

**'SMALL CATASTROPHES'**  
**CRITICAL RESPONSE BY JUDE ANDERSON**



Participating in Roarawar Feartata's Small Catastrophes was like hanging out with a backyard grunge performance outfit invented by the nerds next door. The familiar, intimate and poignant are combined with the grotesque and pseudo scientific to create a chaos born from a passion to share investigations on performance, poetics and public space with a gathering of the curious.

Craig Peade and Ben Cittadini are the core artistic duo of Roarawar Feartata - a Melbourne based live art ensemble who, through their work together on Small Catastrophes, have a history of taking performance into hard edged unapologetic public spaces as a way of creating a 'time for dreaming'. With their self styled absurdist Agency of Small Catastrophes, Peade and Cittadini have already taken to streets, plazas, parking lots and malls of Dandenong, Frankston, and Fitzroy to perform with and interview 'a city'.

Bendigo marks their first regional incursion. In Bendigo, Peade and Cittadini took up residence in the city centre offering a registry of poetic catastrophe categories that ultimately led participating passers-by to the sharing of 'a dream'. The white tiled emptiness of Fountain Plaza, the recently socially re-engineered Hargraves Mall and smaller plazas bordering centre city parking lots are the chosen public gathering spaces imagined by civic architects and city commerce that provided settings for Peade and Cittadini's encounters with a cross section of "Bendigolians". Peade and Cittadini's week long Agency presence gave them a picture of how public space intersected with the private; where crossovers and gulfs between civic imagination and the dreams of passing city residents lay. From this registry Peade and Cittadini had the material in hand for a culminating performance at the old Fire Station framed as a forum of 'findings'; an inventory profiling the statistics on small catastrophes lived in Bendigo.

Peade and Cittadini's time in Bendigo was coincidentally and temptingly framed by the release of the Australian Bureau of Statistic's 2011 consensus data – a consensus that traditionally provides no space for capturing dream data. At the Small Catastrophe forum, Peade and Cittadini unsurprisingly begin with a parodying of governmental and enterprise analysis and evaluation of statistical findings, and lyricism linked to "Bendigolians" apparent collective dreaming of 'sailing away' and water.

On entering the forum we see a portable screen with a Powerpoint projection of playful catastrophic genre definitions, a beige carpet off-cut, waiting room chairs scattered in a half circle, a microphone stand, a registry table strewn with pens and

questionnaires, and fluoro lighting. It seems all set for some 'angst art' and 'Poor Theatre'. Instead of angst though we get schmalz. Christopher Cross's 'Sailing' is sung Capella style into a microphone by Cittadini - 'an Agency presenter'; the popular collective 'Bendigolian' dream iterated in song. During the singing audience members fill in registration forms - a process coordinated by similarly outfitted, gentle but eccentrically adamant Peade. Once the registration process has been completed by the entire audience, Peade and Cittadini then quite literally throw the performance trope of parody aside to inhabit a more fragile and comic/tragic zone - the poetics of the absurd (meaning and meaninglessness) and idiocy (performance sequences where time is negated and commerce is demonstrated, from Peade and Cittadini's observations in Bendigo at least, as a pornographic empty space of desire and grotesque consumption).

Interpretation and presentation are dismantled at performance, forum, and analysis levels and become a spiraling series of small catastrophes in the form of denuded stylistic figures such as 'the vacuous voice and gesture of authority' and technical protocols such as 'data manipulation' where the two presenters are at the mercy of no thing and nothing as 'performance outcomes'. Embodying a marionette, Peade performs a series of a simulacra - authority, solitude (a Macdonald's super size lunch pack eater oblivious to receiving a haircut whilst eating), and the inner voice (whisperer of sweet dreams). Cittadini in the meantime gradually collapses into the microphone amplifying his frustration at nothing to say or do in the face of analysis platitudes. When Peade performs the 'dream whisperer' Cittadini captures the moment on Polaroid - a momento mori of 'the dream' offered to each audience member. The dream is at the same time imagined, captured, and over - in a flash.

At only a week spent in Bendigo, Peade and Cittadini's work process was for them hurried. With more time to encrust themselves onto Bendigo's public spaces and entrust themselves to city inhabitants they would have been able to delve deeper into the city's dream psyche. In turn the breadth of their work's affect and offer to the forum audience would reveal more of the shared adventure and venturing of the Small Catastrophe Agency in its city street iteration.

Small Catastrophes for all its apparent simplicity and grunge rawness was a provocative multilayered performance where Peade and Cittadini shamelessly collided ontological and humanist perspectives on small catastrophes to spark our interest in the human connections these catastrophes enable. Their forum is a celebration of our capacity to live and dream mess. Perhaps it is that Bendigonians become "Bendigolians" in the collective gathering space created by a sharing of small catastrophes

Ultimately then, Peade and Cittadini's work is courageous not because they invite a place for dreaming in a public spaces that are perceived as being 'hard core', but because it reveals that even award winning architects engineering public spaces are undoubtedly asking seriously wrong questions.