

# Master Thesis

## Escaping yourself while embracing yourself



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## An ethnographic study of the regular visitors of the Performance Bar Rotterdam

Student Name: Christopher Levin Benedikt Stein

Student Number: 481843

Supervisor: prof.dr. EH Bisschop Boele

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication

Arts, Culture and Society

Erasmus University Rotterdam

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## ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study revolves around the motivation, meaning-making and social interactions of regular visitor of the Performance Bar Rotterdam. Findings revealed the visitor's perception of the Performance Bar (PB) as unique and meaningful and separated from their "usual reality", wherefore regulars seem to be particularly attached to the PB as a *place*. The promise to have a different night out, full of surprises challenges and play seems to resonate with the visitors. For them, the PB stand for a specific kind of humor, entertainment, art practice and audience engagement, which they can not get at any other cultural or nightlife venue.

Through the argumentation of differing values, visitors not only demarcate themselves from "other people", but also from PB visitors that are not considered to be "PB people". This indicates towards the idea of a specific core audience that associates themselves with specific values identified as "postmodern". Regulars claim to be more than average open-minded, curious, open, respectful and "free" than other people. Through the choice for and identification with the PB some visitors argue to express their "unique" and "authentic" personality that they particularly identify with the PB community.

To seemingly fluent switch from role to role as described by postmodern scholars the "protean self" and in the PB, the roles between the performers and visitors appear to be reversed and blurry as regular visitor struggle to distinguish one from the other during a PB evening. The hosts of the Performance Bar encourage every visitor to perform on stage and to be engaged in the evenings activities by designing a play like atmosphere through the methods of improvisational theatre. A so-called "magic circle" is drawn between the PB and the "usual reality"; a spatiotemporal materialized fantasy in the frame of performance art with unclear rules and loose structure, which is "organic but also planned." Visitors are invited to engage in the preplanned and improvised concepts, games and artistic activities proposed by the PB team and the curated performers of the evening. Social order and normality is constantly questioned, negotiated and transformed through the reoccurring play with social norms, boundaries, and awkwardness. This seems to create a specific social bonding between the visitor that leads to a "careless and free" atmosphere and a strong sense of community.

Results propose that frequent visits and engagement in the proposed play activities enables and triggers transformative learning trajectories as self-reflection and personal development

**KEYWORDS:** *Community-building, Place attachment, Protean self, Audience engagement, Self-expression, Social norms and boundaries*

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I very much enjoyed this journey. And I felt somehow privileged to spend my weekends at the Performance Bar, calling it my research. I remember these funny lines Daniel would throw me whenever he saw me enjoying myself “a bit too much”,- reminding me that I am located in a “study field” supposed to be a sober, serious researcher.

I was not; at least not in the last few months. I felt privileged because I could take so many valuable experiences for myself, so many important life lessons. I was inspired and enchanted by the people and performances, and the wonderful evenings I spent in the Performance Bar. And lastly, I was very impressed by all the interviewees, who added exciting thoughts and valuable aspects to this work. Thank you for your participation, curiosity, and reflections.

# 1) Introduction

## 1.1 Short background of study field

The Performance Bar (PB) exists in Rotterdam since April 2016, right from the moment, the two founders Daniel and Florian, decided to put a wooden lid on top of the open bar, consisting of a pile of crates made of steel wood and beads. Located in the Boomgaardsstraat 69, the PB is placed in the 'Witte de With' district, which is known for its artistic and creative output and impulsive nightlife. As the bar hosts say themselves, it is not easy to explain what's going on in that place, but I will give my best to guide you through it in this research paper.

Technically, we are talking about a bar that can transform into a stage. Literally, the barmen go out of the bar, put a wooden lid on the bar and performers take the stage. But that's just the surface. The PB embodies a community of people coming together at every Friday and Saturday night to improvise a play with identity and the awkward, a ludic negotiation of social norms and personal boundaries. As the hosts claim, "every night is different at the PB," and they themselves don't really know what's going to happen beforehand.

With a steadily growing core audience, they are constantly trying to test and expand social boundaries by provoking and challenging their audience which became sort of their trademark. While bringing joy to the crowd, their goal is also to add something "interesting" to Rotterdam's nightlife and cultural scene, which Daniel and Florian perceive as either too commercial or too distant and exerted. As they claim most art institutes and theatres automatically create a keen sense of the boundary between the visitor and performer. A boundary, with the two of them are eager to break by "forcing" its visitors as close to the stage as possible and by engaging them intimately and dynamically, provokingly yet empathically.

And there is prehistory to all this. Daniel and Florian are roaming around Rotterdam's nightlife for a while already. Together they were part of an association called the 'union of wild dancers,' which got invited to clubs and bars with the mission to 'turn up the vibe' and "re-engage people with their inner wild dancer" (Performance Bar 2018). Whereas Daniel has more of a theatre background, especially in street interventions, Florian started off his career as an officer of sailing ships, but soon after found himself in an autonomous art school. They both have an impressive record on art projects and theatre shows that they performed at several festivals. They also work side-lines as DJs, filmmakers or visual artists. The performance bar is their full-time job though. A job which combines their biggest passions and strongest artistic beliefs: The outbreak from the classical theatre scene, the creation of new levels of engaging the audience in a nonconventional way, anti-elite way, and the use of art as a transformative tool for self-development. While not leaving the most essential out of sight: The Joy. Having a fun night out, partying together with people, all within the frame of contemporary art.

How they started was more or less a coincidence. They were invited in Summer 2014 to the ‘parade,’ a traveling theatre festival, where they had been performing a small tent, called the ‘café ik’ on the campus. Without any budget, they found a bathtub and a musical organ for free on the internet, which they used for their performances at the parade and which can now be found in the PB. They invited their friends and together discovered new possibilities to work with an audience. After a “great and successful summer,” (Florian) they returned with a plain mission: To set up a sustainable, explorative performance art place in the city of Rotterdam. As they started looking for locations, they got in touch with WORM, “a non-profit, alternative cultural center” with focus on “experimental, new media art, avant-garde and underground art” (WORM 2018), since they were expanding their operation and had a new space available. Soon the deal was sealed. And the “age of awkwardia” was on the rise.

Their approach was the same approach they always had, trial and error, improvise yourself into the chaos and explore new realms of possibilities. In the first weeks, they collected information from their visitors, were eager to include them in the setting up the place and open for any idea and suggestion. Soon they discovered aplenty ways to play and fool around with their visitors and were able to build a customer relationship with a steady audience core. Supposedly there has never been a written plan; everything just evolved along the way. Was it only their characters, their previous life experiences and acquired performance skills that made it possible to establish the PB as “one of Rotterdam’s pillars when it comes to nightlife” (Ohana)?

Through my research, I intend to bring the subjacent concept and intrinsic approach followed by Daniel and Florian to the surface by connecting the experiences and meaning-making of regular guests with academic findings and putting them into a theoretical context. My research goal is to open future discussions about the impact and importance of a place like the Performance Bar on its visitors and the city of Rotterdam.

## 1.2 Personal reflections on pre-research phase

“Do you remember the first night at the Performance Bar and can you describe your experiences?”

This was the opening question I addressed to each guest of the performance bar with whom I had the pleasure to sit down for about an hour to listen to their stories from this ‘exotic outpost of the avantgardistic state’ (WORM 2018). I still have a quite present memory of my first time. It must have been around October 2017, when I trespassed the boundary into this ‘world of a materialized fantasy’ (Janpier). However, it took me some weeks to actually absorb the magic of this place. At the beginning I was not much impressed, to be honest.

As I entered the fore room, I couldn't spot anything special. I kept on walking and glided through a beaded curtain. There was the bar. Or wait. Was it the stage? A band was playing, and a neat video projected to the wall. I remember the laid-back vibe and that I felt comfortable, I had an enjoyable time. But besides the few people, I saw that were dressed up in 'extraordinary costumes' (e.g., one guy wearing a kimono with a 'barbie wig,' another one a construction worker's helmet and hot pants) there was nothing that entirely amazed me. Let's say; I was quite prepared for the ultimate blow out, my expectations were overboard. Because how often does it happen that someone tells you about a place that is supposed to be 'completely out of the ordinary'?

Indeed, I found this transformative element very interesting that they just put on a wooden lid over the open bar, which then becomes a stage. Still, it didn't seem like this remarkably extraordinary place to me. Until Christmas, I didn't go that often, and I remembered feelings of disappointment and frustration. I had expected something deeper, more sophisticated and more centered around 'true values' of avant-garde art. I was starting to get skeptical if this was an interesting research project for me, after all. I didn't see much more layers and depth beyond it being a bar which curates debatable performance acts.

My actual research then started in the middle of January, and from this time on, I started going more often. And most of the times I went alone (because I didn't find friends who wanted to join or because I wanted to experience it all by myself. There was no "distraction" by having to talk to someone), which was an experience that I haven't had before. I simply sat there, quite shy, mostly sober, just observing people and watching closely what Florian and Daniel are doing, how they engage the visitors and how those react to it. It started to get more interesting because I started to see multiple layers and complex processes being at work. The PB started to become this 'special, extraordinary and exciting place' that it symbolizes for me today.

### 1.3 Research questions and study outline

The same way PB constructs its evenings collectively with its audience, I tried to build this thesis 'collectively' with the input I gained from each of the nine regular visitor and four PB organizers that I interviewed. The study is therefore mainly based on their perception of their reality, their personal sense-making and their perspective on all kinds of social interactions that take place in the PB. As a theoretical framework, this study was very much inspired and influenced by the work of Erving Goffman (1959), and his investigation of social interaction and 'role-playing' in everyday life. It made leeway to the postmodern perception of the 'protean self' (Lifton 1999), which is described by high adaptability and flexibility of an individual's identity in fluently switching from one performed role into another. Also, the academic contextualization of normality, namely the social construction of social norms and boundaries will be introduced. Further to explain the concept of the PB and the social interactions between visitors themselves and the organizers, I rely on seminal and current literature on



'play theory', - the perception that humans are constantly involved in playful situation that constitutes a fundamental part of our identity and culture (e.g. Rieber 1996; Rodriguez 2006; Sutton-Smith 2009; Huizinga 2014; Henricks 2015). Lastly, to provide a theoretical context for the audience engagement, I will provide an introduction to the practice of participatory performance theatre (Turino 2008). This theoretical framework serves the purpose to gain deeper insight and understanding of the way the PB engages the audiences members into a sort of play with social norms, boundaries, and awkwardness, and further how the visitors perform and negotiate their "protean self", consisting of the multiple roles each individual is portraying and enacting in everyday life.

The interest in such play seems to attract a very specific core audience that is curious and willing to observe and engage in the theatrical activities-by the PB team and invited performers. As most regulars described, the PB became a "part of their life" and the preferred place to spend their night on weekends. My research will foremost tackle a more general question concerning the meaning-making and motivations of the regular visitors.

**Research Question:** How can the particularly strong attachment to the Performance bar as place and the embedded personal meaning and deeply felt values of the regular guests be explained?

Because individual meaning-making can be extremely complex and manifold, I, therefore, divided the RQ into several sub-questions and assumptions that help to structure it and to build an answer by building together several specific aspects that contribute to the meaning-making process. The structure and design of the thesis will follow the approach of tackling each sub-question in the analysis part, and then to interweave them in the conclusion part to provide a concluding explanation for the general RQ and the subquestion 3. To orientate the reading focus, for each subchapter the corresponding sub-question or proposition will be stated again at the beginning of each sub-chapter in the analysis.

As the findings of the interview analysis suggest, the regular visitors are being engaged in a specific entertaining, and joyful manner by the PB team and the invited performers. This approach attracts a specific core audience, to whom the PB represents a "unique place," perceived as an escape from the quotidian world, including the workplace and leisure time activities offered by the "mainstream culture" or "highbrow cultural institutions."

**Sub-question1:** "What are the ways and arguments through which regular visitors demarcate the PB and themselves from the so-called "usual reality?"

As it will be elaborated detailed and profoundly in the analysis, the hosts and performers of the PB use manifold and unconventional ways to engage their audience. Also, they expose themselves by acting out of social norms and common boundaries of shame and embarrassment. The performance of the unconventionality is realized in a "joyful and entertaining" manner which together with the influence of alcohol establishes a certain atmosphere and setting that enhances security and comfort.

**Sub-question 2:** “How are Daniel and Florian as the “designers” construct a safe and playful atmosphere in the PB that enables them to conduct a specific form of audience engagement?”

Florian and Daniel designed the PB as a place, in which they can expose themselves and act out of ‘normality,’ which causes visitors to encounter awkward situations. Those remind the audience of personal and societal boundaries experienced in everyday life, while also suggesting alternative ways in how to perceive and to approach such boundaries.

This research investigates the experiences of regular guests in dealing with feelings of awkwardness, a form of embarrassment that is caused by disrupting and crossing social boundaries and norms. The combination of placing them out of the ordinary in a ‘safe space’ and playful setting may lead to exploration, experimentation, and trespassing of social and personal norms and boundaries of socially controlled everyday life.

**Sub-question 3:** “How can the constant negotiation process with societal and personal norms, values and boundaries of the visitors and PB team be explained?”

The findings propose that the PB as it is designed by the organizers (“PB team”) is further shaped by its visitors (particularly regulars) and invited performers, who attribute personal meaning and attachment to the place through intimate social interaction, which leads to an atmosphere of particular social relatedness:

**Assumption 1:** The visitors and organizers establish a particular form of community-building every evening in the PB.

The construction of a safe space and temporarily community may encourage visitors to perform their ‘protean self’ by taking on roles and identities that are not accepted and appropriate in other everyday life settings:

**Assumption 2:** The perception of the PB as a distinct place from the “usual reality,” triggers and encourages its visitors to engage in forms of „self-expression” that are not socially accepted in other everyday life settings, which leads them to perform, what they refer to as their “true self.”

Lastly, the research investigates the possible learning effects and impact the audience engagement and playful atmosphere of the PB may have on its visitors and organizers and which societal implications may be drawn regarding the cultural and social infrastructure of Rotterdam.

**Sub-question 4:** Which are the individual learning trajectories and societal implications that can be achieved when frequently engaging in play situations in the PB?

Findings propose that the approach to awkward situations with an open mind may transform the perception of social norms, values and boundaries towards a state of normality that is constituted of specific themes and values related to the reality construct of postmodernity.

## 2) Theoretical framework

In this chapter, I will provide the most crucial concepts and theories which will be embedded in the analysis part to back up my findings and put them into academic discourse and theoretical context. An overarching summary of all the introduced concepts and theories will be provided in the end of this chapter.

The first subchapter will discuss the presentation and performance of the “self” in everyday life (Goffman 1959) and the way people change and adapt their behaviour according to various situation, contexts and social settings. What do people mean when they say they have a ‘role to perform’ or they want to ‘develop themselves’? What do we mean when we refer to a person’s status? And what is our identity composed of? I will introduce multiple concepts as “self,” “identity,” “status” and “role,” which are crucial for the understanding of understanding the social interactions and “self-performance” of regular guests of the PB. These concepts are rather complex and difficult to distinguish from one another, as also scholars use them quite variable and interchangeably. (Sarangi 2010). To guide the reader through the analytic description of the visitor expression of their “self,” their use of role-playing and negotiating of their identity, I intend to provide a clear and differentiated account of the used concepts. Further, the academically constructed concepts of the “protean self” in “postmodern times,” will be introduced to explain the performance of the “self” in specific social groups in mostly Western, modern societies (Sökefeld 1999; Lifton 1999; Sarangi 2010).

I will begin by introducing Ervin Goffman, a Canadian sociologist who coined the debate about self, identity, status, and social roles of the last century.

### 2.1 Social acting and theatrical acting

#### **The world is a stage**

Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical approach contains careful investigations of ritual performances and interaction in everyday life, and his concept of self-representation and role performing, have profoundly influenced new sociological approaches (Grazian 2007). At the latest since the models of Goffman in 1959, dramaturges, psychologists, and social scientists are dealing with the differences between the quotidian and the theater world and whether the performance of everyday life follows similar processes and patterns as the life of the actors on stage (Goffman 1959). The inherent psychology of acting can explain us a lot about social behavior in everyday life and the conception of

the self, as argued by Goffman (1959). As well as social actors, theatre actors integrate the internal and external psychological functions inherent in social relationships, which makes it possible to examine social interaction from another new perspective, claims Walsh-Bowers (2006). A social interaction means the process by which people (re-) act in relation to each other and can be found anywhere within a social structure, which sets directions to and limits social behavior (Ashforth & Mael 1989). Goffman understood such social interactions as if they were plays on a theatrical stage, on which the actors perform roles for each other with the goal of keeping in line with the expectations of the audience. For that to happen, individuals tend to give an idealized portrayal of themselves in everyday interactions and want to keep up the impression by using “sign vehicles” and “props,” which include their language but also nonverbal communication, e.g., their clothing or gestures (Goffman 1959). Goffman’s view is that the differences between the quotidian world and theatre are accidental, meaning that playing a role in one’s daily life is like being an actor on stage. For Goffman, there is no such thing as a “true self,” no identifiable performer behind the roles. Rather, the role becomes the performer, by which he challenged the idea that each of us has a fixed character or a psychological identity.

He further explicated that people are performing each role according to the status related to it. A status set describes all the positions one holds in a society or social group and is part of one’s identity. Sociologists differ between ascribed status (gender, race, age, sexual orientation etc.) of which a person has no choice since they are either assigned at birth or involuntarily later in life. And secondly, the achieved or chosen status, (professions, e.g., doctor and patient; actor and audience) which had been accomplished or obtained with at least some effort on the person’s part (Ashforth & Mael 1989). Hence the status describes a position in the social hierarchy, whereby roles are the sets of behaviors, obligations, and privileges that go with that status (Ashforth & Mael 1989). In short: people *hold* a status, but they *perform* a role. Together they constitute the identity of a person, the “self” (how we see ourselves) and the “social” (how others see us) one. Sticking to Goffman, performers then try to express a one-sided personality in social situations, pretending that their projected character or role is the only one to them. However, has a person “as many different social selves as there are distinct groups of persons about whose opinion he cares,” states William James (James cited in Goffman 1959: 57).

Goffman calls it “*audience segregation*” when he describes how we take on specific roles in a specific setting that we wouldn’t take on in other settings with other people. Whenever the setting for social interaction changes though, our assumed roles might not fit anymore which can make it “awkward” for people because the behavioral expectations became unclear (Ashforth & Mael 1989). For example, when we assume the status of an audience member in a traditional theatre, this role of a passive consumer comes into conflict in the setting of the Performance Bar (PB), in which participation and engagement is expected of one. We face conflicting expectations for the performance

of our status or might feel strained because we face difficulties to meet the responsibilities and expectations of that particular role (Ashforth & Mael 1989).

In Goffman's words, we lose our *artistic imagery*, which 'prepares us for the fact that a single note off key can disrupt the tone of an entire performance' (Goffman 1959: 52). By this, he means unmeant gestures, loss of muscular control, being too little or too much concerned with the audience interaction or finding oneself in an inadequate setting that mislead the otherwise fixed dramaturgical direction of the performance, by taking unexpected turns. In the PB it seems that such behavioral mistakes are allowed and slipping out of expected roles even desired and encouraged. However, this can cause confusion, or nuisance and lead to "quitting the role" and leaving the situation, so basically if one would interrupt a role performance or simply walk out of the PB (Goffman 1959).

### **Distinguishing Theatre Acting and Social Acting**

With his dramaturgical metaphor, Goffman (1959) delineated the adoption and performance of multiple roles, the negotiation of social status, and the impact of these role-plays and situational demands on social identity. However, Richard Walsh-Bowers (2006) questioned this perception drastically. Though he claims that theatre acting resembles some elements from social acting his stand is that the theatrical world is merely a metaphor for off-stage life and must be clearly delineated from it. The term role is not restricted to the concept of personality, but can also mean a performed character in theatre, a psychological state or an approach in drama therapy (Landy 1993).

The performance of a social actor entails real consequences and risks. Instead, a theatre actor does have much more security over their actions as for they usually can account for aberrations for their on-stage behavior and preserve the conception of their self in everyday life (Pervin 2002). His point is that for every character displayed on stage there is a person behind that within his/her status of an artist consciously creates this specific character (Walsh-Bowers 2006). An actor blends with his theater role as a person but distinguishes it from his "self" as an actor and thereby among themselves. This implies that humans are aware of playing a theatre role, but don't have the same degree of awareness when it comes to everyday life performance.

Walsh-Bowers (2006) believes in the unifying ability of our self-identity to manage our disparate social experiences in our off-stage life. There are moments in our daily life, however, in which we become self-conscious of our role and behave as if on stage, and our self-perception and awareness of others intertwine. Goffman's sole focus on the observable appearance and communication of the social self is misleading since it disregards the self-consciousness and the appendant thoughts, emotions and inner experiences of the same social actor (Walsh-Bowers 2006). Though our self constantly switches roles and status in various social situations, it cannot be reduced to an actor that is nothing but their performed character (Pervin 2002).

There are grave differences in how much social actors permit themselves to be contained by these roles, and the identification and expression of such can be very individualistic (Walsh-Bowers

2006). According to Patricia Linville's (1985) self-complexity model, individuals differ in the degree to which they can organize various numbers of interconnected self-aspects. They maintain a differentiated view of the self, no matter in which role they find themselves, which helps them to deal with emotional extremes. For example, a person performing a "drag persona" in the PB, may not be inflicted with shame in front of his parents, because this person may see no negative impact to his "self-as-son", since these two different self-aspects are clearly apart from each other by a chain of other detached self-aspects that serve as absorption to the threat (Linville 1985).

"Through multiplicity in self-understanding, therefore a person can distribute his or her precious self-esteem eggs into many different self-baskets spreading out the risk and minimizing the chances of a big break." (Ashmore & Jussim 1997: 53)

What does she mean though by the multiplicity of self? According to Goffman (1959), the "self" reflects on itself in relation to a complex social world that makes a consistent and coherent self-perception problematic. Flexibility is needed in self-performance, which means that the adaptability of the "self" describes a rather loose confederation of different self-perceptions (Goffman 1959). In the following subchapter, the protean self will be discussed and placed into the context of the postmodern worldview. Both constructs are important since in the PB they are practiced and appropriated by the PB team and presumably its regular visitors.

## 2.2 The protean self and postmodernity

In 1993, Robert Jay Lifton introduced the term "protean self," named after Proteus, the Greek sea god of many forms:

"We are becoming fluid and many-sided. Without quite realizing it, we have been evolving a sense of self appropriate to the restlessness and flux of our time. This mode of being differs radically from that of the past, and enables us to engage in the continuous exploration and personal experiment." (Lifton 1993: 1)

*'Life used to be so simple'* may be the "older version" of personal identity sigh, in this time before social norms were steadily eroding throughout the post-war period, especially during the decade of sexual rebellion and civil rights movement that marked the 1960s (Kotsko 2010b). The radical break with previously constant and stable status ideas and clear-defined role expectations supposedly caused tremendous uncertainties without establishing a new, conventional social order (Lifton 1993). Academics suggested the historical transformation of modern times into "postmodernity," which constitutes a specific social order based on the perception of the world being in constant flux and change (Águila et al. 2008). The idea of living in a postmodern time or society is therefore misleading

since in every nation, city and community you can find people living with an either postmodern, modern or traditional mindset, as such constructions of social reality are always historically path depend (Inglehart and Baker 2000). Postmodernity is therefore far from being a universally applicable way to phrase modernity but subsists as a very distinct way of seeing and experiencing the world. As Gergen (1991) suggests, the postmodern self must be primarily seen as a relational version of oneself, which connects with the way the regular guests<sup>1</sup> seemed to make sense of the world and described themselves (e.g., highly educated, open-minded, city dwellers) and other regular guests (Águila et al. 2008).

In “postmodern times” our new personal identity must deal with an unpredictable, inconstant reality, in which convictions, values and principles become more and more blurry and dynamic (Lifton 1993). As our lives are in constant motion with changing jobs, partners, residencies our “self” is on constant demand to juggle with multiple roles according to each particular life situation. For example, working or studying abroad or being in an intercultural relationship, requires a skilled appropriation of new role sets and careful manoeuvre required roles between widely divergent circumstances. The “provisional unity of self” dissolves constantly into new combinations or brand-new version of our “self”, whatever life change we are going through (Lifton 1993). People change over time and the multiplicity of self can only exist in a temporal and spatial sense. However, we seem not to crush under the increased weight of complex, contradicting role-performance, but rather be surprisingly resilient towards the risks and pitfalls, proving ourselves quite versatile in the way we switch between these many kinds of roles (Ashmore and Jussim 1997). All these rather “free-floating”, experiences, sensations, and communities can be balanced out and brought to the ground through the interplay of protest and reconciliation of social and professional arrangements by the use of humor and mockery as well as constant improvisation, argue Ashmore and Jussim (1997). However, it’s a strong challenge to achieve a kind of unity with the self and whenever people fail drastically in it, this may lead to “negative proteanism”: A sort of destructive fragmentation of the self, characterized by high instability and fragile moral content. This led scholars to question whether multiplicity would be even desirable, since the permanent formation of new identities implicates a rejection of a steady set of values or beliefs that ultimately depredates a person from its accountability and identity at all (Ashmore and Jussim 1997). William James already concluded that some roles are simply incompatible with each other or will at least entail severe conflict. For example, did he amusingly conclude that the handsome lady-killer and the fat philosopher could not fit the same suit and that a millionaire and saint would lead a fierce marriage:

“Such different characters may conceivably at the outset of life be alike possible to a man. But to make any of them actual, the rest must more or less be suppressed. So, the seeker of his truest, strongest, deepest self must review

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<sup>1</sup> The audience demographic and description will be elaborated in chapter 4.

the list carefully, and pick out the one on which to stake his salvation. all other selves thereupon become unreal, but the fortunes of this self are real. Its failures are real failures, its triumphs real triumphs, carrying shame and gladness with them.” (James 1890 in Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 336)

Basically, we cannot have it all. We cannot pursue all kinds of contradicting goals and values at the same time. As agents we have to commit our “self” to certain life decision that define our “true” identity. Which does not mean that this identity cannot evolve and change over the course of time. However, the acting out of contradicting roles is very well possible in the realm of theatre, hence the acting self can consist of an identity composed of every possible role and status set. According to Goffman’s idea of amateur stage acting, we all have a rich repertoire of cues and hints of possible roles, which could be used to fill in the gaps of performing new roles (Goffman 1959).

This sub-chapter gave an overview of the postmodern reality construct, in which individuals represent a protean self that strives to manage the differing and contradicting role expectations. The use of irony and humor, as well as the constant negotiation process, follows the ultimate goal of achieving unity with the “self” or as James would phrase it: a *real* version of one’s identity (James 1890 in Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010).

Crucial for this pursuit might be the use-making of theatrical acting in the realm of participatory theatre, in which the roles between actors and visitor are starting to blur. For this reason, I will give a short historical overview and a note on the applicability of participatory performance approaches to the social interactions that happen in the PB.

## 2.3 Participatory performance

### **Historical context**

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, several new theatrical forms emerged, namely post-dramatic and participatory theatre as well as avant-garde theatre, which all developed towards an increased audience engagement. At the beginning of the 60s the theatre form “Happenings” emerged, a theatrical expression through which artist provoked shocking and disturbing reactions from their audience (Ryöppy, Lima and Buur 2015). In the meantime, the “theatre of the oppressed” (Boalian approach) targeted on tearing down the “fourth wall” through which dramatic theatre keeps a distance between the audience and the actors on stage (Sloman 2011).

Postdramatic theatre is a theatrical concept which describes the shared ownership of a live and situational performance event (Ryöppy, Lima and Buur 2015). The key concept is improvisation, understood as the momentary collaboration between performer and audience. It is seen as



emancipation from dramatic theatre, with its rigid structure of time, dramaturgy and presentational form towards the audience. Instead, visitors are asked to interpret the multiple impressions that happen on stage by giving individual meaning to them (Ryöppy, Lima and Buur 2015). In post-dramatic theatre practice, there is a paradox between the concept or planning and the improvisation. Though performances continue to inhibit different levels of rigid structure, they also allow the unexpected or unplanned action to occur. Improvisation makes engagement and intervention from the audience possible and benefits from the specific characteristics of the setting (Ryöppy, Lima and Buur 2015).

### **Participatory performance**

Participatory Performance theatre uses an approach to directly involve the public in the creative process, authorizing it to become a co-author, editor, and observer of the work itself (Turino 2008). Hence, the performance is incomplete when it does not include a physical interaction with the spectators. The dominant way of making art, for which a small class of artists creates while the public plays the passive role of observer or consumer, is thereby challenged (Turino 2008). In the context of participative theatre, this means that the audience dissolves the hierarchical one-way communication from stage down to the audience by interacting with the performers (Ryöppy, Lima and Buur 2015). Turino (2009) distinguishes between two different approaches to participatory performances, namely the improvisational and formulaic one. The latter constitutes a genuine reproduction of performance pieces and relies on models and habitual formulas. On the contrary, the improvisational approach is based on surprise and spontaneity and either change and extends the original work or creates a new one from scratch (Turino 2009).

Besides its spontaneous nature, improvisational performances, especially in the context of improvisational and participatory theatre, are usually built on a chosen idea, topic or a headline, which gets the action started (Lemons 2005). Improvisation is always regarded as a social activity, involving other actors or an audience that participates in the performance. Improvisors build their actions on what has been initiated by other team members or the audience and play around the logic of these previously introduced gestures, mimic or words. Improvisation is regarded as *teamwork*, in which *communication*, the orientation on each other and constant negotiation enables collective dynamics and creative processes to emerge. Thinking and acting spontaneously can be a challenge, or even an *emotional risk* as one delivers an *honest expression* of a feeling that ‘just comes right out’. It requires a *safe environment*, where new and extraordinary ideas are accepted and tolerated, and individuals are invited to create and initiate own actions so to *self-actualize* themselves. The whole creative process should be *joyful*, and a thrilling stimulation for the participants. Vidal (2013) stresses in this context also the function of *humor* as a state of mind that stretches our thinking and enables us to combine thoughts and ideas not originally interrelated with each other. Taking things less seriously can create opportunities for extraordinary moments and untypical solutions (Vidal 2013).

As Vidal (2013) further outlines, one essential part of unleashing creativity is its *playfulness*, which embeds the language of imagination, evokes emotions, stimulates our senses and activates our

'inner self' to mimic others as well as to invent new stuff on our own. As an example, he mentions improvisation theatre as an art form that assembles various techniques to enhance the ability to act creatively and spontaneously. When we find ourselves in a safe and playful situation, we get the opportunity to express ourselves creatively, to try out new things, experiment and to explore (Vidal 2013).

In participatory performances, the audience is being confronted with appealing stimuli that are new and challenging, and for which creativity is needed. By improvising words and actions, one's imagination and fantasy come into play, and new solutions and ideas are continuously created (Vidal et al. 2004).

The participatory performance theatre approach is being followed consistently by the hosts and performers of the PB and all the before mentioned characteristics are employed and well understood by the PB hosts and performers, as it will be demonstrated and elaborated in chapter 4.5 "Actions of play." However, to reduce the audience involvement and social interaction in this concept would come too short. In fact, most interactions in the PB can be explained by play theory, which understands social actions as a play. This research will argue that the play like situation and atmosphere is enabled through the use of participatory performance theatre with a strong tendency towards improvisation and creation of chaos-like scenarios. The following chapter will introduce a short background to contemporary play theory and revolve around the key concepts that will be used to explain what is happening during a PB evening.

## 2.4 Theories of play

### **Historical background /Overview**

The game-changing publication *Homo Ludens* in 1938 by Johan Huizinga constituted the modern research approach to play (Huizinga 2014). The Dutch historian understood play as a pregnant and voluntary activity, containing a self-constructed system of rules and a spatiotemporal separation from the demands of everyday life. Huizinga (2014) considered human play as a fundamental wellspring of culture and immensely valuable. According to his view, culture and play cannot simply be separated; on the contrary, playful elements be found all around our culture (Rodriguez 2006). Whenever we are watching a soccer match, an improvisational theatre performance, exhibitionists or virtuosi, in fact, "play" is taking place. The strike for excellence, surpassing others in the zeal of glory and victory, or showing off one's talent can all be understood as behavioral expressions derived from our ludic attitude towards life (Huizinga 2014). From this, it can also be followed that in many cases a relevant distinction between the playful and the serious cannot be made, if we begin to look at meaningful cultural achievements under the aspect of play, instead of logic and rationality (Rodriguez 2006).

## Defining play

Conceptually speaking, play is regarded as extremely complicated to define and to distinguish from other leisure activities. On the surface, it seems obvious, but on a deeper analytical level, it's difficult to translate it into concrete terms. And can we even notice it, every time it happens? Who would consider going out to some bar as a sort of playful activity? Does play start at the moment we leave our workplace and go into leisure time? According to Rieber (1996), our tendency to define play as the contrary to work is misleading and relying on only these two dimensions is seen as an inadequate model to distinguish such human activity. That's why scholars agreed on the following four attributes that characterize and distinguish play from "nonplay" (Rieber 1996): It is a *voluntary activity*, which is *intrinsically motivating* and involves *physical engagement* as well as a *make-believe quality* (Csikszentmihalyi 1997), with the latter being the main distinction from other behavioral forms. To Beckmann (2014) who reviewed the last 40 years of play research, the essential character of play is the fact that it is *fun*:

„We take it for granted (...) but several current research trends indicate that “fun” is a fundamental and probably essential element of the normal, healthy development of perhaps all living things. And if we make “fun” a subset of “play”, we’re right on it.” (John Beckmann 2014: 12)

## Types of play

According to Rieber (1996) and Sutton Smith (1995), the most widely discussed theories of play are centered around the following four themes: power; fantasy; self-experience; learning.

Firstly, the commonly practiced play of *power* as to be found in sports or any other competitive game. Secondly, as a *fantasy*, which stresses the imaginative and liberating elements of play. Caillois and Barash (2001) recognized many other versions of play apart from its competitive character which was rather based on coincidence, role play and the seek for chaotic and turbulent scenarios. Educational thinkers like Paley (2005) or Rieber (1996) have emphasized the value of imaginative and creative thinking like when children invent fantasy worlds and act within them as a sort of play (e.g., cowboy and Indian). Importantly, in play, people are not restricted to the norms and possibilities of everyday life, that's why play can have such a strong impact on social change, concludes Hendricks (2015).

Play can also be described as *self-experience*, which is the most novel theme, aimed at play's potential to achieve ideal life experiences. The main value can be found in its intensity and quality. However, secondary outcomes, for example learning trajectories, often follow the experience (Sutton-Smith, 1995). Self-experience as play connects well with the concept of the protean self, which is

perceived as an interchangeable entity consisting of various identities that hold different status and enact different roles that can be played out differently, depending on the situational context of the social interaction (Lifton 1999).

The last theme is *learning as play*, where I will focus on one specific form or approach to learning, namely the belief that most manifestations of serious culture innately inner ludic aspects ab initio. The fundamental nature of the subject (e.g., science, art) already has strong ludic elements that only need to be played out. This makes play and the process of learning an entertaining experience, which is essential to the findings of my thesis since in the conclusion part I will argue whether a playful approach to performance art as practiced in the PB can enhance individual learning trajectories (Rodriguez 2006).

### **The Magic Circle**

Huizinga (2014) introduced a very crucial concept of play, called the “magic circle,” which metaphorically insulates it from serious tasks of everyday life by creating a separate and self-contained sphere that encloses the players within a temporal frame. Once in the circle, play can be performed in any mode of pretended and improvised interaction, mimicry or games. In a way community of players encircle themselves with a sort of secrecy and privacy to stress the detachment from ‘ordinary’ life (Rodriguez 2006) and design and improvise particular rules and conventions that constitute their play. The temporary and spatial outage is further established by a literal physical area, like a soccer stadium, a theatre stage or a children’s sandbox. The demarcation of such a specific “playground” can be explained by the establishment of particular temporary codes of behavior that does not apply anymore as soon as it is left, and players return to everyday life (Rodriguez 2006). Concluding, the magic circle comes close to the idea of an artificial ‘microcosmos’ with special rules or unspoken conventions that apply only within the sphere of the play and naturally contain elements of imagination or pretense (Rieber 1996; Rodriguez 2006).

### **Postmodern Context**

Thoughts on play in the context of postmodernity and poststructuralism are expressed by scholars like Küchler (1994) or Henricks (2015). Their research argues that in fact people are much less restricted by social or cultural structures than presumed. Rather, they assume the world itself is “at play” and that concludingly people are constantly “in play” when they shift from one moment to another. To them play is actually the most reasonable way to face an ever-changing, ambiguous reality in a decentred, highly complex world (Küchler 1994; Henricks 2015).

Hence the circumstances and the environment in which is play is happening are highly ambiguous and coincidental. Likewise play, which consist of surprising moments and often takes unpredictable outcomes. Henricks (2015) claims that people, generally, strive for (and profit from) experiences with the world that are fortifying, novel, exciting or in any other way stimulating. By seeking new encounters and by modifying our responses to them, we extend and thicken the scope of our possibilities. At the same time, however, play is an exercise of mastering the familiar and gaining feelings of control and refinement through repetition (Henricks 2015).

In the context of the PB this means that the “postmodern visitor” is constantly involved in a play of negotiating uncertain “postmodern values” such as liberal ethics (e.g., feminism, homosexuality, gender role, and equality), rejection of traditional authority (e.g. patriarchal structures or religious morals) and the belief that morality is subjective and relative and belongs to personal opinion instead of traditional values and rule-sets (O’Callaghan and Jordan 2003; Águila et al. 2008).

I will argue in this research that a very specific kind of play is taking place in the PB: Foremost the play with social norms and boundaries caused by the personal confrontations with an awkward situation, which is being triggered by shameful and exposing “self-performances” by the PB team and the curated performers. Therefore, the following subchapter will deal with the construction of social boundaries and norms and the consequent emergence of awkwardness whenever those are being crossed or drawn too loosely.

## 2.5 Boundaries, norms and the awkwardness

What are exactly norms, and how do we as human create social boundaries? What makes a situation awkward and what is meant by normality? And finally, how are these concepts interrelated? Starting with normality, it is generally understood as the embodied and implicit understanding and practice of social norms and expectations (Schultz et al. 2007). However, as Syristová (2010) argues normality is a relative term, always time-depend and dynamically changing from setting to setting. The personal evaluation of appropriate behavior then relates to the applicable extent of acting according to the expected norms in any given context (Schultz et al. 2007). Which means that we align our actions with these social norms that are supposed to determine our moral and social status. In the case of a violation, sanctions follow, namely that our character and the one of our opponent is at stake (Goffman 1982). Such disruptions and role outbreaks are constantly occurring in our lives, which is why Goffman refers to social life as an "inexhaustible and non-formalizable Pandora's box of possibilities," rather than an order of interaction governed by strict formal rules (Manning 2013: 17). Goffman also refers to these rules as social boundaries, which can be understood as the societal and personal confinements through the compliance to socially constructed norms of behavior Dellwing (2010).

How can the emergence of personal and societal boundaries be explained in the first place? Goffman (1959) talked about the ideal sphere that people created around them and referred to it as it “honor.” Its function, he describes, is to prevent an individual from any harms and threats towards her/his personality value. The sphere, which shall protect the sacredness of human personality should be considered context-related (Goffman 1959). The state of awkwardness is a form of embarrassment that, according to Goffman occurs from disrupted interaction, which threatens the maintenance of a consistent and appropriate display of one’s social identity (Goffman 1956). As people may feel their honor or dignity under attack, awkward situations are tried to be avoided and quickly repaired whenever they happen. Whenever we “come into play”, we want to keep the impression of staying in play, what Goffman named the “impression management” (Goffman 1959). It is being practiced when people feel to lose control of themselves or the situation, for example by being seen naked or in underwear or unwillingly becoming the focus of attention (Miller 1987). The feeling of awkwardness depends on the existence of a real or imagined audience because people rarely feel embarrassed when they are by themselves (Marcus 1999; Withers and Sherblom 2008) As Kotsko writes:

“We are only able to identify someone as awkward, however, because the person does something that is inappropriate for a given context. Most often, these violations do not involve an official written law—instead, the grace that’s in question is the skillful navigation of the mostly unspoken norms of a community” (Kotsko 2010: 7).

This relational emergence of awkwardness hence depends on the social norms and expectations concerning the “play” which the individual enters (Goffman 1959; Kotsko 2010). Even though the individual is many times not the protagonist of the play, she/he gets affected by the awkward situation, since it spreads through the social network and draws every participant into it (Kotsko 2010).

To sum it up: Our status is something we possess, a role something we act. The way we act the role depends on underlying values, social norms and the social context within people are acting. In the perception of the protean self, people constantly shift the way they play an assumed status because in the flux of people and contexts that they face in their lives high flexibility in how to handle contradicting and diverse display of roles is demanded. Participatory performance theatre blurs the strict line between social acting and theatrical acting, which consequently means that spectators can be engaged in role-play that they could be acted out in every day social life. In play theory, we learned that play in a postmodern context is the constant play within a constantly changing environment and that whenever being in a play situation, a differently constructed reality is faced, which opens a new way to interact and re-enact roles. Boundaries, social norms, and values become products of negotiation and exploration.

Before we can finally go into a deep analysis of the play happening in the PB, I will give an idea of how the data was collected, analysis and therefore constructed by the researcher. The following

chapter will, therefore, provide the reader with a description and traceability of how the data was construed and analyzed. As my supervisor was very keen in reminding me: “Data does not speak for itself but is there to be interpreted by the researcher.”

### 3) Methodology

For the conduction of this research, the approach of grounded theory (GT) was followed, which is particularly promising when theory develops in the course of the research, instead of relying on a fix theoretical framework beforehand (DePoy & Gitlin 2015). The constructivist version of GT as Charmaz and Belgrafe (2012) argues, is advantageous in the way that it can combine different approaches and “makes ethnography more analytic, interview research more in-depth, and content analysis more focused” (Charmaz & Belgrafe 2012: 408). Although the structure of this research presupposes the idea of a linear process of writing and working, this is a false conception. As a work in progress, the observational findings, the analysis of interviews and documents were continually shifting the focus to new conceptional approaches. The way I used GT implied a constant readjustment of the research question and constant evolvement of the theoretical framework. Nonetheless, the ideas stemming from Goffman and the participatory theatre approach accompanied me from the beginning and sensitized the focus of observation and interview questions. However, the consideration of play studies and social norms and awkwardness evolved throughout the different stages of the research progress. Therefore, the order of the chapters is just designed in this specific way to give a more linear and comprehensible structure of the work. However, it does not hold the account for the actual process of the study itself.

#### 3.1 Participant observation

For this study, the ethnographic triangularly research approach was followed, which combines participant observation with qualitative, semi-structured interviews and the analysis of artifacts and documents (content analysis). Following Geertz interpretative theory of culture, I studied the “behavior setting” and “stage” of social interaction (Goffman 1959) of the PB in the pursuit of deciphering the meaning-making of its participants (Geertz 2000). In becoming an ‘insider’, - a regular visitor of the place, I intended to produce “thick description” of participants (inter-) actions and behaviors while considering contextual factors, - the PB as a place. To obtain insight into participatory concepts and social interactions I visited the performance bar over a period of seven months approximately 15 times. These observations allowed the alignment and complementation of information gathered with the findings of the conducted interviews. At the beginning I did not interact too much, but mostly observed the happenings from a distance, taking notes on my smartphone and observing closely. More and more, however, I started to participate more extensively and did not only start to engage more often in conversations with other visitors but also took part in the proposed



activities. The observational approach was a naturalistic one in the sense that participants were studied in a natural setting, modified by the researcher, however, does the presence of the researcher naturally always imparts a certain influence, as it is the case with every social interaction (Swann & Allington 2009). In the final weeks of my observation, I decided to “go native” and did an own performance, which had a twofold effect: I became an idea, and the experience of working with the audience of the PB myself, and further got access to the backstage area, in which another aspect of reality in the PB could be observed: the one of the performers and PB team. This aspect, however, did not influence the analysis of profoundly. I did not build a personal relationship with the hosts, although a certain familiarity and comfortableness were established over the course of the research phase.

### 3.2 Documents

To analyze documents created by the PB team (Facebook posts, house rules, Instagram channel) I operated the method of content analysis, a qualitative research technique which systematically examines documents with the goal to decipher meaningful content (Rapley 2007). In this case, the documents were created by the organizers of the PB and hence reflect the way they promote their evenings, address the audience and communicate their values, ideas and identity trademark to them. I analyzed and coded 20 units of Facebook event description from January until April 2018 as well as the inclusion of some “special events” like workshops, artistic laboratories or theme nights that happened in autumn 2017. Pieces of content were assigned with codes (e.g., “humor,” “encouraging,” “play,” “self-expression”) that evolved into networks and models during the analysis. The aim was to identify a pattern of reoccurring themes and topics and the way those were promoted, which should help me to retrace the construction and ‘play design’ of a PB evening on the part of the organizers. Further, it was helpful in illustrating the way, in which guests are being preselected by proposing very specific themes for each night, which then attract specific people who are interested in engaging in them.

### 3.3 Qualitative interviews

The goal of conducting qualitative interviews was two folded: Firstly, I strived to gain insight in the practices and individual experiences of *regular visitors* of the PB (Charmaz & Belgrave 2012), to comprehend their motivations and values, to reflect on the way they make sense of the PB as a place, and how they are being engaged in the performances. *Secondly*, to re-enact the way in which the *organizers of the PB* perceive the happenings in the PB, their motivations and goals and approach to engage the audience. I decided for a semi-structured interviewed designed, which means that I created

a question catalogue beforehand (which can be found in the appendix), which I divided into two categories: The “crucial questions” which I addressed to everyone and the follow up questions, which I asked in case of further inquiry or to keep the conversation going. This approach allowed me the freedom to align my interview according to the personal preferences of the interviewees. Each of them had a personal focus and particular topic they were especially eager to talk about, wherefore I decided to grant them a certain control over the course and content direction of the interview. Although, whenever a respondent drifted too much into a direction of irrelevance or debauchery, I interfered by drawing the attention towards a new topic. Every interview with a regular visitor started off with a short introduction of the participant to gather some demographic data, followed by an inquiry of the frequency of visit and habits and length of their stay in the PB. Then I introduced an open question about their first experience at the Performance bar to allow visitors to create a personal narrative, which served several purposes: Firstly, it narrated a process by bridging their first experience of being there with the present. And secondly it gave me insights into the personal accents and their focus of importance in regard to the PB without me staining and shaping their answers too much beforehand. Afterward each person was asked questions from the seven prepared theme blocks of my interview guide that can be found in the appendix. The discussed theme blocks revolved around: *PB as different place* (e.g. does the PB offer an alternative for you from other nightlife venues?) *Personal motivation and meaning*; *Perception of and interaction with other visitors*; *Values* (e.g. do you find it appropriate what happens in the PB?); *Audience engagement* (e.g. can you explain how the performers and hosts engage the audience into the show?); *Self-performance* (e.g. Are the hosts themselves or in a performance role?); *Learning* (e.g. do you discuss what happened during the performances with friends?).

A similar approach was followed when interviewing the organizer: The interview started from a more general starting point (Daniel/Florian: What was the first night like when you started the whole thing; Can you recall some experiences? / Janpier: What made you curious about Daniel and Florian?) towards specific themes (“Demographic and motivation of visitors”; “Engaging the audience and self-performing”; “Mission and Impact”) that were approached and processed from a deeper layer of reflection and in specialized knowledge (e.g., Do you aim to have a place where people also experiment and can be creative, maybe take on a new role?).

At times, I asked follow-up questions when I felt there might be interesting information that hasn’t been specified enough yet (e.g. “you said they come for the crazy party and what do you think makes it crazy in the first place?”), however, in general, I tried not to interfere too much, except for some affirmative remarks like “yeah” or “okay”, through which I intended to encourage further elaboration. At some parts of the interviews, participants struggled to find the certain word, and as English was the second language for most of them, I dropped the expression if I knew it myself.

### 3.4 Research units and sampling

Besides the two bar hosts, Daniel and Florian, who will be introduced in more depth in the analysis chapter “construction of the magic circle,” I interviewed Janpier, the director of WORM, and Tizo, a performance artist who had been a resident at WORM UBIK for two months. My decision to not only interview Daniel and Florian follows the intention to get a fuller and multi-sided perspective of the organization and procedure of a PB evening.

Janpier became the director of WORM in the spring of 2017 and therefore started developing a profound insight of the PB and its current development after it had been already opened for a year. His working relationship with Daniel and Florian is described as rather functional. As he stated, the PB marks a very independent integral part of WORM and stands rather outside of the strongly shared avantgardistic values of the rest of WORM and its sub-organizations.

Tizo is considered to be part of the ‘Performance Bar family,’ and in the frame of his artistic residency, he worked professionally as a performance artist, which methodologically means he can be understood as an organizational part of the PB. As a performance artist, he stated to perceive his body as a medium of art and encouraged participants during his “body laboratory” workshop to achieve a higher body and motion awareness and to break down personal barriers to body exposure and acceptance.

Table of interview participants – organizers

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Profession</b>	<b>Country of origin</b>	<b>Interview place</b>	<b>Duration of interview</b>
Daniel	38	Host/founder of PB	Netherlands	Telephone	25: 12 (part 1) 38: 09 (part 2)
Florian	34	Host/founder of PB	Netherlands	Telephone	45:32
Janpier	50	Director of WORM	Netherlands	Wunderbar (WORM)	57:27
Tizo	38	Performance artist	Brazil	Café	61:20

During my first visits, I identified some regular guests that seemed to have a special bond to the place and the PB team. From my initial observations and assumptions, I concluded that these regulars had a distinct quality: As “old hands” they understand the place like no other, which was also confirmed by Daniel who stated that their steady crowd “knows what (the hosts) stand for and are dedicated to going with the vibes that (they) propose to them”. Some of them knew the place from the very moment it opened and accompanied it throughout the last two years by visiting it regularly at least once per month and in some cases every single time the PB is open. And indeed, I realized during the interviews that many of the regulars started from a very deep level of reflection, so I could tell they were already much past the perception of the PB as a mere entertainment bar.

Table of interview participants – regular visitors of the PB

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Profession</b>	<b>Country of origin</b>	<b>Interview length</b>	<b>Interview place</b>	<b>Frequency of visit per month</b>	<b>Usual period of stay</b>
Ohana	33	Business Strategy Analyst; background as a pianist	Armenia	53:47	Bar	6-8 times	9pm – 2am
Mila	30	Artist (fashion design, art installations, performance)	New Zealand	39:42	At her atelier	At least once	9pm – 2am
Sebastián	24	Dishwasher; side projects in social and digital innovation	Portugal	34:51	At his home	2-3 times	11pm - 2am
Hendrick	36	Mechanical design engineer	Netherlands	35:09	Café	2-3 times	11pm – 2am
Raivo	28	Bike shop manager	Latvia	58:31	Bar	2-3 times	11pm – 2am
Carol	30	Student (Arts)	USA	46:29	At her home	At least once	9pm - 12:30am
Alexa	28	Student (Sociology)	Greece	56:02	At her home	6-8 times	9pm - 12:30am
Fenna	48	Freelancer (communication advisor and photography)	Netherlands	86:37	Bar	2-3 times	11pm – 2am
Thorsten	38	Business consultant	Germany	28:12	Tele-phone	6-8 times	9pm – 2am

In deciding over my interview partners, I made use of ‘purposive sampling’ (Bryman, 2012) since I strived for a diverse representation of the regular guests regarding age, gender, sex, ethnicity to come as close as possible to an authentic representation of the overall visitor’s demographics. As most of the performances are conducted in the English language, the PB attracts a broad international audience, which I aimed to represent with my sample. Though I approached the potential participants randomly in the PB by introducing myself and my research, I based my selection on the frequency of their visits and hence their familiarity and expertise about the place and people. Four respondents claimed to attend the PB (almost) every time that it is open Friday and Saturday, another three replied to visit two or three times per months, and two went once per month if time allowed it. Interestingly the ones working within a corporate environment attend the most often, the ones studying or practicing art, the

least. Five of the selected interviewees related their professional practices in some way to artistic fields, whether it be as the academic study field (“arts”), “side projects,” full profession, partly profession (“photography”) or former profession (“pianist”). Besides that, the range of professions is wide, reaching from dishwasher to Business consultant, mechanical design engineers, and bike shop manager.

The total interview length was ~630 minutes (~10.5 hours), and most of them were recorded on my smartphone or iPad whenever a phone interview was conducted. The sound quality was mostly good; however, in some cases, some background noises blurred some of the spoken words. I interviewed four people in their homes or workplace, another four in a bar or a café and one person on the telephone. Before each interview, participants were asked for permission to record the conversation and were guaranteed anonymity in the report. Spoken consent was given and recorded before the actual interview started. I used only anonymized names for all the interviewees, except for Daniel, Florian, Tizo, and Janpier because their identities are in any case ascribable and none of them requested to be protected with the strictest confidence.

### 3.5 Data analysis

All the collected data consisted of

- a) participants observations protocol, containing all the field and mental notes collected during my field studies
- b) Social media analysis (Facebook) protocol, containing 20 units of PB event description
- c) Interview transcript: seven transcripts and six “*Verlaufsprotokolle*”<sup>2</sup>

As I fully transcribed the first six interviews, I had the opportunity to work closely with the participants language to work out relevant quotes and assign crucial in-vivo codes. As I proceeded with the interviews I was able to isolate some first key concepts, which made *Verlaufsprotokoll* a suitable method, since it provided the interview protocol a well summarized structure and highlighting of the most relevant content. These documents were all processed through the qualitative analysis program ‘Atlas.ti.’ Initially, open coding was used, whereby approximately 120 codes were assigned to the statements of the interviewees. Most of the assigned codes were ascribed by the researcher (such as: “construction”, “selection”, “community”, “boundaries”, “confrontation”, “play”, “self-expression”, “self-performing” etc.), but also, the use of “in-vivo codes”<sup>3</sup> (Charmaz 2006) was

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<sup>2</sup> *Verlaufsprotokoll* was developed and introduced by Alheit and Dausien (1985) as a time-effective method of interview transcription. It is described as an efficient tool to structure the interview process and foreground the most relevant content of the interview.

<sup>3</sup> The advantage of “in vivo codes” is the capture of key concepts by adopting or staying closely to the participants’ own words and terms (Charmaz 2006).

particularly feasible because it allowed me to stick closely to the experience as expressed by the visitors. The most frequently used were the PB as a “different place”; the construction of the evening as “organic and planned”; encounters with awkwardness as “What the fuck?”; further, the PB visitors were referred to as “open and carefree” unlike the “other people” in “other places.”

The process of initial open coding was followed by a focused coding analysis which enabled me to sieve coherent, relevant information through the data pile and to mark interrelated substantive codes, so I could deploy my hypothesis and theories, (re-) formulate my RQ and develop a coherent narrative structure (Charmaz 2006).

I decided for a mixed writing style, switching from a more precise and perhaps ‘drier academic tone’ to a more loose, personalized rhetoric means, intending to give the reader an idea of me having been there and experiencing the PB by myself. Further, I considered the adaptation of the style and used language by regulars in my personal writing as well so to make it more flowing and consistent.

### 3.6 Coda: Autoethnography

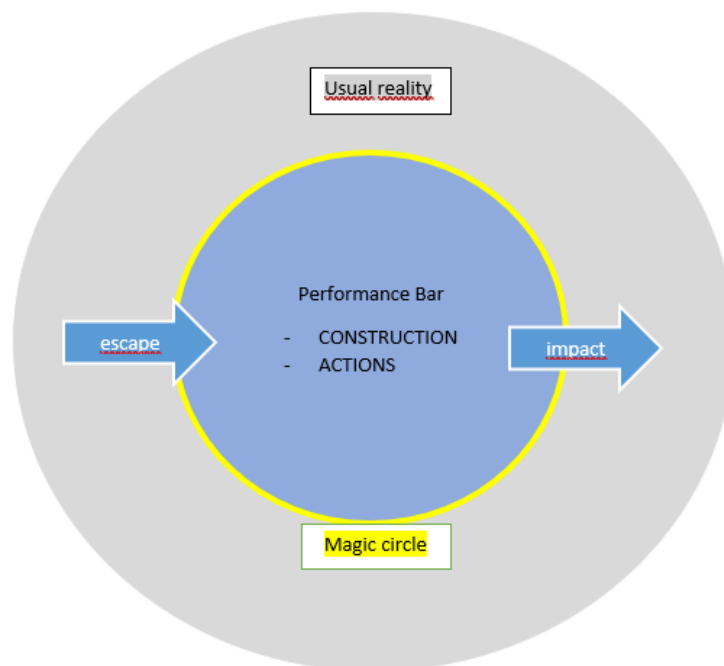
I would like to stress the fact that I as a researcher I brought a specific mindset, subjective experiences and value set into the study, which naturally influenced and filtered the data gathering (observations, interview, documents) and the analysis of the finding. As a regular visitor of the PB, I was not a mere, neutral observer, but constantly judged, estimated and reflected on my findings, observations, and experiences. For this reason, I also decided shortly before finishing my research paper, to have a last-minute amendment and decide to include elements of autoethnographic research (Scott-Hoy and Ellis 2004) into my work. Autoethnography adds a personal and emotional account to ethnographic research, which expands the boundaries of academic writing by tailoring it towards an audience outside the scholarly world (Scott-Hoy and Ellis 2004). Entering the PB as a researcher, admittedly, I had not foreseen in advance that the study could influence me as well or that I could go so far as to say there was a “personal development” occurring side-ways. However, as one of my formulated research goals was to reflect on the personal learning trajectories of regular visitors of the performance bar, to which I can be count as well, I decided that it can be of valuable insight for the reader as well to get familiar with my personal experiences and learning outcomes. According to Scott-Hoy and Ellis autoethnography means “employing, experiencing, and embracing all senses in the search for a better, more honest, engaged, lifelike, and transforming ethnographic form” (Scott-Hoy and Ellis 2004: 11). In chapter 7, I will provide a more elaborated statement on why including elements of autoethnographic research seems particularly feasible in the case of my research.

## 4) Analysis

### 4.1 Introduction of model

The analysis part is mostly based on the findings of the 13 conducted interviews and completed by personal observations, the analysis of social media content and the integration of adequate literature theoretical framework. I decided to illustrate and orientate my findings with the support of a linear process model that follows five stages, which will be discussed in each sub chapter: The “*Escape from the usual reality*” by entering “*The magic circle*” that leads to the “*Construction of the place*”, which enables “*Actions of play*” that entail personal learning trajectories for the visitors when they are “*Coming out of the circle*”.

**Model 1:** Five-stages process of construction and actions



Firstly, I will introduce the visitor's perception of the PB as a distinct, and even unique place from every other venue they have visited In Rotterdam, but also outside of it. I will explain their idea of a “usual reality” that is being disrupted by visiting the PB and entering a sort of fantasy place that is very particular in the way it promotes itself and the kind of audience it pulls in. The alleged exclusivity and secrecy that frame the place are very appealing to its visitors as well as the elements of surprise, the particular kind of entertainment offered and the promise of a ‘different night out.’ The

mechanism of demarcation from ‘other places,’ as well as from ‘other people’ will be explicated in depth and will lead over to the next chapter, the designing of the “magic circle” (Huizinga 2014).

In the second chapter, it will be explicated how Daniel and Florian and their team accomplish to create situations of “play” every evening and what this implies for the visitors. The idea behind it is that the PB team designs a “magic circle” around the “usual reality,” as it is described by the visitors and invites them to escape from it. This construction then attracts a certain audience interested in the invitation to visit a place outside of this presumed usual reality. Hence, the construction is happening both ways, but it starts with the designers, enabling and pursuing the fantasy of another layered reality. The findings of the social media analysis will support my findings and examples will be given to illustrate this mode of operation and audience engagement.

The third chapter “construction” will deal with the mutual construction of the “place,” by which its atmosphere and surrounding conditions are meant. The PB team takes in function as a designer that construct the matrix, and the visitors as the shapers that influence certain parameters and variables. Also, the building of a particular community will be reconstructed, as the PB is quite distinct in the way it binds the public together through its actions. And lastly the benevolent, as well as destructive effects of alcohol for play, will be evaluated.

The fourth chapter will contain all kinds of “actions of play” and comprise the biggest part of the analysis. It will be discussed whether visitors can distinguish the visitor from the actor, the audience-performer interactions and ways in which visitors engage in role-playing and self-performing activities. Findings of the interviews analysis will be reconnected to the introduced theoretical concepts.

Lastly, the impact of the “actions of play” will be assessed and grouped in micro effects – for the visitors and for the hosts – and the macro effects, the possible societal impact on Rotterdam as a whole.



## 4.2 Escape from usual reality

The following four chapters of the analysis will constitute a rather descriptive account, being foremost based on the perception of the regular visitors and at times backed up with literature findings to clarify some statements. They will not involve a deeper interpretation and application of these findings, as such will be provided in the chapter 6 “Conclusion”.

The next subchapter will approach the **first sub question**: “Which are the ways and arguments through which regular visitors demarcate the PB and themselves from the so-called “usual reality”? A broad impression of the regular’s perception of the PB as a distinct place with a particular audience that is assessed with specific values, mindsets, and attitudes that are related to the idea of postmodernism will be provided.

### 4.2.1 Setting of the place

The setting of a social performance marks a crucial feature for Goffman (1959) as the act cannot begin until all the participants brought themselves to the “appropriate place,” which includes all kinds of “stage props” and “scenery” (e.g., physical layout, furniture, décor, additional items). These objects gain meaningfulness through the ongoing interactional processes that are happening on these physical sites (Goffman 1959). This chapter starts with a description of the PB setting and room layout, based on my observational field notes. I decided against taking pictures and leaving it to the imagination of the reader to create their own version of the PB. After all, the PB depicts the image of a fantastic place outside the usual reality, so it invites for the contemplation through an imaginative lens.

The first encounter when entering the PB is the cash register places in the fore room, where its visitors pay an entrance which is 2€ from nine to ten, and 3,50 €. from ten onwards. In this fore room, the PB in collaboration with WORM, are jointly implementing new artistic concepts of exhibiting works of art as well as art installations and performance landscapes (representing a landscape or idea using objects). In addition, the room is sometimes used for larger parties when the focus of the evening is on dancing or space expansive activities, and public rush is expected.

When continuing straight ahead, a bead curtain appears, through which one passes to get into the bar area. This room is painted in black and right in front of you is a square bar, which is constructed of about chest height mounted solid steel crates with wooden boards on top of them. All around are bar stools and inside the bartenders, either the hosts themselves or friends of them who work in the PB. On the opposite side of this bar object, there is a gap, a passageway where the barkeepers are always crawling down to get in or outside. And whenever a performance is about to happen, they just put a wooden plaque over the empty area where the bartenders stand. And then the bar transforms into a fixed stage installation. The bar looks nothing special, it is a simple, improvised

construct in the “do it yourself style”, because at the beginning there was no budget for something better. The selection of drinks at the bar is also very sparse. There is one draft beer brand and simple long drinks for an average price. To the right of this bar object, which is approximately 1.80 \* 1.80 in size, there is a small table next to the wall. It is used by artists to store their painting material or by guests to gather around and conversate. Left and right of this small table, artists are producing live painting on the wall on some evenings, which are often auctioned off at the end of the night. On some evenings, for example on theme evenings like the “Cape Verdean Night”, photos or pictures of artists hang on the wall to match the respective theme. Next to it is the backstage room where artists, and the bar team are preparing for the evening, for their performances, to get new props or to dress up (there are also two clothes poles with an extensive stock of extraordinary costumes).

To the left, there is the DJ desk and some seats made of wooden blocks that serve as a bench. And of course, the dancefloor described as the most important space, in which usually, the people who are looking for action and engagement, who are up for dancing and “bringing the heat” (Thorsten).

Regarding the room layout as a whole is to say that everything is happening in a very small space, which contributes to the fact that it is not appearing strange, even if there are only a few guests. And all in all, this closeness is very important, it can happen easily that you touch someone’s else shoulder or some other body part, it has a sort of a “chamber bar vibe sometimes” (Ohana). Certainly, it is not like the cozy bar, in which one sits, conversates and drinks a gourmet beer and whiskey. However, the darkness and the spatial proximity makes the whole scene quite intimate. The darkness sort of covers the events of the evening with a coat that is laid over everything: ‘what happens in the Performance bar stays in the Performance bar.’ However, there is no strict policy against photo and film documentation, except for special event evenings that invite the visitor to expose themselves in a possibly vulnerable way (e.g., Pas de pantalon parties to which visitors attend without wearing their pants).

After this short description of the setting, it will be now analyzed what makes it a *place*; a very particular place, as the regular visitors, ascribe profound meaning to it and demarcate it strongly from other places they know.

#### 4.2.2 Demarcation from “other places”

One of my ‘in-vivo’ codes was “place,” which can be retracted to the meaning-making and strategies regulars used to define and demarcate the PB from other places and venues. The regulars describe the PB as distinctively from every other place they have been visiting, different from all the places they have seen in Rotterdam, but also in other city or their home countries. The respondents ascribed certain characteristic and attributes that are usual to be used when describing a bar. For example, Hendrick, who “cannot remember the first time being there,” however, “it must have been quite impressive. Other regulars described it as “interesting,” “bizarre,” “crazy,” “inspiring,” “impressive,”

“surprising,” and related a particular kind of humor to it, classified as “weird,” “light” and “ironic.” Certainly, some bars have live acts (open mics, singer-songwriters, poetry slams) which can be endowed with similar attributes but then the particular performances are usually described and not the venue itself. But in the case of the PB, the guests connect these characteristics particularly to the place, instead of single performances. Further, the regular visitors described some “other places” that incorporated equitable elements to the PB, none of the interviewees questioned the PB status of “uniqueness”. What is the performance bar doing so different, what sets them apart from all these other venues? Firstly, let us clarify what is meant by “the other”: Literally, the respondents referred to every other cultural or nightlife venue they could think of, including bars, clubs, festivals, galleries or theatres. I then discovered four main contrasting juxtapositions through which the demarcation is implemented: commercial – uncommercial; innovative – traditional; incidental – sustainable; artistic – non-artistic.

#### *Commercial – Uncommercial*

The demarcation is especially strong from the Witte de With “big promotion street” with bars like “Witte App” that are regarded as “popular places,” “crowded every night,” and designed for “mainstream consumers” (Raivo). The atmosphere and its customers were referred to as “boring” and repetitive: “it is always the same, standing around and drinking” (Fenna). Places as such became “too commercialized,” (Thorsten) diluted and homogenous for the interviewees because they don’t dare to be different and are built up according to predictable marketing concepts. Either because of a lack of budget or necessity, there are no performances, no entertainment offered; or at least not the kind of entertainment PB guests seem to look for.

#### *Traditional – Innovative*

Further, it differs from theatres for the respondents because of its flexibility and freedom to come and leave whenever they feel like it. The informality sets it apart, by making the visitors feel “behaviourally free” (Carol) and engaged, which means that the boundary between performer and audience is seen as much more blurry and loose than in a theatre, where one sits in an assigned chair with a clear distance from the happenings on stage (Ryöppy, Lima and Buur 2015). Besides that, the PB is described as much cheaper, and with a shorter duration of the performances, which are stretched out throughout the entire night. The quality is regarded much higher in the theatre, without lowering the value of the performances in the PB, but those are seen as supplementary to the whole night out experience.

#### *Incidental – Sustainable*

Also, bars or cafes that hosts music bands or live acts could not compare to the PB, since it would be again mere consumption of the art, instead of getting involved. As Hendrick stated, “it is like when you invent a different way of thinking about art and then just play and fool around with.” That’s what they seemed to miss from all the other places: action, physical involvement, disruption of the usual and “getting out of your emotions (Alexa).” Although some festivals or bars were named that had some special nights with gigs and performances comparable to the PB, all of these describe single events of which none was as sustainable as the PB, which established its reputation from being open every weekend.

### *Non-artistic – Artistic*

Finally, the atmosphere in the PB was described akin to a gay bar, with its gender role play, cross-dressing and “wild, unconventional parties” (Thorsten). However, they were not seen as innovative, artistic and “inspiring.” PB regulars were fond of the fact that the PB didn’t make use of any label, meaning that it is supposedly not the point to offer a place particularly for the gay community, but instead “a place for everyone.” Lastly, the role play concept and community-building of sex clubs and “comic cons” or other festivals were compared to the PB. However, the PB again differed because of its focus on performance art, whereby role play marks only one element among many others. To conclude it seems to be the unexpected combination of a range of features and elements that make up the PB as a unique place that seems not to fit into any imaginable scheme for its visitors.

### 4.2.3 Outstanding characteristic of the place

Behind the four suggested categories lay some very particular characteristics of the PB, namely “secrecy and exclusivity,” “surprises” and “entertainment” that demarcate it from other places, while simultaneously arouse a specific attraction and fascination to the visitor as it will be elaborated in the following sub-chapters.

#### **Secrecy and exclusivity**

All of the regular guests found out about the Performance Bar from hearsay or ‘by coincidence,’ because from the outside it is actually unlikely to find your way inside by your own. Without any large sign or lettering it appears as a quite nondescript place, inconspicuously kept with the door being only a crack open. Also, a bit remote from the Witte de With street, it is located in one of the side streets next to the big brother WORM. It seems like the PB is surrounded by an almost mystical appearance of secrecy and exclusivity. Instead of huge posters, social media or marketing campaigns, most people

know about it through their channels of friends, which touches on the idea of a “secret society” and a “real insider” place.

What seems to fascinate the customers is the rather unprofessional perceived service, with a sparse offer on drinks, partly “horrible performances” and the fact that the hired DJs can play an arbitrary genre and “weird tunes” (Raivo) on their record players. By sticking to their ideas, the hosts of the PB are seen as quite authentic. Hendrick assumes that this marks the “difference between a popular place and a place that just stand for its values and doesn’t change anything. In a popular place, they tend to change towards what public wants.” Apparently, the PB team wouldn’t change their style of running the bar according to their customer's preference and needs. Instead, its visitor’s needs are particularly satisfied by the fact that the PB is keeping its “counter-discourse” of how to run a bar. The visitors seem to be captivated by this break of expectation, the caused confusion and disruption by breaking down the usual and what is considered as “the norm.” With the most ironic twist being the stamp they put on your hand, where its written “normal.” Do they want to make you normal? Or to make the extraordinary normal? Certainly, this play with normality and the strong opposition to it creates a specific identity of the place.

### **Surprises and Amazement**

Another particular characteristic is the promise of “every night is different” (Florian), with unexpected parties, turns or surprises so that it never repeats itself. The atmosphere is supposedly always different, depending on each night, and the fact that it is so fluid and changeable keeps it alive. These staged surprises seem to be a big part of the concept. The event descriptions don’t add too much sense, and the free-handed conduct of the two hosts enables the immediate transformation and adaptability in all kinds of directions. The element of unpredictability is a very crucial one and one of the main motivators to visit the performance bar over and over again. The guests seem to yearn for these novel impressions, and pleasant surprises as the following excerpt from one of the interviews demonstrate:

Fenna: It’s just you get surprised in a very funny, absurd way. You never know what you gonna expect, it’s like the box of chocolate from Forrest Gump.

Researcher: Is it always tasty the chocolate?

Fenna: Oh, no way! (laughing)

Researcher: How does it taste like?

Fenna: Well, sometimes the performances are quite, well most of the time they are quite absurd, or they are weird, but I just love it! You stand there with your mouth open, like “whoa”- What the fuck am I...? Am I the witness of...what? I can’t even describe it. It’s a weird thing going on there, but it is always fun for me. It is so absurd that you just keep on laughing, you stand there smiling and astonished with your mouth open.

The visitors are clearly in fond and attracted by the absurdity the PB represent for them. Following their accounts, it lightens up their evening and delivers entertaining moments and joy. However, it is a *particular* joy they experience, which is not shared by a majority of people. Many respondents reflected on the fact that “not everybody is ready” for this kind of humor and that the approach in how to “deal with the absurdity of life” (Thorsten) is a very specific one (see Allan 2008).

### **Entertainment**

The fact that the visitors can be entertained, instead of having to find own ways to entertain themselves seems quite appealing to most, as they stated they might get bored otherwise. Quiet nights turn into life, as many reported to have a great laugh for most of the time and to appreciate every small humorous detail they can find in a PB night. Regulars like the expressiveness of the performers and that the shows don't last too long, so the scenery is constantly changing. The fact that some compare it to watching television might indicate, however, that they do not find most performances too sophisticated or intellectual, but rather an easy entertainment that delivers them this particular joy. More serious performances with heavy content and encryption seem to mark the exception. And whenever such are happening, the reactions were described quite differently. A few visitors stated that it can be emotionally difficult or a mental overload to watch certain performance, which can cause them to block or shut down in the sense that "it just got too weird" for them. But even if the regulars are disliking some performances, they don't seem to be disappointed at all, instead they seem to embrace it, because it adds more variety and unpredictability to the evening:

“It can be very different. It is like from a scale from 1 to ten, it can be anything. Sometimes it is so fucking bad and awful but sometimes there are things like ‘oh man, so good’!” So, It depends. But that's kind of charming about the whole place that everybody is able to do something.” (Mila)

The quality seems to be subordinate to the value of democratizing the arts and granting everybody the chance to perform themselves on stage (see Zolberg 2004). Further, the fact that it's not too serious gives the visitors the opportunity to move around freely, which makes their evening lighter and more playful. Concluding, for most of the visitors the performances don't need to contain messages all the time or deep philosophy. Instead, they should be entertaining in the first place. The most favorited seem to be the ones that extract intensive emotions, either through mockery, irony, shock or disturbance and those that are aesthetically moving. Hence the majority of the performances are of a rather entertaining nature and kept simple and easily comprehensible for every visitor. If there is a message, it is usually transmitted pretty straightforward without any major metaphors or circumlocutions. The focus of the performances seems to be on triggering strong reactions, knowing, of course, that things are getting better when provoking those.

However, this often happens through the use of humor, irony, and satire, which caused controversy perception and opinion about the limits of personal appropriateness for some visitors. This particular humor, which often seeks to vilify or diminish traditions, cultures, and lifestyles, is perceived by some, mostly foreign visitors as ridicule and boundary crossing. As Alexa reported in our interview, she considers it as the “typical Dutch humor”: Very direct, not very reflective and without greater sensitivity to the perception of others. Also, Nuzza, a Polish woman (not a regular guest and therefore not interviewed), emphasized that she sometimes gets uncomfortable with the performances, because she thinks that it's all about making something ridiculous and that not enough sensitivity is being paid to certain social groups or ethnic groups. This debate will be discussed more elaborately in the discussion part 5.2 “Censorship to artistic freedom and self-expression?”.

As described in this previous subchapter, all of the interviewees were very strong in the demarcation of the PB from other places, and in fact, they are strongly demarcating from “other people” as well. In the following subchapter, it will be discussed in which way the regular visitors of the PB confine boundaries between themselves and “other people” that go to “other places”, but interestingly also between “other people” that visit the PB through the argumentation of differing values.

#### 4.2.4 Demarcation from “other people”

As the PB is perceived unique, its regular customers seem to long for this uniqueness as well. Which follows the assumption by Kim and Drolet (2003), who states that the choices we make in our daily lives can be understood as acts of self-expression, through which individuals make statements about themselves. Further, as uniqueness is supposed to be a desired value in Western culture, individuals seek to make particular choices to build up particular images of their personality (Kim and Drolet 2003). Through the display of varied choices, people demarcate themselves from others and create a sphere of “specialness” around them. When regulars hence claim they do not want to be seen “like everyone else in everyone places” (Raivo), they express their idea of avoiding conformity by considering their choices as breaks from standard behavioral consistency (Kim and Drolet 2003). But let’s clarify who is going to the PB in the first place. As Florian recalled, at the beginning the audience consisted mostly of “highly educated” and artistic assessed people, but nowadays it is supposed to be more diverse with “old guys” and “youngster,” lots of “artsy people” and internationals, many expats, students as well as workers. When it comes to age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and gender the audience is perceived as a complete mixture. Like one regular said it’s mirroring the diversity and internationality of Rotterdam. Janpier identified a core audience, though, which is made up of “mostly millennials, white, with art education, culturally interested, more than average creative interest and curious about play.” Águila et al. (2008) discovered in their study that postmodern values could mostly be ascribed to highly educated and young people that favor cultural values and leisure over values of hard work and material possession. Further, they are associated with

creative, self-conditioned characteristics and a focus on self-realization (Águila et al. 2008), which resonates with my consideration of a “postmodern audience”<sup>4</sup> that described the regulars of the PB.

Regulars also dissociated the performance bar audience from what they called “mainstream consumers.” Some admitted having a fix preconception about the people going to places as “Witte App,” commercial cinemas or the audience of TV shows as “Holland got talent.” One of the interviewees described the “mainstream consumers” as a “flock of sheep” and quite “one-dimensional.” Other visitors referred to the people, they dissociated themselves with as the close-minded “bro-types” or “machos” acting within their “structured imposed masculinity” or as very uptight in fulfilling expected roles:

“I can go to a normal bar. Be a perfect woman for my age, but I’m kind of proud that I go there too because it makes me me. It’s not a normal thing to do, because the PB is a different taste. If I tell people that I go to PB probably, they think I am open-minded.” (Fenna)

On the contrary, the PB visitors were perceived as “different” “particular,” and more complex people. Does that mean the audience is full of cultural snobs, claiming to be the cultural elite? Interestingly they demarcated from “snobs” as well and liked it about the performance bar that it’s a “non-pretentious place” (Thorsten) and the fact that everyone can perform, which connects to the idea of things being not taken as very “grave” and serious as in other so-called avant-garde or highbrow cultural places. Especially the invited artist and the PB team were regarded as alternative, extraordinary and “very interesting characters” (Francisco), whom many of them enjoyed observing. But even more interestingly for the regulars the people going to the PB are not the same as the “Performance bar people”. Many interviewees made a clear distinction between these two and their mechanisms of demarcation followed the assumption of differing values. The display and understanding of oneself as an independent individual with a unique set of thoughts, preferences, choices or values leads the visitors to express and assert those traits, which they feel make them unique and define their “self” (Kim and Drolet 2003). This aspect of personality display is called “expressive individualism” and is used demarcate and protect oneself from differing value sets and conflicting personality traits (Kim and Sherman 2007).

#### 4.2.5 Values of “Performance Bar people”

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<sup>4</sup> When reconsidering the fact that many of the regulars, however, are working within a corporate environment, they seem to be caught between postmodern reality and their modern workplace reality, based upon conflicting and contradicting values. How this conflict is being approached and intended to resolve, will be discussed in the chapter “play action”.



The regulars considered themselves as being “open-minded” and assessed with a particular mindset of “being open and carefree” (Ohana). Values or skills that are supposedly required in the PB to be comfortable with the messages that come across and the performances that are shown (see Sheldon et al. 1997). Therefore, I would like to introduce two concepts, the one of openness, which describes a character trait of someone's personality and open-mindedness as a value and skill that can be trained and developed. To start with openness, it is described as one of the “Big five personality traits,” (Sheldon et al. 1997) and associated with an imaginative, curious and broad-minded character that strives for novel and unconventional experiences (McCrae and Costa 1997; LePine, Colquitt and Frez 2000). Further, open Individuals are attributed with self-monitoring skills and the willingness to question societal and personal values (McCrae and Costa 1997). Accordingly, open-mindedness is the ascribed ability to “be aware of one’s fallibility as a believer and to acknowledge the possibility that anytime one believes something, one could be wrong” (Riggs 2010:172). Especially when one’s own point of view is in conflict with another, serious attention should be paid to the alternative view. Even the strongest believe should be undertaken a test of fallibility, which requires firstly, “self-knowledge” about one’s strengths and weaknesses and secondly to “self-monitor” whether one’s own view is likely to be biased in a certain situation or domain (Riggs 2010). Hence, constant reflection and challenging of one's own values and beliefs are what makes up an “open mind.” As Florian explicates, the PB “challenges you openmindedness and if you don’t have an open mind or aren’t ready to be open minded you don’t come, but you are still welcome. And sometimes, you know, some people will go away, but that’s fine with me if it's only the dedicated people who are interested in these kind of things that’s the best.”

Further, the shared understanding of “live and let live” (Hendrick), meaning that “your freedom stops where you start annoying the freedom of the other person” (Alexa), seemed to resonate strongly. Further, a valued trait was the respect for the performer (e.g., quietly listen to a poem in the middle of the night) and the privacy of the performers. The regulars think that these values are not carried in by every visitor (“the other”) since they observed visitors that had issues with the expression of homosexuality, with men wearing dresses, and who were not taking the PB staff serious with their costumes and role-playing:

“There was a group of 20 people entering like ‘we take over this place now.’ They were starting to make fun of it, screaming ‘boo hoo hoo’ or whatever. Yeah, I don't really like this type of audience, they were clearly not like performance bar people. But this type of audience will not come a second time.” (Mila)

Especially the so-called “Bro-types,” described as “typical Dutch macho man” were clearly on the red list. Every night it was said you could have a “good” or a “bad” audience, with the latter being people that were described as not being “ready” for the PB. These people supposedly only come for “getting wasted, stealing stuff, misbehaving and annoying everyone” (Mila). Whenever these “other people”

entered the performances, who acted not according to the codes and with the mindset of “Performance bar people” it marked an unpleasant disruption for them. It was assumed that these “other people” were struggling to let the joy take themselves in and instead reacted irritated and challenged (see Allan 2008). Sticking to the depictions from the interviewees, open-mindedness, a particular kind of humor and entertainment that is not suiting everyone’s taste all serve as a filter, deciding over who comes and who leaves the PB. Indeed, it can be really hard to figure out all the social codes and cues if you are not used to them, especially if these are blurry and hard to pin down. And this irritation can cause strong reactions or a strong need to defend ones “honor” and own values (Goffman 1959). Such confusion in role expectations and identity dissonance can cause a wide range of emotional disturbance, from surprise to disgust to the feeling of being incompetent in how to deal with the new, unconversant environment (Allan 2008).

### 4.3 The magic circle

In the previous chapter, it has been discussed how the regular guests define the usual reality consisting of “other places and people” with whom they dissociate themselves. Even though living and in some cases even working in mainstream society, regulars seem to feel the need to escape from it into a spatiotemporal delineated ‘playground,’ surrounded by a magic circle, which is designed by the PB team. The following chapter, therefore, will explain how this process of construction can be retracted and explained .

**Sub-question 2:** “How are Daniel and Florian as the “designers” constructing a safe and playful atmosphere in the PB that enables them to conduct a specific form of audience engagement?”

#### **The hosts and the “Performance Bar Family”**

Before explaining the construction of the magic circle, I would like to provide a better understanding of the designers behind it and how they are perceived by their audience. As Florian and Daniel told me they share the same functions, tasks, and responsibilities, though Daniel tends to be more involved with the theatrical processes and Florian with bar-related technicalities. As they organize and handle most of the things themselves, once per week, they meet in the back office to plan the activities and events for the weekend, curate the artist line up and do all the operational and administrative task that comes with running a business. Their support team grew over time because of their growing audience and their plan to expand their operation. Nowadays they are being supported by friends, family members, and fellow employees who are dealing with communication, social media affairs and further, a network of volunteers helps them every night with the ticket sale. The hosts are selecting the barkeepers as they need to have some ‘performance soul’ and play an import part in creating a certain vibe and help to shape the place. Instead of application adverts on the internet, they seem to be ‘hired from the stage,’ (Raivo) are either guys that started working as volunteers or close friends of Daniel and Florian.

When it comes to their status as hosts and bartender, they both have their distinct style in how to ‘play’ that role, how to perform themselves and host their guests. I collected information from the respondents in how they perceive the two of them as a person and as performers and whether they think there would be a difference at all. To them, it is important to have both of them in the bar because they have strong tendencies in how to engage the visitor that is being balanced out by the other. Dan is perceived as more of a perfectionist and introverted performer. He is described as slightly more distant and serious, closed up and very immersed in his role-play, but also, very skilled in working with the audience. It is also him who usually initiates a participatory performance that is prepared and thought of in advance. Florian is perceived as a more approachable and entertaining

character and his actions, in the perception of the visitors, tend to be more improvised and spontaneous, but also more provocative towards the audience. Further, he is supposedly making use of method acting, which means that when he decides to dress up, e.g. as a pregnant woman, he interacts with the audience within the parameters of his character, though his general behavioral attitude is perceived as quite constant and more persistent.

#### 4.3.1 Constructing the magic circle

Generally speaking, a performance bar evening can be separated into three phases. The first one starts with the opening of the bar at 9 pm and was referred to as the “awkward hour.” It is regarded as the preheat phase in which only a few and usually devoted regular guests are hanging out in the bar, passing their time by talking and getting some first drinks. The new ones might be a bit puzzled and ask themselves: “Is it this already?” because there is not too much happening during this time. It can happen though, depending on the mood of the hosts, that the few guests get involved in some special activity like being dressed up or involved in some interactive games.

At around 10 pm the first performance usually starts, and by 10:30 pm the place starts to fill up with more people. This time marks a turning point and the evening crawls into the “heat phase” with an increased audience that initiates more interaction. The party vibe starts to build with more alcohol being consumed and people conquering the dance floor. Every half an hour there is a performance delivered until 12:30 am most of the times. At this point the peak phase is reached, performances are usually over (but that can differ) and the “pumping party” is full on and stays until 2 am, when the bar eventually closes.

I want to argue in my study that every evening at the performance bar can be understood as a sort of play, separated from the “usual reality” by constructing a magic circle around it (Huizinga 2014). For it to happen, every evening Daniel and Florian are designing play scenarios with little and quite inexplicit rules (Huizinga 2014). Some of the respondents were wondering about the concept and audience engagement themselves, as pointed out by Sebastián: “The structure of the thing is not so public, they try to run the show properly, but it is very unclear how much is prepared like how they make the show running.” Consequently, I tried to come up with an answer myself and found it by getting a deeper insight into play studies, particularly the idea of the ‘magic circle’ (Huizinga 2014). In my scope of apprehension, Florian and Daniel use certain parameters to frame the ‘magic circle,’ which they are constructing. For example, they dress up as persona “X” (e.g., mermaid, space cowboy, drama queen) and persona X acts like “Y” (e.g., secretive, annoying, loud). They have a preset theme or game “Z” (e.g., Performance awards, Bingo night, Murder mystery, Pas de Pantalon), for which they sort of planned a script, which is then generated by itself during the evening. They invite their guests to participate in the theme or game and to collectively write the script. The script and its plot are therefore never completely finalized beforehand but developed through improvisation on the basis

of some general guideline (Zimmerman 2004; Rodriguez 2006). Playing hence describes the free-handed motion within a more or less rigid structure that explores the interstitial spaces between and among its parameters (Zimmerman 2004). In many cases, the performance can be understood as part of the concept, since they had been curated according to the night's theme. Especially when Daniel or Florian are giving a performance themselves, it is within the frame of the nights specific play design. Disruptive moments are particularly interesting since they destroy predictability, let the script go off hand and can create chaotic scenarios. I would like to give a little illustration with the example of the "disaster weekend" that took place once. A night, in which everything was supposed to go wrong. At some point in the night, everyone had to literally leave the bar and take a walk around the block with the hosts. Through such intervention, the usual bar operation was disrupted, which certainly is a disaster commercially-wise since no drinks could be sold during this time. By breaking out of conventions and expectancies, the hosts allow themselves the freedom to work around and adapt their parameters to every possible scenario. This methodical commitment to playfulness and experiments places the PB inside the magic circle, cut off from traditional theatres and art institutions (Rodriguez 2006). In the case of the "disaster night," the boundaries of the magic circle even expanded and were temporarily marked off, since the play was happening in the everyday world outside the constructed playground of the PB. Such interventions and performances demonstrate the fluidness and elasticity of the magic circle (Rodriguez 2006).

The PB materializes a fantasy in a way as it had been compared to a "window into another reality" (Tizo), a "drug" (Ohana) or a "TV show." But unlike a TV show, where there is a fix script etc. and artificial, pretended action, in the PB "real action" is performed. Very particular, context-based action, however, that usually couldn't happen in other everyday life settings. The window metaphor comes quite close to what's happening since you can look through and open a window, but you cannot open for example a TV screen. The window symbolizes a passageway, a possibility to trespass and enter the fantasy. Rieber (1996) refers to "microworlds," which can exist naturally or constructed as for example in the form of a children's playground. In those people can enter to 'live a certain domain', instead of only learning about it (comparable to living in another country to learn about the culture and language). Also, in the PB you can experience and perform the 'live action' with your body and with your mind, and as many regulars asserted you have to be there in order to understand it. Instead of a window frame, however, I propose the idea of a 'magic circle' as described by Huizinga, which is being entered to take part in the play. As Daniel explicates:

"The Performance Bar kind of works like a plugin. You can adapt it to situations. If we would be in an organization that's already existing, we would adapt to the circumstances there, but here we can be quite self-sufficient. There are many ways that can come on our path, but we don't know them yet".

The flexibility and adaptability seem key in constructing the magic circle. But how does such a loose concept work out and not break apart? Firstly, the themes and games are prepared and planned without predetermining the interaction with the audience, because then there wouldn't exist a possibility for play (Zimmerman 2004). Secondly, I assume it comes with the experiences and skills, Daniel and Florian acquired throughout the years of constant practice. They learned how to engage with an audience, how to deal with disruptions and how to work with all kinds of different theatrical formats, layouts, and situation. At least, the visitors perceive them as very competent in what they are doing, as can be concluded by Raivo's remark:

“They totally understand what they are doing, their concept and every evening has his own idea to implant idea in the people who visit the place to deliver that idea through the performances through the speeches through the awkward silence moments that they have there.”

One example of a performance that was mentioned by three regular guests can shed light and exemplify their approach to audience engagement: As the guests entered the bar at the beginning of the evening, it was pitch-black dark and only a relatively small number of people were present. Suddenly Daniel popped up and handed out bubble gum to every new visitor. No one knew what they would put in their mouth, for the hosts played with the concept of suspicion and trust (see Rodriguez 2006). The guests then had to make a bubble, and each time someone did so, Daniel held the flashlight against them, which again put pressure on a person because they find themselves in the spotlight for everyone. A magic circle with undefined boundaries and unwritten rules, as practiced in the PB, naturally implies an improvised and venturesome way to negotiate these rules and boundaries of the play (Rodriguez 2006). Both of those elements rely strongly on the actions and response of the players, by which all kind of creative association and outcomes can occur. In such cases, Rodriguez (2006) refers to the “experimental emergence, sustenance and transformation of a community” (Rodriguez 2006: page number unidentifiable), that engages in a purposely ambiguous and risky game, stretching the boundary of the circle through trial and error.

#### 4.3.2 Preselection through social media channels

Much of the construction of the magic circle is happening in the back office, when the event descriptions, which are posted on the Facebook page are created. Their use is to introduce the game or the theme of the night and to have a preselection of guests because the PB team anticipates and understand that not everyone feels addressed by their activities. Most of their event description and titles leaves the visitor completely in the dark about what's going to happen and invites them to be surprised. Some basic information is always given like the entrance fee, opening hours and artistic

line-up for the night but beyond that, all of their posts are doused with humor, a very particular one, almost always ironic, but not in a mocking sense, but rather with a wink. As an example, one of their event titles was :“The Performance Bar - A Normal Night,” which was followed some weeks later by: “An Abnormal Original Night at The Performance Bar”. Ironic twists like these can help to further establish the branding and trademark of the PB as an extraordinary place and also install a certain “cliff-hanger” by arousing the promise of “abnormality” that makes visitor curious about what is going to happen. Without revealing too much, one can only imagine something abstract by the suggested themes.

I am certainly not a language expert, but by going through the social media posts on Facebook, one can find a wide palette of linguistic gimmicks, - staccato phrases, cryptic texts, linguistically coded with Dadaist elements or poetic language, for example: “Sumo Sumo Gong Gong - Sado Manga Pon Pon - Goshi Goshi Geisha - Hen Tai Kawaii - Harajuku JiuJitsu - Moshi Moshi Sushi - Kami Kami Kaze”. Such creative play with language can be seen as an art in itself, which contributes to the overall work of art of a PB evening. The playful and absurd language, however, is not necessarily addressed towards a highly sophisticated, elite audience, since the content is usually kept quite simple.

Many time, narratives are used, which are centered around galactic worlds and encounters with ‘higher entities.’ For example, gets the reader enlightened about the “dimension of brussel sprouts” filled up with “awkward energy” and called to collectively create a “plastic entity to a new utopical world” or “some global pandemic weirdness.” Such narratives with their strong sci-fi character demarcate the PB from the “usual reality” by ascribing it as another dimension or galaxy that its visitors can travel to. This again triggers the image the PB displays of itself to the outside as a place far off the ordinary life, a sort of ‘existent fantasy’ that can be entered every weekend (see Rieber 1996).

Often indefinite dress codes are announced, e.g., “Retro futurism glamazon realness!” that leaves it open to the visitor to think of something creative themselves. Such appeals or encouragements are often followed by announcing support in dressing up and “daring to be different.” Also, for some events, visitors get free entrance if they dress up, especially for the “special theme nights” that they organize, e.g., the “pas de pantalon” series, the “drag factory” or events particularly designed for specific social or cultural groups, e.g., “Cap Verdean night” or “genderbending-queer-party”. Sometimes the modified version of popular games like “Bingo” or “Murder Mystery” is included in the night, whereby the playful approach to engage the audience becomes quite apparent. Also, through the over-boarding use of irony and childlike airiness, social constructs as ‘awkwardness’ or gender are being transformed into something extremely playful.

They also have a very gentle and affectionate way to address their audience, when they refer to them as “free people,” “amazing beings” or “fantastic creatures.” Attributes they consider their audience to associate themselves with and which set them apart from the other ‘ordinary’ and perhaps ‘uptight’ people.

Through their posts, they can accentuate and transport some of their ideas and values (“let's be careful with each other, so we can be dangerous together”) or even political beliefs as the following event title indicates: “Watching CAT video's and other things you do to avoid the TRUMP situation”. Many reoccurring themes and issues connected to the idea of postmodernity are interwoven in the Facebook event posts. As Florian explained in our interview, they “offer a broad theme of values of course. It ranges from weirdness and awkwardness to gender equality and gender fluidness and finding a way to change the point of view in nightlife.” I tried to cover some of these issues in a short social media analysis and identified following reoccurring themes: Liberation (“We honor our body”), self-expression and exploration (“an invitation to those people who search more about body awareness and creativity”), gender (“We let female energy rule”), authenticity (“be ready for real contact”), fun and games (“The night will be filled with (...) interactive games with the audience”), awkwardness and boundaries (“Behave like a trash bag, dress like a trash bag”) and above all the promise of a wild, adventurous night (“as crazy as any other night in the Performance Bar”). Additionally, they keep their customers up to date on their Instagram channel. Every weekend, impressions of the weekend are uploaded as black and white photos or short video clips, bringing the “weirdness” and “extraordinariness” of the place to the outer world.

The content is therefore clearly pre-selective since it is addressed towards people that are curious to explore and engage in the proposed concepts. By this, the PB team can filter and sort of steer the selection of a particular audience for a distinct theme or activity-based night.

#### 4.3.3 Encouraging visitors to perform

Why are Daniel and Florian creating this magic circle in the first place? Their artistic mission seems to be the support of upcoming artists and everyone who needs some boost of confidence to pursue their artistic passions. Daniel explained in our interview that they “didn't want to curate it in a way that says what is good art and what is bad art, but just let things occur and leave it to the audience what they think of it.” Without any prejudgement and any instructions on the part of WORM, they are completely free in their curating and seem to be more interested in the creative process than in the end product, so the idea of creating something collectively becomes very apparent (see Turino 2008).

For Carol, it was very powerful to meet someone who believed in her talent and encouraged her to perform on stage and to do live paintings. By allowing everyone to perform and giving them space to ‘express themselves,’ Daniel and Florian seem to follow the ideals of German artist Joseph Beuys who famously stated, “Everyone is an artist.” With this quote though, he didn't refer to the traditional association of an artist as painter or sculptor which was adjudicated to a rare and scarce number of ‘creative masterminds’ (Richards 2007). Likewise, today's scholars of “everyday creativity” he claimed that every act inhabits potential of doing something creative (Runco 2007) and that there is



a desire in every person for self-expression and use of one's aesthetic and creative qualities (Richards 2007). As Vidal (2013) explicates, "living creatively means (...) becoming all that we are capable of becoming through self-discovery and self-discipline. Then life becomes art. The richest fuel for ideation is first-hand experience" (Vidal 2013: 247).

And these first-hand experiences are what Daniel and Florian want to give their visitors. With their position that art and creativity is nothing that particularly belongs to trained artists, they are granting everyone the opportunity to express themselves artistically without any skilled technique. Huizinga (2014) assumed that adults, likewise children, explore themselves and their relationship to others by playing out various social scenarios. In the context of the PB then, exploration of social interaction means then that there is no fix skill or predefined learning outcome to be achieved, but rather participants are allowed to explore their own possibilities within the play situation that is framed by some simple play instructions (Rodriguez 2006). The process is dynamic and developed by itself since the general region (e.g., body comfort) is only roughly sketched and outlined by the designer. Hence, they might be surprised by the collective outcome and the individual learning trajectories themselves (Rodriguez 2006). It can be called a collective outcome since the designer, and the participants are co-creating the play situation and experimenting with its boundaries and possibilities (Rodriguez 2006).

## 4.4 Construction of the place

In the previous chapter, it has been explained why and in what way Daniel, Florian, and their team design a magic circle that separates it from the usual reality. In their Facebook event descriptions, they propose the idea of an alternative reality to escape, in which they make use of specific theatrical methods to engage the audience. The guests are invited to participate in the fantasy play, which is partly planned beforehand but mainly developed by itself through improvisation and collective production. In the following chapter, it will be discussed how the PB constitutes its particular identity and how the visitors become co-creator of the place's "careless and free" atmosphere and further develop a special bond to the fellow audience member so that a community-building process is evolving. Which brings us back to **Proposition 1**: The visitors and organizers establish a particular form of community-building every evening in the PB.

Particularly the collective construction of a "safe space" is predominant in enabling all participants to engage in the play safely and inclusively and further a place, which they can escape to express themselves more "careless and free" compared to their everyday lives.

### 4.4.1 Constructing a safe space

Sticking to Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor, places do offer stages for interaction, and develop over time a certain atmosphere, which is supposed to represent values and behaviors of its participants (Milligan 1998). The individual participants foremost construct the interactional potential and atmosphere of such places and are called the "set designer" (Goffman 1959). Such atmosphere (e.g. of warmth, fun, safety, acceptance) can create specific interactional patterns, which is more regular visitors are beginning to anticipate and which causes a certain attachment and meaning to the place (Milligan 1998).

Visitor and organizers of a PB evening seem to collectively participate in constructing a "safe space," in which they feel secure, comfortable and welcome. For my research, I will refer to the term in two senses -safe as well as inclusive. According to Roestone Collective (2014), a safe space is foremost targeted on making sure no participant is the victim of abusive forms of behavior, while as the inclusive space shall guarantee that every individual feel included and comfortable in the social setting (Roestone Collective 2014).

According to the PB house rules of the organizers, safety is guaranteed as long as no violent, disrespectful or sexually abusive behavior occurs, no racist or sexist language is used, and no illegal drugs are taken; the "reasonable limit" as described by one interviewee.

The construction of this safe environment hence starts with the PB team, who make sure that every guest can report ‘inappropriate behaviour’, which then will be sanctioned, and further measures are taken to prevent it from happening in the first place. Carol’s reflection is the following:

“In general, I think it starts with Daniel and Florian, and then I think that the people who go regularly start to kind of get the idea. And then you kind of share that with each other. So, it just kind of like. You know, I think it is definitely planned and it is also organic (Carol).”

Florian and Daniel claim not to have any specific audience targets but to be open and welcoming to anyone. A claim which runs counter though with their preselected attraction of a particular audience for the special theme nights they offer and the audience’s description as “postmodern”. Still, Florian perceives it as one of their focus to be a safe place for everybody, for transgender as well as “street boys” and he is in fond to see such “different worlds” coming together in the performance bar. Daniel, however, has a slightly different stance on this matter. Though he claims to consider ways of being more inclusive, he does not see it as a moral obligation to do so and not one of their goals. His point of view is that there are certain societal groups and stigmatized minority, which don’t come in, because they are excluded due to certain boundaries that are outside the space itself, which are hard to overcome and to deal with, like lack of language skills or money. Although their goals are not to be a safe space, there are certain values they held important like “being yourself” (sexual preference, etc.) and not feeling weird or embarrassed by expressing that. His criterion is more the responsiveness to feedback when visitors are reporting inappropriate behavior, so he can look for options to create a “better space”.

As regular guests often bring in new friends and acquaintances to the PB, they prepare the other for the experience through their knowledge by giving contextual information. To give a practical example: People who visit a carnival for the first time, most likely struggle to understand the social interactions and norms, if no “expert” would have clarified the context in advance (see Rodriguez 2006). The atmosphere in the PB is compared to a gay bar, in which no one is offended by displaying his/her sexual orientation and also a space in which people can be approached easily and where these encounters don’t necessarily have a specific end goal, but rather a curiosity in the person. However, women, as well as men, have found themselves at least once in an uncomfortable situation of either attracting unwanted attention by shemales or horny men with a “clear, specific end goal,” (Carol) leading them to disrespectful, inappropriate behavior. A male stranger had been spanking Mila’s butt during one performance, that’s why she suggested that for certain events it could be helpful to have a security man. In the context of play, it is an interesting disruption to consider because not every visitor seems to have internalized the difference between reality and make-believe (Rodriguez 2016). Interestingly Mila tried to excuse his behavior with the remark: “he probably thought it was fake,” which could mean that the molester might have interpreted her ‘sexual’ performance as an invitation to be part of. More likely, however, he was just a rude drunkard. Consequently, it seems that in the PB,

sexually abusive behavior happens, but most likely not more than in any other place. The assumption that everyone who walks in the door is “magically rinsed” of all forms of misbehavior would also be a rather naïve stance. However, most regulars feel that “things aren’t as grave as in other places” (Carol) and that usually, people are respectful and considerate towards each other.

#### *Safe space for self-expression*

The PB is commonly perceived as escape room to flee from ones “simple, boring job” or place, where to compensate what is “missing in life” (Ohana). One part of the regulars seem to find themselves stuck in jobs and daily routines for which they look for an escape room, the other half understand it rather as “a haven for self-expression” (Sebastián). The PB seems to set its visitor back into a childhood state of feeling carefree and relaxed in the way that its visitors don’t have to control their behavior as much as in the “usual reality”. Importantly, everyone seems to be involved in this sort of play, and everyone can decide on which level s/he wants to participate. A place in which “everyone is so weird, so you can’t be possibly the weirdest” (Raivo) is supposed to grant its visitors a high amount of freedom in the way of acting, dressing up and behaving. It seems to the guests that they could “do anything they can think of in the moment” (Fenna). Especially because the performers on stage act as if none social norm or behavioral rules would restrain them. Raivo, who occasionally performed in the PB confirmed this assumption by describing how he made use of the artistic freedom to disrupt conventions by, e.g. surprising the audience with unconventional music genres; he referred to as “hardcore drum and bass from 2002” (Raivo). Generally speaking, the perception of the PB as a safe space is shared by the regular visitors, especially when it comes to freedom of expression. On the other hand, this freedom of self-expression can be daunting for newcomers, as they are being confronted with a situation which is demanding and unclear, in which the behavioural codes are blurry and quite particular (Allan 2008; Goffmann 1959), which again stands in conflict with the idea of an inclusive, safe space.

To sum up, the PB visitors and organizer co-create an inclusive safe for a particular group of people interested in play and free self-expression. Further, this space is created planned and organic at the same time. The next subchapter will deal with the collective building of a community, with contributions on both parts, the organizers, and the visitors.

#### 4.4.2 Community-building

Each night, a unique community is formed within the frame of play, but also throughout time a more sustainable community is built up, consisting of the PB team, regular performers, and visitors. The latter implements some continuity by their shared values and familiarity with each other. Customer

relationships are not built by conversation, but by engaging them in the performances and ideas Daniel and Florian deliver throughout the night. Most of the regulars don't have a personal relationship with the bar team, but they recognize each other and engage in small talk, as time allows it. What the regulars really appreciate is the feeling of being acknowledged as a steady core of the PB. Many regulars felt charmed and perhaps a bit proud, as they revealed to me that the hosts always greeted them or told them things like "see you tomorrow." Also, some regulars stated they would "love to join their team" (Fenna) and get to know them on a more personal level.

The audience itself builds a sort of community bond through the shared observance and experience of the performances, in which they are collectively participating whenever they get invited to do so. Many of the visitors are looking around the audience in the pursuit of recognition and a sort of reassurance for the extraordinary scenery they witness on stage. By exchanging looks and laughs the audience members establish a connection right away, which goes in line with McCulloch's (2011) findings that besides the sense of a shared place, participants construct communities through habitual and often unconsciously routinized practices, such as responding to contagious laughter. Entertainment and humor act therefore as the basis for temporary community building (McCulloch 2011). As Fenna argues she could go all by herself to the PB without feeling alone:

"Because it's fun people laugh at each other even though they don't know each other. And everybody starts talking with each other because of that. This is weird. It's a formula. What happens on stage is helping everyone to lose their shame as well and get to know each other. This is something you don't find anywhere else."

When I was interviewing Fenna in a bar, at some point Hendrick, another regular popped up, and the two of them greeted each other like "old friends," kissing each other on the cheek. However, as Fenna revealed later, they never talked to each other, but build their relationship merely by recognizing the other as a regular to whom they exchange smiles and laughs during the PB evening. Many have made new friends in the PB or at least met "a lot of interesting people more than in any other places. It seems like everybody knows each other, like friends. But maybe they are just open and talk to everyone (Raivo)." Concludingly, the regular visitors of the PB can generally be regarded as open and approachable and rather easy to engage in a conversation. This perception goes hand in hand with my own experiences since I've been to the PB many times by myself and it never happened that I didn't meet anyone new without even initiating encounters on my own. At some evening it felt more like being at a house party, than in a bar, especially at nights with only a few people, the hosts can initiate activities that are particularly designed at creating a kind of intimacy between strangers. Also, Tizo observed during his residency that people seem to "communicate in a more free way, with less commitment and pressure"; many times the encounters he made were not verbal but physical, like "dancing with someone or giving them a kiss". Not every interviewee though interacts so much with others because they come to the PB with a fixed group of friends with whom they stay during the

entire evening. Or they have a fix intention to relax and “chill”, so to not make a big effort into meeting new people but rather being by themselves without initiating or trying to get involved into conversation.

#### 4.4.3 Effects of alcohol

Before we enter the next chapter “Actions of play,” I would like to discuss briefly the effects of alcohol that contribute to the construction of the community, the willingness to engage in play but also the possible negative side effects. After all, it shouldn’t be overseen that all the action is happening within the context of a bar so that the use and consumption of alcohol are important to consider getting a fuller, more coherent understanding of the social interactions. The consumption of alcoholic drinks is commonly taking place in social gatherings, because of its uplifting and exhilarating effects it brings the consumers (Mutchler et al. 2014). Numerous studies investigated ways in which alcohol regulates emotions, especially those of decreasing inhibitions and feeding on risk-taking in social settings (e.g., Sheehan & Ridge, 2001; Montemurro and McClure 2005; Mutchler et al. 2014).

In general, the regulars of the PB ascribed positive effects to their alcohol consumption and regard it as a crucial part of the nightlife setting, as they connect the effects of alcoholic to pleasure and spending a “fun time” (see Sheehan & Ridge, 2001). It helps them to become “freer,” to loosen up (Montemurro and McClure 2005) and makes it for the hosts easier to work with since they become more responsive to challenges and participation. As Raivo concludes: “you get to this point where you are drunk enough and just say: ‘OK, I am ready’.” Five regulars stated that alcohol helped them to overcome feelings of unease and made them less self-conscious and uptight in their behavior (see Montemurro and McClure 2005). They either stated that without alcohol they wouldn’t have been on stage or that the intoxication made it much more comfortable and easier for them to do so. In general, it helps them to get into the night to engage in the games and to decrease the fear of judgment.

The regulars have different drinking habits, though everyone claimed to consume alcohol. The level of intoxication varies, however. Two regulars claimed to be drunk “most of the time” or on a regular base, while for others it varies from “tipsiness to really drunk” and depends on their mood and the atmosphere of the evening. Most of the regulars didn’t sense much danger in the consumption of alcohol or drugs. However, they had observed visitor misbehaving, what is likely to be caused by alcohol consumption. The misbehaving can be in the form of “being annoying” and trying to grab all the attention, to “stealing stuff” and molesting guests. In such situations, alcohol seems to represent a ‘double edged sword’, which frees individuals of social constraints, but in some cases might prevent the guests to discern between play and reality. As Sebastián states, “drugs and alcohol are taken there and as long as no one misbehaves there is no problem.” Hence for the regulars intoxication cannot be held as an excuse for improper behavior in general, but the frequent use of alcohol-related to increase one’s mood and to feel more comfortable to engage in potentially embarrassing behavior is

collectively affirmed and accepted (see Sheehan and Ridge 2001). Also, Tizo attributed fun to alcohol consumption and stressed its socially binding effects (Montemurro and McClure 2005), instead of leading to self-destructive behavior as violence, harassment and mockery, which implies that the regulars and organizers are rather blending out the negative sides of alcohol or at least suggest that “Performance bar people” are not affected by them.

To Janpier, however, there are nights, in which too many people are consuming too many drugs and alcohol, which then makes him, and other guests feel uncomfortable and not welcome. Therefore, he does not always find the social interaction and atmosphere, triggered by intoxication appropriate in the bar. Florian took a more ambiguous stand when he stated that the PB is “not a place to fulfill your drunk habits. But maybe, (it is), you know? You are never sure. You’ll always be confronted with yourself.” Compared to my observations, the alcohol consumption is volitionally supported by the hosts, who give away shots for free regularly, especially for ‘special nights’ like *pas de pantalon* and offering the ‘performance bar special’ which is supposed to maintain a heavy amount of alcohol. For Florian “alcohol is a liquid that actually lubricates” and has comforting effects that make people loosen up and overcome inhibitions and social norms. Which then may result in the expression of specific sides of their personality that contrast with their everyday portrayal of self (Montemurro and McClure 2005), which builds a handy bridge to the next chapter “Actions of play,” in which an in-depth analysis of the regular’s “self-performance” will be delivered.

## 4.5 Actions of play

This chapter compacts the main analysis of the social interactions and audience involvement into play. It will be discussed in which way visitors performer their “self” themselves in a “safe space” with a strong sense of community and the regular consumption of alcohol, - a combination which encourages them to lose inhibitions and overcome fears of shame and judgment. Which leads back to

**Assumption 2:** The perception of the PB as a distinct place from the “usual reality,” triggers and encourages its visitors to engage in forms of „self-expression” that are not socially accepted in other everyday life settings, which leads them to perform, what they refer to as their “true self.”

The PB is supposed to grant its visitors a high amount of freedom in the way of acting, dressing up and performing socially. It seems to the guests that they could “do anything they can think of in the moment (Fenna).” Further, do the PB organizers promote their place on their website as “blurring the boundaries between performer and audience”. However, what does this imply in practice?

### 4.5.1 Distinguishing social acting from theatrical acting

In the following subchapters, we will explore to what degree the regular visitors themselves make use of the boundary blurring between social and theatrical acting and whether they perform and interact less self-conscious and more “authentic” than in their everyday lives. First of all, it will be discussed to what degree the visitors are capable of distinguishing visitors from performers and to what extent such a distinction is even allegeable in the context of the PB.

#### *Blurring the boundary*

This clear difference between actor and spectator and their displayed roles seems to become fussy in the PB. As it can be concluded by the statements made by the interviewees, the distinction between social acting and theatrical acting becomes blurry in both ways: participants don’t have to justify discrepancies between their everyday self and theatrical self as much as they don’t have to account for keeping a steady impression of their social acting (see Goffman 1959; Walsh-Bowers 2006). By asking each participant, I wanted to find out how the “boundary blurring” between the visitor and performers is experienced and evaluated by the regular guests. Indeed, did the switch between social acting and theatrical acting seem to become dynamic and fluent. Namely, highly conflicting and diversified opinion was given in the interviews on the topic of being able to distinguish a visitor from performer, performer from staff and vice versa.

One half of them claimed to be able to distinguish theatrical acting from social acting. The staff would always be wearing attention-grabbing clothing and wander through the room with a certain



confidence, demonstrating familiarity and comfort. Regular visitors, interested in “role play” could be identified, as some of them also dress up more eccentric and “dance around freely” or jump on the bar and perform a “weird dance “(Hendrick).

The other half of the interviewees admitted that it’s hard for them to distinguish who is a performer and who is merely a visitor because the transformation can happen quite fluid. Within a blink, someone from the audience might be disappearing to the backstage and come out on stage a few moments later. Interestingly, was Fenna who claimed always to manage the distinction not able to recognize me as a theatre actor. Because on the night we met, I was performing on stage, and we met just shortly after, but she couldn’t relate me to the person she saw on stage, as she revealed later during our interview. With so much interaction going on during the performances as well it starts to mix and blur quite easily because people can move back and forth between these roles quite often:

“Yes, sometimes it’s confusing and then and I guess the nature of that is to get you wondering ‘oh are we all performing, yeah what kind of roles are we all wearing daily?’ Which is always a good thing to consider.” (Carol)

In one case an interviewee also struggled to make sense of Tizo, the resident artist, which she had seen all the time, but couldn’t tell whether he was just a regular guest that is into “free expression dance” and “doing catwalks on the bar” or if he is a hired artist by the PB to do such performances. Some regulars even struggled to identify the PB staff, because of their costumes and make-up which can make them quite unidentifiable. Such role reversal also becomes apparent when examining the ascriptions or comparisons, the visitor made to the PB (“it’s like being in a theatre”, “in a bar”, a “crazy circus”, “interesting discussion”, or a “pumping party”), which all finally merge into a single event: an evening at the PB. The boundaries of given frames can eventually blur to unrecognizable condition (Fischer-Lichte 2008) and increase the indeterminacy of the performances and the unpredictability of the audience reactions.

#### *Are the hosts themselves?*

When trying to answer the question whether the performance bar hosts, Daniel and Florian are merely playing roles every evening or if they are displaying their “real personality” or “real selves” was a distinct matter of opinion as well. Again, the one side shared the conception of the hosts as designers of their own free universe for self-expression, in which they could perform themselves without feeling awkward and restrained. Within this frame, the hosts can behave and interact as they feel right at the moment: as drunkards, as children, as a woman, in short: by acting what is not the social norm of male bar host’s role behavior. By acting out their inner impulses and enjoying themselves by doing it, seems to relax the visitors and might stimulate them to play around with roles. Janpier perceived Daniel and Florian as hosts not very far from who they are personally. He described their performance as bar

hosts by comparing it to a role-play with certain pre-decided parameters, through which they can express themselves as they are.

The other side of opinion was then that the hosts are always performing a role which the set in their mind for the evening. One regular raised the concern that if it were themselves how they were acting out during the evening, they would face some serious issues and judgments in their daily lives. A close friend of both of them commented:

“Florian is also always performing. He's doing like crazy the whole evening even to me because. He can be very normal very serious. But in that evening, the whole night he's talking to me like he's a girl or something or pregnant woman or whatever. So and he's not giving that up. He's just being in his role like all time. No Daniel can be serious sometimes between the scene. But Florian is being into method acting like always (Mila).”

Concludingly the PB marks a place of confusion and uncertainty about whether its visitors, performers and hosts are merely acting socially or theatrically (Walsh-Bowers 2006). The boundaries between the roles of a visitor, performer, indeed seem to blur in the perception of most regular visitors, which will become even more treacherous when examining the manifold ways, the audience is engaged and transformed into theatrical actors.

#### 4.5.2 Audience engagement

Visitors believe that its more interesting and part of the whole experience of a performance bar evening. The direct involvement is needed for some performances, which benefits the audience because they can experience it directly and possibly understand it better. Performers are supposed to extract strong emotions from the audience and to play around with them by disrupting expectancies and surprising them. In the first place though it's supposed to be fun, to expose visitors to make them show something of themselves, to have collective fun “like in a cabaret,” as Hendrick describes it.

##### *Forms of engagement*

Breel (2015) distinguishes several forms of audience involvement: The full participation (audience's participation as the dominant factor for the outcome of the artwork), co-creation (audience involvement towards determining some parameters of the work), and co-execution (audience enables the artist to perform the work s/he envisioned). All forms contain three crucial aesthetic components: bodily experience, creative contributions and interpersonal relationships between the audience and the performer and between the participants themselves (Breel 2015). It seems like the PB commutes

between these forms of audience engagement. Some of the performers conduct a traditional form of theatre with a rehearsed script and course of action, where the audience is merely involved as spectators. Other performances, however, depend on the active participation of the audience and invite either everybody or some volunteers to engage in the show actively.

The hosts usually engage with the audience during the evening within the role that they are playing, which can happen when you order your beer at the bar, or they initiate some common activity, e.g., when Fabian is saying something in the persona of a teenage girl like “let me see your tongue everybody put out your tongue, oh, so nice and sticky.” For the interviewees, it is usually most fun when they get involved in something and can become creatively and artistically active. One evening a performer offered a workshop, e.g. on Kingsday visitors were invited to make their own version of Donald Trump out of an orange, hay, text markers and colored paper. A collective physical activity can be something like gathering together, holding hands and collectively start a sort of humming sound, which eventually turned into a sort theatre workshop activity, in which one word was mentioned as the broad theme, and each participant had to say one sentence and then hand the word to the next one.

The way in which Daniel and Florian engage the audience is supposed to be always different, depending on the kind of performance and the setting of the evening. Their goal is supposedly to “spread the right vibe for the right theme (Raivo).” Mostly their approach was described as being “chaotic” and “provocative,” while “empathic” at the same time. As Alexa explicates:

“Usually they're there talking to the microphones, and they are saying that ‘come closer, be close, participate.’ They are asking the audience questions, and they can answer. They are doing it like in a combination of theatrical and live act”.

Turino’s (2008) understanding of full participation is based on the tenor that everybody can and should participate in the social interactivity to create a sort of social bond. Hereby Turino distinguishes between subtle (e.g., conversating on parties) and explicit forms of ‘roping somebody into participation’, e.g., when a performer comes very close to an audience member and ‘forces’ an interaction. Every regular agreed that engagement is desired, but that it is not sanctioned if they don’t participate. Though it sometimes seems like they don’t really have a choice, or you might be confronted with judgment as Sebastián reports:

“I am just human I can just go: ‘He! This is a little bit too much. I am comfortable with my pants on’. So, they can get someone else. But the audience will be like ‘boo boo, loser’.”

### *Values*

Participative performance is built on values, with the most important being the degree and intensity of the performance, instead of its quality (Turino 2008). The group leader’s role and responsibility are to

build a foundation, which inspires and facilitates other people to participate. This role is taken by the PB hosts and the performers. For Florian and Daniel, it's an essential artistic value and conviction to involve the audience, instead of regarding them as mere consumers:

“We like to engage the people in our bar, and we like to speak directly to them and try to find things and subjects that are important to us. And we want people to engage in these concepts.”  
(Florian)

If they fail, to get the people hooked on the show, the participative performance cannot succeed. Mostly, it is not difficult to get volunteers on stage, I have never witnessed any case, in which a performance could not happen, because of lack of support. The interviewees describe the audience as being open and eager to participate and grabbing every chance to express themselves. However, for more daring performances, including sexuality or nudity, etc. either a higher sensitiveness and patience towards the audience is needed or the other way of direct, individual confrontation is followed to get someone on stage. Two regulars stated that they had been participating in “daring” performances, e.g. one volunteer was asked to remove a sock from a performers genitals, who laid on stage wrapped in duct tape. Three interviewees further claimed they had or would consider taking off their shirt for a performance. As Daniel states:

“The PB works like an interesting massage. We want to make you feel comfortable, but we also go between the ribs, where it can hurt.”

The visitors are still regarded as sort of material or responder (mirror), which Daniel and Florian use in order to realize their ideas and topics. However, as the audience has the bigger number, the very basic hierarchy is supposed to dissolve in a way. What does this imply though, and can their approach still be considered as innovative and democratic or does it mark a rather traditional format of engaging the audience? Fact is that the hosts and performers have a concept or plan beforehand and then improvise around it during the show, which comes with the experiences to deal with different situations, audiences or formats, which makes them always the initiator of the play situation and its parameters. The idea behind this inclusive approach is that the various levels of experience and abilities give each performance its unique dynamic. Also, the performances have an open format, since individual parts and interactions cannot be pre-planned, most of the performance ideas develop at the moment (Turino 2008). The interaction is seen as very direct and very fluid and dynamic as well and claims to approach people with empathy, instead of mocking them or making fun of them like many comedians do (Kotsko 2010a). For Daniel and Florian it is about empowering people to take risks and to put them into the scene by giving them space and the opportunity to perform themselves and to experience new situations and sensations. As Tizo explains every visitor can be part of every layer and he strongly encourages people to participate, e.g., in his “catwalk”, through which visitors can evolve as they can “lose their shyness and turn into divas on the bar stool.”

The participation is usually more intense and intimate with a small number of visitors involved, the bigger the audience, the more likely they will be treated as a traditional audience. Fenna went, for example, one time at the beginning of the evening when there was barely anyone, and all of them were invited backstage, they could hang out there with the team and some of them were dressed up, which made her “belong to the place” and “very welcome to join their party” (Fenna). Interestingly, she said to join *their* party, which implies the perception that the PB team would have a sort of separate party going on just for themselves in the backstage, which is not shared with the rest of the audience. Therefore, the engagement of the visitors is not limited by asking them on stage, but can be also any form of random, sudden interaction, like giving out candy to people in a fishing net, blowing vodka shots in audiences faces with a hairdryer, giving them strange items e.g. fake flowers, hats (e.g. bandeau with dinosaur on top) plastic object that looks phallus-like, asking them to lick a metal stick. The other way around it is usually not happening though; it seems rather like a one-way “top-down” approach, which means that the collective production of the play is solely initiated by the designers and organizers (PB team and performance artists).

#### *Disruption from the audience*

But what if the disruptions come from the audience, instead of the designers? To me it was interesting to observe how Daniel and Florian deal with interruptions and obstruction caused by audience members. In fact, they both seem to be quite relaxed or even positively challenged by such incidents. Firstly, there are some predictable and stereotypical behaviors coming from some drunk audience members that are taken as given. For example, do they already plan it in their budget to constantly replace fake flowers or props from the bar that are regularly ‘disappearing’. Disturbances of performances on the part of ‘overreactive’ members in the audience are taken as granted as well for which they have many set ways of controlling or counter steering. One way that I observed a few times was to interrupt the whole action of play so they “get out of the game” (e.g., turn down the music), while still being in the game as their characters. But now, they have the flexibility to take turns and move in the direction they want to go. This method is usually used when they have some specific idea in mind in which they think the night should evolve. Although there are exceptions to this, most visitors that are eager to grab the full attention, e.g. by taking the microphone or climbing on the bar, are rather put down and hindered, instead of encouraged to pursue their idea or inner drive. Probably Daniel and Florian fear that the situation might go overboard and that allowing too much freedom would turn the place into an uncontrolled state of play and interaction. On the one hand, they supposedly like chaotic situations, but seemingly they prefer the chaos, which they created themselves, to keep control over the situation. Instead of granting the visitors their idiosyncratic freedom of conduct and play, the hosts seem to have a rather clear and unilateral perception of how the visitors are supposed to participate and be engaged in the evening. Nevertheless, I also observed moments in

which some forthright howlers got integrated into the performance and brought into the spotlight so to get all the desired attention they needed. One particularly successful example of at first sight regarded ‘disturbing external factor’ turned into something legendary when a group of ‘street boys’ entered the bar, howled around but then got offered the stage and performed for the first time some of their hip-hop tracks.

To sum up the social interactions in the PB follow a playful course of action, triggered by the feedback loop from the audience, which enables the hosts to be responsive and open for ways of altering the play in any present moment. Instead of trying to maintain control over the situation, willingness is shown to let things go off hand and improvise further action (Ryöppy, Lima and Buur 2015). Because of distancing to traditional artistic values and focusing more on the engagement and entertainment of the audience decreased uncertainty and risk of failure as improvised outcomes are unpredictable (Ryöppy, Lima and Buur 2015). However, does this only explain one aspect of the social interaction, the one initiated by the hosts and performers to include the audience in their play. Another crucial side is the initiations by an individual visitor to perform her/his “self.” Following the postmodern idea of the protean self, people take on various, sometimes contradicting roles or can find themselves in the new, different context in which the role performance is unclear and needs to be invited by the social actor her/himself. In the following subchapter, we will discuss the ways in which the regular visitors understand the multiplicity of the self and how they perform sides of their personality that they wouldn’t conduct in an everyday setting in the “usual reality.”

#### 4.5.3 Performing the protean self

Several interviewees were addressing the multiplicity of self and the performance of different, sometimes contradicting role they pursue in their lives, from being a co-worker, friend, interviewee or bar attendant. The performance bar is seen as a place, in which different factettes of one’s spectrum of personalities can be explored and performed, e.g., by exposing nudity or “assuming a weird character” and wearing daring outfits or acting “out of role” (Sebastián). A phenomenon which can be compared to the role-playing in sex clubs, comic cons or fantasy role games like *dungeon and dragon* or medieval pageants. Carol reflected that:

“I think if anything that Daniel and Florian are trying to show you is that this self as performance is also just the self. So, this idea of the Western individualized self, where these different versions of yourself also can overlap or be the same (...) You are more than welcome to own your multitudes. (...) It’s about embracing the variety in you and enjoying that.”

Whenever someone feels like bringing a part of their “self” to the party which they usually leave at home, they are very invited to do so and probe sort of “unity with themselves” (Carol) of who they want to be in any moment. As this occurs naturally in children, as adults we are likely to struggle with

being open to such self-performing experiments argues Piaget (2013), especially if we are afraid they could embarrass us. The PB seems to mark a sort of playground for testing out these roles on stage and being supported by an open-minded, benevolent audience.

The regulars that I've interviewed can be grouped broadly into two categories: one half is willing to perform their artistic, creative and free "self," though they wouldn't necessarily need the PB to do so. These people practice art in their lives, at least occasionally and would not necessarily need a safe space, in which to express this part of self-identity. The other half seems to need a place like the PB to display qualities of their personality, which they can't otherwise in their day to day life. At work they have to act "super serious" and "live up to expectations," but in the PB they do not feel forced to comply to certain behavioral norms and to cross foreign-imposed boundaries. Two of the interviewees both working or having worked in a corporate context, stated to feel somehow alienated and constricted with the role they have to perform at their workplace.

How many interviewed regulars actually engage in before mentioned "self-performance" and which concrete form can such embody? I categorized three ways, through regular visitor make use of the freedom the constructed "safe space" and intimacy of an "open and respecting" (Sebastián) community offers them. Those are through *physical appearance* (altering their style of clothing, wearing makeup or costumes), the use of theatrical acting either by being engaged in performance or by initiating and conducting a *theatrical self-representation* by themselves. Finally, regulars claimed to perform sides of their personality, referred to as their "*real self*," by which they meant the expression of roles, which they feel too restricted to perform in any other everyday life setting.

### *Physical appearance*

Starting firstly with the physical appearance, most visitors reported wearing ordinary clothing to a performance bar evening most of the time. However, they have the feeling that "if they would want, they could do it," suggesting that the boundaries of shame and embarrassment are regarded as rather low. There were some reports, however, of regulars trying out "new hats" or putting on "stupid or crazy things," painting their face or trying on costumes they wouldn't wear somewhere else. The inspiration, as well as the security to do so, comes from arguing that the staff does it as well. Time and consideration were spent by some to find "extraordinary clothing" in second-hand stores so to wear them in the PB because it is supposed to suit the place and its people. Especially when it comes to performing themselves as a DJ or actor, Raivo stressed the importance to transform oneself in a role as well and to be an active designer of the evening, likewise the performance bar team, which is always dressed up and involved in some kind of theatrical act or role-play:

"Of course, if you go play at the PB, you can't come with a normal DJ t-shirt and play, that's not gonna be it, you know? You should be a performance yourself you know, playing there, be

part of the evening be part of the all that it's happening, because as you probably saw none of the staff is like dressed normal." (Raivo)

In other nightlife places like bars or live venues regulars felt restricted to do so, because they feel it either come across as being a "pretentious attention-seeker" (Thorsten) or because they would feel uncomfortable because of the judgemental looks they would get. Even though some stated to have the confidence to "be above all this" they further explained that the setting was just not right in other places, to be fully accepted and to feel completely safe and comfortable. Some of the art-practicing regulars also reported that in their everyday life they do not feel free to "be themselves" without being judged, e.g., on the streets of their neighborhood or at their workplace. Entering the PB seems to be a transformation of their described "specialness" (see Kim and Drolet 2003) and "weirdness" into normality, e.g., did Raivo once drive in the PB with his cargo bike, which clearly can be considered a rather unconventional act to conduct in another public venue.

### *Theatrical self-presentation*

Secondly, everyone had been participating in performances in some form (e.g., putting their pinkies up or making "strange sounds" when they were asked to do so) and the vast majority of had been on stage at least once. Some of them decided to go on stage when they felt in the mood for it or were curious about the topic/performance idea, but most of them were kind of pulled into the performance or directly addressed to go on stage, which they all eventually did, sometimes sober, but mostly drunk. At first call, they sometimes felt comfortable but lost this comfort as soon as they entered the stage and started participating. The participation is usually restricted however to become sort of a "subject" to be played with on stage or to carry out specific commands given by the performer. Self-initiative is seldom asked for and even rarer introduced by individual visitors. However, at times, the chance is given to say something in the microphone, telling a joke or a story or during "special theme nights," visitors may be encouraged more to initiate the play themselves (e.g., *Pas de Pantalon*; body laboratory).

Three regulars had been performing an act on stage themselves and liked the freedom, easiness, and confidence they experienced. Especially the lack of bad judgment and encouragement to experiment and embrace mistakes and failures. Two other regulars would actually like to perform one day, but feel a lack of inspiration or artistic skills to transform their idea into something interesting. Raivo as a DJ tries to play with the audience as well and is even trying to mess with the bar hosts as well: "If I have something stupid in my mind to say to bit ruin their idea, you know just like awkward funny moment then I try to take a chance." He also reported to get into a distinct character when he visits the PB, the one of an art connoisseur that orders the "Performance bar special" – a strong alcoholic drink served in a vase with plastic flowers, which he carries around the bar and examines paintings in the exhibition room. He further claims that with the increased frequency of visits one



naturally creates a personality for the people that come regularly as well, so they start noticing you. This certain personality was often described as an “authentic” display and version of the regular’s self-identification. The concept seems to be key in deciphering the meaning-making and underlying motivation of the regulars to engage in play, -whether by dressing up, “acting out of role,” or being involved in the proposed activities. Therefore, it will be discussed how regulars feel about themselves and relate emotionally to other and object seems to constitute their understanding of authenticity.

### *Being real is the deal*

Authenticity is a widely discussed phenomena in academia (e.g. Beverland & Farrelly; 2009 Williams and Vannini (2016) as well as mainstream culture, which scholars like Williams and Vannini (2016) trace back to the rising significance of feelings and emotions in contemporary Western culture that became the foundation to authenticate individual experiences and self-conceptions (Williams and Vannini (2016). The pursuit of the “real self” and authentic choices and actions can be followed in places and public setting, which open encounters with themes and experiences described with codes such as “something real and emotional and even life-affirming” (McCarthy in Williams and Vannini 2016: 252). Another account of authenticity can be retracted from the perceived connection towards places and objects as well as the feeling of belonging to a community (Beverland & Farrelly 2009). As a result, such experiences of connectedness indicate the representation of authenticity on the base of pure and true motives and emotions. People draw benefits from sticking to their moral understanding and seeing their values reflected in their choices and actions (Beverland & Farrelly 2009). Which fits well with Daniels perception of self-authenticity as a “direct connection with the source, that can also be distorted while still having an authentic connection to it.” This means that whatever role visitors are taking in has to deal with them directly by representing a fantasy of who they would like to be, or rather not be. When Daniel is wearing a bikini, for example, he claims to do so for his ego and the expression of his feminine personality traits. If people then ascribe him with authenticity, is a choice and judgment which is being made about him, while he is feeling comfortable and “authentic” either way. Daniel, Florian, and Tizo also referred to the PB team as a ‘family,’ unified as an “intimate community of love and friendship” (Tizo), something that is “true” instead of genetically constituted.

Authenticity is certainly a reoccurring issue for the hosts, as it is something that can regularly be decoded in their event description, e.g., when they encourage people to “show their amazing self” or to “be ready for real contact.” As I concluded authenticity is meant in the sense of freeing or liberating self-inflicted or societal-imposed boundaries and feeling connected to the source in the form of a place, community or your “self”. This begins to make much more sense, when turning to the respondents’ views on this matter. Fenna as an example assesses herself as an authentic person that could not unfold her “real self” in a work setting in which she had to dissimulate her “true nature,” what eventually led to a mid-life crisis:

“(…) As a manager, I lost my authenticity (…) following everyone’s guidelines except mine. And this broke me, so I quit my job and became a freelancer. And now I feel in the last two years, and that is exactly the same period as the performance bar (laughing) that I am back to my normal self again, and I do feel my personal authenticity is back. Maybe the PB had a role in that. You can say that.”

Also, Ohana states she does not feel to fit in the corporate world and has a rather artistic nature and code of conduct, which she cannot unfold in her work setting. And this vacuum seems to be filled by visiting the PB on a regular basis, because she gets the idea to have the freedom to do what she feels like, e.g. dancing on the bar table/stool, singing, drinking, seeing “artsy people” and “weird performances” that communicate “her ideas” by talking about “different subjects”.

The feeling of being themselves in the PB is even shared by artists who admit they also restricted and cautious about the way people see them in their daily lives in public places such as bars, nightclubs or on the street, where they act differently and more restrained, because of the different setting and the different kind of people they encounter. Visitors reported that a performance bar evening could set them back into a “childhood state of feeling carefree and relaxed” (Ohana) in the way that they don’t have to control their behavior as they have to in their daily lives. Importantly, everyone seems to be involved in this sort of play and atmosphere. And everyone can decide on which level s/he wants to participate:

“You’re able to express yourself being a performer or an audience; you’re always a member of it like even if you don’t want to, you’re part of the whole theatrical thing or team or something. So, I think that’s a really good thing (…) that there’s at least one place like that because there’s nothing like it.” (Mila)

To the regulars, it all seems to come down to self-experiences and to perform their “self”, in ways which they wouldn’t feel free to do in most other everyday settings and context in their lives. By observing, playing and engaging in role-play and experimentations with the “self,” they feel amazed, relaxed, free and themselves.

We discussed the limitations to draw a distinction between social acting and theatrical acting and the manifold ways, in which the visitors participate in the performances and activities proposed by the PB team and invited performers. These engagements seem to break boundaries and social norms, which turns the evening into an exciting, unusual and stimulating play for the participants. As Ryöppy, Lima and Buur (2015) argue, such forms of audience engagement can shape the process enhancing a mutual learning experience through applied forms of expression (Ryöppy, Lima and Buur 2015). The ability to move between acting, directing and watching without fear of losing control makes post-dramatic theatre unfold its strengths,- participation and creativity through improvised actions. In the following

subchapter, the described learning trajectories by the regular visitors and the PB organizers will be showcases and elaborated.

## 4.6 Coming out of the circle

Every night comes eventually to an end, but for most of the regulars, the PB experience does not stop at 2 am when the closing time is announced. In reality, they seem to carry personal learning trajectories and deeper layers of meaning outside the bar, either by retelling their experiences to their family and friends or by reflecting on the performances, the boundary-crossing and encountered feelings of “awkwardness” and amazement. The impact, however, seems not to be restricted to the individual visitors but may unfold its effects on Rotterdam’s cultural scene and even part of its society. In this subchapter the learning trajectories of the regulars, the PB organizers as well as the potential impact on the city of Rotterdam will be therefore discussed.

**Sub-question 4:** Which are the individual learning trajectories and societal implications that can be achieved when frequently engaging in play situations in the PB?

### 4.6.1 Personal learning trajectory

The most obvious trajectory that visitors take out of the performance bar is some remarkable story to tell: About how extraordinary, shocking or weird a performance was, how deep a discussion went, and most importantly, their personal experiences and encounters with the awkwardness and the ways, in which they dealt with them personally. In the ideal case, it sets visitors thinking, processing and reflecting on what they witnessed and further brings it to the public as they share it with their friends, who will share it even with theirs if it’s a story worth telling.

As delineated in the theoretical framework chapter about play theory, scholars concluded that it might trigger significant learning processes and opportunities for self-development (Henricks 2015). When adults engage in a play, their habitual modes are being disrupted and substituted by new codes of conduct, which can bring about change in their perception of the world and their mode of life (Henricks 2015). Because of the temporarily constructed magic circle surrounding the visitors of the PB, they can act out their feelings of foolishness and frivolity that may seem inappropriate in the outside world of everyday life. This may inveigle them to unleash potential or resources inside of them, which they were not aware or too inhibited to release. Visitors made statements that indicate an understanding of the protean self-conception, switching from role to role, depending on the context and adopting more or less fluently with differing situational demands. They enjoy the challenge the performances impose on their role conception of an audience member, increasing the complexity and code of conduct within the assigned and adopted roles. The needed skill for being adept at

participatory performance seems to intersect with the flexibility and spontaneity to switch between various roles and settings, described as self-complexity (Linville 1985). Further, play opens possibilities for new life experiences, encounters with others or ourselves that we didn't have until this point and may cause reflection and fabricate new knowledge and skills (Henricks 2015).

The performances might activate a process of self-development and awareness of oneself as a more complex being (see Linville 1985). In every situation in our life, we have our role to perform, but we can be creative and individual in how to meet certain role expectation and can overcome these by surprising ourselves (Linville 1985; Ashmore & Jussim 1997). The PB seems to be a place, in which people don't feel so bound to expectations like in any other public life situations and role codes, a place in which people can "explore and enlarge (their) personal playground (Fenna)."

For internationals, another interesting side-effect are the insights into "Dutch culture," to see how which issues matter to them and how society deals with or not deal with them. Many respondents indicated personal reflection and sensitization on various new topics and ideas, seeing new perspectives that can open their minds, which has a "positive impact" on them personally. The learning part was mostly connected to the performances but not only; the observance of the hosts of "interesting people" was likewise important, as they are modeling how to break down barriers or obstacles, how to overcome personal constraints like body discomfort. In this way, people learn from each other and possibly after going more regularly start claiming this freedom for themselves and confront their 'inner barriers' in a joyful way. As Ohana concludes for herself, the PB is "like a drug. You go there and have the after-effect for some time, the fun, remembering something, telling it to friends. And then it goes away, you miss it, but it starts fading, and you go back to your mainstream life. But, hey, then there is another Friday."

The PB seems to not only change the way she feels and behaves inside the bar, but these experiences extend afterward and have a positive effect on her well-being outside of it. This careless feeling then accompanies her for some days, but soon she feels falling back into her work role and the attached pressure and expectations to it. Apparently, she has to go regularly to the PB to keep this positive effect of relaxation and 'sort of childhood state'. Otherwise, she will feel less emotionally balanced and comfortable during her work week.

#### 4.6.2 Societal learning trajectory

On the macro level, the PB appears to represent an alternative cultural venue, open for initiating controversial discussion and entering a dialogue with a wide variety of people. Through its practice, it opens a collective learning experience by questioning societal boundaries and strives at redefining or altering them. Its further seems to promote a range of values like social inclusion, open-mindedness and respect, and tolerance for diverse lifestyles and people:

“The place is weirdness normalized; if you often come there, it just becomes normal to you and much more acceptable of other things. And that’s kind of cool. (...) You can take a general acceptance of other people and other behavior and general understanding of each other.” (Carol)

Most of the learning experience happens on the spot, and the two hosts seem to have an effective way of guiding this learning process, by taking the graveness out of issues that seem so heavy to approach. By bringing performance art into a public and popular space like a bar, individual artists can spread their messages widely to all groups and kinds of people. By bringing the “out of the ordinary” to the surface of society, drag people, homo-sexual, eccentrics or feminists can expose their beliefs and worldviews without feeling threatened and unsafe. And every witness then can draw her or his own conclusions from it, as Sebastián sharply concluded:

“Each individual in there is different. And the same way heterodox art brings different lessons to different individuals. If there’s anything to learn from the place than it’s the experience of being there.”

When I asked the regulars whether they discussed what they experienced during a PB evening with their friends, most of them replied to have only a small chat about whether they liked a performance or not but at times engaged into more controversy and multisided discussions. And that is specifically what Daniel and Florian aim for, the disengagement from moral obligation and “fix, polarized points of view” of ‘wrong’ and ‘right,’ to “embrace the duality.” A clear statement for an open-minded society that is embracing the questioning of own beliefs and emotionally and socially trained thinking patterns (Riggs 2010).

#### 4.6.3 Learning trajectory for hosts

For the two founders, it is actually very much a surprise where they arrived in the last two years. They achieved much more than they expected: To form the place according to their individual characters and create a particular trademark that sets their place apart from the rest of Rotterdam’s nightlife and cultural venues. Also, the hosts themselves seem to take confidence and food for thought from their nights:

“I have learned in the PB that failing does not really exist, even if you are failing it can be really interesting for the audience. As artists, we tend to be very much pleasers and in that sense, we are also pleasing ourselves.” (Daniel)

With their goal to make it comfortable for the audience, they are simultaneously making it convenient for themselves to go beyond their shame and create a space of common “self-exploration” and “boundary-trespassing.” To Daniel, art is understood as a tool for constant transformation and self-development, an opportunity to stay in the constant questioning of one’s views and perception of the world (see Riggs 2010). A challenge for oneself and others to test their own views and values and to become aware of potential boundaries in oneself and in society. A rare opportunity to intimately engage with strangers, to meet inspiring upcoming artists and to encourage people to go on stage for the first time in their lives. But with this, they are not only empowering their visitors but also widen their own network of performers and artist. Together they are looking forward to expand their operation inside of WORM and find new formats in which they include the exhibition room and the theatre hall in the back of the bar. But also, outside of it, outside of Rotterdam. By training a new generation how to run the performance bar they allow themselves to open up new venues, for example, the one in Berlin and thereby realizing their fantasy of becoming a traveling theatre, going back and forth between these different cities and their own locally flavored Performance bars.

## 5) Discussion

The results of the analysis indicate towards many questions, topics, and points of discussion; among those I pinpointed two major themes, which will be the focus of this chapter. Firstly, matters of the open, inclusive and informal approach to performance art, in opposition to the perception of the contemporary art scene being stuck in in the “fourth wall” will be expounded and both approaches compared. Furthermore, art as a transformative tool, capable of transforming lives of individuals and having an impact on society as a whole, will be reconsidered in the light of play and participatory performance theatre.

Finally, I will provide a discussion about the boundaries of artistic expression and freedom, which included the personal limits of appropriateness for the regular visitors, followed by the estimation of Janpier and Daniel. For the debate, the concepts of open-mindedness and ironic appropriation will be compared and put into context.

### 5.1 Breaking the fourth wall

Traditionally, theatres hold the function to explore and dispute emerging issues and developing ideas of a society (Sloman 2011). It is regarded as a communicative tool, a mirror of societal issues and an invitation to reflect on one’s own behavior and responsibilities (Sloman 2011). Even though theatre was never meant to literally solve problems but instead to expose them to the surface of the public and leave it to the audience as to how much they let their actions and thoughts be influenced by it. In the PB the beneficial effects of participatory theatre are combined with the inherent logic of children’s play enabled through the dynamic, poriferous and construction of a magic circle (Kaprow 2003). By engaging the audience directly and allowing them to contribute to the play they emancipate from the traditional role of a spectator and enter another layer of reality, creation, and perception (Mangan 2013). Tizo concluded the PB breaks the fourth wall, the so-called invisible boundary that separates the audience from the performers (Mangan 2013) and bursts apart the confines of art and everyday life. Instead of being stuck in the conventions of traditional theatres or galleries, by staying attached to the conformity of the medium, an attitude of openness and curiosity towards the ambiguous and coincidental form of adult play is cultivated: “I think many other places kill vibes because they are too stuck with the conventions of their art form, instead of asking why these conventions have to be like that (...). You can create different vibes with every art form, so why a theatre cannot be Rock and Roll?” (Daniel). Indeed, does the PB create an informal setting, a ‘casual vibe’ that makes everyone feel like they are part of the show, instead of remaining in the role of spectators. The value of arts orientates less on the aesthetic and more on the co-production and relation to the audience. The

opportunity for explorative play creates novel forms of social interaction and experimentation within the boundaries of art and everyday life (Kaprow 2003).

Even within the same foundation WORM there are strong differences of opinion regarding form and content and the orientation and direction of artistic values. While the PB seems to be more on the side of entertainment, audience involvement and personal transformation, the rest of the organization clings more to “authentic avantgardistic values” (Janpier). It certainly has this ironic wink to it that the PB as part of WORM “the avantgardistic state” is following an anti-elite, inclusive artistic approach allowing almost everyone to perform almost anything on stage. In that sense they are distancing if not mocking the avant-garde scene for its rigidity and uniform perception of “pure art,” which “makes it for the hardcore old fashion WORM people not very easy to cooperate with, because there are different values,” reflects Janpier.

Certainly, the PB opened a vivid, controversial debate of how much “dilettante or lowbrow art” or art forms that are generally connotated to mainstream taste (e.g., Hip-Hop) the foundation itself allows. How close should the WORM foundation, which claims to be on the cutting edge of ‘experimental art’ stick to their values to protect their image and reputation, and how much openness can they allow to integrate elements of mainstream culture without selling out to the cultural industry? It’s a daunting balancing act, but as Janpier opened up they began to also look for connecting hooks with art forms that traditionally had recently been condemned as too commercial and search for multiple layers. And then provide those artists a stage that otherwise would have to turn to venues that might conflict with their artistic values. That’s why Janpier would like to take the PB more “into the center of the organization, showing that (they) have a very special thing”. For this, it could be advisable to communicate and inform the public in more depth and intelligibly about the PB and their approach to community building through the collective experience of fun and escape from everyday life by illustrating its partial absurdity.

The experience and direct involvement in performances may constitute a medium of transforming one's life, to open up new perspectives by engaging in playful approaches to gender, sexuality or awkwardness, from which every visitor can draw her/his own interpretations and conclusions. According to Kegan (2018), transformational learning marks a self-reflective process that accompanies one through the entire life and beyond that changes the focus from what people learn to how they learn (Kegan 2018). Preconceived perspectives and thinking patterns can be transformed, in the way that they may change, but also extend. Space is given for personal exploration of one’s own body, the fluidness, and multiplicity of possible identities available to oneself (see Rodriguez 2006). Further, is ludic experience channeled into situations that require trust in interpersonal exchange, vulnerability and reciprocal interdependence (Rodriguez 2006). Risk-taking in experimenting new ways to relate to strangers and to question ordinary expectations then means to overcome threats and personal boundaries with an open, curious attitude and a passion for being surprised and challenged.



Such an explorative, experimental form of mediating performance art stands in opposition to the most other more rigid and inflexible structure of arts and cultural institutes (Mangan 2013).

A more practical and illustrative account of how such transformative learning is happening will be given in the conclusion, in which an overarching model will explain the effects and mode of operation of self-reflective learning trajectories.

## 5.2 Censorship to artistic freedom and self-expression?

Debates about the boundaries of artistic expression and freedom will most likely never dry out and also found their way into the PB. As the in-depth analysis of the social interaction and performance of the protean self demonstrated, performers, visitors, and the PB team express themselves in unconventional and risky ways. On the one hand, Daniel and Florian granting themselves and the performs great freedom of self-expression, on the other hand, remain boundaries of personal appropriateness, described as the “reasonable limit” (Raivo). Therefore, in the following debate, I will provide a critical examination of the PB practices, the possible limits of artistic freedom and the means to enable controversial and self-critical debates. I collected a palette of diverse opinion on this matter, which is why I invite the reader to make up her/his own opinion about this issue.

The PB was described as a place with a particular kind of humor and entertainment based on the break with convention and the boundary-crossing of social norms by humorously questioning worldviews and the conventional social order. For most regular visitors of the PB the public exposure, satire and freedom of expression never go overboard and what happens on stage is regarded as appropriate. However, there were incidents or performances mentioned in which a personal boundary of ‘appropriate taste’ had been crossed. As a matter of fact, the feeling of inappropriateness didn’t detain regulars from returning, although it is crucial to address those and critically assess them in depth. After all, open-mindedness implies, every aspect has to be taken into serious consideration, for which it can be assumed that right at the moment people think they ‘understood the world’ and are certain of their values special consideration should be given. Particularly when a very strong demarcation is drawn towards other people, their culture, and world view, as it happens with the regular guests of the PB.

One of such controversial moments was a portrayal and performance of a shaman figure during one special theme night organized in tribute to the Cape Verdean community of Rotterdam. In this performance, three volunteers were asked on stage, sat down on a chair and took part in a ghost summing session. The shaman figure started moaning and made ferocious sounds while circling the group in ducked posture and smirking oddly. One regular, Alexa, commented:

“It was not the first time they make fun of other people's traditions, other countries' traditions. I don't know if really like that. They are both making fun of everybody, but they are not making fun of the Dutch, white people for example. They feel superior in a way, making fun of people that are not on their level.”

The considered ironic appropriation of certain social groups or cultures appeared to at least two regulars as an elitist arrogation, with what they don't feel comfortable with. As I observed, however, there are in fact many performances directed towards mockery of the own Dutch culture as well. For example, the theme night “sixty shades of orange – choose one!” had been advertised with “They say Orange is the Dutch national color but what variety? Peachy Orange? Apricot Orange? Light Orange? Atomic Tangerine? Tea Rose? Orange Peel? Princeton Orange? | Groetjes to the king of ORANGE”, which can be interpreted as an ironic, humorous demarcation of the tradition of celebrating and honouring the birthday of the Dutch king and the remainder of monarchic identity. The evening ended in smashing orange headed figures that represented Donald Trump, which points to the critical dispute and mockery of Western and native mainstream society. However, I have not witnessed any critical contention with the “postmodern identity” and worldview. The PB seems to pursue a categorical upholding and defence of own values, such as feminism or gender equality, but appears to have a more lenient treatment of other people's values. For example, religious people are most likely to be offended by event descriptions such as “House of GHOD<sup>5</sup> | Lost in life? No place to go? Feeling empty? Our house is here to save you”; “JESUS WAS GENDER FLUID ♥”, even though they are clearly meant to be humorous and in a very specific context, Alexa's point is still valid: Are such performances or event description merely statements aimed at making fun of religions and traditions for the sake of legitimizing one's own values and opinions or are they necessary and crucial for the opening of meaningful and exciting discourses?

In any case, the use of satire, irony, and exaggeration is always a tightrope walk between respecting cultural and personal spheres of ‘honor’ and the freedom of expression through artistic intervention (Goffman 1959). When I discussed this matter with Janpier, he agreed that in fact, this issue had been causing some conflict in the past already, when their collaboration with Manon van Driel, who organized a party at the PB called “BENT the mini gender bending queer party” was put on a stake. Manon van Driel, who is active in promoting and organizing safe spaces for Rotterdam's LGBT community, was not amused at all about the appropriation of what she regarded ‘their’ queer culture. Supposedly the PB took away the stage that is not theirs and inappropriately portrayed the LGBT culture. Though it seems harmless and funny on the surface, the PB enters a complicated field or zone that can lead to drastic misunderstanding or affronts (comparable to the “Black Pete” controversy in the Netherlands). Janpier believes that Daniel and Florian “cannot possibly imagine what is wrong by playing a queer persona because they are playing, they cannot imagine that it can

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<sup>5</sup> House of GHOD is the name of a performance collective, based in Rotterdam.

also hurt.” Although upsetting or hurting someone is the last thing the two hosts want, as they stated. Janpiers concern may reflect that although Daniel and Florian seemingly share a postmodern perception of reality, which is understood as the denial of absolute truth and reassuring certainties (Rorty 1989), they do not seem to reconsider whether their portrayals or the ones of the invited performers judge other persons constructed realities in a caricatural display or ironic appropriation.

When Daniel positioned himself towards this problematic, he reflected that labeling something as e.g., queer leads to a certain social group being put on the spotlight. However, what they do is the opposite: Instead of labeling they are “putting together pieces of human nature” that they find interesting. This argumentation follows the perception of people as “protean selves” that consists of various performed roles (“pieces”) that compose a person’s status set and identity, instead of people as “one human being” (Lifton 1993). Of course, Daniel and Florian are aware of certain reactions that such costumes or performances of cliché can cause, however, for them, the cause resides more in the conditioned minds of the visitors who come to the PB and put a label on everything they see themselves. However, such “conditions” construct the reality of human beings which they then experience as genuine and “real.” Therefore, for Daniel it becomes interesting, whenever out of such a discrepancy or ‘boundary crossing’ a discussion can evolve.

What they don’t want is to take a clear stand, and rather look at every issue from a broad, dualistic perspective, - with an open mind, ready to question itself. Following Rorty (1989) this implies that all human thinking and speaking is contextualized and relative and the diversity of contexts, worldviews and interpretations of the meaning of human existence should all be taken seriously. Instead of appropriating another culture, to ridicule anyone or anything, Daniel and Florian claim to be foremost interested in making things lighter, taking the graveness out of them to approach them with an open, curious mind. Values, Norms boundaries are fluid and traditions, social structures, and systems are in constant historical flow (Inglehart and Baker 2000) so that we don’t have to be too serious and grave in our intents to defend them. Ideally such thoughts challenge our own convictions and the ones of others and remind ourselves that there isn’t the ultimate truth in the end, and what we experience in life are products a social construction. And that it is a good idea to question or adjust your moral compass from time to time, to walk offside the social norm of appropriateness, to challenge the duality of “good” or “bad”. As long as one does not intentionally hurt anyone or falls into degrading forms of humor and behavior, which I did not see or experience in this way. Daniel and Florian’s thoughts and ideas seem to resonate with the regulars since they acknowledge the benefits of controversy and critical dispute:

“If some performances are a bit more mocky in a way, that's how I see it. I don't think they do it for a bad reason or whatever. Maybe that's the way that the Dutch performers deal with these issues. And because I am from another country I have been used to a different type of dealing with these issues.” (Alexa)

After all everything “humanly created” in this world could potentially be mocked, be ridiculed, be doused with irony. Irony is a funny and curious weapon that works both ways: We use it to expose and criticize immoral behaviors and depict vicious people and flaws in society (Colebrook 2002), while also justifying our own appropriation of “low culture” by consuming it “ironically” (McCoy and Scarborough 2014; Peters, van Eijck, Michael 2017). Members of the “intellectual and cultural elite” are either openly mocking and ironizing cultural products, declared as “lowbrow” or “mainstream” or found ways to secretly engage in them (Peters, van Eijck, Michael 2017), while simultaneously feeling guilty for consuming something considered to be immoral or flawed (McCoy and Scarborough 2014). Perhaps the “intellectual and cultural elite” might consider finding ways to make their sacredly held values, highbrow culture and understanding of art and intellectuality more fun and engaging? For the regulars’ it seems like the PB team found a playful approach to color intellectuality and turn it into something joyful and entertaining, while still clinging to their personal sense of morality and values.

Nonetheless, it is crucial to keep in mind that any social construction (e.g., postmodernity vs. religious belief, traditions, etc.) constitutes the reality of individuals who are believing in the construct. As every human being is living in a constructed and subjective form of reality, every norm, belief or value becomes relative and cannot be held as the “true” or “superior” form of reality (which would imply ironic consumption/appropriation of constructed realities that feel inferior or “untrue” to an individual). I assume a good first approach would be to reflect whether a statement is being made or a suggestion to question particular social construction such as traditions, norms, values or worldview. And then to reconsider whether one's worldview is questioned or the one of others. And lastly how to deal with either constructed piece of reality– in a controversial and self-reflective discussion or by making simple statements about the perception of other people’s reality construct.

## 6) Conclusion

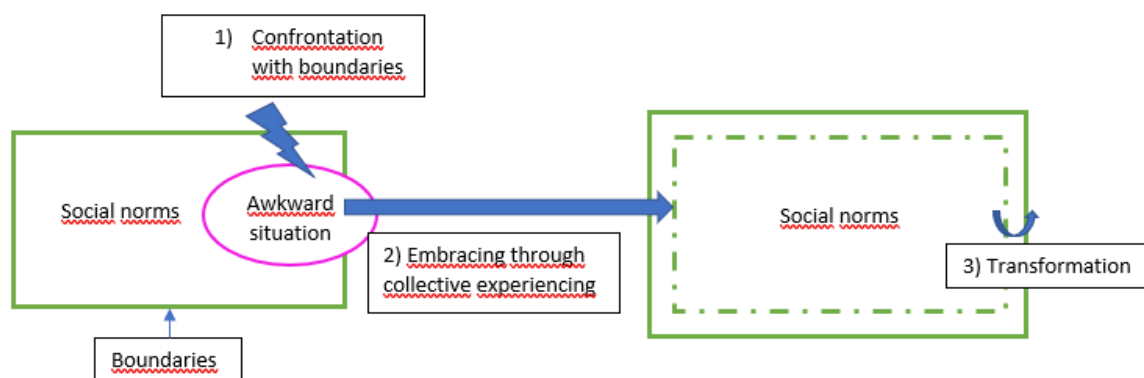
In this final chapter, the initial research question: “How can the particularly strong attachment to the Performance bar as place and the embedded personal meaning and deeply felt values of the regular guests be explained?” will be tackled and answered by merging the findings of the analysis with the insights of the discussion. The concluding chapter will foremost decipher the play with awkwardness, social norms, and boundaries and playful navigation of the visitor’s protean self-identity within the

frame of performance art. Both seem to constitute the reasons and motivation for their frequent visits and the deeply embedded meaning they attach to the place and its community which will lead to a final overarching conclusion.

## 6.1 The transformative power of awkwardness

"Awkward energy is what powers the universe and wherever you go always have clean underwear (Florian). “

In the following subchapter, I would like to introduce a model, which shall explain how such an impact could be explained and achieved. I intend to decipher the reoccurring games with boundaries, norms, and awkwardness that are being played at the PB. The model can be understood as a reduced, interpretative version of the general, descriptive model introduced in chapter 4.1 and shall merge the discussed literature about play theory, social norms and boundaries, participatory theatre and the protean self within a postmodern context. It depicts a specific aspect of the general model, the play with the awkwardness that is an omnipresent and permanent aspect of the play happening in the PB. The social norms and boundaries characterize the usual reality, from which the visitors like to escape. Constantly, they are being confronted and reminded of them, since in the PB a disruptive approach to expectations and social conventions is pursued and artificially constructed by the PB community. Instead of backing off and being stuck in the boundaries and norms, visitors are invited to embrace them through the collective experience of humorous and absurd presentations of social awkwardness. As a result, this may transform their perception of social norms, though, it does not necessarily occur with everyone and at every time.



**Model 2:** The transformation of normality by embracing the awkwardness

Let’s look a bit deeper into this process to find an answer to **Sub-question 3:** How can the constant process of negotiating societal and personal norms, values and boundaries of the visitors and PB team be explained?”

Daniel and Florian have a clear goal in mind: To find interesting ways in which to play with social norms and boundaries and challenge its visitor by breaking status quo and expectations. The nightlife seems to be a suitable context, because of the break from everyday life and the stimulating and loosening effects of alcohol. In the PB it is the norm to regularly ignore, adapt or deliberately transgress such boundaries in order to free oneself from a restricted scope of action (Dellwing 2010). As an example of such a scenario, I will sketch out what happened during the “night of the passive aggression.” This event was promoted on Facebook with the following post: “You \*\$@#!%^ better come to this event or &?\*%^#\*#@ die. Ho, ho, ho, calm down, or be passive aggressive about it”. Not surprisingly, visitors were constantly thrown into awkward situations, as they had, for example, justify themselves for arriving too late, or not being properly dressed. One performer kept complaining about the fact that it only ever happens to him to find broken eggs in an egg carton and held a cynical speech about the incompetence of the deliveryman. Raivo, who was also taking part in the night, experienced the night accordingly:

“They did create that vibe of the total awkwardness, like people who would actually participate in that evening, it was not a lot of people, but everyone was part of that performance, and everybody took it extremely seriously, what I really liked, and everybody jumped in the game, nobody except actually my cousin with who I arrived there, and she was saying like ‘what the fuck’?”

The introduced plays should therefore not solely perceived as entertaining and flippant, as they also contain serious features that the participant seem to pursue with sincere effort (Huizinga 2014). Most interviewees could relate to Raivo’s cousin, as they also described various cases in which they experienced moments, labeled as “What the fuck?”. Such disruption with the “usually reality” and expectancies is what causes the “bubble of amazement,” as Daniel calls it himself. By creating such disturbing and implausible situations, they can exaggerate awkwardness which is already present in our lives and can test individual limits of comfort (see Carrigan 2013; Garber 2017). For example, when Daniel and Florian break conventions and social norms by turning off the music and ask for absolute silence, in which they let their audience hang for several minutes. Or by inventing stories with illogical plots or making absurd sounds in the microphone. Interestingly, the hosts even created a whole narrative about the ‘age of awkwardia,’ explaining what happens to people as they encounter the awkwardness:

“When you feel this awkward feeling it's because there's another dimension. And it's like you just brush with that other dimension, and then the other dimension is ruled by these ‘awkwardions’. (...) So they're using the story, and they can perpetuate the story. And so, for them, they consider awkwardness as a brush with this kind of like higher entity. And that's a really interesting way to use a narrative I think.”

The PB is making social norms and boundaries explicit by confronting its visitors with them through the creation of awkward moments and the display of shameful action. The importance with the creation of awkward moments is that its theatrical and narrated, which makes it safe to engage in, unlike the everyday life, in which the crossing of social norms may result in penalties, judgment or violence. In the PB, the disruption of normality is handled in a humorous, frivolous and burlesque way. Further, it is experienced together, which turns the awkward feeling into comfort and entertainment.

### 6.1.1 The game of shame

I assume that the logic of shame and penetration of one's dignity follows a different logic in the PB than in the quotidian world of the PB visitors. For example, to wear a string-tanga as a male or to be seen naked in public can be regarded as disgracing in most public context but as a sign of freedom and self-expression in the PB. As a space that everyone can potentially enter the definition of public and private seems to blur, as it might enable private and intimate portrayal in front of a public. It also seems to play with the social imperative of not coming too close in the radius of this personal sphere, as it flips this "social coin with awe on the one side and shame on the other" (Goffman 1959: 70).

The partial absurdity of the demarcation between private and public is regularly stressed by Daniel and Florian, who remind their visitors of the fact that comfort of nudity is always context-dependent. In public places, it is mostly regarded as disgraceful, except for designated areas like a nudist beach, sauna or communal shower. In such situation people interact according to strict behavioral norms and conventions, with a disciplined gaze, pretending lack of interest, but secretly sneaking a peek (Cover 2003). On the one hand we live in over-sexualized societies, in which naked or eroticized bodies became a daily routine in advertising, art, pornography, film and other media (Cover 2003) so that the collective viewing and consumption of sexuality became normalized. On the other hand, contexts or frames that formerly weren't culturally coded as sexual or erotic, eventually became sexualized according to Cover:

*"Where there is an increased bodily and psychic anxiety about the self-naked under the gaze of others, this is not merely the result of contemporary cultural codes of the obscene, vulnerability and personal privacy, but of the 'postmodern' destabilization of contexts, frames and reading practices which formerly 'protected' the naked in certain sites from slipping into significations of the sexual" (Cover 2003: 55).*

Hence, the sensitivity to the gaze of nudity depends on its purpose, functionality and situational context (Cover 2003). To conclude, whether we experience nudity as shameful or disgracing, depends on many factors and can differ drastically between generations, gender, city dwellers and villagers and other demographic or cultural characteristic. The PB invites the visitor to reflect upon the

awkwardness we may feel when observing a male performer in a women's dress and to ask ourselves: "What is it exactly that makes this occasion so strange? Why am I having such a strong reaction by gazing at a naked body, why do I feel so inhibited to present my own?" I would like to further illustrate this discussion by referring to the PB special theme night "Pas de Pantalon." This 'sensual party' can serve as a splendid example to showcase how people can be encouraged to do something they would not consider in most other public contexts. Clearly, taking your pants off in the setting of a bar requires certain courage to overcome personal boundaries and inhibitions. The focus is laid on creating a safe space in which people are invited to explore their bodies and the ones of others. It marks an autonomous, temporary sphere at the very border of dominant body exposure ideology (Cover 2003); a meeting place for friends and strangers, singles, and partner, in which nudity and play with sexuality are welcome and a sensual, caressing atmosphere is collectively created. Within an encapsulated, intimate community it opens the possibility of self-reliance and "all-out" body-expression. Erotically charged, but distinct from a sex party, the event raises awareness and sensitizes the perception of naked bodies beyond the oversexualized gaze as well as the prudish view. By steering the focus away from the genitals, participants can sharpen or differentiate their view on sexuality, and eroticize the whole naked body at a distance from the cultural codes that delineated it as obscene (Cover 2003). Hence, the de-sexualizing of genitals is not forced as in saunas, public showers or locker rooms, but the gaze shifted, and the sexuality of the body emancipated from the one-dimensional genital approach. This way the naked body can be regarded as neither sexual and always sexual, freed from the codified denotation and containment of sexuality and erotic as subjectivity itself (Cover 2003).

### 6.1.2 Embrace the awkward

The PB initiates discussions of controversial topics, such as sexuality, body comfort, gender fluidness, homophobia, inequality, migration or social inclusion, which can make one feel uncomfortable and divide a whole nation. In the PB they lose their heaviness because they are portrayed in a most cheerful, frivolous and laughable way – the strengths of awkwardness as Garber (2017) delineates. Kotsko (2010b) calls it the temporary social bond of the audience when everyone is able to embrace the awkward humor and collectively laugh about jokes made at the expense of society itself. This fact is much exploited by comedians who are aware of the power of awkwardness in collectively involving the audience (Kotsko 2010). The difference, however, is the sustainable, inclusive and participatory way the PB works with this concept, as it bases it on self-experience of the visitors, concealing the clear boundaries between social acting and theatrical acting, which are more rigid and predeterminate in cabaret or comedy. Such a self-experience approach attracts a specific audience that is interested in engaging in such proposed play. By reflecting on the statements of the visitors, they seem to mark a



different kind of audience than the one attending cabaret, a rather “postmodern audience,” interested and open in the context related depiction of awkward scenarios.

The PB visitors use different coping strategies in how to deal with the disruption of normality. For many, it marks a strong break with their familiar lens of perception, which gets them into the “fight or flight” mode, which results in either leaving the bar immediately or messing around and “sabotaging” the play (Allan 2008). What’s another significant self-conception of Daniel and Florian is the approach of welcoming people who are feeling disturbed or opposed by these “weirdos” and awkward performances and the intention to integrate “intruders.” Depending on how visitors perceive the disruptive awkward moment it may loosen their boundaries of what they constructed as normal or contrariwise confirm the usefulness of the social norm and boundary. In the former case, a transformation is taking place, and the former boundaries are crossed, the social norms are widening, which might lead to greater self-confidence, cognitive flexibility, and tolerance for ambiguity (Allan 2008).

According to Piaget (2013), learning signifies the construction of new knowledge, stemming from resolving conflicts. Through playfulness inhibitions in the form of shame or embarrassment can be dissolved and learning processes nurtured and triggered (Rieber 1996). Being confronted with novel and unusual, perhaps disturbing happenings, ideally results in self-reflection to make sense of a given conflicting situation (Rieber 1996). Through playfulness, inhibitions in the form of shame or embarrassment can be dissolved and learning processes nurtured and triggered (Rieber 1996). Whether an individual creates new knowledge and arrives at a resolution or solution to the conflict, depends on her/his ability of self-regulation (Rieber 1996). Learning can either be achieved by either assimilating the conflict into existing schemes or accommodating it into a new mental structure. However, there is also the possibility that the conflict remains unsolved and the learning stream runs dry (Rieber 1996).

My assumption is that the possibility to arrive at a (re-) solution for the conflict depends on the awareness and the monitoring of one’s own biases and mental pitfalls. But how can we train and practice such an attitude of open-mindedness? To Riggs, the “obvious answer is through exposing oneself to a variety of ideas and worldviews. Closed-mindedness can be the result of taking one’s assumptions to be obvious and universal, hence incontrovertible. To discover that those assumptions are not shared by people across time, place, and culture can help one see that one’s assumptions are controvertible after all” (Riggs 2010: 183-184). When comparing this powerful quote to Piaget (2013) notion of knowledge as always being transitory and constantly converting in shape and form, it becomes clear indeed that the possibility of being wrong can never be entirely erased. However, “there is a difference between an open mind and an empty head” (Dey, 1999: 251, quoted in Charmaz, 2006: 30). Not every idea or thought must be followed for the sake of open-mindedness, if rational skepticism about certain issues and one's confidence in consistently tested beliefs is high, uncertainty can be brushed aside (Riggs 2010). This makes open-mindedness an optimal attitude when striving for

cognitive excellence but can also be considered an important civic virtue that can foster tolerance in contemporary pluralistic societies (Riggs 2010).

### 6.1.3 Living on a case by case basis?

The PB practices a play of relativizing norms, showing that as humans we are profoundly social, but rely on socially constructed norms which aren't always useful. Awkwardness then gains the double function of setting them up in the first place, but also to transform and change them (Kotsko 2010a). Disruption of social norms and the tension caused by awkward behavior reminds us that any social order is constructed and cannot account for every situation (Kotsko 2010a). But in place of causing blunt chaos, it may lead to a productive reconsideration of the underlying norms and value, which may lead to the opening of the discussion. Awkward situations then can no longer be understood as the problem, but the solution. Instead of avoiding them at any costs and trying to overcome them when they occur, we might as well embrace them and see whether they can change our perception.

Does the PB exemplify an imaginative community in which “awkwardness is no longer a way of escaping social norms, and social norms are no longer a way of escaping awkwardness: instead, people simply meet each other, without the mediation of a defined cultural order, and figure out how to live together on a case by case basis?” (Kotsko 2010a: 80).

What could be implied by living together on a case by case basis? Firstly, every individual has a particular way in how to perform a role and how to understand this role, depending on her/his value set and acquired social norms boundaries (Schultz et al. 2007). Hence if two individuals meet and none addresses any prior roles expectation towards the other, it would constitute a case by case scenario. Indeed each role can be performed in manifold ways, - depending on the context and the particular person with a particular status, which leads back to what Goffman (1959) describes as “audience segregation.“ One example could be a student who meets her/his professor without any role expectation on both sides, which would lead to a state of negotiating the social interaction on a case by case basis. It seems that Kotsko (2010a) overlooks that each individual has a strong interest in following social norms because there is a purpose for most social interaction. In this case keeping the “artistic imagery” of a ‘proper behaving student’ (Goffman 1959) who wouldn't, for example, reveal her/his weekend activities at the PB because they might cause awkwardness and disturbance. Could it be beneficial to a professional and formal working relationship to cross lines of decency or would the revelation of confidential private information rather cause defects and disturbance?

To imagine that human beings might organize themselves without a defined cultural order implies either anarchistic chaotic structure or a community in which people live together without any intention, expectation or regularities towards the enactment of specific roles- basically as if social norms would not exist. Although a rather romantic thought, it is extremely interesting to follow

Kotsko's (2010a) idea by adapting it to the regular visitor's perception of the PB as an escape from the usual reality. The crossing of the magic circle might be understood as a departure from the modern world while entering the PB is like entering a postmodern, fictive reality, - a sort of utopian state, in which social norms and boundaries are constantly re-negotiated.

Referring back to Syristová (2010) perception of normality, it marks an endless developmental process instead of an ideal state that could ever be reached. In this sense, the model can be understood as a dynamic motion of overcoming of personal and societal boundaries and a constant reorientation of one's identity when regularly visiting the PB. People who are questioning the normality of their everyday lives and who enter the PB and its temporarily fantasized reality. The impact might be an alteration or change of one's behavior and thoughts regarding certain social norms outside of the PB. As we all to differing degrees feel awkward in our daily lives (Kotsko 2010b), we can somehow all relate to their ideas and their scenarios. Awkwardness marks an omnipresent phenomenon that will always emerge and persist in any kind of social order (Kotsko 2010b). Trying to overcome it makes little sense, rather we should take a humorous stance and be amused about the ever-lasting potential for awkwardness among our encounters with fellow human beings (Carrigan 2013). And as more as people are confronted with them and experience these unconventional, unusual ways of how to deal with such feelings, it may normalize or at least becomes lighter in their own lives. The play with awkwardness then becomes more than entertainment but may evolve into a transformative tool to constitute civil values as solidarity and tolerance (Carrigan 2013).

### 6.3 Navigating the self

Entering the PB is to enter a world of uncertainty and ambiguity, simultaneously, however, all these unexcepted possibilities and encounters make it possible to open and for new views and perspectives through play and public art experiments. Constant navigation between, contradicting different roles can be a burden and energy sapping. As humans, we tend to seek to balance out various roles by remaining a superordinate impression of our "self" that is distinct from any other role we have to perform elsewhere (Sökefeld, 1999). Such basic difference is likely to be created through meanings that were transmitted through cultural and social upbringing but also each biography (Sökefeld, 1999). How people then experience the world is subject to their superordinate self, illustrated as a system of all the roles we act out or which our 'former identities' have acted out (e.g., class clown or nerd in high school). Hence the multiple roles and even identities are regarded as various, while the self always 'stays one' and frames all the pieces into one picture (Sökefeld, 1999). Since it is not detached from the roles and identities that constitute it, the self as well as in constant motion and active flow

and its ‘carrier’ – the individual acts with an agency, meaning on her/his account. The selection and rejection of action then constitute a reflexive sense of self (see Sökefeld, 1999).

The conclusion of this research is that for each role people enact in their daily lives there are specific codes, norms, and boundaries and expectations (Sarangi 2010). In the PB then, the display of aplenty contradicting and unconventional role-performances inspires and encourages visitors to reflect on personal boundaries, role enacting and sense of self. (e.g., How is my self-identity composed and constituted? Which roles might be in conflict or oppressed?). The PB hereby allows individuals to enact roles, which they do not feel permitted to play in their everyday life. Although inside there is a yearning or curiosity to play out new and daring roles and then to (re-)consider whether such a self-expression or role performance should be included in the “reflexive self” or rather not (Sökefeld 1999).

In many ways, Daniel and Florian represent role-models for their guests, whom they admire for their courage and “craziness.” Alexa described them as “fun guys” (Alexa), who are doubtless and shameless without too much concern for social norms and expectancies. Two of the interviewees regarded the PB as a “role model establishment” (Carol) with the hosts as the creators and advancer who provide a platform for self-expression. By acting out and modeling different behavioral roles, the PB team and performers introduce new life concepts to the visitors, from which they might integrate new aspects into their own lives.

With the opportunity to become a theatrical actor that plays out “real social action,” the visitors find themselves in a play between social reality and theatricality, which protects them against embarrassment and might dissolve inhibitions. This consideration makes the concept of the protean self and self-complexity (the ability to manage conflicting roles) such interesting concepts when applied to the play actions of the PB (Linville 1985; Lifton 1999). And it makes the concept of the authenticity of the self more tangible since it can be understood as the navigation and design of a self-structure in which the individual feels fulfilled, complete and “true” (see James 1890 in Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010; Sheldon et al. 1997).

The individual learning trajectory may delineate the transformation and evolvment into new roles aby cultivating openness and receptiveness towards riskful and daunting personal exposure. According to this consideration, individuals may reflect on the roles they play depending on situational context, audience, and purpose. This may trigger self-reflection on whether the role performance is based on expectations and role codes of others or an inner conviction and freedom of self-expression. Since the regulars strongly identify with the PB as a place and community, the hosts can attract and preselect their customers with the promise of more self-expressive freedom, instead of duties, inhibitions, social expectations and fears. People might not always be able to change their status, but the way they play the role.

To give an overall conclusion, the findings will emerge together to approach the initial Research Question: How can the particularly strong attachment to the Performance bar as place and

the embedded personal meaning and deeply felt values of the regular guests be explained? This last subchapter will explicate how and to what extent the visitor of the PB ascribe personal meaning to the bar as a *place*. It will be discussed how they feel attached and deeply connected to it and what are their suggestions, but also their fears regarding the future of the PB.

## 6.2 Meaning-making and place attachment

Every act imports some form of meaning to its participant and eventually a place becomes known and familiar (Milligan 1998). For the regular guests of the PB, this meaningfulness seems astonishingly high; they seem particularly attached to the place. When I asked them what would happen if the PB shuts down next weekend, they reacted with an expression as being “shocked” and “really sad,” as it marks an irreplaceable, distinct place in Rotterdam’s nightlife and cultural and artistic landscape. For Mila, it became a crucial “part of (her) life,” for Fenna “an extension of (her) living room” and constitutes Ohana’s “center of social life.” As Milligan describes it such “place attachment is significantly based on the meaningfulness of the interaction itself (which then imbues a site with meaning), not on the inherent meaningfulness of the place in which it occurs” (Milligan 1998: 28). Indeed, for the regular guests, the attachment came with a “growing relationship with the people” (Carol) and the opportunity to spend an “inspiring evening” with these “interesting people” (Sebastián). A place in which to release frustration or negative energy and be filled with “a lot of weekend happiness” (Ohana). For others, the most important was the encouragement they received to pursue their passions and follow their ideas, projects, and dreams.

The yearning for the place to stay unique, and not “lose the magic” was quite strong in most of the respondents. Many of the regulars addressed the danger of the PB in becoming too mainstream or that the weirdness and abnormality of the place might become too normal and hence repetitive and predictable:

“I would never want the performance to get bigger for example. I mean it's hard when you have something you like sometimes you are like ‘don't touch, don't ever change.’” (Carol)

However, no place can ever stay the same, that’s why Milligan (1998) declared the inevitable disruption another fundamental aspect of place attachment. Whether this change was introduced voluntary or involuntary, it almost always embeds the experience of loss (Milligan 1998).

At the end of each interview, I was always curious to know what the respondent themselves would like to improve to change or evolve about the place. I was surprised and amused by the wide palette of answers I received. A very clever answer was giving by Fenna who reflected that as soon as they would start asking the audience what they want, the customers wouldn’t be surprised anymore, so she wouldn’t change anything and leave it all to them. All the other regulars suggested minor changes and amendments, as they favored longer opening hours, a better sound system and choice of alcohol,

acceptance of cash, and almost everyone agreed on having no entrance fee. Daniel, however, arguments that the decision to pay for an evening at the PB already sets awareness that all the happenings are within an art frame and that such an investment means higher engagement, instead of strengthening a come and go attitude. Regarding the performances, more variety was asked, less nudity and expression dance, and shorter duration, so they would not have to wait too long for their next beer. As introduced already, it is important to the regulars that the PB manages to keep its charm by operating in small-scale and keeps attracting creative resources to keep the quality. In contrast, Thorsten proposed not to keep the expectations too high, “because at some point the stimulus peak is reached and then you have to decide: either you get frustrated, or you just keep enjoying yourself.” Tizo suggested to organize more workshops or laboratories and enable even more space and opportunities for experimenting in small, intimate groups. Could be the next step to create spaces of even deeper intimacy, in which only people enter that have already established a certain mindset of comfort and openness? For example, workshops based on self-development and intimate social encounters or theatre training in conveying skills as a performer for those people that would be interested in performing themselves but feel inhibited because of a lack of training or inspiration. Before I provide a concluding statement, I will briefly discuss the shortcomings of this study and pinpoint towards possible direction for future research.

During the transcription process, I discovered some technical weaknesses, e.g., when I became aware of moments in which I guided the interview ‘too much’ and interrupted a respondent’s narrative. Especially at the beginning of my interview series, I struggled to allow my interviewee’s certain flexibility in deciding naturally when to open and close topics of conversation because I held on strictly to the prepared interview structure. I occasionally intervened when I felt there was an overstraining of jumping from topic to topic which might have taken respondent out of their flow of talk and faded the results to a certain degree. Also, it is likely that I framed certain questions in a way that they proposed concepts and ideas that the respondents might not have considered themselves thoroughly. Further, as my sample was limited to nine regular visitors, it would not have been valid to propose any specific findings related to country of origin, professional sector, age, etc. although such an approach seems promising. Instead, I streamlined the findings into a coherent story and solely provided certain indications. If my sample had been bigger, a more extensive and differentiated review of the individual motivation, learning trajectories and meaning-making could have been provided (e.g., professional background: corporate vs. artistic; perception of PB as “haven for self-expression” vs. “escape room”). Future research might pick some of the indicated cues and look deeper into the meaning-making of specific sample groups, characterized by similar demographics and background. There are many direction and fields this study could have further explored, but due to time limitations and guidelines, this was not possible. For example, could the paradox between the PB described as an open and safe space be compared and further discussed with the pre-selective concept of audience designation and attraction. Another paradox is the fact that postmodern constructiveness constitutes

the identity of the PB community (e.g., relativeness, diversity, fluidity) while at the same through strong demarcation from “the other,” which from this perspective seems to represent a rather static, instead of dynamic world view.

Future research might further investigate the transformation process of weirdness and awkwardness into a state of normality by interviewing newcomers to the PB over an extensive period. Also, it would be interesting to get a deeper understanding of the visitor’s perspective that decided after their first or second visit that they will not return to the PB.

Lastly, research might look deeper into the sphere of arts education and drama therapy, since the PB seems to embed great potential for personal transformation and development through art interventions that allow for self-experience and self-awareness in a like-minded community. One focus could be on the perspective of the performers and the encouragement and inspiration they might have gained in the PB. Artistic career may be tracked and followed for a certain time period and to evaluate the influence of the PB on the artistic development. Secondly, does the PB provide its visitors the opportunity to express themselves in the context of safe and public space, which may help them to overcome feelings of shame. Visitors may expose hidden insecurities (e.g., sexuality, body comfort) they are uncomfortable and afraid to portray to others and themselves. As respondents revealed they feel relaxed, happy, carefree and confident in the PB, for which reason they *need* to go every weekend to keep this effect for the days to follow. Further, I observed visitors that exposed strong emotional outbursts when they seemed to have overcome body shame or sexuality-inflicted fears. Therefore, it seems extremely interesting and promising to schedule another study that measures the participants status of psychological well-being over a specific period.

Coming to a final conclusion, I propose that Daniel and Florian can be regarded as stewards of individual development and societal change in the designed “microworld” (Rieber 1996) called “Performance Bar”. The hosts allow every work of art to just emerge without putting a stamp on it and rationalizing it too much. By granting the audience creative agency, the hosts allow them freedom of self-expression and the opportunity to propose their ideas and thoughts to others (Caris 2016). Every artist and performer is given the chance to extract emotions from the audience and to deliver her/his message. However, the interpretation and decoding are left to the individual, whose level of personal reflection decides over the transformative learning trajectory and practical implementations in one’s own life (see Caris 2016). Further, are visitors given the opportunity to publicly express themselves and their lifestyle, which gives stage to all the stigmatized groups and subcultures that would usually encapsulate themselves in private spheres or designated venues like gay bars. The “openness”<sup>6</sup> and “no-labeling policy” of the PB might explain the mixture of audience members, which in consequence may create public awareness that our society is much more colorful and diverse than most people experience it in their daily lives. The PB marks for its visitors an unprecedented place to celebrate and *experience* tolerance and openness, to respect other people who fall outside the

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<sup>6</sup> “Openness” in relative terms, since the pre-selection of the audience had been discussed elaborately.

social norm. And to not only respect but further to celebrate and admire them for the courage they show. The idea of belonging to a like-minded community with a strong attitude towards “postmodern values” seems to resonate strongly and profoundly (see Àguila et al. 2008) with the PB regulars. It seems a paradox: Although the regular visitors are particularly strong in the way they demarcate themselves from “other people” and their worldviews and traditional and conservative considered values, they claim to be open, tolerant and respectful towards everybody. The creation of such a micro-community seems to hold potential to reflect on how the general society could embrace and accept individuals of all differences and how to constitute a state of normality, in which all citizens feel safe, included and respected. By embracing frivolity, “weirdness” and openness to different life concepts and new ideas of how one could live in a postmodern reality construct. In this sense, the PB represents the Rotterdam the regulars want to live in: international, open for experiments, willing to embrace novelty, challenges, and controversy in the pursuit for constant transformation and adaptation. The loss of the PB would be a loss for the city, especially for its artistic scenery and cultural landscape, because of its strong stand against any form of censorship towards self-expression.



## 7) CODA: Self-development and personal reflections

This research could have been written in a completely different format and style, wherefore I would like to introduce a draft for an alternative approach to write about the PB: Autoethnography. Its strength lays in the traceability of the personal development of the researcher as the study becomes personal documentation of an emotional and self-reflective research process (Ellis and Scott-Hoy 2004).

Likewise the PB, the autoethnographic approach aims at extracting strong emotions from the “consumer” of the “experience,” which may cause feelings of awkwardness, irritation or fascination. Performers expose themselves in shameful and vulnerable ways and challenge the personal limits of appropriateness by crossing conventional lines of decency. It is also ‘surprising’ to include it since it marks an unusual break with the conventional ground of academic research.

A surprise for myself too, since I remember my cynical and ironic degradation of autoethnography when it was introduced to me for the first time. Back then, I was not ‘ready.’

Are you?

I am still critical of autoethnography, as I am of every academic method and research. However there is some reason why the autoethnographic approach becomes particularly feasible in this case: The creation of potentially awkward moments, which invite the reader to reflect on their personal reaction that might flow into a transformative learning experience.

The text was written in one flow, inspired by the impressions of the last night (which happened to be a “Pas de Pantalon Party”) at the PB before the three months summer break. When I read these reflections a week later, I decided not to do any major editing or amendments, but to leave it as it came out, which gives it a more “authentic touch.” Through this reflection on my personal development, I would like to provide the reader a better understanding of how the data was produced and colored by my own experiences and the process I went through personally. I hope to make my work more plausible by giving the reader an idea of how much engaged and attached I was during my research phase with the PB and its people. Did I experience the PB as awkward and to what extent? Did my social norms change or did I reflect on them and came to new conclusions? What is my personal learning trajectory, and does it differ from the ones of the regulars and hosts? I decided not to back up my assumptions with too many academic findings. Therefore, this chapter provides merely a personal stream of reflection, which is very welcome to be questioned, revised, admired or challenged. It will be quite a philosophical discourse, discussing ‘existential questions of human existence’ and is inspired by my experiences in the PB, but also by many great thinkers (writers, philosophers, scholars,

my family and close friends) that coined my way of thinking about these wicked, exciting questions life constantly throws on us.

To start with, I would consider myself as an open person that has always been curious to explore and experiment with “alternative ways” of living. Mainly because it gives me satisfaction and a thrill, and indeed a better understanding of myself and my reality construct. But also, because I’m convinced that it is important to radically question all kinds of “systems” whether they come in an economic, social, cultural or political form. And this includes everything we hold most sacred: Our family, friends, ideas about love, conviction about “Western values” and “progressiveness,” ideas about academia and convention and foremost ourselves.

Until today, I didn’t really get access to an alternative format of living, in which I could really “let myself in.” I found many alternative lifestyles and social communities too esoteric and spiritual (e.g., “rainbow communities”) for me. And others too radical or sexually aggressive (KitKat Club in Berlin), which then appeared rather forced and daunting to me. Or they came across as too intellectualized, by providing straining concepts explaining and justifying the need to live an alternative life and to honor ourselves and bodies, instead of the materiality in which we cover ourselves.

In the PB I experienced and explored these “postmodern phenomena” like cross-gender dressing, gender-fluidity, queer and drag culture, authenticity, self-expression, etc. *organically* without a need for explanation, without a clear written out concept, but instead, all these things just *happened*. Because the PB has this built-in filter of letting those people in that want to engage in these “concepts”, who are curious to discover and develop themselves in such schemes. That’s the magic of it I guess. Over-intellectualization always “kills the vibe”, - the problem of most of the art or cultural venues promoting avantgardistic values, as Daniel explained it. By making things playful and light, inhibitions can be reduced, and the mind opens.

I believe it is essential to have places like the PB, in which people can discover new ways of living, new ways of experiencing themselves, to be surprised and play with themselves within an intimate, still public, community. I’ve been surprised by myself as well: By going to bar all by myself over and over again and not to feel alone or awkward. I was surprised that I ended up dancing without my shirt and pants and didn’t feel like a hooligan or eccentric expressionist dancer. And I remember clearly the day I met Tizo, and he turned to me saying: “You may have the face of an angel, but I know about the demons inside of you.”

Santayana would give him credits for his legendary line: He claimed that our animal’s impulses and natural needs are converted into social obligations and norms, which makes us become ‘persons’ or animals with masks (Santayana 1923 in: Goffman 1959). Why not tear off the mask and let the wild creatures run loose?

Why are we putting so many rules on ourselves? Instead of admitting that we sometimes want to be careless and wild and free as a child again, playing silly, without the fear of being judged. In a

“safe space”, a “playground” which we can enter, whenever we feel the need to play and escape from our serious lives. The PB permits its guests to throw their *impression management* (Goffman 1959) overboard and invites them to play. Many regulars stated they had their “first time” in the PB. First time to be on stage, first time to kiss the same gender, first time to dance wildly on a bar stool, first time to wear a “crazy outfit”, first time to have a tequila shot taken on their belly.

I remember an actor once told me that in order to play all his different kind of roles, he had to experience, to play them out as well. Is this the way to manage the multiplicity of the self? To allow yourself to be and act different, to surprise yourself, to embrace your protean self?

### **Becoming your “real self“**

You probably heard this one before. Probably in some way touched upon in every second “psychology today” magazine, “life coach training,” “manage yourself better handbook” and any other format of self-development disquisitions. Why do we care so much about becoming or finding our “real self”? And what makes it so difficult to find it? Is it hiding too well? Or do we simply have to accept that there is not this *one* “self,” but that we are in a constant transformation and development process of leaving and adding new pieces to the never finishing mosaic structure of “our self”?

My conclusion and answer is that a promising way is to make use of the “artificiality” of theatrical acting to discover new roles and characters in us that can be transformed into our “social acting”, or to stick with the “realness”: our authentic selves. Which follow Nietzsche’s (1996) idea to distinguish first, who we want to be (that’s the imagination running in your head, the fantasy, the “theatricality”) and then reflect on who we are (how we are (inter-)acting in our daily life). So, if we feel like “improving” or developing our life and sense of a this “better version of ourselves” that nowadays is much fuss about, then we should start asking our self: Am I really happy with the way I live my life? How much are my decisions in my life influenced by others? Which limitations do I have in terms of age, education, genetics, the culture of upbringing? What are my personal boundaries, and which are the one's society, my family, etc. imposes on me?

I assume most people encounter such thoughts once in a while. Or they are very successful in oppressing them. Or they are leading indeed a very fulfilled life, and when looking back or ahead, they wouldn’t change too much. And don’t waste ad infinitum thoughts with doubts like “ *I should have been bolder, I should have gotten better at this, I should have opened up more, I should have stick to my dreams.*”

But, honestly who is among them? Who secretly doesn’t crave for some specific fantastic experience, who doesn’t have some secret role model, who wouldn’t like to be a Rockstar sometimes, a revolutionary, a “handsome lady-killer,” an admired writer, artist, performer, a ballet dancer, a restless explorer?

Which brings me back to Goffman (1959) and Vidal (2013) and their perception of a wide, “inner repertoire” on roles and costumes that every individual can wear. The fact that we are creative and artistic by nature. And despite all the changeable and unchangeable boundaries we can use our hands, or tools to finalize these visions, dreams and to mold the figure and character we have in mind and want to pursue. No matter how small these hands are, how unhandy the tools, we can always make an effort to change our lives and do things that are daring and might put us in the place of shame and awkwardness. Such as learning a new language, approaching a stranger in a bar, sitting naked on the ‘narcissist chair’ in the PB and be portrayed by the audience. If it’s true that we are all artists than shouldn’t it be our main profession to explore ourselves and possibilities of being? I couldn’t say it more beautifully than Caris:

“Art reminds us, maybe more than any other practice, of the fact that being human is not just about being a technically functional element in an economic system world, but is foremost about being a surprising free spirit in an amazing plural and diverse community (Caris 2016: 203)”

For me, the PB marks a social laboratory, in which you are invited to trial and error interventions, to let experiments go out of hand, to embrace failure, to laugh the awkwardness away, to free yourself from the chains you feel buckled to. Or at least they learn how to dance with them.

### **Open for self-experience**

Among the many things I have learned, it was essential for me to realize that open-mindedness is about yourself first and foremost. Certainly, it is crucial for Western society to teach the values of openness, acceptance, and respect towards different people and their way of lives. But perhaps, it is even more important how accepting and open you are towards your own feelings and behaviors? By asking whether you would allow yourself to have homosexual experiences to wear crossdress, to expose yourself on stage, to come to a party with underwear and be touched by strangers.

Do you allow yourself to be part of all the silliness and absurdity of life?

And if not to ask yourself why? And if the reasons are a shame, fear of judgment, feeling “too proud,” “too male,” “too serious,” “too old” or “too intellectual” then I suppose we get to the core of all that. I allowed myself to make these experiences. I allowed myself to touch men’s bodies, to be butt-spanked, to cream the breasts of random women with massage oil. Because I decided that no one should put up these rules for me, but that it is in my hands to decide where I draw my personal boundaries. I guess whenever people start judging something or feel inhibited, it has to do with the

factor that they wouldn't allow themselves this freedom. Because this way we protect our way of life, convictions and norms which we, and the social group or class we feel aligned to, constructed. And, clearly, it is hard to get over these preconceptions, prejudices and social boundaries that are deeply integrated into ourselves. And I would like to encourage everyone to face them. And to tear off the mask of a law-abiding citizen, a proper educated civilian and go for the experience. No matter how silly or awkward it may appear. Because it can be massive fun. And further marks a strong stand of a particular belief in a certain stage of life.

Why not play with the fact that we still live in a "close-minded society" full of homophobia and sexism, of exclusion and injustice while hypocritically convincing ourselves that we aren't. We should be more honest to ourselves, instead of trying to convince ourselves to be magically rinsed of all insecurities, prejudices and covered aversion, because we live in a country that made up laws to protect minorities, and grants freedom of expression and "equal chances" for everybody. I assume most humans pursue some form of discrimination, stigmatizing and stereotyping and hardly anyone is freed of them. But we can face them, by firstly becoming *aware* of them and *monitoring* our behavior, thoughts, and attitudes (Riggs 2010).

What Riggs (2010) implies is that everybody is judgemental and closed up to a certain degree and that but that we can learn and develop new thoughts and ideas by seriously considering the possibility of being wrong with our current point of view. And I believe that in the end, we can never be absolutely certain whether something is "inappropriate" and uncomfortable, if we haven't tried, haven't allowed ourselves the chance to experience it.

So, why not prove yourself wrong? And take the stage and be castigated by a domina figure, whipping "the structured imposed masculinity" out of you? Why not embrace the awkwardness to be seen by your friends acting out "weirdly," breaking the norm, engaging in the play of boundaries? There shouldn't be any feeling of shame or discomfort stop you from pursuing whatever feels good to you. Or as my friend, Ludwig would put it: To feel sexy in your head.

Even though I don't have much interest in practicing such activities in my "ordinary life" (social acting). I feel lifted by acting them out (theatrical acting) in a safe community that respects and tolerates me for it. And it was curious to observe my own feelings of discomfort because it sensitized me to the struggle of socially marginalized groups to deal with everyday discrimination. By exposing myself to the public and riding to the PB on my bike, wearing a blouse and full make-up was a thrill, accompanied with an extreme feeling of discomfort, of vulnerability, of judgemental looks. It gave me an idea of what it means to feel like an outsider, to belong to a marginal group, to be a victim. Also, I became aware of my personal transformation: I became the guy wearing a kimono and a barbie wig who I saw the first time I entered the PB. Such experiences certainly changed me and had a profound imprint on me. And helped me to reflect on my own privileges and to build confidence, by feeling more loose and careless. The kind of aftereffects, regulars described after taking the drug "Performance Bar."

After all, it should never be forgotten that the PB foremost produces fantasies, plays and performances and therefore serve as a mirror of social acting in the outside reality. And what's happening in "real life" is much more shocking, much heavier, much more awkward than anything to be witnessed in the PB, in my opinion. To pass a homeless person begging in front of a supermarket and claiming not to have a change, is much more awkward and absurd to me than anything I witnessed in the PB. Hopefully, the PB triggers the ability to filter out for ourselves which kind of absurdity and awkwardness we should embrace and which we should tackle and battle in the pursuit of a healthier and more free and equal society. We should reach the point of accepting all the diversity and inclusion of different ways of life as the normal state, instead of continuing to accept social stigmatization and exclusion as the normality.

I learned that there are lessons in life that can be only learned with overcoming shame, inhibitions, by throwing yourself into an embarrassing situation. That there are things that can only be understood by experiencing them personally. Certainly, I can understand that not everyone craves for such weird, risky, frivolous, "ridiculous" self-experiences and acknowledge that it would be misleading and overbearing to claim that openness for self-experience would be the right, or the best way to make sense of the world and how to live your life. However, the PB encourages everyone to make use of the simple right to pursue what you want to do, how you feel, how you want to be. And whether people want to achieve this by letting out their stage animal or play with ambiguous, daring roles or by being curious and open to experience and observe the play and performers (and ideally to get to know them) in the PB, in both cases I believe new ways to see and deal with the world are opened and individual learning lessons can be drawn from it.

I learned to take things lighter. Of course, you can't laugh everything away, but most issues are made much graver than they deserve it, especially when we already wasted so much time in taking them too serious than they actually are. Life is too short to waste it with self-inflicted boundaries that stop you from being happy. Life is too short to be bored.

There will never be the right answer, but perhaps there is this one way of living that is only for you. And when we reach obstacles along our way, like in Kafka's parable "before the law", in which the presence of a mighty doorkeeper, who represents all the boundaries, inhibitions, norms and laws we face in our lives, detains a "simple man" from discovering his purpose of life, then instead of wasting our lifetime to be invited in, we might also consider overcoming our doubts, fears, questions (where is it leaving to, who is going to stop me?) and just to keep our head up, whistle a tune and walk it along.

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## 9) Appendix

### Question catalogue for regular visitors of the Performance Bar

**Note:** The order of the questions is only suggestive, in fact they were asked in various order, depending on the conversational flow of each interview. Further, not every question had been asked, and sometimes questions were asked slightly different, aiming at extracting the same informational content, while still keeping the conversational flow and context.

Demographics: age, gender, ethnicity /country of origin, occupation

#### Opening Question

“Do you remember the very first time you went to PB, and could you describe your experiences?”

#### Degree of familiarity

- How frequently do you come to the PB?
- Do you check the programme before you go?
- Do you usually stay the whole night, or do you come and go?
- In what relation do you stand to the owners/staff?

#### Different place

- Does the PB offer an alternative for you from other nightlife venues? In what way?
- Does the PB mark a special place to you?
- The PB claims: “Every night is different. You never know what you get.” To what extent do you agree? In what ways is it always different?
- How full is the PB? What happens when its empty?
- What is the essential difference of watching a performance in the bar rather than in a theatre?

#### Interaction and perception of other visitors

- How would you describe the visitors of the PB?
- How do you relate to the other visitors? / How do you engage with them?
- Do you often meet new people?

#### Values

- Do you find it appropriate what happens in the PB?
- How comfortable do you feel there? Would u describe it as a safe place?
- Do you find your personal values represented here? And what are they?
- How are these values communicated in the PB?
- Does it make you reflect on your values and behaviour?

### Audience engagement

- Can you tell who is staff and/or actor and who isn't?
- Can you explain how the performers and bar owner engage the audience into the show?
- Why do they want to engage the audience?
- How do the participants contribute to the performance and bar evening?
- Would you like to perform yourself some time?
- How do you contribute? Do you like participating in performances themselves?
- What observations did u make about the reactions towards the performances?/ Is it your own one too?/ Is this the goal of the hosts too?
- Do you get drunk at the PB?

### Self-performance

- Are the hosts themselves or in a performance role?
- What kind of performances do they do themselves?
- Are the visitors expressing themselves or roles?
- Do people dance in the PB differently than in other places?

### Learning

- What do you think about the performances?
- Are the performances easy to understand?
- Do you discuss what happens in the performance with friends?
- Are there reoccurring themes/issues approached?
- What do you take from it?
- Do you learn something new every time you come?

### Personal motivation and meaning

- What keeps you coming to the PB?
- What does the PB mean to you?
- Is there something you wish more from this place? How it may develop in the next year?
- Imagine the PB would close next weekend. How would this make you feel?

## Question catalogue for the organizers of the Performance Bar

**Note:** This question catalogue was designed for Daniel and Florian and then resumed for the Interviews with Janpier and Tizo. Many questions were therefore deleted, changed, amended or subjoined from the regular visitor's question catalogue (especially in Tizo's case).

### Opening Question/background

- Could you just walk me through how you got started with the Performance Bar?
- What was the first night like when you started the whole thing? Can you recall some experiences?
- Could you please specify your professional background?

### Demographic and motivation of visitors

- Who was your target group when you opened up the place?
- Is it still the same? /Or who is coming to the PB? /How would you describe your audience?
- What do you think are their reasons for visiting PB?
- What do people get at your place that they can't get somewhere else?
- And besides the performances? What can they do what they can't do outside of the PB?
- How inclusive would you describe your approach? / What makes your place a safe space?

### Engaging the audience and self-performing

- On Your website you mention the boundary blurring between the audience and the actors. Can you please a bit more specifically what you mean by that? How is this transformation taking place?
- What is your approach in engaging the audience into the performances?
- How do you deal with disruptions from the audience?
- In the Facebook event description, you deal with topics like self-expression or celebrating awkwardness weirdness: Does the PB offer a place for people to creatively experiment with to take on new roles?
- Do you offer a safe space where social expectations or restrictions are circumvented?

### Curating and technical & organisational issues

- How do you prepare actually an evening at the Performance Bar?
- Do you both (Daniel and Florian) have the same functions and responsibilities in the PB?
- What is your working relationship with WORM?
- I was also wondering if really everybody can perform who writes you an email or how do you select?
- Are you completely free in your programming?

### Mission, vision, values and Impact

- What were your values when you started?
- What is your vision of the place?
- What is your mission, what would you like to offer your visitors?
- What impact do you want to have in Rotterdam?
- What's the most fun for you? / What do you like the most about working at the PB?
- Is there anything you would be curious to know about your audience or your place?

