

TOTALTHEATRE

MAGAZINE



SMASH AND GRAB GANDINI JUGGLING AT THE LONDON INTERNATIONAL MIME FESTIVAL

WALK THIS WAY WITH ALEXANDER ROBERTS AND RAGEWALKSLONDON AT BR-116

LEVIATHAN LOOMING: THERE'S A FLURRY AT SEA WITH LIVING STRUCTURES

THE VOICE OF GISLI FROM VESTURPORT IS CALLING

SEPARATE THE SHEEP FROM THE GOATS IN RED EARTH'S CHALK

SHINE A LIGHT ON BRAZIL WITH LUME TEATRO

WHAT A GIFT! TIM JEEVES ENJOYS THE PRESENT MOMENT

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TOTAL THEATRE MAGAZINE

Winter 2011/2012 Volume 23 Issue 04

To paraphrase the artist Richard Hamilton: what makes today's Total Theatre Magazine so different, so appealing? We like to think that it is the emphasis placed on contemporary theatre practice rather than theory – and in particular, our championing of the voice of the artist.

In this edition of the magazine, you'll find plenty of artists flexing their voices. Upfront, there's the first instalment of a new three-part feature series, *Work in Progress*, which focuses on the creation of a new show – in this case, *Living Structures' Leviathan*, which will premiere mid-2012. Other manifestations of the 'artist diary' format can be found in Alexander Roberts' reflection on *Rage Walks London*, which he made for the BR-116 festival, presented in collaboration with LIFT (the London International Festival of Theatre); and in Philip Watkinson's piece exploring the role of chance. Phil is a young emerging artist, just graduated, but he has been careful to place the documentation of his new discoveries within the context of the artists who have gone before him (such as John Cage, Fluxus, and Jacques Lecoq) and whose territory he is sharing. Our regular *Voices* feature has someone a little further along the line of experience as its subject – Vesturport's Gisli Örn Gardarsson. And our 'artist, review thyself' feature *Being There* takes a threeway look at Red Earth's environmental art / performance walk piece *CHALK*.

We also pride ourselves on our insider knowledge of key artists and companies working in contemporary theatre and performance. *The Works* brings a knowledgeable eye to a body of work by an established artist or company: in this case, it's Gandini *Juggling* (whose latest show *Smashed* comes to the London International Mime Festival 2012), and the eyes are those of Thomas Wilson, a long-time Gandini admirer who has followed the company's work avidly over the years. Our reviews section includes a very knowledgeable appraisal of the *Suspense London Festival of Puppetry* by Beccy Smith, and a detailed review-essay by Mischa Twitchin reflecting on the RSC's revival of the *Marat/Sade*.

Although our emphasis will always be on UK theatre practice, Total Theatre has also been characterised by its strong international connections – and indeed much of the work that we cover crosses national as well as artform boundaries. So with a face out to the wider world, this edition also brings you the first of an ongoing series called *Worldview* that will focus on a key company or group of artists working outside of the UK – Brazil's LUME Teatro kick us off.

The end of one year and beginning of another is always a good moment for change. In August 2011, we set up our new website, *Total Theatre Review*, as a sister project to *Total Theatre Magazine* on a trial run. We are pleased to say that the pilot has been a success, so we will be launching the website officially in 2012. You'll perhaps have noticed that some reviews and news content has already shifted online, and this shift will continue, with this edition of *Total Theatre Magazine* being the last that will carry the *Update* section in its current format.

We are also saying goodbye to our columns in this edition. I would like to say a big thank you to Pippa Bailey and Laura Eades (aka *The Canny Granny*) for the work they have done on *Out & About* and *Home Truths* over the years. As part of our reworking of the magazine and website content for 2012, you will find new regular blogs surfacing at www.totaltheatrereview.com

As the website develops and grows, *Total Theatre Magazine* will in the meantime be continuing to bring you in-depth feature articles, extended reviews and festival round-ups, and previews of the coming season – available in print and electronically on PDF.

So here's to new beginnings! We wish all of our readers and contributors, and all the artists, past and present, who have inspired them, a happy and productive 2012.

Dorothy Max Prior
Editor

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Front cover image: Gandini Juggling *Smashed* at the London International Mime Festival 2012. www.mimelondon.com
Photo: Ludovic des Cognets.

WORK IN PROGRESS

Leviathan: Loomings

In the first of a three-part feature, Living Structures document their research and development process in the creation of new show Leviathan



Living Structures' new work *Leviathan* is based on Herman Melville's classic text *Moby Dick*. Our aim is to tell key moments of the story through original song, physical theatre, dance, puppetry, projection, spatial transformation, massive installation, found objects and aerial performance.

Over the past years, through our work on previous show *Cart Macabre*, we've collaborated with nearly 100 multi-disciplinary artists. Many of these are now part of the cast and crew of *Leviathan*, which is fantastic as there is a real sense of familiarity with each other's creative processes. Living Structures performances generally start from disparate visions, ideas that are thrown about and brewed in our minds until we get the chance to be together in a space where we can actually test things out. This process is incredible as searching for the materiality of those ideas often seems disastrous at first. With time, we've learned to appreciate the disaster, as we know now from previous experience that it is exactly from this critical, explosive and delicate process that unexpected things emerge, that the real work begins to exist.

*Draping. Cutting away the light.
Lina arrives. Sets a rope. Walking in the rafters.
An awkward silence over lunch
'It's all going to go wrong'
I do not like their prediction.'*

Earlier this year we were very lucky to become associate artists of the Pinter Centre in Goldsmiths College where we were able to have a first intensive Research and Development (R&D) phase. We worked in a very small group, only the core members and a few other artist friends who were very generous in diving into the unknown with us. Those sessions have planted essential seeds for our current rehearsals at Trinity Buoy Wharf.

Once we got into our new space we built the main set design elements

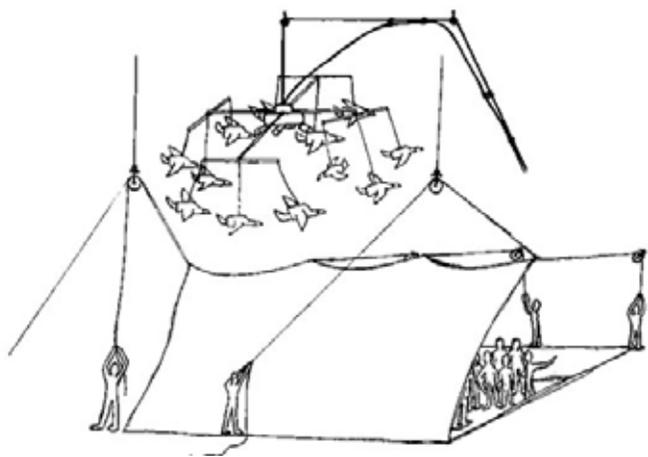
and started revisiting some actions and objects from our experience in the Pinter Centre. Immediately more and more things began to form from and around these first sparks of shapes, colours, actions and sounds. A first sequence of scenes was born out of architectural transformations, visual and physical images that related to important moments in the story.

*Chalk lines.
White/ the sea/ the whale / hypnotic
Desperation/ the widows/ the hunt
Tribal/ grief/ loss
Laughter/ stick your tongue to the roof of your mouth.*

We are working in the Chain Store at Trinity Buoy Wharf, directly opposite the O2 Dome (that appropriately looks like a huge, surfacing, white, many times harpooned whale back!). The Wharf is a varied hub of arts and business: the University of East London and ENO; boats, sound studios and a wealth of history in 'London's forgotten container city'. The red lighthouse, ships rocking along the sides of the wharf; cobbled pavements; rusty machine sculptures; thick boat ropes and mooring points and the renowned eleven year, 302 day old Artangel commission *The Longplayer*, a 1000 year durational sound installation composed by Jem Finer chiming in the rafters of London's only lighthouse (we are working directly beneath it!). The whole site, jutting out into the Thames, feels and looks so superbly right for our retelling of Herman Melville's classic text.

Ah... Some immediate cashflow issues seem to be creeping up in direct contrast to our need to buy a ton of wood, rostra, etc... Larry Lynch from University College Falmouth once again saves the day by arranging the first £1000 of UCF's contribution towards our project. Phew!!

- 300m calico muslin curtains
- 49 large steel deck rostra
- 180m blood red satin lining
- 250m black satin lining
- 180m white satin lining
- 2 sewing machines
- 5 broken sewing machines
- 2 and counting kilometres of black and white thread
- 45 sheets of ply
- 70m of conduit piping
- 11 large boxes with lids
- 170m steel cable
- 2 cellos
- 1 large-throw projector
- 1 organ
- 6m of prototype netting
- 50 free bagels + toaster
- 1 found rubber mould probably for melting down
- 10 laptops
- 1 dongle



If set-building week was a time-lapse film it would run something like: Intricate stage up | big boxes made | small boxes made | ramps crafted | black paint | aerial ropes and silks rigged in the rafters | white podiums constructed in archways | tea and coffee and special biscuit area needed | tool area set up | tool area arranged, rearranged, sorted, tidied and then re-arranged | ditto bag area | play with the curtains and turn off the lights and play with torches because we can't help ourselves | the painting of everything.

Then, news:

WE GOT OUR ARTS COUNCIL FUNDING!!!

Next: singing began with a multi-tonal bang as Phil Minton agreed to lead us in one of his famous feral choir workshops. Phil is a leading jazz and yodelling vocalist and he had us creating the most extraordinary soundscapes using our voices in ways we never thought possible and at the end demonstrated his amazing ability to sing (to choose and sing that is) two notes at once. We watched and listened in awe and totally failed to emulate him. We learned that a little yodelling goes a long way towards relaxing the larynx and preparing the voice – however, not if you are in pursuit of more classically bent sound... Luckily, this is not our bent.

Hamish Jenkinson, creative director of The Old Vic Tunnels has just confirmed that they have come on board our R&D as co-producers! Incredible news which follows from our sell-out run of *Cart Macabre* at The Tunnels, and the show being recently taken to Centro Niemeyer in Northern Spain, programmed alongside Sam Mendes' *Richard III*.

Cello arrives.

Hiques' fixing a sewing machine.

'If we bring the angle in, it will sag.'

Beth arrives.

'Jousting with cotton.'

Amanda from Driftwood Café (a blue storage container converted into a beautiful, eco-friendly and delicious little café tucked away on the Thames) feeds us glorious homemade soups, smoked bacon rolls, baked potatoes and cake. All very nautical and hugely appropriate for the crew working at the wharf on *Moby Dick*!

Our musical director, Verity Standen, has an old-world nautical-themed composing shack, placed just outside the space and hung with glass buoys, maps and paved with river stones. We are harbouring the faint hope that after this luxury she doesn't started demanding only blue M&Ms for future projects.

There has been a lot of work already building, producing, preparing for the first phase of *Leviathan* but the project really felt like it had started when Living Structures' director Klaus captivated our cast and crew with his visions for the show, running round the set describing our white whale, Ahab, drowning our audience, obsession, Ishmael, hysteria, puppets, Pip, blood-baths, wax baths, sea shanties and spermaceti.

We are well and truly a 'work in progress'...



Excerpts from visual director Ula Dajerling's notes:

*In the first stage of this development the visual aspects of **Leviathan** are inspired by Russian Constructivism, with the predominant use of the solid colours of red, white and black.*

*The historical reference of this 1920s avant-garde movement contextualises our work. Transformation of the performance space is a focal point of our performances and among other aspects in **Leviathan** the emphasis is placed on colour fluctuating in monochrome cycles of black, red and white, referring to different parts of the performances.*

Proposed but not yet executed, the props consist of large forms hanging in nets resembling whale guts. We imagine dark red shapes surrounded by black fishing nets that can be shifted by performers around the space, giant triangles and circles, pyramids...

The human figure of the performers is to be obstructed, and geometric costume design becomes another manipulation of theatrical space manifesting through sculpture. Geometry is reached by moderation of existent items of clothing; embedded with wireless technology and inspired by Liubov Popova, Varvara Stepanova and Aleksandr Rodchenko's original designs.

Excerpts from musical director Verity Standens' notes:

Klaus gives me a loose outline of some of the scenes and tells me to start brewing and putting down some ideas – think visual, stark, geometric, cold, boiling hot, the elements, minimal, abstract...

...The Widows. Four Women. Calling at the start of the show. Black. Mourning heavy voices that speak of the future. I think of Diamanda Galas, her freedom and flexibility within a melody; her voice is lyrical but loose and frayed at the edges – this would work well if I can adapt it into my music. I play with Balkan broken calls layered into four-part harmony. Cold, unhappy sounds. All of these things I write will be manipulated and played with by the performers in the space so I need to keep a constant openness to the shift that the music may take... I'm trying to think of voice completing the environment that K physically builds. I want to use voice that stretches and bends beyond a listener's comfort but which still retains echoes and structures that listeners can recall and be comforted/ disturbed by...

Research & development notes edited by Dugald Ferguson and Dani d'Emilia. Boxout notes by Una Dajerling and Verity Standens. Also included in the article are excerpts from assistant director Danny Prosser's workbooks.

This article is the first of a three-part series that will document the development of *Leviathan* over the coming months.

Living Structures will be premiering *Leviathan* in June 2012.

Living Structures was formed in 2007 by Klaus Kruse, Dani d'Emilia, Ula Dajerling, Verity Standen and Dugald Ferguson.

www.livingstructures.co.uk

All images are from the research and development of *Leviathan* at Trinity Buoy Wharf. Photos: Darren Perry / Henrique Slomp. Line drawing by Klaus Kruse.



The Present Moment

In this season of giving and receiving, Tim Jeeves reflects on the artistic possibilities of gift-giving

Two days after the series of gift-themed public interventions in the centre of Liverpool that I curated under the title *Present in Public*, I received an email from Apple Computers that told me, ‘The best gifts surprise people long after they’re opened’. I kept it for a number of days, seeing the message every time I checked my mail – not because I needed reminding that Apple sell computers in the weeks leading up to Christmas, but because its insistence on defining the ‘best’ gifts intrigued me.

What are the ‘best’ gifts? What makes one gift better than another? Is there not something fundamentally in opposition to the spirit of gift in this hierarchy Apple suggests? And of course, behind this and the countless signs selling the ‘Perfect Gift’ that we’ll encounter in any shopping district at this time of year, there is the spectre of consumerism, promising us the chance to engage in idealised exchange, all wrapped up in shiny packaging whilst hiding capitalist profit.

Giving in to Gift, the project of which the *Present in Public* programme was a key strand, opened up the space for dialogue around some of these issues. Not because gift is a solution to the ills of the world, nor because it is necessarily even a good thing – gift-giving is fertile soil for power games, status interplay and showy generosity – but simply because gift provides a means to tackle the current financial crisis in a manner a little more oblique than a straight-on interrogation. It is a surface we can bounce off in order to investigate areas that we might not otherwise be able to see.

This take on capitalist consumerism was central to two of the six works presented. Alinah Azadeh, reflecting on the emotional and financial hold that institutions and people can gain on us, spent the afternoon conversing with and recording the debts of the people on the street into a book, which was then ceremoniously burnt at the end of the day (*Burning the Books*). By documenting everything from £70,000 accumulated in credit card debts to love that was never repaid because a spouse had died, a beautiful mix of the personal and political was the result.

In an entirely different fashion – although, in some ways, thematically resonant – Simon Farid’s *I Want to be a Real Boy or What does an Actor want with a Conscience Anyway?* raised questions around the images we are continuously gifted in the form of advertising by sending a mannequin and identically dressed performer out on to the streets of Liverpool’s shopping district, where they performed a series of choreographed actions to each other.

Over the six weeks spent developing the work prior to the public presentation, the artists had, under loose guidance from myself, acted as peer mentors to each other – gifting a perspective on each other’s work that might have escaped an artist working alone. We conversed, we wrote an anonymous blog, we made cards and videos for each other, and from this communal act of making solo work a programme developed diverse in both form and content.

In *Try to eat everything*, Jessica Mautner, inspired by the Victorian concept of the sin-eater and Chinese funeral sweets, created a



character that swept through the city in an eerie white paper dress, inviting the public to eat her sins in the form of biscuits made according to a hundred-year-old recipe. Meanwhile, Hannah Hull, in *Reclaiming Politics: Conversations around protest*, engaged in a series of conversations with members of the public that highlighted those political acts we all make on a daily basis before gifting a personalised slogan on a badge, whilst Jake Ayre, who spent many of our weekly encounters in the time preceding the final event interacting with those on the street whilst wearing his The Gift Must Always Move superhero outfit, ‘rapped’ up his experiences in the hip-hop inspired *Gift Rapping*.

The rap and Alinah’s book-burning ceremony both took place in the Bluecoat, the partner institution for the project, whilst throughout the afternoon Natasha Vicars’ *Free Gifts* was hosted in the foyer of the space. Highlighting the issues of responsibility that are key in gift reception, Natasha interviewed those interested in adopting some of her possessions (ranging from a fake CCTV camera, to a teapot, to an encyclopaedia), before giving the interviewee the choice of taking home the object or not.

Although there was this activity in the Bluecoat, the focus of the programme remained the streets of Liverpool city centre. The project was publicised, and a programme made available that included a map

of the area in which the interventions would take place. Nevertheless, the nature of this promotion was such that only the team of people documenting the day were in a position of knowing exactly where people would be at a given time, and I suspect it was only this small group of three that encountered every work in the programme. In spite of this – no, because of this – there was a reverberation in the city of an entirely different quality than if the work had been concentrated in a studio theatre or an arts centre. There was a sense that Liverpool was being permeated in a fundamental and subtle way.

There were two audiences for the work, those that encountered it first-hand, that were less able to package it up in the tidy box of an arts festival, and those that encountered it in virtual space: that saw the e-mails publicising it online, that visited the project website, that will read about the day in this article. Neither is more important than the other, but in a system such as the contemporary performance world, where careers and future opportunities depend on work being recognised, labelled and owned, there was something refreshing to the anonymity in the way much of the work was encountered.

Aside from this negotiation of cultural capital, questions of finance were a key concern when developing the structure of the programme. I suspect that few reading these words would disagree with the sentiment that artists should be paid for their work. We provide a vital role to society, and need to survive within its structures. Nevertheless, when making artwork around gift, once funding had been secured, a threat that the work made could be undermined comes into being. If a gift is made on the condition of being paid, questions around motivation will arise. The strengths and weaknesses of financial transactions lie in the manner in which they depersonalise exchange, and gift is rooted in the personal.

Addressing such questions is a minefield, but this project demanded an acknowledgment of the processes leading to the creation of the work, something sadly lacking in much artistic presentation. I don’t want to suggest that we reached a final resolution to the many issues at stake here, though in an attempt to open up the space for discussion around the subject the financial workings of the project have been made transparent. There is a full breakdown of the money spent on the project’s website, including the fees paid to both the artists involved and myself (£500 and £1,285 respectively).

Gift, despite its attempted appropriation by commerce, retains a unique place in our collective consciousness. In some way, there is a desire for it to remain pure and unsullied – aims that will never be met. Nevertheless, the lingering sense I have of the day is that those of us involved in the project, by taking gift as our starting point, enabled something very special to take place that afternoon; a change in the fabric of the city. And whilst there’s no doubt that this change was miniscule and subtle, it was definitely there. I like to imagine that over dinner that evening in Liverpool, there was more than one conversation in which someone said: ‘You know something really beautiful (strange, surprising, disturbing) happened to me today...’

Present in Public was presented at Bluecoat and at sites around Liverpool on 12 November 2011.

For further on the project and on the individual artists presenting work, see <http://givingintogift.org/present-in-public>

Also linked to the project is Tim Jeeves’ ongoing investigation, *Artist’s Statefragment*. This online work, written in hypertext, enables an increasing number of statements to be viewed non-linearly and with fluctuating priority. View at www.timjeeves.com

Image credits:
Image p8 Simon Farid; p9 Alinah Azadeh. Photos by Mark Loudon. Burning the Books sketch by Alinah Azadeh.



Walk a Mile in my Shoes

A reflection by Alexander Roberts on the making of
RageWalksLondon, a BR-116 festival commission

My body went into shock, my senses were bare and this week in London battered them raw. Normally I'm not so sensitive to London's aggressive energy, but when I arrived to partake in BR116-Festival (produced in collaboration with LIFT, the London International Festival of Theatre), I was coming out of a performance-making process for a community of just a couple of thousand people, on the west coast of Iceland. Otherwise known as, in the most adoring of ways, *a middle of nowhere*. I, with my collaborators, had adopted a very particular soft mode of thinking and being that comes from being situated in *the middle of a nowhere*, walking across lava-filled fields with free-roaming sheep and meeting hardly anyone who wasn't one of the 'local folk' helping us convert an old fish storage freezer into a theatre. Suddenly, with my proposal to create *RageWalksLondon* commissioned, I found myself buried by high walls of grey, a thick and polluted humid air and a lot to do over the course of just five days. From the fresh cool air of Iceland, I felt like I had been dropped into a pressure cooker made only of concrete and millions of people all in a rush to get somewhere they were not.

Thankfully I had the trusty production assistance of Joao Toleda, who was on hand to hear my sprawling ideas, and a London city veteran in the shape of Jon Grieve, who collaborated with me to realise this performance experiment. The commission was to create

a performance work that was responsive to London as a mega-city, with a particular focus on the city's transport system. To set the scene, it was the first half of September and London had just recently been under siege from rioters. Consequently there was an all-out ban on groups marching in London, and I was interested in exploring what this meant for the freedom of collective expression in this city. As such, the proposal was born to create a participatory performance in which participants would conduct a ritual of rage which brought them to consider all of the things from the very personal to the global, and explore through an-attempt-at-doing what it might mean to express anger collectively in London today.

The performance itself was very stripped down and simple. It began in a studio space at Arcola theatre with all of the participants taking part in a five minute free-writing exercise in which, departing from the opening line 'I am filled with rage by / when...?', each participant wrote all the things that filled them with rage from the the very personal to the global. With these 'rages' externalised on paper, yet unshared, together the participants took a silent march with blank placards from Arcola Theatre to Trafalgar Square travelling by walking, bussing and tubing. The march included three different walking formations: single file, walking holding hands in pairs, and walking as a mob. Once at Trafalgar the blank placard protesters formed a human wall that cut

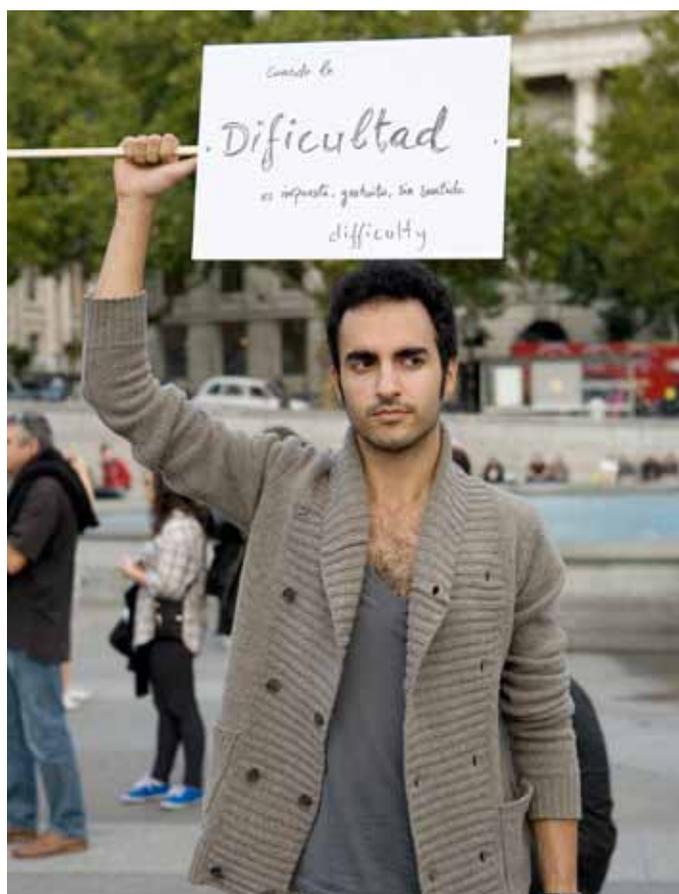


a diagonal line across the square. They were standing together, not with an explicit common cause (the placards were blank), but simply, in their shared feeling that there were things they would like to have changed in the world. From this, the opportunity then came for each protester to take out a black marker and fill their blank white placard with whatever they wished, and then proceed to draw a chalk circle around them and conduct a personal act of rage.

These personal acts of rage were not explosions of dynamic physicality, but striking moments of stillness (lying down, standing, kneeling), acts of writing, and exhibiting that writing. The whole walking performance was very simple, but it was specifically designed to be. My experience from being in London, first when I lived there, and now returning as a visitor, is that my head and my body are forever struggling in search of moments of quiet and pause: trying to cease the constant imposition of urgency that comes from moving through the centre of this brash city; looking to activate spaces that allow us to think and breath more deeply.

There was also a strong sense of emptiness to the performance; the placards were left blank, the protesters were silenced, the acts of rage were still, but again, to me, it speaks very strongly to the moment London and many cities and countries around the world are finding themselves in. There is a thirst for change, an awakening awareness of the glaring flaws of global capitalism, but, at the same time, a severe absence of imagination that is capable of seizing this moment of dire need. In this context, what excites me about art is its capacity to create spaces in which, we, its participants can advance an imagined model for how we would like things to be different. Performance art holds the potential to allow us to cross the borders of all sorts of taboos, perceived boundaries, horizons and limits; both with our bodies and in our thinking. So, although I am far from suggesting that this first scratch run performance was a good example of this, BR116-Festival, with its programme of work-in-progress commissions, provided a platform for taking a bite, through performance art, into this dense, heavily governed, but equally chaotic labyrinth of a city.

In relation to developing the work further, I would like to change the nature of the route and work harder to find the cracks of quiet, solitude, and surprise within the city, because for all I have described London as in this commentary – as something similar to an Ali vs. Frazier boxing match in the heat of Manila – the city is full of rabbit



holes that can be fallen into, crawled through and dug out. I would like to make more of these spaces. I would also like to further enrich the ways in which the performance fosters encounters between its participants, which I think can come through the marching, but especially after the personal acts of rage. In this version, each participant dissolved back into the diaspora of the city, but I was sad to see such a disappearance occur so soon – it is after all inevitable that it will occur eventually, so why have it happen so soon?

I also would like to mention two things I learnt about London that week. First, that it is even more policed than I realised, and that the most oppressive police force in London, I discovered, can be the one inside your own head. I say this, because, we spent the whole week, with everyone from Joao, to Jon, to me, to the BR116 Festival team, all (even with just an hour to go before the performance) second-guessing the attitude the police would take towards what we were doing – and, incidentally, I do not remember encountering a single police officer throughout. We had collectively succumbed, to a certain extent, to paranoid self-policing. At least for me, this inner police officer needs to play a quieter role in my future endeavours. Secondly, I learnt that my interest in working with London as a site is precisely to discover how performance art (in this case walking performances) can ‘unwork’ the city; ‘unwork’ its oppressive urgency; its concrete horizons; its chaos and its order; wander its rabbit holes, splice open its cracks, and dig under its floorboards.

Alexander Roberts' *RageWalksLondon* was performed on Thursday 15 September 2011 as part of BR-116, which was created in collaboration with London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT).

BR-116 was curated by Jorge Lopes Ramos of Zecora Ura and Persis Jade Maravala. The festival brought together artists, curators, funders and researchers from the Rio-Sao Paulo and London-Edinburgh axis to discuss and experience artistic disruptions in mega-cities. It is an ongoing project that will see its next phase manifested in Brazil, early 2012, that will also take on an online presence.
www.zecoraaura.com

Image credits:
Images pp 10 & 11 from Alexander Roberts, *RageWalksLondon* at BR-116.
Photos by Ludovic des Cognets.



BR-116 – a feast of journeys and events across London

Dorothy's Shoes was commissioned to create a travelling interactive performance for London transport on the first full day of BR-116 (Wednesday 14 September) – a journey which began at the Theatre Royal Stratford East, and led eventually to Trinity Buoy Wharf, taking in buses and bus stations, Tubes, the DLR, and an unexpectedly tranquil walkway and woods next to the river at East India Docks. Entitled *Behind the Moon, Beyond the Rain*, the piece was inspired by the live-in-the-moment ethos of Frank L Baum's Wizard of Oz books, and set out to explore temporary friendship and the appreciation of what we've got – right here, right now – as we journey together. Referencing also numerous Grimms fairytales, the performance invited the audience to read and misread the city as a labyrinth of child's play and fantasy with audience participation (both from those on the whole journey, and those picked up along the way!) including choral singing, paper-boat making, playing carnival dress-up at West Ham tube, picnicking, and partner dancing down an avenue of trees towards the O2 Dome (which was cast as a palace of dreams).

Brazilian artist **Gustavo Ciriaco** was commissioned by BR-116 to create *Todo Onde*, an audio performance for a journey by boat and DLR that would lead its audience from the South Bank to Trinity Buoy Wharf. The production, in contrast to *Behind the Moon* and *RageWalksLondon*, was characterised by absence, rather than presence – and was a piece that relied on an individual rather than collective experience. Performed/enacted by participants on Friday 16 September, those taking part experienced the journey accompanied by an audio file, which was created through the artist's response to video material he had received of the proposed route. It told a narrative of what the artist had seen, leaving the audience to retrace the steps of his observations, in the absence of the happenings that were captured on the film he had seen.

The Selfish Banquet was a lunchtime event (held on Friday 16 September, before Gustavo Ciriaco's performative journey) exploring how rituals of food sharing and idea sharing can be combined to create multi-levelled knowledge exchanges and encounters between artists, curators, educators, thinkers – embracing people from different professional and personal backgrounds. People taking part bring food to share, all of which is luxuriously heaped onto a main banquet table, then guests make themselves a plate of food and move from table to table, experiencing different discussion topics led by facilitators placed one to a table. Facilitators included Jorge Lopes Ramos, director of Zecora Ura and Jonathan Grieve, co-founder of Para Active; invited guests/roundtable speakers included Pippa Bailey (of Total Theatre Awards and *Biding Time*) and Rupert Thomson from the new Summerhall venue and arts project in Edinburgh.

On Saturday 17 November, there was more feasting to be had: this time in the company of **Nomad Cafe** who took their audience foraging along the Tidal Basin for wild foods, and then later that day for a picnic on a DLR train, eating foods found earlier, but also things prepared in advance using ingredients found or sourced from along



the train route – a feast that included lavender biscuits, blackberry muffins, fruit-and-nut bread, and homemade elderberry 'champagne'.

On the final night of the festival, two special commissions were presented: **Flavio Rabelo's *Take-Away***, in which the artist sits slumped on a pavement in a flowing gown and a mask that completely obscures his vision, carrying a helium-filled party balloon, inviting passers-by to take him away for a walk and talk – an exercise in trust and the sharing of confidences. Also set outdoors – but this time in a hidden garden rather than a public street – was a delicately beautiful piece by **Olga Lamas** called *Sirva-se* ('Help yourself'). Inspired by a study of Virginia Woolf, the work is part of an ongoing research project by Olga Lamas, and takes the form of a night-garden tea party, an enchanting one-on-one encounter in which every gesture is enacted with measured calm. The evening also saw the culmination of **Urias de Oliveira's *Dom Quixote Messenger Service***, which used the capital's 'Boris Bikes' to take messages across the city from one artist to another (starting with Kathryn Hunter and Marcello Magni of Complicite, who were performing at the Arcola Theatre that week).

BR-116 also embraced a week of nightly workshops by Brazilian companies Tannteatro and LUME (see our Worldview: Brazil feature elsewhere in this magazine for more on these companies), daytime film showings and seminars, and a cross-continent internet conference.

Image credits:

From top to bottom: Dorothy's Shoes, *Behind the Moon, Beyond the Rain*; *The Selfish Banquet*; Flavio Rabelo, *Take-Away*. All photos by Ludovic des Cognets from BR-116 September 2011.



Take a Chance

Philip Watkinson calculates the odds of securing chaos when working with chance in performance

Taking chances. Something we all do at various points in our lives, be it in large or small ways. It's a notion that is usually looked on as a positive thing, as something to be encouraged. We often take chances in order to achieve something – He Who Dares Wins!

Yet when making performance work, 'chance' is an element that is commonly avoided if at all possible. If one takes chances, then things can go wrong. But this doesn't always have to be a bad thing.

Whilst a third-year performing arts student at the University of Winchester, I spent around six months working with chance. This culminated in No I In Company creating a performance called *Secured Chaos* for my course 'Company Production Project'. Building on the work of John Cage, the Fluxus artists, and Jacques Lecoq, we aimed to create an original performance aesthetic that questioned the nature of what performance is or can be. It was to be a Happening (of sorts), but one in which the content was not predetermined at all.

A central concern that soon arose from our practice was that of rehearsal. When working with chance, how can one rehearse if the end-product is to occur by chance? Surely, if it is rehearsed then it is not chance at all? Initially this was the conclusion we came to. However, a lecturer soon commented that without a through-line or structure to our process, were we not just exploring chance for chance's sake? We realised (somewhat reluctantly) that this was what we were doing, and that it wasn't a particularly fruitful or original way to go. We then set out to answer this question.

The group arrived at this idea (oddly enough) by chance. Our initial focus was maskwork and the practice of Lecoq. However, having misunderstood the nature of a task for a work-in-progress showing

one week, we found ourselves completely unprepared and with nothing to show. A group member quickly suggested an improvisation we could do, and we did it, having no idea what would happen. The reaction was more positive than we could have ever expected and it proved to be the most exciting piece of work we had performed up to that point. The group's focus then shifted into more unpredictable areas.

We began to workshop various improvisation exercises in order to create situations where interesting 'chance collisions' occurred. To generate these collisions we began to use Cage's notion of 'performance scores' (specific performance instructions which are performed precisely as written) as a basis for our improvisations. We initially had a focus on not interacting with each other. We would each simply perform our own scores without any recognition or awareness of what the others were doing, meaning that any significant synchronicities or perceived narrative were imagined by the audience rather than 'given' (although it could perhaps be argued that the audience always 'imagines' the narrative in theatre, no matter what is given!).

This proved very limiting, as possible moments of interest were being created but not being seized. For example, one of my scores consisted of me being 'blind' for a length of time. I slowly made my way around the room, feeling out in front of me for obstacles. During this score Louise (Byrne, a company member) stopped me and attempted to interact with me. I did not respond at all as I was focusing on my own score. This potential onstage relationship was an interesting occurrence that had been completely overlooked.

To remedy this we introduced Lecoq's notions of 'le jeu' (playfulness) and 'disponibilité' (openness) to our practice. This meant that we not only aware of each other but constantly open to interactions. This enabled us to have fun with what we were creating, making everything that we did subject to chance and change.

Then a decisive moment came in our process: we began experimenting with the *I-Ching* (an ancient Chinese book of divination). This oft-used 'chance bible' seemed like an obvious place to go, but we were determined to use it in a new and different way. Whilst the rest of the group were performing their scores I used the *I-Ching* to calculate hexagrams (each hexagram corresponded with a word, action, feeling etc) and then announced my results into the space to affect improvisation. People could then choose to do what they wanted with this information (for example, to obey it, ignore it, force it on others). My process of using the book then changed in accordance to what happened as a result of its use. For example, I began to open the pages at random or spin a bottle instead of using coins (the common method of *I-Ching* calculation). At one point people ignored what I said, so I



quickly chose another faster method of hexagram calculation because I got frustrated by the lack of reaction.

What we did was use a chance process (myself using the *I-Ching*) to generate chance performance results, which also allowed the process itself to be subject to chance and change. In addition to this, the process and its results were affected by outside influences (such as illness, tiredness, needing the toilet...) What we began creating was an 'open process performance' where the process and the results of the process are subject to change, from themselves, each other and the outside world!

All of a sudden we were able to sustain chance improvisation and allow our creative impulses to become fully formed. By the end we ran everything through the *I-Ching*: our choice of space, our costumes, even the title of the piece, which came out (rather luckily) as *Secured Chaos*.

And here we began to see how chance can be rehearsed. In order to have a purpose and direction, a performance does indeed need some form of structure. If the structure is one that has chance inherent within it, then it can be rehearsed without ruining the essence of the piece.

The end result was a gloriously messy performance that questioned not only the nature of performance itself, but also allowed performers to explore their own personal boundaries and to examine the nature of our existence in the world. Everything and anything was allowed to take place, including driving around the field in a car, masturbation, a lecturer being breastfed under a suckling blanket, fruit being rolled down steps, and one group member spending the entire performance riding furiously on an exercise bike! One thing about chance work is that it is rarely dull to watch!

We discovered that a close relation between theory and practice really helps to shape a chance performance such as this. As standard 'rehearsals' were not needed in our project (indeed they would likely have had a detrimental effect) a refined performance concept had to be present to make sure that the potential practice was kept in check. This concept was then allowed to flow organically from our practice, and vice-versa. As we went through our process, the group's concept changed and informed the next session. This eventually led to the creation of a detailed final programme that was given to audience members on the day. This allowed them to 'frame' what they saw with the theories and concepts we had in mind.

Another key discovery we made was the importance of commitment. Only complete commitment to the moment could dampen any potential fear of the uncertain. We realised very quickly that it was not about *performing* presence, it was about *being* present. Being fully 'there' in the space and existing as fully as possible. This is how an undeniable sense of authenticity can be created, and can give clarity to a performance. This is doubly useful for audience members when say a narrative or characters are absent.

Our performance ended up gaining quite a lot of notoriety around campus. On a recent evening out with friends in a local pub, I overheard a student proclaim with great shock: 'Have you heard about



this so-called 'performance' by the performing arts lot. Apparently there was this girl, completely naked in the middle of the football field, and she said to a lecturer, "Do you wanna suck on my boobs?" Ah gossip, how you transform things! Suffice to say when I told the rest of the group about this, there were smiles all round.

An incident that occurred in my first year of university provides some closing thoughts and final reflections on chance work in performance. In a work-in-progress showing in a Year 1 Devising class, myself and a few other No I In Company members were involved with a piece about emotions. Each section of the piece concerned a different emotion. We had all the sections fully rehearsed and prepared. Then on the show date, from start to finish, everything that could go wrong did. We began by walking onstage, each carrying a word of the piece's title. Two of us carried ours on in the wrong order, which made the title incomprehensible. Then a sad, moving monologue about the death of someone's grandfather turned into a comedic flight of fancy. Someone even started to sweep up food crumbs during the performance, as we were worried about breaking health and safety regulations! The whole show was a chaotic shambles. To this day it is the most fun we have ever had performing, and I believe it was the purest performance aesthetic that has ever been created by a group I have worked in. Everything was 100% authentic. When people laughed, it was because they found something funny. At moments everything felt 'right'. Some of the moments and images that were created were so stunning, they even made me forget what I was supposed to be doing.

Ever since then we have been pining after re-creating such an environment. This is what we attempted to recreate, albeit in a more advanced and informed way, with *Secured Chaos*. When you give performers freedom what you get in return is a heightened, purer form of performance. People ignore being tired, ill, cold or 'not up for it'. However, this freedom does need some form of structure and purpose, otherwise complacency and self-indulgence tend to set in. When used shrewdly, what chance can offer in performance is an infinite amount of actions, gestures, interactions, and occurrences that operate on all ends of the scale, from extreme to mild. The trick is to channel this somewhat unwieldy material into something concentrated and manageable. Then the unpredictable becomes not only a useful tool, but also a powerful one.

No I In Company have all graduated from university now and have been inevitably thrust into the real world of chance. However, we hope that this is only the beginning; we feel this performance aesthetic can and should be pushed as far as possible and explored in fine detail. We are currently developing theories for practice that stem from the ideas explored in *Secured Chaos*. We are focusing on the effect of 'environmental framing' and location on chance practice, and examining acutely the role of time in performance. This will be done by extensive discussion followed by pop-up performances in as many unexpected places as possible then revised discussion and so on. After this research period has taken place we will then shift our attention to the next performance and running some workshops inspired by our practice. Chaos hasn't yet been secured.



More Chance Occurrences

The use of chance and indeterminacy in performance has a long and rich heritage. Here, Philip Watkinson gives a brief overview of a few of his key influences in this broad but somewhat elusive field of work.

John Cage

John Cage was an American composer and pioneer of aleatoric or 'chance music', often using the *I-Ching* book as a tool for composition. Perhaps the most notable example of this work is the piano piece *Music for Changes* (1951) where the book was used to determine all the elements of the piece such as the notes, their lengths, tempi, dynamics and so on. Through his long association with choreographer Merce Cunningham he was also instrumental in the development of contemporary dance. The pair's chance operations developed new ways of interaction between dance and music, where they concluded that the two were linked by time and space but could be composed independently of each other. Cage once described music as 'an affirmation of life – not an attempt to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply a way of waking up to the very life we're living'. This ethos was a view shared with Fluxus, an artistic movement to whom Cage's work was a great inspiration.

Fluxus

The work of Fluxus was of great importance to the development of chance in performance. It began in New York in the 1960s and mixed artistic experimentation with social and political activism, presenting a melting pot of artistic practices and media. A key feature of Fluxus was the 'Event Score'. These were instructions, often written and of varying length, that consist of simple everyday actions, ideas, and objects that were recontextualised as performance. They are often physically impossible and always thought provoking. For example, Yoko Ono's *Fly Piece* (1951) consisted of the instruction to 'Fly'. Examples of some other key artists in the movement were George Brecht, Ay-O and Dick Higgins. Fluxus aimed to generate pathways that question the knowledge and nature of our existence in this world, with a desire to expand the setting of our human experience. They shone a light on the unique significance of particular experiences that are both predetermined yet completely out of our control.

Allan Kaprow's Happenings

Allan Kaprow's Happenings were loosely structured theatrical events that began in New York in the 1950s. They often consisted of the participants (both performers and members of the audience) following instructions, sometimes across quite a large area such as a city. These

happenings served to significantly blur the line between art and life, between performer and audience. Due to the involvement of the audience and their tendency to take place outside of a 'theatrical' environment, the element of chance is an underlying aspect of these events. Indeed the outside influences would often form important parts of the events themselves.

Jacques Lecoq

Jacques Lecoq was a French actor-trainer who became famous for his influential methods and training in physical theatre, movement and mime. Lecoq's actor training placed a strong emphasis on the creativity of the performer. Lecoq did not teach performance, he allowed performance to happen. His concepts of 'disponibilité' (openness) and 'Le Jeu' (playfulness) were fundamental to his teachings. Whilst he did not focus on chance specifically, this element is implicit to both these concepts. As situations unfold between performers, their 'play' is a search for these beautiful moments that can occur by chance, and being 'open' is a necessity for this to happen.

Apocryphal Theatre

In a more modern context, companies such as Apocryphal Theatre have explored and pushed notions of chance further. Founded/directed by Julia Barclay, based in London, and with an ensemble that included William Aichison and Theron Schmidt, the company worked together for a decade, but have recently (summer 2011) disbanded. *Besides, You Lose Your Soul or The History of Western Civilisation* (2009) featured a different set of performers each night (a mixture of performers who were both familiar and unfamiliar with the details of the piece) and a script that was constantly being revised during the show itself. Whilst the themes being explored were set, the method in which they would unfold throughout the piece remained uncertain until the very moment in which it happened. As company director Julia Lee Barclay said in an interview in *What's On Stage*, 'Our work may not appear precise or crafted on the first level, but if you watch it closely, and understand that our aesthetic is a rough one on purpose, you will see there is a lot of precision within and between the performer-artists.' This perhaps presents the lynch-pin of chance performance work: the wider context can be as vague and undefined as you like, but the specific has to be defined, committed and above all, present.

No I In Company's *Secured Chaos* was performed 2 June 2011 at the Dytche sports field, University of Winchester. The piece was devised and performed by Louise Byrne, Lucy Cody, Claire Devall, Daisy Greening, Catherine Neighbour, Sheida Moharrer and Philip Watkinson.

For further information on the company, contact Philip at pwm26@kent.ac.uk

Images pp 13-14: No I In Company *Secured Chaos* performing at University of Winchester. Photos Catherine Neighbour.

Image p16: Merce Cunningham Dance Company *Secondhand*. Photo Anna Finke.

VOICES

Gisli Örn Gardarsson of Vesturport, in his own words



When in drama school in Iceland we were always saying, ‘Let’s do something, we have to do something.’ For that to happen we would have to unite around something. One morning on our way to school, me and a classmate walked past this shed in Reykjavik. And it said ‘For Rent’. And we called them, on our way to school, and rented the place. Then we gathered the like-minded artists that had been involved in these discussions about how they wanted stuff to be, because we figured out everyone would have to pay something like £150 a month.

For that money you would have a share in a theatre of your own! That was the start of Vesturport. There were some people that didn’t join because they thought it was too much. There’s no obligation, artistically. You have a theatre space, there is a collective group that rents it. You can look for help if you need it, but whoever does the project is fully responsible, financially and artistically and everything. And that’s how it has remained since. I think that’s why we’ve survived. When I do my productions, I just do them, it’s my responsibility. So that’s why we don’t have clashes. Cos there’s a lot of egos in that company. A lot of big egos.

It’s like a marriage; the seven year crisis was there, when somebody was like ‘Ah, we should just split up.’ We’ve all sort of calmed down now because we appreciate what we have, and we’d rather be a part of it than not.

Vesturport is like an umbrella. There’s a core group of around ten of us – others come and go. Everyone is working elsewhere as well, that’s why we’re still alive. We’re not an ensemble that meets every day. Everybody’s working, because they’re all such sought-after artists! So I’m here now in the UK doing *Robin Hood*, and other people are doing other stuff, doing films on the side, working with the National Theatre, or whatever.

I used to think ‘damn, I’m never going to get out Iceland’ – because there’s no history of that really. Everything you do in Iceland is in Icelandic, nobody from England comes to see theatre in Iceland [Editor’s note: Total Theatre does!]. But we were doing *Romeo and Juliet*, which was the first thing I directed, and there were some English actors who saw it, and they said, ‘This has to go to England!’ They encouraged us to get in touch with some people in England, so we sent out some random letters to theatres in London. And there was only one guy who replied, David Lan of the Young Vic.

We flew David Lan over, paid for his flight, took him horse-riding, took him to the blue lagoon, and then he saw the show and, to cut a long story short, he decided to invite us over. We learnt *Romeo and Juliet* in English. I’d only been to England once in my life before that. None of us had performed in English before; the original production was in Icelandic.

Doing *Romeo and Juliet* was an actor-driven decision. I wanted to play in a show that was seriously physical, and there wouldn’t have been a director in Iceland who could have provided that sort of platform. That’s why I felt I had to direct it myself, because I knew what I was after.

With *Romeo and Juliet*, no one had any background whatsoever in circus – nothing, nothing. It’s the same situation with *Robin Hood* – just a bunch of actors who are sort of willing and eager – if scared of heights! I have a background; I did gymnastics when I was younger. So I have the knowledge, and I know what it takes, and how to train – that’s why I can demand it. I can quickly spot where someone’s natural talent lies, in terms of physicality. And we’ll just focus very specifically on that, and focus on making simple moves look really grand and cool. For example, with the platforms in *Robin Hood*, just by having someone standing on them, they’re already in mid-air, without doing anything. As an audience member you understand that if they fall down, it’s an injury. So already you’ve started the process of the circus world.

When we turned to circus, I think the industry sort of laughed behind our backs. ‘Circus, these guys? Pffff. What do they think they can do?’ I think it came as a big surprise. But we spent a long time on it. Now, it’s much easier because I’ve done it so many times and know what I’m looking for. But that process was really long because it was the first time, getting to know how to do things. The key is, like always, really really hard work. There’s no magic. It’s just long hours, long days, many months. And not losing faith. I didn’t know it would be successful. Not at all. *Not at all.* I mean, I hoped it would be, but we were just out of drama school, most of us, nobody knew who we were.

There was an 11-year-old boy in the show, a gymnast. Now he’s a 20-year-old and still in it. Shakespeare in Iceland will usually do fifteen performances, twenty at the most. I was hoping we’d do that at least, that we’d survive twenty performances. When his mother asked how long it would run. I said, ‘Well, ten, fifteen performances?’ Nine years later we’re still doing it, and it’s been 400+ performances.

In the film world, people will do original stuff all the time. The theatre world is different. In theatre you’ll keep on being drawn to titles. When you want to co-produce, often, a festival in Germany, if you decide to do *Faust*, will co-commission it. And you say, ‘Ok, I’ll read *Faust*.’ And then you go ‘Hang on, that’s good! Guys, let’s do *Faust*.’ Here in England, we’re sort of known for the big titles, but back in Iceland we’re known for doing all kinds of stuff.



I've written a musical called *Love: the musical*. It's set in an old people's home – it toured to the UK and to Korea. The music was all cover songs. So we do write original works too, as well as the reworks and adaptations. The latest thing we did in Iceland is a farce that we wrote ourselves called *The Housewife*. It is utterly silly and ridiculous. And very successful.

Only 300,000 people live in Iceland, but we sell 500,000 tickets a year – to theatre, in general. That means everyone goes two times, or something. So there's a big theatre scene, a lot of shows. On a busy weekend you'll have 30 different productions on, so it's massive. And the competition is massive.

I wouldn't want to leave Iceland. Of the past seven years, I've spent four in England. But the facilities there for me to work are so good. Life's much simpler in Iceland, and everything takes five minutes, as oppose to three days. To get between places, to get something brought in. And you get to spend more time in the theatre. I couldn't have created *Romeo and Juliet* here, because I wouldn't have had the facilities. But there, I was rehearsing in the actual space for a long time – in the evenings, whenever it was free. So the facilities there have certainly helped me do what I did.

With *Metamorphosis* (created with David Farr at the Lyric) we started here in the UK. But then the condition was that they built the set early on, so we had it from the first day of rehearsals. Otherwise I couldn't have done that production. I was working as an actor when he was running the Lyric, I was working with Kneehigh theatre, and me and David started talking about doing something, and he came up with the idea of *Metamorphosis*, but I knew it quite well, and it instantly sort of took me. I knew already what I would want to do with it. We work really well together, really well. He's very good with the words. And I'm good with fooling around.

And so *Robin Hood* came out of that. We'd been talking about finding a thing to do for a long time. And then he had this crazy idea that he'd written this play and did I want to direct it, and I read it and I thought it was very good. So I thought what the hell. He's an associate at the RSC, so it was already commissioned by them. With *Robin Hood*, we're in a rehearsal space for five weeks and then one week in tech, and then showtime. It's not a great way when you want to do big, physical shows. But we collaborate very closely on it. We never have a row about it, we always talk it through and reach a sort of consensus.

The next big project I'll do is based on *The Brothers Karamazov*.

It's a big co-production between Iceland, Sweden and Denmark. I'm co-writing it with an American screenwriter called Richard LaGravenese. He's one of America's finest screenwriters, he's Oscar nominated for *The Fisher King* and he's done loads of films. So that's very exciting for me, to be working with someone with that background and that writing knowledge.

It's going to be called *Bastards*. It's in the Reykjavik City Theatre, and then in a big tent in Sweden and Denmark. And it's a big, big family play. Not for families – about families. It's going to be dark and sexy as hell.

Vesturport was founded in Iceland in 2001. *Romeo and Juliet* was the first performance in the UK, and played at the Young Vic in 2003. Gisli Örn Gardarsson's other major international productions have included *Woyzeck* (2005) in collaboration with the Barbican; *Metamorphosis* (2006) at the Lyric Hammersmith, co-adapted by David Farr and Gisli Örn Gardarsson, and *Faust* (2010) co-commissioned by the Reykjavik City Theatre and the Ludwigshafen Theatre in Germany.

<http://vesturport.com/>

The Heart of Robin Hood by David Farr, directed by Gisli Örn Gardarsson, is the Royal Shakespeare Company's Christmas show. It runs at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 18 November 2011 – 7 January 2012.

<http://www.rsc.org.uk/whats-on/the-heart-of-robin-hood/>

Box Office: 0844 800 1110

Gisli Örn Gardarsson was interviewed by Cassie Werber, November 2011.

Image credits:

p16: RSC *The Heart of Robin Hood*. Photo Eggert Thor Jonsson.

p17: Gisli in *Metamorphosis* directed by David Farr for Lyric Theatre.

Home Truths

The Canny Granny on theatre from the comfort of her own sofa

Through a change in fortune, I find myself confined to the sofa. My cat, Amstrad, is on his ninth life and counting, so while I'm stroking him to keep his healing hormones up I'm typing this one-handed – hang on in there, old pal. Confined as I am, I've been internet shopping for theatre, wondering what art you can enjoy from afar... Yes dearies, watching *The Mighty Boosh* on Dave channel is officially no longer the most fun you can have in slippers!

This year's DIY workshop series at Artsadmin had good news for far-flung makers of queer theatre because Chris Goode ran his course 'on a descentred basis'. He sent them a communication every week, 'invitations and stimulus materials', then they all met up to share at the end. It's an inspired idea. I wish someone would send me stimulus materials, all I get is reminders from the library. (Where has that copy of *Fear of Flying* gone? I must ask Grandpa if he's seen it.)

The Public Space Programme also used communications from afar. Artists including Tim Etchells, Phil Smith of *Wrights and Sites*, Gob Squad, the Icelandic Love Corporation, Samo Gosaric, and Georg Hobmeier all made up rule-sets which were interpreted by participants in Reykjavik in public spaces, leading to strange choreography and urban journeys. If you find a stranger in your garden they may not necessarily be trying to make off with the family sapphires but rather be trying to cross the city in a straight line. Fine, but please don't tread on my Physalis.

Theatre from afar might revolve around little tasks, like on Miranda July's website 'learning to love you more', which tells you to, among other things, interview your parents, and then post the results on her site. I interviewed mine using an ouija board. (Me: Mum is that you? Mum: Yes. Me: Send me an instruction and I'll perform it. Mum: Wrap up warm. So much for that long-distance collaboration.) I got more joy with Little Wonder's guided walk along Regent's Canal, *Vagabond's Voyage*, which is audio downloadable for free from the Camden People's Theatre website. Who needs a director, or even actors? Rotozaza's *Wondermart* is also an mp3 which you download, then use to cause havoc in your local supermarket. It had me fiddling with the freezer cabinets and waltzing down the aisles with my trolley – and the best thing



was I still came home with a lamb shank, Yorkshire puddings, parsnips and a key lime pie for afters. Perhaps that was because I did it in Welsh.

Tim Etchells did away with all the trimmings entirely and simply texted a vivid piece of theatre to audiences for Norfolk and Norwich Festival. The show was all in the imagination – unlimited special effects, fireworks, galloping horses ... cheap! Don't let the coalition hear of it, they'll slash physical theatre – I mean actual theatre – completely.

A less Spartan option is provided by Once Art and Ceremonies. The show *Kitchen Sink Drama* comes in an almost-too-good-to-open parcel like a treasure hunt – a sea voyage in your own sink. Using the postal service endows artefactual richness. Tracey Emin cottoned onto this when she launched her 'Tracey Emin Museum' by selling 'Emin Bonds' to benefactors with the promise of posting them artworks which would increase in value – she sent them letters and videos and boy oh boy did they increase! Someone told me she put up a poster when she lost her cat and even that got nicked. I'm thinking of starting 'The Museum of Gran'. Bonds start at £200. (Cheques to Long Tailed Tit Towers, SE22 0PD.)

It's not just your imagination you can animate from afar. Sitting on the sofa can leave you intellectually razorsharp if you sign up to the Argument Room, a monthly live debate you watch on webcam and join in the online discussion forum – two parallel arguments! It's really satisfying for your online discussion points to suddenly be put to the guest – this month Beatrix Campbell! Lucky really cos when I voice my thoughts on the topic of gender equality in my living room I'm met with purrs and snores.

Hold on a minute, I can't actually hear any purring... Amstrad has gone, folks. I'll miss him. But at least I can type with both hands now. I've just ordered Brian Lobel's piece (which is posted to you) called *Or Else Your Friends Will Have To Do It* (hosted by Chelsea Theatre's Sacred festival) which guides you in making a mix CD memorial for yourself – 'a reflection of mortality and responsibility'. I think my days are numbered. I feel it in my

bones. So I'll do one for me, and one (strictly cat-related) for dearly departed Amstrad. And while I'm there I'll order myself some groceries from Tesco, some flowers from Interflora (for the garden burial) – and the iPad 2. Night night.

The Canny Granny is Laura Eades. She's indoors a lot at the moment. If you'd like to collaborate across the divide by post, video, text, postcard, walkie-talkie or other means, email Laura at laura.eades@hotmail.co.uk. In 2012 you will find her online at www.totaltheatrereview.com

Rotozaza's Wondermart:
www.wondermart.co.uk

Little Wonder's Vagabond's Voyage – the audio tour:
Search the events archive at www.cpttheatre.co.uk

Brian Lobel at Chelsea Theatre's Sacred:
www.chelseatheatre.org.uk

Tracey Emin (exhibition now finished, but you can have a good look on this microsite, and also, remarkably, write her a letter here):
www.loveiswhatyouwant.com

The rules to The Public Space Programme:
<http://thepublicspaceprogramme.tumblr.com/post/3433938670/the-guidelines-for-each-rule-set-are-as-follows>

Chris Goode's DIY workshop details from last year's Artsadmin workshop season:
http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/prof_dev/diy/diy8_chris_goode.html

Tabletop theatre by post from Once, highly recommended for a weird night in:
www.once.uk.com/table-top-theatre

The Argument Room: www.theargumentroom.net

Voice recognition app for those confined to the sofa and unable to use both their hands to reach out to the world:
<http://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/dragon-dictation>

THE WORKS

A personal view of the works of Gandini Juggling by Thomas Wilson



Gandini Juggling *Smashed*. Photo Ludovic des Cognets.

For Gandini Juggling, 2012 – their 20th anniversary year – will begin with a visit to the London International Mime Festival. It's their fourth appearance at this prestigious festival of physical and visual theatre, which has always had an eye on the edgier circus work coming out of the UK. This time, they bring a reworked, full-length stage version of their 2010 outdoor show *Smashed*.

Formed in 1992 by Cuban juggler Sean Gandini and Finnish rhythmic gymnast Kati Ylä-Hokkala, the Gandini Juggling Project, as it was first titled, has continued to be in the vanguard of contemporary circus, reinventing and reinvigorating the role of juggling across commercial and non-commercial strands of the industry. Although named after Gandini, Ylä-Hokkala's role in the company is of equal importance, and the interplay of these two artists sits at the heart of what is in essence an ever-changing and altering ensemble of jugglers and dancers.

Gandini and Ylä-Hokkala's commitment to both commercial and non-commercial contexts is typical of the easiness with which circus artists in general take advantage of the opportunities the artform presents. Gandini Juggling's commercial output is prolific, whether in terms of commissions, festival appearances or residencies (currently four of the Gandini Juggling ensemble are resident as part of Cirque de Soleil's Macau show *ZALA*). This has afforded them a number of benefits, including the opportunity to establish collaborations throughout the

world and to maintain a rigorous and continuous investigation of juggling as a skill, as well as an art event. This rigour, in part, lies at the heart of Gandini and Ylä-Hokkala's success, in particular their dedication to learning new skills and new ways of approaching their work.

The outdoor version of *Smashed*, their second of three commissions by the National Theatre's Watch This Space programme, skilfully unites two of Gandini Juggling's concerns – the 'composition of complex multiple-juggler patterns' and an inquisitive and inventive relationship with principles of contemporary dance – all whilst retaining an unfussy populist spirit and delicate humour. *Smashed* takes nine jugglers, nine chairs, a host of apples and a whole assortment of crockery and spends 30 minutes playfully using and disrupting juggling conventions as a way to hint at the darker reaches of human contact, set alongside a soundtrack of music hall songs. Sean Gandini has identified the obvious debt to Pina Bausch in the work, even coining his own phrase 'tanzjonglage' to describe the company's approach to this work. This debt manifests itself in the attention to detail in the physical action, the deadpan delivery and most importantly the use of the repercussions of the choreography on the performers to drive the emotional and 'narrative' content of the work.

Smashed, like all of Gandini Juggling's work uses object manipulation to weave the performers together, not just in the physical sense



of their involvement in the patterns but in the way in which the connection between the performers come to evoke relationships and situations that have a dramaturgical weight. In this piece the apples and crockery, as in any juggling routine, heighten the dramatic impact of the patterns. They also serve to reinforce the slightly-stilted afternoon garden party feel to the work, as well as allowing the company to cast a knowing glance at the classic apple-eating juggling cascade. This sense of an underlying tension to what ostensibly appears to be a pleasant social occasion further echoes the connection to Bausch, bringing to mind her works *Kontakt* and *1980*. This underlying tension builds through the work, as playful behaviour turns to sarcasm, verbal insults and a final crescendo of each performer undermining and impeding the juggling of the others.

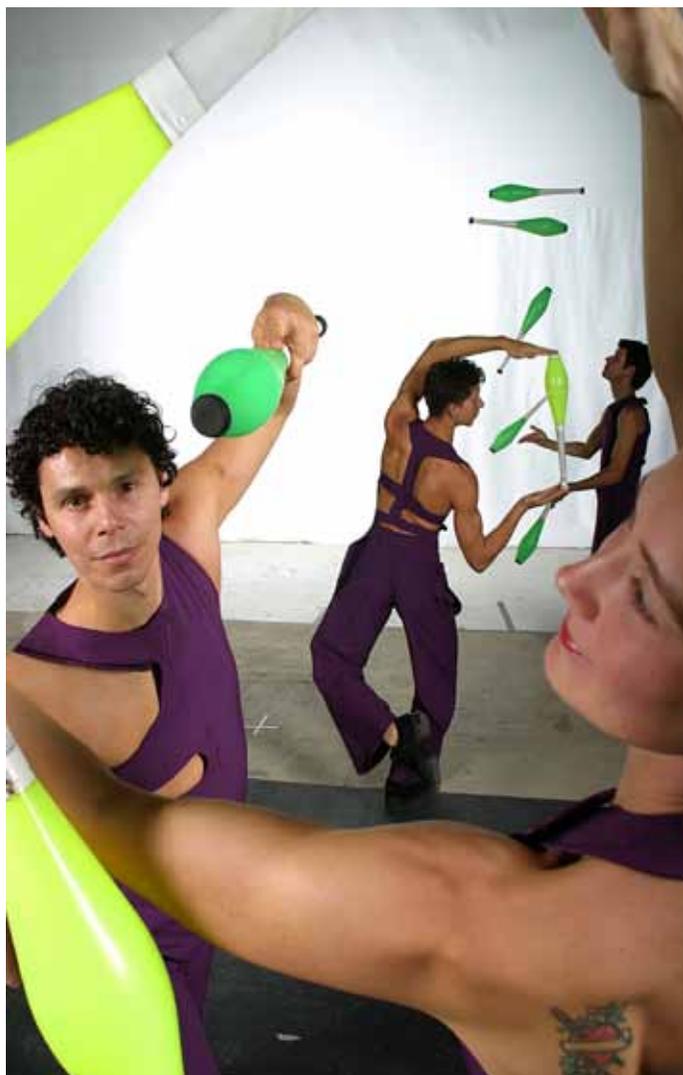
The denouement of the outdoor version of the show is a wilful and joyful destruction of the crockery, intentionally rejecting each catch and revelling in the refusal of the juggler's primary task. This rebellion is not a new choice in Gandini Juggling's work, its origins lying in their first piece *nEiðer Eiðer botH and*, the final moment of which saw Sean Gandini cascading five clay balls, finally allowing them to smash one after another into the floor, one of only two natural end-points to an artform dedicated to keeping objects aloft.

nEiðer Eiðer botH and was born out of Gandini and Ylä-Hökkala's early experimentations with contemporary dance. Choreographed by the prolific contemporary dance teacher and choreographer Gill Clarke and featuring dance experimenter Lindsey Butcher and juggling notation pioneer Mike Day alongside Gandini and Ylä-Hökkala, *nEiðer Eiðer botH and*, like the follow-up *CAUGHT: "STILL"/hanging(CSH)*, was rooted in the postmodern principles of Merce Cunningham and mixed specific dance vocabulary alongside juggling. In these two works juggling appeared to take on the role of another 'task' to be completed during the course of the action; complex tasks that were designed to be deliberately difficult to achieve. The fusion of the dance vocabulary with the juggling led to a lilting

suspended quality to the work, with the movement taking on the arcs and trajectories of the objects – informed by the quiet focus of the juggler. Gone was the street-juggler's patter in these works, replaced by momentary glances and smiles between the performers, leading to a gentle and soothing theatricality.

Also gone was juggling's front-on orientation, and in both these pieces the juggling happened in a variety of angles, sometimes leading to sculptural groupings, especially in the more complex passing patterns. These moving sculptures appeared to emerge out of a fusion of side-by-side and facing passing patterns. Often these patterns were accompanied by the 'calling' of numbers – a visible cue for patterns or shifts in sequences, to be developed even further in *Septet*. Thus something of the occult construction of the work was laid out for an audience. Like some secret code it served to reinforce the mysterious and otherworldly in the dance-juggling. In this way, the work playfully worked with audience expectations of the virtuoso and with the meditative, almost philosophical, inquiries inherited from the early postmodern ideas of Cunningham.

What *Smashed* has acquired that Gandini Juggling's early pieces had not yet found was a gently simmering dramaturgy in the work. This thread first surfaced in Gandini and Ylä-Hökkala's delicate, sensuous and witty 2003 duet *Stop Breaking my Balls*. Directed by Company FZ's John-Paul Zaccarini (working alongside choreographer Gill Clarke) this work started from Gandini and Ylä-Hökkala's relationship, playing knowingly and carefully with the universal tensions that any personal relationship carries with it. What was most delightful about this work was the embracing of the dramaturgical possibilities of juggling, without losing the dextrous complexity and inventiveness of the patterns that Gandini and Ylä-Hökkala could weave. This is not to say that this was a foray into a fully narrative piece but instead that it suggested the dynamic and development of the relationship via the subtle crafting of Gandini and Ylä-Hökkala's personas and their approach to each pattern's execution in terms of rhythm, accompanied



by their glances at one another. What this work also highlighted was the importance of the soundscore in Gandini Juggling's work: in this case the use of romantic songs to begin to contextualise the themes of the work and Guy Bellingham's musical saw to provide an evocation of mood.

The use of sound came to the fore in Gandini and Ylä-Hökkala's 2004 collaboration with John Blanchard, *K-DNK: no exit*. This worked principally with ball-bouncing and the mesmerising rhythmic and acoustic properties of the sound, whilst responding to Sartre's *Huis Clois*. The use of various constructions to facilitate the bouncing of balls served to further highlight the complexity and architectural splendour of juggling patterns, and the ways in which the patterns interact with various planes and geometric shapes. This relationship to architecture is an interesting thread in Gandini Juggling's work, as they have shifted between the use of elliptical and geometric forms, in part due to the people with whom they have collaborated as much as for any other reason.

Collaboration is of course a further ingredient in the development of the work, both in the ongoing collaboration between the core members, Gandini and Ylä-Hökkala, and the continual integration of new members in the company. This collaboration has not only aided but also guided the shifts and turns of the material. There is a sense that Gandini Juggling choose their performers with meticulous care.

The latent sound of juggling reappeared in Gandini's 2008 piece, *Downfall*. This production mixed austere silent sections, where the thud or catch of a ball or the brush of a hand on a table was the only accompaniment, with hypnotic painterly object choreographies to classical music and a hint of illusionism – the visual highlight of which was a computer-programmed light-club passing sequence to Mozart's 25th Symphony. Whether the tone was one of austerity or richness *Downfall* was characterised by richly complex patterns, and something of a hymn to the theatricality of the object in space.



This opulence, coincidentally appearing at the height of the financial boom, has been replaced by a certain roughhewn make do-and-mend feel in *Smashed*, echoed in the musical hall songs, the suits and understated cocktail dresses. Likewise, the space at the end of *Smashed* is disordered and littered with the remains of the company's destructive actions. In this way Gandini Juggling have completed another development of their theatricality, a process begun by reconfiguring juggling in relation to dance, carried through in their integration of dramaturgy, and now embracing the totality of the mise-en-scene in their work. Suggestions are that the most recent version of *Smashed* will develop the darker tone of the material. If this is the case it will be a further maturation of one strand of Gandini Juggling's work, and a rich sign of the possibilities to come.

What began as experimentation with a form has led to a rich tapestry of differing work, work that has been built upon Gandini and Ylä-Hökkala's commitment to the fundamental basics of juggling – objects moving 'miraculously' in space. Whether this is in the fiendishly complex patterns of balls, clubs and rings or the complex interactions of the performers, it is all built on clear and precise rules. It is the adventurous and open spirit with which Gandini and Ylä-Hökkala search out these rules within other forms which marks them out as a distinctive and evocative company of artists.

Gandini Juggling's *Smashed* will be presented at the Linbury Studio Theatre, Royal Opera House, 18–21 January 2012, as part of the London International Mime Festival.

Box office: 020 7304 4000

For full details of this and other LIMF shows, and to book online, see: www.mimelondon.com

For more about Gandini Juggling see the company's website: www.gandinijuggling.com

WORLDVIEW – BRAZIL



LUME Teatro The Non Place of Agada Tchamik. Photo Luana Navarro.

LUME Teatro

In the first of a new regular feature looking out to the wider world, Dorothy Max Prior shines a light on one of Brazil's leading physical and visual theatre companies

LUME is a Brazilian theatre company with a world theatre sensibility. The company was founded by the late Luis Otávio Burnier, a disciple of Etienne Decroux (and one-time associate of Jacques Lecoq, Eugenio Barba, and Jerzy Grotowski) who also trained in the Eastern theatre traditions of Noh, Kabuki and Kathakali. Hosted by the University of Campinas, and based in that town (not far from Sao Paulo, Brazil), LUME is a seven-person ensemble dedicated to the research of the art of the actor.

I meet long-term company member Jesser de Souza at the DRIFT symposium and residency, held in Brazil in February 2011, where he has been invited to give a lecture-demonstration and to lead workshop sessions. Jesser is keen to stress the importance of LUME's mission, focused as it is on research into actor-led theatre. The company's link to the University of Campinas is intrinsic to its work, and the theatre emerges from the particular artistic processes of each of its seven individual members – processes which are always intertwined with the research programme at the heart of the company's practice. Being an actor in LUME means far more than being an interpreter of roles!

Jesser's contributions to the DRIFT symposium weekend are an inspiration. His performative lecture gives a clear picture of how his personal path of actor training resonates with LUME's shared vision. With ease, humour and extraordinary physical dexterity he illustrates such concepts as working organically with movement 'giving and receiving energy from the earth'; learning to use both the large articulations of the body's major joints and the smallest of movements, to different ends (keeping the focus on the energy in the abdomen); and using 'vibration' of the voice in a quest to nail the key qualities of any particular voice. Thus, with LUME, character work is not psychological, but built on detailed observation, in keeping with the corporeal mime tradition established by Decroux. We are given a beautiful example in the depiction an old man, the walk and the voice sourced from different starting observations (the walk of old man in a city square combined with the high nasal talk of an Amazonian storyteller).



LUME Teatro Parada De Rua. Photo Giandomenico



This viewpoint is reiterated by company member Naomi Silman when I meet her in London at Stratford Circus. She is there as ‘technician plus’ with one of the company’s smaller-scale clown pieces, *La Scarpetta*, presented in March 2011 as part of a European tour of shows and workshops, presented under the Casa LUME banner.

Naomi is LUME’s newest member – and by ‘new’ she means a mere thirteen years involvement. Her own lecture-demonstration, seen at The Nightingale Theatre Brighton at the end of a weekend workshop she led there (April 2011), is called *There are no Square Flowers*, made in 2008 ‘as a landmark on my journey with LUME.’ In it, she talks of the struggle to ‘put the self inside the work so it is not mechanical’ and discusses and demonstrates the play on ‘the physical, muscular body; the sensory body; and the energetic body’ in the creation of multi-layered physical motifs she calls ‘matrices’.

Her physical presence in the space during her presentation is both dynamic and endearing – she has a beautiful performance sensibility, a merging of intensity, pathos and humour that endows her stage presence simultaneously with depth and lightness. Her teaching is equally inspirational – partly as a result of her own wonderful energy and abilities, but also indicative of a quality of teaching practice that I have also found in her LUME colleagues Jesser de Souza and Renato Ferracini (the latter I met and worked with when he ran the company’s workshops for the BR-116 project in London, September 2011).

Naomi tells me that when Burnier died in 1995, there was a collective desire to ‘keep the flame burning’ and the company have worked together collaboratively to that effect ever since. There is no one artistic director: the seven members share that responsibility. They recently celebrated their 25-year anniversary as a company with a multi-discipline performance, *The Dream of Icarus*, created with 75 artists and performers – LUME live in the heart of an artistic community and called on all their Campinas friends and colleagues to get on board! The piece, a version of the Icarus myth which included street performance, trapeze, clown, live carnival music and both small-scale and large-scale puppetry – took performers and audience through the streets, then occupied a giant warehouse in Campinas – playing to audiences of 1000 or more per show. Another project, *Abre Alas (Open Wings)*, was also an outdoor performance, which this time used interviews with local people and the history of the location in which the piece was set as a starting point, and included a motley crew of bouffon characters.

The above two examples are of site-specific works created to exist in one place at one time, but LUME also continue to create indoor touring work. They are known in the UK for their highly praised appearance at the Edinburgh Festival’s Aurora Nova (2005) with *Shi-Zen 7 Bowls* – a show that highlights the individuality of each company

member whilst being a beautiful example of ensemble work. In *Shi-Zen*, a succession of elemental states-of-being are worked through using an intricate language of Butoh-inspired dance (the piece is directed by legendary Butoh artist Tadashi Endo) and gestural movement from the European expressionist dance and physical theatre traditions – all set to an eclectic soundtrack that embraces birdsong, electronica, vintage tango, and Japanese song.

Shi-Zen 7 Bowls is one of two whole-company pieces that remain in repertoire, as do many of the solo and duet works. The company’s latest ensemble show in development, *Os Bem Intencionados* (‘the well-intentioned’) references the world of ballroom dance – the glamour, the pursuit of celebrity, and most crucially the notion of taking on of a secret ‘other’ life.

What is so interesting about LUME is this breadth of styles of work and modes of practice employed, from the staged whole-company ensemble pieces, to the community-embracing outdoor and processional works, to the solo lecture-demonstration works by each company member, to the solo or duet clown pieces. In this last category is *La Scarpetta*, which I saw at Stratford Circus London in March 2011. The show is theatre clown of the highest order, but it is painful stuff, playing with that perilous line between delight and despair, balancing grotesquery and charm on a knife-edge. In scene after scene the classic clown scenario of ‘what might happen if things were to go wrong’ is played out with a savage and pitiless intent. It is no surprise to learn after the show that performer Ricardo Pucetti trained with that master of dangerous and uncomfortable clowning, Philippe Gaulier, and the show is directed by the legendary Italian clown Colombaioni Nani (a collaborator of Federico Fellini).

And alongside all the various modes of performance work is the company’s teaching practice – never viewed as something that is an ‘add-on’ but intrinsic to their practice. During the year various company members continue their research and teaching at Campinas whilst also travelling the world giving workshops and lecture demonstrations. Additionally each year, in February (the university’s summer holiday), the company open up their performance home in Campinas to host Terra LUME – a month-long series of workshops with company members and guest artists, together with seminars and symposia and other initiatives to bring artists together from all over Brazil – and from across the world. A truly world-class theatre company!

LUME company members are: Ana Cristina Colla, Carlos Simioni, Jesser de Souza, Naomi Silman, Raquel Scotti Hirson, Renato Ferracini, and Ricardo Pucetti.

Jesser de Souza was a guest presenter and facilitator for the DRIFT residency and symposium 2011, held at CPC Gargarullo and at Aldeia de Arcozelo, Rio state, Brazil, February 2011.

Naomi Silman spoke to Dorothy Max Prior at Stratford Circus Theatre, London, April 2011. LUME Teatro’s *La Scarpetta* and *Cravo, Lirio e Rosa* were presented at Stratford Circus 25–26 March 2011. The Casa LUME workshop at Nightingale Theatre Brighton, led by Naomi Silman, took place April 2011.

Renato Ferracini ran a week-long programme of LUME workshops focusing on the role of the street theatre performer at Trinity Buoy Wharf London for the BR-116 project September 2011.

LUME teatro’s *Os Bem Intencionados* will premiere in Campinas, Brazil March 2010.

In February 2012 LUME Teatro will be running their annual Cursos de Fevereiro e Terra LUME, a monthly programme introducing participants to the company’s working methods, which is open to applicants from across the world. This event links in to the Feverestival, a festival developed by LUME and now produced independently. Details of both of these are posted on the company website.

www.lumeteatro.com.br

WORLDVIEW – BRAZIL

A Brazil Pick and Mix

This list makes no attempt to be comprehensive, but flags up some of the performance artists and physical/visual theatre companies on Total Theatre's radar



Taanteatro Maquina Hamlet Fisted. Photo Silvia Machado

Taanteatro

Taanteatro is a dance-theatre company of international repute based in São Paulo, Brazil. The company was established in 1991 and is directed by Wolfgang Pannek (who originally hailed from Germany) and its founder, Brazilian Maura Baiocchi, who holds a teaching position at the University of Brasília. Over the past twenty years, Taanteatro, currently celebrating its twentieth anniversary, has created more than forty performance works. Many of these have been based on the life and work of artists and poets such as Frida Kahlo, Lewis Carroll, Antonin Artaud, and Friedrich Nietzsche. In other strands of work, the company has inaugurated an investigation into performative rites of passage, and created extraordinary outdoor performance in the Amazonian rainforest.

The company have concurrently developed a training methodology called The Theatre of Tensions, which is disseminated through lecture-demonstrations, and workshops/summer school residencies.

Currently (December 2011 to January 2012), the company are presenting *Hamletmachine Fisted* by Wolfgang Pannek, and a reworking of *DAN (ancestral becoming)* by Maura Baiocchi – the extraordinary Amazonian landscape piece mentioned above – from February to April 2012. A new piece by Maura Baiocchi, *[Im]Pure Dances*, a Brazil / Argentina collaboration, will be presented May to July 2012.

www.taanteatro.com



Grupo Teatral Moitara Acorda Ze!

Grupo Teatral Moitara

Grupo Teatral Moitara was founded in 1988 by Venício Fonseca and Erika Rettl, who are still the company's directors and leading lights. Moitara is a theatre company, but a great deal more too! Their lovely upstairs premises in a building in Lapa, Rio (which they've occupied since 2004) hosts a large rehearsal and performance studio with a sprung dancefloor, together with a 'lounge' area and an extensive library collection of books, videos, and audio recordings.

The company are dedicated predominantly to mask theatre and to actor-led physical theatre, and create performance works (including *Acorda Ze!* (2010) which merges Commedia dell'Arte techniques with Brazilian music and dance, and *Quiproco*, which takes a playful look at North-East Brazilian folklore using storytelling and music) which have appeared in festivals across Brazil and worldwide. They also run an extensive education programme of workshops, presentations, exhibitions and lecture-performances. International exchange is close to their hearts, and the company encourage visits to their premises by artists from across the world.

www.grupomoitara.com.br

Zecora Ura

The work of Anglo-Brazilian company Zecora Ura has been well documented in these pages! See Total Theatre Volume 23 Issue 02 for a resume of the company, and a detailed feature on the DRIFT residency hosted by Zecora Ura and Persis Jade Maravala. An update on late 2011 activity: the company's keynote show, *Hotel Medea*, created in collaboration with Persis Jade Maravala, had an extremely successful run at the new Summerhall venue at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in August 2011, selling out its weekend 'midnight to dawn' performances, receiving praise from critics and audiences alike, and scooping up a Herald Angel Award (as well as being shortlisted for a Total Theatre Award). They are currently preparing for the next DRIFT residency in Brazil, for February/March 2012.

www.zecoraura.com



Thelma Bonavita

Dance and live art practitioner Thelma Bonavita was recently brought to the UK live art scene's attention with a two-night appearance at Chelsea Theatre's Sacred festival. She is Brazilian-born and studied Laban technique at São Paulo University, then studied at Amsterdam's School for New Dance Development. Currently based in São Paulo, she is a co-founder of Brazil's Estúdio Nova Danca and works under the auspices of the Desaba Platform.

Her work *Eu Sou Uma Fruta Gogoia (I am a Gogoia Fruit)*, presented at Chelsea Theatre November 2011, was inspired by Gal Costa's hit song about an imaginary fruit, and was billed as a 'pop/fashion satire on the Tropicália Movement'. Spiky pot plants, ripe round fruits, black balloons, blonde wigs, clunky platform shoes, feathers, fans, a Casio keyboard, and sheets of coloured cellophane are all part of the mix in the creation of a Gogoia Garden of Delights which audience members are eventually invited to come and play in! Thelma's appearance at Sacred was one of a number of Brazil-related shows and events: the venue/festival is committed to a year-round series of Anglo-Brazilian collaborations.

www.chelseatheatre.org.uk

Gustavo Ciriaco

Choreographer, dancer, and live art practitioner Gustavo Ciriaco is best known in the UK for his collaboration with Andrea Sonnberger on performative walk piece *Aqui enquanto caminhamos* (Here whilst we walk) which creates a silent group walk that invites participants to ruminate on the possibilities of inhabiting the urban space differently through a shared experience. The piece has been presented twice by Chelsea Theatre, for Sacred Festival in 2007, and for Sacred in Transit July 2011. Based in Rio de Janeiro, Gustavo currently divides his time between Brazil and Europe. He has recently become artistic director of Teatro Cacilda Becker in Rio. Together with theatre-maker and producer Joelson Gusson, he also programmes the ENTRE_Lugares festival at Sergio Porto in Rio, who are Chelsea Theatre's collaborative partner in their Anglo-Brazilian exchange programme.

<http://gustavociriaco.blogspot.com>

LUME Teatro Shizen 7 Bowls. Photo Tina Coelho.



Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed in conference



Taanteatro DAW Devir Ancestral. Photo Joana Limongi.



Augusto Boal and The Theatre of the Oppressed

If we are talking of Brazilian theatre, how could we fail to mention Augusto Boal? Boal (1931-2009) revolutionised not only Brazilian theatre but also the theatre of the world. Key to his work is the notion that theatre should be a mirror that reflects an individual's strengths and defects, and a society's needs and concerns. The man himself may be dead, but the work lives on. Sited in a ramshackle building near the Arcos of Lapa – an inner city area of Rio that holds the beating heart of the city's artistic community – Augusto Boal's company continues to explore the role of the 'spect-actor' and his vision of The Theatre of the Oppressed, using methodologies and provocations that include 'newspaper theatre', 'invisible theatre' and 'the rainbow of desire'. For the English language version of the company website, see below:

www.theatreoftheoppressed.org

BEING THERE

A threeway view of Red Earth's *CHALK* on Wolstonbury Hill in Sussex



We gather late afternoon at Chantry Farm on the Sussex Downs, a few miles north of Brighton. We are just a stone's throw from the busy M23, but this is another world – rolling hills, stony paths, ramshackle outbuildings – the farm's barn and courtyard requisitioned to serve as a gathering point for the performance-walks that will mark the culmination of Red Earth's *CHALK* project. There's a merry throng of expectant people kitted out in walking boots and woolly jumpers, chatting, enjoying a cup of spiced apple juice, or queuing for the local organic lamb burgers sizzling on a barbecue – the significance of the lamb burgers will become apparent later.

A bell is rung and we group at the foot of the hill: we are asked to walk quietly, to stay behind the flag-bearers, and *most important* to keep dogs on a lead at all times. Up the steep hill we go, and as we reach the summit, looking back to gasp at the wonderful panoramic view of the surrounding countryside, we hear what sounds like a medley of cow-bells. Except that they are sheep-bells...

And here are the sheep! Enclosed in a pen, each sporting a bell. Beyond them, framed by the wide, wide sky and the hills on the other side of the valley, is Butoh dancer Atsushi Takenouchi, dressed in natural-coloured wool, his flowing movements balancing the stillness of the landscape and the restless energy of the sheep. The enclosure is opened, and the sheep run off down the valley, weaving around him in a feisty dance of freedom, bells clanging. It's total theatre, for sure!

From then on in, the sheep do as they will, whilst we are shepherded by human sheepdogs. We are guided down a twisting path, chalk crunching beneath our feet. On the hillsides around us, flags flutter and ancient horns sound. We are herded into a circle in the bowl of the hills – a large natural amphitheatre – and I look up to see a dozen sheep standing as if guarding the top of the hills, looking down at us.

Performers, audience, animals and landscape merge into one picture. But who is doing the looking and who is being looked at?

It is the mix of controlled elements and elements of chance that makes *CHALK* such a strong and soul-enriching work. The very flightiness of the natural world (of which we humans are of course a part) is built into the work, which by its very nature will be a unique event each time 'performed': the vagaries of weather, the behaviour of sheep, the direction of the wind, the singing of the birds and choirs, the barking of the dogs, the walking speed of the participants, the skittering of the stones underfoot, the particular shades of red and purple in the sky at sunset. A thousand variables to make this a unique event, for this group of people sharing this space at this particular time.

Yet up against the uniqueness of the event is the universality. The bringing together of performers from across the globe for the piece reinforces the common territory: people everywhere, in all times, walk the landscape, herd animals, sing songs, sound horns, light fires. We are, indeed, one world – I leave feeling glad to be part of it.

Dorothy Max Prior, witnessing *CHALK* for Total Theatre Magazine

We ring the bell. Three hundred people agree to follow us, in silence, up a sheep field towards Wolstonbury Hill. Atsushi Takenouchi, our Japanese performer, appears on the horizon, striding purposefully across the ridgeway, a Neolithic ancestor in white shepherd's robes perfectly framed against the skyline. And there, between the fluttering blue flags at the hill's crest, an unexpected figure appears, waving a cup of tea. What is she doing there?



That's the frustration and beauty of making performance in the landscape – it's an open public space and you can't predict what passing hikers, dog walkers, sheep or weather fronts are going to do on a two-mile, two-hour journey, never mind the audience. This unpredictability keeps it vital, alive. There is no fixed perspective for the audience as we lead them east along the drovers' path, worn white by centuries of human and animal footfall. They can watch Atsushi follow his flock of sheep down into the valley, or six distant flag bearers move along the intricate network of animal paths etched into the chalk grassland by centuries of grazing livestock. Below them in the bowl of Wellcombe Bottom nestles our sculpture FOLD, a woven ring of coppiced greenwood built in the spring to herald our arrival at Wolstonbury where for the last six months we have invited people to build, walk, navigate, forage, explore, perform and sing with us. And sing we do. Our *CHALK* choir competes with the wind to belt out a 17th century folk song 'Shepherd of the Downs' as the audience becomes the flock and we herd them towards FOLD with horns, animal bells and drovers' cries. There, Atsushi holds us captivated as he effects a transformation from shepherd to chalk-covered spirit ancestor.

This is not historical re-enactment, neither is it an attempt at 'authentic' ritual. We are creating a contemporary landscape performance where music from the South Downs, Russian steppe and Mongolian grassland collide with modern Japanese Butoh dance, soundscapes of ancient instruments, gas cylinder bells and bronze gongs. The landscape is stratified with stories – of ancient seas and hidden rivers, human hardship and celebration. We re-animate this living landscape and generate a multiplicity of new meanings - our *CHALK* journey becomes part of its history, its future archaeology.

As we reach the Bronze Age enclosure the cup-of-tea lady appears on the summit, silhouetted against the gathering cloud; she smiles and waves. I manage to gently shepherd her onto the earthwork bank before the gongs begin and the sun sets, Atsushi disappears over the horizon, and Baadma sings her last plaintive achingly beautiful Mongolian Longsong.

In the valley below, fires still glow, a trace of where we have been, transformed. The audience, released from all obligation to move as a herd, feel free to wander back in single file, their movement a sinuous ripple along the path where flickering fire pots pick out the contours of earthwork and hill. Archaeologists might be able to excavate this site but they can never know if our ancestors might have flocked here too to sing, celebrate, feast or mourn. We can only imagine.

Caitlin Easterby is co-artistic director of Red Earth and co-director of the CHALK project

One of the joys of site-responsive outdoor theatre is the abnormality of the everyday tasks. Simply arriving on-site in the morning involves driving up a muddy track swinging side-to-side in a 4x4, feeling you could topple over any minute – then once at the top having to start a fire up in order to make a cup of tea.

First job was to make cling-film-wrapped balls of pyro which would be thrown onto fires during the performance to create big flashes of light and plumes of smoke; the next was to round up the sheep. As you do. For this we had to run up a steep, uneven hill after them, calling and clapping, and then sprint around the outside of any sheep who decide to make a dash for it. When all the sheep were tightly in the pen, we needed to attach the collars with bells to them, which as you can imagine not all the sheep were too keen on. But after we struggled with the first couple of sheep they started to calm down, and we got the collars on the rest of them.

With a show like *CHALK* – spread over a vast site, with a large number of participants, and including elements which can't be entirely rehearsed – it's not uncommon to have never done a full run of everything together. Therefore, as I sat hidden under a bush at the start of the show, I felt almost like an audience member, excited to see what was going to happen next. I must have been under the bush for about fifteen minutes (listening to the gentle twinkle of sheep bells) before I started to hear the faint sounds of musical instruments creeping over the top of the hill, and peeking through the branches of my hideout I could see a large group of people emerge on the horizon. There was a sudden thunder of bells as the sheep were released from their pen, and they bolted away. The audience then arced around the top of the hill spiralling down into the middle of the valley towards the woven FOLD sculpture in the centre. About halfway down they stopped and heard singing from the choirs, after which, scattered across the hill, six or so horn players emerged – me being one of them – who started in sequence and then slowly became more chaotic as we made our way down to the sculpture.

Later, the audience were moved up the other side of the hill towards the top where large gongs and fire bowls were waiting for them, just out of sight: I stayed behind and stoked up the fires so that as they walked back along the hill and looked down, they saw the fires burning brightly around the sculpture, which was now covered in chalk from the earlier ritual. Once the darkness had completely taken over, and the fires had burnt themselves out, it was the end of my working day – and after a lamb burger and a beer I went off to bed, ready to do it all again the next day.

Milo Foster-Prior, production crew member/performer on CHALK

Red Earth's *CHALK* was a six-month-long project incorporating installation, performance, and experiential walks on the South Downs, created in partnership with the National Trust April – October 2011 in Harting Down (Chichester) and Wolstonbury Hill (Brighton). The performance journey documented here took place on Saturday 8 October 2011. www.redearth.co.uk

All images from Red Earth *CHALK* on Wolstonbury Hill. Sunset and overhead view photos by Paul Winter. Sheep photo by Milo Foster-Prior.



Where is UK adult puppetry today? Beccy Smith reflects on a growing and changing practice

Suspense!



London's celebrated Little Angel Theatre inaugurated the Suspense Festival of adult puppetry in 2009, both responding to and feeding a growing appetite for puppetry within more mainstream adult theatre fare. Their efforts were rewarded with excellent audience figures, a number of new north London venues programming puppetry and a Fringe Report Award for Best New Festival, as well as a shortlist placing for the Peter Brook Empty Space Award.

The festival for 2011 is that notorious second album – there's a pressure of expectation and artists and venues wanted to be involved in greater numbers, perhaps hoping for a taste of the *War Horse* effect in these tough financial times. Suspense 2011 programmed more than 30 shows, spread across eleven venues, including larger-scale houses such as the Roundhouse, and incorporating the V & A Museum. I cherry-picked seven productions over the nine-day schedule to try to get a taste of where adult puppetry in the UK is at today, and what might be the trajectory of an artform whose popularity seems to just keep on growing.

My experience of the festival was bookended by two productions exploring shadows and projections – a puppetry form that relates less immediately to the public perception of puppetry featuring scaled figures and skilful hands. Skilful fingers, however, were much in evidence in Nutmeg's labour of love *The Invisible Cities of Margherita Monticiano*. The production, developed in collaboration with Norwich Puppet Theatre's new director Joy Haynes (of Banyan Theatre) was a series of re-imaginings of the city of Venice, conjured through overhead and video projection with shadow work, all focused onto a single screen in a rickety booth – most satisfying in one sequence when it was reversed to show its struts and workings.

Influenced by Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, these are sidelong characterisations of place where the real and imaginary blur: one city is defined by its populace's inability to actually connect so obstructed are they by their vivid fantasies of one another. Perspex slides and the less tangible qualities of video projection intermingle to create images that can be wonderfully sensual and the whole is very eclectic, populated by diverse cut-outs, drawings and shadows, creating a bricolage effect reinforced by a highly diverse musical score.

The production was presented as a work-in-progress showing (though not framed as such in the festival programme) and some progress is needed, principally in the relationship of the two busy performers to the audience and the material – they worked like craftsmen but were being used as performers, and their understated movement and presence muddled the storytelling.

This is a not uncommon problem in the puppetry field and the increasing focus on the artform triggered by its growing popularity places growing pressure on practitioners to up their game in performance terms. It is partly a question of formal placement – exactly what type of work is puppetry creating? It's tempting to identify the form squarely within theatrical terms (theatre's 'lost limb' as Adrian Kohler of Handspring is quoted as saying in the festival programme), however indefinite articles' work increasingly seems to situate it in more of a live art frame.

Their new production, *Penumbra*, amply illustrates its credentials as a collaboration between puppeteer and visual artist, as well as between husband and wife. This is a tender performance as much about the intimacy and familiarity between two

individuals who draw one another with light, with colour, with pencils and puppets, as it is about the medium they use. Steve Tiplady and Sally Brown create a series of images saturated in colour and light via projection, coloured gels, and the shadows of their own bodies clothed and, later, naked. The abstract coloured shapes, cut outs and shadows reminded me of Matisse and, after a slightly late and much-needed framing explanation (of the story of the first image, drawn around the shadow of a husband his desperate wife was about to lose at sea), the steadily accumulating connections of desire, time, shadow and image begin to build toward something gently satisfying. However, I found the offhand relationship the pair established with the audience distracting, a slightly uncomfortable concession to 'theatre' that felt alienating. There's real experimentation here, but again the place of performers (and audience) within it remains ill defined.

Hit Gelamp's production *Madeleine on Tiptoe* was also interested in shadows, revealing the story of nineteenth century ecstatic Madeleine through the eyes of the psychiatrist who treated her. This production formed part of a seam of young companies running through the programme, including work from Pangolin's Teatime, Eye Spy Arts, Folded Feather and Maison Foo, demonstrating puppetry's continuing appeal to emerging artists. In this case, the idea – connecting the figure disappearing into two dimensionality with the symbolic transformation of Madeleine for her doctor, of individual to icon – reached further than the execution could, hampered by some all-too-visible theatrical devices and a rather odd acting register.

In *Little Edie* we found an established puppet theatre company, Pickled Image, taking a sideways step. The company are here retelling the true story from a famous documentary about a destructive mother-daughter relationship, locked in a decaying mansion (beautifully conjured by the company's trademark slightly gothic, cartoonish design) and in memories of another time. Octogenarian Edie pets her cats (some dead, some living), festers in her bed and in turn bosses, berates and comforts her strange daughter; Little Edie meanwhile piles rubbish up against the walls, rails and panics at the outside world and reminisces about her dreams of becoming a star.

It was great to see visually arresting large-scale puppets in action with some delicately played payoffs in the dance sequences



(showcasing two shapely pairs of real bestocked legs behind a *single* figure), but there were some problems with the form. Naturalism is always a difficult choice in puppetry, its rhythms are often wrong and, despite gradually drawing us into this esoteric world, the production never really answered the question of *why* they wanted to retell this story.

Autumn Portraits, by US-based Sandglass Theater likewise focused on characters of a more mature disposition, occasionally (though not enough) touching on the philosophical (and puppetry focused) issues of age, dying and control. Co-founder Eric Bass is a master craftsman and the beautifully honed vignettes were perfect little morsels of puppet design, lighting and rhythm – if never quite building into a full meal. This award-winning production was first made over thirty years ago and has toured successfully ever since, and the highly atmospheric and characterful figures peopling its five discrete scenes intriguingly conjured up puppetry past. But we demand more now from a form once prized only for its artistry – we want drama, we want performance, we expect art as much as craft!

There were moments when Wild Theatre's *Stonebelly* delivered this, and I was very happy to see some pure object animation in this year's programme. Performed on three freestanding circular plinths, each covered with sand, Wild Theatre gradually unearthed a range of objects – detritus – collected from their native New Zealand tideline. The objects disclosed themselves gracefully, and her commitment to them was such that we could appreciate the characters from within their form even when they didn't become figurative. As objects landed heavily and explored, fought and traced art in the sand, which occasionally swirled sensuously over the spinning rim of one of the drums, the theme was of the life lost through the cracks, residual in discarded objects. This underlying exploration was at times more or less clear within the highly abstracted form supported by its discordant and diversely detailed score by Hannah Marshall, but it was always beautiful, reflecting the care, skill and commitment of performer Rebekah Wild. When the 'cello+' score finally resolved into a melody line for the final sequence

the effect was joyous – a soaring harmony to accompany the life-affirming dance of a crack-mouthed driftwood figure.

Plucked was undoubtedly my festival highlight. Created by Liz Walker, formerly of Faulty Optic and now heading up orphan company Invisible Thread, this was a 'true fairytale', a re-casting of ancient tropes of romance, parenthood, and witchcraft into a different frame, shaped by bitter experience and a taste for the absurdity of life. The life-story outline was lightly sketched, thoroughly weird and rendered entirely believable and full of heart by the evocatively detailed puppet characters. Romance here between two bird-like yet human figures with silver pin-head eyes is the thinnest of affairs – a chance meeting looking for worms, a 'house' set up with a single rickety plank slung between two ladders (I can't right now imagine a better visual metaphor for the hopes we erect in the flimsy architecture of human relationship), some uneven stumps of wood to demarcate the edges of their world. And yet the delicacy of their reactions and interactions with one another – the coy and nervous glances of the initial encounter, the glances of shared joy that amplify pride in becoming a family, the tenderness of touches to comfort loss – create a recognisable emotional world that is both profound and touching. The puppetry is astonishingly good – every breath, each shift in rhythm communicates with us richly.

This emotional grounding allows us to follow the piece deep inside its delicious weirdness. This is a world where childbirth produces an array of unexpected visitors (some delightful surprises I'm not going to spoil here) and, at the end of a relationship, the family can simply fly away. It would be tempting to read these rich actions metaphorically but such is the production's commitment to this material logic that the possibility opens up to simply accept the objects and events on their own terms, and this reading feels richly rewarding and rather unsettling.

Sex, however, is still sex – and to say there's a priapic theme running through the show would be an understatement. In the second act the willowy if episodic lovemaking of the protagonists is replaced by an aggressive anti-men (or at least anti-cock) rampage as the abandoned woman takes on the mantle

(literally) of the crone (or crow, here). I really enjoyed the horny, hairy wolf who has colonised the booth of Mr Punch (himself no stranger to an extended erection) and you can feel in this production Walker stretching her wings to demonstrate the formal breadth of her puppetry imagination.

There is a powerful marriage of form and content here: for many people puppets are part of the language of fairytale – their strange charms lend themselves readily to magic, transformation and an epic scale. Yet Walker's puppets have always also been about struggle, suffering and downright weirdness and it's this tension that is most satisfying. The show throws together the best of human relationship and the worst of human emotion – it is powered by our frailty and effort and need, supported by the relentless architecture of folklore and fairytale.

Suspense 2011 offered a big programme curated by a small theatre – the Little Angel – that is Britain's crucible for puppetry. It was an ambitious venture, delivered under the guiding hand of Peter Glanville, who is artistic director of both the venue and the festival, and the programme included not only an enormous variety of performance work from all over the world but also a hefty number of masterclasses, workshops and discussions.

What Suspense highlights is that in practice, puppetry can be not one form but many. The festival prisms out some of the diverse influences and forms that converge in puppetry, continuing to demonstrate audience appetite for puppetry as visual art, as storytelling, as material theatre, and as emotional drama. It is at its most potent for me, though, when these forms and styles, embodied in the art of masterful puppeteers old and new, empower one another and work together.

Suspense Festival took part at venues across London, 28 October – 6 November 2011.

Beccy Smith saw the following shows:
Nutmeg, *The Invisible Cities of Margherita Monticiano* at Pleasance Studio, 28 October; Sandglass Theater, *Autumn Portraits* at Little Angel Theatre, 30 October; Pickled Image, *Little Edie* at Jacksons Lane, 1 November; Wild Theatre, *Stonebelly* at Little Angel Theatre, 4 November; Hit Gelamp, *Madeleine on Tiptoe* at Pleasance Studio, 4 November; Invisible Thread, *Plucked* at Little Angel Theatre, 6 November; indefinitearticles, *Penumbra* at Roundhouse Studio, 6 November.

For more on Suspense 2011 see www.suspensefestival.com

P28 top: Invisible Thread *Plucked*
P28 bottom: Pickled Image *Little Edie*
P29: indefinite articles *Penumbra*
P30: Nutmeg *The Invisible Cities of Margherita Monticiano*

Thomas Wilson sees the circus come to town at this year's Dance Umbrella

Ali in the Balance



Bolze & Thabet *Ali*. Photo: Reynaud de Lage

First programmed in the UK as part of the London International Mime Festival 2009, *Ali* takes the possibilities of the meeting of these two artists as its starting point. Consequently the work hovers between a frugal theatrical encounter and the sketch for a circus act. To look at it in this context, as dance, is a provocative demand and serves to remind us of the similarities which circus shares with dance.

In content *Ali* is essentially a pared-down, skittering sequence of encounters. These retain the feel of the studio devising process, leaving a rough-hewn quality to the material – as if the marks of the sculptor's chisel are still visible. *Ali* has a minimalist look – one chair, one light, two pairs of crutches – and a sparse choreography of circular floor patterns, explosive actions, razor-sharp lifts and stark poses. Marking out its heritage might suggest a parentage of Beckettian staging, the staccato compositions of Merce Cunningham, the pedestrian work of the Judson Church and the bodily-democracy of Candoco.

But this belies its obvious circus root: inside it is driven by bravura displays of skill, moments of spectacle, and the hunt for the striking image, making it in many ways closer to the ethos of modernist and earlier dance forms. Whether it is Thabet's stratospheric leaps or Bolze's acrobalance, the vocabulary is one of largesse within the otherwise restrained staging. Thus, in ways, *Ali* sits perfectly in Dance Umbrella.

What *Ali* lacks though is a sturdy enough premise for, and development of, the relationship between the two performers, both narratively and more importantly choreographically. Similarly, the use of the staccato rhythm of the crutches on the floor begins clearly enough, but the possibility of this rhythm needs more development.

As Dance Umbrella continues to develop its offerings, shaping a rounded festival of live performances, films and supporting events, its inclusion of artists working with disciplines outside of dance marks out one way in which it is reinvigorating itself. By drawing on circus-rooted work, a sector that has now firmly established itself across a range of festivals and venues, Dance Umbrella continues to welcome adventurous investigations of dance.

Ali by Mathurin Bolze and Hedi Thabet was seen by Thomas Wilson on 29 October 2011 at the Robin Howard Theatre, The Place, London, as part of Dance Umbrella 2011.

www.danceumbrella.co.uk

This was always going to be an important year for Dance Umbrella. In the year of funding cuts *the* London festival of dance, like most organisations in the country, faced the eerily doom-laden mantra of 'doing more with less'. In response, the Dance Umbrella 2011 programme carried the sense of an organisation digging-in and retrenching its position before the full might of the storm hits.

Alongside established behemoths such as the Merce Cunningham Company (on its farewell tour), Lucinda Childs, and Richard Alston, the festival continues to bring less well-known artists to London's consciousness. This year saw South African choreographers Nelisiwe Xaba and Mamela Nyamza and Germany's Gintersdorfer and Klaffen make their Dance Umbrella debuts.

More importantly it champions choreographers, and this year saw the celebration of 20 years of Candoco with a slew of events, and the commissioning of a large-scale participatory work by Rosemary Lee. This programming, alongside the supporting Alston events, also highlights Dance Umbrella's commitment to developing dance skills and understanding across a range of audiences – an educative and participatory function that marks out Dance Umbrella as a festival with a wider remit than the staging of work.

The most interesting strand of Dance Umbrella has in recent years been the 'brief encounters with...'. These short, small-scale works allow 'talented new artists and established choreographers' the chance to

stage short works prior to main events. This year's included Matthias Sperling, Claire Cunningham – and Mathurin Bolze and Hedi Thabet: the inclusion of their work, *Ali*, marks an unusual tangent for Dance Umbrella in welcoming a circus-based artist into the folds of the dance world; an interesting choice of programming as in some ways dance is not the first label you would assign to this work.

However, the points of connection between these two artforms makes them easy allies, whether it is at the virtuoso end of the spectrum, or in more experimental contexts – the latter of which has characterised a certain thread of contemporary circus over the last couple of decades.

Bolze and Thabet, of course, are not the first artists to explore this crossover between the languages of dance and circus. Indeed circus has always attracted its fair share of dancers, Lindsey Butcher being one notable example, whose first forays into circus were with Ra-Ra Zoo, and who now runs her own aerial dance company Gravity and Levity; but crossovers the other way appear less often. Perhaps this is more a question of labelling, as circus companies who chose to work with dance in a significant way usually find themselves in circus and cross-artform festivals rather than in dance festivals.

Ali, a duet between Bolze and one-legged juggler Hedi Thabet, is Bolze's most intimate work to date, in stark contrast to his earlier works *Fenêtres* and *Tangentes*, and the more recent extravaganza *Du Goudron et des Plumes*.

Sarah Davies goes to the Canterbury Festival 2011

Kent Pickings



Canterbury Festival has run in its current form since 1984, and is now well established, attracting a loyal audience from Kent and its surrounds, with an average seventy thousand tickets sold annually. This year, the festival (which extends beyond Canterbury into other Kent towns) presented over 200 shows and events, encompassing theatre, street arts, music, comedy, dance, exhibitions, and the ever-popular artists' open house trail. In a time of significant funding cuts, the festival continues to deliver some strong theatrical programming, showcasing a range of productions by artists from the region and from further afield. There was also a small fringe programme, which included *Drive By* staged in a car park in Margate, *Steffin* by Amber Glass which took place in Bramley's Bar, and *Inbetween* by Accidental Collective, staged in a small tent. In the main programme, theatrical highlights included Night Light Theatre's beautifully staged *Romeo and Juliet*, Volcano's hard-hitting *A Clockwork Orange*, Transport/New Wolsey Theatre's highly original *Invisible*, and *All Hands* by The World Famous, an outdoor spectacle staged in Toddler's Cove Park in Canterbury which followed the festival's opening parade.

All Hands indeed utilised its outdoor setting

brilliantly, creating a tangible atmosphere of anticipation in the audience. The performance was accessed via a considerable walk through a darkened park, making the experience of entering the final space full of impact. The visual aesthetic was particularly pleasing, mixing old-fashioned seafaring images, a set using modern scaffolding, and pyrotechnics – enhanced by a pumping contemporary soundtrack composed by Kuljit Bhamra and David White. Notable too was the effective integration of multicultural elements, both in the dance pieces, seemingly heavily influenced by Bollywood style, and the musical choice, which seamlessly melded modern Western pop music by the likes of Robbie Williams with Eastern-flavoured beats. This element was reflected too in the audience; Canterbury still remains at heart a largely 'white' area, and thus it was pleasing to see a mix of people of other ethnicities in the crowd. The production generally made excellent use of this crowd, encouraging audience members to interact with giant pulley systems to bring large set structures to life and involving costumed local volunteers to aid this. The only element that fell a little flat was the audience's participation in a singing section, where our role was unclear, so interaction was limited, making the section drag slightly. However, the

substantial scale of the spectacle and ever-changing visual elements quickly brought one's attention back and highlighted the clear theme of human endeavour, with all hands pulling together to create change.

Audience interaction was again a key focus in Sam Wills' *The Boy With Tape On His Face* at St Mary's Studio Theatre, though this time in comic and absurd fashion. Having already enjoyed a substantial tour and a well-received run at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, the show was slick, engaging and at times genuinely hilarious. Described in its promotional material as 'mime with noise, stand-up with no talking, drama with no acting', the production was an effective study in just how much a performer can encourage an audience to do without uttering a single word. We were assured that the less we knew about the performance prior to watching, the more we would enjoy it, and indeed the elements of surprise and fast-paced visual gags kept the action flowing. So as not to spoil the experience for prospective audiences I will merely assert the following; Sam Wills (the Boy himself) is a consummate performer who plays the audience exceptionally well and has created some innovative material, cleverly delivered. There is some sense of repetition in parts, and the final section ends with a slight fizzle, but this does not significantly detract from what is an intriguing and uplifting experience.

We are presented with harder-hitting fodder in Transport/New Wolsey Theatre's production *Invisible*, presented at The Theatre Royal in Margate. An exploration of 21st century mobility, the production explores the stories of a group of disparate individuals all of whom seemingly have one thing in common, a desire to be somewhere else. Written by one of Croatia's leading playwrights, Tena Štivičić, this complex production explores multiple issues surrounding its theme, effectively brought together by Complicite 'associate director' Douglas Rintoul's direction, and some clever ensemble-based choreography by Darren Johnston. At times the multiple narratives almost overwhelmed the action, and although beautifully executed, the production is at times complicated to follow and difficult to fully engage with. By far the most compelling story for me was that of Lara (very well acted with precise physicality by Anna Elijasz) who comes to England in search of a better life and believes that hard work will get her there, but struggles to get her boiler fixed with her initially minimal grasp on the English language. Such small human stories were the ones that spoke the loudest, underlining the



five performers all effectively performed multiple roles, also taking it in turns to play lead 'droog' Alex, which at times was a little confusing, but added a sense of playfulness to the interpretation. The production effectively retained the disturbing air of the original, taking pleasing risks with the text and executing this with real flair.

Each of the productions that I saw at this year's Canterbury Festival was well selected, well delivered, and embraced challenges. There is now a further challenge, acknowledged by the festival itself on its website, to create a balance between retaining loyal audiences and developing artistically to entice new ones. As a local theatre-maker, I felt that one concern is the somewhat dwindling fringe scene of the festival, which though still present this year, seemed more buoyant in previous years, making use of a wider range of venues. Whilst recognising funding restraints, one would welcome the inclusion of further experimental, site-specific and inclusive work in future programming to accompany the excellent level of 'main programme' productions on offer this year.

difficulties faced in seeking a new future.

Invisible's visual elements shone particularly brightly, with a simple and stark set consisting mainly of tables and chairs used in multiple ways, and all actors present on stage for most of the time, watching the action when not directly involved and taking on the role of voyeur along with the audience. The well-thought out direction strongly enhanced meaning and subtext, with scenes flowing into each other and sometimes overlapping in an abstract, clever manner. This worked particularly well when businessman Felix, dissatisfied with his life, received a visit from Lara at his home. Felix's wife had recently left having discovered that he very nearly cheated on her with Lara, but she remained on stage, watching the conversation as a ghostly presence that invoked a strong audience response.

Another festival production with a strong visual element was Night Light Theatre's *Romeo and Juliet* at The Gulbenkian Theatre, University of Kent. This was a stunning production, created with clear care and attention to the smallest of details, and successfully managing the difficult task of encapsulating Shakespeare's expansive narrative in a limited timeframe, whilst still retaining a keen sense of plot and characterisation. Notable elements included some well-delivered ensemble singing and musicianship; clever utilisation of raised rotunda staging from which characters appeared through trapdoors or leaping from the edges; and an excellent use of lighting both from the rig itself and from beams held by the actors in the place of swords in fight scenes. Such scenes were exceptionally well executed, with heightened, precisely choreographed movements that

were a pleasure to watch. The young cast approached the narrative with real energy and commitment, and the at times youthful naivety of the key characters was highlighted by the director's choice of using puppets to symbolise the 'adults'. Thus, the nurse became a highly comic, tiny fairy-like creature with a gruff man's voice, and Friar Lawrence was created from part of the stage itself, rising and moving like a mythical beast. Each element was carefully constructed and none were superfluous to communicating meaning, and at times even had that rare sense of 'magic' felt in witnessing a high-quality live theatrical experience, particularly apparent in the staging of Juliet's 'final' death, accompanied by exquisite ensemble singing, dappled lighting and an audience seemingly collectively holding their breath.

The Gulbenkian Theatre was also host to Volcano's production of *A Clockwork Orange*, exploring the still-pertinent issue of youthful violence and associated pleasure taken in debauched behaviour. Despite the original text now being over fifty years old, in this production Burgess' narrative still communicates urgency in its questioning of whether one should be free to do evil, or be forced to be good. Tackling a 'cult classic' comes with some inevitable weight of expectation, felt in this full house before the start of the show. Luckily, this inventive and highly physical production did not disappoint, committing fully to an exploration of the key question and making full use of its skilled, engaging, young performers. Catherine Bennett's innovative and disturbing choreography brought key passages of the text to life very effectively, with characters dancing through their twisted deeds, underlining Burgess' use of juxtaposition of cheery dialogue with hideous acts. The

The Canterbury Festival took place 15–29 October 2011 at various venues throughout Kent.

Sarah Davies saw:

The World Famous, *All Hands* in Toddler's Cove Park, Canterbury; Sam Wills, *The Boy With Tape On His Face* at St. Mary's Studio Theatre, Canterbury; Transport/New Wolsey Theatre, Canterbury; Transport/New Wolsey Theatre, Canterbury; Transport/New Wolsey Theatre, Canterbury; Night Light Theatre, *Romeo and Juliet* at The Gulbenkian Theatre, University of Kent, Canterbury; Volcano, *A Clockwork Orange*, also at The Gulbenkian Theatre, University of Kent, Canterbury.

www.canterburyfestival.co.uk

P32: Transport/New Wolsey Theatre *Invisible*
P33 Left: Sam Wills *The Boy With Tape On His Face*
P33 Right: Night Light Theatre *Romeo and Juliet*

Mischa Twitchin goes in search of contemporary ‘total theatre’ at the RSC

Into the Asylum with *Marat/Sade*



What makes a play – or, indeed, its performance – contemporary? Evidently, this is not simply a question of its being produced now, if Shakespeare, for instance, remains ‘our contemporary’. Nor is this a question of its being topical, when so little of what seems urgent today will prove to have been so tomorrow. Exploring ways in which the past may mediate the cultural and political present is at the heart of the Royal Shakespeare Company’s mission, and as part of their 50th anniversary celebrations this year, the RSC is honouring the so-called Theatre of Cruelty season of 1963-4 with a new production (directed by Anthony Neilson) of Peter Weiss’ play, *The Persecution and Assassination of Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade*.

Not the least of the paradoxes involved in this revisiting is that the play’s UK premiere, by Peter Brook and Charles Marowitz in 1964, marked the end of a project (which was initially meant to research a possible staging of Genet’s *The Screens*) intended to explore what Brook then called ‘total theatre’. While the production was a triumph both in London and on Broadway (and in 1967 Brook made a now famous film of it), what of this work remains contemporary today?

It is evident in the writings of both Brook and Marowitz that the possibilities of an ongoing research into theatrical *process*, free from the economics of production, simply had its season. While the later work of Michel Saint-Denis and the Other Place at the RSC should be recognised (although it

seems absent from the anniversary publicity), the production of Weiss’ play concluded a year of subsidised laboratory work – with the absorption of the experimental project’s ensemble within the larger RSC production apparatus.

Unfortunately, there is little in the current production to suggest that the commitment to a cultural space of theatrical research is seen as a milestone in the RSC’s history, rather than its simply resulting in one of the company’s landmark productions. Brook addressed the importance of subsidised research as needing to be free of the demand to fill a theatre, arguing (in a 1959 article published in the theatre magazine *Encore*) that: ‘To face new audiences we must first be in a position to face empty seats.’

It is surely the politics of such subsidy that remains contemporary – distinct from the topical discussion of empty seats in terms of people walking out of the current performances (not to mention Neilson’s irritation at the focus by reviewers on this story, rather than on the political questions supposedly addressing the Arab Spring within his production). To start with the figure of those walking out ‘outraged’ was reported in *The Guardian* to be fifteen, but by the end of the same week the figure was reported as 30 by the *Independent on Sunday* – suggesting that the so-called controversy was better publicity than the artists’ own story. It should be said that on the occasion I attended there was no noticeable walk out and, at the end, the production (or at least the performance) was warmly received.

The full title of Weiss’ play is typically condensed into a stark juxtaposition of just the two names, *Marat/Sade*, as though its complex dramaturgy was reducible to the subject of the play within a play that it stages. This play concerns the ends of the French Revolution, figured in the death of one of its tribunes, Jean-Paul Marat – as written and directed by the Marquis de Sade. (This death, commemorated in a celebrated painting by the contemporary artist Jacques-Louis David, was famously played by Artaud in Abel Gance’s 1926 film *Napoleon*.)

Performed as an exercise in art therapy by the Charenton inmates, the play is set in dialectical tension with a framing play about this very performance for the visiting audience, as presented under the aegis of the asylum’s enlightened director, M Coulmier. If the RSC’s anniversary provides an occasion



With an overwhelming sense of dramaturgical redundancy, the production supposes simply that the audience it addresses is also the audience for mainstream news media representations of the Arab Spring. Here the contemporary is understood not in terms of a relation between a particular play's past and a revolutionary present, but in terms of dressing up the former in pantomime images of the latter. How the debate between Marat and Sade provides for critical judgment concerning the complicity of our own government, in the name of some of the audience's jobs, in arming erstwhile dictatorships is not articulated. What, after all, are the political links between arts subsidy and the current demand by the Treasury that the new government in Egypt repay £100m of loans previously given to the Mubarak regime to support the purchase of British arms exports?

In Neilson's approach, the political seems to ignore the theatrical itself. As the basic economic model of theatre production – not least as it involves the reproduction of audience expectations – seems hardly to change, perhaps a more fitting celebration of the relation between ensemble and experiment (that was the key to the 'theatre of cruelty' project) would have been a commitment to at least another year of a performance laboratory. This freedom – as posited by both Weiss and Brook in the early 1960s – had its season at a time when the notion of a social contract was broadly underwritten by the state. Today, we are witnessing a systematic destruction of public cultural space in the UK – from the closure of youth clubs and libraries, through the decimation of free evening classes, to the long-term goal of privatising the universities, not to mention subsidy of the arts. The 'repressive liberalism' that Weiss's Charenton explores – precisely in a (state-subsidised) theatre of critical distance – is being overtaken by libertarian repression. Seemingly indifferent to the dialectics of Weiss' dramaturgy, Neilson's production appears to stage a repetition of the very violence that it aspires to expose, by reducing the experience of theatre to an all too familiar theatricality. The topical controversy engendered by this seems proof that, as regards the politics of theatre production, it remains business as usual on the main stage.

Mischa Twitchin saw the RSC production of *The Persecution and Assassination of Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade*, directed by Anthony Neilson, at The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-on-Avon, on 29 October 2011.

www.rsc.org.uk

Pp34 & 35: RSC *Marat/Sade* 2011.
Photos by Manuel Harlan

for a rare revival of Weiss' play, how is this tension manifested in the present production?

The Welcome note that introduces the programme (with its essays about political events abroad), from the RSC's artistic director Michael Boyd, offers a curious framing of the work. Addressing the audience, the note offers an example of the play's fiction of the enlightened director of the Asylum (or of what one might call the educational correction institution of the Stratford theatre itself). In the experience of the performance (rather than in the production) a seemingly inadvertent framing is also effected by the presence of the ushers, who constantly supervise the audience's behaviour. While the performance ostensibly begins with the arrival of an onstage audience of Sheikhs and Royals, it seems as though Neilson is content to take the play's mode of direct address at face value, as if it did not need any of the Brechtian distancing that the dramaturgy demands. (The songs that interrupt the protagonists' drama, for

instance, are simply presented as musical routines, sadly lacking in critical bite.)

Between Boyd's analgesic and Neilson's applied theatricality, it is not simply the play that is made safe for the audience, but the audience who are made safe for the play. Were the abbreviation of the play's title 'Coulmier/Sade', perhaps the process of putting the work before an audience in the first place – which is, after all, the very subject of Weiss' play – might have been identified as political, rather than the masquerade of revolutionary topicality on stage (which seems generally reduced here to the age-old play of veils and phalluses). Rather than a sense of 'outrage' at the 'smoke, guns, and sexually explicit content' – about which the audience is all too wearily warned on the way into the theatre – it might be that people walking out have exercised a judgment concerning the de-politicisation of Weiss' work through the production's isolating of its content from its form.

Fred Dalmasso has a thought-provoking day out in Leicester

Freshly Hatched



Olwen Davies *Fridge Logic*. Photo Julian Hughes

Hatch is a platform for performers based in the East Midlands and beyond, curated and directed by local artists Michael Pinchbeck and Nathan Miller. The Hatch: Fresh Festival presented (on just one day) an array of fourteen acts at Leicester's Embrace Arts venue, and at other sites across the city. Faced with a dilemma presented by so much choice, I decided to focus on half-a-dozen shows happening inside Embrace Arts.

I experienced the festival as a series of performing digressions as I stumbled upon preliminaries, impromptus, asides, one-to-ones, footnotes, interpolations skirting issues such as the extinction of the human race, collectively pre-empted homicide, maiming car crashes, verbal abuse coming to blows, political empty promises and the second death of theatre. Yet the evening remained strangely convivial and good-humoured.

Michael Pinchbeck's *The Beginning* – a reflection on waiting in the wings – delineated stage recesses from which The Strange Names Collective and Leicester-based artist Olwen Davies particularly glowed. Inspired by *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Beginning* was subtly performed by Ollie Smith and cleverly created theatre in absentia.

The Strange Names Collective is the vehicle for the performance work of

Winchester-based Philip Stanier and his regular collaborators. The company's work has been described as sitting somewhere in-between performance art, stand-up comedy and theatre. *Prologue*, billed as 'a ribbon-cutting event unable to reach its conclusion, transforming into a maze-like exploration of notions of the future' is an uncanny demonstration of humankind's doomed potential to pile up facts, comments, anecdotes, without ever exhausting its subject(s), if it wasn't for the need to gasp for air. From coal miners' canaries to shark attacks to Little Orphan Annie – never has a PowerPoint presentation been so inspiringly far-fetched.

In *Fridge Logic*, Leicester-based artist Olwen Davies attempts to make a movie: 'following classic narrative structures, referencing famous movies and their characters'. What ensues precisely defies logic, except perhaps that of galactic space travel between screen and stage. On screen or off it, the immediacy of Olwen Davies' live performance is hilarious and all of a sudden poignant. In line with the other performances of the evening, the subject of the performance is her attempt to perform. She relies upon the audience to guide her through and makes the most of the porosity between screen, stage and auditorium, and that between spectator and performer. When she invites a member of the audience to answer her call, it almost

becomes personal. She is talented at relating to each member of the public and at drawing them into her astute performance attempt.

By contrast, in Sylvia Rimat's *Imagine Me to Be There*, it is the text that literally performs. A woman seated on the floor in front of a laptop (with a knife and a drumkit also on view) tampers with a text projected upon a screen. It is the story of a possible knifing among members of the audience. Some potential suspects or victims are singled out by a few lines on the screen and summoned to act, to drum, or to leave. The poetic autonomy of the text is highlighted by the subdued presence of the performer. On the screen, writing performs in a way that is reminiscent of the performative layout of French poet Stéphane Mallarmé's *A Throw of Dice...* Yet we are far from what this poem inspired the Surrealists to create. *Imagine Me to Be There* neither breaks the surface of language, nor that of the screen, but remains bi-dimensional. I might have missed the point though, as the rest of the audience seems to have enjoyed it. Was it the thrill to be summoned to perform? Does this old trick still work?

Back to the lobby, I look around, with my eyes heavy after a long drive, through pages and pages waves of footnotes could not start to map out. I see people hugging one another, waving from one corner of the



Strange Names Collective Prologue. Photo David W Clarke



GETINTHEBACKOFTHEVAN Oral. Photo Julian Hughes



Freshly Hatched | Fred Dalmasso

room to the other. This is an intrinsic part of *Complimentary*, the one-to-one rendezvous staged by Birmingham-based company The Other Way Works, which strangely gathers momentum as it involves members of the public one by one in the bar area, although everybody ends up knowing that it is an act. My mind drifts and I return to Mallarmé and his unfinished project for *The Book*, an ideal theatre which aimed to eternally bind the mystery of the collective to the power of the text. Tonight, a collective voice has passed from performer to performer like a relay baton. Yet among the audience, people already know one another; if collective there is, it has formed beforehand. It is not the produce of the mysterious gathering of the crowd.

There are questions to be asked about the audience for Hatch. Is there an aim to gather people from a wider public? The event is ticketed but free, yet I doubt many

outsiders have ventured here in the Leicester University quarter on a Sunday evening from 6pm to late. Perhaps this type of event is instead intended for a group of artists and friends to precisely ‘perform the collective’? Yet, this would perhaps be undermined by the one-to-one performances you have to book upon arrival. Wouldn’t these have worked better as totally improvised provocations?

This also goes for GETINTHEBACKOFTHEVAN’s durational performance *Oral* – in which two girls play a three-hour game of double-talk on the very edge of a kiss: what we could describe as a kiss suspended by words. Couldn’t that work by directly engaging the audience rather than offering a voyeuristic experience? I might be crossing the line here by suggesting other ways of organising such events, but isn’t that a proof of Hatch’s success that it provides much food for

thought and stirs your mind into questioning its very form, just as it questions performance formats?

Hatch’s exploration of participatory forms of performances or happenings focuses on performing processes and the social interaction they initiate and sustain. I went away tired with thinking but grateful for Hatch’s tentative but engaging search for different ways of being together, of acting together, in the recesses of ‘the society of the spectacle’.

Hatch: Fresh is supported by the National Lottery through Arts Council England, Embrace Arts, The Y Theatre, and De Montfort University. Fred Dalmasso attended Hatch: Fresh Festival on 16 October 2011.

www.hatchnottingham.co.uk

UPDATE LONDON INTERNATIONAL MIME FESTIVAL 2012



Blind Summit The Table. Photo Nigel Bewley



Claudio Stellato L'Autre. Photo Martin Firket

The highlight of the winter calendar and the best place in the UK to see visual theatre (with a broad church definition of the genre), the London International Mime Festival returns in 2012 with a clutch of new shows.

In circus there's a strong presence from UK companies – testament to the current strength of the sector. There's Gandini Juggling's *Smashed*, a witty and impeccable piece of Bauschian tanzjonglage originally commissioned (in a shorter form) for the National Theatre's Watch This Space Festival; NoFit State Circus' stage show *Mundo Paralelo*, directed by Mladen Materic of Theatre Tattoo and a departure from the Welsh company's usual style of work, approaching circus with the eye and compositional instinct of a visual artist; and Sugar Beast Circus' *{Event(Dimension)}*; a promenade performance in the form of a TV game show / lecture which uses the differences between classical physics and quantum physics to explore the nature of *metaphysics*, and which will hopefully be as weird and outré as previous work *The Sugar Beast Circus Show* and as intelligent and pared-down as its sister piece *Milkwood Rodeo*. Circus aficionados should also watch out for Camille Boitel, a French performer who often earns the Chaplin comparison and who seems to fairly vibrate with compacted energy; and Cie Toron Blues, who'll be performing *Tendre Suie*, a dramaturgically minimalist corde lisse work inspired by Jean Paul Satre's *Huis Clos*.

In the animation category Blind Summit's *The Table* is a narrative swirl of stories and ideas and masterful puppetry in the cabaretish style of their previous show *Low Life*, while Theatre Ad Infinitum's mask piece *Translunar Paradise* is the emotive tale of a bereaved widower looking back on his life to find the strength to go forward. Both were big hits at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Also on the bill: Invisible Thread – a company headed by Liz Walker and one of the projects to emerge from the dissolution of long-time LIMF favourite Faulty Optic – who'll be performing their fairytale for adults, *Plucked*; Théâtre Tête De Pioche with *Fragments de Vie*, a performance-installation in nine stages that conjures images from fire, water, earth, wood and metal; and Kulunka Teatro, whose mask work *André and Dorine* is the story of an elderly couple who find their gentle routine broken by the onset of Alzheimer's (making it a weepy spiritual pairing for *Translunar Paradise*; steel yourself).

Moving into a blurry genreless interzone, Hiroaki Umeda will show the new work *Haptic + Holistic Strata*. He last presented at LIMF in 2008 with his triple-bill *Duo / Montevideoaki / while going to a condition*, a spare and sometimes aggressive combination of technically virtuosic but unshowy movement

Fleur Elise Noble *2 Dimensional Life of Her*



Kulunka Teatro *Andre and Dorin*



Theatre Ad Infinitum *Translunar Paradise*



(sort of pop n lock) + jittery fast-paced projection + brutal invasive strobing, the slippery identity of which has seen it programmed across visual theatre, live art and dance festivals.

Also seen on the live art circuit (recently at New Territories in Glasgow), Fleur Elise Noble's *2 Dimensional Life of Her* is set in an artist's studio and uses drawing, animation, puppetry, projection and paper to create a layered universe of striking, alternative perceptions.

And then two more: one, Claudio Stellato's *L'Autre*, fitting into the fresh category of new magic, and enacting a series of classic tricks of the eye using only a few wooden boxes; and another, Autour du Mime's *Tell Me The Truth and Other Stories*, which, finally, falls into the category of good old-fashioned mime, being the work of a performance group founded by artists who trained with Marcel Marceau Company, among others.

Joining the usual venues – the Barbican, the ROH's Linbury Studio and the Southbank Centre – and the Roundhouse (which first presented LIMF work last year), Jacksons Lane and Soho Theatre will be part of this year's festival.

11-29 January 2012 | www.mimefest.co.uk



UPDATE PERFORMER + COMPANY

Daedalus



Angel Exit Theatre will be touring their new adaptation of *The Secret Garden* January – April 2012. Orphaned Mary Lennox is plucked from the bright vibrancy of India and transplanted into a mysterious house on the dark Yorkshire moors with locked doors, hidden keys, a curious robin, and strange cries ringing down the corridor. The tale is brought to life by an ensemble of five actors using striking physicality, puppetry, singing and an original soundtrack.
www.angelexit.co.uk

Bottlefed: After a summer/autumn of extensive performance work in London's public spaces, Bottlefed are happy to present the research material online at www.farfromgravity.com. The company are now looking forward to a winter/spring in Switzerland and Argentina, working on different educational projects focusing on community regeneration and young people at risk. Forthcoming performance dates with the company: *Pure Pleasure Seekers*, a research residency with Berlin-based sound artist Fabian Kalker at Theater Tuchlaube Aarau, with work-in-progress performances on 3 & 9 December 2011; and *Hold Me Until You Break* at Festival Heimspiel, Dampfzentrale Bern (www.dampfzentrale.ch), 25 & 26 February 2012.
www.bottlefed.org | info@bottlefed.org

Daedalus Theatre Company have reworked *A Place at the Table*, their piece on Burundi, for an envisaged tour in 2012. As well as award nominations and interest from human rights researchers and campaigners, it has attracted academic interest, including a paper given at TaPRA, for its innovative approach to verbatim theatre. The company recently showed the new version at Camden People's Theatre and will be running a programme of performances and workshops at Southwark Cathedral in January. They are also developing a new piece on the Balkans, and are now a properly incorporated company, with egalitarian principles at the core of their new structure.
www.daedalus theatre.co.uk

Forkbeard Fantasy's interactive exhibition 'Theatre of Animation' celebrates the 37-year history of the company's pioneering work. Visitors to this free exhibition will be able to experience the magical world of Forkbeard, with life-size creatures, puppets, automata, films, cartoons, peepshows and fantastical creations from the company's surreal and colourful history of theatre and film. The exhibition will be resident at the Royal Festival Hall 2 December 2011 – 8 January 2012, 10 am-11 pm every day, and will be complemented by performances of Forkbeard's *The Colour of Nonsense* 19-30 December 2011 at the Queen Elizabeth Hall's Purcell Room.
www.forkbeardfantasy.co.uk

Giffords Circus has just finished its summer tour of the South West with *War & Peace at the Circus*. Their 2012 show will be directed by Cal McCrystal and be based around a series of annuals published from the 1940s to the 1970s called *The Saturday Book*, and the company are currently seeking a high-level equestrian gymnast to join the production.
www.giffordscircus.com | info@giffordscircus.com

Liz Aggiss: The unclassifiable iconoclast is once more taking the stage with performances of *Survival Tactics* in 2012. This solo performance turns the usual perception of the female stage body on its head with a seamless fusion of text and movement, film and reconstruction. See it at: University of Plymouth 6 March (showing with *Beach Party Animal* – a film by Liz Aggiss and Joe Murray); Performance Centre, University College Falmouth 7 March; The Loft, Yorkshire Dance, Leeds 24 March. *60 things to do at 60*, a new piece for 2013, seeks partner venues/commissioners. For booking *Survival Tactics* or more information on the new work please contact Lisa Wolfe on wolfework1@aol.com
www.lizaggiss.com

Giffords Circus



Theatre Ad Infinitum



Natural Theatre Company announces the launch of their brand-new website, which features short archive videos, details of their beautiful new studio (available for birthdays and bar mitzvahs), tour dates and even study notes to help the many students who are focusing on the company for their theses! They have lots of new street theatre scenarios and their Natural Youth Theatre has grown to nearly 50 members. The company are also attacking the prospect of a 100% core funding cut with brio, except perhaps on Monday mornings when there's a communal weep.
www.naturaltheatre.co.uk

Nola Rae: *Nellie Pasta's Opera Cocktail* with Nola Rae and Michael Popper will be trying-out in December 2011 and booking from mid January 2012. Two of Nola's repertoire shows will also be touring: *Elizabeth's Last Stand*, which visits City Theatre, Espoo (14 February) and Dance Theatre Hurjarruuth, Helsinki (15 February) in Finland, before going to Reginateatern, Uppsala (17 February) in Sweden; and *Mozart Preposteroso* goes to Théâtre des Osses, Givisier Fribourg (14 March – 1 April) in Switzerland.
www.nolarae.com

People Show: *People Show 121: The Detective Show* will be in London, at People Show Studios, from 18-21 January, before moving on to South Side Theater in San Francisco. One of the UK's most inventive, enduring and original theatre groups, People Show has, since 1966, entertained audiences all over the world with their experimental and challenging brand of theatre. Do not miss this rare opportunity to see the company in their Bethnal Green home, with a homage to all things detective, from Miss Marple to The Sweeney. For tickets and information, call People Show on 0207 7291841.
www.peopleshow.co.uk



Strangeface: This winter award-winning Strangeface are making a new adaptation of Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio*, bringing their mix of masks, puppets and live music to this tale of wild mischief in a style closer to Dahl than Disney. The Farnham Maltings associate company will be premiering this new piece at The Stables, Milton Keynes. They hosted Strangeface's *Christmas Carol* last year and have become partners for *Pinocchio*, investing in the original music used in the piece. The show then has a small tour in the region and will be available to tour nationally in autumn/winter 2012.

www.strangeface.co.uk

Theatre Ad Infinitum are taking their hit play *Translunar Paradise* on tour in the New Year. After a ground-breaking season, which saw the company premiere the new work to substantial critical acclaim at the Edinburgh Fringe 2011, they have won no less than seven theatre awards for this production. *Translunar Paradise* is a powerful and emotional play about life, death, and enduring love, told without words. *Translunar Paradise* is supported by the Ustinov, Bath, BE Festival, mac, The Lowry and Redbridge Arts Centre. For more information see:

www.theatreadinfinitum.co.uk

Théâtre Sans Frontières is collaborating with The Sage Gateshead on a show for 8-12 year olds, *La Chanson du Retour (A Song to Take You Home)*. Performed in simple French, the show will tour schools nationally from February until April 2012, with public performances at The Sage Gateshead on 12 February. Following a funding award from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, TSF is also working on producing a digital version of its popular family show *Le Tour de France*. See:

www.tsf.org.uk

The Chipolatas will be celebrating twenty years as a professional touring company in April. Tours for 2012 are already confirmed in Europe and Australia with more to follow... For more information see:

www.chipolatas.com

The Paper Birds: Following a fantastically successful run at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, The Paper Birds will be touring *Thirsty* in February and March – with 34 performances at 28 venues over two months it promises to be a very busy season! In the spring, the company will also be developing their next show *An Age* at Sheffield Theatres, and for *Transform* at the West Yorkshire Playhouse. For tour dates and further information on *An Age* see:

www.thepaperbirds.com

Wet Picnic: After successful tours in China, Russia and Europe, Wet Picnic are back and busy rehearsing for the first installation of *Depth Charge* – a piece commissioned by shopping and leisure destination Gunwharf Quays in Portsmouth that creates a pioneering, participatory promenade performance based on the site's military history. *Depth Charge* is supported with a £36,000 Arts Council England Grants for the Arts Award. Wet Picnic are also currently creating a new outdoor show, *The Birthday Party*, directed by Paola Rizza at Le Fourneau Creation Centre in Brest, as well as their new indoor show, *Death and Gardening*, which is currently being scratched in the UK. www.wetpicnic.com

Zoo Indigo are back touring their virtual babysitting performance *Under the Covers* with another baby in the mix. They have also been working on a new piece, *Blueprint*, with performers Suzy Gunn and Olwen Davies, multimedia artist Barret Hodgson, and the Centre of Genetics, University of Nottingham. *Blueprint* mixes autobiography with scientific explorations as four female performers liaise through live Skype video links with their mothers. Virtually exchanging stories and performing tasks, the mothers/daughters reveal their shared genetic traits and unearth forgotten memories. Premiere on 28 April 2012 at Lakeside Arts Centre, Nottingham. For tour dates see:

www.zooindigo.co.uk

UPDATE FESTIVALS

Robert Wilson *Einstein on the Beach*



World Stages London is a season of high-profile theatre events programmed between a justice superleague of Battersea Arts Centre, Bush Theatre, Lyric Hammersmith, Royal Court Theatre, Sadler's Wells, Somerset House, Theatre Royal Stratford East and Young Vic, in association with the National Theatre Studio. Among the many events on offer, total theatre folk will probably be most interested in *Babel*, the WildWorks / BAC collaboration that'll be set at a tbc 'major London landmark' and feature a cast of 500 community and professional actors and musicians; the Young Vic and CICT / Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord production *The Suit*; and *Wah! Wah! Girls - A British Bollywood Musical*, written by Tanika Gupta and staged by Kneehigh.
www.worldstageslondon.com

London 2012 Festival: Serving as the culmination of the Cultural Olympiad, the London 2012 Festival will run 21 June – 9 September 2012 and is, contrary to what you might draw from the name, a nationwide festival covering the whole of the UK. There's music, film, literature and all the rest within the immense programme, but a few of the theatre highlights will be Robert Wilson's iconic *Einstein on the Beach* and a slew of Pina Bausch works at the Barbican; a world premiere of the new Handspring Puppet Company production, based on the poems of Ted Hughes, at Greenwich + Docklands Festival; Punchdrunk presenting their *Doctor Who* adventure *The Crash of The Elysium*; a visit from renegade New York choreographer Elizabeth Streb and her Extreme Action Company (to perform one of a series of 'surprise' events in partnership with the Mayor of London, beginning at day break and going on late into the night); and Argentinian choreographer and director Constanza Macras creating a new site-specific show in the Rheidol Forest of North Wales, drawing inspiration from the ancient stories of Mabinogion.
www.festival.london2012.com

UPDATE AWARDS + FUNDING

Punchdrunk *Sleep No More*



OSBTTA: Applications are open for the 2013 Oxford Samuel Beckett Theatre Award, with two research grants of £2500 and a production grant of £32,000 up for grabs. The Award supports a company or artist to make a new work as part of the Barbican's theatre programme – with the piece either showing in the Barbican Pit, or else at a site-responsive venue in East London or the City of London. All types of productions will be considered in terms of scale and length of run – from one-man to larger-scale shows, and from a limited run (not less than 10 performances) to a project, if site-responsive, that could last up to a month. Deadline for applications is 5pm 16 December 2011.
www.osbttrust.com

NESTA Grants: Eight projects have been announced as those being awarded funding from the Digital Research and Development Fund for Arts and Culture run by NESTA, Arts Council England and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). Emerging victorious from a total 495 applications, sharing between them £0.5 million funding, the eight supported projects include a grant of £75,920 awarded to Battersea Arts Centre working with Videojuicer and The Arts Collective to develop a digital arm of its scratch programme that will 'allow artists to share ideas online and engage in a creative dialogue with the public to develop those ideas', and Punchdrunk with MIT Media Lab (£80,120) to 'merge theatre and gaming on an online platform that will partner live audiences with online participants' with the intention of piloting the project within their show *Sleep No More*.
www.nesta.org.uk

ACE Strategic Funding: Arts Council England have published details of how they will invest £440 million of strategic funding between 2012 and 2015. The strategic funding will be invested in three ways: the targeted grant programmes, Capital and Catalyst, plus the Touring programme; the specific grant commissions Audience Focus and Artsmark; and a general strategic grant programme to open in spring 2012.
www.artscouncil.org.uk

UPDATE TRAINING + PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

DUENDE will be running two residential training and performance courses in the summer of 2012: 'Self-With-Others: Ensemble Physical Improvisation' at the Au Brana Cultural Centre, France 16-23 June 2012; and 'Performing at the Edge', held on the Greek Island of Lesbos, 30 June – 14 July 2012. Both will be based on the ensemble-focused training work developed by DUENDE's artistic director, John Britton.
www.duende-ensemble.com | duende@duende-ensemble.com

Mick Barnfather (Complicite) is giving three workshops this Easter 2012: 'Play, Rhythm and the Ensemble', 2-3 April 2012; 'Characters and Comedic Play', 4-5 April 2012; and 'Clown and Comedy', 9-13 April 2012.
www.mickbarnfather.com

MISSA 2012: The Mintfest International Summer School for Street Arts will take place 25 August – 3 September 2012 in Kendal, Cumbria. Practical and performance-based, the course is an intensive, fully immersive ten-day residential experience where participants work with a leading national or international street artist on a group performance showcased at Mintfest, one of the UK's major street arts festivals. Full course information available early 2012. To join the mailing list email jenny@kendalartsinternational.com with your contact details.
www.lakesalive.org/mintfest-summer-school

Desmond Jones holds short courses on specialist areas of modern and classical mime, and on physical theatre. Having run his own school for 25 years his range is broad and deep, encompassing Decroux, Lecoq, Keith Johnstone and many others, from street theatre to straight theatre, television and Hollywood film. He teaches different levels of stylisation, and lectures and teaches at universities and schools both in the UK and abroad. In a few days he can give information for you to expand on for weeks and months to come.
enquiries@desmondjones.com

New Territories Winter Schools: In 2012 New Territories is offering four Winter schools in Glasgow and Edinburgh: Rosemary Butcher's 'The significance of memory in conceptual movement practice' 27 February – 2 March; Forkbeard Fantasy's 'The State Of The Sea' 5-10 March; Guillermo Gómez-Peña's 'Pocha Workshop' 5-8 March; and French Mottershead's 'No Fixed Abode' 19-24 March. The courses are all open to artists working in live art and related arts practice, and are by application. Cost for each is £100. For more information and an application form:
www.newmoves.co.uk

UPDATE VENUES

Murmurs at SBC



DESH at Sadler's Wells



The Enormous Turnip at Jacksons Lane

Jacksons Lane's Christmas show this year is *The Enormous Turnip* by the puppetry company Stuff and Nonsense. Living on an allotment in a tiny house the size of a shed, Mr and Mrs Chickweed show off their prizewinning vegetables for the last time before they retire. However, they can't resist planting one last seed and as the Enormous Turnip grows it threatens their house with disaster! Can anyone help them pull up the Enormous Turnip? Played with unswerving energy, eccentric puppetry, and live music this re-potted version of the world-famous children's story promises surprises aplenty for those in the theatre and out on the street too! Commissioned by Lighthouse, Poole, in association with Salisbury Playhouse and with support from The Merlin Theatre, Frome.
www.jacksonslane.org.uk

Southbank Centre: Providing relief from the schedule of pantomime and children's shows that otherwise clog the Christmas season, the Southbank Centre offers the alternative of *Murmurs* 20 December 2011 – 2 January 2012. In this follow-up to the internationally acclaimed *Aurélia's Oratorio*, Aurélia Thierrée is a woman fleeing from reality, her life packed up in cardboard boxes. Seemingly everyday actions lead to a spectacle of strange and beautiful transformations as she becomes immersed in snippets of others' lives. A tour of whirlwind romance, city confusion, undersea encounters and dining-room debacles told through a blend of theatre, illusion and dance.
www.southbankcentre.co.uk

The Cube Microplex: Round pillars of the old quarry, an old man wanders scratching at the mysteries of the rocks... calling... What have they seen, what are they, what makes them, what stories can be told by these weather blown sentinels? Unwrap geological time, explore the layers of the rock. *The Rock Charmer* is a new piece by The Paper Cinema, presented by Ausform at Bristol's Cube Microplex 18 December 2011.
www.cubecinema.com

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Out & About



Pippa Bailey on Poland, Party, Politics – and Play

Join the party! During October, I was in Krakow for the Informal European Theatre Meeting (IETM) Autumn Plenary Meeting. People from 64 countries, all over Europe and beyond, gathered to continue conversations under the theme of ‘party’, whether that be politics, participation or fun. The three-day meeting was spent focused on the deepening crisis in Europe and the role of the performing arts. The number of UK participants was smaller than for previous meetings, evidence perhaps of deepening economic hardship at home. The artistic programme featured unusual city trips entitled, for example: ‘Are We Again Travellers or Still Tourists? An Encounter with the Other’ or ‘Looking Through Another’s Eyes’ and featured artists from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldavia and Ukraine. These walks were a salutary reminder from people operating under extremely challenging circumstances, often excluded and shunned, and offered a wonderful experience of Krakow.

I also attended an afternoon of presentations by artists creating music theatre that included Danish company Hotel Pro-Forma with an inspiring piece entitled *War Sum Up: Music Manga Machines*. Total Theatre Award winner Pawel Passini from NeTTTheatre offered insight into the company who created *Turandot* for this year’s Edinburgh Festival Fringe, and reflections on their unusual working methods. The IETM meeting concluded with a standing ovation by over 400 participants for Occupy Wall Street. Go to the IETM website to see this action and

many others who have followed suit.

ISAN (the Independent Street Arts Network) invited me to a symposium with the greening agency Julie’s Bicycle at City Hall, London to discuss initiatives to reduce emissions in the outdoor theatre sector. Chenine Bhatena is a creative programmer at London 2012 and since leaving Arts Council England, where she championed outdoor work, continues to be passionate about outdoor performance and London’s ambition to be the ‘greenest games’ ever. It’s hard not to be a little cynical when the Olympic Circus necessitates huge construction and millions of air miles spent ferrying people round the globe under big corporate banners, but at least there is a genuine desire to counter this impact and find new ways to save and share resources. Roger Hartley from the Bureau of Silly Ideas talked about touring by train. The World Famous (of which I am associate director) have a project to count our carbon emissions and find out how the burning we do relates to audience travel and other polluting factors. We are also curious to try and measure the powerful impact of getting thousands of people together to share a free arts experience and see how that might fit into the green equation. Julie’s Bicycle want to help artists and organisations put environmental impact at the heart of their operations. There are some great tools on their website...

On another green note, I was fortunate enough to get onboard the new Rainbow Warrior III at West India Dock in mid

November as part of the wonderful work Greenpeace continue to do to raise awareness and fight polluters. Utterly inspiring!

And so to a sad moment: this is my last Out & About column. It has been a privilege to write for Total Theatre Magazine and reflect on the various worlds of theatre work I collide with. Some of them are outside the usual tranche of Total Theatre but I hope that has been interesting. And so I say a fond farewell. Many thanks to editor Dorothy Max Prior and the Total Theatre Magazine team who are brilliantly dedicated and worth so much more than their salt.

My parting gift is this provocation: go ‘out and about’, talk to people outside your set. Try not to judge them. Respect that they may not understand what you do or why. Find inventive ways to meet people on equal terms. Identify what you value and tell others. Accept that you are part of current problems but can also play a vital role in finding solutions. Turn heads and keep turning yours to see the wider world. Stay connected to nature and the live experience. Reflect. Create. Play.

Pippa Bailey continues to produce the Total Theatre Awards at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. See www.totaltheatre.org.uk/awards

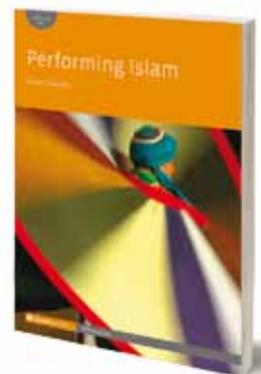
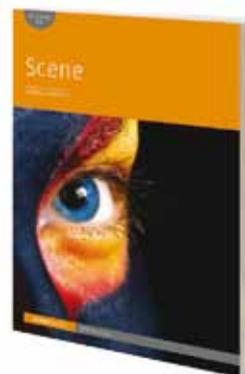
Informal European Theatre Meeting (IETM): www.IETM.org
For more on Julie’s Bicycle see www.juliesbicycle.com
Independent Street Arts Network (ISAN): <http://isanuk.org/>



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Performing Islam

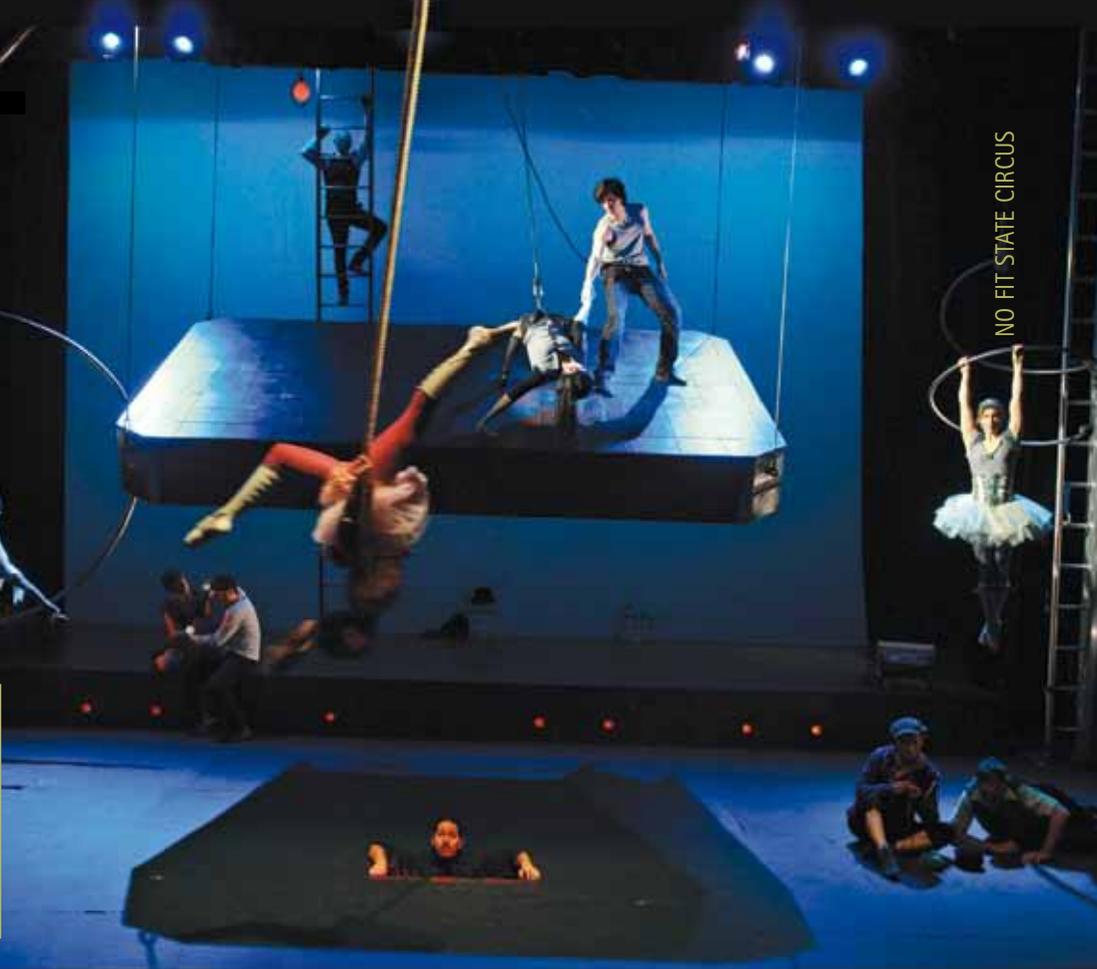
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Emerging from an international network project funded by the British Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economics and Social Research Council, and research collaboration between academics and practitioners, *Performing Islam* is the first peer-reviewed interdisciplinary journal about Islam and performance and their related aesthetics.

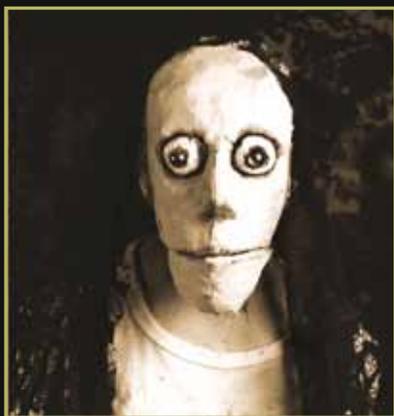
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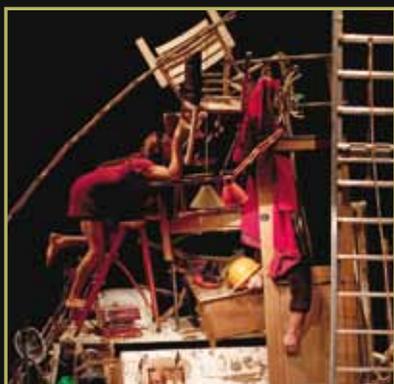
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