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The Making of Faulty Optic's *Dead Wedding*: Inertia, Chaos and Adaptation

Tim Moss

It is difficult to faithfully record and disseminate the process of a company devising a piece of theatre, to excavate those 'ephemeral moments of devised performance' (Govan, Nicholson & Normington, 2007, p.9). It is impossible to watch the company in every minute of their process: you are not privy to their dreams; you are not with them as they overhear a conversation on a bus; you are outside fetching the tea at the very moment that they make a breakthrough in the devising process because a bird has flown through an open window, causing them to think of the next scene as a pair of wings fluttering hysterically. But it is possible to tell *something* of the truth if certain moments are allowed to encapsulate it, to stand as small parts of the larger metaphor that will act as a simulacrum of the reality of performance devising. Then it is possible to give an account of the difficult, delirious, funny, frustrating and joyful process that theatre and performance artists undergo as they make work. Rather than write the whole story of the making of *Dead Wedding* I will look at certain significant moments, trusting that they contain and explain the fashion in which this remarkable performance came into being.

I will use a playful analogy called Chaotic Darwinism to help describe and understand Faulty Optic's devising process: the analogy is a combination of a Darwinian idea on natural selection and the study of patterns of 'chaos' in Chaos Theory. I posit the idea that some of Faulty Optic's ideas survive because they are able to adapt to the changing circumstances of the creative process, while retaining their relevance. Others are born out of 'chaos' and Chaos Theory shows us that chaotic systems result in there being enough instability in a process to disrupt usual patterns

of behaviour which results in a new order emerging, In this way they can be described as creative systems and creativity is at the heart of what is being described in this chapter: how Faulty Optic accessed and employed their creativity in the making of *Dead Wedding*.

Faulty Optic, who receive core funding from Arts Council England and support for international touring from The British Council, has been making work for over twenty years, having been founded in 1987 by Gavin Glover and Liz Walker. The company is based in Holmfirth, West Yorkshire and is often described as a puppet performance company but it is significant that Faulty Optic's website describes the company's work as 'Theatre of Animation',¹ eschewing a straightforward reference to puppetry, which too simplistically pigeonholes Faulty Optic's work. The company have developed their work to include many other elements and a quotation from their artistic policy on the British Council website best describes the milieu in which they operate: they 'combine visual and physical theatre and puppetry with an exploration of 3D film animation, automata and mechanical sculpture to create a unique style of theatre'.² They continue to 'create exciting collaborations with other artists and to experiment with different artforms'³. This combining of mediums and theatrical styles places Faulty Optic alongside companies such as IOU and Slung Low Theatre Company (in some of the latter's installation performance work), who often adopt long, intricate patterns of devising, rather than a model of performers working intensively in a studio for a shorter burst of creative activity. The former pattern is in part necessitated by their use of newly wrought technical and sculptural apparatus as central performance elements.

Faulty Optic's previous work, much of it still in the company's performance repertoire, contains macabre humour, evident not just within its shows' narratives and

thematic content (there is often a preoccupation with death) but in the sets and puppets themselves; Faulty Optic has won the Observer newspaper award for 'most macabre puppets'⁴. The titles of some of their shows prior to *Dead Wedding* also reflect this sensibility: *Darwin's Dead Herring*; *Snuffhouse Dustlouse*; *Soiled*; *Licked*; *Horsehead* (which conjures up the famous grotesque image from Francis Ford Coppola's first *Godfather* film). Faulty Optic's puppetry background was established in their work at the Little Angel Marionette Theatre in London in the mid 1980s and they have since combined their puppeteering prowess and considerable making skills with an interest in other art forms, to create darkly humorous performance work. Apart from *Horsehead*, which was made in 2005 and included a narrator figure, their work before *Dead Wedding* had historically used few words, allowing it to leapfrog language barriers and this has helped to facilitate their touring profile. They have performed extensively throughout Britain and in most of Western Europe as well as in Canada, North and South America and Indonesia. Glover and Walker remain as the core of the company and have a clear vision for the direction of their work, but have collaborated with other performers, puppeteers, musicians, composers, lighting and sound designers, and automata and film makers. *Dead Wedding* was a collaborative project, but as Glover and Walker suggest, not like any other collaboration that they had undertaken previously.

Dead Wedding was officially commissioned in March 2006 by Opera North Projects Director, Dominic Gray, and the Manchester International Festival (MIF), for performance at the Library Theatre in Manchester in July 2007. The terms of the commissions required the work to be a collaboration between Faulty Optic and a composer/musician, approved by the commissioners. This was the first difference to the fashion in which Faulty Optic previously approached collaborative work: 'usually

we choose to collaborate with people whose work we know quite well...collaboration tends to happen organically through conversation and the sharing of ideas'.⁵ But this time they had actively to seek a musician and have their choice approved by Opera North. Although commissioned in 2006 the project had been talked about 'two or three years before,'⁶ so the seed of the idea had probably been sown in late 2004. Walker says that 'Originally, I think he [Dominic Gray] wanted to do a festival around the theme of the Underworld...and we thought it was going to be a much smaller project'.⁷ So the project had a three year gestation period, before finally being born at the Manchester International Festival but the child of this union had irregular growth spurts and twisted and mutated a number of times before its birth, and even then shifted its identity over a number of performances. Perhaps, like humans, its identity was never fixed but liable to change as and when circumstances demand. *Dead Wedding* was part of Opera North's celebration of the 400th anniversary of Montiverdi's *Orfeo* which, in its time, was itself an experimental piece of musical writing and one of the first that could be described as opera. Opera North described *Dead Wedding* as 'a contemporary re-telling of the Orpheus myth...'.⁸ In the original story, Eurydice is killed by a snake's bite soon after their marriage, and is transported to Hades, where the dead reside under the careful watch of Pluto, king of the Underworld. Orpheus descends into Hades, and singing in his extraordinary voice pleads with Pluto to let Eurydice live a while longer. Pluto is so moved by the beauty of Orpheus' singing that he agrees to let Eurydice leave, on condition that Orpheus refrains from looking back at her as the newlyweds ascend from the underworld. When they have almost reached the world of the living, Orpheus forgets himself and glances back, permanently consigning Eurydice to Hades. A grief stricken Orpheus is then torn limb from limb. However, *Dead Wedding* is not a re-telling or re-imagining

of this myth but a sequel to it, imagining another meeting of the two ill-fated lovers when both are dead, waiting to pass into the deeper regions of the extensive kingdom of Hades.

It is 5 July 2006 when I first meet Glover and Walker to negotiate the disturbance of watching their process. An email from Glover gives a sense of the workshop and rehearsal space where most of the practical work on *Dead Wedding* took place:

...it is tucked up a track at the side of a mill...beware of forklifts, giant bales, scrap industrial bits...take care not to run any wandering poultry over...The workshop is the Old Canteen, a 70s one storey building between the end of the mill and a field.⁹

The workshop is many things: a storage space filled with materials such as foam, cloth, latex, wood and metal; a tool store; a rehearsal space with a basic, moveable lighting setup; a film studio with contraptions for holding cameras to assist in the making of animated film. There are various delineated spaces within the workshop dedicated to the multifarious tasks of making a performance, and over the course of the time that I visited the workshop they changed their function; the puppet-making vestibule became an editing suite and the set construction space morphed into a rehearsal room.

Walking in for the first time I interrupt them in the act of making; Walker is busy adjusting and adapting the body of the puppet that will eventually represent Orpheus, while Glover takes off his welding mask and stops piecing together a preliminary piece of set. They clear tools and papers from a table, dust down some

chairs and we drink black coffee and eat biscuits as we talk about how this observation might work. I stress that I want to be as unobtrusive as possible. Walker says that I will probably be roped in to do things and to make comments about what I see. Glover tells me that they don't usually work with a director but in the process of making a show they both step out from time to time to give an outside eye to the work and they have other trusted friends and acquaintances whose opinions they canvass. They point to a large mirror that stands at the side of the main space of the workshop which they use to monitor the action of their work. I imagine a puppet ballet class with puppet pliés and pirouettes. We talk about their approach to making a show and ascertain that they do not imagine themselves having a particularly fixed process that they apply to making work. They joke that it will be interesting for them to find out how it is that they do make work, as it is not something that has previously concerned them.

At this point I take stock of what progress has already been made towards realising *Dead Wedding*. There is a firm commission, a performance date to work towards and funding in place. There is a possible collaborator who might work on the musical soundscape but this has not been finalised. Their first choice musical collaborator has been rejected because he is not well known enough to the commissioners. Glover and Walker imagine that they will both be the puppeteers in the performance and they have begun work on ideas for puppets, including some initial fabrication. They have also built a nascent set for the show. I am shown scribbles of design on scraps of paper and a typed initial scenario that includes possible characters, sets and actions, along with ideas for sound effects/music/mood, lighting and film. It is important to note that this written scenario does not constitute a conventional playscript. It is a set of possible actions for the puppets but, just as

importantly, it is also a guide towards what needs to be fabricated in terms of set and other sculptural objects. Beside each scene are comments such as 'Melodramatic', 'Cruel but funny' and 'Beautiful'.¹⁰ For Faulty Optic mood is an important guiding principle. The desired emotional impact is as much of a starting point for devising performance as a set of possible actions. This made particular sense in the case of *Dead Wedding*: they imagined that a musical collaborator would want to know what the desired emotional resonance of the sound should be for each sequence of the piece. This premonition of what a collaborator might need proved welcomingly prescient and absolutely vital when a composer was finally attached to the project at a relatively late stage in the process.

At this first meeting I talk with Glover and Walker about IOU (also based in West Yorkshire and with whom I worked as a performer-deviser in the 1990s) suggesting that there are similarities in some of the ways that they begin the process of making work and also in the ways that they don't begin to make work. Neither company begins with a scripted text that forms the architecture or the scaffolding for the piece. Both companies begin with a strong emphasis on the design or visual content of the performance, or a theme that might serve as a foundation upon which to build (rather than a pattern to follow). Walker and Glover indicate that I can have open access to their process but suggest that there will be periods of time when nothing interesting will happen. However, I leave our first meeting feeling that it is important to see the non-interesting periods of inertia as much as the interesting leaps forward. It is useful to see that forward progress is not always easy when devising performance, not least so that other practitioners and students of performance can take heart that they are not alone in the one step forward, two steps sideways, backwards or down a cul-de-sac that is often the reality of performance making.

Two weeks later, I received another email from Walker.

June 15 script is now out of date (a bit), the current one is scribbled in our note book...We have been building a preliminary set with help from Matt - a very keen set builder from Leeds. I can't keep up with him! We have met a graduate - Leah - who may help with the animation over the summer. We don't yet have confirmation from [name deleted] - the musician/composer. We may be looking yet again for someone else soon.¹¹

People are being added to the collaborative mix and in August I meet Leah Morgan, a graduate in Art and Design, who helps to make the animated films that are an integral part of the performance. At this meeting there's a discussion between Liz, Gavin and Leah: the filmed sections of the performance will represent aspects of the underworld, and focus on the pennies used by dead souls for payment of the journey across the river Styx into Hades. They also decide that this month they will build some set and play with animation ideas but they must also resuscitate their previous production *Horsehead* for an autumn tour. This will involve re-rehearsals and an extended time away from their home base, so little practical work can now happen on *Dead Wedding* until late November 2006. At this point it became evident that this show was not going to be made using a conventional working model that might see the assembly of the show's participants, followed by their working together over a fixed and continuous period, culminating in the performance of the work. Indeed, this idea of a conventional model may be a red herring. As Heddon and Milling stress, devising processes 'are fluid. Moreover they are located in specific times and places. In light of

this it becomes problematic and disingenuous to propose the existence of "models" (Heddon and Milling, 2006, p78). This Faulty Optic process proceeds in a stop start fashion: there is some playing with half-finished puppets, a look at the possibilities of film, then more set construction, followed by a two month layoff for touring and running workshops followed by...what? In summer 2006 no one is completely sure. But the show is not due to open for another eleven months. This is the calm before the metaphorical storm that will unleash a measure of chaos into the proceedings, which in turn will determine the route to the show's construction.

I had one more meeting with the company in October before a type of 'chaos' started to feed back into the system of this creative process. In the workshop, Glover, Walker and Morgan are stealing some time between *Horsehead* tour dates to try out ideas for filmed material. They are working on a section where Orpheus will remember the terrible climactic moment when he foolishly looks back at Eurydice as he walks out of Hades, in direct contravention of Pluto's instructions. This section will be a recurring moment of anguished memory for Orpheus shown through film but as Glover says 'looking round isn't particularly dramatic'.¹² Walker remembers the moment when they decided upon the action that would show Orpheus' memory of his dreadful mistake: they imagined the scene as a race to leave Hades, set in a cavernous athletics stadium. They 'wanted that empty feeling' and 'hadn't twigged that it was like the Olympics,'¹³ the Olympics being born in Ancient Greece, connecting with the original myth in terms of place and epoch. And from 'somewhere' they decided that the image of Eurydice's face would be seen on a television screen and that the television would wheel around the track after Orpheus, both of them running the race to leave Hades (figure 1).

It is possible to trace the 'somewhere' from which the television image came. Walker remembers their early thoughts about a set for a possible segment of film showing a contemporary version of Hades. The film would give the point of view of someone walking down a hotel corridor and looking into a room through a spy hole and a 'figure [Orpheus] would be there watching a television'.¹⁴ This idea was never quite forgotten and almost a year later it emerged, in the changed form of Eurydice's face on the screen of the travelling television set, the central image of a film showing Orpheus' memory of turning around and losing Eurydice. From reading Darwin's writings on evolution in *The Origins of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (Darwin, 1985) it can be concluded that it is neither the strongest nor the most intelligent of the species that necessarily survive but those who are most responsive to change. Writers, devisers and other makers of work know that strong ideas don't always survive in the creative pond in which they were spawned. They may become the controlling impetus in another project but experienced practitioners know when to discard favourite ideas that no longer fit a current scenario, despite their brilliance! The idea/image of the television is an apt example of this type of Darwinian survival as it had the capability to adapt to new circumstances and maintain its integrity and validity in a rapidly evolving scenario; its strength was in its adaptability, not its innate 'rightness' and it re-emerged as a central core of Orpheus' memory. In the show, the memory is an animated film of a hurdle race from Orpheus' point of view, with him and Eurydice as the competitors. The starting pistol fires, Orpheus sets off around the track, the Eurydice-faced television in hot pursuit. Orpheus breathes heavily as he strides the hurdles, in contrast with Eurydice, whose television set persona crashes through them, a look of horror on her face. At the finish line Orpheus makes his fatal error, looking back to see where Eurydice is in the race. As the television trundles

towards the finish, a nightmarish giant worm-like creature (seen previously in the performance in a film of Orpheus' descent into the underworld) zooms towards her and plunges into the television screen, smashing the image of Eurydice's face. The final part of the memory shows the flaming, smoking, smashed television forlornly retreating to Hades.



Fig .1 *Dead Wedding*: a still image from the animated film representing Orpheus' memory of Eurydice attempting to escape Hades. Photo reproduced by kind permission of Faulty Optic

In the workshop the running track has been built complete with white lane markings; the television has been made, incorporating a housing and magnifying lens to increase the size of the image that will be played through a small monitor located in the set. A pre-recorded image of Leah Morgan's face is projected from the wee television that is standing on the running track. Glover points a video camera at the television set to record the movement as it is moved up and down the track. This whole image can be seen on another monitor that Walker and I are watching. She makes suggestions and the lighting is changed along with the size of the image being fed through to the monitor. Everyone is trying to imagine what this will look like when it is projected onto a gauze screen in the performance - the size of the image must be correct as well as its brightness and contrast, as it will be competing with spill from other lighting used in the performance. It is difficult to estimate the lighting needs - at this point in the process it is not clear if the musicians will be visible on stage and if they will need light to read their music (assuming there will be live musicians). Morgan talks about the quality of the video and how it might need to be treated to create the desired effect. For the first time there is the sense of a team collaborating to find out the best way to present the material. With Morgan now a part of the process the show can no longer remain inscribed in the shorthand that Glover and Walker use to communicate their ideas to each other. Their almost telepathic sense of what is needed from each other is a massive strength, when working as a duo,

as evidenced by the silent and unseen communication process they use to manipulate a single puppet's movement and action in *Horsehead* and *Soiled*, two shows I've seen them perform. But now they have to articulate these ideas so that Morgan can work with the material to create the desired effect. There is a measure of relief, a welcome letting out of breath as Glover and Walker talk about the video images and ideas with Morgan, and finally are able to play with them in concrete form. This is the beginning of creating performance material, the beginning of the realisation of the ur-play that is inside their heads. After the end of the rehearsal I wonder if the relief that I identified was actually my own rather than anyone's directly involved with making the show: at last I have been witness to something that I can recognise as the making of performance material.

As the process of making the show accelerates in the autumn of 2006, elements of 'chaos' begin to emerge: the very late identification of Mira Calix as the composer and the sudden emergence of Jim Bond as another collaborator, but one with minimal time to help to imagine, design and build the set. These occurrences require Faulty Optic to adopt an altered sequence to the devising of the performance, forcing them to tackle the fabrication of material, both performance and actual objects, in a counterintuitive order. This counterintuitive approach, which asks them to accept the patterns that this 'chaos' provides, forces their process into new directions. In order to consider the chaotic aspect of this devising process it is useful to very briefly introduce Chaos Theory. It was initially developed by meteorological scientist Edward Lorenz when studying equations to help predict the weather. He introduces the idea that seemingly inconsequential factors at the beginning of a process can have an enormous affect upon the system within which it is operating. This is often expressed in the popular analogy that a butterfly flapping its wings in

Singapore can stir up a storm that breaks over New York some time later and, while this is a gross simplification of a small part of Chaos Theory, the analogy is rooted in truth. As Gleick states, the patterns that Lorenz witnessed in his study of weather systems 'signalled pure disorder, since no point or pattern of points ever recurred. Yet it also signalled a new kind of order' (Gleick, p30, 1998). A further look at other systems, such as the growth of insect populations showed that they too produced non-repeatable patterns, non-linear systems, which followed their own logic. Looking at such non-linear patterns, it was noted that many of these systems operated most successfully at the edge of chaos, a point in their development when they were on the edge of complete turbulence but just stable enough to maintain their own integrity. A good analogy is that of hundreds of birds taking off from a lake and flying away together. They spontaneously organise themselves into a 'patterned flock' (Sardar & Abrams, 2004, p.83). It is a feature of chaotic systems that at certain points they spontaneously self-organise and make novel structures and new modes of behaviour. In this way they can be described as creative systems, and it is possible to see this type of pattern in the process of making *Dead Wedding*. Far from being a linear process that unfolds in a sequential pattern it has more affiliation with the non-linear order that Gleick refers to in his analysis of Lorenz's findings.

The first 'chaotic' element is the extremely small amount of time available to Jim Bond, the 'mechanical sculptor'¹⁵ who has a sudden gap in his own busy schedule to come to help design and make the set. Because of the compressed timescale the company has to make a quick decision and so determines that a key part of the set will be a stage area which embodies the shape of a lyre, Orpheus' harp-like musical instrument. This is a significant decision as it influences the movement and action of the Orpheus puppet, much of whose performance takes place upon this area of the set.

The lyre-shaped construction also has a train-like rail-track welded to its top, which allows a small flat-bedded wheeled cart to move across it. This too will influence much of the interaction between Orpheus and Eurydice, especially as the Orpheus puppet has no legs and relies on this cart and some prosthetic legs made from planks of wood to perambulate around the stage. The set is a major factor in shaping the performance, rather than merely being a setting in which action will take place.

The second 'chaotic' element is the fact of the late arrival of a musical collaborator, almost eight months into the process. This collaboration with Calix proves dissimilar to previous ways in which Faulty Optic have worked with musicians. Rather than sit in on rehearsals and compose from and around the physical material being witnessed, Mira will write independently from written information about the performance action. The consequence of this is that Glover and Walker must decide upon quite precise timings for scenes and sequences of action and also make clear their emotional temperature. There is nothing implicitly wrong with this process but at this point in November 2006 they have not yet devised any live performance material. The complexity of Calix's ideas for the music, incorporating cello, viola, clarinets and electronic sound played through her laptop, means that she needs plenty of time to complete the compositional work. Because Glover and Walker are forced to try to guess the timings for scenes and to quickly make decisions about their emotional undercurrents, the action of these scenes will be shaped by the length of the music as much as by other dramaturgical imperatives. This is a creative problem to be solved rather than a headache to be treated but again is different to the process that the company would usually adopt if they were not working under the particular constraints of this commission. It is the theatrical equivalent of writing poetry to the stricter metric form of a sonnet rather than writing in free verse. Faulty

Optic's devising strategies have been forced into different directions by the 'chaotic' elements that are introduced into their creative process.

In December 2006 the animated film part of the performance is growing in complexity to include sections set in Hades and the ghostly figures of the Bacchae, who haunt Orpheus and taunt Eurydice on their wedding day. This wedding section is a mixture of live puppetry and projected film, representing another of Orpheus' memories, leading him to try to recreate the wedding feast to rekindle his and Eurydice's love for each other. These are broad brushstrokes of action at the moment. The puppetry equivalent of basic blocking takes place and parts of the filmed sections are edited into possible sequences. The fine detail can't be created until all the music, set and puppets are in a state of near completeness. Faulty Optic send Calix a scenario, consisting of all the scenes or sections of action that they think will be in final piece, complete with their timings and emotional temperatures.

In February 2007, five months before the premiere, the workshop space is cold and our breath steams out of our mouths, echoing the hot coffee mugs cupped in our hands. Since New Year Glover, Walker and Morgan have recorded and edited the animated film sections of the show. In the performance each section of the projected material has a different characteristic dependent upon which part of the dramatic world is being explored. The Bacchae, when appearing in Orpheus' memory will have an ethereal quality, floating smoothly across the stage. This effect is achieved in the workshop space by experimenting with backlighting gauze onto which the film is projected. The animation that shows dead souls being ferried in coffins across the river Styx has more of a ghoulish two dimensional cartoon quality. The film of Orpheus' recurrent nightmare of his failed attempt to rescue Eurydice uses three dimensional objects (see figure 1) and puppets and most closely resembles the real-

time aesthetic reality of the live performance action. Although this footage will be re-edited before the final performance the material now exists in a form that stays constant until opening night. It is one facet of the performance that is now in a relatively fixed state.

In March Glover and Walker decide that they will need a third puppeteer because the action has increased in complexity. Glover steps out of the performance to concentrate on directing the piece and Morgan is introduced into the performance as a puppeteer. At the next rehearsal experienced puppeteer Simon Kerrigan appears. Watching the rehearsal unfold it is clear that he will be the main Orpheus performer, while Walker concentrates on Eurydice, with Morgan moving between the two. It is worth noting here that the predominant puppets in the performance can be manipulated by one, two or three people; the more people working a puppet the greater the degree of movement and detail that can be achieved. At the most sophisticated level these puppets are manipulated by the one puppeteer controlling the head and an arm, another the legs and a third the remaining arm. As I watch the rehearsal unfold it is clear that the puppeteers will need to develop an instinctive knowledge of each other's movements, when to swap hands and to anticipate each other's actions. In the coming rehearsal period the company will not only need to devise the bulk of the live action but also to develop an ensemble playing style; Walker, Morgan and Kerrigan will need to create and learn the performance language of *Dead Wedding*.

Glover and Walker feed ideas to Kerrigan and Morgan to help them develop the physical action of the scene. The Faulty Optic founders are acting as a mirror, constantly feeding back information about the puppet movement aesthetic that the new puppeteers are striving to achieve. The scale of movement is so important and

they offer fine tuning advice about the angle of Orpheus' head or the height of a jump. The live action being worked upon is linked with the filmed material on the running track representing Orpheus' nightmare. The animated film plays and Kerrigan synchronises the action of the Orpheus puppet with the film: each time a hurdle is reached in the film, the live-action Orpheus puppet also jumps up as if reliving the race. But being in an enclosed space under the lyre-shaped piece of set, each time he jumps he bangs his head on the metal frame above him. The image is both desperately sad and funny as Orpheus tortures himself with the memory of his loss. But although the image and action works well in this rehearsal, when it comes to rehearsing the show months later the action is discarded: for when performed with full theatre lighting in place, the puppet's action is too distracting from the theatrically subtle narrative of the filmed section. The original action is strong but, unlike the television image it does not survive and evolve because it is not responsive or adaptable enough to the changed circumstances.

In discussions after this rehearsal Faulty Optic voice another difference between this process and their previous devising practice. They usually work with the puppets on set to create actions and images that they find interesting and then find the best way to use this material to create the fabric or associative narrative of the show. But in this collaboration, they have had to fashion a scenario before the practical devising process begins and now have to find images and action that fit with their 'script'. They are being forced to follow the more conventional model of fleshing out a scenario rather than allowing the narrative to emerge from material exploration. The 'chaotic' process generated by the collaborative imperative has in this instance spontaneously self-organised, making a novel structure (in terms of the usual working practice of this company) resulting in a new mode of behaviour.

In April Calix delivers drafts of music for particular sections of the performance and detailed rehearsal begins. Some of the material of the scenes will have to be re-thought as the action that the puppeteers have created will need to be changed to fit with the length of the musical score. When they had previously been asked by Calix to establish approximate timings for various sections of the show, Glover and Walker had overestimated the probable length of the scene where Orpheus tries to recreate the wedding feast. Now there is simply far too much music for the length of the action that has been created. The action of the scene must be extended to fit with the score. There is not enough time to recompose the music because of the complex nature of the composition, which involves live instruments working in tandem with electronically produced sound and voice, played from Calix's laptop computer. Time and complexity dictate that action must fit with existing sound. However Faulty Optic do now know the parameters of most of the scenes. Over the next week the detailed action is shaped to fit with the music. In a rough run-through the thematic and poetic links between scenes begins to emerge. At the end of the rehearsal there is discussion about what the performers should wear. The performers will be seen and there will be no attempt to disguise their manipulation of the puppets. The relationship between the puppet and puppeteer adds theatricality and meaning rather than spoiling an illusion that the puppets are independent beings. Even in rehearsal this relationship creates a powerful emotional charge, not unlike the thrill of seeing a well developed physical theatre ensemble working collaboratively onstage, some performers embodying character as others supply physical support.

Pace gathers and at the end of the second week in May there is a run through of all the material so that Calix can make some small adjustments to the musical soundscape. Glover mentions that the music is influencing the performance style,

making it less 'upfront'. Having not worked together or with the puppets for three weeks, the three puppeteers realise that there is logistical work to be reconsidered: who will animate which puppet head or body or limb at each particular moment? The action has not been fully set or scored, and like dancers supporting each other during physical interactions they must allow their bodies to remember these occurrences. At this moment the show feels crude and awkward because the mechanics of the piece are too visible and the performers have not rehearsed enough to develop the subtlety of performance required. There are many elements that are not realised fully in this run of the show, such as lighting, full integration of sound/music and action, and final decisions on set detail. This results in a chaos of components coming together, making it difficult to see the show as a whole, but Glover must trust that the ideal show that he and Walker have imagined will emerge when all these chaotic elements have been refined and mixed in the right measure. In June the mixture is almost complete. In Studio 2 at the University of Huddersfield, detail and clarity emerge as the puppeteers and musicians work together, understanding the performance aesthetic. The puppeteers have found the language which allows them to work together to provide detailed action: they are rehearsing a section where Orpheus has collected together many of the belongings that Eurydice has tried to throw away, including their wedding photograph and her wedding dress. Orpheus is trying to retain the memory of their happy nuptials in direct contrast to Eurydice who is doing her best to forget the past and move into her future. Orpheus holds up the tattered wedding dress with one hand and scratches his head with the other. It seems that he can't understand why she won't respond to his attempts to reunite them. The torn dress is a sad symbol of a ruined past that he can't come to terms with and the scratching of his head is an economical and recognisably human indication of his confusion. It might be a cliché

in other circumstances but here, in combination with the previous action of Eurydice divesting herself of her belongings and the image of the dress held aloft by Orpheus, it becomes a simple, economical, truthful action that allows an audience to believe in the puppet's dramatic reality and creates an empathetic link between performance and spectator. Improvised by the puppeteers, this and other similarly detailed moments emerge within the broader brushstrokes of larger images and bring a powerful focus to the performance. The show is emerging. It takes a week for Mark Webber, the final collaborator, to provisionally light the piece; lighting is an element integral to the show, providing emotional texture in combination with the soundscape and performance action.

After a final rehearsal with the full cast of three puppeteers and four musicians, everything is in place. Now the show must be dismantled and transported to Manchester for the world premiere on Thursday 5th July 2007. And so it opens. Calix's music creaks, scratches, and moves from creating discomfort to moments of spare beauty. Pluto appears playing a giant gravestone-shaped fruit machine. It disgorges pennies when he wins. Orpheus emerges in the gloomy half-light. He has no legs, so scuttles around on crude wooden substitutes or pushes himself on the trolley to move closer to Eurydice, who has emerged from a water-filled drum where she is submerged. She scrubs at her dress, trying to wash away memory, almost ready to make the final journey into the deepest lands of the dead. An animated film shows coffins crossing the river Styx, cadavers with pennies at the ready to pay for their journey. Orpheus re-enacts the wedding feast for Eurydice but only has dusty champagne glasses and dead roses. She rejects him and Orpheus is haunted by memory of his failure to rescue her, her filmed image captured in the television that crashes through hurdles until its screen is smashed by the unnamed giant worm-like

creature from Hades. Orpheus is told to let go of her by an enormous head, a representation of his former self. But he takes a hammer to it, beating it into submission. Eurydice sees his distress and holds him one final time. He helps her climb up high so she can jump into the rushing winds to be carried away into peaceful forgetfulness. Orpheus climbs into the water drum. He will now let go of his failure, attempt to find some peace.

As was clear from the enthusiastic audience response to the performance that I saw, many members of the audience, including some reviewers, were enchanted by the show's fractured poetic drive, extraordinary visual and sonic impact and skilful puppetry, along with its 'wonderfully macabre sense of humour'.¹⁶ (Bourke, 2007) But some found the lack of narrative arc problematic, one reviewer arguing that the show 'could have shed a little more light on exactly what was going on here'.¹⁷ (Walker, 2007) Glover and Walker decide that for the next performances at the Huddersfield International Music Festival in the Lawrence Batley Theatre, a few more signposts would help to make the performance as accessible as possible to a wide audience, without losing its poetic integrity. The order of two middle scenes is changed to provide greater continuity in the storytelling. In consultation with Calix, the positioning of some of the music and sound is altered to provide clearer thematic links between non-sequential scenes. They also decide to add projected text, which appears hand written in the air. The text is informative and witty, poetically enhancing the narrative of various scenes, opening up the two lovers' relationship, and providing context and irony. She says 'You are my heartstring plucker'¹⁸ and urges him to play his music faster until they both conclude with

as one heart

as one beat

fast together

together forever ¹⁹

In the final performances at the Barbican in January 2008, Gavin takes the role of the main Orpheus puppeteer. By now the show has bedded in and has a greater amount of detail in the specific actions of the puppets. Each tiny action has become a character's thought. This detail has been arrived at through the playing of the piece in performance, listening to audience reaction, careful observation and the company's instinctive sense of puppet performance language, built up over twenty years of practical experience. To say that the development of *Dead Wedding* is necessarily complete though, would be to misrepresent the way in which the company operates. Glover and Walker keep much of their work alive in their repertoire of available shows, and each time these are revisited, changes are made to reflect new developments in their thoughts about the aesthetics of performance, as well as the pragmatics of touring to a wide variety of venues worldwide. For Faulty Optic, as with many companies that keep work in repertoire, the devising process is a continuum, the performances being stopping off points on the journey of the evolution of the work.

Because Glover and Walker have worked together on all aspects of the production and performance of their work for over twenty years, much of their process is instinctive and organic. Their longevity has resulted in a very strong company aesthetic, that lies not only in the actual fabric of the performance, the puppets, set and use of filmed animated material, but also in the sensibility of the performed material, a unique brand of comic melancholia and often grotesque humour. The strength and innate knowledge of this aesthetic allowed the company to

ride the chaos of making a complex collaborative show over a long period of time. The resulting moments of inertia in the process are not wasted time or unproductive meanderings. They are evolutionary moments when osmosis can take place, the unconscious absorption of the ideas and knowledge related to the performance, allowing the company to make sense of the chaos of the process and letting the performance ideas adapt to new circumstances. All that I have described in this chapter has been a significant part of the devising process. But the performance also developed in unseen ways outside of the designated performance making time; in conversations between Glover and Walker in the van on the way to perform *Horsehead*; sharing a meal together; after watching a film. This unconscious work is also a significant part of the way in which these long-term collaborators develop ideas, and helps to explain why they are often uninterested in describing their process and why this description of it is a part but not the whole of the story.

Chronology of Productions

My Pig Speaks Latin, Rosemary Branch, pub-theatre in Islington, London then national and international tours, 1988

Snuffhouse Dustlouse, national and international tours, 1991 - 1994 & 1999 - 2000

Darwin's Dead Herring, ICA London then national and international tours, 1993

Shot at the Troff, Komedia Theatre, Brighton, national and international tours, 1998

Bubbly Beds, national and international tours, 1998

Tunnelvision, BAC London, national and international tours, 1998 - 2000

Soiled, national and international tours, 2003 - 2004

Licked, with Edward Carey and Dominic Sales, part of *Resonance* 2004, Leeds Met Studio, commissioned by Opera North and co-produced by Leeds Metropolitan University

Horsehead, national and international tours, 2005 - 2006

Dead Wedding with Mira Calix, commissioned by Manchester International Festival, Opera North Projects and presented in association with the Library Theatre,

Manchester, 2007. Also played at The Lawrence Batley Theatre Huddersfield and as part of the London International Mime Festival and bite08 season at the Barbican, London.

Fish Clay Perspex, Shunt Vaults, London national and international tours, 2009

¹ <http://www.faultyoptic.co.uk/> [accessed 2 May, 2008]

² <http://www.britishcouncil.org/arts-performanceinprofile2007-faulty-optic-theatre-of-animation.htm> [accessed 29 October, 2007]

³ *ibid*

⁴ Clapp, S (2006) *Critics Review of 2006*
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2006/dec/24/1> [accessed 19 September 2008]

⁵ Glover, conversation with the author at rehearsal, 15 August 2006

⁶ Glover & Walker, interview with the author, 17 September 2007

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ www.operanorth.co.uk/ontperformanceinfo.aspx?productionid=47 [accessed 29th October 2007]

⁹ Glover, personal email to the author, 4 July 2006

¹⁰ Glover, G & Walker, E (2006) *Orpheus and the Underworld (scenario)*

¹¹ Glover, personal email to the author, 21 July 2006

¹² Glover & Walker, Interview with the author, 17 September 2007

¹³ *ibid*

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ *Jim Bond* <http://www.jimbond.co.uk/> [accessed 17 July 2008]

¹⁶ Bourke, K (2007) *Theatre and Dance Reviews*

http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/entertainment/theatre_and_dance/theatre_and_dance_reviews/s/1010/1010689_mif_dead_wedding__library_theatre.html,
[accessed 19 September 2008]

¹⁷ Walker, L (2007) *Opera: Dead Wedding, Library Theatre, Manchester*
<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/reviews/opera-dead-wedding-library-theatre-manchester--none-onestar-twostar-threestar-fourstar-fivestar-457382.html> [accessed 19 September 2008]

¹⁸ Faulty Optic (2008) *Dead Wedding* (DVD of Performance 2008, chapter 5)

¹⁹ *ibid*

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