

# **End-User Experience of AD for Live Performance: Complexities Beyond Practice**

**Preliminary findings from qualitative research undertaken  
in London, Singapore, and Adelaide.**

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# Research Questions

**In exploring the main Research Question, the following sub-questions were raised:**

- What barriers do end-users identify?
- Are those barriers adequately addressed by practice?
- What is the impact of legislative frameworks (if any)?
- How do social, cultural, & political contexts impact end-users?

# AD Scholarship

- Translation Studies has been the predominant paradigm of AD research
- End-user “experience” has focussed on “reception” or comprehension of AD content or source text
- Informed professionalisation of practice
- Not allowed for full range of end-user experiences to be understood
- Barriers to participation have not been adequately addressed by practice

# Audience Studies Scholarship

- Participation and implications for experience of citizenship (Nightingale 2011)
- What an audience *is* and what an audience *does* (Brooker & Jermyn 2003; Ross & Nightingale 2003; Ruddock 2001)
- Helps to understand a whole range of social and cultural processes (Silverstone 1990)
- “enabling audiences to speak for themselves” (Livingstone & Lunt 2011, p. 186)
- Reflected in this project when respondents discuss “the experiences they themselves consider important” (Schoenmakers 1990, p. 100)

# Theatre Studies Scholarship

- Theatre audiences are contracted to listen (Brown, R 2009)
- *“freedom of listening is as necessary as the freedom of speech”* (Barthes 1985, p. 260)
- There is *“a great deal more to listening than meets the ear”* (Home-Cook 2015 p. 168)
- *“In attending theatre we not only do something, but also ‘participate’ in shaping that theatrical experience”* (Bennett 2019, p. 170).
- Listening is not only something we do, but listening itself does something

**Why is this important?**

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# Research: Respondents

|           | <b>AD<br/>End-Users</b> | <b>BSO<br/>Staff</b> | <b>Theatre<br/>Staff</b> | <b>TOTAL</b> |
|-----------|-------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| London    | 8                       | 4                    | 1                        | 13           |
| Singapore | 4                       | 1                    | 2                        | 7            |
| Adelaide  | 5                       | 2                    | 1                        | 8            |
| TOTAL     | 17                      | 7                    | 4                        | 28           |

In each site:

1 repertory theatre company

1+ Blind Service Organisation (BSO)

End-Users have 1+ experience of AD for live theatre

# London AD

- Most developed AD service for live theatre
- Available for longest time across three sites
- End-users have the most AD experience
- End-users well “educated” about AD Practice
- Many End-users involved in formal feedback process

## Legislation

- Disability and Discrimination Legislation
- AD Legislation (yes but limited, and only for broadcast)



# London – unexpected outcomes

## Persistent use of visual language to describe aural (AD) experience as an actual visual experience

- “going to see a performance ... the colours of the costumes, the body movements, the visual gestures”
- “seeing” the information as it’s described
- “watched” musicals, pantomimes, plays
- “sat at the back of the stage, looking straight out at the audience space ... it felt “wrong ... I should be looking this way.”
- “the panto dame actually showed us his costume ... we got to see all the tricks”
- the AD guides “your eyes in the right direction”
- Friends are always “quite impressed by the fact that I am seeing ... what’s going on, on stage”

# London – unexpected outcomes

## Transport

- “I was very worried about getting home. I used to spend the last half an hour panicking, thinking, Will I be able to get a bus?” – Alison
- The closest tube station “isn’t the station I could use because the dog wasn’t escalator-trained ... its all these extra elements that go into making sure someone is getting the inclusive experience.” – Paul

# London – unexpected outcomes

## Charity Model Mind-Set (make do)

- “[It’s] not always great, but I’m just so pleased its available ... just so grateful that it’s there in the first place.” – Jess
- “[Even if] its not great, there’ll be less complaints from blind people.” – Debi
- “Many blind or partially sighted people would be grateful for whatever they get. [We] don’t want to criticize too much, because the service might get pulled ... and then that access is gone.” – Toby

# Singapore AD

- AD only available since late 2018, developed with support from Adelaide
- Already highly professionalised service
- End-users well “educated” about AD Practice and involved in formal feedback process

## Legislation

- No legislation supporting individual rights
- No AD Legislation

# Singapore – unexpected outcomes

## Situated Experience

First response to an invitation to share about their AD experience for theatre:

- “Well, from the AD perspective I mean, the thing is this ... I’m a clinical psychologist doing counselling...” – Jim
- “I am a career coach” – Melissa
- “I have seen several shows. I also make AD films.” – Lee Lee
- “I am a performer, an actor and singer ... I posted my work on my YouTube page or Facebook page.” – Wai Yee

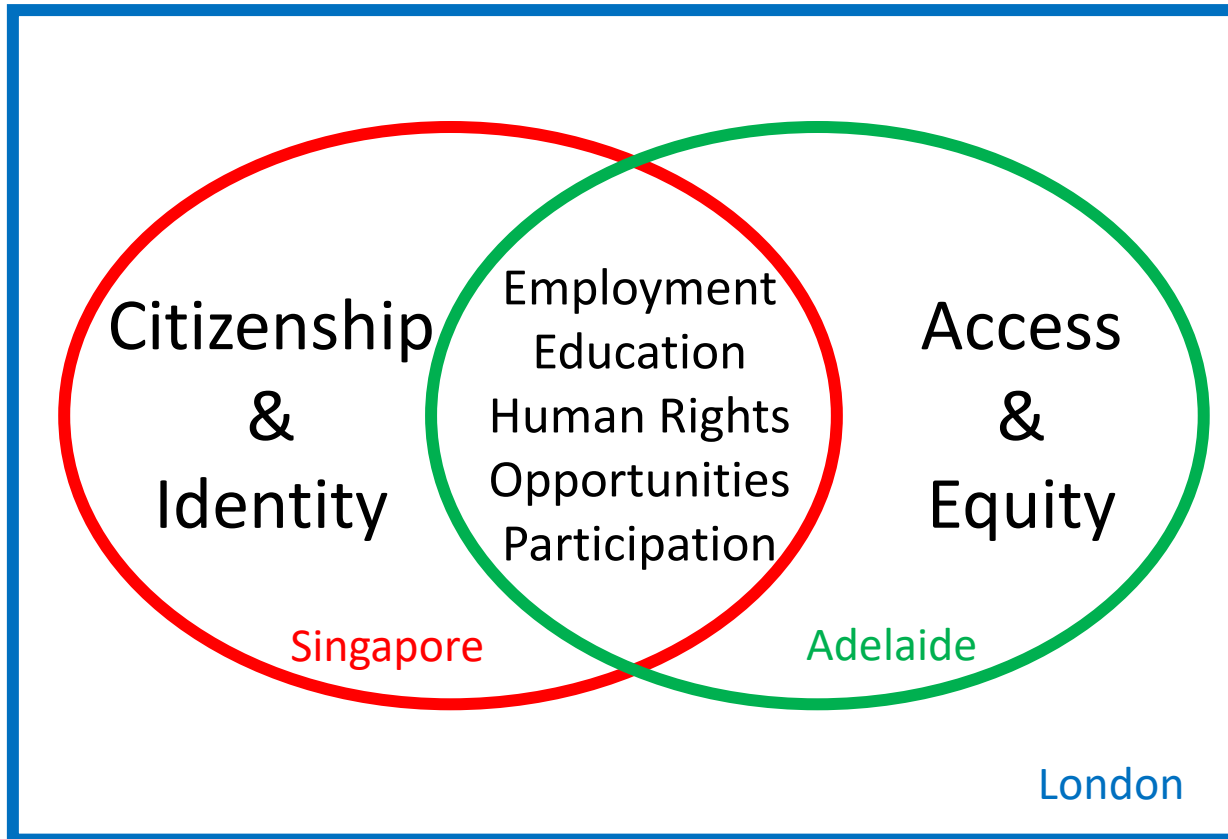
# Singapore: Socio-Cultural Context

- Although a democracy, there is an underlying commitment to communitarian ideology (Chua 1995).
- Socio-political environment prioritises community & social interdependence over individualised welfare (Chua & Kwok 2004; Raghunathan et al 2015; Wong et al 2017)
- The increasingly stratified population of Singapore is “held together by loosely observed mass loyalty to the nation” (Chua 1995, p. 5).

# Critical Disability Studies Scholarship

- Disability is “a category of critical analysis in culture and the arts” (Garland-Thomson 2019).
- Disability discourses are determined within social and cultural structures (Shakespeare 2014).
- The social or cultural context of disability is vital to understanding and addressing disability issues (Goggin 2010).
- Citizenship and participation in social and cultural life are foundational issues for people living with disability (Barnes 2007; Morris 2005; Patterson & Pegg 2009).

# Critical Disability Studies



**Why is this important?**



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# Singapore – unexpected outcomes

## Collectivised Experience

- *“AD can be also useful for children under 12, especially those in the primary schools, [if] they don’t understand what they are looking at.”*
- *“people with ASD would benefit from AD because it clarifies certain aspects of what they are looking at. Due to the nature of the neural pathways not synchronized ... the AD could help bridge the gap ... for them to appreciate what they’re observing.”*
- *“If there isn’t something that’s stimulating enough for me [with ADD/ADHD], I get very switched off ... so, having an AD is an added advantage. It ... keeps me alert and it helps to stimulate me in appreciating what I am there for.”*

# Singapore – unexpected outcomes

## Paradox of Practice

- AD experience framed by involvement in formal feedback process
- Considered to be a responsibility for contributing to others
- End-users are always aware of the formal duties attached to their attendance
- "I was trying to think how could the AD have been more helpful" – Lee Lee
- "Sometimes I just want to attend" without the responsibility to provide feedback - Jim
- Singapore respondents' experience of AD may result in *disengagement* from the embodied theatre experience, rather than enhancing end-user engagement

# Adelaide AD

- AD services available for 20+ years
- Developed with support from London
- Highly professionalised service
- Does not have end-user feedback process

## Legislation

- Disability and Discrimination Legislation
- No AD Legislation at all

# Adelaide – unexpected outcomes

## Inclusion AND Exclusion

*“I felt like my eyes were opened, in a sense, like I felt less blind ... I felt like I fit in a bit better” but “I’d never really felt like I had a disability until that point, because I didn’t know what I was missing.” – Rachael*

## Explaining faces

Charmaine identified that, even before her sight loss and specifically due to her autism, she found it difficult to understand faces. The AD interpreted the faces of the actors on stage and enabled her to engage more deeply in the live performance experience.

# Adelaide – unexpected outcomes

## Cohort (class) Division

- Theatre is “a social, situational and experiential phenomenon” (Walmsley 2011, p. 336)
- Stark division between those with a broad range and large number of live performance experiences vs those with very little live performance experience at all.
- Some have been to hundreds of live performances over many years.
- Others have been to one live theatre show with AD, preferring TV, video, or the cinema for their entertainment

# Adelaide – unexpected outcomes

## Social Anxiety

*“I would definitely go again. But I would not go on my own. I get judged. Whereas when I’m in that group, I do not get judged by any of them, because we’re all in the same boat. If you go [to the theatre] as just another person, you get judged. That’s how I feel. [P]eople judge you a lot, out in the community. There’s a lot of judging. Which is sad. ... If you bump into someone, even if you’ve got your cane, you get abused. But if you’re in a group, and the volunteers are there, they help you.” - Charmaine*

- social judgement experienced by sighted audiences (Foreman-Wernt and Dermin 2013).
- Venues can “elicit profound feelings of unworthiness and incompetence” for those unfamiliar with them (Walmsley 2019, p. 34)

# Conclusion

This research has identified a number of **unexpected outcomes**.

End-users in all three sites identified **barriers** to their participation that would **not be adequately addressed by AD practice**.

Some of those barriers are closely **tied to the socio-cultural and political** contexts of each site.

It is known that **legislative requirements** drive the development of access services (Kubitschke et al 2013). Perhaps this is another avenue of investigation in the pursuit AD services being more widely available in both quantity and quality.



# Thank You

I would welcome any feedback, comments, or questions you may have on this research project.

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