

TOTALTHEATRE

MAGAZINE

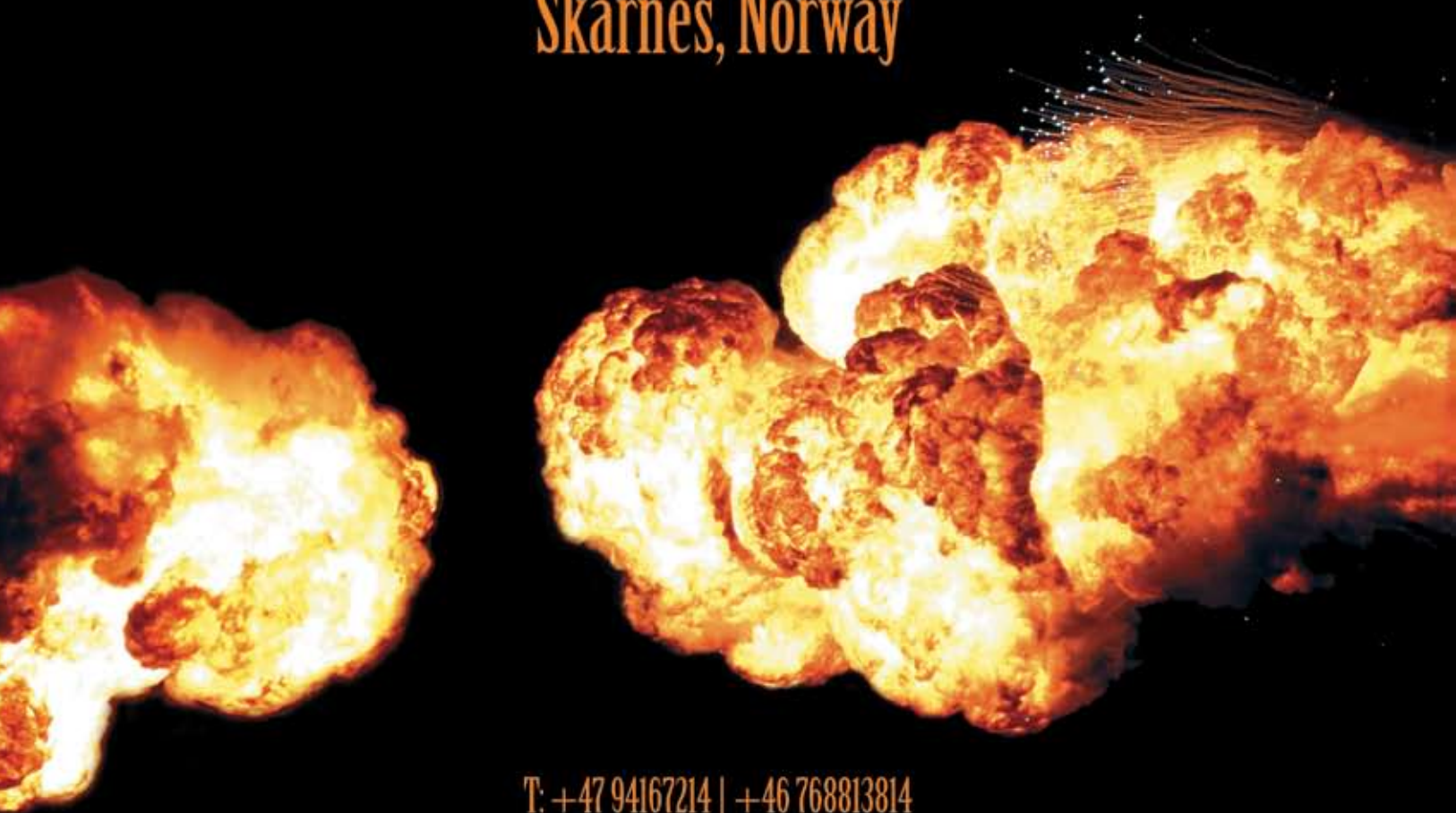
VOLUME 20 | ISSUE 04 | WINTER 2008-09 | TOTALTHEATRE.ORG.UK
TOTALTHEATRE - DEVELOPING CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

DAY OF THE DEAD - MEET THE YOUNG THEATRE COMPANIES TACKLING BEREAVEMENT
SPECTRES A GO-GO AS WE HAVE WORDS WITH THE SPECTACULAR TIM ETHELLO OF FORCED ENTERTAINMENT
VENTURE INTO THE FOREST IN EDINBURGH AND GO ON A FABULOUS WALK IN DEVON
TAKE A TRIP TO NEW LIFE BERLIN - WOOLLOO!
FIND OUT ABOUT THE TOTAL THEATRE AWARDS 2008 WITH REPORTS AND REVIEWS A-PLenty
READ ALL ABOUT IT - NEWS OF THE LONDON INTERNATIONAL MIME FESTIVAL, COMPANY UPDATES, AND MORE
TOTAL THEATRE MAGAZINE - TAKING YOU THROUGH THE DARK DAYS AND TOWARDS THE BRIGHT LIGHTS OF NEW PERFORMANCE



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Image: 'Some Short Exercises in Love' By Fevered Sleep A piece commissioned by the Faculty of Arts for the launch of the Performance Gymnasium

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WINCHESTER

EDITORIAL

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My first 'job' in 'the arts' was at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London. Those words are in quote marks because this was in the days (mid 70s) when the talk was of art, not the arts, and making and presenting art was seen as a vocation rather than a career. Divisions between departments at the ICA were pretty loose then. In our view it was all art. In a typical week I might well be programming an ethnographic film festival, doing the get-in for The People Show, running the bar at an informal late-night gig by The Clash, or setting up the opening party for the notorious Prostitution exhibition that earned us the Daily Mail headline 'These People Are The Wreckers of Civilization'. Of course it didn't last, and we all got chucked out eventually. The ICA was dull and boring for a while, then a fresh crew took over (including Lois Keidan, now of Live Art Development Agency) and a new era began.

The ICA is currently in the spotlight because of the decision made by its artistic director, Ekwu Eshun, to close the Live & Media Arts department from the end of November 2008. This has understandably caused a furore – although, to play Devil's Advocate, Eshun is mostly concerned about the redundancy of New Media as a distinct artform and wants to rid the ICA of its Digital Studio, and I'm with him on that. 'New Media' is a horribly old-fashioned notion – a pencil and a computer are both just tools, after all.

There are plenty of theatre spaces in central London, so if he wants to focus on visual arts practice, so be it (and hopefully he knows that includes performance art). Outside of the London International Mime Festival – which will, as usual, be using the venue in January 2009 – the ICA theatre (one of many badly managed and underused black-box London theatres) has not been programming anything much of interest for years. It's no great loss.

And actually, London isn't the epicentre of experimental theatre/performance practice currently (with notable exceptions including CPT, BAC, Toynbee Studios, Barbican BITE, Shunt Lounge). Look a little further afield and you'll notice venues such as the Warwick Arts Centre, The Basement in Brighton, greenroom in Manchester, Arnolfini in Bristol, The Phoenix in Exeter, and The Arches in Glasgow – vibrant artistic centres commissioning and programming exciting new work. Look through the Total Theatre Magazine lens and you'll realise that a lot of theatre/performance we cover doesn't even need a theatre building – to pick a few examples from current and recent issues: National Theatre of Scotland's rural touring; the Without Walls consortium of street arts festivals; NoFit State's circus-theatre; and the Fabulous Walks project and numerous other site-responsive works documented in this issue.

Yes, I'm as sad as anyone at the thought of no theatre at the ICA. But mostly for reasons of nostalgia. Times change, let's leave Eshun to his yuppie restaurant-bar and get out into the railway arches and onto the streets.

Dorothy Max Prior
Editor

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COVER: REDCAPE THEATRE'S THE IDIOT COLONY; WINNER TOTAL THEATRE AWARD FOR VISUAL THEATRE, APPEARING AT LIMF 2009. PHOTO DAVE YATES

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AKHE PLUG & PLAY. PHOTO NATALIA DUDAREVA



BORY'S LES SEPT PLANCHES DE LA RUSE. PHOTO AGLAÉ

31ST LONDON INTERNATIONAL MIME FESTIVAL 10–25 JANUARY 2009

London's celebrated showcase for contemporary visual theatre enters its fourth decade with a feast of UK premieres, featuring artists from the UK, France, Germany, Portugal, Russia, Spain, the USA, Greece, and China.

Highlights of the 2009 festival include France's Aurélien Bory, working with 14 Chinese performers in *Les Sept Planches de la Ruse* at the Barbican Theatre (part of Paris Calling for bite09); and Germany's mask theatre experts, Familie Floez, visiting Southbank Centre's Queen Elizabeth Hall and Newbury's Corn Exchange with *Hotel Paradiso*, described as 'an Alpine thriller-chiller with more than a hint of Fawlty Towers'. The season opens at the Purcell Room, Southbank Centre, with *Le Petit Travers* from France's Collectif Petit Travers, taking object manipulation to new heights. Other highlights include: Circus Klezmer from Spain; American vaudeville maestro Tomas Kubinek; the truly demented Buchinger's Boot Marionettes; Russia's cult avant-garde performance group Akhe whose *Faust 2360 Words* is a bizarre version of *Faust* in precisely 2360 words of text and a torrent of unforgettable images.

A recent hit at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and winner of a 2008 Total Theatre Award for visual theatre, and a Fringe First, RedCape Theatre (UK) presents its debut show *The Idiot Colony*.

This year's festival features a raft of Meet the Artist discussion dates, and an intensive workshop from Angela De Castro (see Training News, page 7).

See the full programme online from 3 November at www.mimefest.co.uk
A free festival brochure is available from 24 November – call 020 7637 5661.

NEWS FROM VENUES AND FESTIVALS



NUTCRACKER AT EGG. PHOTO TOBY FARROW

THE EGG, THEATRE ROYAL BATH

The egg theatre for children and young people presents its first in-house Christmas production with a new adaptation of ETA Hoffman's *The Nutcracker*, written by Hattie Naylor with music and lyrics by Paul Dodgson, directed by Lee Lyford and designed by Hayley Grindle.

This major Christmas production heralds the arrival of a permanent fixture in the egg's annual calendar, building on recent critical acclaim for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *His Dark Materials*, previously produced by the same team at the Theatre Royal Bath. For more information visit www.theatreroyal.org.uk/the-egg



EXETER PHOENIX

This autumn at Exeter Phoenix: Marie-Gabrielle Rotie's *Black Mirror*, drawing inspiration from the expressionist vampire film *Nosferatu* to explore a gothic world of shadows and childhood fears (4 November); Drunk with Joy's *Joy Collective*, fusing the formats of the visual art exhibition, motion picture and live performance in a showcase that handpicks a selection of the south west's most interesting emerging visual and performing artists (6 November); Badco's *Memories are Made of This*, a piece inspired by the F Scott Fitzgerald story *The Crack-Up*, by a Croatian artistic collective comprising four choreographers, two dramaturgs and a philosopher; and Cupola Bobber's *The Man Who Pictured Space From His Apartment*, a physical performance that hangs somewhere between staged theatrics and the beautifully familiar, investigating the stars, the railroad, and memories in a struggle to pinpoint something infinitely satisfying. See www.exeterphoenix.org.uk



UNIVERSAL HALL

Strangeface are at Universal Hall 22 November with *The Last Resort*, a satire about greed, ambition and redemption in a style best described as Spitting Image does *Under Milk Wood*. Also at the Hall, Giant Children's Theatre present *The Ceilidh Tree*, playing 5 & 6 December. Combining magical lighting, storytelling, puppetry and song it's a gentle multi-sensory story celebrating our forest friends, the turn of the year and the season of good cheer in a truly inclusive and accessible way. See www.findhorn.org/uhall

BRISTOL DO

A new late summer festival and member of the Without Walls consortium, the Bristol Do took place 27-28 September on a weekend of shocking and incongruous good weather. Portland Square was host to a strong programme of circus and street arts events, including commissioned work by aerial company Above and Beyond, and touring pieces by Acrojou Circus Theatre, Company Fierce and Walk the Plank, Tavazive Dance Company, and Tom Marshman. In the evening audiences moved over to Spectrum, a showcase of work at St Paul's Church to celebrate the launch of Circomedia's foundation degree course; and Carny Ville, a rich Victorian-style circus of the bizarre, presented by The Invisible Circus in an old fire station renovated by Artspace Lifespace. See www.thebristoldo.com

THE BASEMENT

The Basement's dedication to innovative live art practice has come to fruition this autumn/winter, with a dazzling line up of the most interesting work nationally and internationally. The new season has opened with a series of new monthly ventures: the *Supper Club*, devised and curated by the venue's supported artists; *Live Lunch*, curated by Movement12 (a group of independent dance artists that includes Liz Aggiss and Charlie Morrissey); and the *Twilight Club*, curated by David Bramwell and Rachel Blackman. This enterprising Brighton venue will also be showcasing work by renowned artists Lone Twin, Marcia Farquhar and Noble & Silver. For further details, contact info@thebasement.uk.com Download the full programme from the website: www.thebasement.uk.com

FEEAST AT RIVERSIDE 18-23 NOVEMBER 2008

The Festival of Central and Eastern European Arts (FeEast) showcases quality performances from Central and Eastern European countries, helping ex Soviet bloc countries to create a cultural identity in the UK.

There will be three different shows at Riverside Studios as part of the FeEast programme, including *Don Juan. Who?* a physical theatre piece about sexual politics, co-produced by Athletes of the Heart and Mladinsko Gledalisce Theatre. The project was written anonymously in a cyber studio across three continents and includes performers from Italy, Slovenia and the UK. See www.riversidestudios.co.uk

CALL OUT TO ARTISTS

PACITTI COMPANY

This November internationally acclaimed Pacitti Company will be making *Finale* at the Lawrence Batley Theatre, Huddersfield, and are currently looking for participants. *Finale* sees Pacitti Company join forces with sensational Swiss cult electronica band Velma to create a series of highly visceral performances shown in intense site-specific locations. Abstracting the 1867 Emile Zola text *Therese Raquin*, *Finale* dispenses with narrative structure and character in order to prioritise the themes of the book – deception, lust, spite and domination. See www.pacitticompany.com or email jen@pacitticompany.com

QUEER UP NORTH CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Queer Up North is looking for new work for the next Festival in May 2009 – and they're also laying plans for 2010. QUN are looking primarily for performance work – anything from a few minutes long to a full evening. They're open to work at any stage of development, from early ideas to fully produced ready-to-show work. See www.queerupnorth.com

PLATFORM 4

Platform 4 are continuing their exploration of *The Tempest*. The company have just finished a nine-month R&D process (anyone is invited to add to their Living Archive with memories/thoughts/observations on the play at www.platform4/currentprojects). Platform 4 will be previewing their *Tempest* at Lighthouse, Poole in spring '09 and then touring autumn '09. Anyone wishing to book the show should get in touch on enquiries@platform4.org The company also continue their cross-arts work for 2009 by creating a project for early onset dementia sufferers in partnership with the Nuffield Theatre Southampton. See www.platform4.org

CAMDEN PEOPLE'S THEATRE SPRINT 09 CALL

CPT are now accepting submissions for Sprint 2009. This month-long festival will take place in June, and feature the work of around twenty companies. Building on the success of last year's two off-site projects, CPT will be expanding this section of the festival, so companies and artists are invited to submit proposals for work both in the theatre and in sites around the local area – these may be pre-existing projects or new works. To see last year's programme visit the website. For further info email sprint@cpttheatre.co.uk. Deadline for submissions is 5pm Monday 12 January. See www.cpttheatre.co.uk

NEW DIRECTIONS

MISSION POSSIBLE

In 2009, State of Emergency will premiere a unique, all-male dance show exploring issues faced by boys and young men, and their role models. Three pieces have been commissioned from a stunning line-up of black British choreographers: Jeanefer Jean-Charles, Kwesi Johnson and Colin Poole. Both humorous and poignant, *Mission Possible* will offer a male perspective on life; connecting with relationships between sons and fathers, brothers and uncles, and bringing the male of the species into the theatre in droves! State of Emergency is an Arts Production and Management Company committed to the support, development and profiling of black choreographic work. See www.stateofemergencyltd.com or email deborah@stateofemergencyltd.com



TRESTLE TACKLE LOLA MONTEZ

Lola tells the unique story of Lola Montez, the infamous Spanish dancer who was in fact Irish. Though born in Ireland in 1821 and christened in Toxteth, Liverpool, she lived with her parents in India throughout her childhood. Trestle's production looks back at her unusual life and loves, utilising music and dance as well as the company's signature brand of storytelling physical theatre; it is one of their first un-masked productions. *Lola* features dance from Barcelona-based company Incredapacion Danza plus live music from virtuoso guitarist Ricardo Garcia. See www.trestle.org.uk

TROOP

After a sell-out London show at the Purcell Room, South Bank in 2007, Jane Turner's *Troop* travels to Scotland this December with more dates to be announced, as well as brand new work. Partly inspired by Andrea Stuart's book *Showgirls* (Jonathan Cape), *Troop* is Turner's homage to the eternal vaudeville goddess, showcasing the disciplined drill of the iconic female form in this extraordinary piece of dazzling dance theatre. For more information see www.janeturner.net

THEATRE AD INFINITUM

Theatre ad infinitum's Edinburgh Fringe hit *Behind the Mirror* is on at the Lowry Quay's Theatre, 31 October 2008 at 9pm, as part of the Nu Burlesque Festival. Theatre ad infinitum are now discussing their coming 2009/2010 tour with several venues. If you want information about *Behind the Mirror* please email info@theatreadinfinity.co.uk or see www.theatreadinfinity.co.uk

PRECARIOUS

Fresh from performing to over 3500 people and winning the annual Total Volleyball tournament at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, Precarious are now off on tour with their latest five-star, physical theatre and multimedia production *The Factory*. Check www.precarious.org.uk for dates. As finalists for the Oxford Samuel Beckett Theatre Trust Award, Precarious are also engaged in a process of research and development for an exciting new show called *anomie* which will be launched in 2009. The company are also taking bookings for performances and workshops for next spring; interested persons should email info@precarious.org.uk

PUNCHDRUNK

Following non-stop production activity over the past three years, Punchdrunk is currently involved in an extended period of research and development for several new projects for 2009–10. In addition to regular funding support for the first time from Arts Council England, London, Punchdrunk's artistic director Felix Barrett and producer Colin Marsh have been awarded one of the inaugural Paul Hamlyn Foundation: Breakthrough Fund grants, to develop the company's work over the next three years. See www.punchdrunk.org.uk

TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

THE WHY NOT INSTITUTE AT THE MIME FESTIVAL

The Why Not Institute at the 2009 London International Mime Festival presents 'How To Be A Stupid' or 'The Clown's Intelligence', a two-week intensive, challenging journey into the state of clowning and clown persona development with master clown Angela de Castro, 9–19 January 2009. For beginners and those more experienced who need refreshing, refocusing or a burst of energy, this course takes you on a profoundly challenging journey, with laughs and play along the way. Email info@thewhynotinstitute.com See www.thewhynotinstitute.com

JOIN THE AGITATORS – 3 DECEMBER 2008

'The Agitators' are Professor Liz Aggiss (University of Brighton), Ju Row Farr (Blast Theory); Greg Whelan (Lone Twin); and Silvia Mercuriali (Rotozaza). Join them at The Basement in Brighton to question and quibble over live art practice within the regional and national context. Special guest for the evening is Lois Keidan (Live Arts Development Agency), who will present 'Live Art: The Parameters and Possibilities of a Practice'. £4 entrance fee includes a glass of wine or beer! See www.thebasement.uk.com

INDEPENDENT THEATRE COUNCIL TRAINING PROGRAMME

Total Theatre subscribers save 15% on ITC one-day training courses and seminars! The majority of their courses take place in central London. Coming up over the winter months: Successful Co-Productions (to consider the elements – artistic and administrative – needed for a successful co-production), 24 November, led by Bryan Savery; Working as a Freelance Producer on 1 December with Susannah Kraft; Promoting and Presenting Young People's Theatre on 4 December; Introduction to Arts Marketing with Rachel Escott on 29 January 2009. Contact: training@itc-arts.org T: +44 (0)20 7403 6698. See www.itc-arts.org

VERTICAL STUDIOS

The Vertical Studios is proud to announce the opening of Hertfordshire's first circus school. Their aim is to promote the fitness benefits of aerial and ground-based circus to the masses, offering classes in contemporary dance fitness and circus, for adults and kids. They are also looking for instructors in everything from aerial and juggling to stilt-walking and unicycling. The space is available for renting & events. There is a small stage for performances. See www.theverticalstudio.com

DELL'ARTE

The source for training in ensemble-based physical theatre among the majestic redwoods and rugged beauty of California's north coast, Dell'Arte offers an MFA in Ensemble-based Physical Theatre as well as a one-year certificate programme. Dell'Arte also offers a residential intensive in Bali, 8 Feb–24 March 2009. Email info@dellarte.com See www.dellarte.com

Fuller listings of degree courses, classes, and workshops can be found at www.totaltheatre.org.uk/news/training.html

PERFORMER & COMPANY UPDATES



THE ONASSIS PROGRAMME

CIRCO RIDICULOSO



BOTTLEFED

Operation Powervløtt is a joint project run by Bottlefed Ensemble, their regular musical collaborators Kobayashi and Norwegian sound artists DrDeem and Dotcomrune. The fourteen artists spent ten days in Norway, Bergen, pushing their research into improvisation further, performing in different spaces across the city and running workshops with local teenagers. In November *Operation Powervløtt* will take place in London: on 19 November at The Space (7.30pm start) and on 20 November at Southwark Playhouse bar (9pm start). Both nights will include improvisations by Bottlefed in collaboration with the musicians followed by independent gigs and party! Email info@bottlefed.org or see www.bottlefed.org

CHICKENSHED

The Twelve Days of Christmas is a new and exciting production from the award-winning Chickenshed which uses the traditional Christmas song as inspiration for an original, modern festive show. Playing 3 December–17 January. Four children embark upon a journey to find their mother and the fifth gold ring. Their journey takes them far and wide as they meet a selection of weird, wonderful and downright strange characters. An array of music, dance and exuberance makes this production a Christmas treat for all the family. For full listings see www.chickenshed.org.uk

CIRCO RIDICULOSO

This season Circo Ridiculoso presents the family friendly show *Lighter than air*. Danny Schlesinger invites you into the strange and bizarre universe of a wild balloon tamer where surreal, skilful and stupid things happen. Using circus skills, eccentric performance and physical comedy he gives a funny yet moving series of visual contemporary clown acts loaded with surprises and laughs. Dates include: Jackson's Lane, 9 November; Stratford Circus, 16 November; and the Blue Elephant Theatre, 25 November. Bookings are now being taken for Spring 2009 and beyond. Contact Helena Richardson of Richardson

PR & Management on 07931 801091 or helena@richardsonprm.com. See www.CircoRidiculoso.com

DYNAMIC NEW ANIMATION

Dynamic New Animation (DNA) is currently touring Singapore and Kuala Lumpur with the innovative visual theatre performance *Atishoo!* – for early years audiences with original music by Indonesian composer Haviel Perdana of Yorkshire-based company Indigo Moon. The company is also launching a programme of creative education training for early years settings called Imaginary Leaps and have a website live at www.imaginaryleaps.com Alongside touring *Ball Pond Bobby*, *Chicken Licken* and *Dr Nose Travels Through Time*, new for 2009 is *Fairy Tales* based on the published stories by ex-Python Terry Jones. Full details can be found at www.dynamicnewanimation.co.uk and www.thurtinkle.com

FEVERED SLEEP

After a sell-out UK tour and summer run at Polka Theatre, Fevered Sleep's *Brilliant* returns to London this winter, showing at the Lyric Hammersmith 21 November–27 December. *Brilliant* is a new devised theatre piece all about light for 3–4 year olds combining live music, beautiful lighting, movement and captivating imagery. The latest in a series of acclaimed projects made for the very young. Devised, designed and directed by David Harradine. To book tickets visit www.lyric.co.uk or call 0871 221 1729. For company information and past projects see www.feveredsleep.co.uk or email admin@feveredsleep.co.uk

METRO-BOULOT-DODO

Fermynwoods Contemporary Art has commissioned MBD to create a performance audio tour based on the children's story *Hansel and Gretel*. Members of the public will take a walk through the Northamptonshire countryside whilst listening to the audio tour and encountering performers and installations en-route. The day also includes a witches' picnic and its final destination is at Sudborough Green Lodge cottages where visual

artist Richard Woods has covered the building in a daring retro design (1 & 9 November). For booking details contact Fermynwoods Contemporary Art on 01536 373469. See www.metro-boulot-dodo.com

MOMENTUM

Following successful collaborations with the Everyman theatre and Hope Street Ltd, Momentum will be touring their critically acclaimed show *Anima* nationally for the second time this year. *Anima* is a commission of the Liverpool Culture Company for the artistic programme 2008. Based in the world of dreams, *Anima* explores the distorted dynamics between the conscious and subconscious, taking you on a surreal and emotional journey that is deeply disturbing, humorous and moving. Originally devised with Tanya Khabarova (Derevo), directed by Malou Airaud (Pina Bausch). For tour dates see www.momentumtheatre.com

NEWS FROM NOWHERE

Tim Crouch's Total Theatre Award-winning play *England* – performed by Tim Crouch and Hannah Ringham (Shunt) – is on tour in the UK during November. Leeds Metropolitan Gallery, 6 & 7 November. Mead Gallery, Warwick Arts Centre, 12–15 November. Victoria Art Gallery / Bath Theatre Royal, 21 & 22 November. The Lowry, Salford, 27 & 28 November. The play arrives in London in May 2009, with a six week run at the Whitechapel Gallery. See www.newsfromnowhere.net

NIE

NIE are performing their new show *Everything Falls Apart* this autumn at Lyric Hammersmith as part of Lyric Firsts (6–8 November, 8pm) and in The Junction Cambridge club space (18–19 November, 8pm). *Everything Falls Apart* follows the story of two boys smuggled into the UK hoping for a better life and one man's single-minded pursuit of justice at any cost. With a European ensemble and featuring NIE's trademark mix of physical theatre, live music and comic mayhem, this show explores uncomfortable underground stories and the place where they collide. See www.nie-theatre.com



FEVERED SLEEP



NOLA RAE

Nola Rae is in the process of writing and directing *Dracula the Clown* for CoBotin Teater and the National Theatre of Cluj-Napoca in Romania, due to premiere at the end of the year. *Mozart Preposterous* is meanwhile touring to Clownin Festival of Women's Clowning, KosmosTheater, Vienna, 30 November; Teatro di Rifredi, Florence, 30 & 31 December; and Teatro de Buratto, Milano, 15 & 16 January. See www.nolarae.com

THE ONASSIS PROGRAMME

The Onassis Programme have recently played at The Pleasance in London with their Total Theatre Award shortlisted show *Cloudcuckooland*, along with their show for under 5s *Pick 'n' Myths*. Both shows will be touring again in 2009. The Onassis Programme is also about to premiere a new work at the Globe – *The Burial at Thebes*, an opera, co-produced with Manning Camerata. Words by Seamus Heaney, music by Dominique le Gendre, directed by Derek Walcott, conducted by Peter Manning.

THE PAPER BIRDS

The Paper Birds' latest show *In a Thousand Pieces* was awarded a Fringe First and a Fringe Review Award at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2008. The company plan to tour the show – which was also shortlisted for The Stage's 'Best Ensemble', Total Theatre's 'Best Young Company' and an Amnesty Award – in spring 2009 beginning at the National Review of Live Art. In the meantime the Paper Birds will perform *40 Feathered Winks* at the Amsterdam Fringe Festival and will be starting an MA in Theatre Collectives at Chichester University. See www.thepaperbirds.com

THÉÂTRE SANS FRONTIÈRES

As well as embarking on a world tour with Robert Lepage's *Ex Machina* in the acclaimed epic *Lipsynch*, Théâtre Sans Frontières will be touring nationally in October and November with *La Pelota Mágica*. This charming tale follows the adventures of brother and sister Luis

and Natalia. Set against the Argentinean Andes, *La Pelota Mágica* is vividly told through live action, puppetry and music, and is an engaging introduction to the Spanish language for younger children. For more details on both productions see www.tsf.org.uk or email admin@tsf.org.uk

THINGUMAJIG THEATRE

Thingumajig Theatre will be touring their new puppet play *A November Day* from 12 October to 1 December. To mark the 90th anniversary of the ending of the First World War, Thingumajig Theatre in association with Imperial War Museum North tells the story of one survivor's memories of the conflict and his unexpected encounter with a stray dog who knew no boundaries. With evocative puppet characters and live music, *A November Day* presents a timeless fable on war and the miracle of friendship when all else seems lost. Touring to Glasgow, Manchester, London, Bath, Brighton and more. See www.thingumajig.info

TRAVELLING LIGHT

Travelling Light has a busy winter season. *Lenny the Boy Who Wanted to be a Train* tours for six weeks including dates in London (Unicorn), Salisbury, Oxford, Kendal, St Andrews and N Ireland. Then *The Ugly Duckling* performs at Warwick Arts Centre for six weeks over Christmas, followed by a five-month national tour. Last but far from least, a new play *Home* (by Lizzie Allen of Freehand Theatre) will be co-produced with Bristol Old Vic to launch the theatre's reopening. *Home*, is the story of two wanderers looking for somewhere to live, who find themselves creating the perfect miniature home for somebody else. Bristol Old Vic 27 December–1 February 2009. See www.travlight.co.uk

UNPACKED

This autumn Unpacked are touring *Funeral Games* and *No Obvious Trauma* around the UK. The company's new show for children *Jumping Mouse* is a coming of age story set on a red double-decker and is a full-throttle experience with puppetry and live music that will leave you feeling totally

revved up. Unpacked's new show for the under 5s, *Pip's adventure in the big out there*, is a show that springs out of a giant pop-up book and is full of puppet fun. See www.unpacked.org or call Gilbert on 07903 018 310.

WALK THE PLANK

Pull out your spade, dig out your dancing wellies, and head down to Walk the Plank's theatre ship in Liverpool's Albert Dock for the Potting Shed cabaret, a monthly dose of green-fingered fun showcasing the best talents in the city, with comedy, performance, dance, burlesque, theatre magic and music aplenty; 22 November, 19 December and 13 February. On 31 December Walk the Plank will present *Glowmobiles*, a dazzling array of Art Cars transformed and illuminated by artists – on display around Newcastle city centre on New Year's Eve. See www.artcarparade.co.uk

ZECORA URA

Zecora Ura featuring The Urban Dolls Project presents the world première of *Hotel Medea* (running from midnight until dawn in real time) at the Arcola Theatre, 22 January–7 February 2009 (Thursday to Saturday only). *Hotel Medea* merges the classical myth of Medea with indigenous and Afro Brazilian myths, rituals and dances in a mass of blood, pounding live drum beats and intimate performances. Bringing together artists from around the world including writer Marc Von Henning and Brazilian DJ Dolores, the performance invites the audience to join in a truly shared experience. For more information see www.medeatv.tv or call 07916 278 949.

OUT AND ABOUT

PIPPA BAILEY

The washout summer in Britain coupled with deep anxiety over the economy has contributed to the general feeling of unrest this autumn. Edinburgh in August at the Festival Fringe was its usual crazy wet self but fraught with trouble over a new box office system which failed many venues, punters and artists. Is the Fringe really just a marketing and ticketing function? A record number of people attended the heated Annual General Meeting to ask such probing questions and Jon Morgan resigned as artistic director in early September (after just fifteen months in post). So watch that space...

I ran into an old acquaintance in Edinburgh, performing his new one-man show *Possessed* at the Assembly Rooms. Frank Woodley performed for many years with partner Colin Lane as Lano and Woodley, 1994 Perrier Award winners and household names in Australia. In a snatched conversation, frequently caught in Edinburgh, he spoke eloquently and poignantly about the challenges of returning to Edinburgh and performing his slapstick show outside the comfort zone of Australian star status. Performed in a cavernous venue to respectable and appreciative but seldom full houses he admitted to a rocky ride. As we spoke, Michael Barrymore, vilified TV personality, scurried in full makeup through the Freemantle Bar. Only in Edinburgh is there such a level playing field with the chance of performing alongside great names and finding the fickle twist of fate falling in your favour.

Outside the Edinburgh bubble, arguably the greatest show on earth was staged in Beijing this summer. The metaphoric baton was handed over to London in anticipation of the next Olympic Games in 2012. I watched London's contribution to the closing ceremony in horrified astonishment and have been even more surprised by the lack of criticism in the UK media. The scale was small for the 91,000 stadium (clear to anyone who works in outdoor performance). The cultural icons – a zebra crossing, umbrellas and a London bus unfolding to reveal a topiary London skyline – seemed tokenistic, and not imbued with the wealth possible. (Did no-one else make the connection to the blown apart bus images from the 2007 London bombings, the day before London learnt it would host the 2012 Games?)

Ageing rocker Jimmy Page, reality star Leona Lewis and David Beckham complete with football were offered up as the best of British culture: what does this say about British cultural identity? That we are celebrity obsessed, seduced by popular culture and desperate to portray a funky corporate identity? In situ, the cultural elements of the Olympics are poorly commented and sports presenters offer little chance of critical analysis of these performances. Where are our cultural commentators? In Edinburgh perhaps... Back at home in September, the launch of the Cultural Olympiad offered over 600 events across the UK. Having produced the event in Dover in Kent – a town desperately in need of its planned regeneration, and intent on being the place where the Olympic torch enters the UK in 2012 (as it did in 1948) – I witnessed first hand the incredible potential for switching 'non arts' people onto culture. I don't think the public really understand what the Cultural Olympiad is all about, but the aims are sound, particularly its ambition to raise the value of culture in this country. The Cultural Olympiad represents an important opportunity for artists, partly because that is where money will be spent in the next four years and partly because of the unlikely doors that fly open when that magic 'O' word is uttered.

Away from the dizzy promise of the international stage, Arts Council England (ACE) have commissioned a study, engaging consultants and three creative advisors (of which I am one) to identify the impact of £25 million additional investment into the theatre sector over the past five years. The website (www.theatreassessment.org.uk) details the process and gives opportunities to respond, and there have also been a series of open and closed meetings. Consultants Jodi Myers and Anne Millman have sought responses from theatre communities across England in order to gauge changes in the sector, gather up burning issues, and present a detailed picture. The process is only part way through at the time of writing but we can only hope that this helps build bridges for ACE following the cuts in April and provides a solid basis from which to determine how future investment is shaped, including of course the implications of the Cultural Olympiad and Olympic games.

Pippa Bailey is director of Total Theatre, the national development agency for contemporary theatre based in the UK. For more on the organisation see www.totaltheatre.org.uk



IMAGE CREDITS: (TOP TO BOTTOM)
30 BIRD PRODUCTIONS PLASTIC
EXHIBIT 44 AT EDINBURGH ZOO
C GREEN/U MARTINEZ OFFICE PARTY
LOOK LEFT LOOK RIGHT THE CARAVAN

ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS

THE CANNY GRANNY GETS SPECIFIC ABOUT SITE

Where you put things matters. The oil painting that my mother-in-law gave us looked dreadful in our living room but goes beautifully in a box in the attic. So it was with *The Caravan*. This well-crafted show could have resembled other verbatim plays had the audience of eight not been invited into the caravan's seating area. In the 60s-style snug, we knocked knees with actors playing the victims of last year's floods in Gloucestershire – so close I struggled to conceal tears during a moving part. We were offered a small dish of biscuits and a cup of tea. Is it total theatre? It's certainly total refreshments.

Proponents of site-responsive theatre have been refreshing our artistic palettes for some time. You see how I slipped it in? Site-responsive. You see it's not just site-specific (i.e. a play set in a launderette, staged in that launderette). It doesn't have to be so literal. Otherwise Badac's *The Factory* would have had to be actually set in Auschwitz (rather than a whitewashed series of tunnels under The Pleasance), which would have terrorised a lot of American tourists. Oh, it did anyway? Yes, it sounded ferocious, I wasn't sure my ticker could take it.

Why is it 'site'? Why not space? Because it's like pitching a tent, colonising a plot with development potential? So it could be a performance out of context, like humans in shop windows (a favourite trick of French company Cacahuete); or the group of women in a cage in Edinburgh's city zoo this year (*Exhibit 44* 'a sub-species of humans: dancers'); or the burlesque performance *Feasting on Flesh* at the Assembly rooms this summer that had its photoshoot tantalisingly set in a butcher's cold store. What a shame the show itself didn't take place there: a woman in a corset hanging from the ceiling looks a bit different framed by two half pig carcasses. Or a pork chop looks different beside an obese transvestite in a fuchsia catsuit. No offence to my local butcher.

Could it be 'site' because the locations are often derelict? A can of Haze in the handbag is advisable. But fusty smells aside, what wonderful buildings! Dreamthinkspeak's *Underground* was presented in an abattoir in Clerkenwell and their recent show in the tower of Liverpool Cathedral (*One Step Forward, One Step Back*) invited the audience to (almost) trespass. Likewise, Punchdrunk's *Faust*, sited in a factory in Wapping, was a triumph of Stealth and Danger over Health and Safety. Site-responsive artists use the natural features of the architecture to create unique images, like an animated art installation. It's special because it can't just be packed into a van and taken on tour, though dreamthinkspeak managed the feat of transferring to new sites in far-flung places such as Russia. They probably had to make a detailed map of where everything was, like our kids did when we went on holiday and they moved the ornaments so they could have a party, the devils. Don't think I didn't notice that the china leopard's head had been superglued, Christian. Not forgiven.

The audience is a treasure-hunter, letting their own curiosity dictate the parts of the story that they gather. Whereas Punchdrunk and dreamthinkspeak leave clues of sound and light to tempt you to explore, in *30 Bird's Plastic*, permission is more firmly controlled: We are divided into groups according to gender, or barred from entry but encouraged to peer at dancers in another space, or led like a chorus, everyone walking in unison. Striding with eight other women into a urinal has never been so exhilarating. Don't try this at home. Everyone should make work for disused and public spaces because these are renegade actions that stick up two fingers to the theatre industry. It's like megabusking!

The audience have a unique experience. *Office Party*, set in an office block in Edinburgh, makes a believable postmodern fiction from concrete-clad corporate spaces in a kind of controlled booze-fuelled riot. Except it's not fiction, it is actually a booze-fuelled riot. Memories of the middle-aged lady who fell over whilst dancing and the woman hiding behind a pillar from her husband. To treasure, Paula, wherever you are.

LAURA LLOYD

More about Site

If you are looking for a site, pretend you are making a film! Providers of film locations - everything from retro swimming pools to aircraft hangars: www.amazingspace.co.uk

Edinburgh-based company Grid Iron have long created site-responsive shows, which have included shows in Debenhams, Edinburgh Airport, and numerous playgrounds, houses, and dungeons: See www.gridiron.org.uk

Geraldine Pilgrim and her company Corridor create site-responsive work in spaces that include disused hotels, swimming pools, and parks. See www.corridorperformance.org

For more on Punchdrunk see www.punchdrunk.org.uk

Dreamthinkspeak's website is at www.dreamthinkspeak.com

The Caravan (Look Left Look Right), *The Factory* (Badac Theatre), *Exhibit 44* (Janice Claxton Dance), *Plastic* (30 Bird Productions), and *Office Party* (Christopher Green and Ursula Martinez) were all site-responsive shows presented outside of regular theatre spaces, and were all shortlisted for the Total Theatre Awards at Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2008.

See company websites:
www.lookleftlookright.com
www.badactheatre.com
www.janisclaxton.com
www.30birdproductions.org
www.ursulamartinez.com

I GIVE YOU MY WORD

DOROTHY MAX PRIOR MEETS TIM ETHELLS OF FORCED ENTERTAINMENT



Sometime in the mid 1990s, I went to see a show called *Speak Bitterness*. It was by Forced Entertainment, and I'd previously seen them do a highly visual durational live art piece with few words and a whirling frenzy of costume changing (it may well have been *12.am: Awake and Looking Down*) so was expecting something similar.

What I got was a row of tables and chairs set up in a line on a bare stage, and half a dozen or so performers in 'normal' clothes who each stood up in turn and read a first-person confession. The confessions ranged from trivial childhood misdemeanours (stealing sweets, pulling pigtails) to rape and genocide. Each was delivered in a tone of importance regardless of the seriousness of the offence, forcing the audience to move beyond the manner of delivery (our usual signifiers of the gravity of words). Further, the first-person delivery had the effect it usually does of tricking the audience into believing that what they are hearing is 'real' – the 'if it's first person, it must be an autobiographical statement' confusion which has caused consternation for many a novelist, poet and songwriter (Winterson, Browning and Eminem come to mind) – this assumption challenged by clever transpositions, for example, from male to female speaker in the 'rape' confession.

Speak Bitterness forced me (entertainingly) to re-evaluate my views on words in theatre – which at that point, I had little time for – because here was evidence of the power of the word to make entrancing theatre. Here was a 'play' that toyed with fiction and reality, the actor transparent, not crowded out by the 'character'; the 'I' of the speaker an enigmatic mix of truths and lies.

*Tim Etchells likes words.
He likes words that play games,
words that challenge*

A dozen years or more on, I've seen a fair few Forced Entertainment shows, and have come to recognise the patterns in their work. There are the big, messy shows filled with visual props, music, and wild costumes (gorillas suits, wigs, clown suits, satin evening gowns, Viking helmets...). There are the quieter, calmer 'desks and chairs' shows. There are the shows that investigate 'theatre' and 'presence' (although in a way all do this, some do it more obviously).

Common to this great body of work is the importance of the word – the word as truth-giver, but also the word as trickster. In Forced Entertainment's work, words work hard, their semantic meaning often in opposition to the semiotics of the accompanying visual image, the tone of delivery, or the context in which we are hearing them. The company's latest show, *Spectacular*, we are told in the advance publicity, is (amongst other things) about 'the strange contact between two performers on-stage and an audience caught between what they are watching and what they're being told'.

The company's director, Tim Etchells, likes words. He likes words that play games, words that challenge. He likes them in books: he's just published his first novel, *The Broken World*, a 'slacker love story and a walkthrough or guide to a non-existent computer game'. He likes using them in his work as a visual artist: one of his current projects is a series of neon signs with messages that are arresting and disturbing: my favourite – incongruously, maddeningly – reads 'Wait Here I Have Gone to Get Help'. His video works use words – in *100 People*, the 'cinema' is nothing but words, a series of on-screen written descriptions conjuring up a hundred people. He likes words on the Internet: he (of course) writes a blog, and has last year created a real-time collaborative Internet project with Adrian Heathfield, called *Long Relay* and involving writers such as Tom McCarthy, Deborah Levy and John Harrison. And of course he likes them on-stage, in the wealth of theatre work he has created as a team player with Forced Entertainment, and also in his other theatre projects.

One example being a collaboration with Flemish theatre organisation Victoria. He was, he says, 'given carte blanche to make a theatre piece with a group of young people'. What resulted was *That Night Follows Day*, which has toured the world for the past 18 months (including a recent appearance at the Dublin Theatre Festival, autumn 2008).

Created in collaboration with a group of sixteen young people between the ages of 8 and 14, it was made using 'a process of writing alongside and through a workshop process'. Using a chorus that 'breaks down into solo parts', the young people address the (adult) audience directly, in the second person ('You tell us that the world is round...'), creating 'something between a litany and a naming of parts' that highlights 'how adults frame and make the world for young people'. Like *Speak Bitterness*, the piece is a catalogue of statements that are sometimes contradictory, and which encourage 'the adult audience to re-evaluate their role in young peoples' lives as parents and teachers'.

I ask Tim Etchells how he works the balance between Forced Entertainment and his other projects, but he feels that for the most part it is pretty straightforward, with him accepting invitations that come to him as artist, writer, or director – although he is careful not to accept too many performance projects. He says that he has always had other projects running concurrently with Forced Entertainment, but that he has become more visible as a solo artist in the last five or six years. If he gets the balance wrong, then: ‘the main casualty is me – I’ve no time to breathe!’.

The company are based in Sheffield, where they continue, as they have for more than two decades, to operate as a collective. The decision to make the new piece with just the core group of six (five actors and Etchells) came about after the mad hurly burly of the last two ‘big’ shows, *Bloody Mess* and *The World In Pictures*, which both involved larger ensembles – with all the logistics and pre-planning that this requires: ‘We have to pre-book the big shows before we even get out of bed’.

Spectacular is about the strange contact between two performers on-stage and an audience caught between what they are watching and what they’re being told



So *Spectacular* was planned as a piece for the original company of five, yet ended up as a show for two actors, Claire Marshall and Robin Arthur, ‘by accident’, as Etchells puts it. I haven’t seen it yet, so ask him what its like and what he likes about it: ‘I like the fact that it’s a little piece for larger spaces,’ he says, ‘There’s a fragility and a power to seeing a single person standing on a large empty stage’.

I say that the publicity makes it sound a bit like *Dirty Work*, also a piece for two actors (in which an imaginary performance is described to the audience with ever-more hysterical competition between the actors). He agrees that there is ‘a relationship – the interest is in the show that isn’t there – but in many ways they are very different. *Dirty Work* is about creating a spectacle out of words. *Spectacular* is more interior; to do with intangibles. The actor tells us how he normally feels at this point in the show, what music normally plays at that point, how the music moves him, or what kind of things go through his mind – *Spectacular* pulls us down much more into a slippery abstracted space’.

As with all their work (including the ‘anarchic’ pieces like *Bloody Mess*), *Spectacular* has been created with meticulous precision. ‘Where you see a kind of chaos, or an apparent randomness in these shows,’ says Etchells, ‘then it is usually well rehearsed, highly structured’.

Asking him how they usually work (if there is a ‘usual’), he replies that the company rarely start with a script (*Exquisite Pain* was an exception) but rather usually start with improvisations ‘inside a framework of rules’, later annotating and transcribing from rehearsal tapes, refining, reworking, and finally scripting. Voila – *Spectacular*!

So as *Spectacular* wends its way in the world, I ask what’s coming up next.

Unsurprisingly, Tim Etchells is pretty busy over the coming months. There’s a new Forced Entertainment piece to be made for Spill Festival (London, April 2009) – and *That Night Follows Day* will also be shown there; there’s a new collaboration between Etchells (as director) with the Roasas dancer Fumiyo Ikeda that will premiere in June; and if you happen to be in Berlin this November you can enjoy the tangible, concrete results of Etchells’ ongoing collaboration with an ice cream maker (yes, really) called *Art Flavours*, which has involved the creation of new flavours of gelato inspired by ‘curatorial concepts and terms from contemporary art’, such as ‘Archive’, ‘Memory’ and ‘Spectacle’.

Words can be so many things, and you can even eat them...

Dorothy Max Prior interviewed Tim Etchells in London, September 2008.

Spectacular plays the Riverside Studios in London 6–15 November 2008 (not including 10 November), then tours to: Contact Theatre, Manchester (18–22 November); The Brewhouse, Taunton (28–29 November); and Tramway, Glasgow (4–6 December). There are further European dates in 2009. For full tour dates and other information on the company see www.forcedentertainment.com

For full details of Tim Etchells’ other projects, and for his blog, see www.timetchells.com

Tim Etchells’ novel *The Broken World* is published by William Heinemann (London) £14.99 rrp (Hardback) ISBN 978 0 434 01833 8 www.randomhouse.co.uk You can buy it from the Forced Entertainment shop www.forcedentertainment.com/shop

1&3 | FORCED ENTERTAINMENT’S LATEST PRODUCTION SPECTACULAR. PHOTOS HUGO GLENDINNING
2 | WAIT HERE I HAVE GONE TO GET HELP. NEON ARTWORK BY TIM ETHELLES

VOICES

CREATIVE PRODUCER RACHEL CLARE IN HER OWN WORDS

Crying Out Loud is a company led by artists and informed by the artist's ethos.

Talking about ideas – that's what it's about! Our work is driven by the creative urge, not a response from a brief.

Crying Out Loud's work combines so many different artforms: circus, theatre, dance, site specific, installation, and much that can't be easily defined – from the epic work of James Thiérree to the intimate and delicate work of Sophia Clist.

To be fleet of foot is crucial – to be able to respond to ideas from artists and venues.

I don't want to run a sausage factory! I don't want to be an 'employer' weighed down with the burden of organisational structure.

My work has been informed by my years spent in Africa and the Caribbean.

I was taught to embrace all cultures. I was brought up in a liberal, socialist family – my parents worked for the British Council teaching homeless children, in Addis Ababa and elsewhere – and that sense of social responsibility has stayed with me.

I became a producer by default – I was supposed to be Ra Ra Zoo's designer, but I ended up organising a round-the-world tour (in the late 80s) and acquired all this amazing knowledge. There were no 'creative producers' then – or at least it wasn't called that. I just followed my nose, programming and producing anything I was interested in – alternative theatre, circus, music... from Bow Gamelan to Alain Platel to Station House Opera.

You go to the theatre to find your place in the world, to make sense of the world.

My parents sang to me, and I sing to my children. Music is important to me and to my work. I learnt a great deal about jazz and world music from my uncle [the legendary Honest Jon, whose Portobello Road shop was, and is, a mecca for music lovers into alternative sounds].

I'm a secret artist. I trained as a visual artist – initially as a theatre designer but in my mid-30s returned to do a degree in Contemporary Fine Art Practice. I enjoy creating installation work, and I like the quietness of it, in contrast to my work in theatre.



The aesthetic of my visual art crosses over with my theatre work. I made an installation using an enormous swathe of ripped and torn red velvet curtaining thrown out by the Purcell Room at South Bank. I held onto to it for fifteen years and eventually used it: I made a secret chamber where you could enter to have a personal theatrical 'moment'.

Crying Out Loud's work challenges the idea that work for 'all ages' is not good theatre. So much of what I am interested in – physical, visual work – has universal appeal. I like work that is joyful and uplifting but which has darker shadows too – work like James Thiérree's.

I worked with Jean Baptiste and Victoria Chaplin (James and Aurélia Thiérree's parents) when they brought Cirque Imaginaire to the Riverside in London in the early 90s. We had the circus ducks, geese, and rabbits outside the venue.

Aurelia was a teenage rebel – so she ran away from the circus. She went off to New York to go to school, but she came back! I worked with her when she developed the three short pieces that she made for the Tiger Lillies Circus, and so I put her into *The Catch* at the Lyric. This eventually formed the core of her full-length show *Aurélia's Oratorio*.

I also produced tours for James Thiérree's shows *La Veillée des Abysses*, *Au Revoir Parapluie* and *The Junebug Symphony*. James's new show will be a solo piece. Very different, retaining the homemade find-it-on-a-skip aesthetic – creating a visual environment through body and object manipulation.

Everyone loves a story – but I believe there can be narrative without words.



Crying Out Loud (established by Rachel Clare in 2002) produces, programmes, commissions, and curates exceptional performance and theatre events.

Crying Out Loud's current projects include Collectif Acrobatique de Tangier's Taoub which is directed by Aurélien Bory, founder of the acclaimed contemporary circus ensemble Compagnie 111. The show is currently available for touring.

Other current projects: shunt artist Layla Rosa's What If...? and Sensazione, a 'theatrical fairground' by Laika from Belgium.

Autumn 2008 sees two Crying Out Loud events at the Newcastle Gateshead Children and Young People's Season - Sophia Clist's Stretch and Italian company TPO's Butterflies.

In 2009, James Thiérree's new show, co-commissioned by barbicantbite09, will be playing at the Barbican Theatre in October, and the first mid-scale show by puppeteers Blind Summit, a stage version of Call of the Wild, will be appearing at a major London venue then touring.

Crying Out Loud is commissioning Matilda Leyser to create a new aerial play called Bridges as part of its PIPs (Performance in Progress) programme. Bridges will be made in collaboration with acclaimed children's author David Almond and an ensemble of artists to be confirmed in 2009.

For further information on any of the above, see www.cryingoutloud.org

1 | LAYLA ROSA'S WHAT IF...?
2 | JAMES THIÉRRÉE'S AU REVOIR PARAPLUIE

FESTIVAL AT THE CROSSROADS

GREAT ART, SOCIAL INCLUSION, SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OR SOCIAL ENGINEERING? WHERE IS (THE) LIFT GOING? ASKS PIPPA BAILEY

For those in the know, lift was a long-awaited event, three years in the making. For others it was a vague and distant memory, of the biennial London International Festival of Theatre that stopped in 2001 and entered a period of enquiry and introspection. lift in the traditional festival format was a leading light, bringing extraordinary international work to London over 25 years. In 2001 renowned directors Rose Fenton and Lucy Neal decided to abandon the intensive seasons of performance. *The lift Enquiry* into theatre (2001–2006) that followed produced some extraordinary projects but the organisation started to lose its public profile and identity.

As something of an institution with a strong reputation and links at the highest cultural level, lift festival is being reincarnated. The question before the arrival in its new form in 2008: will it rise phoenix like from the ashes, be outshone by glorious golden memory or get stuck between floors? The proof of the pudding, as they say, is in the eating.

This takes us neatly to *Eat London*, a glorious project in 2007 leading to the first new-style festival in 2008. Different community groups around London were charged with recreating their landscape with food. Great architectural icons were built by these groups, some of whom had never been to or seen live the places they were sculpting. The proposition was delicious, engaging people in art through the universal language of food, brought together in Trafalgar Square for a grand celebration. Anxious for a taste, I attended the overcrowded event, exhibits mobbed by rightfully proud and eager participants. It was impossible to get so much as a glimpse of the finished feast so this beautifully conceived and marketed project never satiated my whetted appetite.

Access has been at the heart of the new vision for lift. Who are the audiences for theatre now and how can they be increased and extended?



The changes over seven years and the new direction lift's work is taking reflects seismic shifts in our society

What does community mean today and can live performance help to define, unite and celebrate them? With noble local aspirations, a team of international seekers help to identify the most interesting work from across the world, supporting lift director Angharad Wynne Jones' new vision. Part of the plan has been to build a new temporary superstructure, a space in which to see performances, talk and share. As traditional theatre buildings are increasingly rejected by contemporary artists and some communities don't have theatre buildings, this is a brave and exciting move. Originally entitled 'lift new parliament' and now confusingly just 'the lift', the new structure had two sites during the 2008 festival: Stratford, East London in June, and London's South Bank in July. Then 'the lift', (but not lift festival) made an appearance at the Shoreditch Festival in August. More confusing still!

Starting in Stratford, lift made a bold (and financially expedient) decision to move into the depths of East London, traditionally shunned by the rest of the capital and now presenting enormous opportunity as the 2012 Olympics promise to breathe new life into its disparate communities. I attended as part of Mobile Lab, a writing initiative to explore theatre criticism and commentary, with 12 of my 25 European colleagues. I read disappointment in their faces when faced with the lift in a Stratford park. This was not the London of iconic buildings with an international reputation for theatre they had expected. Negative connotations of 'community theatre' emerged, and engaging with new audiences seemed a foreign concept, a salient reminder that the realities of this global city are alien to many and that cultural context remains a significant factor. It was fascinating to have the festival programme reframed by visitors from

other countries. Sadly it seemed that most prestigious international work was taking place on the South Bank while the more community focused work was taking place in Stratford, reinforcing cultural stereotypes about the two places – a view further reinforced by there being two separate festival leaflets for each geographic/ social area.

Unfortunately Angharad is leaving lift for family reasons but the plan is to work with her vision for the festival and appoint an interim director. The changes over seven years and the new direction lift's work is taking reflects seismic shifts in our society. If only more cultural institutions would question their role in moulding and shaping our view of ourselves and each other. The desire to reach out beyond geographic and social boundaries; to understand, take new risks, find new form for a theatre festival and ask really difficult questions can only be admired. For my money, they haven't got it right yet and perhaps need to concentrate on clarifying their own identity, presenting less in order to achieve more. Changing the world through theatre is not very easy but against the odds I want lift to keep trying and for the doubters, culture vultures and hardened cynics to give this brave new world a bit of a go.

For further information on the future of lift, and for details of the lift Living Archive, see www.liftfestival.org.uk

1 | THE NEW LIFT BUILDING AT STRATFORD
2 | THE BLACK ARM BAND, PRESENTED AT SOUTH BANK CENTRE, LIFT 2008. PHOTO GARTH ORIANDER
3 | THE LONG TABLE AT LIFT 2008

NO ESCAPE

MARY KATE CONNOLLY TAKES A TRIP TO NEW LIFE BERLIN – AND FINDS THAT PARTICIPATION IS THE ORDER OF THE DAY



I was spat out at the end of New Life enriched and enlivened

Anybody strolling by Chloriner Strasse, central Berlin, on 31 May 2008 would have spied a motley crew, amassed in front of a tiny gallery which sported a gaudy installation of lurid pop pinks and kitsch tinfoil silver. They might also have sensed, on the breeze of that balmy summer night, the buzz of infectious excitement amid the pavement group, who traded names and artistic aims – united in purpose yet divergent in language, dress and profession. No ordinary community this, but one which until that evening had only existed in the murky imagined caverns of cyberspace. For this was an online community which had chosen this particular time to spring, from the international ether, fully formed, vibrant and alive in downtown Berlin. This was New Life.

Notions of community formed the core of this unusual participatory art festival. Curated from an online collective, Wooloo.org, it brought together an array of artists from differing practices and countries in order to create a tantalising and experimental programme of works which, erupting from both artistic and sociological starting points, sought to explore, in the words of the festival's curators, 'real life cultural mobility'. And how did these heady sentiments translate into the vivid, eclectic landscape of Berlin? Eloquently indeed...

Before I elaborate on these artistic adventures further however, I must make a ghastly confession... I fear (but not loathe) participatory art. It makes me queasy. I quail at the sight of street artists, lest they drag me into their quirky orb and make me the unwilling straight guy of their act. I feel not empowerment, but dread and the

manifestation of an unattractive clamminess, at the prospect of an 'encounter' or even worse, an 'exchange' (that ghoulish word, evocative of liver transplants) with a performer. I'm shy. I'm awkward. If I'm the one left holding the sacred banana or some-such at the end of the performance, I tend to feel more 'piggy in the middle' than 'chosen one.'

Unpleasantly, this phobia was to prove acutely relevant in the context of my writing and therefore participating in New Life. I attended as a writer on the Open Dialogues project of the festival; a model whereby writers and artists closely collaborated in each other's work in order to ignite new communications and facilitate deeper insights into the relationships between artist and writer. Comfortable distances eroded, writers were pressed to consider the implications of writing on a project in which they were enmeshed, participating and invested. Hmm... so no room for aloofness and reserve then; a poisonous junket filled with banana-toting performance artists, I could tell, feel it keenly in the liver which had so far escaped exchange...

But I went, I saw, I participated. I am writing from the stance of one who began her festival's festivities chatting to 'Zorba the Greek', and enquiring politely whether he had done any sightseeing with 'Queen Elizabeth?' (more of that later), spent my Saturday night lugging building materials to Berlin's Alexander Platz to build a house before dawn and the polizei intervened, and fretted ponderously as to what part of the edible Berlin Wall I might nibble on first...

A certain fluidity and uncertainty of outcome

characterised the work showcased in Berlin. An emphasis was placed on process rather than product, and throughout all, an element of chance came into play in the realisation of the interventions and artworks. The co-directors of Wooloo Productions and New Life curators, Sixten Kai Nielsen and Martin Rosengaard have previously facilitated projects which test boundaries between art and social experiment such as *Asylum NYC* (2006), in which a select group of immigrant artists on the verge of expulsion from the United States were housed in a gallery, Big Brother-style, to battle it out artistically for a visa to remain in the country.

Springing from these experimental sensibilities, the programming of New Life was destined to be provocative, evocative and a little *risqué*. And so it was. *Fictive Days*, by the Peruvian artist Sergio Zavallos (in collaboration with TEMPS – space support for nomadic projects), saw a group of performers selected to live together in a Berlin apartment as famous and infamous characters of the silver screen. One couldn't help feeling that this project was a wicked incarnation of that tiresome question favoured by Sunday newspapers when quizzing sometime celebrities; 'who would you invite to your dream dinner party?' Zavallos' answer made for a potent group, including Zorba the Greek (as previously mentioned), that delightful poppet of the projectile, Regan Lewis from *The Exorcist*, Flash Gordon's Princess Aura and – 'say cheese' – Diane Arbus.

Zavallos explained in his project outline that 'everyday functions in the apartment are arranged solely on the structures of famous film scenes involving the performing

*I feel not empowerment,
but dread at the prospect of
an 'encounter' or even worse,
an 'exchange'*



characters. Consequently, everything that happens during the two weeks can be understood as a scene'. I was lucky enough to attend Regan's birthday party which was to test my 'exchange' phobias to their limit. Finding myself situated between 'Queen Elizabeth', resplendent in a crown fashioned out of a Brillo box, and a statuesque brunette in red tights who stared pointedly in my direction (I assume Princess Aura?), I found I had little appetite for the cake which Regan had baked herself for the occasion. It was a strange and gruesome gathering. I had gone assuming that by now (halfway through the festival), the participants would be – theatrical masks long slipped – casting about for their long lost marbles in an effort to return to the 'real' world. Instead they were composed and tight knit – not giving anything away. I had that uneasy feeling one gets when considering that actually it is the tiger in the zoo cage who is examining you...and not the other way round.

Marisa Olson's *Assisted Living* offered a playful portal to a troubling future of genetic modification and 'vitamin D blocker pills' in the sickly sweet guise of 'Martha Scissors' – the future's answer to TV host Martha Stewart. Nightly throughout the festival, Olson 'aired' an episode of her TV show in front of a live studio audience. With a delivery sugary and brittle as Brighton rock,

'Scissors' imparted tips, Americana style, for 'coping with the health and environmental challenges of living a life prolonged by technology' to an audience supposedly more vacant and consumerist than we could imagine in our wildest nightmare (bananas aside).

Sheffield artists No Fixed Abode dug physically and metaphorically at the foundations of land ownership in their one-night build *Caban Unnos*. Drawing on Welsh traditions of 'one night' dwellings which saw people constructing houses overnight in order to stake an otherwise unattainable claim on a dwelling and its surrounding land, No Fixed Abode built a house in central Berlin. Designed by architect Tony Broomhead, and fashioned entirely from wooden crates and water cooler bottles, the house lived until 6am when the long arm of the law intervened.

There were oodles more of course; Danish artist Lars Vilhelmsen's (in collaboration with Charlotte Mosen Jensen / Den lille) ongoing project *The Sandwich Box*, a curated suitcase of bits and bobs to aid the interventionist artist, made an appearance before jetting off to Copenhagen to be opened by a new artist in a new context. New Yorker Barbara Rosenthal performed a series of improvised live and video

performances throughout the city equipped with button pins, fake money, slogan cards and other magic tricks as part of *Existential Interact*. Alicia Ríos invited 'cooking constructors' to build edible brinks for an *Eat the Wall* ceremony which 'long after the fall of that other Wall', as Alicia put it, 'invites critical reflection on the more subtle barriers still constructed around the world, socially and individually'.

I was spat out at the end of New Life enriched and enlivened. Each work while dramatically different, did offer an alternative – weird or wonderful, to current cultural modes, both social and artistic. Also on display was the innate power of people to connect, forge communities and affect change as a collective. The heady setting of ever-evolving Berlin, a wise old head who has witnessed more upheavals and tides of social change than one can bear to think of, seemed wonderfully apt for a festival teleported from virtual to 'real' space – real, gritty, and alive.

And as for me? A convert. A participatory nut. And not a banana in sight.

Details and full listings of the New Life Berlin festival can be found at www.wooloo.org/festival

Writing produced as part of Open Dialogues Berlin can be found at www.wooloo.org/opendialoguesblog

1 | NO FIXED ABODE'S CABAN UNNOS
2 | BARBARA ROSENTHAL'S
EXISTENTIAL INTERACT
3 | FICTIVE DAYS BY SERGIO ZEVALLOS
4 | EAT THE WALL BY ALICIA RÍOS
ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF NEW
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BEING THERE

FABULOUS WALKS

PHIL SMITH, SIMON PERSIGHETTI, AND MARK GREENWOOD
GIVE A THREE-WAY PERSPECTIVE ON A RURAL PERFORMANCE
PROJECT WITH LEGS



As we sat on the grass outside Old Forde House with the sunlight fading, beers in hand, the music of Chartwell Dutiro playing from an adapted suitcase, I felt relief and pleasure. In six days our four pairs of artists, working from scratch, had brought their ambulatory performances to fruition and performed them over two and a half days. The mythogeographical model had held up well – the idea of creating work from a mixture of documentary research, ambulatory exploration and personal association; the mix of mis-guided tour with traces of theatricality, sometimes blazed. A new group of artists had experienced the making of walking-performance.

The walks were all very different. Dancer Rachel Sweeney and scenographer Anoushka Athique created something very like a mis-guided tour with mini-installations in nooks in warehouse walls, ipods playing the disembodied voice of Donald Crowhurst, the audience mixing bread and shaping clay. Movement artist Fumiaki Tanaka and performance artist Katie Etheridge drew on the encounters of their exploratory walks, especially the spectacular front garden (sculpture park) of a Scientologist artist. They displaced pub and fete onto green footpath.

Writer-performer Simon Persighetti's partnership with mbira musician Chartwell Dutiro was disrupted and altered by Chartwell's serious illness, yet somehow Chartwell was just as big a partner as if he'd been there, phoning ideas from his hospital bed, made present by Simon's referencing. In Teign Village – a single quarry workers' street in the middle of fields – I'd worked with singer Nicola Singh. Unexpectedly we became very theatrical, creating a version of *Beauty and the Beast*, drawing on the boundedness and fissuring of local land ownership, with tableaux, songs, recitations, eating and drinking and symbolist characterisation (Katie and Fumiaki driving over from their sites to be Bird Woman and Tiger for us).

Getting the email responses of audiences, both instant and long delayed, it was wonderful when I read of people immersed in the pleasure of the thing:

'The sun shone, the scenery was beautiful and Katie and Fumiaki were fantastic.'

It was gratifying to read of a resonance that continues beyond those beers on the Olde Forde lawn...

'It's funny, the girls have been reciting bits of the bird text all summer!'

... and thrilling to feel that there might be almost utopian destabilisation in the work, beautifully evoked by Emma Bush of Propeller in her response to the Teign Village piece:

'We enter through the garden gate. The Daughter is alright in there, in the garden, everything is OK. She is planted in a bowl of earth. Her feet are being watered by Bird woman. She begins to sing. Pear, apple, peach, plum. An unusual and hazy beautiful. An amazing series of allotments, close together portioned land. It is very unusual to see people acting and especially singing outside. Surreal almost, slightly siren like, closer perhaps to how things could be.'

PHIL SMITH



VEGETABLE

(Sung as the vegetable, convulsive, the power of nature, urging, rhythms, seasons...)

My darling allotment
Made with love, love and pliers

Uh uh uh uh...

My darling allotment
Ruin, ruin and some pliers

Peach pear plum (uh)
Peach pear plum (uh)
Peach pear plum (uh)
Peach pear plum (uh)

My lion lies down with my lamb
Curious as to the fleshy nature of women
I am the rose and I am unwell
A muted sickness of extraction

Peach pear plum (uh)
Peach pear plum (uh)
Peach pear plum (uh)
Peach pear plum (uh)

If you don't eat your boiled beetroot the Beast man will come
And my blushing vegetables he'll gobble you up
The earthy things that he did crave, held by my hands
I read the right books lead by desire

Apples,
Blackberries,
Purple sprouting broccoli,

Peach, pear and plum

Strawberries,
Mint,
Rhubarb,

Peach, pear and plum

Uh uh uh uh uh

My darling allotment
Made with love, love and pliers

My darling allotment
Ruin, ruin and some pliers

NICOLA SINGH

The devising of my route began with an extraordinary first encounter with Chartwell Dutiro, a Zimbabwean performer and mbira player. Our meeting by a stack of granite stones in the grounds of Forde House, Newton Abbot, Devon triggered a discussion about ownership of land and the trade of artefacts and souvenirs. Issues surrounding tourism and exoticism became the thread I would follow over the next five days in navigating a *Fabulous Walk*.

I told my collaborator about a piece of Shona sculpture that I had purchased on a visit to Harare in 1991. This piece called *My Shadow*, by George Chitalineke, had come to England in a ply-wood case but had never seemed at home in my house. Its import had become for me an image of displacement. It is really part of Zimbabwe, a piece of the landscape that has been quarried, hewn and shaped into a dream image, a stone shadow. I told my collaborator that though I had purchased the sculpture, I did not feel as if I could really own it. Chartwell nodded and said, 'This is very honest'. He lay down on the grass and said, 'Listen to the Ancestors'.

I went for a walk and discovered that beyond the manicured lawn of our meeting ground, the stately house was bounded by a marsh and undergrowth that seemed to transport me into a mythical zone. I returned determined to show Chartwell this surprising anomaly or contradiction of the ornate. As I approached him a large bird of prey (a buzzard) lifted itself off the earth and swooped over his prone body. He sat up and played a haunting tune on his mbira. He said: 'You only have short time to make this journey and take others with you but do not be in too much of a hurry. It can be very simple. Like that big bird, it can just come up and you just have to follow it.'

The working title *Fabulous Walk* was already accruing to itself pilgrim-like and fabled dimensions. The idea of a geography that embodies histories, stories, mythologies and imagined associations became lucid and palpable in this short encounter. The next day on a mobile phone I heard Chartwell saying: 'Simon when you take the people on your walk tell them that they cannot see me for I am stuck in a big house but I will follow. Tell them to listen for me.'

I bought a suitcase on wheels and inside it I hid the sculpture with some oranges and a bottle of water. I attached sound speakers to the suitcase and people who followed me heard Chartwell's music. The route took us over a motorway bridge, along a river, through an industrial estate and back to the pile of granite where the polished stone sculpture *My Shadow* was revealed. When I opened the case the Devon granite became a shrine or arena for this piece of granite from another part of the world. After such a shared journey with strangers it was as if the stone had come home.

SIMON PERSIGHETTI

'The Storytelling that thrives for a long time in the milieu of the work – the rural, the maritime, and the urban – is itself an artisan form of communication, as it were. It does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again.'
(Walter Benjamin, *The Storyteller*. *Illuminations*.)

On a beach in Teignmouth.

Scandalous stories of a dancer from a dancer, crab buckets, balloons, and life jackets as we watch cardboard ballerinas in a miniature theatre.

Dramas of promiscuity and tragedy, of lost lovers undergoing electric shock therapy.

Under the shadow of old boots two stories plait, ravel and loop like frayed laces: a dancer who takes to the arms of a lover, a failed engineer who takes to sea. We look to maps, charts and faded photographs to decide for ourselves where the facts and fictions lie in these narratives.

In the Teign Valley a storyteller approaches us. We receive a tale from a father, of a daughter and a tiger. Myth and geography collide in this place where reality and the imagination intercede and distort. Ancient narratives are adorned by storytellers to excite strangers to these parts and unsettle the villagers. Hybrids of the human/animal are well documented in mythology as dark powers that threaten to invade the places in which we so carefully build our lives. In the merging synaesthetics of this encounter their presence is made explicit.

Wandering around an industrial estate in Newton Abbot – a miniature zebra in our minds. A footnote to the cultivation of natural elements in order to manufacture desired objects. We may ponder false satisfactions from survivals that increase through emigration and immigration. Poverty is not transcended in these flows: it is merely gilded.

Motorways, CCTV and pylons mark the edges of these urban borders. The trees and rivers bear witness to the length and breadth of this land that has become a faithful portrait of commodification. Objects encountered on these peripheries recite their own stories. Speeches that need only occasional prompting as African music accompanies a human monologue. Multiplicities and synchronicities are tied together in an isolated moment of infinities.

These narratives and events are evidence to the emergence of a site-specific arts practice and the integral role it plays in relation to local culture, identity and history. The combination of dancers, performers, visual artists and storytellers parallel to a conceptual framework that includes notions of the psychogeographic and the mythographic reveals a methodology that thrives when located in a public context.

Form, content, performers, audience and site are fused together and each element feeds and reconfigures itself in relation to a multitude of possibilities and risks that are fundamental to the return of the storyteller and the socio-cultural integrity of his/her living immediacy. This paradigm of phenomenological and experiential theatre complicates the site of its own production not only as a tangible and physical arena, but also as a location that is constituted through social, economic and political processes.

The walks are indeed fabulous.

MARK GREENWOOD



Phil Smith and Simon Persighetti (in partnership with Stephen Hodge and Cathy Turner) are core members of Wrights & Sites, a group of artist-researchers committed to producing experimental, site-specific work across a range of media. Formalised in 1997 and based in Exeter (UK), the company aims to explore and celebrate space and place through site-specific performance, Mis-Guided Tours and published Mis-Guides, 'drifts', mythogeographic mapping, public presentations and articles. See www.mis-guide.com

Mark Greenwood is a performance artist and writer.

The Fabulous Walks was funded by Arts Council England, South West and Teignbridge District Council. Performance dates were 25–27 July 2008.

ALL IMAGES TAKEN FROM FABULOUS WALKS 2008, AND COURTESY OF PHIL SMITH AND THE CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS

TOTAL THEATRE AWARDS 2008

PIPPA BAILEY REFLECTS ON THE PROCESS FOR THE TOTAL THEATRE AWARDS 2008 AT EDINBURGH FESTIVAL FRINGE



At the beginning of 2008 it was not clear if the Total Theatre Awards could happen this year due to ACE cuts and uncertainty about Total Theatre's future. So it is with great joy that I am now reporting on the Awards process, which received a new level of industry support making it stronger than ever. Big thanks to those that have supported the process and enabled it to happen; barbicanbite08, Central School of Speech and Drama – Centre for Excellence in Training for Theatre (CETT), London International Mime Festival, Norfolk and Norwich Festival, Royal & Derngate Theatres Northampton, University of Chichester (MA Theatre Collectives) and University of Winchester.

Following the McMaster Report produced by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (December 2007) there has been much debate and discussion about excellence, innovation and peer review in the UK but few models offered with appropriate ways to actively engage people, particularly artists. So strengthening our process has been part of the focus for the Total Theatre Awards 2008.

This, the 11th year of the Total Theatre Awards, included for the first time applications to take part in the assessment process and fourteen assessors were selected. This new team of critics, academics, producers and theatre-makers assessed 268 shows over the first ten days of the festival with the enviable job of seeing a wide range of theatre; up to six shows a day. In the spirit of Fringe we agree to assess all of the shows that register for the Awards and this year (again for the first time) we offered to share these assessments with the presenting companies so that artists can benefit from taking part.

Our emphasis was on the series of conversations between a diverse range of professionals who helped decide which artists to shortlist and finally award. According to our research this process is unique in the world. At a lively and rigorous meeting on Wednesday 13 August, 26 shows were shortlisted in five categories. Three of these categories (Visual Theatre, Graduate Company and Young Company) were decided prior to the festival and two were added (Story Theatre, and Experiment and Innovation) based on how the assessors felt the remaining work could best be compared and judged. These categories were then divided between Total Theatre's judging panel, another group of esteemed professionals from a range of backgrounds.



Judging the Awards is always an intense process amongst professionals who share a big responsibility and care passionately about helping theatre-makers develop their best and most exciting work, but whose perspective varies. This makes for very interesting discussions. A detailed report about this years process is available on our website. Here, a couple of assessors share their thoughts:

'The Awards became a conversation that doesn't stop. It was excellent to review and talk about new work as a group of people with different experience. There were some fringe moments (the one-person audience, drenched outdoor performance, disappearing tickets) and memorable work (from mime and human percussion to hard-hitting political theatre). The discussion was constructive, even when there were disagreements. It ranged from details of performances to wider questions about the festival's direction, genres and the best theatre ever. More than thirty shows later, it was too soon to leave.' **Charlotte Smith, Journalist**

'....All those shows I watched – some of which I thought at the time I'd rather forget – and how the whole process was a such a great experience... even the worst of the shows were useful both for defining more closely my taste in theatre and for showing me the mistakes to avoid myself in the future. But perhaps the most invigorating and fun experience as an assessor were the meetings. Your hospitality and generosity went down a treat in the hectic life of the Fringe, although I found your harnessing of all our various opinions the best food for thought. It was a tremendous privilege to work alongside, listen to and learn from more experienced professionals – something I don't expect to enjoy again for a while now. I found your passion, excitement and belief in 'total theatre' (that elusive form) and the awards hugely inspiring and really want to thank you for having me along.' **Matthew Evans, Director**

The judging panel for the Total Theatre Awards 2008: Christie Anthoney – Director of Adelaide Fringe; Matt Burman – Executive Producer at Norfolk and Norwich Festival; Rob Daniels – University of Chichester; Professor Anthony Dean – University of Winchester; Ben Harrison – Artistic Director of Grid Iron Theatre; Donald Hutera – Critic, Time Out & The Times; Brian Logan – Critic, The Guardian; Dorothy Max Prior – Editor, Total Theatre Magazine; Dani Parr – Associate Director, Royal & Derngate; Kayte Potter – Co-director, Great Leap Forward; Nick Wood – The Central School of Speech & Drama.

IMAGE LEFT | TOTAL THEATRE AWARDS JUDGE BEN HARRISON OF GRID IRON WITH JON MORGAN, DIRECTOR OF EDINBURGH FESTIVAL FRINGE 2008
IMAGE RIGHT | FOOTSBARN ACCEPT THEIR TOTAL THEATRE AWARD FOR A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO PHYSICAL & VISUAL THEATRE

Full Total Theatre Awards 2008 report available at www.totaltheatre.org.uk

TOTAL THEATRE

TOTAL THEATRE AWARD FOR EXPERIMENT & INNOVATION

Ontroerend Goed, Kopergiettery
& Richard Jordon Productions
**Once and For All We're Gonna Tell You
Who We Are So Shut Up and Listen**
Traverse Theatre

This year, they were back with something completely different: an ensemble piece for young performers, presented at the Traverse. If you can imagine Forced Entertainment's *Bloody Mess* performed by teenagers you are getting close to the manic energy, mayhem, and exuberant humour of *Once and For All...* which was devised using the young people's experiences and viewpoints as the starting point. Intimate confessions, water fights, dirty dancing, schoolyard teasing, hopscotch, rediscovered childhood toys, friendships, bubblegum, scooters, skateboards, clothes-swapping, boredom, ecstasy, flirtations, fears, grunge, grime – it's all here, laid bare. Some people in the audience were shocked by the noise and filth and bad language. As the mother of teenagers, it felt like coming home to me. It is so rare to see young peoples' lives honoured in this way on stage, and impressive that the company were not resting on their laurels and repeating formats of previous successes.

Shortlisted: Janis Claxton Dance/Dance Base Enclosure 44 – *Humans*, Edinburgh Zoo;
Badac Theatre Company *The Factory*, Pleasance Courtyard; Paper Cinema & Kora *The Night Flyer*,
Forest Fringe; 30 Bird Productions *Plastic Pleasance Courtyard*; Ursula Martinez & Christopher Green
The Office Party, Udderbelly Pasture; Anonymous Ensemble *Wanderlust*, Underbelly.

TOTAL THEATRE AWARD FOR A GRADUATE COMPANY

Little Bulb Theatre
Crocsmia
The Space on the Mile@The Radisson

Theatre demonstrated a mature understanding of theatre rare in a company so young. What was particularly impressive was the handling of the performer-audience relationship. From the moment that we entered the space we felt engaged and involved in the action – even the way in which we were directed to our seats, or 'sold' the notion of sitting on the floor at the front, was undertaken with great theatrical aplomb. The final scene (when the whole audience joins in the celebration of youngest orphan Freya's eighth birthday) was particularly well-executed as many an experienced theatre company have floundered on the sharp rocks of 'audience participation'. As with the whole production, this scene was handled with a balance of pathos and humour that was hard to fault – not a dry eye in the house!

Shortlisted: You Need Me *How it Ended*, C cubed; HuNuNunMul/InvAsian *ID*, ClubWEST @ Quincentenary Hall;
Dancing Brick *21:13*, C Soco.

TOTAL THEATRE AWARD FOR STORY THEATRE

Puppet State Theatre Company
The Man Who Planted Trees
Scottish Storytelling Centre

to create *The Man Who Planted Trees* are all commended for their superb work. A beautiful aesthetic (simple metal, Hessian and calico set and props; wafting pine and juniper aromatherapy oils as we are 'taken' through the forest; gorgeous hand-crafted woolly puppets, and a flock of birds made from feathers); a cleverly reworked text (from Jean Giono's book of the same name); a gentle and low-key soundtrack; and perfectly pitched performances that were entertaining to the whole audience, neither talking down to the children nor playing up to the adults. What was rare and lovely was the quietness and gentle humour of the piece and the solid environmental message of the work, presented without brash political polemic. Oh, and the puppet dog's 'button eyes' joke got a special mention (I won't repeat it, you have to be there).

Shortlisted: Gomito Productions *Before We Remember*, Bedlam Theatre; The Onassis Programme *Cloudcuckooland*,
Pleasance; Tall Stories *How the Giraffe got its Neck*, C Too; Tron & Vox Motus *Slick*, Traverse Theatre; RealWorld *The Zawose
Family*, The World @ St George West.

In what was perhaps the hardest category to judge, with so many very good and very different shows pitted against each other, a Total Theatre Award was, for the first time, given to a company in two successive years. Last year, Ontroerend Goed won the 'innovation' category with *Smile Off Your Face*, which created a unique theatrical experience for the (blindfolded, wheelchair-bound) solo audience member who was led through a dank basement at C Venues.

The Graduate Company category saw a shortlist selection of very different styles of work: a delightful in-the-round ensemble piece (*How It Ended*); a dance and moving image piece on immigration and cultural identity (*ID*); a lovely piece of Lecoq-inspired physical theatre (*21:13*) – and the winner, *Crocsmia*.

Crocsmia was one of many shows on this year's Fringe that featured bereaved characters (see our feature in this issue). Yet it was an exuberant, heart-warming and humorous piece that ultimately celebrated the power of life over death. Little Bulb

The Total Theatre Awards have been persistent in their support of puppetry over the years, with previous Award winners including Shona Reppe for *Cinderella* and Kazuko Hohki/Mervyn Millar for *Evidence for the Existence of Borrowers*. So it was great to see so much work featuring puppetry and animation make it to the shortlist in this category (along with other excellent work aimed primarily at family audiences), and a delight to report a 2008 Total Theatre Award win for a puppet theatre production – one playing on their home ground, to boot! Edinburgh based Richard Meddington is an extraordinarily able storyteller, and the small team he has amassed



E AWARDS 2008

FEATURES

TOTAL THEATRE AWARDS 2008



4

TOTAL THEATRE AWARD FOR VISUAL THEATRE

RedCape Theatre
The Idiot Colony
Pleasance

of Philadelphia based Pig Iron and has also previously worked with Hoipolloi and Theatre O; Dr Rebekka Loukes is a collaborator of Phillip Zarrilli and Jerri Daboo at Exeter University; and Claire Coaché made her mark when she worked with Angela de Castro to create the hit clown-theatre show *Something Blue*. In forming RedCape their stated aim is to tell 'stories that matter, move and entertain using stunning visuals, physical storytelling and original writing'. For their first venture they've joined forces with playwright Lisle Turner to create a beautiful piece of theatre that does, as they intend, merge strong and haunting images with the sort of physical storytelling skills that come from a Lecoq training, and 'new writing' that uses words sparingly and with a poetic sensibility – the text created from first-person accounts of women incarcerated in mental hospitals. The show has subsequently been chosen for the London International Mime Festival 2009.

Shortlisted: Circus Oz *30th Birthday Bash*, Assembly; Daegu City Modern Dance Company *Hamlet Episode*, Rocket@Roxburghe Hotel; Mono Mime Comedy Theatre *Mime for Laughs*, Hill Street Theatre; Adriatik *Polaris*, Zoo Venues.

In the Visual Theatre category, the judges were looking for a show in which the traditional 'total theatre' skills of physical acting and image-led theatre were at the heart of the production. Thus, the shortlist featured an interesting mix of dance-theatre, solo clown-mime, large-scale circus, and physical theatre. The winning show, RedCape's *The Idiot Colony*, was directed by previous Total Theatre Award winner Andrew Dawson, and featured three women performer-directors who are making their first show together, yet are far from being novices, as they have a wealth of different experiences between them: Cassie Friend is a member



5



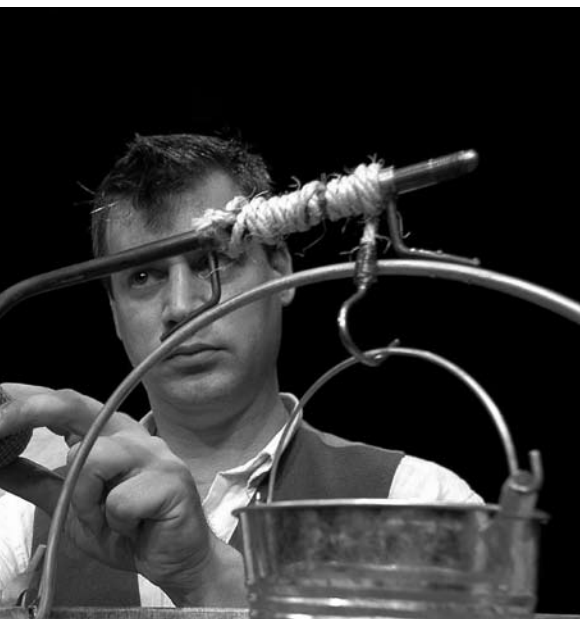
TOTAL THEATRE AWARD FOR A YOUNG COMPANY

THE TEAM & National Theatre
of Scotland Workshop
Architecting
Traverse Theatre

Architecting was not a perfect piece of theatre. Indeed, the company themselves describe it as a work 'exploding at the seams'. The show interweaves numerous different threads about America in general and the deep south in particular – urban planning, the desecration of communities, the 'apocalyptic' moment in US history that was the American Civil War, the heritage of Scarlet O'Hara and the abiding love of *Gone With the Wind*, the legacy of racism, 9/11, beauty pageants, the lure of reality TV and the pursuit of fame. There is an everything-including-the-kitchen-sink approach to staging and dramaturgy – a great structure of a set, crammed into the Traverse downstairs, the constantly morphing characters, the use of moving image, the intertextuality with *Gone With the Wind* that required a pretty solid knowledge of both book and film to make sense... But ultimately it won because it was so brave and brash and intelligent. It is rare, at the Edinburgh Fringe, to see shows that are two hours long; to see shows that you don't immediately get; to see shows that make you want to come back and see them again for a second or third time, shows that niggle and torment you for days afterwards, with sudden flashes of understanding and inspiration coming at random times. Complicated, messy – and must-see.

Shortlisted: Look Left Look Right *The Caravan*, Pleasance; DOT 504 *Holdin' Fast*, Zoo Southside; Paper Birds *In a Thousand Pieces*, Gilded Balloon Teviot.

The Young Company Award category featured an eclectic mix of work: two very different verbatim pieces (*The Caravan* about the floods in England summer 2006; *In A Thousand Pieces* about sexual abuse and trafficking of young women to the UK); a beautifully executed dance-theatre piece inspired by Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (*Holdin' Fast*); and – the winning show – *Architecting*, a collaboration between New York's THE TEAM and the NTS workshop.



TOTAL THEATRE AWARD FOR A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO PHYSICAL AND VISUAL THEATRE

Footsbarn Touring Theatre

Footsbarn should win the Total Theatre Award for a Significant Contribution to Physical and Visual Theatre on the occasion of their residency on Carlton Hill at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2008 with their renowned production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Footsbarn have been touring inventive visual theatre for almost 40 years. They have defied theatre convention by choosing to tour in their own portable venues (from horse and cart to the current beautiful big top tent!), and have influenced a whole generation of artists who have taken inspiration from their inclusive, multicultural approach to theatre-making. It seems right and fitting that

TOTAL THEATRE AWARDS 2008 WINNING SHOWS REPORT BY DOROTHY MAX PRIOR

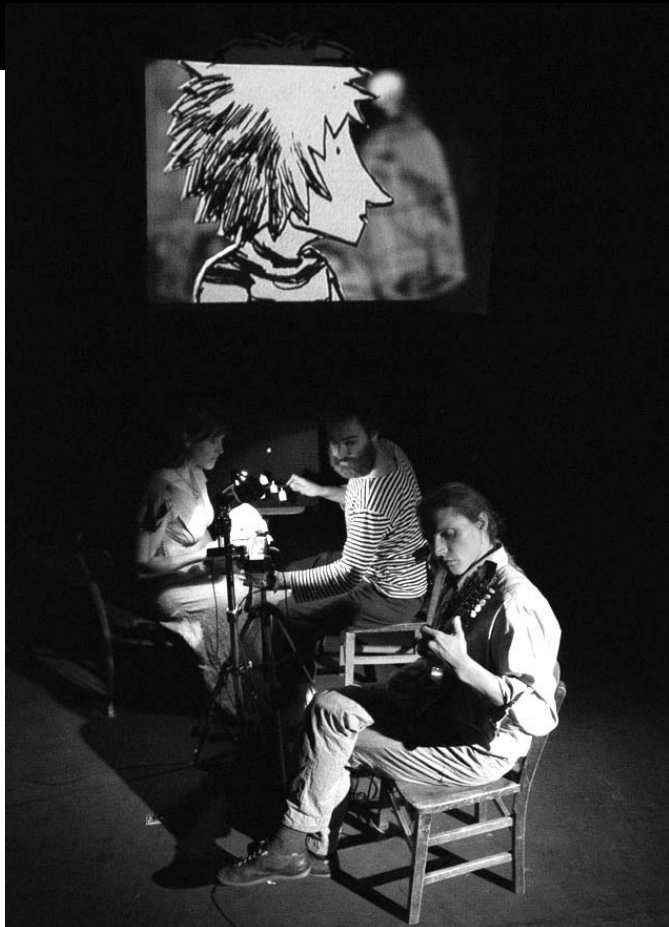
1 | ONTROEREND GOED *ONCE AND
FOR ALL WE'RE GONNA TELL YOU
WHO WE ARE SO SHUT UP AND LISTEN*
2 | LITTLE BULB THEATRE *CROCOSMIA*

3 | PUPPET STATE THEATRE COMPANY
THE MAN WHO PLANTED TREES
4 | REDCAPE THEATRE *THE IDIOT COLONY*
5 | THE TEAM & NATIONAL THEATRE OF
SCOTLAND WORKSHOP *ARCHITECTING*

INTO THE FOREST

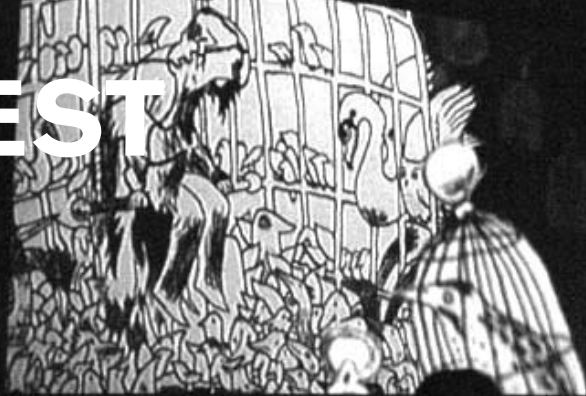
FOREST FRINGE DIRECTOR ANDY FIELD REFLECTS ON THE EDINBURGH LANDSCAPE

TOTAL THEATRE MAGAZINE | VOL. 20 | ISSUE 04 | WINTER 2008-09



Edinburgh in August. Briefly the unrelenting drizzle had subsided, replaced with something that might optimistically be described as overcast. It was the final night of The Paper Cinema and Kora's *The Night Flyer*, the show that had headlined our venue, Forest Fringe. As usual before the show I was occupied with rearranging chairs and lighting candles while Kora rehearsed his guitar loops, the gentle plinking echoing through the dark, empty hall; a beautiful, fragile moment of calm in an otherwise frantic month. Having checked my sound cues and made sure that they were ready to go I headed downstairs to see the box office. 'How are we doing?' I asked. They simply pointed at the queue of people snaking out of the door and down the street, waiting for the possibility of standing room at the back of the auditorium. I didn't quite know what to say.

Forest Fringe was an attempt at doing things differently. Edinburgh in August is a dizzyingly exciting place but few would deny that it has its problems. Far from being the all-welcoming democracy that it is frequently championed as, the Fringe festival is riddled with suffocating conventions that promote only a very limited spectrum of work. Because of the eye-watering price of renting space, shows generally have to be no longer than an hour and have a breakneck get-in and get-out time. In order to get reviews and therefore find an audience amongst so much else going on, shows have to be on for at least a week. Shows must be squeezed into tiny black spaces. They must be parcelled and gift-wrapped and offered to a bleary-eyed audience like fast food – to be considered, consumed and discarded in the space before the next of the five shows they have lined up to see that day. Subtly struggles to breathe in Edinburgh amidst all the shouting and the brightly coloured show T-shirts and the never-ending paper sea of flyers.



*'Forest Fringe was an attempt
at doing things differently
in Edinburgh'*

Forest Fringe was our response to this. A space outside of the official Fringe festival that attempted to dismantle some of those conventions and encourage people to see afresh all the things that are still possible in Edinburgh. We wanted to encourage artists to experiment in front of eager audiences in the midst of the most gaudily, loudly, brilliantly theatrical environment you'll ever find.

It was a wonderful, exhausting, exhilarating couple of weeks. What I think struck me most was quite how comfortable people were with genuinely trying something out to see if it worked, in the full knowledge that it might not. Chris Goode getting up to read a staggering piece of sound poetry he'd never performed all the way through before; Abigail Conway's hauntingly lovely installation piece made especially for the venue; Bristol artist Ed Rapley moving around the building finding new spaces for his intimate one-on-one encounters; Kora improvising a new soundtrack of swirling, looping guitar sounds to an old Brothers Quay film picked at random by someone in the audience. Something about the whole set-up, from the pay-what-you-can tickets to the informality of a venue staffed by people performing there, to the ageing church hall itself, smelling of old dust and varnished wood, seemed to give people a confidence to risk something of themselves, trusting that we were all somehow in this together. This was for me what gave the place its atmosphere – the spirit of generosity from both artists and audiences and the giddily intoxicating sense generated that anything might be worth trying.

It was by no means perfect. And those old conventions too easily slunk back in, but it felt like a start. Next year we may well be back, though what I'm more interested in is in seeing other people following our lead – finding a space in which to play and working together to make something happen. Hopefully we showed that if you build it, they will come.

Forest Fringe is a not-for-profit co-operative venue run by theatre-makers Andy Field and Deborah Pearson in collaboration with the Forest Café, and with the support of Battersea Arts Centre. The venue won a Herald Angel Award 2008; Night Flyer won an Arches Brick Award and was shortlisted for a Total Theatre Award. See www.forestfringe.co.uk

The Forest Café in Bristo Place Edinburgh is a year-round venue and haven for all things alternative, offering free events on a regular basis. See www.theforest.org.uk

IMAGE | THE PAPER CINEMA AND KORA'S THE NIGHT FLYER AT THE FOREST FRINGE 2008. IMAGE COURTESY OF ANDY FIELD

DEATH IN THE AFTERNOON

THIS YEAR'S EDINBURGH FESTIVAL FRINGE SAW A NUMBER OF SHOWS THAT HIGHLIGHTED THE EXPERIENCE OF BEREAVEMENT, REAL OR IMAGINED. THREE COMPANIES SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS ON THE MAKING OF THEIR WORK

INTO THE DARKNESS – AND OUT THE OTHER SIDE

CLAIRE HARVEY, CO-ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF THE RIVER PEOPLE, ON MAKING *LILLY THROUGH THE DARK*



2004 was a life-changing year: the year I graduated from Winchester University; the year that I met Ed (Edward Wren, who was to become my partner in founding The River People); and the year that I began my career in theatre.

It was also the year that my father – my best friend – passed away, following a lifelong battle with diabetes and kidney failure. And 2004 became more life-changing than I ever could have expected.

Four whirlwind years later, it's May, and I am sitting in my office with Ed wondering where we are to begin with our new show *Lilly Through the Dark*, a macabre fairytale about a little girl who journeys to the land of the dead to seek her deceased father. We had formed the River People theatre company the year after my father's death, but it was in 2007 that things progressed for us in earnest, having completed a run at the National Student Drama Festival and the Edinburgh Fringe with our first full show (*The Ordinaries – In an Awkward Silence*). We both knew already that my experience of losing my father was to form the basis for our next show.

It is very important to us that theatre starts from a place that is honest, and we both felt that it was necessary to explore my feelings surrounding his death, and also bereavement in general. The process began with me requesting pieces of writing from others who were willing to share their

own experiences in order to gain a wider perspective on our subject matter.

The first experience I looked at closely, though, was my own. I wrote down everything I remembered and felt about my father's death: the emotional feelings, the colour of the wallpaper, the smells of the room, the preceding illness, the way that people did not know what to say, the odd moments of family closeness that were never there before, the dark times and the emptiness.

One thing I knew for certain was that I did not want to wallow in sadness: it was my father who had died, not me. What I was fighting through, and what I had found the hardest, was dealing with my own personal grief and sense of loss. It was this we chose to explore; the often forgotten journey of those left behind.

Ed writes the majority of our work, and we often start with a rough script before picking it apart and devising bits together. But writing was difficult from the beginning; Ed had not experienced death as closely as myself. So he read through my writing on my experience, and accompanied this with long, sometimes difficult discussions about what had happened. Slowly, characters, scenes and a rough story arch emerged.

In the rehearsal room, however, the scenes we had planned at home did not transfer well. Everything felt slightly forced;

we found that when telling a story of the after-life, it is very difficult to avoid clichés about existence. The answer it seemed lay in the small details of the piece of writing I had put together at the start. The story needed to remain personal and honest, so we included little glimpses of real experience, such as the detail of my father's hands and his last words. The show then gained an element of sincerity that reinforced and supported the message we were attempting to convey.

However, as good as it felt to be exploring and communicating my feelings about my father's death, there were moments that were difficult for me as a performer. To write feelings down in the security of your own home is one thing; to perform them in front of your peers is quite another. A particular scene towards the end of the play, where Lilly is coming to the understanding that she will not see her father again, led to tears and a pause in rehearsal. It was, at times, difficult for me to expose these deeper feelings.

But now the process is complete it has proven to be very therapeutic. By exploring, discussing and recreating these events I feel I have achieved something in the long journey of my grief. Although it is hard to pinpoint exactly, I feel a little lighter perhaps, and have a better understanding of my feelings. This is something we hoped to give to others who have been touched in some way by death.

It is within this transaction that the purpose and beauty of theatre lies – it is an artform unique in its ability to arrest its audience, where in that moment there is a connection between a group of people – the communication that exists between the performers and the person sat in the dark watching them.

The River People's Lilly Through the Dark was presented at The Bedlam Theatre, Edinburgh Festival Fringe, August 2008. The company are now supported artists of The Point, Eastleigh where they will be developing a new show for 2009. See www.myspace.com/theriverpeople



2

IS THERE ANYONE HERE NOT RECENTLY BEREAVED?

DIRECTOR CASSIE WERBER REFLECTS ON BY THE WAY, CHOPPED LOGIC'S RE-WORKING OF NOËLLE RENAUDE'S PAR LES ROUTES

Par les Routes – the original title under which Noëlle Renaude wrote what she describes as a 'road poem' – was created by the author for two particular actors, Christophe Brault and Jean-Paul Dias.

The three got together to talk about what they would make, and discovered a common experience: all had recently lost their mothers. Renaude went away and wrote a piece, characteristic for several reasons: it is not structured as a 'play'; there are no characters named, and the lines are divided up, but not assigned to any speakers. There are no scenes, no stage directions, and no punctuation. There is also very little that is sentimental; the piece is not a homage to mothers, or a celebration of the lives of these three women.

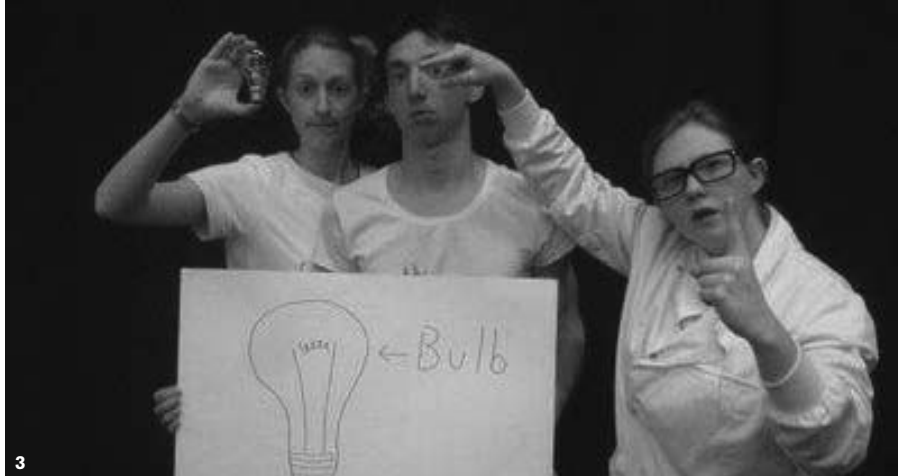
Working with the English version in collaboration with translator Clare Finburgh, we began to unravel the different characters. The first is a waitress who states 'I have not got the hump. I am sad. It is simple. I have just lost my mother.' But this reaction – uncomplicated grief – is not one which we encounter often in the twists and turns of this road trip text. There is a hotel owner who dwells gleefully on the details of his mother's suicide, claiming, 'she couldn't take the wrinkles'. A man returns from cremating his mother-in-law, who he blames for continuing to make demands on his wife: "Do not forget me, not yet". An extended family chase an 80-year-old matriarch who has escaped the nursing home, pausing breathless on the street corner to scream: "we are exasperated, infuriated...let her go!". Renaude's approach to the subject is comic and often brutal. Even the two 'main characters' – friends who drive across France with the vague object of getting to the sea – never give us much insight into their own mothers, their relationships with them, or their feelings of loss. The closest we get is in dreams, chance comments,

tears, which come from nowhere and remain unexplained. When we glimpse the mothers themselves, they seem to have forgotten exactly whose son is whose.

Working on this text, myself, Stavros Demetraki and Kevin O'Loughlin were starting from a different basis. Each of us has a strong – though very different – relationship with our mothers, all of whom are living. Our approach to the piece was therefore much more interpretive, and perhaps more character driven, than the original production needed to be. Because we did not know it, experientially, it was necessary for us to find the story behind the words. The Edinburgh Fringe was also, perhaps, a strange place for the debut of our new and experimental piece. Many have commented that the festival is increasingly weighted towards comedy, and especially performing at The Pleasance – renowned for its stand-up and sketch show programming – we found our audiences very ready to laugh at the grotesque and silly moments, and less comfortable with the darker, quieter, slower sections.

One of the ideas that the piece explores, and highlights through its structure, is that bereavement can be boring. Like a featureless landscape passing the windows, it just goes on, unchanging. The moments of drama were of self-discovery, rather than revelation of ideas, or action. In tragedies, death is an end point (though sometimes, of course, precipitating another tragedy). But our text was dealing with the aftermath, the getting on with life, but life minus the one thing that, up to that point, has been constant. Sometimes the performers came off stage worrying that the audience had not laughed that day, to discover that people had found the play profoundly sad. It is a strange grey area to work in, surprisingly productive of comedy as well as bleakness.

Supported by Escalator East to Edinburgh, ChoppedLogic's By the Way was developed in Ipswich, Colchester and London before premiering in Edinburgh Fringe 2008 at The Pleasance. See www.choppedlogic.co.uk



CAN A VIVID IMAGINATION BE A SUBSTITUTE FOR REAL LOSS?

CLARE BERESFORD OF LITTLE BULB THEATRE ON THE MAKING OF THEIR AWARD-WINNING SHOW CROCOSMIA

Rather than beginning as a piece about family tragedy, *Crocoshmia*, actually started out as a piece about family life. Alex, our director, had envisaged from the offset a family on stage, centred around a record player and all the family memories contained within their vinyl record collection. From those two fundamental elements, we began creating improvisations to various records and the characters of the three children, Freya, Sophia and Finny, started to take shape. Everyone has childhood memories, and I've no doubt that we were all influenced by our own experiences of growing up, which we shared, explored and celebrated throughout the devising process.

It wasn't till a few weeks later, that we realised the parents in these children's lives were nowhere to be seen, and that the level of protectiveness they had over each other and their 'things' was indicating that the piece was going to be taken in another direction entirely. The day we discovered what had happened to the parents (killed in a car crash), every action of each child was seen in a new light, and yet ultimately everything became much clearer. Although, as performers, none of us have experienced such devastation in our own lives, we are all very close to our families and I think the 'what if' factor gave us that horrific insight into how the children must have felt when their world was shattered overnight.

However, rather than purely seeing sadness in their coping mechanisms, which overlays everything they do from that point on, we sought to find the beauty and love that siblings can show each other through the tiniest of actions. For instance, in one game the children use Battenberg cakes to enact memories of their parents. When Freya takes a bite of the big Battenberg cake, it is not because, for a change, she is hungry, or wants to ruin the game, it is because she can see that Finny isn't finding the game fun anymore; she can see sadness creeping over him and that he is stuck with the burden of the next memory, so she helps him in the best way she knows – take the game away, eat it if you have to.

What was so wonderful about having Alex as a director was that he allowed us to completely indulge in being children, treating us as an older parental figure would, and allowing our characters' imaginations to run wild, as children's do so freely. I think that the show worked so well as a piece of theatre because the idea of putting on a show comes so naturally to the children – you only have to take one look at the shoe and the perfume bottle used to represent foster parents to see that they are performing for one another all the time anyway. Elements like changing the music and scoffing our faces with cake brings a unique 'liveness' to the piece, because we are not 'acting' eating, we really are eating, and I think audiences appreciate seeing moments like this on stage where not only the character, but the actor is suffering too.

Ultimately, the decision to make the audience participate in the birthday party (as the youngest orphan, Freya, reaches her eighth birthday – her first without her parents) at the end means that not only do they become part of the show itself, but actively singing 'Happy Birthday' connects them to the roller-coaster of emotions felt by the children as they create the event. And because of everything they've witnessed beforehand, you get the impression that the audience really do want to help make this 'the best birthday what she's ever 'ad'.

I think most people, no matter how young or old, have memories of their childhood that will never leave them, moments like this which connect everyone, when all we could think about was blowing out a candle and wishing for something that only our imaginations will let us have. *Crocoshmia* celebrates the power of that imagination and its ability to see us through the times in life when reality just falls short of the mark.

Little Bulb Theatre won the Total Theatre Award for Best Graduate Company at Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2008. Crocoshmia will next be performed at Battersea Arts Centre in London, 18–20 December 2008.

1 | THE RIVER PEOPLE
LILLY THROUGH THE DARK
2 | CHOPPED LOGIC BY THE WAY
3 | LITTLE BULB THEATRE CROCOSHIA

TRACES

**ANNA-HELENA MCLEAN, PERSIS-JADE MARAVALA,
AND IAN MORGAN REFLECT ON A WEEK-LONG LABORATORY
INSPIRED BY THE WORK OF JERZY GROTOWSKI**



Traces was a performance laboratory session organised by the British Grotowski Project at the University of Kent, Canterbury. It offered participants the opportunity to work intensively for six days with four British theatre practitioners who have each had extensive experience in work connected to that of the late Polish theatre director Jerzy Grotowski.

The title Traces was chosen carefully to reflect a certain practical relationship to Grotowski's work. The express concern of the organisers and leaders was to avoid any pretence that the work session offered 'direct access' to Grotowski's own practice. Whilst the session echoed many of the issues well documented in Grotowski's own articles and speeches, the practical traces of these issues were to be made manifest through the leaders' own long-term, ongoing performance practice.

The participants were split into smaller groups for the day-time sessions. This was led by Anna-Helena McLean (independent performer/teacher, formerly of the Centre for Theatre Practices 'Gardzienice'), Persis-Jade Maravala (performer and artistic director of Para Active), and Ian Morgan (performer/teacher, formerly of the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards, and currently with Song of the Goat Theatre, Poland).

The evening sessions, stimulated and led by director Jonathan Grieve (formerly of Para Active), allowed participants to respond to and play with the work they had been doing during the day. During these sessions they created etudes of physical action, including song and elements of choreography and incorporating texts from Greek tragedy, which were then developed, shared and reflected on as the week advanced. The aim was to allow the whole group to explore the work outside of the led sessions, encouraging a freedom to adapt and respond to elements introduced during the day. This also provided a basis for the group to observe and discuss emergent themes and shared concerns and enthusiasms arising in the laboratory. This was space for exploration beyond training.

Almost ten years after his death, Grotowski's thoughts on theatre practice continue to resonate individually with many of those interested in theatre and the actor's process especially. Some encounter his work purely through print and read his essays, time and time again, finding endless stimulus for re-invigorating their creative process. Grotowski's practice-based activities, with different colleagues through several phases over the years, have left unique memories in those who experienced them, resulting in their own responses to his approach.

Those who had the chance to work with him either directly or to encounter his work through one of his collaborators have been left with very specific traces derived from this influence. The session leaders of Traces are examples of these two groups of people: Anna-Helena worked extensively with Włodzimierz Staniewski, who was a young member of the Teatr Laboratorium's Paratheatrical experiments from 1970–76 before he founded The Centre for Theatre Practices, Gardzienice; Persis-Jade had a laboratory training with Jonathan Grieve for ten years based in training centred specifically on the practice outlined by Grotowski through Jola Cynkutis, a close collaborator of many of the Laboratorium's actors; and Ian worked with Grotowski and Thomas Richards at their Workcenter in Italy through the mid-1990s, in the practical research into Art as Vehicle. Through the work sessions, participants were offered a rare opportunity to explore alongside a younger generation of theatre artists (intentionally all from the UK) who embody in their own way traces of Grotowski's vision for the actor's potential.

Ultimately, however, Traces was a work session for people interested in acting beyond illustration and pretence. It thrust participants into structures, stimuli and exercises that demanded rigor, a total engagement with all their capacities, and yet a constant 'aliveness' in action – coaxing the actor to reach a level of work that was open and sensitive to spontaneity, yet demanding of clear and detailed physical action. Traces offered an invitation to those interested in the actor's process and an impulse – one that is transmitted uniquely from person to person – towards a possibility of working on the self through their craft. It was hoped that as a result of the laboratory, participants will continue to explore Grotowski's oeuvre for inspiration.

Towards the end of the week, four visiting artists were also invited to attend and participate as respondent interlocutors – Bella Merlin (Exeter University), Dorothy Max Prior (Total Theatre Magazine), Katya Kamotskaia (Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama) and Professor Mike Pearson (Aberystwyth University). They observed the daytime sessions and an evening sharing, and on the last day contributed to a closing discussion,

'Ultimately Traces was a work session for people interested in acting beyond illustration and pretence'



chaired by Professor Paul Allain and Dr Giuliano Campo (the principle organisers of the workshop and the British Grotowski Project itself). Each spoke of their interest in the work of Grotowski, how it touched their own practice and what they had seen during Traces. Participants and leaders also expressed how they had experienced the laboratory and their own interest in exploring such approaches further.

During this last meeting no one spoke of a 'Grotowskian' legacy in conclusive or reductive terms. What remained was an overwhelming sense of the rich source of stimulus and inspiration that Grotowski's work represents – impossible to cram into a soundbite, summarise in study notes, experience in a single exercise, or even learn in some kind of a system.

Over the coming twelve months the British Grotowski Project will develop this work by organising, amongst other things, a multi-modal international conference for practitioners and academics in 2009, the 'Year of Grotowski' (marking the 10th anniversary of his death). As well as discussion and debates, the conference will include such 'practical' elements as an exhibition, performance, demonstrations and selected films.

As for the practitioners involved in Traces, Anna-Helena continues to develop her work on Shakespeare, musicality and archetypes with collaborators from Europe and the US; this is feeding into a new performance, *The Queen & Fool*, scheduled to open in 2009. Jade, as documented in the last issue of Total Theatre Magazine (Vol 20 issue 03), is also the director of The Urban Dolls Project



who continue to develop *Hotel Medea* in collaboration with Zecora Ura, and is now also Associate Artist of La Pocha Nostra with Guillermo Gomez-Pena. Jonathan has left Para Active Theatre to set up a new company called MAS Productions with Daniel Danson (formerly of the Tobacco Factory). And Ian continues to work with Song of the Goat Theatre, Poland, touring in *Lacrimosa*, whilst rehearsing a version of *Macbeth* to be premiered before the end of 2008 and teaching on their MA in Acting in co-operation with Manchester Metropolitan University.

In all these ongoing explorations, Traces of Grotowski somehow live on.

Traces was organised by the British Grotowski Project, University of Kent at Canterbury, and took place 14–19 April 2008

Jerzy Grotowski: Theatre and Beyond will take place at the University of Kent 11–14 June 2009. This AHRC-funded conference in the UNESCO-designated 'Year of Grotowski' will celebrate Grotowski's enduring influence by bringing together key people to ask what riches he has left behind. It will assess his impact on British theatre, and will invite international scholars and artists to reassess Grotowski today. If you are interested to know more or to participate, please contact Giuliano Campo on gc71@kent.ac.uk Tel + 44 1227 82 4918

See The British Grotowski Project website at: www.britishgrotowski.co.uk/

Total Theatre Magazine will be including a special feature on Grotowski's legacy to mark the tenth anniversary of his death in 2009. If you are interested in contributing, please contact the editor on magazine@totaltheatre.org.uk

1 | IAN MORGAN, *SONG OF THE GOAT THEATRE*. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST
2 | ANNA-HELENA MCLEAN, INDEPENDENT ARTIST/FORMERLY OF GARDZIENICE. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST
3 | JERZY GROTOWSKI 1971. PHOTO ROALD PAY. IMAGE FROM ODIN TEATRET'S ARCHIVE, (COURTESY OF THE GROTOWSKI PROJECT AND REPRINTED WITH THEIR KIND PERMISSION)

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EDINBURGH FESTIVAL FRINGE AUGUST 2008

SEND IN THE CLOWNS – PHYSICAL THEATRE AT THE FRINGE

In any discussion of physical theatre at Fringe 2008, it has to be acknowledged that there was a gaping wound in the festival caused by the pulling of Aurora Nova (the home for the past seven years for much of the physical/visual work presented in Edinburgh). Although some work relocated – an example being **Al Seed's** wonderful bouffon clown show *The Fooligan*, which went to The Pleasance – for others this wasn't a viable option.

No Aurora Nova meant a lower number of larger-scale physical theatre shows, but there was certainly a good number of solo works and smaller ensembles keeping the physical fires burning.

Some shows took physical theatre into dark territories. *The Gymnast*, a collaboration between the *enfant terrible* of dance-theatre, **Nigel Charnock** and performance artist **Jane Arnfield** (presented at Pleasance Courtyard by **The Empty Space**), is a stunning piece that effortlessly merges the political and the personal – Arnfield's autobiographical story of her obsession with Cambodia and fighting the wrong-doings of the Khmer Rouge is intermingled with social commentary and pop-culture history that takes us from the 60s through to the present. A fragmented narrative uses spoken text in various modes and voices; carefully choreographed and beautifully performed physical action and movement; an at-times earsplitting soundtrack that merges found sound, recorded political speeches, and pop classics; and a beautiful design – the stage centrepiece is a large, mirrored pagoda-pink wardrobe that revolves and opens, its drawers spilling their contents; the stage becoming the site for a visually exciting and thought-provoking object theatre created from strewn clothes, toys, newspaper cuttings, and flags.

The River People's *Lilly Through the Dark* (Bedlam Theatre) tackles family bereavement in a show that mixes vaudevillian physical comedy, puppetry and gentle music (from director Edward Wren on mandolin). Pitched as a contemporary fairy tale, the show explores the dark sides of life (and death) with a light touch. There's a lovely aesthetic: (purple and gold cloth; straw and steel lighting), and some great puppetry/object animation – the eponymous puppet-heroine who is our constant in this journey through the darklands; two 'humanette' hangman clowns; and a luminous rising moon that finally lifts us out of the land of the dead. This is just their second show and The River People have already established themselves as a company to look out for, in Edinburgh and beyond.

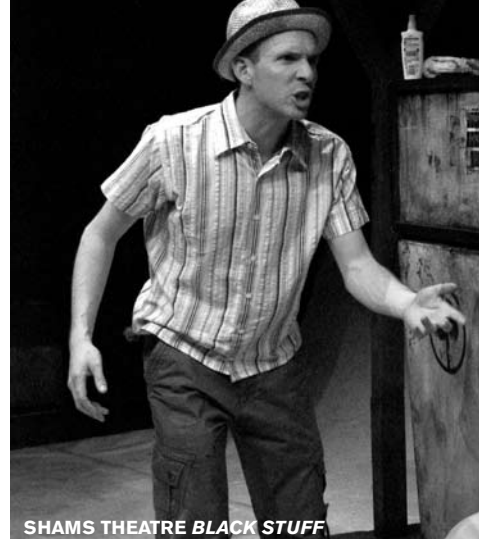
Slightly further along the line of experience are **Paper Birds**. In *a 1000 Pieces* (Gilded Balloon) sees a return to the all-female ensemble, and again a story about female oppression, aspects of which have been tackled in previous work. In this case, it is trafficking and sexual abuse that is addressed, using a well-integrated mix of verbatim techniques and movement theatre. It was impressive to see such material addressed in the language of physical theatre, and the subject matter was dealt with in a way that allowed the stories to be heard and understood. Difficult material dealt with carefully and considerably, and engaging performances.



Other shows, like *Mime for Laughs* (Hill St) were good old-fashioned fun – a series of delightfully entertaining sketches using all the tricks of the (old-school) mime trade. 'Polish superstar' **Ireneusz Krosny of Mono-Mime Comedy Theatre** was particularly good with animals (so to speak) – burglars terrorised by dogs, cocky cockerels, and a fly trapped in a honey pot who gorges himself to death on the heavenly goo that has captivated him... an attempted escape from the jar allowing for a clever update of the Marcel Marceau 'stuck in a glass box' routine.

Talking of traditional mime, mention must be made here of one of our national treasures, female clown-mime **Nola Rae**, whose delightfully-named *Exit Napoleon Pursued by Rabbits* played at Footsbarn's beautiful tent on Carlton Hill. **Footsbarn** themselves presented their multicultural version of *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, a riot of colourful costume, music, mask – and of course plenty of good commedia-style 'Zanni business' from the rude mechanicals (it was a great pleasure to see such well-seasoned theatre clowns in action!).

Working in the wordless mime tradition came Czech company **Adriatik** whose show *Polaris* (Zoo Venues) is a heartbreakingly poignant meditation on Arctic exploration. The performers paint the explorers' world with physical precision, and in a way that cleverly portrays that in such bleak and extreme conditions the external world and the internal self merge into one dreamlike reality. It becomes hard for us to tell where man ends and penguin begins; the sighs of exhaled breath and cries of a distant albatross melt together; and in walking through the blizzard, explorer seems to become blizzard personified. At times it is painfully slow, but I love it all the more for this. Beautiful, melancholy, and sometimes terribly funny. It was also heartening to see Zoo Venues programming so many physical theatre shows, and to see audiences full (often with young adults, a demographic not often reached in the theatre) for shows such as *Polaris*, **Precarious' The Factory** and **Lost Spectacles' Lost in the Wind** (these last two reviewed elsewhere).





THE ONASSIS PROGRAMME CLOUDCUCKOOLAND



DANCING BRICK 21:13

Theatre Infinitum's *Behind the Mirror* (Pleasance Courtyard) is also a wordless piece, featuring a highly talented trio of Lecoq-trained performers. It's a charming little show about the shadow self (mirror man takes over 'real' man's life, muscles in on his girlfriend, causes havoc etc) that fully and cleverly exploits all the comic possibilities of that scenario. This is old-school physical comedy – but none the worse for that – done very well. On the day that I saw the show, it played to a full house of people of all ages from many nations – proof of the power of non-verbal performance to cross boundaries of language and culture, and of the universal appeal of slapstick.

Also in the Lecoq tradition were recent graduates of the school, **Dancing Brick**, with *21:13* (C Soco), in which an Italian boy and English boy are stranded together on a deserted railway platform. The lack of a common language provides a structure on which to build a charming series of physical and visual sketches, together with many clever plays on language. Their exchanges are juxtaposed with lovely little interludes of each character's inner hopes, fears, and dreams. If there is a criticism, it is that too much of the show still feels like a series of sketches based on classic Lecoq exercises. But the potential here is enormous – a physical theatre company to look out for.

The Lecoq legacy was also evident in *The Idiot Colony* (Pleasance Dome) by **RedCape**, a young company directed by veteran mime artist Andrew Dawson (reviewed elsewhere) and also in **Shams Theatre's** *Black Stuff* (Pleasance Courtyard) – although the influence was rather more oblique in this latter show. On one level *Black Stuff* is a fairly straightforward comic drama which imagines the global end-of-the-oil crisis that will no doubt occur sooner or later, and the chaos that will thus ensue, with feisty performances that went down well with the afternoon 'physical comedy slot' crowd at The Pleasance. A more careful reading of the piece is as a clown-theatre show (devised using the process of Clown Through Mask), and ultimately, although enjoying the show, I wanted the clown aspect to be more visible; for the characters to be pushed further.

Also at The Pleasance, **The Onassis Programme's** *Cloudcuckooland* was a children's clown-theatre piece with political bite – a reworking of Aristophanes' *The Birds* that took the form of a cautionary environmental tale along the lines of 'people are ruining the world, so the birds are now in charge'. Some great clowning from skilled physical performers, and I loved the live music (musical clowns are the best – and to see a harp onstage at the Fringe, what a treat!).

Elsewhere on the Fringe were clowns of a different sort. Lea Anderson's **Cholmondeleys and Featherstonehaughs** paired up with vaudevillian musician Nigel Finch to create a grotesque-burlesque piece called *Dancing on Your Grave* (Assembly Rooms) which gave the **Tiger Lillies** a run for their money as it ran rings around the latter's *7 Deadly Sins* (Spiegeltent). The theatrical conceit is that this is a troupe of vaudeville performers who are still doing the rounds even though they're dead. The dancers show a real understanding of the mores of eccentric dance, and the musicians embrace classic clowning in the delivery of their delightfully decadent ditties.

Also in the vaudevillian spirit were the darlings of Edinburgh, **La Clique** (at The Famous Spiegeltent), who returned triumphant with a show featuring the best of international variety: **Ursula Martinez** was as wonderful as ever, and it was a delight to see her latest take on striptease, in which a carefree fag-smoking go-go dancer sets fire to her bra and pants. Contortionist **Captain Frodo** takes the biscuit for physical clowning, as he squeezes himself through a couple of tennis rackets – mic stands and stool crashing wildly around him; **Mario, Queen of the Circus** excites the crowd with a fantastic juggling act to *Another One Bites the Dust*, and a daredevil unicycle ride through the Spiegeltent; and how great to see French Canadian puppetry superstars **Soma International's** *Cabaret Décadance* providing the links for the evening.

It was wonderful to see so many variations on the physical theatre tradition at Edinburgh, and to know that far from being in decline (as was feared a few years ago), mime and physical theatre are alive and well, and walking in the wind to ever-greater successes.

DOROTHY MAX PRIOR

EDINBURGH FESTIVAL FRINGE

VOICES FROM THE PAST

As a child, I was always fascinated by the 1930s and 1940s. Whether it was stories of civilian life in wartime recounted to me by my grandmother, or romantic notions of a slower pace of life and a heightened sense of community, I was completely enthralled. This fascination is clearly shared, as evidenced by the wide variety of work on this theme at Fringe 2008, where I had the pleasure of watching three pieces, devised by young companies, that dealt with the lives of young women coming of age during the war years. Although the personal stories are entirely different, insightful narrative and direction has resulted in three beautifully touching and heartfelt pieces.

The first, *How It Ended* (presented by **You Need Me** at C Cubed) is the tender exploration of a marriage blighted and eventually destroyed by cultural differences. This fast-paced piece, characterised by short scenes and freeze-frames, focuses on our happy-go-lucky teenage heroine, Lillian, whose unremarkable daily life in a provincial Welsh town is turned upside down by a passionate wartime romance with Raymond, a French trainee fighter pilot. The couple's early relationship is characterised by some touching and amusing moments such as their stilted attempts at courtship with the aid of a French-English phrase book. All too quickly, this carefree lifestyle is superseded by an unplanned pregnancy, hurried marriage and the reluctant bride's return to her husband's childhood home in the recently liberated France. Raymond's widowed mother speaks only in French, but her tone and mannerisms mean that her severe and domineering attitude towards her daughter-in-law can never be misconstrued. Unable to communicate or interact in this alien environment, Lillian becomes increasingly isolated and desperately lonely much to the frustration of her now overbearing and insensitive husband.



GOMITO PRODUCTIONS *BEFORE WE REMEMBER*

Gomito Productions' latest offering *Before We Remember* (Bedlam Theatre) explores the final memories of a century-old woman as she meets her death. Gomito's skilful use of life-sized puppets and light-hearted tone prevent us from becoming bogged down with morbidity and instead encourage us to celebrate the reflections on youth and life that we have witnessed. Post-it notes build up a communal timeline of personal memories attached to a suspended piece of string which seems extremely fragile yet combines with numerous other timelines to create an intricate and solid spider's web of memories which refuse to be forgotten. The youthful energy and exuberance of the young cast combined with the innovative and highly original use of trash puppetry provide a poignant and sensitive insight into all manner of memories, from the personal through to ground-breaking moments in international history – each one building on the last to paint a picture of a lifetime's worth of thoughts and feelings.



REDCAPE THEATRE *THE IDIOT COLONY*

RedCape Theatre's production of *The Idiot Colony* (Pleasance Dome) explores the banality of institutional life experienced by three women confined to an asylum for 'moral deviance' in the 1940s. After 40 years of incarceration, the women's everyday lives have become characterised by ritualistic grooming, mealtime and bedtime routines, manifesting as well-choreographed, synchronised movements to a 1980s disco soundtrack. The kindness and tenderness the women demonstrate towards each other starkly contrasts with the sterile efficiency of the nurses. In one particularly poignant scene, one woman is stripped and bathed by two nurses in a bathtub fashioned out of a large white towel. Despite this intrusive and violating treatment, her innocent face appears blissfully unaware of the loss of dignity which is now such a part of her life. Accompanied by a soundtrack of swing classics, a series of flashbacks provide an insight into the characters' past experiences where 'crimes' such as becoming pregnant as a result of childhood rape were enough to commit you to a lifetime of incarceration. Another character, locked away for her 'dirty mind', graphically relives passionate moments of her affair with an American GI, painting one of her own arms and legs black in order to emphasise the sharp contrast of his skin on hers (the implication being that her 'crime' was to love someone of another race). The final and arguably most intriguing character of the piece never speaks and the audience is left to infer that she may have fallen in love with another woman, implied by beautifully realised scenes of femininity and sexual freedom including the use of a dripping towel to create the image of swimming beneath a waterfall.

So, what can we intimate about the effect of this period of recent history on the work of today's young theatre companies – and moreover on the entire generation of 80s children, brought up on a diet of children's war literature and all manner of stories handed down by ageing relatives?

Perhaps, rather than feeling alienated by stories of people and lifestyles we could never imagine meeting or experiencing, the joyous reminiscences of our grandparents have brought us closer to them, encouraging us not to upset ourselves with thoughts of their old age, or indeed the prospect of our own, rather to celebrate life and youth.

Moreover, we are encouraged to embrace these insights into our own ancestral history and to reflect on the universal truths and experiences paralleled today in many areas of our modern society. In particular, it would be naive and entirely unwise of us to dismiss conflicting attitudes surrounding cultural differences, failed marriage and mental health, to name but a few, as issues merely affecting an era long since passed.

FRANCES BRYCE

CHRIS GREEN & URSULA MARTINEZ *OFFICE PARTY* UDERBELLY PASTURE

The genius of this dirty, ironic bit of theatre is that it turns the spectators into the spectacle.

Arriving as if to an office party, you are given name badges and whisked off for a humorous departmental meeting, with booze, and you get to know the other audience members a bit. Then the party starts, which is a mixture of booze-fuelled departmental quizzes and gluttony contests. When we are asked if anyone would like to get their kit off, four naked men rush to the stage, cavort; one leans over and parts his buttocks. They must be plants. We look at everyone suspiciously – are they a performer? Someone vomits. He's an actor, right?

Cabaret acts intersperse the party, some better integrated than others. Ursula Martinez leads the audience in an appropriate chorus of 'I hear you wank on a mirror' (to the tune of Latin classic 'Guantanamera'). And a head of department performs a savagely aggressive and drunken 'I'm gonna get myself sacked and go out with a bang' pole-dance – for once, some of this burlesque has a story to tell. Less so with Tina C or an aerialist who leaps into action for no apparent reason.

The name badges come in handy. I dance with Sarah. She falls over. People dance with sexual exhibitionism, randified by the burlesque performances. An attractive couple pose romantically in a spotlight. How pretentious! I dance with Martin in a corduroy jacket. He tries to knee me in the groin as we dance. Paula is hiding behind a pillar from her husband. It's Martin. 'You're such a good performer,' she whimpers. 'You're so realistic'.

LAURA LLOYD

30 BIRD PRODUCTIONS *PLASTIC* THE PLEASANCE UNDERGRAND / PLEASANCE COURTYARD

I wasn't expecting to see this. I was on my way to someone's house for dinner. I had a bunch of lilies in my arms. The garage door went up, and I was taken into whitewashed underground tunnels. The garage door closed with a bang. The men were led to another room. After a while, a man came and told us how to pickle onions, and then announced his intention to have his penis removed.

The beauty in this promenade performance is the fine balance of the performers' relationship to their audience. You are led around, sometimes given permission to peep at dancers through an archway, or sometimes allowed to roam more freely. The subject-matter – gender realignment laws in Iran – may be a little inaccessible, and body politics may be a standard topic for live art, but the tension and suspension, the care with which the performer/dancers handle teacups, shoes, look at you and move, makes it a dreamlike experience.

Downstairs, there is a matrix of roller blinds. I go round the back of it. A couple are peeping at each other, opening and closing blinds. One peeps at me. I'm surprised. I move behind another blind. The lilies are smelling so strongly! His fingers touch the edge of the blind – he is behind it, and I am right there! It's full of sexual fizz.

It's poetic, full of angles and images and ambiguity to digest later. It is delicate and deliberate and dangerous, like surgery.

LAURA LLOYD

MOTHER VISION / DAVID SANT *POT NOODLE* THE MUSICAL PLEASANCE COURTYARD

Several reviews dismissed 'the noodle' as a blatant plug for a tub-based snack. But whilst it was funded and promoted by advertising agency Mother Vision, the company had completely free range over the content (of the show) and early on threw out the script suggested to them. What we got instead was an enjoyable hour in the company of some of the best physical and comedy actors around, directed by a national hero. What's not to like?

Loosely based on Hamlet, the story goes that evil brother Allan Little (beautifully underplayed by Phil Whelans) kills good brother and noodle factory boss Barry Little (William Owen) so he can spend even more money on prostitutes and yachts. Barry's lovely daughter (Rhona Croker), assisted by the factory workers (Flick Ferdinando and Ben Frimston), manage to overcome Allan and all ends relatively happily, although Barry is still dead.

Highlights include Flick's dance dressed as a fly, and later her playing the musical saw; all the cast wearing Captain Ahab style beards as a Barry Little heavenly chorus; and some great ensemble singing. Director David Sant builds drama and tension into the story while keeping the laughs flowing. A bit limited on their small stage, the performers were all adept improvisers, able to relate to audience quips and delivered a tightly packed hour of perfect Fringe entertainment.

LISA WOLFE

REVIEWS FROM THE EDINBURGH FRINGE FESTIVAL AND FRINGE AUGUST

LOST SOULS AT THE FRINGE

Lost Spectacles describe themselves as a 'frustrated theatre company' – which might say something about our industry, or at least the relationships between it and emergent artists. Graduated last year, and already frustrated! Not so far from my own graduation, however, I can also relate to this questioning; where is the great physical work? Where can we go consistently to see far-reaching stories played by genuine ensembles? Where is our *Complicité*?

Lost Spectacles' answer is to make work which looks back to some of the great traditions; mime, clown, physical theatre in the Lecoq mould, full of extraordinary, odd images and beautiful choral work. There are few words, and the narrative is consequently pared down, sometimes opaque and somewhat generalised. This avoidance of specificity in terms of subject matter is something I have come across repeatedly in some of the most accomplished physical work, and which, speaking entirely of my own taste, can be disappointing. Without the hooks to engage the conscious mind – place, time, specific reference – the imagination can play but is less likely totally to engage. *Lost in the Wind* (Zoo Venues) offers many delightful moments, and displays the talents of its buoyant young creators admirably. But it doesn't leave its audience with a lot to think about once the dust, feathers, and magnificent snow-clouds have settled.

Across the way at Zoo Southside, **Precarious** pack out a large auditorium with *The Factory* (one of two shows with this title on at Fringe 2008, and neither of them related to Al Seed's show of the same name), a piece characterised by high-energy performance, high production values, and a markedly political agenda. Connections to Orwell's *1984* abound as Precarious create a world driven by the demands of the consumer and fuelled by the avidity of the producer – in this case the advertising guru / slave driver / friendly dictator embodied in the Dickensian figure of the Factory Boss.

Physically, the performance is as well-oiled and relentless as the mechanism it depicts, with many moments of really impressive work – performers play over tables, hang upside down, lift, flip and dance their way across a clever layered set, while projected images work with varying degrees of success. While the political agenda is set, however, it is again a lack of specificity which prevents Precarious' punch from really landing. The text, though often clever, sometimes gets bogged down in its own rhetoric; everything and nothing is criticised all at once, so that the audience feels dressed-down rather than enlightened. When the moments of pathos come, the ideas seem pulled too thin to hold together. This is particularly evident in the moment – in some senses a climax – where a young woman, pinned to the back wall and spot-lit, asks us to see her as an individual, rather than only a cog in a machine. The text at this point is heavy-handed, and we realise we have been unable to invest in the people in this story to be sufficiently interested in, or moved by, their individual dilemmas.

Precarious and Lost Spectacles, with all the admirable ambition of youth and in totally different ways, choose to tell 'everystories', with the result that there is not enough human frailty or idiosyncrasy to touch this particular human to the core.

To be touched emotionally or intellectually in a way that rarely happens outside our interactions with artistic work; perhaps this is what I was seeking more than anything else in the performances I saw at this year's Fringe. The ways in which this happened highlight the fact that there is no formula, no right way to go about producing such an effect, and that the effect depends as much on the audience member as the production.



The Empty Space's *Heartbreak Soup* (Pleasance Courtyard) with two young performers playing on its economic and effective set, manages to navigate difficult territory; the young protagonist's encounter with major surgery, and his life experience up to that point. Deftly treading a path through potential pitfalls of sentimentality, the performance succeeds in creating a world different to, but connected with, that which we know. The writing, poetic without being laboured, is given wings by the sensitive performances of Scott Turnbull and Chris Price while writer/director Laura Lindow does very well never to allow her text to get unwieldy, either in its writing or playing. The production, aimed at younger audiences but equally engaging for other ages, is characterised by lightness, transformation, and a child-like joy which contrasts to great effect with the darkness at the centre of the story.

In complete contrast, **Badac Theatre's** *The Factory* confronts its audience with all the heavy-handed brutality it can muster. Creating a journey through several underground rooms at The Pleasance Courtyard, Badac designate the space as part of a concentration camp, and treat the audience as inmates. The opening experience was, for me, the most powerful: the audience is led into a small space and subjected to a seemingly endless barrage of noise, as the performers beat metal sheeting, while a woman screams, struggling to get to her feet, and repeatedly falling. In reducing our world, for fifteen minutes, to genuinely painful noise, Badac do what they can to take us into the minds of a group of terrified, trapped individuals. It does not matter, at this point, where or when we are – specificity is, in this case, circumvented, as we experience deeper, more animal emotions. We are frightened – not because we believe ourselves to be in actual danger, but because loud noise is in itself frightening. We are disoriented, angry at our treatment, desirous of escape, of air, light, quiet, anything but this. Though not on the day that I saw it, many people leave at this point. Choosing to stay involves an effort of will, and comes both from curiosity (possibly, prurience), and a desire to explore the self. What would we feel like, confronted with these conditions? It is for this reason – the encounter it gives the audience member with his- or herself – that I found the work powerful. More criticism, praise and blame has, and will, be levelled at Badac's *The Factory* than perhaps any other show at this year's Fringe. But while the debate about the treatment of the audience, the approach to the subject matter, and the role of the critic rage on, I am glad to have experienced it first-hand, perhaps more accurately to have come through it, in some way changed by the experience.

CASSIE WERBER

EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL 2008

TR WARSZAWA *DYBBUK* KING'S THEATRE EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL



Mourning the loss of Aurora Nova and the consequent depletion of richness in physical, visual and international work in the Fringe, a piece of work in the International Festival stood out: TR Warszawa's *Dybbuk* directed by Krzysztof Warlikowski, and adapted by him from a play and a short story combined into one piece.

Remarkable in this piece was how spacious it felt. Though it is perhaps unfair to contrast this high-budget work with that on the Fringe, it is a criticism of the system rather than the work to say that after seeing dozens of Fringe shows packed into vans to be unloaded in back rooms and crammed into hour-long timeslots, *Dybbuk* actually had a chance to breathe.

This in contradiction to its subject matter: the choking from within of the victim by a malignant spirit, affecting both its subject and the wider community. Warlikowski's production is expansive, seeming to have endless time for stories to be told and atmospheres to build. The use of all the depth and width available at the King's Theatre enhances this sense of an opened-out experience, while the thrumming, murmuring, sometimes subconscious underscore offers intimations of infinity. The pace of the piece is also elongated – sometimes too much so, so that the attention can wander, reminding us that Warlikowski, a student of Krystian Lupa, is perhaps not yet as masterful in his art as his teacher. Overall, however, the inhabited, mature performance of all the cast, married with a host of extraordinary moments – and the most beautiful projection I have seen used in live theatre – gave *Dybbuk* the savour of a dish cooked with care and served in style.

CASSIE WERBER

HEINER GOEBBELS WITH THE HILLIARD ENSEMBLE *I WENT TO THE HOUSE BUT DID NOT ENTER* ROYAL LYCEUM THEATRE EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL



German theatre-maker Heiner Goebbels is hailed the world over for his creations which consistently blur the boundaries between music, theatre, opera and performance. In his last piece, *Stifters Dinge* (2007), the stage was filled with moving musical instruments without a body in sight. For *I Went to the House But Did Not Enter* we are greeted with four bodies: those of celebrated Hilliard Ensemble, noted for their performances of early music and contemporary works. The piece is described as a staged concert, the evening separated into three separate tableaux, each based on a different twentieth-century literary text, all connected through the fragmentation and anonymity of 'I'.

In the first piece, inspired by TS Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, we are presented with four trench-coated men soberly packing the contents of an impeccably white dining room into an oversized white box. When the men suddenly break into a restrained four-part harmony it is startling and mesmerising. They then unpack an identical box with the exact same contents as that which they have just unpacked, except this time most of the contents are black rather than white. Who are these men and what is it all about?

The following tableaux have similarly cinematic and imposing designs (by Klaus Grunberg). The singing continues in its stoic, unemotional manner which becomes hypnotic but not wholly communicative – the tone was so unchanging that it became difficult to truly engage with the content.

Ultimately, I felt as if I went to the performance but did not enter; I sat back, watched and heard many interesting, beautiful, mundane and profound things but never emotionally stepped into the world onstage. Perhaps that is the point.

TERRY O'DONOVAN

REVIEWS FROM CPT SPRINT FESTIVAL JUNE 2008

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PEOPLE IN PIECES 15 STORMS IN A TEACUP

PEOPLE IN PIECES 15 STORMS IN A TEACUP

Led into the dark, given protective goggles, and seated around a square of trestles, the audience for *15 Storms* had already begun to feel the tingle of anticipation. What would happen to us? This time, perhaps refreshingly, it was not to be an evening of confrontation, high drama, or complex 'issues'. Simplicity reigned as the gentle, home-made performance was laid out before us, a kitchen chemistry set put to earnest use by a group of young experimentalists. In a performance so minute, small details are paramount, and I would have liked to see more attention paid to some technical aspects: costume, vocal work, co-ordination within the ensemble. But as we watched the company's collection of little miracles – frost forming, a tornado in a plastic box – accompanied by sparse, reflective text, I was reminded of the value of calm, space and possibility. This piece, brief, torch-lit and quiet, gave me as much food for thought as many more developed, more complex and 'accomplished' works have done. Arnolfini associate artists People in Pieces will do well to hang on to this bravely simple approach, a strong core around which to develop their ideas and visions.

CASSIE WERBER



THE SPECIAL GUESTS NIGHTFALL

BADAC THEATRE THE FORGOTTEN

Taking on the Holocaust is no easy task. Especially in a one-man show. [Editor's note: see also Cassie Werber's review of *The Factory*, Badac's larger-scale piece about the Holocaust, as seen at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe]. Looming over this single performer is the enormity of what has passed; the vast shadows of the persecuted seem poised to dwarf this lone figure.

Running on the spot, Steve Lambert plunges into a blow-by-blow narration of one man's story. Loud, fast and packing a thousand punches it is initially a struggle to find a window of quiet to crawl into this world: a world of hard labour, humiliation and pain. Ultimately, it is the space between blows – the gentle cracking of a heart as Lambert skilfully illustrates his mother's degradation as she is forced to strip at the point of a Nazi's whip, and the silent courage of a child as she slips her little hand into her father's and looks into his eyes with steadfast defiance in her own – that tell the real story: the human story in all its different colours. When Lambert paints these moments for us, we step outside our own collection of facts, figures and timelines and into the lives and hearts of these characters.

Lambert's sheer physical force is admirable, so too is his fervent desire to communicate this story; his eye contact with the audience as unremitting as the forces that strike down upon him.

Those lurking shadows do not ever squash him down completely: in the six million victims that were massacred in the Holocaust, it was only ever lived through the eyes of single human. In this visceral and moving solo performance, lies one of these stories.

MARIGOLD HUGHES

THE SPECIAL GUESTS NIGHTFALL

With this solstice performance of *Nightfall*, The Special Guests conclude the tour of their most recent work; a time-specific investigation into the daily disappearance of the sun, performed at dusk on each date of the tour.

Moving between scientific explanation and social exploration of what this period of liminality means, the performance maintains a sincere but playful attitude to its subject matter as the four performers argue, dance, and explain their way through the evening.

This sense of play lies at the root of much of *Nightfall*. Whilst the exuberance of the company occasionally veers dangerously close to self-indulgence, on the whole the company manages to remain on the right side of such excesses, well in the domain of the endearing.

The biggest problem lies however in the way that the performance tackles its time-specificity. Whilst the company's use of radios to report back on the events outside the theatre overcome some of the difficulties inherent in a studio-based work that deals with issues around nightfall, this feels to be little more than a tokenistic gesture. It is a device akin to doing a site-specific work but not actually taking the audience to the site, only describing it to them.

Nightfall is an entertaining performance, quirky and charismatic, which unfortunately falls short of its potential to occupy a unique space in time. On the longest day of the year, when this promise should be at its greatest, such a failing sadly felt all the more poignant.

TIM JEEVES

**NATIONAL THEATRE OF SCOTLAND
BLACK WATCH
BARBICAN THEATRE/BITE, LONDON
JUNE 2008**

The much-heralded *Black Watch* is a cleverly constructed piece of 'total theatre' Directed by John Tiffany, it has a script (by acclaimed Scottish playwright Gregory Burke) worked up from interviews with young soldiers who have served in Iraq. With choreography by Frantic Assembly's Steven Hoggett, it is beautifully staged, and performed with gusto.

I loved a lot of things, particularly Hoggett's beautiful movement work, and the traditional regimental songs, sung with great heart. Good scenography: the scaffolding set used to denote different times/other spaces; screens running 24-hour news broadcasts; a row of lockers used to great effect for costume changes; and there's a gorgeous moment early on when the transformation from Fife pub to Iraqi desert happens with a sudden ripping of a pool table and the emergence from below of suited, booted and armed soldiers.

But I felt uneasy throughout and left with a bad taste in my mouth. So what's my problem? The sexism and homophobia for a start. Yes, these are soldiers – but there was no racism (beyond a timid reference here and there, say to 'Chinky' food) – a contemporary audience (rightly) wouldn't tolerate onstage racism, yet it's acceptable for women and gays to be denigrated?

And there is this terrible lie that informs the whole piece: that there is a noble history of soldiering; that this Iraqi business is somehow not real war, but a political quest. *Black Watch* ultimately buys into the glorification of war, which I suppose is why it made me angry.

DOROTHY MAX PRIOR

**DUKES THEATRE
BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
WILLIAMSON PARK, LANCASHIRE
JULY 2008**

Walking into Williamson Park, Lancaster on a beautiful summer's evening, it's the perfect setting for a promenade performance.

Using the breathtaking Victorian vistas, woodlands and dells as the natural scenery for the retelling of this classic tale, director Joe Sumison brings *Beauty and the Beast* back to its roots with a dark adaptation by Kevin Dyer.

This is no Disney cartoon but earthy and very beastly, with a strong cast, adept at playing multiple roles. The witty, nasty sisters Ruby and Grace persuade the audience to pull them uphill in carts to the magnificent Ashton Memorial, the scene for the Prince's / Beast's party, where he cruelly ridicules Beauty's father.

We then follow Beauty as she's tricked into entering the woods to save her father's life. The scenes in the wooded dell worked marvellously as the sun set, and the overhead birdcage lanterns entwined with giant silk roses lit up the night. The cast as the animalistic assistants in the Beast's hovel developed interesting and effective vocal soundscapes accompanied by a piano perched high up in the trees. They comfort Beauty by telling her own story from an imaginary book, as a means for time passing, which worked wonderfully.

Beast and Beauty dance and it's a beautiful moment when she unlocks his heart. The final scene of her kiss bringing the Prince back from death, was a little too underplayed for my liking, and could have been further developed with a bit more passion. But this is an imaginative retelling with some original theatrical delights and quality performances.

RACHEL RIGGS

**THÉÂTRE SANS FRONTIÈRES
COMO AGUA PARA CHOCOLATE
PLAYHOUSE, OXFORD
JUNE 2008**

This award-winning novel and film comes to the stage courtesy of Théâtre Sans Frontières, with a rough and ready humour set amongst a clear dramatic and physical theatricality. Exploring romantic and familial strife amidst revolutionary Mexico it bears clear comparisons to Lorca's *The House of Bernada Alba*, with the youngest daughter losing her lover to the eldest sister, thus opening up an exploration of familial fidelity and the desire and passions of youth.

There is a certain charm to the production, proving, despite the language barrier, entertainingly accessible; in fact, the moments of English narrative feel disjointed – jarring against the tempo of the rest of the piece. At times the theatrical tricks amongst the familial scenes are somewhat obvious and you wish for either an increased realism or something more theatrically adventurous. In contrast, and making further nods to the poetic symbolism of Lorca, is the classical masked dumb-show – interspersed throughout and with a relevance only apparent towards the climax of the play, it lends a suggestion of universality to the characters' relationships, while evoking a certain physical tenderness.

Against this are the more raucous moments of comedy and pathos: raiding revolutionaries, infant mortality and the squabbles of a family that succeed in evoking the concealed passions of the central figures. The lighter moments allow for a release of tension and an easier progress through the performance, though it doesn't reach the possible heights of passion that the narrative could afford.

TOM WILSON

**EVA WEAVER
THE BREAD OF THOSE YEARS
NIGHTINGALE THEATRE, BRIGHTON
JUNE 2008**

A woman burdened with suitcases makes her way across a floor strewn with stepping-stones of bread, as we watch the migration from one culture to another via the 'staff of life' mapped out from an eclectic collection of loaves.

After crossing a crazy paving of German ryes and sourdoughs, our protagonist reaches the stark choice of English brown or white. Reminiscences of arriving in England are punctuated by the toasting of her former tracks. Footprints remain embedded in the dough as a silver toaster periodically pings up the leitmotif of a human foot branded onto toast, up into the air.

The suitcases open up, the past is liberated, and questions are asked. Like Proust's *madeleine*, the medium of bread becomes a conduit to a personal and universal past, and the past opens up conflicts of history, of cultures, of identity. 'What,' she asks, 'do you really think about Germans?'

As she pulls on an outfit of lederhosen, Heidi wig, and leather boots, a film plays out on the back wall of a visit to her home town of Nuremberg where in the same outfit, she visits the famous market and the sites of the Nuremberg rallies. Seen in its original context the absurdity of stereotype is thrown into relief.

This moving, provoking and often humorous performance piece asks questions of our place in history that the preceding generation sometimes prefer not to answer. The motif of bread, in all its richness, proves to be an apt departure for the still unresolved narratives of our pre- and post-war homelands.

HELEN KANE



HAT FAIR WINCHESTER JULY 2008

I spent a good part of my time in Winchester seeing previously-seen things that I knew I liked – due to the admirable support of the Without Walls consortium many of the best shows on this year's street arts circuit were playing all the major festivals. At some point on Saturday (the fullest day in this four-day programme), I realised that I needed to get on and see some new work... or work that was new to me, at least.

So first up was **Nutkhut's** *Movieplex*. A two-part piece set in its own specially constructed 'hut' by the riverbank. In the first 'room' we encounter a performance-installation, a mock-reality documentation of the life of Shanta Rao Dutt, a Mumbai-born filmmaker who supposedly has played a key role in every single innovation in film over the twentieth century. Then we get to see a film. I like the installation (an old curiosity shop of Victorian bric-a-brac: pink satin gloves, globes, bones, feathers, and fans), but find the performers unconvincing. The film is an interesting sepia-tinted pastiche, a clever joke; but a joke that wears a bit thin. There seems to be the potential here for something far stronger: somehow the piece is less than the sum of its parts.

Back on the streets, I encounter **Wet Picnic's** *The Dinner Party*. It starts as a walkabout, as a great circular dining table and chandelier are dragged through the streets, accompanied by folks in evening dress (it all has something of an Adams Family feel). Settling down in a market square, our hostess for the party introduces herself: ladies and gentlemen, meet Ursula Harrington-Carrington-Larrington-Barrington-Schmarington – played by Jude Barrington-Smuts (and yes, that is her real name), who is an absolutely natural street theatre performer, trolling around in her swanky black cocktail dress, bantering with the audience and knowing exactly who to pick on for a little bit of light amusement. In fact, all of the cast of four (three, plus a stooge in the audience who is taken into the dinner party to be tormented mercilessly, and forced into an unpleasant encounter with mayonnaise) have a confidence and presence that belies their experience (this being their first street show). Essentially, they've grasped the core requirements of street theatre and have executed those requirements with panache: an interesting set-up (in this case, the walkabout section of the piece); an eye-catching set that creates an instant picture of the essence of the show; carefully controlled yet seemingly effortless interaction with the crowd; a short, sharp twenty-minute static show that is witty, surreal, sometimes a little risqué and always very funny. *The Dinner Party* was my discovery of the day; a delightful show from a company destined to go far (although at a slow pace, with that bloody great table to lug around).

Strolling back through the Cathedral Green I come across Catalan company **Kamchátka**. An overcoat-clad, long-faced line of people walk slowly across the grass, each carrying a suitcase. They approach a bunch of picnickers, looking intently at each in turn. The group put their cases down, slowly and in perfect unison open them, and each takes out the only object inside his/her case – a photograph. Each scrutinises the photograph, then again the picnickers. One is singled out, silently hugged by all of the 'overcoats'. The group painfully take their leave of the lost 'friend' and go. It is such a simple piece of theatre, but performed so carefully and beautifully that most of the picnickers sit in stunned silence, tears in their eyes. Physical theatre at its best: so much can be said without words.

Across the way was something completely different. Setting up his pitch was someone dressed as a medieval fool, bells and all, who was mumbling to himself and tipping an assortment of scrappy toys and kid's musical instruments onto the ground. This is **Rumpel the Jester** and this is what he does: bad juggling; playing the kazoo/toy guitar; putting his spring-boing shoes on and off and jumping around; fiddling with wind-up toys that then hop around the space; talking through his spooky voice-distorter mic. Basically, the setting up is the show, with much fiddling and little bursts of action here and there, and it goes on for hours – really for hours. People come and go (go, mostly) children gather round a kindred spirit (they are embraced into the action in a childlike and 'unperformative' way, which is very touching). Some of us stay, and stay, and stay; mesmerised, determined to see it out to the end. There is no end. For all I know, he's still there. The antithesis of clean, glib, arty 'outdoor performance' – long may he reign as court jester in this increasingly sanitised world.

DOROTHY MAX PRIOR

MEDIA

Publications reviewed by Dorothy Max Prior and Natalia Capra

THE LIVE ART ALMANAC

Ed. Daniel Brine

Live Art UK/Live Art Development Agency

ISBN 978-0-9546040-6-6

£5 paperback

www.unbound.co.uk

The Live Art Almanac is described as a collection of 'found' writing about and around Live Art. It includes previously published or otherwise distributed works (from 2006-2008) from a variety of sources. But lest you think you'd be getting a re-hash of academic essays sorted into a new order, think again... what we have here is a fascinating farrago of texts of all sorts: an obituary from the Independent (for Paul Burwell); a very cheeky letter from Simon Casson of Duckie to the Mc Master Theatre Review panel, entitled Demolish the Theatre!; an excerpt from David Gale's blog; a long email from Guillermo Gomez-Pena; Tim Etchells opening polemic from Spill Festival; a Lyn Gardner piece on Lone Twin; reviews; profiles... All words, no pictures – which is an interesting decision. Cheap, cheerful, and a jolly good read. Order from LADA's online bookstore, Unbound.

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THE THEATRE OF SOCIETAS

RAFFAELLO SANZIO

Joe Kelleher, Nicholas Ridout, Claudia

Castellucci, Chiara Guidi, Romeo Castellucci

Routledge

ISBN 978-0-4153543-1-8

£19.99 paperback/£75 hardback

www.routledge.com

The Theatre of Societas Raffaello Sanzio (the first English language book on the company) chronicles four years in the life of an extraordinary Italian theatre company whose work is widely recognised as some of the most exciting theatre currently being made in Europe. By assembling letters, production notes, essays and pictures, the book reflects on the processes of theatre making of the company, whose artistic aim is to create performances where the spectators can 'fall into representation that has neither narrative nor logical context'. The result is a sensorial experience where spectators get trapped into a net of visions, images, sounds or silences that recall some of our ancestral and inexplicable feelings. This book is not an easy read, but it is a unique piece of writing that asks us to enter the world of thoughts and theories of the company members.

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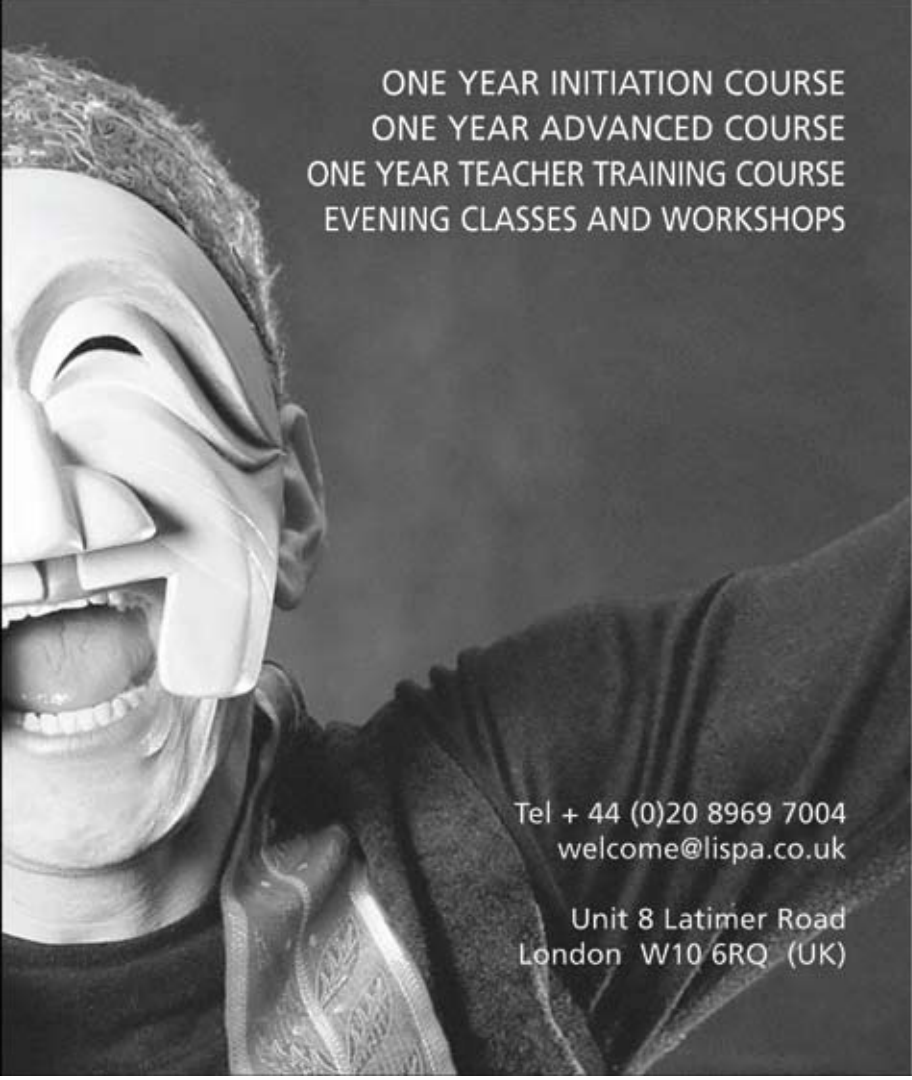
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2007: 246x174: 304pp

Hb: 978-0-415-35430-1: £75.00

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Small Acts of Repair

Performance, Ecology
and Goat Island

Edited by Stephen Bottoms
and Matthew Goulish

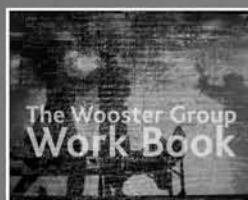
Carefully juxtaposing writing by company members and arts commentators, *Small Acts of Repair* reflects on Goat Island's work through the critical lens of ecological thinking.

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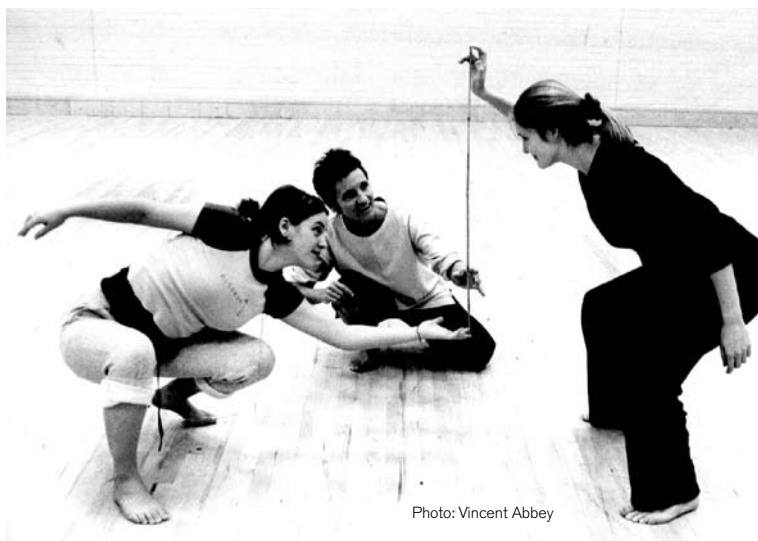
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