

TOTALTHEATRE

MAGAZINE

VOLUME 18 | ISSUE 02 | SUMMER 2006 | TOTALTHEATRE.ORG.UK
TOTAL THEATRE NETWORK CELEBRATING PHYSICAL + VISUAL PERFORMANCE

SPEND SUMMER NIGHTS SURVEYING THE BEST IN EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE, PERFORMANCE AND LIVE ART
TAKE A LONG LINGERING GAZE AT CONTEMPORARY VARIETY
GO DOWN DOWN INTO THE SHUNT VAULTS FOR A THREE-EYED LOOK AT AMATO SALTONE
SEE THE LIVING PICTURES THAT ARE STREET ANIMATIONS AND ENJOY THE UNCERTAINTIES OF IMPROVISATION
IS IT DANCE OR IS IT THEATRE? STRETCH YOUR NECK FOR A BETTER VIEW OF BRITISH DANCE EDITION 2006
COME INSIDE TO MEET A HOST OF FABULOUS CHARACTERS FROM FEMINIST ICON MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT TO THE FANTASTIC MR JOHN FOX
A TOTAL PACKAGE OF NEWS, REVIEWS, PREVIEWS AND FEATURES



EDITORIAL

Welcome to Total Theatre Magazine, which documents, celebrates and supports physical and visual theatre and performance.

Within the context of these various roles, the question of reviewing work is often raised. Who, why, what, where and when should we review? And are there better ways to report on contemporary performance than the regular short-review format, read with a presumption of the writer's critical distance from the work?

Our continuing policy is to present as broad a range of approaches as possible to a broad range of work from both emerging and established artists. In our reviews section we publish a selection of reports that fit the 'conventional' short-review model, intended as a snapshot of a performance at one particular place and time. The usual ground-rule is that the person writing the piece has no professional or personal connections to the artist(s) responsible for the work, although the difficulty here is that in the small world of performance-making, overlaps of some sort are sometimes unavoidable. This is not a new problem: Kenneth Tynan often reviewed work with which he had strong connections, and many years ago an attempt by a national newspaper to stop book reviews written by friends and associates of the authors resulted in the prospect of a succession of blank pages, so the decision had to be reversed.

Other ways and means of reporting on contemporary work include longer reflections in the editorial section of the magazine. These include responses to work seen within the context of a festival or event, an example in this issue being Borderline Cases, which circles around British Dance

Edition 2006. Another way to 'review' work might be within a feature looking at one particular strand of practice – an example being Edward Taylor's reflection on walkabout in Street Animations. We also document contemporary practice from the artist's perspective with articles written by practitioners about their own work, such as the artist's diary by Anna Birch on Wollstonecraft Live!

One item in this issue breaks the mould by being something different again: a three-way (re)view of Shunt's Amato Saltone, which after some consideration has been placed among the reviews rather than in the editorial section. This piece attempts to find an alternative response, and equivalent perspective, to a multi-dimensional piece of work that challenges the notion of a 'fixed' performance text, by giving three points of view of the show, as witnessed on the same night. Two of the witnesses are there as reviewers, one giving a considered reflection, and the other presenting an in-the-moment response to the sensations, thoughts and images evoked by the performance. The third eye is that of one of the Shunt collective itself – so a case of 'artist, review thyself'.

We hope to find other innovative ways to 'review' work in future issues, and would welcome suggestions as to how we might re-evaluate and renew the art of reviewing!

Dorothy Max Prior, Editor

*Comments on anything in this issue of
Total Theatre Magazine welcome to
editorial@totaltheatre.org.uk*

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The Power Station
Coronet St, London N1 6HD

Further information
+44 (0) 20 7729 7944
e-mail: admin@totaltheatre.org.uk
www.totaltheatre.org.uk

TOTAL THEATRE MAGAZINE

Editor
DOROTHY MAX PRIOR
editorial@totaltheatre.org.uk

Editorial Forum
ROBERT AYERS
FRANC CHAMBERLAIN
RICHARD CUMING
ANTHONY DEAN
LAURA EADES
BARRY EDWARDS
PENNY FRANCIS
DAVID HARRADINE
MARIGOLD HUGHES
MIRIAM KING
ALEX MERMIKIDES
BECCY SMITH
EDWARD TAYLOR
MISCHA TWITCHIN
CASSIE WEBBER
TOM WILSON

Thanks to
NICK DE SOMOGYI

Advertising & Subscriptions
FELICITY HALL
admin@totaltheatre.org.uk
advertising@totaltheatre.org.uk

Design
STUDIO TONNE
studio.tonnetonne.com

Printing
ANDUS
andus@mistral.co.uk

Published by:
TOTAL THEATRE NETWORK
The Power Station
Coronet Street
London N1 6HD

Tel 020 7729 7944
Fax 020 7729 7945
www.totaltheatre.org.uk

Director
FELICITY HALL
felicity@totaltheatre.org.uk

Board
ANTHONY DEAN
DEB DURRANT
CLARE FUREY
JASON HIRD
JONATHAN HOLLOWAY
LYNNE KENDRICK
DANNY SCHLESINGER

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COVER: SPYMONKEY AT BRIGHTON FESTIVAL MAY 2006/ PHOTO SEAN DENNIE

TOTAL THEATRE MAGAZINE | VOLUME 18 | ISSUE 02 | SUMMER 2006



As the days grow longer, Total Theatre takes you into pastures new – although not without a little summer nostalgia for past days of wine and roses. In **THE FANTASTIC MR FOX JOHN FOX** ^{P8} we hear about the last ever gig by Welfare State International and the future plans and projects of its founder. **OLD DOG, NEW TRICKS** DOROTHY MAX PRIOR ^{P11} looks at variety: a rich source of reference for contemporary performance, or an artform in its own right? We stay with 'popular theatre' forms in **STREET ANIMATIONS** EDWARD TAYLOR ^{P14}, which highlights the many excellent examples of walkabout street theatre. **WOLLSTONECRAFT LIVE!** ANNA BIRCH ^{P16} is an artist's diary plotting the development of a multi-media exploration of the writings of prototype feminist Mary Wollstonecraft. A tribute of a very different sort can be found in **JOHN BULL PUNCTURE REPAIR KIT** BRIAN POPAY ^{P18}, the latest in our ongoing Best of British series. In **BORDERLINE CASES** EVE WEDDERBURN ^{P20} we go to Leeds for British Dance Edition 2006 to ponder on the intersection points between dance and theatre. **MAKING IT UP** WALLACE MCDOWELL ^{P23} looks at improvisation in performance, as witnessed at the SHIFT1 event at Warwick Arts Centre.

In our regular sections: find out about the summer's festivals and events in **NEWS & PREVIEWS** ^{P4} and catch up on the tours and project plans for Total Theatre artists in **PERFORMER & COMPANY UPDATES** ^{P6}

REVIEWS ^{P24} include a meaty selection from the London International Mime Festival 2006, a ground-breaking three-way look at Shunt's Amato Saltone, Kneehigh's Nights at the Circus, emerging stars Special Guests and Organic Theatre, and living legends Lepage and Gardzienice.

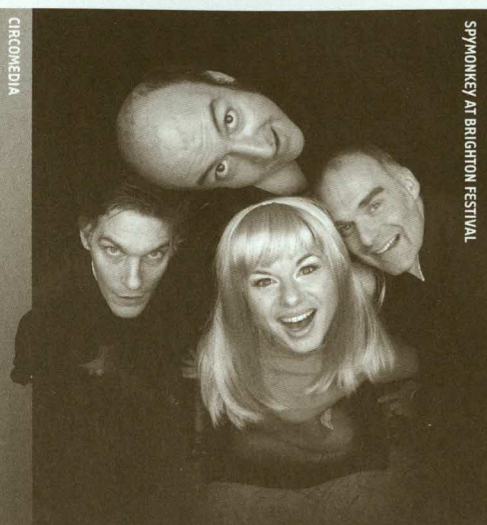
MEDIA ^{P31} brings you a selection of the latest publications on performance. And, as always, **TRAINING & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT** ^{P31} lists upcoming courses, classes, workshops and symposia.



UNPACKED AT CPT SPRINT



CIRCOMEDIA



SPYMONKEY AT BRIGHTON FESTIVAL

TOTAL THEATRE AWARDS 2006 AT EDINBURGH FESTIVAL FRINGE

Total Theatre Awards are a well-established event at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, honouring the best in physical and visual theatre/performance. The Awards this year are generously sponsored by both Central School of Speech and Drama (who are new sponsors for 2006) and the University of Winchester (who are continuing their ongoing support for the Awards). The Awards 2006 launch date is 12 June, and nominations from Fringe artists/companies/programmers can be accepted after that date, up until 1 August 2006. We will also be accepting Wild Card nominations up until 15 August. From 12 June, entry forms for proposals can be requested by email from awards@totaltheatre.org.uk or they can be downloaded from the website, which will also carry full information on the nominations and judging process. See www.totaltheatre.org.uk. There will be a special Total Theatre Awards supplement in the next issue of Total Theatre Magazine, published 1 August 2006.

PCT TOASTS PUPPETRY BURSARIES The Puppet Centre Trust, the national development agency for the artform of puppetry, have recently announced the winners of their prestigious bursary scheme. The scheme, designed to support artists of exceptional potential, offers £8500 in order to support professional development. This year's winners Luis Boy and Sara Ekenger were presented with their cheques by Chairman of the PCT Board Professor Anthony Dean at a reception held in March. Luis Boy is artistic director of Norwich Puppet Theatre, and has a prestigious career as a freelance puppetry director. The bursary will fund an advanced R & D period into film and light/shadow. Sara Ekenger is a founder member of acclaimed company Unpacked. The bursary will support her research into the theatrical possibilities of the mechanical form, combining physics, engineering and puppetry. For more information contact Beccy Smith on 0207 228 5335. See www.puppetcentre.com.

ARTSAGENDA FIRST BIRTHDAY ArtsAgenda's first year has been filled with wonderful discoveries and unexpected surprises and the future looks set to develop in increasingly interesting directions. Katie Etheridge is finalizing the details of her UK summer tour following the success of her appearance at the National Review of Live Art in Glasgow. Dreamthinkspeak announce the first dates of their 2006 tour of Total Theatre Award winning Don't Look Back. New faces to the ArtsAgenda family include aerial performance company Gravity & Levity and live artist Charlie Murphy. For more information on all artists and projects, email info@artsagenda.co.uk. See www.artsagenda.co.uk.

BFAP RELAUNCHES AS THE BASEMENT May is going to be a busy month for arts organisation Brighton Fringe Arts Production. SubScreenSonic: An International Exhibition of Gig Poster Art kicks off on 12 May - 29 May with its collection of events including masterclasses and panel debates. They are also planning a big name change to better reflect the varied services and they provide for emergent, professional performing and visual artists. BFAP is soon to be known as The Basement, a connection to its atmospheric underground rehearsal and production space, which has been making a name for itself as a premier venue for experimental art works. The name will also be applied to describe the services and resources the organisation provides to artists outside of their Basement venue. For more information email info@brightonfringe.net.

CIRCOMEDIA GRAND REUNION As we go to press students, staff and alumni are gathering to celebrate Circomedia's 12th year with a cabaret party held on 28 April. The company that has been responsible for two decades of circus and physical theatre training has also announced this year's show: Cold Blood (Warm Heart) will be a dramatic show featuring breathtaking aerial skills, cool manipulation and juggling and fearless acrobatics. It takes place at Bristol Old Vic from 21 - 24 June, at 7.30pm with a Sat matinee at 2pm. See www.bristol-old-vic.co.uk. For information on Circomedia's many training and professional development options, tel 0117 947 7288, email info@circomedia.com or see www.circomedia.com.

BRIGHTON INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL MAY 2006

The eclectic and exciting 2006 main programme of England's largest arts festival includes a large number of UK artists (many in the Total Theatre extended family) performing on home territory: Total Theatre Award winners Spymonkey return triumphantly from a two-year stint with Cirque du Soleil (in Las Vegas!) with a re-vamped version of Cooped; Stomp premiere a new show, Lost and Found Orchestra; Tim Crouch's News from Nowhere bring An Oak Tree, hit of last year's Edinburgh Fringe, back to the old home town. Prodigal Theatre's Ten Thousand Several Doors is a reworking of Webster's Duchess of Malfi set in the backrooms, stairways and surrounding streets of the Nightingale Theatre. Told by an Idiot's The Evocation of Papa Mas goes right to the heart of carnival, and Kneehigh associates WildWorks bring Souterrain, a landscape theatre piece, to Stanmer Park. Festival Fringe highlights include Organic Theatre, ChoppedLogic, Lone Twin, Unpacked, The Tiger Lillies, and a fabulous line-up at the Famous Spiegeltent that includes Ragroof Theatre's Tea Dance, Ida Barr's Bingo and a welcome return of the best variety show in the UK, La Clique. See www.brightonfestivalfringe.org.uk.

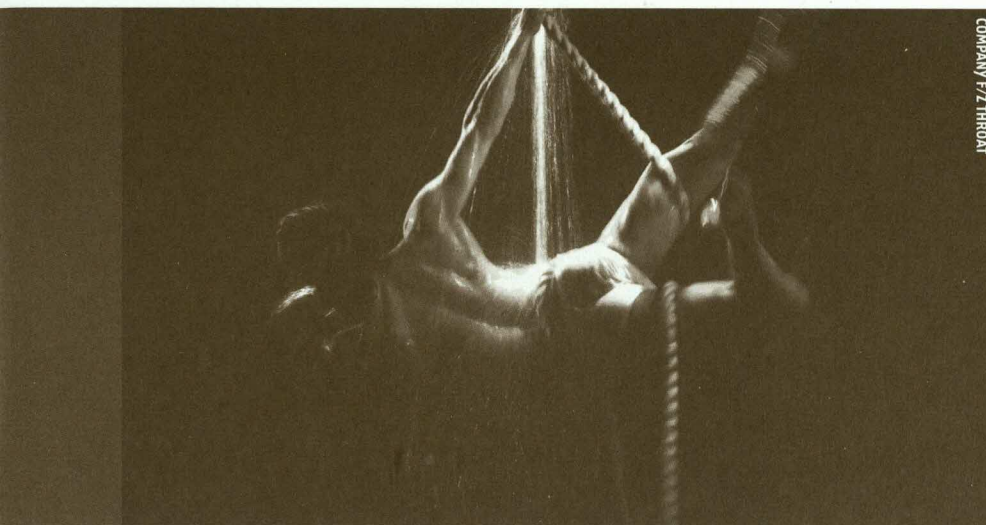
CPT SPRINT FESTIVAL OF NEW THEATRE MAY 2006

This year's Sprint programme at Camden People's Theatre features a new show from Unpacked, No Obvious Trauma, described as 'a macabre, comic and fantastical piece of theatre' that fuses physical theatre, object animation and puppetry. There's also UK-based international company Dan Kai Teatro with Nana Del Caballo, Laura Griffin with The Flickering Truths of a Cruel and Dirty Bitch, new shows from Petra's Pulse (Donkey Shadow) and ChoppedLogic (The Runaround), and work by Song Theatre, Demonstrate, Karl's Imposter and Loose Chippings Theatre Company. Also a pay-what-you-can programme of works in progress and Forbidden's Freestyle day of experimentation. See www.cpttheatre.co.uk.

FORBIDDEN THEATRE COMPANY As mentioned in the item on Sprint, Forbidden Theatre Company will be holding their annual Freestyle Performances on 21 May, at the Camden People's Theatre, Hampstead Road, London. The event will start at 5.30pm. Tickets are £3 and they can be reserved on 08450 093084. The Freestyle Performances provide a physical and mental space for company members to test theatrical ideas in front of an audience. For more information please visit www.forbidden.org.uk.

NORFOLK & NORWICH FESTIVAL MAY 2006 Norfolk & Norwich Festival, under the directorship of Jonathan Holloway, have added a new dimension to their established festival - a range of 'left-field' events that includes circus, street carnival, magic, clowning and sound installations. The line-up for 2006 includes Circus Ronaldo's Cucina dell'Arte, Les Grooms with Threepenny Ring

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO SUBMIT NEWS OR LISTINGS OR TO ADVERTISE IN THE NEXT ISSUE, PLEASE NOTE THAT THE COPY DEADLINE IS 7TH JUNE 2006.



Cycle, Company F/Z's Total Theatre Award winner Throat, a scintillating mix of sex and circus, and Sarruga, a Spanish company that specialises in dramatic, large-scale outdoor spectacles, with massive, creatures, illuminated from within, which move through the audience in a terrifying yet thrilling way. For Norfolk & Norwich Festival listings or to request a free festival magazine, tel 01603 614921 or see www.nnfestival.org.uk

BAC'S BURST FESTIVAL MAY 2006 BAC assembles 16 big nights out in BURST including 9 music gigs, 15 theatre shows, 4 performance lectures and poetry nights, 4 sound installations, 4 premieres, 4 workshops, 12 Scratch performances, 12 shows commissioned by BAC, and 1 huge Trashy party. BAC seeks out the future with artists who dance around the edge of sound, theatre and music. Highlights include: Lone Twin, Jake Oldershaw, Richard Dedomenici, Patrizia Paolini, David Gale, Richard Thomas and Punchdrunk. See www.bac.org.uk

STREET ARTS FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS The 2006 street arts season kicks off with Streets of Brighton, which takes place 11-13 May, and presents an exciting range of street arts events with an On/Off programme based on the French festival model. Highlights include a large-scale piece by pyrotechnic company extraordinaire Groupe F. In June and July, there is a weekend intensive Greenwich+Docklands Festival 23-25 June, followed by Winchester Hat Fair 30 June-2 July. Hat Fair highlights include Get Lost by Dot Comedy), who can also be seen at Falkirk and Brighton in May, and Nutkhit's Bollywood Steps who are co-commissioned by Stockton International Riverside Festival 2-6 August. Another highlight at Stockton will be the appearance of Brazilian aerialist circus company Circo da Madrugada, which takes place in a 40m high 'angeldrome' and is the story of a group of angels who visit earth every 500 years to sample life's pleasures. SIRF will also see new work from Hoodwink, Metro Boulot Dodo, Wrong size and Caravan of Desire. The Independent Street Arts Network (ISAN) website has information and links to all the major street arts events: see www.streetartsnetwork.org.uk

THE SULTAN'S ELEPHANT BY ROYAL DE LUXE The streets of London are to host the biggest piece of free theatre ever staged in the capital, 4-7 May 2006. The Sultan's Elephant, a fairy tale for all ages, features a vast, moving, wooden elephant, 42 tons in weight, and the height of a three-storey house. The spectacle is the work of French company Royal de Luxe, who are famous world-wide but hardly known in Britain — although previously profiled by Edward Taylor in Total Theatre (Volume 13-2, Summer 2001). This is the first time one of their 'giant' shows has appeared in London — indeed, the

first time one has played in any capital city. It is produced by Artichoke's Helen Marriage and co-produced by LIFT. Route to be announced: for updates see www.thesultanselephant.com

MANCHESTER INTERNATIONAL ARTS

MIA are extremely disappointed to report that Manchester's Garden of Delights festival will not be taking place this year. In its place are a series of smaller but equally alluring events, under the banner Enchanted Evenings, which include appearances by the legendary Theater Titanick from Germany on 2-3 June, a Feast on 17-18 June, and the fabulous Circus Ronaldo (Belgium) 14-17 July. MIA are also producing WOW: Windermere over Water 24-25 June at The Glebe Recreational Space, Bowness, Windermere, Cumbria, a free weekend extravaganza around the Lake District's most celebrated lake, including a visit from French company Quidams with their delightful night-time show Herbert's Dream in which four stilted wraiths guide the crowd on a journey to find a mysterious light, with fireworks from Manchester-based pyro-wizards Walk the Plank. For full details see www.streetsahead.org.uk

STATION HOUSE OPERA Station House Opera's Roadmetal Sweetbread (winner of a Total Theatre Award 2005) has further dates planned for Slovenia in August, Lithuania in September and at NOW Festival, Nottingham, 23-24 October. Roadmetal Sweetbread is available for further touring — each performance recreated specifically for a unique environment. From 14-24 June 2006, Station House Opera will present the transcontinental premiere of their new work Play on Earth simultaneously in Brazil, Singapore and the UK. A cast of nine performers in the three different countries will perform together, shown concurrently across three continents. For further information email: judith@artsdmin.co.uk See www.artsadmin.co.uk and www.stationhouseopera.com

STEVEN WHINNERY AND LYING WITH THE ANIMALS

Steven and his menagerie (including fellow Animals Sophie Powell and Daniel Gentely) will be coming out of hibernation for the Hackney Spice festival (provisional performance date 21 July). Lying with the Animals is a mask theatre piece commissioned by the South Bank Centre and premiered in 2004 to popular and critical acclaim. They are currently looking for other venues for the autumn and seeking potential collaborators. The company are seeking new members and holding workshop/auditions in London on Sat 6 May and Sat 20 May. Send CV, photo and covering letter to: Steven Whinnery, Lying with the Animals, 52 Daubeney Road, London E5 0EF. For further information email Steven at steven@lyingwiththeanimals.com or see www.lyingwiththeanimals.com

BANDBAZI CIRCUS THEATRE is a multi-cultural, artist-led company dedicated to creating challenging and original new works combining circus with theatre. It has recently been awarded an organisational development grant by Arts Council England, South East. BandBazi's current show, The Persian Cinderella, tours Scotland April-May before an appearance at the Sallis Benney as part of Brighton Festival Fringe on 11 May 6pm and Jackson's Lane Theatre, Highgate, London on 10 June. Their show Breakfast at Audrey's is to go to Germany in May before a national tour in Sept-Oct. The company is looking for new board members who can bring their expertise and vision to shaping its future. If you are interested, please email: mail@bandbazi.co.uk. See www.bandbazi.co.uk

DYNAMIC NEW ANIMATION (DNA)

are currently touring their witty and lively adaptation of Puss in Boots, directed by Steve Tiplady of Indefinite Articles, to theatres, arts centres and street theatre festivals. DNA's touring puppetry marquee Puppets A Go Go! will also be out and about this summer, and DNA would be interested to hear from performers with a short piece of puppetry for the evening cabaret component. With the support of the British Council and UK Trade and Investment, DNA's tour developer Rosa Parkin attended the Australian Performing Arts Market in Adelaide last February. DNA are working on touring and collaboration opportunities arising from this visit. To find out more email: DNA@dynamicnewanimation.co.uk or see www.dynamicnewanimation.co.uk

MIMBRE After Christmas performances in Genoa, New Year in Hong-Kong and next to the slopes at the Olympic games in Turin, mimbre is now back with shows Sprung and Trip-tic, as well as an acrobatic, character-based walkabout designed by Strangelings and inspired by the paintings of Marc Chagall. A planned new production for 2007 features a series of sketches set on a bridge, using acrobatics, dance and physical theatre. Mimbre are looking for co-commissioners and potential bookers, and theatres in London who would be interested in supporting or co-producing the piece, providing logistic support and rehearsal space. They plan to tour this show for three years in UK, Europe and worldwide. For more information, email info@mimbre.co.uk. For the summer's tour-schedule and availability see www.mimbre.co.uk

3 MONKEY PRODUCTIONS



LOST & FOUND THEATRE



3 MONKEY PRODUCTIONS After a great first year, street theatre absurdists 3 Monkey Productions are going from strength to strength. The team continues to expand and collaborate with other artists, including directing Upswing, Bash Street Theatre and Bright Fx. Their street theatre comedy spectacle The Incredible Bull Circus has a fantastic tour planned including UK, Irish, French, Dutch, Belgian, Spanish and Canadian dates. They also continue the next stage development of a three-year project, which began in 2005 with the The Shop, developing the absurdist cinematic world introduced in that show. During a month's residency at The Ateliers 231, Rouens, France they will be working on a new mid-scale nighttime production for 2007 entitled The Quarter. This will then lead into The Street in 2008. For further information email admin@3monkeyproductions.co.uk. See www.3monkeyproductions.co.uk

ANDREW DAWSON Total Theatre Award winning Absence and Presence recently spent a two-week season at PS122 in New York City as the winner of the Carol Tambour Award 2005. Andrew has stayed on in New York to work on the new work by Rainpan 43 (All Wear Bowlers). Other projects include The Process of Portrayal, with neurologist Jonathan Cole, filmmaker Chris Rawlence and performer/Alexander Technique teacher Lucia Walker. Supported by Welcome Trust, they are working with people who are tetraplegic with a view to expanding awareness of movement impairment. Work is also in process with on a collaboration with Jos Houben. Absence and Presence will continue to tour in the autumn, including UCLA in October. See www.andrewdawson.info

COLLABORATORS THEATRE COMPANY Fallen Star, a new show for children and adults, is a unique international collaboration in which magical and poetic shadows, puppetry and acting are fused with an unusual mix of music and percussion. Fallen Star travels to Istanbul in the late spring and tours the north of the UK in the autumn 2006. If you are interested in booking this show please contact Frankie Aitchison, tel 07968 586 995, email francesaatchison@aol.com or see www.collaboratorstheatre.co.uk

CREATURE FEATURE PRODUCTIONS LTD Creature Feature have two new shows for 2006: There Ain't Nothin' Like a Dame! is a comic and highly visual three-hander walkabout with static moments, and with loads of audience participation. Based on Pantomime principles, the performance is aimed at all age groups. Also, Rin Tin Tin And Creature Feature have worked in collaboration to produce a new street theatre show called www.we-r-beauty.con, an original and perceptive parody of the beauty business.

FOURSIGHT THEATRE Apna Ghar (Our Home) is a collaboration with Black Country Touring and English Heritage. This new production will be based on the stories of South Asian women in Sandwell, West Midlands. These stories will be the stimulus for a creative team including designers, makers, musicians, choreographers and performers drawn from both the region and the Punjab to create a site-specific show to be performed in early June 2006. Contact Emma Beale on tel 01902 714257 or email foursight.theatre@boltblue.com. See www.foursight.theatre.boltblue.net

HOODWINK Hoodwink's new outdoor show for 2006, Pleasure Garden, commissioned by Stockton International Riverside Festival and Henley International Festival and supported by ACE can be seen at Henley Festival from 5-9 July, and at Stockton International Riverside Festival 2-6 August. Hoodwink are also touring Tock Tick and Gastronomic in summer 2006. Hoodwink have also just been awarded funding from ACE towards the creation of a site specific show commissioned by Salisbury Festival in 2007 called Flood. Flood, a promenade performance in collaboration with Sarum Chamber Orchestra around river sites in Salisbury. For further information and tour dates see www.hoodwinktheatre.co.uk

LOST & FOUND THEATRE

Following the work-in-progress performance of The Lost Moon (created in collaboration with Little Angel Theatre artists), Lost & Found have now received a second grant from Arts Council England South East to develop it into a full-length show to be toured initially to rural venues, theatres and arts centres throughout the south east. Mandy Travis of Lost & Found has been offered the wonderful opportunity of working with director/designer and puppeteer Nino Namitcheishvili from The Basement Theatre in Tbilisi, Georgia. Mandy visited Tbilisi for a week in April 2006, and Nino will be coming to England in June to develop the show further.

For further information contact Lost & Found on: tel 07742 611634, email info@lostandfoundtheatre.co.uk or see www.lostandfoundtheatre.co.uk

ORGANIC THEATRE Organic Theatre will tour with performances of Sheepskin at the Nightingale Theatre (Brighton Fringe) on 26 May and in Exeter, Paignton, and Bristol in June, prior to a national tour in the autumn. Mask and Transformation training and research project is continuing to develop into a full production. The company is also organising The Present Generation workshops, in Naples, Italy, 26 June-1 July. International participants will develop an interdisciplinary performance installation in collaboration with guest facilitators within Contemporary Art Museum PAN, set in a 17th-century Neapolitan Palazzo. Tel 01392-275787 or email info@organictheatre.co.uk for details or visit www.organictheatre.co.uk

NATURAL THEATRE COMPANY Natural Theatre's Artistic Director Ralph Oswick is once again organising a huge street party for 6,000 guests in Bath's Widcombe suburb, where the Naturals are based. The event is themed to the 19th-century heritage of the area and the entire neighbourhood is expected to dance down the street to a specially written polka. Renowned for their walkabout characters, the Natural Theatre Company are currently creating a new static installation - The Literary Greengrocer - an old fashioned market stall, with brown-coated barrow boys promoting fruity fiction and leafy literature... see how many uses and abuses of the greengrocer's apostrophe you can spot! For further information email info@naturaltheatre.co.uk. See www.naturaltheatre.co.uk

NIKI MCCRETTON Niki McCretton's new project Space 50 recaptures the past fifty years of space travel. The show looks at the history of this meteoric journey through the eyes of those who remember the onset in 1957. Niki's research takes her to Moscow through the support of Space Adventures USA (the people who put tourists into space) where she will visit and film the space training facilities and work on choreography whilst wearing a space suit. Space 50 has been endorsed by Arthur C. Clarke and is supported by Lighthouse in Poole, where Niki is currently the Associate Artist. Space 50 will tour in 2007 alongside Mutttnik, the First Dog in Space. For more information tel 07867 565 880, email nikimccretton@lineone.net or see www.nikimccretton.com

NOLA RAE'S LONDON MIME THEATRE As part of the continuing celebrations of his 250th anniversary, Mozart Preposteroso! is still much in demand. Nola Rae will take it to Santander for the Arrigorriaga Clown Festival, 12-13 May, to Rovereto in July, the Regent Centre, Christchurch 4 June and the Sinden Theatre, Tenterden 9 June. Her last show, *Exit Napoleon Pursued By Rabbits* will appear at Port de Bouc on 18 May. During the summer she will be working on a new show, *Home Made Shakespeare* in which she joins forces with Lasse Akerlund (Teater Allena) to produce an evening of delicious Shakespearean morsels.

PANTS ON FIRE Pants on Fire will be performing *Labyrinthine*, a brand new devised show, at the Enterprise06 season at The Space, 30 May-4 June. The show is set against the backdrop of the Second World War and tells a version of the Theseus and the Minotaur myth. Director Peter Bramley and a cast of 12 performers will continue the company's exploration of visual storytelling, Bunraku puppetry, chorus, mask and film with original music composed by Lucy Egger. Pants on Fire have been invited to perform at the Arena Festival in Germany (6-11 July) with their Edinburgh hit show *SPLICE: A Theatrical Ode to Cinema*. For more information on performances and training opportunities see www.pantsonfiretheatre.com

PEOPLE SHOW People Show will be staging a performance party, the Birthday Show (People Show 117) at People Show Studios in Bethnal Green 12-15 July. They are devising the party as four nights of performance. Possibly re-staging, re-inventing, realising unrealised performance moments from People Show's past. There will be live music and cake. People Show 118 - *Expedition* will be a touring exhibition: an animated museum of curiosities with a live performance element. People Show 119 - *The Ghost Sonata* is a site-specific production inspired by Strindberg which will tour in 2007. Set in glasshouses, this will be a classic, simple fairy story. For further information, email people@peopleshow.co.uk or see www.peopleshow.co.uk

PERHILION THEATRE COMPANY / ALASDAIR SATCHEL From *One Man Rant* to *Two Man Rumble!* The *One Man Rant* is performed as part of the Brighton Fringe at Nightingale Theatre Twice-nightly on 18th and 19th May (19.00 and 21.00). Further afield for the *Two Man Rumble*, which will take place at Prague Fringe 2-4 June. To find out more contact Alasdair Satchel, tel 077 697 958 44, email alsatch@hotmail.com or see www.hi-arts.co.uk/perhilion.htm

PHIL SMITH Phil Smith has been performing *For Space* (for the Making Space/Taking Space conference), delivering a series of presentation/performances on his performative walking. As TNT dramaturg he has co-written/adapted *Frankenstein* for its present tour of Europe and Asia and is helping prepare text and concepts for the forthcoming TNT tour of *Taming Of The Shrew*. With *Wrights & Sites* he is publishing a new book, *A Mis-Guide To Anywhere*, which was launched with walks and presentations at the ICA in April. He is also preparing *Coastal Edge*, a performance about the coastal path between Shaldon and Babbacombe, for Tide and Time.

PLATFORM 4 Platform 4 is currently touring *Shiver - A Dark Fable of Love and Loss*, written by Hattie Naylor. They also have a new publication, *No Moon*, A small book of poetry written by Anna Maria Murphy, following a series of Christmas workshops commissioned by the Drill Hall, London in December 05. Finally, BLISS is their new show for 2007, currently in its early stages of development, with an installation investigating patient's feelings of BLISS at a local doctor's surgery - its a welcome relief for the company following *Claustrophobia 05* and *Shiver 06!* For further information and tour dates, see www.platform4.org

PÚCA PUPPETS Púca Puppets new show, produced in association with Carlow's Éigse festival, is *Coraline*, which is based on Neil Gaiman's novella of the same name. It opens in Carlow 15-17 June till the 17th, then goes to the Midsummer Festival, Cork, 23-24 June. It is available for touring to the UK July and August 2006. It will then be seen in Dublin at Project Arts Centre, 16-28 October and Meath Arts Centre, Navan 10-12 November. For further information email pucapuppets@eircom.net

RAJNI SHAH In January 2006, Rajni co-produced the conference *An Invitation to Tea*, which challenged language and direction in the debate around diversity. In February she worked with Lucille Acevedo-Jones and Cis O-boyle to perform *Mr Quiver* at Fresh and the National Review of Live Art. The show is now a four-hour installation performance perfect for festivals of new, experimental or visual work as well as those themed around identity. Rajni's fellowship at the Farnham Maltings ends in May after which she plans to spend some time developing work for public spaces, funded by the Live Art Development Agency's One to One Bursary scheme, and to continue work as an adviser and creative producer. See www.rajnishah.com

RAGROOF THEATRE Preparations are in full swing for *Shall we Dance?* a show designed for bandstands and inspired by the memories of local older people about partner dancing. As the band strikes up and the glitter-ball twirls, the bandstand is brought to life by glamorous dancing couples from the 1920s to 1950s. The main performance events are: 24 June at Calverley Gardens Bandstand, Tunbridge Wells; 29 July at Brighton in Brunswick Square (The flagship show of Celebrating Age Festival) and 31 August at The Pier, Hastings. Ragroof are also hosting a stylish tea dance in the famous Spiegeltent, Brighton, 7 May 2-4pm. Dress to impress for all events! Email ragrooftheatre@yahoo.co.uk

SINÉAD RUSHE

Sinéad Rushe, in collaboration with Camille Litalien, has received funding from the Arts Council to perform her recent show, *Night-Light*, for three weeks at Oval House Theatre, London 16 May-3 June. The show then tours, together with a previous show, *Life in the Folds*, to Ustinov Studio, Theatre Royal, Bath; Bristol Old Vic Studio, South Street, Reading; Old Museum Arts Centre, Belfast, Mac, Birmingham; The Gate, Cardiff. For more information contact producer Kate Houlden, email katehoulden@hotmail.com or visit www.outofinc.co.uk

PÚCA PUPPETS



TALL STORIES The *Gruffalo's Child* has been born, to a welcoming world. It premiered at Polka Theatre in autumn 2005 and played Maidenhead's Norden Farm over the Xmas period. Our other Xmas productions were *The Gruffalo* at Hampstead Theatre and *The Snow Dragon* at Soho Theatre. All three were enthusiastically received and continue to tour, alongside *Them With Tails*, our co-production with Network of Stuff. Since January, Tall Stories has been resident at Ickenham's Compass Theatre, in the London borough of Hillingdon. See www.tallstories.org.uk

TARRY THEATRE PROJECTS Tarry Theatre Projects is a new Brighton-based company, led by artistic director Jade Blue, creating performance which tells stories that will challenge audiences to question their social and political understandings. Tarry Theatre also looks to create performance collaborations between established artists and younger artists, focusing predominantly on the use of physical theatre, combined with clowning, circus, music, puppetry and illusion, aiming to create theatre that matters, that goes beyond being ornamental, that provokes, challenges, questions and inspires. For more information email tarrytheatreprojects@yahoo.co.uk

THE WHALLEY RANGE ALLSTARS New show *Compost Mentis* features a large compost heap and the gardener who looks after it. Their relationship slowly begins to break down when it's discovered that the compost heap has a life of its own and harbours thoughts that are fermenting within. Puppet, mechanical and musical interventions ensure that the audience, like the gardener, are led up the garden path. The show is designed for outdoor spaces and signals a break from the company's previous three intimate shows designed for small audiences. It opens at the Lyric Hammersmith, 2-4 June and then tours. In addition, *Pig and Bedcases* tour from May to October, in the UK, Portugal, Germany, Slovenia, Holland, Belgium and Lithuania. All dates can be found at www.wras.org.uk

THE WRONG SIZE The new 2006 show for this well-established circus theatre company is *Luminous*, created in collaboration with designer Emma Burton and composer Pete Coyte, directed by Kirsty Little and performed by the company as a quintet on stilts. The *Wrong Size* offers this unique medium-scale show for festivals in 2006. The show plays with the discovery of light and it is performed outdoors using simple symbolic imagery. The combination of colours, music and contemporary movement culminates in a fantastic uplifting flag routine. The personal lighting costumes have a LED system meaning they have the potential for 16 million colours! See www.wrongsizes.co.uk

THE FANTASTIC MR FOX

WELL FAREWELL, THEN...

A FEW WORDS FROM JOHN FOX ON
THE OCCASION OF THE LAST EVER GIG
BY WELFARE STATE INTERNATIONAL

'Here make-believe time goes backwards. The journey, like ours, is both complete and continuing, so there is just cause for celebration.'

These lines, spoken by our young narrator at the end of the evening, bring into focus the three intentions of Longline the Carnival Opera.

The first is our completion of three years' work connecting with the communities of Ulverston and the Bay. Nearly 500 people have had a major influence on the Longline process. At Lanternhouse we have assembled songs, stories and ideas which have gelled into exhibitions, installations, theatrical performances, concerts, CDs, DVDs, workshops, books, lectures and meetings. One job of Longline the Carnival Opera is to pull these strands into a final performance of which we may all be proud.

Its climax will demonstrate the joyous creativity and talents of so many people who have played non-competitively together, in a world where boundaries such as those between professional and amateur, young and old, have dissolved like warm candy-floss. To my mind, this process is a kind of Utopia: it is rare, but could be universal.

The second intention is the show itself. A work of art should be self-contained, with an internal logic reflected both in a consistent aesthetic structure and an integral and entertaining poetic truth. The truth may be difficult, and its stark necessity not always palatable to certain audiences or even appropriate in the world of surrogate social work to which so much community art has been relegated. I hope what we have presented is an imaginative and strong distillation of our concerns with which audiences can connect.

The final intention is a rite of passage



for the end of Welfare State International and its extensive network of artists, supporters and friends. This is perhaps the hardest part, and certainly a part which could be out of joint with the other two intentions.

For many of us — especially the Fox family and those scores of artists who have also become family — it's hard to say goodbye to a way of being which has nurtured us for nearly four decades. We never believed there would ever be a 'last gig' but times change and we are all, in our own ways, moving on and mostly away from Lanternhouse.

A GOODBYE GIFT

JOHN 'I-AM-NOT-RETIRING' FOX AND DOROTHY MAX PRIOR CHEW THE CUD IN THE LAST DAYS OF THE LEGENDARY WELFARE STATE INTERNATIONAL

and-more in Ulverston, Cumbria. On April Fool's Day 2006, just a couple of weeks hence, Welfare State International will cease to exist. When the decision had first been taken for Welfare State to pack up shop, John Fox had hoped for Lanternhouse to be taken over by a collective ensemble of its young and established artists, but his radical and imaginative solution was unfortunately rejected by WSI's board.

Now a point of resolution has been reached. Lanternhouse will remain a working space, in the hands of new creative director Stephen Powell, here observed chopping onions in the kitchen and wiping down the library tables so it would seem that he has already got the hang of what being a creative director here requires: plenty of dirtying of those hands. Come the first of April, a few of the key players in Welfare State may still also be found inside the Lanternhouse walls: for example, Sue Gill will stay in charge of the Rites of Passage programme, a vital strand of WSI's work in recent years (and more on that in the next issue of *Total Theatre Magazine*), and administration queen Dot Queen will remain at the end of the Lanternhouse phone line for the new company, which as yet has no name.

But there will be one significant empty chair at the table – that of John Fox himself, the man whose artistic

integrity, inspiration and energy has fuelled four decades of work for Welfare: from spectacular street arts and circus-theatre shows, through to the re-invention of Northern European-style carnival processions that place fire and light at the centre of the event; from large-scale celebratory theatre involving all sorts of different communities, to quiet and low-key environmental artworks, ceremonies and rituals that question the divide between life and art. It's a body of work that is, in its very nature, collaborative, co-owned, inclusive, and co-operatively made by an ensemble of artists.

John would be the first to credit all those collaborators, and in particular to

project created with, about and for the people of Morecambe Bay. Speaking of the creation of this massive enterprise, which he describes as 'a pantheistic meditation on the lakes and bay', now culminating in a large-scale performance event, John says:

'It's been a bit like a game of snakes and ladders, but with a fuck of a lot of snakes.'

I suggest that the various 'snakes' – which have included considerably less funding than needed; a snowed-in cast who couldn't rehearse (not to mention tons of snow on the circus tent); an objection to the company's application for a performance licence for their circus tent from locally based pharmaceutical



make it clear that WSI is jointly directed by himself and his long-time partner in life and art, Sue Gill. Yet it cannot be denied that John Fox has come to be seen as the figurehead of WSI, as the person most immediately associated with the company's work – and it's perhaps for this reason that the time-honoured name of Welfare State International would have to go whenever he did: it would just be too much of a burden for his successors – a millstone of history and achievement around their neck.

So what happens for John from April onwards, once Welfare is no more?

'Well, I'm certainly not retiring,' he says.

For a start, he has an exhibition coming up of his wonderful woodcuts, and other 2D images, at the Mid-Pennine Arts Association gallery in Burnley. It's called *Graphics and Gifts*, reflecting the role that gift-giving has played in his artistic creation – be it a print for a birthday, or the Longline carnival-opera, a three-year

company GlaxoSmithKline (who claimed, and the mind can only boggle at the cheek, that WSI might be 'polluting the bay'); a hired generator that malfunctioned; a first-night that was in fact a dress-run, since it was the first time the whole cast could be brought together – could all perhaps be seen as a gift. After all, if the 'last ever gig' had gone too smoothly, perhaps it would have been too hard to walk away?

John concedes that it hasn't been easy:

'Thank God for the police,' he says, with a smile that shows that he is aware of the irony of being an outsider anarcho-artist who is now working hand-in-hand with the Old Bill.

'They've been very helpful – they like us and have been very supportive over the years of lantern processions... they approved the 96 hours temporary performance licence that enabled Longline to go ahead.'

So, yes, the running of large events,

the servicing of a needy building and the organising of a big ensemble company has taken its toll in recent years, and John is looking forward to the pleasures of solitary art-making – one man and his chisels. He expresses a belief in the philosophy espoused by French painter Georges Braque: that one's life should become the artwork.

'Consciousness needs to become concrete,' says John. 'I'm interested in the liminal; the cross-over between life and art, between ritual and theatre; the points of transition and transformation.' He is also, in this age of the 'super real' (he cites Peter Jackson's film *King Kong* as an example), interested in what he calls 'the ticky-tacky' – 'bits of cardboard and string, art where you can see the joins'. Yet he is simultaneously interested in using digital technologies (an important feature of *Longline*), and we talk briefly of the new era we can now see arriving, when not only musicians but also digital film-makers will be able to snatch back the power of distribution from the middlemen. It is also, we agree, a sign of the times that as more and more 'new technologies' emerge, so there is a parallel and growing interest in the hands-on ink-on-the-fingers craft skills of old, with plenty of room for cross-overs between the two. As an example of this, John expresses an interest in performing live, using 'real' ink drawing over projected digital images. He also points out that *Longline* digital film-maker Tom Lloyd is a digi-film maestro who breeds fell ponies and lives in a yurt. 'Vernacular Art' – the making do

by the self-taught outsider artist using all means possible – is a concept John currently finds intriguing; he is soon off to meet with a Canadian, Clarke Mackay who is writing a book on vernacular art in a post-digital age.

In fact, said Canadian writer has been waiting downstairs in the café for a while: John really must go, he says, but still he stays, ideas flowing like ink from a pen. So, last words, John: what does John Fox want for himself from 1 April 2006?

'Well, if I was sensible I'd say I ought to do nothing at all for a month or two – but of course I'll do nothing of the sort. I've got the exhibition opening, for a start. I'd like to spend more time on music – I play melodeon and I'd like to play more sax. I want to develop my skills in etching, and work on merging my etching and my poetry; to do more lectures, but performance-lectures. I already play music in my lectures, but I'd like to develop a comic character, subvert the lecture-form further, be a cultural provocateur. I want to do more gardening and develop gardening as an artform – I'm influenced by Derek Jarman – to study sea-plants and to study Zen gardens and meditative spaces, maybe go to Japan, although I'm worried about the environmental impact of air travel. I want to bring life and art closer together, and to investigate what I'm reluctantly calling "the spiritual" (although I'm not too fond of that word).

I want to form a clown duo with Jamie Proud, who plays the Raven in *Longline*; to do more cycling; to spend more time with my grandchildren; to have fun and play

more – to play is a political act!'

It's a fitting last thought. I'm now (despite enjoying his company hugely and having no wish to finish the meeting) feeling rather guilty about the patiently waiting Canadian, so I encourage John to go in search of his visitor. I ask him for a final visual image of his departure from Welfare State, and he replies:

'Riding off on my bicycle, with my melodeon in one pannier and a Powerbook in the other.'

Goodbye, John, good luck – and may your gods go with you.

Graphics and Gifts runs until 12 May 2006 at the Mid-Pennine Arts Association Gallery, Mechanics Institute, Burnley.

John Fox was given a Lifetime Contribution Award from Arts Council England, North West in honour of his achievements with Welfare State International. He has also recently been awarded an ACE Grant for the Arts, under the Artist plus Time plus Space scheme, in order to explore new possibilities.

John Fox can be contacted at: The Loft, 53 The Gill, Ulverston, Cumbria LA12 7BL.

For further information on future plans, see www.foxandgill@btinternet.com

1 & 3 | WOODCUT PRINTS BY JOHN FOX
2 | WELFARE STATE INTERNATIONAL –
THE SHIP OF FOOLS FROM *LONGLINE*



OLD DOG, NEW TRICKS



DEAD AS A DODO? OR A LIVING ARTFORM THAT REINVENTS AND RENEWS TRADITION? DOROTHY MAX PRIOR LOOKS AT THE PLACE OF VARIETY WITHIN CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, have we got something for you! Showgirls, ventriloquists, magicians, acrobats, eccentric dancers, jugglers, hypnotists, psychics, aerialists, plate-spinners, fire-breathers... All this and more, a cornucopia of tricks and turns and speciality acts, provide the staple ingredients of the variety show.

'It's the directness of its address that drew Forced Entertainment to variety,' said Tim Etchells in a virtual presentation made at the De La Warr pavilion as part of the Variety Acts weekend, held in November 2005.

'Theatre addresses the audience sideways or through subterfuge... in variety the audience is right there, dealt with... there is no pretension that you are there to give them anything other than what the audience want... this directness of variety is more honest than theatre's subtle dance of veils.'

Etchell's partner in conversation (present in 'real time') was academic and writer Adrian Heathfield, who spoke of variety as 'a resilient presence and a rich source of reference for contemporary performance', going on to refer to it as a form with 'in-built nostalgia'.

And therein lies the rub: from this exchange, and indeed throughout most of the weekend, there is little sense of variety existing as a force in its own right in contemporary culture; for the most part it was seen to exist in past not present time, a repository of what Etchells called 'pre-owned illusions', and Heathfield an 'aesthetic to be plundered', a 'slip through a door in time' to encounter a lost and left-behind world. Again and again came the references to death: the 'dead eyes' of Archie Rice in *The Entertainer*; the relentless smiles of the variety compere, as parodied so effectively in *Forced Entertainment's First Night*, 'life imitating life, the double positive making a negative' – death again; Tommy Cooper 'corpsing' on stage – then literally corpsing as he dies in front of a live audience...

Elsewhere in the Variety Acts weekend there is an ongoing preoccupation with variety as an archive: a dressing-up box of useful source material. Geraldine Pilgrim's *Stardust* is an installation-performance, a site-inspired piece in which the ghosts of variety haunt the De La Warr pavilion. A flock of white-feathered showgirls flutter through the building, nesting below the eaves in the attic spaces. A ventriloquist and his dummy lie slumped in the corner of

a lift, locked in their relationship, oblivious to anyone who enters. A diva does her make-up on a top-floor corridor; a pair of trapeze artists are trapped in a cupboard; a cleaner remembers better times as a go-go-dancer, images of her former self projected from her cleaning trolley onto any available shiny surfaces. It's a gentle and loving tribute that animates this glorious art deco building in interesting ways.

*The directness of variety
is more honest than
theatre's subtle dance
of veils.*

An inherent love and respect for the traditions of variety is also found in Rose English's presentation, which takes in references both to the contemporary and the recent past. Amongst the artists she admires are Philippe Petit, the high-wire walker who walked between the twin towers of the World Trade Center; Jeremy Robins with his wonderful *Slippery When Wet* boy-in-a-bath act; and James Thiérée, (the grandson of Charlie Chaplin), who has re-created the famous clown-with-a-newspaper routine and given it a new momentum. She describes this act as 'a classic scenario, with not a hint of nostalgia', an important distinction well made.

In another reference to popular theatre's historical repertoire, Marcia Farquhar was to be found outside on the beach with The Cabinet of Horribly Violent Glove Puppets, a real-life one-woman Punch and Judy show, which managed to be both humorous and a commentary on humour. Marcia was also to be found on the Duckie Big Saturday Night Seaside Birthday Special bill. Entertainment for the evening was a mixed bag of local talent (Bexhill's own Silver Bells Soprano Ann Dalton and the Sheik's Delight belly-dancers, who were everything that their names imply), together with Duckie favourites Ida Barr and Miss High Leg Kick, and other veterans of the alternative London cabaret scene. It was all jolly good fun, but much of the evening's entertainment could be placed in the 'postmodern pastiche' bag: more send-up than re-invention of the form. An exception was Jonathan Allen, whose magic act (in the persona of his alter-ego, Tommy Angel) subverted the form whilst upholding the variety tradition – the key to this being his own mastery of the art that he was himself subverting.

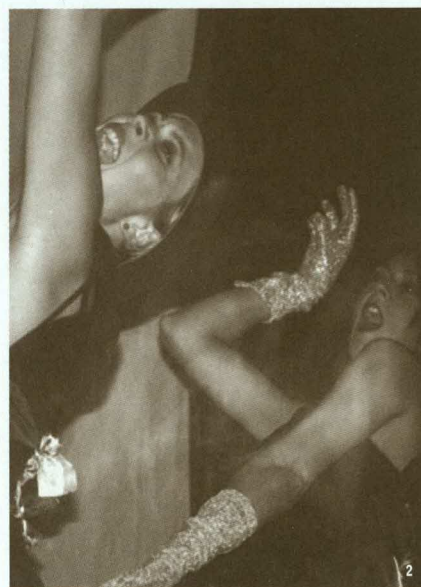
Variety Acts raised a lot of interesting questions on the difference between variety as an inspiration or reference point for visual arts versus new variety as a real and true continuation of the tradition – questions that were addressed at the Total Theatre Talks event at London International Mime Festival 2006: Everything Old is New Again, which aimed to 'highlight the place of contemporary variety within the wider historical continuum'. The starting point for this discussion event was an assumption that contemporary variety had a value in itself beyond being a metaphor or inspiration for artists; a living and continuing tradition that re-invented itself for the 21st century.

In order to understand the context for this discussion – the 'old' that we were

hoping to show was 'new again' – Charlie Holland (programme director of The Circus Space) presented a short showreel of classic variety acts, tracing a history of the past hundred years. This selection of wonders included the fabulous tap dancing Nicholas Brothers, whose astonishing routines featured in the films of Cab Calloway (news of the death of 91-year-old Fayard Nicholas came through a few days after this event); Josephine Baker's Banana Dance; paper-tearer extraordinaire Joan Rhodes; new vaudevillian Tom Noddy, the guy who 'made soap-bubbling a popular entertainment' (as it says on soapbubbler.com); and Circo Roncali's 'live fur coat' act which has to be seen to be believed. Artists who took part in the subsequent panel presentation and discussion came from very different strands of practice, but each shared a love of variety and an interest in keeping alive the traditions of the form.

*Variety has a value
beyond being a metaphor
or inspiration for artists
– a living and continuing
tradition re-invented for
the 21st century.*

Miriam (Mim) King works mostly within a live art context, and sees herself predominantly as a visual artist, often taking costume as her starting point; but her training and experience in dance and circus informed her practice, giving a substance and skill-base to the roster of burlesque characters that she has created, among them the three-armed 'humanette' Gracie, and Pugalo the contortionist scarecrow who removes her ragged coat to reveal a showgirl's sequinned basque. Mim's latest project was The Insect Circus



at Hoxton Hall, which brings to life Mark Copeland's extraordinary flea, ant and butterfly circus models and automata. She also spoke of her work as part of the Voodoo Vaudeville collective, led by UK new variety veteran Chris Cresswell.

Voodoo have become something of a staple on the alternative variety/cabaret scene, having been formed by Cresswell and his partner Ruth Glaser (collectively known as Lenny & Morris) to push the barriers of possibility for variety, cabaret and burlesque. The Skin of the Moon will be the second touring Voodoo Vaudeville show, in development during spring 2006, with a tour in the summer months. The intention here is to create work that plays on the mores of variety and burlesque, but which is free to incorporate new technologies (in the form of a collaboration with alternative media group Junk TV). The show will feature a core-group of performers, but also incorporate set pieces made by individual artists – Mim King's Mermaid Tales being one example.

Also crossing boundaries of form was Geraldine Pilgrim (fresh from her success at the De La Warr), who creates site-specific work with her company Corridor. She spoke of her early discovery of theatre's power of transformation – the magic 'light in the box'. Popular theatre was in her blood: her grandmother was a Gaiety Girl, and growing up in South London, she was taken to the circus and the pantomime. Working as a dresser and theatre designer in the 'traditional' theatre sold her on the smell of the greasepaint, and counterbalanced her work within performance art and site-specific theatre. Her next major area of investigation will be a theatrical exploration of Angela Carter's last novel, Wise Children.

Staying quite firmly within the boundaries of traditional burlesque was striptease artist Jo King (of the London School of Striptease) for whom striptease





offered the opportunity to be a self-determined artist, choosing her own themes, costumes and music. She could also choose when and where to work – a freedom denied to most actresses and dancers. Her main work nowadays is teaching women to strip, through her own school, and through avenues such as the International Workshop Festival (her Six Ways to Remove a Glove workshop being one of the roaring successes of the IWF).

Tony Lyddington (of Promenade Promotions in Blackpool) calls himself 'a showman', which he sees as being close to being a shaman. He, like Jo, is committed to popular entertainment and neither of them sees a distinction between 'art' and 'entertainment'. He is entering his 23rd season with The Pierrotters who were formed in the post-punk era: 'we wanted to kick against the system... to change the world with white satin and pom-poms.' Thus, he bought a banjo and, gathering his group of satin-clad men around him, stormed the streets (bringing a whole new meaning to the Clash's punk anthem White Riot). He feels that variety is far from dead but has shifted with the times, finding new outlets such as street arts festivals, working men's clubs, and the opening ceremonies of major sports events; few would see these last occasions as 'variety shows', but to all intents and purposes this is what they are.

This is a point that was later expanded on by Charlie Holland, who pointed out that new varieties of variety (so to speak) included: the BBC idents of free-running across rooftops; MTV pop videos; mass gymnastic spectacles in Korea (synchronised Busby Berkeley-esque events involving thousands); and post-Archao

contemporary circus companies who incorporate a whole raft of extraordinary acts.

One concern that raised itself in numerous ways was the question of how artists could hone their skills so that they could come closer to the sort of high standards witnessed on Charlie's introductory showreel. This brings in the questions of opportunities for training and professional development, but also of where and how professional variety artists can take their work. As Tony Lyddington put it, 'We need to have a quantity of people with a variety of skills.' There needed to be a range of resources, and either an investment of arts funding or commercial financial support for the ante to be upped.

Quality control remains an issue in 'new variety': whilst acknowledging the fantastic success of initiatives such as La Clique, which brings top quality variety bills to the Spiegeltent during the Edinburgh Fringe and Brighton festivals, we can note that these and similarly lauded events feature a small roster of highly skilled artists who turn up again and again. The piss-taking pastiche is still far more common than the skill-based variety act – and although the former is fine and dandy within the alternative cabaret circuit, new variety needs something more.

But finishing on a positive note, Jo King remarked that 'everything is possible – now more than at any other time we can do anything we want'. Let's hope that one thing that UK artists with an 'act' to sell will want is to hone their skills and hit the big-time!

Variety Acts was curated by the Live Art Development Agency and took place November 2005 as part of *Variety*, the inaugural programme for the re-launched De La Warr Pavilion. See www.thisisliveart.co.uk and www.dlwp.com

Total Theatre Talks: Everything Old is New Again took place in January 2006 as part of the London International Mime Festival, and was chaired by Felicity Hall, director, Total Theatre Network. See www.totaltheatre.org.uk/projects/talks and www.mimefest.co.uk

For further information on artists and companies referenced see:

Duckie www.duckie.co.uk

Marcia Farquhar www.marciafarquhar.com

Miriam King www.mimking.com

Voodoo Vaudeville
www.voodooovaudeville.co.uk

The Insect Circus www.insectcircus.co.uk

Geraldine Pilgrim and Corridor
www.corridor.eu.com

Jo King www.londonschoolofstriptease.co.uk

Promenade Promotions and The Pierrotters
www.prom-prom.com

The Circus Space www.thecircusspace.co.uk

The Famous Spiegeltent and La Clique are at Brighton Festival 5-29 May in The Spiegeltent, Old Steine Lawns. See www.spiegeltent.net and www.komedia.co.uk/brighton

1 | LA CLIQUE AT THE FAMOUS SPIEGELTENT
2 | VOODOO VAUDEVILLE – THE SKIN OF THE MOON
3+4 | GERALDINE PILGRIM – STARDUST AT VARIETY ACTS,
DE LA WARR PAVILION

STRUT THOSE STREETS!
EDWARD TAYLOR GOES WALKABOUT

STREET ANIMATIONS

'Walkabout', as it is usually known, is such an anaemic term for what is one of the purest and richest forms of street theatre. It is a theatre that moves through the crowds instead of standing still and encouraging them to gather round and watch. As it moves along, it exploits the ever-changing locations in a town centre (or other environment) and it positively thrives on the appearance of an unexpected element – for instance, a stray dog or a huge crate being pushed by three people – that a busy street will always throw up. It is a real 360-degree theatre which requires enormous concentration and the ability to change tack at a moment's notice as well as real nerve to make it work successfully. Desperate Men prefer to call this area of work 'street animations' and this I think is a better term. 'Walkabout' suggests some sort of genteel aimless activity, whereas 'animation' gives you the feeling that something has been shaken up, albeit temporarily. The best groups do exactly that – they change the energy of a street.

The UK's best-known animation act is Natural Theatre. They also tour extensively throughout the world. They have a huge repertoire of characters and situations. One of their classic acts is The Protestors. A group of four or five appear on the streets holding placards with slogans that proclaim that it's National No Smiling Day and that they are against anything, whatever it is. They are a motley crew – elderly generals in blazers, tweedy women, the sort of people who knock on your door in the afternoon and ask you about the bible, and 28-year-olds who should have left home years ago. They stand there impassive and resolutely humourless while the audience virtually knock themselves out trying to get a smile out of them. In fact, the audience's behaviour is 80% of the show and the company are mere catalysts for this. What really makes their shows work is the attention to costume detail. In one version of The Protestors I saw, one of the men wore a neck-brace, which somehow emphasised his suppressed reactionary ire.

Other groups have taken the image of strolling characters and developed them in different ways. Bob and Bob Jobbins build a boat or a Spitfire onto a motorised wheelchair so that a sailor or pilot can glide around the streets. A concealed sound system pumps out a suitable soundtrack and the character stops from time to time to dispense words of wisdom or nonsense (usually the latter). A quick wit and a well-polished sense of the absurd keeps the show funny and surprising.

The Flying Buttresses have created two half-sized puppets who hike through the streets with their more than full-sized rucksacks and engage the public with their verbal ramblings. The costumes are very ingenious with the heads of the puppeteers hidden in the rucksacks and the heads of the puppets animated with the puppeteer's hands. You do spend time trying to work out how they are doing it, but it's a measure of their skill that once you've worked it out it doesn't diminish the charm of the piece. When you see an audience gathered round them, everyone's eyes are



fixed on the puppet's heads rather than where the performer's real heads are.

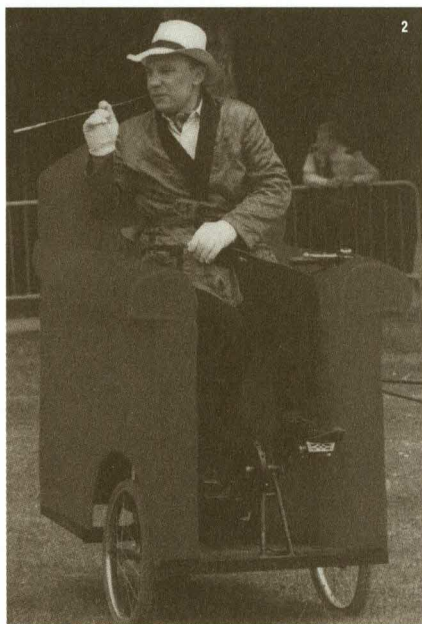
Big Rory is a stereotypical Scotsman with a kilt, tam o'shanter and ginger hair. He wears stilts which have been disguised to resemble an extremely sturdy pair of legs. He looks like a Caledonian version of those Robert Crumb Keep on Truckin' cartoon characters with their oversized legs and tiny heads. Being larger than life requires a larger than life personality and Big Rory has this in spades.

The Big Heads are, as the name suggests, big heads on legs that wander the streets creating a glorious mixture of humour and disgust simply by the way they look and act. What they can do is extremely limited but they manage to make a virtue of these limitations – something which some walkabout acts singularly fail to do. The costume is a huge shaggy-haired latex head which covers all the body except for the legs. The heads each have an especially lascivious tongue which licks the most inappropriate surfaces, and when the heads retract their legs they use this tongue to inch themselves along the pavement. The audience's reactions are a winning combination of disgust and unwillingness to look away. Children goad them in the hope that they chase them down the street, an offer that is occasionally taken up. Big heads are a long-standing staple image of many European carnivals. There's no doubt that creator/director Bim Mason had these historical precedents in mind, but it's to his credit that the Big Heads' wide-eyed single-mindedness seems strangely appropriate in town centres with their emphasis on 'retail therapy'.

Cacahuete from Provence push the idea of carnivalesque shock and outrage to its limits. One of their shows features a group of men dressed as babies and behaving in a baby-like way. This sight in itself is somewhat worrying. But when they seek out suitable breasts to feed from or their nurse lays them on their backs and whips off their nappies to powder their bottoms it starts to go beyond what we expect on a street.

Walkabout is an appropriate term for many groups (especially UK-based ones) as the act is often a single visual gag and the interaction with the public is barely more than a polite greeting. Cacahuete are a great example of how challenging this area of work can be. They play with taboos and mix them with ideas of commerce to uncomfortable effect – for example in their infamous funeral cortege, in which a coffin is trawled through a town centre. Their work is often ambiguous – are they being satirical or are they just being tasteless for the sake of it? The answer is usually yes to both questions!

Warner & Consorten from Amsterdam create characters who, rather than subverting a recognisable stereotype, are abstract in look and behaviour. The company spend a long time rehearsing group dynamics so that something that is loose and unstructured can suddenly snap into a dance with tight choreography. The company will often let three different groups of figures with three different sorts of *modus operandi* onto a street to create a 'they are all around us' feeling. Their work is playful and extremely unpredictable.



Street animation is a huge and varied area of work. It encompasses the likes of drumming band Dadadang from Italy, with their futuristic costumes and unpredictable marching patterns; performers with extremely detailed characterisations such as Lady Christobel, the drunken dowager, and her wrinkled retainer Scrotum; and shows where the audience is taken on a journey through a town with surprises en route, such as the musical shows by Décor Sonore from Paris, who explore and develop sounds on the streets using a moving choir and the likes of dial-tones from telephone booths or car stereo systems – you start the show in the courtyard of a block of flats and the singers all appear in different windows. Then there are huge visual spectacles with groups of perambulating puppets, such as Compagnie Off with their giraffes; shows that actively involve the audience, like Desperate Men's Film Crew, who use them as extras in their location work; and performances involving normal-looking people who are anything but normal – like Edmond Tahl, a businessman whose briefcase is full of sound equipment so at times he appears to have extremely loud footsteps or seems to be under surveillance from a helicopter.

If you made a Channel 4 programme (and please don't!) about the 100 best walkabout/street animation acts, top of the poll would have to be Les Hommes en Noir from Belgium (who are now sadly defunct). They were four (occasionally five) men, all dressed in shabby black suits, each one spectacularly ugly, the ugliness enhanced by their hairstyles – greased down, all combed to one side, parted in the middle, enormous mutton-chop sideburns. Each member clutched a metal object – a stepladder, a fender, a sort of aluminium standard lamp, a bunch of music stands – all of which functioned as a sort of comfort rag and something to be dropped or loaded onto a hapless member of the audience at a moment's notice. They took the personae of four innocents abroad who cannot quite comprehend daily life and whose incomprehension develops into quite exquisite chaos. They must have caused more chaos than any other group. It was all improvised, no show ever being the same, and they pushed the idea of interaction with an audience as far as they could. In Manchester (where I saw them in 1992) they drove off in someone's car, diverted motorists the wrong way down a one-way street causing a traffic jam, loaded children onto someone's arms, completely covered a car windscreen with sticky labels and invaded a shopfront, all this followed by a large crowd unable to tear themselves away. Although it was improvised, the group was highly disciplined in keeping their shape (to use football jargon). Les Hommes en Noir stories remain a staple topic of conversation between groups, and although many of them change in the telling, it's likely that the basis of every one of them is true – which is a tribute to their brilliant ability at this most invigorating form of street theatre.

For further information on UK street arts see www.streetartsnetwork.org.uk

Edward Taylor is co-director of street arts company Whalley Range All Stars. See www.wras.org.uk

1 | NATURAL THEATRE COMPANY – GREY IN JAPAN
2 | BOB & BOB JOBBINS

WOLLSTONECRAFT LIVE!

ANNA BIRCH OF FRAGMENTS AND MONUMENTS DOCUMENTS THE MAKING OF A SITE-SPECIFIC, MULTI-MEDIA EVENT BRINGING 18TH-CENTURY RADICAL MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT BACK TO NEWINGTON GREEN

Fragments & Monuments, based in London, began in 1996 as a collaboration between myself and Dutch scenographer Madelon Schwartz, producing a trilogy of site-based productions in our first four years. Pamela Howard invited me to direct her MA Scenography students' final show at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design where Madelon was a student. We produced new work for Sceno Fest (International Scenography Festival), a turning point where my work embraced physical and visual aesthetics as well as acting and new writing. In this context, I built on my position as Max Stafford-Clark's assistant at the Royal Court in the early 1990s to develop new writing with a forceful scenographic aesthetic.

As a research fellow attached to SMARTlab Centre, London, I have access to digital expertise and performance technology innovations which continue to help Fragments & Monuments develop its live and mediated performance languages. Now, with a new creative team (gathered from Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in London, from New York's Fringe theatre scene, and from long-term collaborators), Fragments & Monuments has produced Wollstonecraft Live!, our largest-scale, multi-media, site-based production to date.

EVOLUTION OF A SHOW

Mary Wollstonecraft (played by Di Sherlock) was invited by Fragments & Monuments to Di's Midsummer Night Party (2000), a millennium extravaganza set in a 19th-century house where she met a host of celebrities and marvelled at the development of the photograph, something she had never seen as an 18th-century woman. Filmed during its live performance, Di's Midsummer Night Party was projected onto the front of Clissold House, Stoke Newington, one year later.

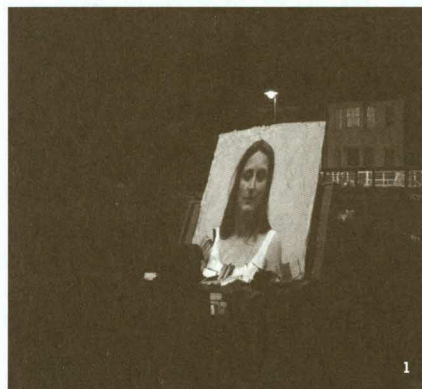
In 2004 I commissioned Kaethe Fine to write Wollstonecraft Live! for

Fragments & Monuments. Kaethe quickly conceptualised the idea of a filmshoot telling the story of Wollstonecraft's life using a mix of Wollstonecraft's writing, letters to William Godwin, Godwin's writing and a contemporary thread involving film-location language. She found a variety of voices to communicate Wollstonecraft's story in an accessible, witty and multi-layered style. Kaethe brought her experience of performing, film-making and script-writing to bear on the theatrical concerns that Fragments & Monuments is known for: transhistorical character, interactivity and inside/outside, exterior/interior use of space. Her script is a unique example of well-researched performance writing for a site-based, multi-media production. When we were invited to open the Spit-Lit Festival in March 2006, the audience were fascinated to discover how Kaethe had woven together the 18th-century world of Wollstonecraft with our 21st-century world through her writing.

Mary Wollstonecraft lived and worked in the same community (Newington Green in North London) as I have lived in for over twenty years, and she has become an inspiring historical figure for me. Mary's writing and lifestyle resonate strongly with contemporary concerns for human rights and liberty. By bringing the past into the present through script, costume, location and audience participation, Fragments & Monuments conjures up the life and times of this spectacular woman of achievement. The boundary between Wollstonecraft's life and our own lives is explored, allowing the audience and local community to experience two centuries simultaneously.

*Wollstonecraft Live!
is... a site-specific,
multi-media event
centred on the life of
Mary Wollstonecraft...
an experimental love
story between a 21st-
century actor and an
18th-century radical...
a film shoot within
a performance piece
on Newington Green,
Islington...*

In its combination of live performance, installation and digital technologies, Wollstonecraft Live! investigates the interface between live and mediated performance, audience and performer, location and history – concepts developed from the previous trilogy of work made by the company: *Dogs Are Alone Too and They Live!* (1996); *Lovely Stones* (1998); *Di's Midsummer Night Party* (2000).



This trilogy has three main themes:

REAPPEARANCE

The reappearance of Adela, the youngest daughter of Bernarda Alba (from *The House of Bernarda Alba*, by Federico Garcia Lorca), Miss Julie (Miss Julie, by August Strindberg), Princess Diana and Mary Wollstonecraft. The destiny of these women is deconstructed and rewritten. Mary Wollstonecraft subsequently reappears embodied by three very different female performers in Wollstonecraft Live!

INTERACTIVITY

The audience interacts as passengers, hotel guests or party guests, becoming part of the action as they sit on the train, take the bus or walk to the midsummer party. In Wollstonecraft Live! the audience take on the role as extras in the Hollywood biopic of Wollstonecraft's life.

INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR

The interior and exterior of the performance space are explored as a central expression of gender relations. In the trilogy, windows are seen from both the inside and the outside, and doors are disregarded or used in a surprising way. In the outdoor screening of Di's Midsummer Night Party, we back-projected the film from the front of Clissold House in an attempt to merge our 21st-century experience of the house with its history. By working in a site-based location, Fragments & Monuments open the door of our work to the public.

A MULTITUDE OF MEDIA

As a consequence of 'working on location', a work style found on film/TV locations has become a hallmark of Fragments & Monuments' production design. The film crew follows the performers and audience as film crew and paparazzi, to create an atmosphere of celebrity and occasion for the performers and audience (both filmed by the camera crew). The film *Wollstonecraft Live!* (2006) will be projected at Newington Green, London N16, one year after the live performance (September 2006). Jana Riedel is our editor and multi-media consultant; Tina Lonergan created the production design for both the live show *Wollstonecraft Live!* (her first professional job after achieving a first-class degree at Central Saint Martins) and our short film titled *VINDICATION*. Music composed by Alastair Gavin (jazz pianist and media composer) underscores the live show and films. *VINDICATION* was shot on location at Newington Green where Reverend Richard Price introduces Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin for the first time in the company of Thomas Paine and her publisher Joseph Johnson. Their discussions focus on the importance of dissent from the 18th-century monarchy and enthusiasm for democracy and human rights.

We worked for six months on the production design, and Tina designed and made a scale model of Newington Green which helped us to stage the show. The dresses worn by the three Marys provide one of the projection surfaces for our multi-media installation. In her article for Theatre Forum (UCSD) 'Fragments of a Life: Performing History in Newington Green', Lesley Ferris says: 'The difficult box skirts provide a constant visual reminder of the ways in which clothing has been used to both confine and control women.'

One year after the live performance, the audience are invited to watch themselves on film in relation to the live performance, location and each other. *VINDICATION* and *Wollstonecraft Live!* will be saved to DVD and distributed both locally and globally to enthusiasts and scholars of new performance and Mary Wollstonecraft. The local community around Newington Green will be given the DVD as a tool to increase community ownership of their local history and as a record of participation in a large-scale community arts event.

'Confined, then, in cages like the feathered race, they have nothing to do but to plume themselves, and stalk with mock majesty from perch to perch. It is true they are provided with food and raiment, for which they neither toil nor spin; but health, liberty, and virtue are given in exchange.' from A Vindication of the Rights of Woman by Mary Wollstonecraft

TO SUM UP

Fragments & Monuments are engaged in a five-year investigation into the ways in which multi-media, site-specific performance can reveal lost biographies and encourage regeneration through the arts. The investigation involves a number of strands: the site-specific performance and filmic event about the life of human rights activist Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97); the conception and creation of a living monument to Wollstonecraft to be realised as an open commission; and the production of The Dramaturgical Tool Kit, offering aspiring artists, students and scholars a way into making and understanding how the production of original contemporary performance work can be grounded in contemporary, popular and historical approaches.

A version of this feature appears on the Total Theatre Explores website, launched June 2006.

Explores is a discrete project hosted by Total Theatre Network to support and celebrate women practitioners of physical and visual theatre/performance, funded by Equal, a European Social Fund programme, and led by EQ (formerly known as Metier).

See www.totaltheatre.org.uk/explores

Fragments & Monuments coming events:
September 2006: *Wollstonecraft Live!* outdoor screening *VINDICATION* & *Wollstonecraft Live!* talk-back with writer and director presented on Newington Green and at the Unitarian Chapel, Newington Green N16
December 2006: Ssamzie Gallery, Seoul, South Korea, invited to screen *VINDICATION* & *Wollstonecraft Live!* films
February 2007: Air Gallery, Soho, New York, invited to screen *VINDICATION* & *Wollstonecraft Live!* films / talk-back with writer and director & multi-media installation
September 2007: Large-scale projection on Newington Green, London N16, UK

Dr Anna Birch has the following publications and conferences coming up:
Birch, A (2006) *The Dramaturgical Toolkit: a visual analysis and making kit. Lines of Enquiry: Explorations in learning in the School of Art (Central Saint Martins School of Art and Design)* edited by Alex Lumley
Birch, A & Barbieri, D (2006) *Frocks in Space, Courtauld History of Dress Association Annual Conference 2006 (CHODA), Dress and the Performing Arts 7–8 July 2006 Courtauld Institute of Art London* researched, written and presented with Donatella Barbieri, London College of Fashion
Birch, A (2006 in press) *Staging and Citing Gendered Meanings: A practice-based study of representational strategies in live and mediated performance* in Birgit Haas (Hg.): *Der Postfeministische Diskurs. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann*
For more information email Dr Anna Birch on silvabirch@btinternet.com or see www.wollstonecraftlive.com

1+2 | FRAGMENTS & MONUMENTS – WOLLSTONECRAFT LIVE! AT NEWINGTON GREEN/ PHOTOS BY TAEY KIM



BEST OF BRITISH

JOHN BULL PUNCTURE REPAIR KIT

BRIAN POPAY SINGS THE PRAISES OF THIS ANARCHIC AND INFLUENTIAL PERFORMANCE GROUP

The John Bull Puncture Repair Kit, for cyclists of a certain age, was a little container that did exactly what it said on the tin. But for a group of artists working in the West Riding of Yorkshire, it was the name they chose to describe their eccentric style of British performance art.

This other John Bull Puncture Repair Kit was founded by Mick Banks and Al Beach, the company later growing to include Diz Willis, John Darling and George O'Brien as regular members, with occasional guest appearances from Jeff Nuttall and others. Of the group, it was Mick Banks that I got to know the best. He was a Kentish lad who had ended up in Yorkshire in the late 1960s and had fallen in with a creative crowd of performance artists. This was a seminal time and place in the history of British performance art. I believe that Roland Miller was also working there at the time, as well as Rob Con. Rob was well known for his extraordinary beer-filled drinking suit – a costume into which and through which he drank beer. The best bitter would run round clear tubes attached to the outside of Rob's body, eventually ending up in his

mouth. I saw the piece performed in a pub and it was bizarre yet entirely appropriate.

I first encountered a JBPRK show at the Serpentine Gallery in the early 1970s. The Natural Theatre Company were performing our Sports Day piece on the lawn – John Bull were performing their Beachboys/Barrowboys, which featured beautifully painted WW2 props and particularly a set of camouflaged wheelbarrows complete with RAF roundels and numbers. The cast were dressed in surplus gear and the finale was a low-budget spectacular with the wheelbarrows performing a formation flying display to military soundtrack, pouring out coloured smoke from their handles.

I was not long out of art school and was impressed by the close attention to detail and beautiful construction of their props, combined with a seriousness of purpose in their performance. John Bull Puncture Repair Kit came from the 'Northern School' of Art and Performance – a hard-edged gritty style that was new to me. But the overriding element of comedy was a shared interest.

Through the 1970s we bumped into them on various gigs – often in Holland, where work was plentiful – and we invited them to our Walcot Festivals in Bath.

Their famous Film Crew (The Northern School of Film Realists) used parts of central Bath as locations for a piece called *The Trial*, a reference to the Pump Room waters which had been linked to a mystery disease at the time. The film starred a smooth matinee idol called Peter Slim (Mick Banks). He spent most of the time relaxing in the star's chair waiting for his call and once on the set appeared for as short a time as possible. Diz Willis was the props and stunt man – responsible for some memorable exploding grapefruits – and Steve Gumbley was guest cameraman. The scenes moved around the city with the audience in tow, including one location on the river, which was directed from the balustrades above the weir by loudhailer. A photo of this appears on the front cover of Jeff Nuttall's *Performance Scripts*.

I remember a great John Bull show in De Lantaren, Rotterdam, a theatre that was a second home for many British



touring companies of the time. It was called Gunman and was a stunning sound, light and performance piece using paramilitary slide images. It was heavy stuff at the time because of the IRA bombings in Britain. I later learned that the piece had been improvised; apparently there had been some Customs hold-up with props and costumes en route, so the planned show could not happen. This was in the days of the dreaded 'Carnet', when every single item in your van had to be listed in quadruplicate!

The visuals and sound were always extraordinary in a John Bull show. The latter was the work of John Darling who was a genius with recording tape and who taught sound at Leeds Polytechnic. Their outdoor work was particularly inventive, for instance their 1969/70 Earthprobes, performed as astronauts investigating a local rubbish tip. Or there was Colour Wheel, a lovely piece that started off as a giant pile of jumble which over a period of time was gradually sorted into colours. These were then hung out on a vast circular washing line so that by the end they had a complete colour spectrum wheel made up of old clothes; it was simple, beautiful and elegant.

They would travel in a big old truck with a large crew cab. On top was a giant roof-rack onto which they would strap any oversize props. On one occasion they were carrying gigantic lumps of polystyrene painted to resemble concrete blocks. On the Dutch motorway the blocks broke free and in the rear view mirror the driver saw



cars swerving to avoid these enormous obstacles! The cast had to run back down the carriageway and with seemingly superhuman strength lift the 'concrete' blocks out of the way. It must have been quite a performance in itself.

I remember a great quote from Diz Willis when he was asked how ideas for a John Bull show came about. He said something to the effect that 'it depends on the quality of the bitter'. It was especially funny for us in the Naturals, as it was the availability of the local Natural Dry Cider that kick-started our creativity!

John Bull is mentioned here and there in various performance art books, but not half as much as they should be, and their eventual break-up at the end of the 1970s was a profound loss to the world of eccentric British performance.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

I last heard (a long time ago) that John Darling was performing with his wife and children as a perfectly turned out 1950s family. They would arrive at Agricultural Shows and such in a period car complete with costumes, old radio and picnic. They would then live out their day as though in a time warp. Mick Banks has also told us that John Darling continued to make soundtracks for groups like Hesitate and Demonstrate and Rational Theatre while pursuing a career as an actor. He published a book of poetry in 1999 and still does the occasional interventionist theatre piece.

George O'Brien disappeared early on. Diz Willis and Al Beach have both sadly died. Mick Banks teamed up with Corinne D'Cruz

of Natural Theatre Company in 1978 to form British Events, and they now live in Germany. The company tours in Europe, and occasionally further afield, with its unique productions combining humour, visual comedy, unusual gadgets and spectacular pyrotechnic effects.

To find out more, email

info@british-events.com

or see www.british-events.com



Michael Banks

Diz Willis

Brian Popay is founder member and senior performer with The Natural Theatre Company.

See www.naturaltheatre.co.uk

ALL IMAGES SUPPLIED BY MICHAEL BANKS OF BRITISH EVENTS.

1 | ROLLS ROYCE WHEELBARROWS – JOHN BULL LAY THE FOUNDATION STONE AT THE GLOBE 1972/ PHOTO ROGER PERR

2 | FILM CREW AT WALCOT SUNSHINE FESTIVAL IN BATH/ PHOTO DAVE DYAS

3 | DELTA STOPOVER PLYMOUTH ARTS CENTRE 1973

4 | ARHUS FESTIVAL DENMARK 1973/ CARTOONS FROM DANISH NEWSPAPER

EVE WEDDERBURN GOES TO BRITISH DANCE EDITION AND REFLECTS ON THE FUZZY LINE BETWEEN DANCE AND PHYSICAL THEATRE

BORDERLINE CASES

TOTAL THEATRE MAGAZINE | ISSUE 18 | VOLUME 02 | SUMMER 2006

I slip into British Dance Edition feeling like an outsider amongst the impossibly lithe-legged, long-necked crowd. For one thing, I'm a day late, and for another, I'm not from a dance background. When I tell people I'm from Total Theatre Magazine, and interested in physical theatre, I'm met with a degree of blankness. And therein lies my first lesson of the festival: dance audiences are mainly just interested in dance, and physical theatre doesn't sound much like dance. They tend not to ask what physical theatre is, which I have to admit is a relief: how do you define a genre that goes from DV8 to Complicite via the circus?

The first show I catch brings into sharp focus all the problems of sequestering performances into categories. Gravity and Levity's *Falling Up* and *Reinventing the Wheel* feature dance-trained Lyndsey Butcher working with circus props (such as the German Wheel). The performances start with the exploration of the relationship of the performers to the objects, in the same

way that dance seems to be exploring the very limits of the dancer's body. Even the functional, reinforced corset of *Falling Upwards* reminds me vaguely of a dancer's pointe shoes, with the clumping blocks at the ends of the toes strangely at odds with the delicacy and grace of the ballerina. In *Gravity* and *Levity*'s show, though, the incongruence is surpassed as the pieces wind their ways into allegorical tales of resistance and surrender, discovery and loss. As if to underline this sense, at the end of *Reinventing the Wheel*, the performers ultimately discard the wheel; they are complete without it.

Having been gently drawn into the world of *Gravity* and *Levity*, I start to watch the next show, *Fever to Tell*, by Probe, absent-mindedly wondering whether or not it is narrative (or a sense of narrative) that draws a distinction between theatre and dance. The dancers twist and throw themselves through a high-octane portrait of what appears to be savagely passionate

It is one step further away from performance's ritual roots: the audience are not here to witness but to observe these dancer-objects and their accomplishment

relationship. I later discover that in fact, the performance is conceived of as describing three separate relationships, but the divide between my perspective from the Total Theatre encampment and this dance audience's is already beginning to show. For all its narrative content, Probe's work doesn't quite cross over into theatre territory. Right from the outset there is something oddly distant between the performance and the audience — Probe produce a work of terrible, searing beauty, but ultimately I have the sense that they'd be just as enraged and

expressive if I wasn't there; the audience isn't acknowledged in the moment of creation. On the other hand, there is no theatre without an audience; there is only rehearsal. This piece may be physical, but it isn't theatre. For all Probe's windmilling arms and swirling hair, their desperate attempts, it seems, to leave their own skin, the passion and danger are strangely nulled by this indifference between the performers and the audience. The dancers are like glittering objects that we view for the sake of the dance and not for the sake of the relationships that the dance is supposed to be describing. I watch, transfixed – it is an incredible performance – wondering if it is only me who is experiencing the odd paradox of seeing an incredible display of virtuosic performance whilst feeling utterly cold. I get my answer when, at a particularly spectacular moment, the audience laughs out loud with delight. It was pretty amazing, I think – failing adequately to note what 'it' was, because I'm too busy wondering whether, at an equivalent theatre performance dealing with an emotionally violent relationship, the audience would ever be moved to laugh.

This experience of seeing virtuosic performance but feeling oddly disengaged becomes familiar to me over the rest of the festival. From the cut-glass choreography of Charles Linehan's *Happy Days* – a beautiful, pared-down work of grace and simplicity – to the energy and fire of Tavasiva Dance's *Worlds Apart*, there was a whole raft of work that left me wondering about this strange relationship between the dancers, the work and the audience. It lacks something of the liminal quality of theatre work, I think to myself, it is one step further away from performance's ritual roots: the audience are not here to witness but to observe these dancer-objects and their accomplishment. It is a sparkling carousel of virtuosity.

To a dance audience, it seems, this virtuosity is a key aspect of their interest. Throughout the whole weekend, I am routinely staggered by the incredible feats of human doing that is British Dance. Even more incredible is the reaction of the (extremely dance-savvy) audience who seem almost to the last completely underwhelmed by this jaw-dropping aspect of the event. They watch these tensile steel bodies with hawk-eye precision – and perfection is the only acceptable standard. Those who reach it are met with only equivocal approval. I'm learning my second lesson about being at a dance festival: the audience is as well trained as the dancers, and this particular audience are connoisseurs.

One show that passes the grade with ease is Rosie Kay's *Asylum*. It is an

incredible piece of performance. The performers have a dancer's aesthetic, with rope-like muscles twisting around impossibly long limbs. The piece itself is mind-blowing, ringing with a crystal-edged clarity that pleases the perfectionist dance audience. The duet starts with a struggling to shake off a stack of shopping bags and then becomes an emblematic tale of people finding each other in the midst of madness. In one sense, they could be two inhabitants of the asylum finding sanity

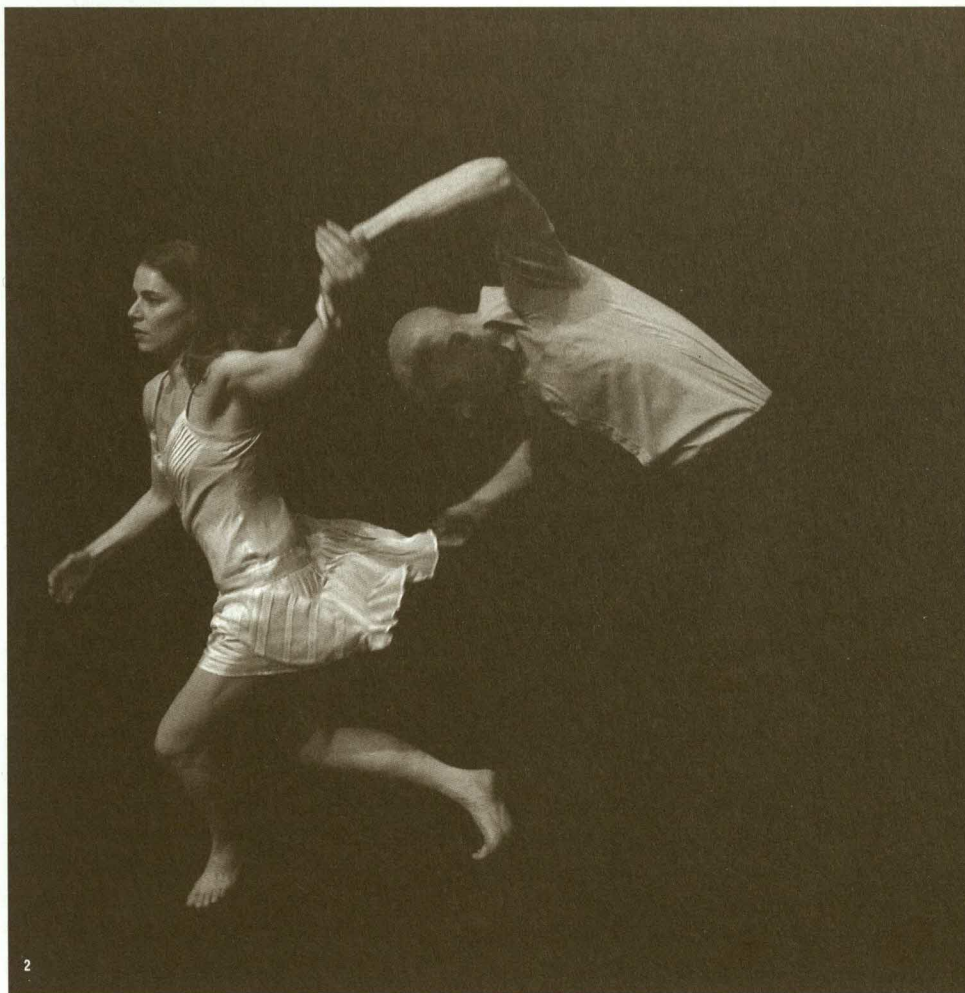
Rosie Kay's work is great dance, but it's also some of the best theatre work I've ever seen

in each other's arms. But in another, the madhouse around them is the modern world, the consumerism that threatened to consume them before they find asylum together. Their extrication from the chaos and shopping bags, their joyful discovery of each other, is a profoundly moving one. Awestruck, I sit and reflect upon whether or not it would appeal to a Total Theatre audience. The truth is, I can't think of an audience that wouldn't want to see it, and I start to think maybe I'm not such an

outsider here after all. If this is what dance is becoming, I'll be counting myself a member of the dance audience. Rosie Kay's work is charged and visceral. It might be great dance, but it's also some of the best theatre work I've ever seen.

The dancers speak to us in New Art Club's *Dance, Jokes and Dance Jokes*. The show has an organic feel – as if the form and structure evolved in tandem with the text. This gentle, complex and hilarious work seems to cross the boundaries between dance and theatre as if it doesn't even notice them. I momentarily reflect that there might be some way of fashioning a definition of 'physical theatre' out of this piece. This is careful writing, articulated by and through movement, and they don't stand about waiting for music to cue them to start. Also, there are no moments of dance for its own sake – except when they make a carefully levelled joke about dance for its own sake. 'There should be more minimalism,' they announce, and then go whirring off into the serious, angular choreography that pervades the festival. I laugh like a drain and start to feel like an outsider again; some of my long-necked friends in the audience aren't quite so amused.

Ultimately, the festival's highlights for me – those pieces that do have a crossover quality – are produced by companies who seem to be using the form to articulate their subject, rather than bending their



subject to fit the form. StopGAP's Corpus, for example, is beautifully danced by the company of four, one of whom had Down's syndrome and one of whom was in a wheelchair. It begins with a circular, haunting refrain about 'you're/your one more useless body'. This of course jangles all my middle-class nerves about political correctness (am I supposed to think it's relating to disability? Do I think that because I'm morally bankrupt?), and I half-prepare myself to receive a sound lesson in what an awful bigot I must be. Nothing nearly so self-righteous: Corpus is an incredible, vibrant celebration of bodies in all their varieties. Watching the company, I am suddenly aware of the monochrome of a whole dance festival in which you only see one kind of body – the standard two-up, two-downer, as it were. StopGAP are a burst of joyous Technicolor, and Corpus, through this triumphant, energetic affirmation, have me questioning my own attitudes much more openly than if I'd felt confronted and defensive. 'Brilliant,' I think, then middle-classedly wonder if the whole show was about something else entirely and I'm too prejudiced to notice.

This ability to entwine the performers, the subject and the choreography in order to speak intelligently to an audience seems to propel the work out of pure dance, using the form to appeal to an audience.

Another example hitting my PC nerve-endings is Colin Poole's The Box Office. Poole dances his way under and through Blaxploitation myths in a remarkable way: he turns his body so carefully that first we see the body, and then recognise the individual bodies behind all the cultural archetypes and stereotypes. Then, equally painstakingly, and as carefully as a diamond-cutter, he turns these bodies upside-down for us, and what starts as provocative dancing and stripping becomes simple and organic sweating and breathing. Using a reversible mask, images, movement, a soundtrack and some brilliant costume, he changes as we watch from threatening and powerful to threatened, vulnerable and gagged. At the end, there is a moment of indescribable tenderness as this masked or gagged body tentatively approaches the light of the centre-stage. Slowly, delicately and like a sly grin, Poole exposed the golliwog image that underpinned all the images he had challenged us with; and it's like a horrific joke – but I'm with the long-necks this time and don't laugh.

It's at the final triple bill of Phoenix Dance, Henri Oguike and Russell Maliphant that I finally give up on ever becoming a full-on dance-fiend. The pieces are spectacular – brilliant choreography, brilliantly danced. The crowd clearly adore



3

The ability to entwine the performers, the subject and the choreography in order to speak intelligently to an audience propels the work out of pure dance

it, and it does hit all the dance targets – interesting, edgy design, high-octane, abstractly aesthetic and hugely impressive.

But it's just dance, I think, which brings me to my final lesson about being at a dance festival: there are artists out there wanting to bridge the gap, to change the terms in which they use and encounter the form, looking, perhaps, for crossover audiences that might be found in the Total Theatre camp; but dance, for the purist, is enough on its own.



British Dance Edition is held every two years. The next BDE will be held in Liverpool in 2008, and will be hosted by Dance North West and the Association of National Dance Agencies. For further information on the 2006 event, held in Leeds, see www.bde2006.co.uk

- 1 | GRAVITY & LEVITY TAKING FLIGHT/
PHOTO JOHAN PERSSON
- 2 | ROSIE KAY ASYLUM
- 3 | STOPGAP/ PHOTO HUGO GLENDINNING
- 4 | COLIN POOLE THE BOX OFFICE

WALLACE MCDOWELL PONDERES THE NATURE OF IMPROVISATION AS WITNESSED AT WARWICK ARTS CENTRE'S SHIFTI

MAKING IT UP



The advance publicity for this event described it as 'Risk-taking, adventurous performances in dance, music, theatre. All shows are improvised in front of the audience'. With one of the performances available for sale on DVD in the foyer, I thought it advisable to take this claim with a pinch of salt. It did, however, set me thinking about the nature of improvisation and its relationships with performance. It's arguably true that a 'pure' form of improvisation – one which centres on exploration, the journey without the arrival – takes place behind closed doors and with an infinite duration, away from spectators' eyes. Improvisational guru Viola Spolin describes it as 'playing the game': 'setting out to solve a problem with no preconception as to how you will do it... it is not the scene, it is the way to the scene... a moment in the lives of people without needing a plot or storyline for the communication.' This reduces the pressure on the participant to communicate with anyone not themselves involved with the activity. The focus is on an open-ended approach in order to maximise the opportunity of participants to break down the barriers – physical, linguistic and emotional – which pervade everyday life. In the SHIFTI performances, however, improvisation became contingent on a number of theatrical framing devices which changed the nature of the engagement. The space was clearly divided into lit performance and darkened audience areas. There were previously negotiated provisions for start and finish times of the performance. The audience had paid to get in. On this last point, I talked to some of the other spectators, asking if the fact that they had parted with up to £20 gave them expectations in terms of what they would get as a performance. The general answer was yes – people wanted something from the evening in performance terms that they could take away with them. With these framing devices in place, it was interesting to note how often SHIFTI items drifted their

way into the comfort zone of unfolding narrative.

I was present at approximately two-thirds of this three-day event and I think it is possible for the most part to place the performances into three categories. Due to the success of the Comedy Store, and of television's *Whose Line is it Anyway?*, the most familiar improvisational form is that of performers responding directly to stimuli from the audience. This form found its expression in a number of SHIFTI events. Holland's Impromptu Theatre began by asking the audience for three musical notes, around which they built a soundscape. This, in turn, prompted the audience to suggest locations and characters to the group, which were then acted out in music and theatre. Art and Shock (Kazakhstan) took on board audience suggestions about emotional characteristics and then placed these in a series of varied locations. In both cases, the group's apparent ease and experience with one another allowed them to shift and segue effortlessly between location and character to build a fairly polished performance. Perhaps the most successful item in this category was *The Quest*, a show for children performed by Fluxx. I took my own performance Geiger counter in the shape of my nine-year-old son Danny, who pronounced himself fully satisfied afterwards and behaved like an excited maniac during the show. The mixture of audience suggestion and participation, coupled with a professional and non-condescending style of performance, was a major hit with adult and child audience members alike.

The second category in evidence during SHIFTI involved performers who began by simply being – exploring their environment in terms of time and place of performance, but who, in the course of their slot, became subject to narrative drift. Action Theatre Performance Group began with a physical and vocal examination of 'openness', operating

as four individuals working in a space. Over time, however, it was interesting to note how the high levels of intensity in their individual performances were lowered, and how they began to operate much more as a group, incorporating moments of stillness and togetherness as they began to communicate a narrative around the notion of 'lean on me'. E.S.P. (Explorations in Spontaneous Performance) began their piece *WOULDBEGOOD* with a series of meanderings – steps around the stage, the odd rasp into a microphone, a random musical note. From this emerged a story, complete with songs, about two brothers, one of whom had been murdered by their mother. The effect was, from the spectators' standpoint, enjoyable and engaging, becoming loud and raucous, reminding me of a somewhat undercooked version of Forced Entertainment's *Bloody Mess*.

The third strand of performance on view was where a complete and finished show had simply been worked up from improvisation. The clearest example of this came from Julyen Hamilton in *The Cell*, where, through a mixture of repeated phrases and seemingly randomised gestures reminiscent of Merce Cunningham, the emotional cost of physical and mental incarceration was explored. The fact that this was the most rehearsed and previously performed of all the items I saw had a clear relationship with the satisfaction of the spectators who saw it.

Seeing a range of diverse improvisational forms over a short period of time provoked, then, a series of questions about their relationship with performance. Perhaps the fundamental one is this: in an inversion of the philosophical question we ask of the sound made by the tree falling in the forest (does it make a sound if there is no one there to hear it?), can improvisation really be said to exist if there is an audience there to bear witness to it?

See www.shifti.co.uk

AMATO SALTONE

2 FEBRUARY 2006: SHUNT'S LATEST SHOW IS [RE]VIEWED
ON THE SAME NIGHT FROM THREE DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

SHUNT'S AMATO SALTONE AT SHUNT VAULTS
PHOTOS CHRISTOPHER SIMMS

THE INSIDE OUT VIEW

In the usual organisation of theatre, the view from the technical booth is normally invisible to the audience. It offers a perspective that is not supposed to be part of 'the public' aspect of the performance – an expectation undone only when something goes drastically wrong. In a production in which the division of space – producing a drama of both licit and illicit voyeurism – is fundamental to the design, it seems especially appropriate to put this perspective into dialogue with those of the reviewers.

Like the performers, after the opening party scene, no one audience group in Amato Saltone has a view of the 'whole' show; and, indeed, given that the two reviewers were women, there is one audience viewpoint that they could never get to see – that of the group of segregated men. As it happens, this is one of the two views provided by CCTV in the technical booth, to help keep track of the progress of the performance. How can a review respond to this fractured dramaturgy, where the reviewer is normally expected to offer a synthetic perspective on the whole experience? In this instance, this question itself structures the project of the review. The view from the technical booth is itself further fragmented – not only in space (being removed from the encounter between performer and audience), but also in time. Here, the performance is experienced in terms of cues: divisions of time into numbers that must correspond between the sound and the lighting systems to achieve a unified effect in that encounter between audience and performer. What links these two systems is a device that links computers called 'midi', and the performance text in the booth is punctuated by a regular, resigned note: 'The midi's down again' – at which point (twice on this occasion) the elements separate out and have to be synthesised manually rather than by the machines. One consequence of this, on the evening being reviewed, was that a series of cues for video projection was lost. Paradoxically, then, in the booth one can even see what is not visible to an audience during the performance.

The sense of the show in the booth as different in time from that of most reviewers is due also to the fact that it is not simply the one performance that is experienced, but rather its relation to all the previous ones. On this evening, there was the pleasure of experiencing one of the performers trying out something for the first time – in the event, something that was felt not to 'work' and which was changed again on the next night. Of course, this measure of 'review' within the performance process by the company is not confined to the constant attempt to explore the possibilities of the show. It also extends to a sense of the audience – sharing the feeling afterwards not only of whether it was 'good' or a 'poor' performance that night, but also whether or not 'they were a good audience'.

Mischa Twitchin, a member of the Shunt collective

ON REFLECTION

The long walk from London Bridge's bustle, through perilously under-lit caverns towards distant laughter from the fairy-lit troglodyte decadence of Shunt's bar, is a representative herald of the latest Shunt experience. Always focused on immersing the audience in a surreal, extravagant world, in Amato Saltone Shunt have married this preoccupation to thematic content through an exploration of the seedy noir lens of writer Cornell Woolrich. The pulp writer's fascination with voyeurism, intrigue and seamy melodrama proves an excellent foil to the company's unique style and setting.

From a participant's point of view, the unsettling, and perhaps slightly over-emphatic, feeling of being 'left behind' by the rest of the group (siphoned off for the best part of the evening) was usefully unnerving. Creating an 'Other' through the split audience set ideas of surveillance and intrigue into play, galvanising our response to the work unfolding around us. Shunt's shtick is to progressively provoke an audience out of its complacency, this time gamely giving us characters later to be credited in the film of the show, and welcoming us to what rapidly emerges as a swingers' party, threatening participation. When the power is cut, we are led into a more disturbing communion with our fellow participants/witnesses – herded through the postures of unwilling voyeurs of disturbing acts, and becoming unwitting performers within the disorienting urban landscape created by the company. There's an effective and persistent sense of something occurring just off stage – a mole in our midst, a demanding voice on the telephone, a glimpse of our lost compatriots – and within the gloom of the vaults, a palpable crackle of anticipation.

At its best, the show plays skilfully with an audience hungry to consume: first empowering then rendering us vulnerable; involving us then rejecting us. This experience resists complacency and recreates in us the sense of simultaneous relish and unease at the emotional heart of Saltone. The performances are ingeniously worked out and the absurd sense of humour threading through the whole warms us to what we might otherwise resist, and enriches the characters we meet only fleetingly as they shepherd us through their environment.

It is difficult then to reassemble later the simpler experience of 'audience' when the performance resolves itself into a presentation of cinematic images in a split auditorium. Here, hilarious spoof noir, strange fetishistic acts and stylised quayside courtship combine to make the intriguing suggestion that previous acts witnessed were not only theatrical but also cinematic

fictions. Yet this image-based sequence felt harder to swallow. Our relationship to the images – however beautiful, provocative or mysterious – was less engaging than our experience of being

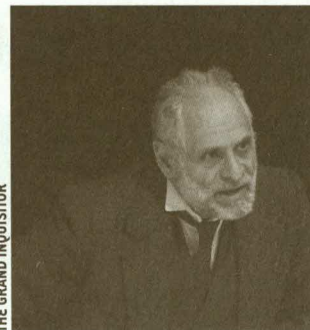
part of them ourselves.

This risk of disengagement threatened throughout the evening. In a show playing with the processes of looking – voyeurism, power and the consumption of images – the irony was that the audience were becoming more interested in taking part, straightforwardly devouring the scenes placed before them. There is a built-in risk to performance complex enough to demand that the audience construct its own meaning, which Shunt's work self-consciously sets out to do: there must be enough remaining clues to offer some sense of being on the right track; the detective work required to piece experience together into meaning needs to be rewarded along the way. Here, the sense of mystery never resolves, and Shunt has cultivated an audience disinterested in anything but experience itself.

Beccy Smith



SHUNT



KNEEHIGH THEATRE NIGHTS AT THE CIRCUS

THÉÂTRE DES BOUFFES DU NORD
THE GRAND INQUISITOR

Kneehigh Theatre
NIGHTS AT THE CIRCUS

West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds

February 2006

Peter Brook / Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord
THE GRAND INQUISITOR

Gardner Arts Centre, Brighton

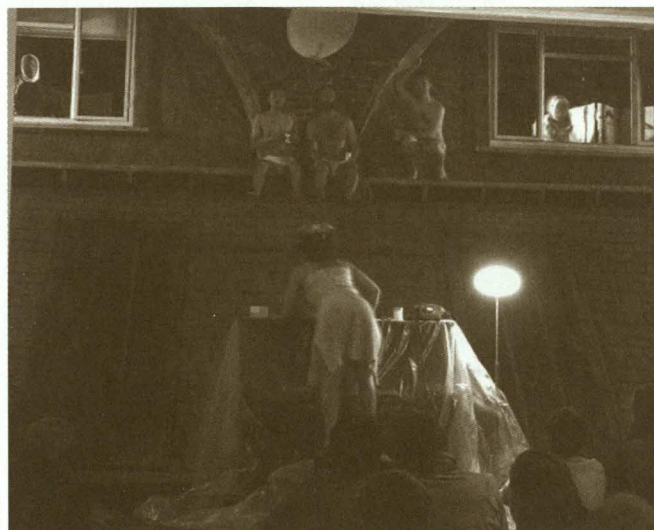
February 2006

THE EXPERIENTIAL RESPONSE

I'm given a key, no explanation, no instructions. Walking, stumbling through dank archways, why do these other people overtaking us seem to know where they are going? What's in those dark corners? Stumble on towards the light and sound into a bar. Are we there yet? Has it started yet? People playing pool. Junk shop sofas. Drink a much-needed whisky (medicinal, am cold and sniffing). What now? Through a door, lockers, oh, the key... a sparkly pink clown's hat, a name, a set of instructions. Another corridor, a room full of people, a room with a view. Not windows but live film sets; pig masks, a crooning cabaret artist, a ringing telephone. I obey instructions and leave; Beccy stays behind. A bedsit – teak tat, a mattress on the floor, a fridge, cheesy cheddars, our host a cringy bloke. We're all sitting nervously, we're left alone, the lights go out. Are we all 'real' audience members? Who'll pick up the ringing phone? Heavy footsteps above, crashing and banging, cries and screams; rape, murder or an S&M scene? Ushered out – who's making the decisions here? Ah, an usherette...

into a cinema but oh my God, what we're seeing is a split-screen version of where we've just been. This whole thing is so Hitchcock, so Rear Window – but it would be, wouldn't it? Credits roll, new people come in. There's a bin bag on its own in the centre – very Gavin Turk. Humiliation – a woman orders a man to undress; he puts on a sailor suit. Glimpses of a trapeze artist swinging by on the other side of the divide. I wriggle on my seat, it's all a bit squirmy. Led out by the usherette, handed a torch, I stumble on with the herd. Now where? Into my own ripped-and-torn past, '70s squats – enormous places with cavernous low-lit rooms full of (it's all here) mattresses, screwed-up tissues, lumps of plastic, bottles, some sort of scrunched-up bubble-wrap stuff, a piano that's seen better days, a few chairs. We shine torches around; objects are highlighted, framed by the light, given the Duchamp treatment, transposed into sculpture. Two women who look heavily pregnant smoking fags, swaying dangerously, staring us out, crawling on the floor. Am I having fun? I think I'm having fun. All too soon the party's over. Thank you and Good Night.

Dorothy Max Prior



Kneehigh is a company rediscovering the largely lost art of theatricality in British theatre, reminding us of what mainstream theatre could be like if companies took more risks and adjusted their focus from the message to the medium.

Nights at the Circus draws us in to a run-down circus on the cusp of the 19th–20th centuries: a tired world yearning for something new to satisfy the longings and frustrations generated by the old. Eventually, the darkness and cruelty of the circus is shattered; out of its ashes emerges a world of honesty, beauty and freedom.

Many of Kneehigh's hallmarks are evident here: 'the anoraks' (the clowns) in their cheap, absurd costumes; a living stage, animated by the performers' bodies and voices; a sensitivity to the productive and qualitative differences between live and recorded sound; a courageous exploration of sexuality, identity, violence, life and death.

So far so good – but a production which establishes the audience as participants in the stage action in the 19th century left me feeling strangely disconnected by the performance as a whole. The stage/audience relationship was often unclear: were we the 19th-century audience? Modern spectators? Both? It was as if, having established our liminal, spectator/participant, identity, there hadn't quite been time to think through the staging implications of this. The dynamic engagement established at the opening promised much, but for most of the first half I felt addressed by the stage, rather than engaged by it in a common theatrical endeavour.

This intriguing and, ultimately, moving production (whose ending surprised me with its power and beauty) picked up pace in the second half, with its more confident exploitation of the stage. However, if Nights at the Circus is 'Angela Carter's ... homage to the theatre', then Kneehigh's production felt torn between establishing its own theatrical identity and paying homage to Angela Carter.

Simon Benson

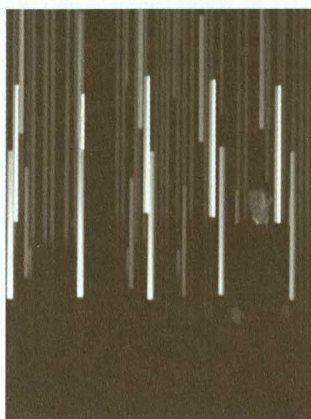
Using a novel as a starting point for theatre has its disadvantages: too much material, and the perennial problem of representing a character's internal thoughts. If you must seek inspiration in novels, a good tack might be to pick just one small section of the novel to dramatise, and then choose a section that is inherently dramatic; perhaps something that revolves around a conflict of ideas that seeks resolution. Well, you can't teach your grandmother to suck eggs. Peter Brook delves into Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, and extracts from it the story-within-a-story section which is the parable of the Grand Inquisitor. In essence: Christ comes back to earth at the time of the Spanish Inquisition. He is arrested. The Grand Inquisitor tells him that he has not understood human nature. He has burdened humanity with too much freedom; the gift of free will has got us nowhere.

Sometimes life (and theatre) can be so easy. Whenever I see a Brook production, I'm tempted to think, 'That's great, so obvious, I could have done that.' Here's an example: a very simple staging – black walls, clear strong lighting, a large area of the stage floor covered by a white mat, a thick one that is a bit like a judo mat. In one corner, addressing the audience and addressing his prisoner, is the Grand Inquisitor who sits, stands, walks, talks. In the corner diagonally opposite, the Christ figure, who sits, in silent but receptive mode. We only see his back; he stays still, other than for the occasional movement of head or leg that perhaps reflects, echoes, or counters a word or movement from the Inquisitor. When the Inquisitor stops speaking, the Christ figure walks towards him and kisses him as his reply. The slow walk across the diagonal is a beautifully simple and effective choreography. Perfect theatre; a two-hander that proves the power of the spoken word, and proves that the most powerful physical theatre can be still, quiet, minimal.

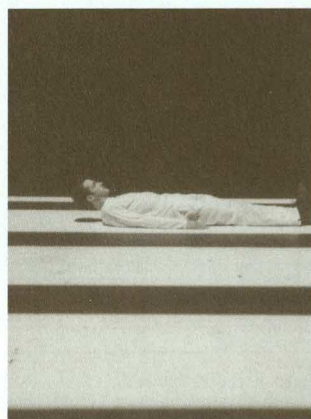
See, it's easy isn't it?

Dorothy Max Prior

CIE111 MORE OR LESS INFINITY



PIERRE RIGAL ERECTION



ADRIEN M CONVERGENCE



CIE111/Phil Soltanoff

MORE OR LESS INFINITY

Queen Elizabeth Hall, South Bank Centre

We were eased into this year's Mime Festival with a gentle foray into CIE 111's 'digitised' world of abstract shape and surreal vignettes. The last of a trio of explorations of 'spatial concepts', and the first co-production for LIMF, have resulted in a soothing experience reminiscent of late nights in front of Ceefax listening to Brian Eno (don't ask).

From all four sides of the theatre space emerge line upon line: white lines, short lines, the bendy line and the human body's lines. From one of the five slices in the floor emerges a disembodied arm, an organic collection of straight and bendy lines; then a disembodied head; soon to be joined by a headless body. In this moment, there is a sense of the incisions that computers can make into our physical being. Soon lines extend, contract and bend under the influence of the performers' actions. The piece is something of a trip into the past of digital experience, including a fantastic game of Pong with two human bodies as computer joysticks.

Many of the images are reminiscent of the early 1980s experimentation with video, and the same cyborg quality pervades the performers' bodies as they glide in and out of the stage space on small 'trucks' mounted in the grooves of the stage.

It all strikes me as reminiscent of a piece of advice I was once given about drawing: focus not on drawing the object but drawing the lines that make up the object. Here then is a striking drawing in time, composed of a variety of lines, both spatial and musical. A drawing where the inanimate lines seem more alive than the soft tissue of the human bodies. A delicious confusion of solidity and plasticity.

Tom Wilson

Compagnie Dernière Minute / Pierre Rigal

ERECTION

ICA

A simple idea that traces a transition of supine man on floor via strobe-induced suspension to final digital diaspora fifty minutes later. A white floor cover takes overhead video projection that continues the theme of 'the line' — a key concept of Aurelian Bory's other Festival show, More or Less Infinity. Bory is credited on this show with conception, direction and design; with Pierre Rigal as choreographer, video creation and solo performer. Bory's training in physics and film is a clear influence. Physics meets film meets theatre — a great mix, and one that really works in this intimate piece. By keeping things simple, the humanity of the performance is never bleached out by the technology. Bory and Rigal tread a fine line between crudeness and sophistication (Rigal's movement is basic but gutsy), cleverly leaving much of the video firepower to the last ten minutes. In this final sequence a grid of lines fill the back wall of the ICA as Rigal moves across them. The projection traces the lines onto the performer as his human body plays with and disturbs the digital symmetry. In the same sequence, two floor projectors overlay the performer's virtual image onto his physical one. Hints of dissolution of the self, dislocation of personality — you get the idea. Technically it's more digital impressionism than state-of-the-art science — but it worked. The show put content and performer first, which in the end was always more about metaphysics than physics.

Barry Edwards

Adrien M

CONVERGENCE

The Purcell Room, South Bank Centre

Convergence is a fusion of live action with computer science; a fusion between the live on-stage image and the projected one; a fusion and convergence of kinetic energy juggled from one source to another, from a real ball to the falling image of one. The skill with which Adrien Mondot juggles the balls is almost flawless. Controlling his subjects with poise and ease, he creates a hypnotic rhythm — enhanced by the live accompaniment of cellist Veronika Soboljevski. It is when the fates reverse, however, and the balls start to control him, that things get more interesting. As real balls give way to virtual balls, the latter start to fly around the screen with chaotic abandon; Adrien M commands them back, the balls now like petulant children. The balls — both real and virtual — seem to take on a power of their own and it is this which allows energy to be transferred between objects and man.

This transference becomes clear when a mass of virtual balls is heaped upon the screen, bouncing and darting around the sole human figure, when suddenly they become suspended in mid-air. Instantaneously, their latent energy flows into Adrien M and their kinetic force powers his movement. He is charged by them and vice-versa.

It is in the closing moments of the performance that the energy of this piece truly reaches the audience. Previously a thin, translucent projection screen separated performer and spectator: when removed, both sides of the screen are finally able to converge with each other. Left in front of us is one man who does what he does best — simply juggles, with simply outstanding skill. Journeying through new fusions between live and mediated performance, Adrien M climaxes by stripping back to the basics of his trade. His body glistens with the sweat of sheer physical focus and the room is charged with his concentration. Mesmerising.

Marigold Hughes

Sylvain Meret/Les Marches de L'Eté & Kairos Compagnie

LE MODÈLE DE MOLINIER OU LE CÉRÉMONIAL NARCISSIQUE

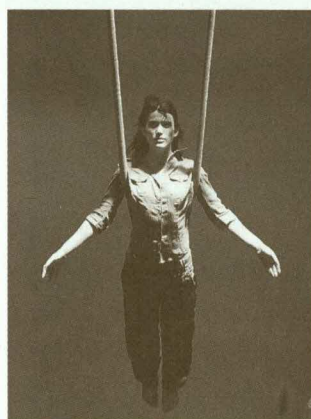
ICA

This show is inspired by the photo-montages of the French painter and photographer Pierre Molinier, whose auto-erotic self portraits depict the artist in an array of sexually charged, faintly sadomasochistic poses: across chairs, balanced on metallic stools, limbs bound in black fishnet and silks, performing his queerness for the camera. In the publicity material for Sylvain Meret's homage to Molinier, the audience is cast in the position of the artist's camera: our watching eyes replace his watching lens; the performance that was once for the camera is re-imagined as a performance in a theatre. But it is in this very translation, from mechanical lens to living eye, that the whole idea of this project stumbles and falls, and ultimately fails. When looking at Molinier's images, one catches the details (the textures of the light and the variously eroticised fabrics and prostheses with which Molinier clothes himself); the visual wit plays against the high art pretensions; the sexual explicitness of the images swings rapidly between the shocking and the ridiculous. And when looking at the pictures, one can flick quickly across the weaker images, linger longer over the good ones. But within five minutes of the opening of this show at the ICA, I felt totally trapped, desperate to escape, and utterly bored. Meret, dragged up in fishnets and gloves, bends and bows his body into a series of poses drawn directly from Molinier's photomontages. Although the elasticity of his body and his garters occasionally catches the eye, the total monotony of pacing throughout the piece, and the deadly seriousness of its presentation, meant that a perceptible unease soon settled over the audience. Although there was one rather beautiful sequence when Meret suddenly and all too briefly began to dance, the show generally had that feeling of urgency that only comes when you hope that every moment will be the last.

Perhaps this piece would work better in a more intimate space, with the audience able to come and go, in control of how they watch, as they are in a photographic exhibition. But instead, forced to watch and wait just like the artist's camera lens, I felt totally disengaged from the piece. And the show, in the end, is exactly what its subtitle says it is: an exercise in narcissism which, like the beautiful youth himself, dies a slow, slow death as a result of its own self-absorption.

David Harradine

MATILDA LEYSER LINE, POINT, PLANE



Matilda Leyser

LINE, POINT, PLANE

Linbury Studio, Royal Opera House

Matilda's Leyser's triptych of work investigates an ongoing theme in contemporary circus-based performance, that of the basic components of geometry: the line, the point and the plane.

The evening begins with the sparsest of Leyser's work, *Night-Plane*, oddly about the fullest of her geometric shapes. Leyser emerges from a funereal, vertical landscape of cloth as if she were a small subterranean mammal emerging from the depths of the earth into the night. As she traverses this darkened surface of hidden foot- and handholds we glimpse half-formed stories scored out of time and repositioned upon this bleak canvas. Despite the pungent atmosphere she creates, there is a tendency for the mind to wonder at the mechanics of the operation, 'shortening' our connection to this stage world.

With Leyser's second piece, *Lifeline* (which was presented as a stand-alone piece at Edinburgh Fringe 2005, and shortlisted for a Total Theatre Award), she lightens the tone and the perceived complexity of her work. Leyser eschews the complex for delicately pitched, archetypal characters and images that are instantly recognisable. We forget the 'trick' and are instead drawn into the simple narrative journey of her character from cradle to maturity, and beyond.

The finale is *Dead Point*. This elegant meditation on the fundamental joys of the cloud swing becomes a poetic metaphor for a way of living; a way that embraces the 'jumping-off' point, the point of all possibilities, the point at the end of a swing's trajectory. Bryony Lavery's text becomes a soft elegy in Leyser's hands, and lends a gentle clarity of purpose to the choreography of Michele Weaver. In this the gentility of Leyser's work is clearest, and serves as a confident marker that there are no boundaries between the three dimensions of circus, dance and theatre; there is only the point at which all three meet.

Tom Wilson

CIRCUS RONALDO LA CUCINA DELL'ARTE



Circus Ronaldo

LA CUCINA DELL'ARTE

The Pit, Barbican Theatre

There is something about the expectation of a circus show – especially one that revolves around clowning – that makes people laugh before anything has actually happened. This could be plain irritating were it not for the fact that *La Cucina dell'Arte* goes on to earn this laughter through such human insight, warmth, skill and sheer entertainment value that it becomes impossible not to laugh. Or, indeed, ever stop laughing.

One Ronaldo Brother is a waiter, the other is a head chef. It is this classically comic relationship, and the power struggles within it, that gives the meat to this feast of a performance. The waiter makes mistakes – the chef chides him. He is made acutely aware of his lowliness and in one attempt to raise his status hands a broom to a child in the audience to sweep up the pieces of a plate he has accidentally smashed. He gets away with it until the chef spots him. Yes, he is indeed the lowest of the low.

Naturally we cannot help but side with the underdog, and the connection between the audience and the waiter is incredibly warm. Not least because the situation established is resolutely one of a restaurant and not a theatre: there is no form of barrier between the audience and the action. As if to reaffirm this, two audience members are taken from their seats and cajoled into sitting down at one of the restaurant's tables. The actors want the audience to be there: this is definitely felt.

La Cucina dell'Arte is a totally human, gleeful and uplifting performance that through the outstanding circus skills of the Ronaldo Brothers, revels in revealing the folly of power struggles and in celebrating the blips and blunders which make us human.

Marigold Hughes

COMPANY MOSSOUX-BONTÉ TWIN HOUSES



Company Mossoux-Bonté

TWIN HOUSES

The Purcell Room, South Bank Centre

Company Mossoux-Bonté have a diverse output. The husband-and-wife team have created more than fifteen pieces of dance and film, and the promising influence of a cinematographic eye can be felt throughout in the evocative and beautiful compositions of light and body in evidence throughout this performance. The presentation too is highly skilled: precise choreography elegantly brings to life a series of mannequins, animated to people her world, raising intriguing possibilities of power and sexual dynamics, relationship and archetype.

Beauty and craft can be justifiable in their own right, but unfortunately the company try to overlay this with a significance not actually merited by the material. A succession of scenes is introduced, each with different characters, dynamic and tone (and mannequins), from the very recognisable (two lovers, sibling rivalry) to the fantastically bizarre – a trio of manic, mythic sorcerers and a brewing witch – but none succeeds in surpassing its initial premise. Just as they start to stray into unexpected territory, the scene is abruptly curtailed, often suspended on a deliberately ambiguous image which initially seems provocative but which, without development within any of the scene's content, emerges as frustratingly empty; a coy gesture towards meaning that the performance doesn't deliver. Gesturing towards subtlety is only intriguing if there remains the possibility that the cheque can be cashed in: Mossoux-Bonté's bounces, leaving only an awareness of dramaturgically repetitive patterns, however beautifully executed, and the crashingly portentous score.

Only in the final image was a more sophisticated reading of the vignettes opened up, but after the performance's consistent suggestiveness, this felt like too little too late. *Twin Houses* remained, for me, a triumph of style over substance.

Beccy Smith

Theatre Momzit

EMPTY HANDS

BAC

Theatre and ritual lie very close together, and in this performance the theatricality of ritual was used to its full extent. In five parts, with two performers and four musicians, it unfolds to a climax of stillness and simplicity in the final piece from which the whole performance takes its name, *Empty Hands*. The programme describes the show exactly (a rare thing in a programme): 'a visual theatre performance based on Korean ritual ceremonies and shamanism accompanied by Korean traditional percussion music.' Yet at the same time it is more – the magical and elementary beginning, of coloured, shifting body-created shadows on held sheets of paper; the Shaman Sword's surprising transformations of dancing man to dancing spirit, followed by the visual and aural high point in *Incense*. Here, the interplay of puppetry, acting and dance was visionary and full of possibilities for further developments. An innovative element, something I haven't seen before, was the fire puppetry, where beings seemed to appear and disappear through the playing of the moving incense sticks. Finally a Zen ending, a visual message, but simply presented with no emotional baggage: 'We come into the world with empty hands and leave it with empty hands, yet we always try to hold on. Why can't we remain with empty hands?' Highly recommendable!

Philip Beaven

ROBERT LEPAGE THE ANDERSEN PROJECT

Robert Lepage/ *Ex Machina***THE ANDERSEN PROJECT**

Barbican Theatre BITE, London

January 2006

One man, many characters. As narrator, he invites us into the show. A curved screen envelops the back wall and part of the floor; it's definitely 2D, but as he moves towards it there's a 'stepping-in' sensation, a bit like seeing Dick Van Dyke jump into the pavement drawings in *Mary Poppins*. Here, no fairgrounds or foxes, but things equally magical: a metro station where graffiti is written in light; a fairy-tale tree that houses a Dryad; a shadow that leaves its own owner (Andersen's most terrifying tale); a Parisian town square, drawn in that gorgeous French style of illustration that reached us through the Madeleine books; a train journey through Europe; a rococo theatre interior. The 'high Romanticism' of much of the imagery is contrasted with fantasy worlds of other sorts. A row of cubicles zips on and off stage (Lepage likes his clunky bits of kit), as we discover that one of our story's characters – a rather Warholian 'I'll be Your Mirror' ex-rocker turned contemporary opera libretto writer – has inadvertently swapped his Canadian apartment for a friend's rather sleazier abode, above a peep-show. Another of our characters, the French opera entrepreneur who has hired the writer, is a fast-talking smoothy with a sad private life; as his marriage falls apart, he consoles himself in the peep-show. Later, an Algerian boy in a hoodie slashes out the cubicles: the metro graffiti writer. The cubicles turn into phone booths, and the writer's phone relationship with his estranged girlfriend becomes another play on fantasy and storytelling. Meanwhile, we meet Andersen himself, who is the precursor and holder of all these personalities: Romantic writer, fantasist, masturbator, traveller, outsider in a foreign country.

Lepage is renowned for his multi-layered narratives and his amazing ability to create solo shows peopled with many distinct characters. In *The Andersen Project* he surpasses himself. The character shifts are so fast that it is close to impossible to believe that this is just one person on stage; the clothes and identities shrugged off

like snakeskins become in themselves a metaphor for a central theme of the show: the sloughing off of identities, moving into the new, transformation of the self. The only slight blip is his morph into the Dryad, which I feel would have been better left out: s/he doesn't really cut it as a 'real' character. Andersen's lover is better dealt with: she's a headless dressmaker's dummy who glides on and off stage, another beautifully realised image. The Andersen Project builds on devices and techniques familiar from works such as *Far Side of the Moon*, but here everything is taken further and deeper. It's a rich, luscious, gilded, Romantic masterpiece.

*Dorothy Max Prior**The Special Guests***THIS MUCH I KNOW (PART ONE)**

Phoenix, Exeter

January 2006

This is *The Cocktail Party* at the end of history; the false play described by Huizinga become a fully-fledged economy. In a universe of pranks and sarcasm, four presences – simultaneously character and performer – trick, fantasise and conjure, with bathos as the only home to return to. The realism around them is a nasty joke. The opening spectacular – with jazz and eyeing up – runs straight into the final moments, exorcising any hope of a conclusion, of satisfaction. The more 'Lucy', 'Tara', 'Nina' and 'Matthew' seek to end their game, the more it re-makes itself with nothing but representations. Talking the old lady neighbour to her death has no closure, the silence that follows only emphasising that there is more talk to come, more games.

It infects us. A pretended end genuinely disappoints. We want more and more of this eternal life of lies, piss-take, art, advertising... what seems most transitory is the most obstinate stain.

But if it has no end, it has a nemesis. Flame Man arrives with a disruptive power I last recall from another Bristol-based company 30 years ago: Crystal Theatre of the Saint. Here again, from behind a domestic illusion, erupts a daemon, banality on fire, a destroyer that cannot kill the beast. Unlike the monster-mother of 30 years ago, this daemon is uncontained by psychology. And retires, hurt, to a den, wounded, but sulky-Arthurian. After that even heavy-petting a teddy bear can only emphasise the crumbs of a structure that can't help consuming itself, wonderfully. No end: more, we are deserted.

Modestly, flirtatiously, *The Special Guests* have made a major social piece.

Phil Smith

GARDZIENCE CENTRE FOR THEATRE PRACTICES

*Gardzienice Centre for Theatre Practices***METAMORPHOSES & ELEKTRA**

The Pit, Barbican BITE, London

February 2006

I think I may be a lone voice on this one, but I left these 'theatrical essays' almost brutalised into submission. Both works are relatively short, yet cram into them such an array of sounds and actions that they grab hold of you and pin you to your seat. While pinned, though, I'm left struggling to get a foothold on the thematic and narrative strands.

Metamorphoses is loosely inspired by Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*. The piece is driven by multiple lines of song, both ancient and modern, that twist and turn throughout. The performers craft a dazzlingly intense experience that has a deep musical logic; but personally I felt adrift, needing more non-musical support to the action.

Not quite theatre and not quite a concert, it lies somewhere in-between; and in this in-between space I'm struggling to find what this piece wants to say about the world. At times I felt cut to the bone by the musical qualities that erupted from the stage; at others strangely distant from the whole thing.

Elektra, Gardzienice's most recent work, has a greater theatrical clarity, helped by a short lecture/exposé of the codified gestural language the piece utilises (a 're-birthing' of the ancient Greek theatrical technique of *Cheironomia*). This physical language serves as a point of access for the audience and allows us to make sense of the emotional and narrative trajectories of the piece. Particularly striking is the work of Anna-Helena McLean (*Elektra*) who, at her best, has a Wigan-like quality, catapulting us into the emotional landscape of the character, but at other times the style just jars.

There is an incredible amount of power in both pieces; but at some points I just felt excluded from their purpose. As experiences, they are vivid and evocative, but as performance there's something missing, and I still can't quite place it.

*Tom Wilson**Organic Theatre***SHEEPSKIN**

Phoenix Arts Centre, Exeter

January 2006

This is a show of remarkable bravery. To distil the slaughter and disorientation of the foot-and-mouth debacle into one vulnerable character, and then to hold character and performance just a cigarette paper apart, so the spark of pain leaps across the divide, is a searing experience for meat and nerves. John Dean takes the risks discreetly and generously; the result is somehow both creepy and sympathetic.

Yet, in spite of the scorched history, there is also transformation here. We see a young farmer, Jeremy, besotted with the new vicar, raging against and entertained by the absurdities of bureaucracy and unfairness, taken apart before our eyes. Rejected by the fearful vicar, dreaming of lucid sheep, emptied out until he is little more than a voice speaking his own name questioningly, somehow the performance rejuvenates him, through symbols, conjuring a mythical personality from him – a sword-wielding metal-headed sheep-god!

Bianca Mastrominico's text and direction are precise and florid in equal parts, building from documentary tics and anxieties a glued ritual of denial, expiation and unnecessary suffering: a prophecy in a world where God speaks in the mealy-mouthed tones of a scared politician. From the struggle of strange desires with cold and greedy forces, from documentary material and improvisations, *Sheepskin* transcends its origins and circumstances to become a deeply odd show, as odd as the real events, but deeper.

Phil Smith

FOURSIGHT THEATRE THATCHER THE MUSICAL

*Foursight Theatre***THATCHER – THE MUSICAL**

Warwick Arts Centre

February 2006

Margaret Thatcher appears on stage in style – and in a handbag. A large-scale model of the famous accessory (naturally accompanying all the performers who take on this role) opens and reveals the Iron Lady in the cosy atmosphere of a miniature living room, complete with Denis's photo and her own portrait. Between the poles of this emblem of traditional values and a tank from the Falkland War on either side of the stage, her career unfolds in front of our eyes. The events are known; the presentation, however, is unique. Directing a musical Cabinet Shuffle or steering a battleship through the events of her first term in office, she is accompanied by the other performers who change in an instant from her tap-dancing sailing crew into mothers bemoaning the death of their sons in the South Atlantic. The acting is terrific. Stylised gestures have more power than the plastic wig to evoke the infamous lady, and the choreography for the chorus transforms the stage into any environment without a single change of décor. Co-operation in the devising process has produced a wealth of hilarious ideas and unexpected connections, but if one fears that the borrowings from music hall, musical, and comic double acts could lead to a lack of political comment, Foursight Theatre leaves no doubt that they can easily accommodate both: as a gospel-singing preacher in a glittery wig, the last Lady Thatcher reminds the audience that she changed the political climate in Britain forever, sending a shiver down our spines while we are still shaking with laughter.

Ann Featherstone

THE PAPER BIRDS ACCIDENTALLY WAITING TO HAPPEN

*The Paper Birds***ACCIDENTALLY WAITING TO HAPPEN**

Mill Studio, Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford

February 2006

It is appropriate that a piece about accidents, and our ways of coping with them, should itself be structured around three monologues that appear to fleetingly intermingle at unpredictable moments, the characters only chancing on a shared resolution in the final moments of the piece. In this case, however, one is drawn to assess the production on the character skills of the three actresses, which, at this stage in the production's life, begin somewhat under-developed. They do, however, build over the course of the piece to more decisively pitched emotional portrayals, most interestingly in Elle Moreton's frustrated and 'forgetful' sister, feeling her way through her past assisted by a box of Post-It notes.

It is the piece's endearingly rough design that elucidates its tone, Richard Partridge's set providing each character with a shelter from potential accidents. Each of these shelters has a distinct emptiness, reflecting each character's loss. The opening use of a series of inventively descriptive arrowed signs to introduce the characters sets the tragi-comic tone of the piece without labouring the point.

Alongside the three narratives runs the fragmented compositions of Shane Durrant's live piano, which for the most part feel detached from the production, only really integrating in a final driving coda, giving supporting muscle to the final tableaux.

Disappointingly, the movement sequences haven't 'bedded-in' yet, and the performers seem a little awkward in the floor work. The motifs of searching feel stronger and have a greater clarity in their purpose. But it is in the tableaux and monologues that this trio reaches the heartache of our inability to control our own destiny. Despite the shortcomings, this production shifts well between the quirky and the pained, and is on the way to being a magically captivating show.

*Tom Wilson**Scena Plastyczna KUL***ODCHODZI (PASSING AWAY)**

La Mama E.T.C. Annex, New York City

February 2006

The rough-edged simplicity of the Annex of La Mama E.T.C. suited director Leszek Madzik and his company Scena Plastyczna KUL perfectly, for the power of this short and enigmatic piece, *Odchodzi*, derived not from anything that was immediately recognisable as theatre, but from their ability to conjure a mysterious atmosphere from the actual place. With the audience seated, the house lights dim very slowly, and the whole thing takes place in such near darkness that one's eyes strain to make things out, misread the scale of things and, I suspect, imagine things in the darkness that aren't actually there.

What can be made out suggests religious ceremony: a Madonna in a wooden box that tips backwards like a coffin; a smoke-filled chamber in which a woman lies flat and a man seems to mourn. The pace is slow, as though one is watching the operation of some ancient machinery in the dark. The music that occurs at the same time (the word 'accompaniment' would understate the case) comprises a strange amalgam of pre-recorded instrumentation – some parts Gorecki, some parts Garbarek, some parts generic moody synth-pop – over which Polish jazz legend Urszula Dudziak improvises a beautiful vocal.

At the piece's understated conclusion, many of the audience were genuinely uncertain whether the performance had finished, and as they were reluctant to join in the sporadic applause, there was the sense that they didn't think much of what they had seen. This is unfortunate, because this was one of the more remarkable pieces of visual theatre that I have seen for a long while.

Robert Ayers

YOU WAYLaid

*YOU***WAYLaid**

Square Chapel, Halifax

January 2006

Waylaid is designed especially for the Square Chapel which, as the name suggests, is a huge square room. Benches run along all four sides. In the centre of the room is a snowy landscape stew of white polythene sheets with an overturned car buried in the drift. Lying on the vehicle is a woman who is being watched or guarded by two figures in white who look part snowy owl, part phantom. What follows is akin to a film like *Incident at Owl Creek* or the novel *Pincher Martin* – a subconscious stew of events, wish-fulfillments, past histories and trauma which appear to be running through the mind of the woman as she lies on top of her crashed car. Occasionally she is joined by another figure, possibly also a victim, who struggles out of the car wreck to try and help her re-live happier moments, before being banished back under the snow by the ghostly white figures.

The soundtrack is relayed through earphones – music, strands of poetic musings, conversations from more carefree times and the random sounds of the landscape. Ambient mikes overhead pick up sounds of the performance and feed them into the soundtrack so at times you aren't sure whether what you're hearing is live or pre-recorded. Playing the sound through earphones, effectively putting it right inside your head, helps to emphasise the feeling of a subjective experience.

In one of many powerful images in the show, the white figures uncover the front of the car to reveal that the second 'victim' has been turned into a beetle (with a metal costume wittily fashioned from the bonnet of a VW Beetle). He's put on his back on a trolley and wheeled off; trapped in the metal carapace and feebly waving his new beetle legs, he looked like a trauma victim who's come round and realised that he is trapped within an unfamiliar body no longer in his control. The image was both ridiculous and extremely poignant.

It wasn't 100% successful – the staging meant that some sequences were difficult to see in certain parts of the room, whilst others had to be performed to all four sides, which felt a bit too slow at times. But a rich beginning for this brand-new show.

Edward Taylor

LITTLE WONDER THE LIBRARIAN'S JOKE

*Little Wonder***THE LIBRARIAN'S JOKE***Croydon Clocktower**February 2006*

It starts in the bar: a library trolley laden with books, pushed by three young women in knee-length skirts and cardigans, a young man strumming a guitar. We're handed books by the 'librarians' and ushered in. The Braithwaite Hall at the Clocktower could have been made for this show – it provides a perfect site, oak-panelled and lined with rows of dusty old books. And what a quaintly old-fashioned show this is! I don't mean just in its subject matter (the story of a librarian and her now-dead beau): it has the feel of devised theatre from a decade or two ago – UK Lecoq-inspired companies such as Brouhaha, early Foursight Theatre.

But that's not necessarily a bad thing – an observation rather than a criticism. There's plenty to applaud in *The Librarian's Joke*. It's a neatly put-together piece, using all the tricks of the physical theatre trade. There's a gestural movement motif section of book-reading with crossing and uncrossing legs, which gives us a chance to focus on the librarians' rather lovely primary-coloured patent shoes. There's the three-people-all-playing-one-character device, with the donning of a rose-pink dress denoting the taking on of that character, Rose the Librarian. There's lots of play with objects, including some nice flying-books-on-strings stuff. Our token man, Malcolm the musician, moves from shelf to desk, pottering with laptop, guitar, xylophone, violin and even spoons, creating an interesting mix of live and pre-recorded sound. There's an unusual use of an overhead projector, on which we see a mapping-out of the paths through the library taken by Rose and the shy but smitten Pete, and also (aided by the OHP) we are given a witty musical run-through of the Dewey Decimal System.

Oh, and we are also treated to a game of Dewey Decimal Bingo. Reservations (excuse the pun) come in feeling a little awkward about these stepping-out-of-the-box audience participations and interventions, and the jury's out on the singing – irony intended, I presume, but it is still rather too cringy for me. But those little worries aside, it's a very nice number, from a show with a golden heart.

*Dorothy Max Prior**Caiscéim Dance Theatre***KNOTS***Cork Opera House**February 2006*

Six cubicles, with perspex walls, each with its own exit sign at the back and a white draw-curtain at the front. Two white trolley-beds at either side of the stage and microphones hanging above the beds and the cubicles. A dance mix of Eurythmics' *Love is a Stranger* plays loudly as the audience enter. Three women enter in white wedding dresses, each with a man sitting on her train and facing backwards. Then a dance in the cubicles to a driving soundtrack, 'personal' stories, verbal abuse, everything hingeing on personal relationships and seeded with quotations from R.D. Laing's *Knots*. But these seeds didn't flourish in the performance; they weren't really worked into the choreography, or into the personal stories.

The final wedding sequence ought to have been bitterly ironic but it seemed that the tying of the knot was an escape from those destructive psychological and emotional knots with which we can torture ourselves.

Knots is a strong piece of dance-based physical theatre and there are some powerful moments of image, movement and emotion, but it doesn't really get under the skin.

Franc Chamberlain

COMPANY COLLISIONS MARY OF NO MAN'S LAND

*Company Collisions***MARY OF NO MAN'S LAND***Oval House Theatre, London**February 2006*

This one-woman show, written by Damian Wright and performed by Company Collisions director Tanushka Marah, bravely tackles one of the most lauded and potent biblical figures: the Virgin Mary. In doing so, they focus on her childhood and pregnancy, presenting the humanity of this semi-divine figure, and challenging our preconceptions of the social relationships of this central figure in Christian myth.

Mary's world is peopled by sleazy priests, batty aunts, self-important kings and a naive young girl with hairy knees. Marah's broad characterisation jumps between first-person narration, comic repartee and expressionistic portrayals of her meetings with the Archangel Gabriel. The shifts in tone make for a pleasingly jolting ride, and the presentation of the more traumatic scenes of the young Mary's life leaves you with a real empathy for her. Abandoned, metaphorically, by her parents, her husband, her son, and perhaps even her God, it is in this sense of her abandonment that the title starts to make sense: that Mary is neither comforted nor protected by any section of society. Indeed, her husband, often portrayed as a loyal and stoic accompaniment to her predicament, is in this version a decrepit old man who says nothing and does little.

There are moments which, although they have a visual coherence and bridge narrative transitions, lacked, for me, a clear connection to the themes of the piece – principally Marah's slow crossing of the stage. But her ability to pitch the tone of her material disarmed any reservations I may have had about the material.

*Tom Wilson**Anna Furse***GLASSBODY***Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, London**March 2006*

Corridors lined with paintings, a lift soaring up into the heights of the atrium, Costa coffee bars. An Italian shopping mall? No, an English hospital – the arts-friendly Chelsea and Westminster.

Glassbody takes place in its own performance pod. Entering the space is like going into the small mammal house at the zoo: the hushed atmosphere, the dim bluish night-light. And here's a bushbaby! The wide-eyed Marie-Gabrielle Rotie is on display, moving from her inert sleep on the hospital bed-trolley to confront us with her unblinking gaze. Stories unfold through screened image, ritualistic action, movement motif and voice-over. As you'd expect from an art/sci piece about bio-medical scanning, screens are important: two large flat screens on the back wall, an onstage monitor, two on each side of the performance space. A water tank is used as a surface for screened images, as is the performer's white slip-dress. The idea under investigation is the inside-out-ness of the scan: revelation versus intrusion; secrets inside the body; the ultimate striptease. We learn that in the early days of X-ray, ladies would send X-rayed images of their hands to loved ones as a keepsake. Look, see inside of me and learn my inner secrets!

The piece touches on the relationship between sound and image, central to the science of scanning, and the relationship between sound-waves and the water they travel through. But despite the richness of possibilities in these core ideas, Glassbody suddenly gets snagged on an investigation of infertility, a recurring theme in Anna Furse's work. Although fine for an artist to continue lines of investigation from one work to the next, it feels that we are now in an altogether different piece.

It is all well realised: Rotie's silent and enigmatic performance presence is beautifully played; the interplay of screen images (flying birds, babes-in-the-womb, X-rayed limbs, playing children) and live actions (the laying out of a set of child's clothes, the pulling of a string of DNA-like beads from the mouth, the ritual washing and cleansing) are lovely images that work in harmony. But I find myself asking – where is the heart of the piece? One area of investigation would have been quite enough, thank you!

Dorothy Max Prior

PRINT PUBLICATIONS

INTERMEDIALITY IN THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE
ED. FREDA CHAPPLE AND CHIEL KATTENBELT
RODOPI/ INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF THEATRE
RESEARCH
WWW.RODOPI.NL

Mime-theatre artist Jean-Louis Barrault famously described theatre as the crossroad of the arts, an inclusive artform that interrelates with all others: poetry, dance, music, architecture, film. This thought is echoed many times over in this new collection of essays, which investigate what is sometimes called cross-artform or multi-discipline practice – here more satisfactorily described as 'intermediality'. In his essay *Aesthetic to Aesthetic Art*, Peter M. Boenisch refers to theatre as 'a medium to broadcast other media', going on to say that 'it makes no sense at all to think of an originally pure theatre invaded by technological media...' Thus, intermediality is not just another aesthetic practice; it is intrinsic to the nature of theatre itself. Key to theatre is the role of the observer/witness, the one who perceives (the Greek word *aisthestai* meaning to perceive). Christopher B. Balme, in an essay on audio technologies and specifically the use of Walkmans by theatre groups, describes how 'theatre has seldom existed apart from and independent of what we would call the media, be they ocular or print, acoustic or digital'. In an intriguing essay on puppet theatre Meike Wagner describes theatre as 'a hypermedium which integrates a variety of technological media'. Unlike some collections of essays published under the auspices of academic research, this one is thoughtfully edited, with an appropriate interrelationship between the included pieces, so that there is a pleasing inter-textuality and overall cohesion to the book. There is also a welcome

focus on practice, for example in Andy Lavender's excellent essay *Mise en Scene*, *Hypermediacy* and the *Sensorium*, which clearly and coherently investigates the ongoing debate around 'real' and 'mediated' experience, and which explores the staging of contemporary works such as *Complicite's The Elephant Vanishes*. An admirable addition to the bookshelf: in its investigation of intermediality this collection takes us to the heart of the debate about the nature of theatre itself and is thus essential reading for anyone, be they theoretician or practitioner, interested in contemporary theatre and performance.

A MIS-GUIDE TO ANYWHERE
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How to get from A to B and perhaps end up at C: follow your shadow; follow a roadside instruction to, say, pick your own fruit; change homes with a friend; stop and view the archaeological exhibition commonly known as 'road works'; overlay a map of Moscow onto your own city and find the Kremlin; find somewhere to sit for 1–24 hours, and sit; take a hen party cross-country; swap shoes with someone else and walk a mile. These and other suggestions for destinationless journeys can be found in *A Mis-Guide to Anywhere*, which is billed as a 'utopian project for the recasting of a bitter world by disruptive walking'. This wonderful little gem of a book is the latest from Wrights & Sites, who have taken theatre into everyday life, and breathed new life into theatre, with their site-specific performances, art-journeys and tourist mis-guides to Exeter and beyond. See it as a replacement for the *I Ching* or as a script for the play of your life. Buy it, tuck it into purse or pocket, and discover the theatre of life on and off the edge of the map.

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www.bristol.ac.uk/drama
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+44 (0) 20 7613 4141 (degree admissions)
www.thecircusspace.co.uk
degree.admissions@thecircusspace.co.uk
BA (Hons) Degree in circus arts. Foundation Degree in circus arts (2 year vocational course) and. Also ongoing adult classes/professional training and development.

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machonj@smuc.ac.uk
www.smuc.ac.uk
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UNIVERSITY OF KENT CANTERBURY
Canterbury
+44 (0)1227 823338
p.a.allain@ukc.ac.uk
MA by Practice as Research. For full details see the website or contact Dr. Paul Allain.

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www.northampton.ac.uk or www.performancestudies.org.uk
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www.thecpr.org.uk
aop@aber.ac.uk
See website for summer school details

CIRCUS MANIACS SUMMER INTENSIVE
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www.circusmaniacs.com
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Summer School runs 7–18 August
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Core approaches based on principles
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Hula-hooping 3–5 May 10am–1pm £60
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May 27/28/29 Sligo, Ireland
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July 10/11/12/13/14/15 The
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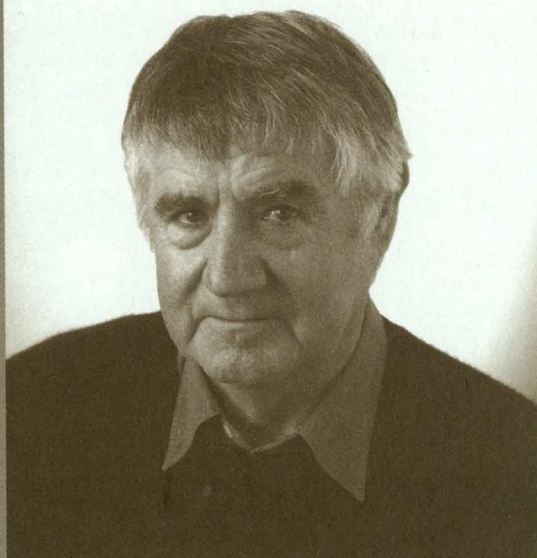
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susan.broadhurst@brunel.ac.uk
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Body, Space & Technology can be
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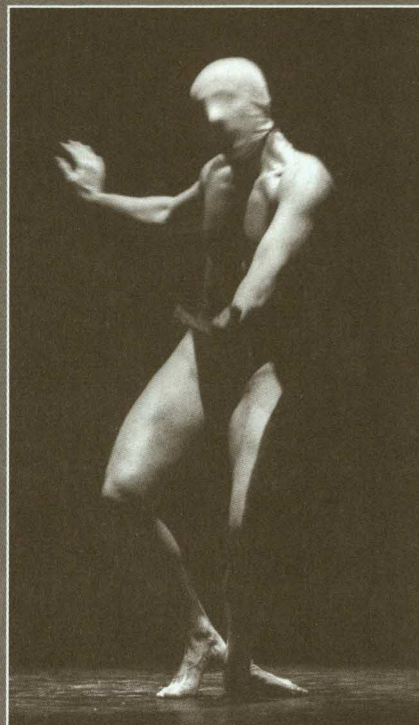
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