in turn generates street performance to generate 'a more convivial and sociable form of public space to result' (Simpson, 2011, p. 427). The disruption to the back-alley space with the giant puppet parade and focus on individual engagement allowed for a quicker interplay to form. This interplay was built on unruly playfulness interchange between spectator and performer which holds the potential to increase the memories spectators were generating.

This legacy of the production from this unruly play is shown in Figure 12 which is a social media comment. It speaks to how the parade, even two days after the performance, had a lingering effect on young audiences' imaginations. Through kinesthetic engagement, resisting any form of narrative story, by focusing on the young people's individuality, the spectacle could provide the ability to look at a back-alley space in a different light. It enhanced the anarchic nature of street performance to a new level as a young person change a space they knew intimately. It encourages a young person to start to extend their boundaries of imagination beyond the walls of their home. It allowed them to, albeit briefly, view the back alley of their house as a space of creativity, loud, bright imaginative play at scale.



**Figure 17:** Facebook comment about performance on Barbican Theatre Facebook Page

## CONCLUSION

Back-alleys as a performance space provide a different kind of spectatorship. By reactivating its history as a place of play with a small act of subversion you could provide a performance that enabled a more accessible performance that put the young person's unique creative engagement first. Understanding the restrictive nature of the space, but also appreciating its unique aesthetic of a pivot space enabled a different spectatorship experience. The ability to break over the space through puppetry, prevent offers of spontaneity and be close to a young person's home space increase the creative potential and accessibility of the performance. Being on spectators' home turf, with creatives tapping into the pivot space and the young person connection that they already have with the space and enhanced it. It allowed for a kinesthetic form of spectatorship that could be embodied in the unruly spontaneity that led to a dynamic creative engagement that was individualised. It granted young people greater control over their theatrical experience and gave them agency in a space they might already have agency over.

Whilst responses, figures and analysis indicate to analysis presented here, a limitation of this study would be the lack of direct voices of young people. As this approach focuses on the creative view, a deep understanding would be needed to collaborate with the initial analysis present here. Whilst the performance connected with the past historiography of the site as a place of play to enable a dynamic creative interplay to occur, it could be possible the response was heightened by the months of lockdown that preceded the performance. Due to this, more research should be conducted to analyze if this response is consistent beyond the two lockdown parades conducted by the Barbican Theatre Plymouth. Further research should analyze direct insights from the young people for the performance itself, gathering rapid response data to directly understand the impact of a kinesthetic experience compared to other performance spaces.



Questions also arise on the long-term legacy of the production: how do spectacle productions live in the memory of a young audience would be interesting longitudinal data to analyze.

## SUGGESTED CITATION

Woodhams, J. (2024). 'If they can't come to you, go to them': Pivot-spaces and kinesthetic spectatorship in back alley parade performances for young audiences. *ArtsPraxis*, 11 (1), pp. 39-63.

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