

Shop Front Theatre

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The overwhelming sense of belonging

It's taken me a long time to narrow down a favourite memory. I still haven't really done it.

Over a decade of popping in and out of the space for various lengths of time making or seeing work, with Theatre Absolute, Talking Birds, F13, Pecha Kucha, events and workshops – working, talking, creating, sharing and eating with others. So much conviviality, dreaming, politics, building, gossip, warmth, friendship, and the overwhelming sense of belonging. All these memories converge, because it is the atmosphere and the togetherness that always stands out: the fact you could go there alone because you knew you'd always see someone you knew (generally Alan!!).

But some of the quiet times were really special too. Maybe these are my favourites: the before and the after, the catch-a-breath times. Possibilities & Reflections.

Early morning meetings with Chris & Julia about how we might configure the space for the next show, the challenge and excitement in finding the right patterns and relationships between space, objects, actors and audience; the logical progressions in the *Are We Where We Are* & *Humanistan* series; the opportunities to move the space around again and again, to do something different each time and confound (or raise!) the expectations of the regular audiences of this chameleon space.

And the tidying. The re-organising. The coiling of cables. The labelling of things. Asking again and again "How come people who hire the space never seem to be able to manage to put things away tidily where they found them?" But enjoying the reset anyway. Those quiet, liminal, focused, in-between-times where Chris takes Henry for another spin over the scratchy green carpet tiles. Tea, coffee and paper towels are topped up. Order is restored. And possibility stretches ahead.

Janet Vaughan
Talking Birds