

Spaces of Appearance:
Writings on Contemporary Theatre
and Performance

by

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'These happenings happened at one time or another,
or almost did, or never did,
but their virtue is that they happen every time they are told'

(Eduardo Galeano, *The Book of Embraces*,
New York: WW Norton, 1992, 66)

'All narratives tell one story in place of another story'

(Hélène Cixous, *Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing*,
London: Routledge, 1997, 178)

'One more thing:
if it can be said that this book is not finally about the theatre,
what can I say? except, finally, that is true.
Not even theatre is finally about theatre,
though it seems to be'

(Herbert Blau, *Take up the Bodies: Theatre at the Vanishing Point*,
Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1982, xxii)

Declaration

The following collection of published materials reflects a plural and evolving engagement with theatre and performance over the past fifteen years or so: as researcher, writer, editor, teacher, practitioner, spectator. These have rarely been discreet categories for me, but rather different modalities of exploration and enquiry encouraging dynamic connectivities, flows and questions.

All of the recent materials included here have been enabled by my position as teacher and researcher within the Theatre section of Dartington College of Arts (see 2.3 - 2.8, 3.4, 3.6, 4.1 - 4.4, 4.6 - 4.9 below). As Professor of Theatre since 1998, I have been involved in the development and delivery of the undergraduate course in Theatre, the taught MA in Devised Theatre, and the supervision of postgraduate researchers. It is evident that many of the following materials are informed by the Dartington Theatre section's commitment to an interrogative thinking through of processes of making performance, its concern with emergent forms, collaboration, embodiment, interdisciplinarity, contextual practice, and the elaboration of ecologies of practice.

In the mid-1980s, I was also employed at Dartington as a full-time research assistant and assistant editor to Peter Hulton on *Theatre Papers*, a series of monographs in which contemporary practitioners were invited to articulate their practices, concerns and contexts. The close contact this experience enabled with a wide array of practitioners in Britain and Europe, and with Peter Hulton, Ric Allsopp and Alan Read, subsequently marked all of my work in Australia as researcher and director, particularly in terms of a desire to attend to the conjunction of ethics, politics, poetics and embodiment in performance contexts. Furthermore, most of the core research for studies of directors Jerzy Grotowski and Robert Wilson (see 1.1 and 1.2 below) was undertaken during this period at Dartington. Primary research on Peter Brook's CICT *Mahabharata* (see 3.1 below) was also seeded at that time; it was initially proposed and explored as a *Theatre Paper*, before eventually taking shape as a book for Routledge. Similarly, my interest in contact improvisation (2.2) was seeded at Dartington in the 1980s by meetings with Steve Paxton and Laurie Booth;

subsequently, and as a direct result of watching these two at work, contact became part of my own training and compositional language for a number of years in Australia. Finally, much of my involvement as writer and contributing editor to the international peer-reviewed journal *Performance Research* (2.3 - 2.7, 4.2, 4.8, 4.9) has been facilitated by the Theatre section and the Research Office at Dartington, as well as by the proximity of core collaborators and interlocutors on the journal: notably Ric Allsopp and Kevin Mount.

I declare that all of the published material submitted here is my original work, apart from three collaborative works, which are substantially my own work (see below). It has not been submitted in part or in whole for any other Higher Degree, either at the University of Plymouth or elsewhere.

I declare that the following are all substantially my own work: the 1998 essay and extracts from the Ex-Stasis Theatre production of 'Beautiful Mutants' (3.3, with Barry Laing); the 2000 editorial for the 'Openings' issue of *Performance Research* (2.4, with Ric Allsopp); and the 2000 essay on Peter Brook's approaches to the training of performers (3.4, with Lorna Marshall). The two chapters included here from *Director's Theatre*, on Jerzy Grotowski (1.1) and Robert Wilson (1.2), are my own work. Although this volume was co-authored with David Bradby in 1988, I was responsible for these two sections. I am attaching letters from collaborators to confirm this declaration (see 4.10 below).

One essay and two of the interviews included as appendices (4.1, 4.3, 4.4) will be published shortly after submission of this collection. Letters of confirmation from the respective editors are also attached (see 4.10 below).

David Williams, MA, BA (Hons),
Dartington College of Arts – February 2002

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For their encouragement and the generosity of their support over the years, I would like to acknowledge my heartfelt thanks to the following mentors, colleagues and friends.

Firstly, my teachers David Bradby, David George, Georges Banu, Maria Shevtsova, Patrice Pavis; Peter Hulton, whose selfless work on *Theatre Papers* and *Arts Archives* has my greatest admiration; at UWA in Perth, Bill Dunstone, Gareth Griffiths, Steve Chinna, Anne Hearder; at the Festival of Perth, Henry Boston and David Blenkinsop; at the VUT in Melbourne, Mark Minchinton, Jude Walton, Libby Dempster and the late Helen Wilkinson; at ANU in Canberra, Gino Moliterno, Röss Ireland and Val McKelvey; at Dartington College of Arts, Ric Allsopp, Josie Sutcliffe, Diana Theodores, Misha Myers, Scott deLahunta, Simon Persighetti, John Hall, Kevin Mount, and in the 1980s, Mary Fulkerson and Anne Kilcoyne; Professor Edward Cowie for suggesting such a PhD might be possible; Corrie Jeffery for her help in compiling this volume for submission. My thanks to Ric Allsopp for reading and responding to a draft of the introduction, and to Tim Dollimore for help with software.

Secondly, my editors in publishing contexts - Bruce King (Macmillan), Nick Hern and Marcy Kahan (Methuen), Helena Reckitt and Talia Rodgers (Routledge), Libby Dempster and Sally Gardner (*Writings on Dance*), Peta Tait (*Body Show/s*), Veronica Kelly (*ADS*), Carol Martin (*TDR*), in particular Ric Allsopp, Claire MacDonald, Richard Gough and Alan Read (*Performance Research*).

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Above all, this work is dedicated to those who have taught me more than anyone else: those students in Australia and England who have burnt bright and flared into appearance with great courage; my parents; and Rachel, Stella, Kev and BJ.

Abstract

Antony David C. Williams

Spaces of Appearance: Writings on Contemporary Theatre and Performance

This thesis, a collection of previously published materials, reflects a plural and evolving engagement with theatre and performance over the past fifteen years or so: as researcher, writer, editor, teacher, practitioner, spectator. These have rarely been discreet categories for me, but rather different modalities of exploration and enquiry, interrelated spaces encouraging dynamic connectivities, flows and further questions.

Section 1 offers critical accounts of the practices of four contemporary theatre directors: Jerzy Grotowski, Robert Wilson, Peter Brook and Ariane Mnouchkine. Section 2 draws on elements of contemporary philosophy and critical thinking to explore the mutable parameters of performance. It proposes performative mappings of certain unpredictable, energetic events 'in proximity of performance', to borrow Matthew Goulish's phrase: contact, fire, animals, alterity, place. Section 3 contains examples of documentation of performance practices, including a thick description of a *mise en scène* of a major international theatre production, reflections on process, training and dramaturgy, a performance text with a framing dramaturgical statement, and personal perspectives on particular collaborations. The external Appendix comprises a recently published collection of edited and translated materials concerning five core collaborative projects realised by Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil at their base in the Cartoucherie de Vincennes, Paris.

The core concerns of this thesis include attempts to think through:

- the working regimes, poetics and pedagogies of certain directors, usually in collaborative devising contexts within which the creative agency of performers is privileged;

- the processes and micro-politics of collaboration, devising, and dramaturgical composition; the dramaturgical implications of trainings, narrative structures, spaces, *mise en scène*, and of images as multi-layered, dynamic 'fields';
- the predicament and agency of spectators in diverse performance contexts, and the ways in which spectatorial roles are posited or constructed by dramaturgies;
- the imbrication of embodiment, movement and perception in performance, and the plurality of modes of perception;
- the critical and political functions of theatre and theatre criticism as cultural/social practice and 'art of memory' (de Certeau), of dramaturgies as critical historiographies, and of theatre cultures (and identities) as plural, dynamic, and contested;
- performance as concentrated space for inter-subjectivity and the flaring into appearance of the 'face-to-face' (Levinas); the possibility of ethical, 'response-able' encounter and exchange with another; identity as relational and in-process, alterity as productive event, the inter-personal as political;
- the poetics and politics of what seems an unthinkable surplus (and constitutive 'outside') to the cognitive reach of many conventional frames and maps in theatre criticism and historiography; an exploration of acts of writing as performative propositions and provocations ('critical fictions') to think the *event* of meanings at/of the limits of knowledge and subjectivity.

This partial listing of recurrent and evolving concerns within the thesis traces a trajectory in my evolution as a writer and thinker, a gradual displacement from the relatively 'solid ground' of theatre studies and theatre history towards more fluid and tentative articulations of the shifting 'lie of the land' in contemporary performance and philosophy. This trajectory reflects a growing fascination with present process, conditions, practices, perceptions 'in the middle', and ways of writing (about) performance as interactive and ephemeral event.

Spaces of Appearance: Writings on Contemporary Theatre and Performance

Introduction and critical appraisal

'When you are working on relationships that are in process, you're like a man who takes a plane from Toulouse to Madrid, travels by car from Geneva to Lausanne, goes on foot from Paris towards the Chevreuse valley, or from Cervina to the top of the Matterhorn (with spikes on his shoes, a rope and an ice axe), who goes by boat from Le Havre to New York, who swims from Calais to Dover, who travels by rocket towards the moon, travels by semaphore, telephone or fax, by diaries from childhood to old age, by monuments from antiquity to the present, by lightning bolts when in love. One may well ask, 'What in the world is this man doing?'

There are dilemmas in the mode of travelling, the reasons for the trip, the point of departure and the destination, in the places through which one will pass; the speed, the means, the vehicle, the obstacles to be overcome, make that space active. And, since I have used diverse methods, the coherence of my project is suspect. [...] In fact, it was always a matter of establishing a relation, constructing it, fine-tuning it. And once established, thousands of relations, here, there, everywhere - after a while, when you step back and look, a picture emerges. Or at least a map. You see a general theory of relations, without any point focalising the construction or solidifying it, like a pyramid. The turbulences keep moving. The flows keep dancing'

(Michel Serres in Serres & Latour 1995: 111-12).

Foreword

The following collection of published materials reflects a plural and evolving engagement with theatre and performance over the past fifteen years or so: as researcher, writer, editor, teacher, practitioner, spectator. These have rarely been discreet categories for me, but rather different modalities of exploration and enquiry, interrelated spaces encouraging dynamic connectivities, flows and further questions. The collection is structured spatially or topologically, proposing sites, contours, trajectories and interconnections within a heterogeneous field of enquiry, rather than any strictly chronological progression or linear development within a singular *topos*.

Sociologist of science John Law has described topology as a branch of mathematics and geometry which explores 'the character of possible spaces':

'These would include what we tend, common-sensically, to think of as 'space' - which is Euclidean, Cartesian or regional in character. But there are many other - indeed limitless - possibilities. So how does this work? The answer is that topologists think about spatiality by asking questions

about the *continuity* of shapes. And such related issues as their *proximity* or relative location' (Law 2000).

More succinctly, the French philosopher Michel Serres locates topology as a relational science of 'proximities and ongoing or interrupted transformations' (Serres and Latour 1995: 105). His 'philosophy of prepositions'¹ focuses on the suppleness and malleability of spatial relations through questions such as:

'What is closed? What is open? What is a connective path? What is a tear? What are the continuous and the discontinuous? What is a threshold, a limit?' (Serres 1982: 44)

As a whole, this thesis perhaps invites a *topological* reading, in terms of the continuities and differences of 'shapes' within its lateral unfoldings: the intersections of component parts within a network, their connections, translations, displacements, repetitions, evolutions, thresholds, rifts, above all their relational and transformative spaces in-between.² For this is a map of 'relationships that are in process' (Serres & Latour 1995: 111): relationships between performance making and watching, between bodily and conceptual practices, between acts of performing and acts of writing, between the ephemerality of the live event and the (apparent) fixity of its inscription, between 'a doing and a thing done' (Diamond 1996:1).³

Section 1 offers critical accounts of the practices of four contemporary theatre directors with whom I am fortunate to have had contact: Jerzy Grotowski,

¹ 'Each of my books describes a relationship, often expressed by a unique preposition [...] *Inter-ference*, for the spaces and times that are *between*; *communication* or *contract* for the relation expressed by the preposition *with*; *translation* for *across*; the *para-site* for *beside*' (Michel Serres in Serres & Latour 1995: 101. Emphasis in original).

² Cf. Michel Foucault's account of the space of late or post-modernity, which he calls 'site': 'The site is defined by relations of proximity between points or elements; formally, we can describe these relations as series, trees, or grids. [...] Our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites. [...] Our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein' (Foucault 1998: 237-8).

³ 'In our simplest references, and in the blink of an eye, performance is always a doing and a thing done. On the one hand, performance describes certain embodied acts, in specific sites, witnessed by others (and/or the watching self). On the other hand, it is the thing done, the completed event framed in time and space and remembered, misremembered, interpreted, and passionately revisited across a pre-existing discursive field. Common sense insists on a temporal separation between a doing and a thing done, but in usage and in theory, performance, even in its dazzling physical immediacy, drifts between present and past, presence and absence, consciousness and memory' (Diamond 1996:1).

Robert Wilson, Peter Brook and Ariane Mnouchkine. The sections on Grotowski (1.1) and Wilson (1.2), the earliest of the texts included here, reflect the nature of my intellectual background in Drama and Theatre Studies as both undergraduate and postgraduate student at the University of Kent at Canterbury. At UKC in the 1970s, the emphasis was on reading theatre in performance historically, aesthetically, and politically as social intervention, and in terms of what Raymond Williams called 'structures of feeling'. These case studies were published as part of a volume, written with David Bradby, which focused on a number of theatre directors working in the wake of seminal pioneers earlier in the 20th century (Craig, Meyerhold, Copeau, Reinhardt, Brecht etc.), a 'second generation' of exploratory and influential practitioners: Littlewood, Planchon, Mnouchkine, Brook and Stein, as well as Grotowski and Wilson. The book as a whole is marked by Roger Planchon's notion of 'scenic writing' (as opposed to dramatic writing), which was used as an operative lens for reading the *mises en scène* of the directors in question. Methodologically, the intent was to provide narrative/descriptive histories of each director's evolving roles, concerns, working processes, and major public productions. I include these two chapters here as a starting-point in a narrative historiographic practice, still today one of the forms of scholarly activity most privileged by publishers in the field of theatre studies. Their primary value perhaps lies in providing tertiary-level students with accessible accounts of practices which remained somewhat unfamiliar and under-discussed in Britain at that time. More personally, their research and writing entailed direct contact with the directors and some of their collaborators (most notably a series of provocative paratheatrical encounters with members of the Polish Lab), and access to archival documentation, both of which subsequently informed my own theatre practices – in particular in the areas of physical training, image composition and spatiality.

The essay on Brook (1.3) was commissioned by Patrice Pavis for inclusion in his anthology of materials about contemporary intercultural theatre practices. This text emerged from a longstanding contact and preoccupation with Brook's

work,⁴ and certain misgivings in the wake of *The Mahabharata* and its critical reception about the pat dismissal of Brook as asocial mythographer and cultural appropriator. I wanted to explore Brook's humanist discourse of myth as reflexive proposition or critical narrative in the face of certain contemporary realities, and to foreground what I perceived as an enabling 'play' within Brook's representational languages and strategies in storytelling performances. Finally, the section on Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil attempts to trace some of the continuities and differences within the volatile 30-year evolution of this director and company. Their work offers particular models of collaboration, theatricality, and theatre making as social action. In this context, perhaps this text also signals my own development as critical historiographer, away from a largely unproblematised 'transparency' of inscription towards a more consciously polemical, positional, historicised writing practice inflected by contemporary critical thinking and political contexts.

This developmental trajectory is further explored in Section 2, which draws on elements of contemporary philosophy and critical/cultural theory to explore the mutable parameters of performance, or its heart. It proposes performative mappings of certain unpredictable, energetic events 'in proximity of performance', to borrow Matthew Goulsh's phrase (Goulsh 2000): the shifting point of contact in contact improvisation, fire energetics and their implications

⁴ If I have revisited Brook's work repeatedly (and variously) in my research over the last 20 years, it is partially as a result of the degree to which it has been informative in my work as teacher and director. My first impressionable and enthusiastic encounters with his work in the 1970s have been tempered gradually by a more actively critical engagement as this long-term relationship has evolved. Nonetheless, I remain profoundly marked and stimulated by certain aspects of this work, most notably: Brook's acute sensitivity to performers and their particular predicaments, to precise metaphorical discourses that enable collaborators in the moment of exploration, to the fluid dynamics of spatiality and its layered unfoldings, to transitions and transformations in scenographies of suggestion, and to the mysterious event of the appearance of forms and the organic cycles inherent within them (see e.g. 2.4 and 3.1 below): 'There is no form, beginning with ourselves, that is not subject to the fundamental law of the universe: that of disappearance. All religion, all understanding, all tradition, all wisdom accepts birth and death. Birth is a putting into form, whether one is speaking about a human being, a sentence, a word or a gesture. It is what the Indians call *sphota*. This ancient Hindu concept is magnificent because its actual meaning is already there in the sound of the word. Between the unmanifest and the manifest, there is a flow of formless energies, and at certain moments there are kinds of explosions which correspond to this term: '*Sphota*!' This form can be called an 'incarnation'. Some insects only last for a day, some animals several years, humans last longer and elephants last even longer. All these cycles exist, and it is the same thing with an idea or with a memory. [...] The event is the shaping of the form. What one calls the work is the search for the right form' (Brook 1993: 50-1).

for writing about the active vanishings of performance, alterity as productive event in human/animal interactions, place as contested and heterotopic. In these texts, I have endeavoured to explore more performative modes of writing critical histories.⁵ So, for example, I have attempted to write about what resists inscription - the qualitative, the fugitive, the unpredictable, the overlooked – and in this way minimally ‘to redirect the geometry of attention’, to borrow a phrase from Joan Retallack.⁶ Such redirection goes hand in hand with a conviction that one can never recuperate a disappeared world, one can simply try to write (into) a new one. The act of writing therefore seeks to ‘do’ or perform something of the moment(um) or affect of movement in absent bodies, or at least to rehearse aspects of the ambiguities, pluralities, displacements and ephemerality of live performance through intertextual citation, linguistic slippage and fray, a poetics of repetition and accumulation, the tropes of the fragment and the list, and so on. As with the ‘critical fiction’ proposed in the Postscript, I conceive of this writing as a material discursive practice, in which the page is a public space for enactments or instantiations of critical performances, rather than a matter of formal (or modish) ‘style’, or writing to be consigned to the ‘merely’ creative; to quote Retallack once again, ‘a space to be playful in a purposeful way’.⁷

Section 3 contains a range of examples of documentation of performance

⁵ For a productive account of performative writing, see Pollock 1998. Pollock proposes six porous frames for ‘performing writing’: it is ‘evocative’, ‘metonymic’, ‘subjective’, ‘nervous’, ‘citational’ and ‘consequential’. ‘Performative writing [...] is for relatives, not identities; it is for space and time; it is for a truly good laugh, for the boundary, banal pleasures that twine bodies in action; it is for writing, for writing ourselves out of our-selves, for writing our-selves into what (never) was and may (never) be. It is/is it for love?’ (op.cit., 98). Cf. the Postscript to this thesis re. the constitutive nature of critical fictions.

⁶ Retallack used this phrase during an inter-disciplinary writing seminar/round-table, ‘Partly Writing’, at Dartington College of Arts (19-20 January, 2002), in the context of a discussion of DW Winnicott’s notion of ‘in-between’ spaces as spaces of cultural invention.

⁷ To some degree, such writing practices intersect with the publishing brief of the editors of the journal *Performance Research*, and to the pedagogic and artistic concerns of ‘performance writing’ as elaborated by Caroline Bergvall, Ric Allsopp and others at Dartington College of Arts in the 1990s. In a recent article about performance writing, Allsopp quotes one of Charles Olson’s course descriptions from Black Mountain College in North Carolina, entitled ‘The Act of Writing in the Context of Post-Modern Man’ (1952), in which Olson articulates a notion of writing and its pedagogy as the disclosure and materialising of a ‘kinetics of experience’: ‘The engagement of each class [...] is the search for a methodology by which each person in the class, by acts of writing and critique on others’ acts of writing, may more and more find the *kinetics of experience disclosed – the kinetics of themselves as persons as well as of the stuff they have to work on, and by*’ (Olson quoted in Allsopp 1999: 78. Emphasis added).

practices, including a thick description of a *mise en scène* of a major international theatre production, *The Mahabharata* (3.1),⁸ reflections on process, training and dramaturgy in my own work in Australia (3.2) and on Peter Brook's preparation of performers (3.4), episodes from a performance text, *Beautiful Mutants*, with a framing dramaturgical statement-cum-manifesto (3.3), and personal perspectives on specifically located collaborations with the Australian dance-theatre maker Alison Halit in Melbourne (3.5) and with British performance artists Lone Twin in Barcelona (3.6).

The internal Appendix, Section 4, comprises an extract from a recent essay about Peter Brook's evolving relationship with Paris (4.1), and three recent interviews conducted with practitioners whose work - as visual artist-activist (Basia Irland, 4.2), documenter-editor-archivist (Peter Hulton, 4.3), performer (Bruce Myers, 4.4) - intersects with and encourages my own ongoing interests and 'possible spaces' as writer, editor, teacher, performance maker, photographer. In addition, I have appended a number of short critical reviews which pick up on, and amplify, certain aspects of earlier discussions in the main body of the text. The external Appendix is a recently published collection of edited and translated materials concerning five core collaborative projects realised by Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil at their base in the Cartoucherie de Vincennes, Paris (Williams 1999).

Finally, Section 5, a 'Postscript', returns to the framing discourse of 'spaces of appearance' as proposed in the final section of this introduction (see below), and extends it into possible future fields of scholarly and creative activity. This supplement offers a tentative outline of current and emerging research, and sketches fragments of a 'critical fiction'-in-progress that combines text and image: an 'outro' towards a new body of writing and performance practice at its genesis, a way forward unfolding in the wake of the materials collected in the thesis.

⁸ The notion of *thick description* stems from the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who employs it to describe a particular culture through a conjunction of detailed local analysis and global synthesis: 'The aim is to draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts; to support broad assertions about the role of culture in the construction of collective life by engaging them exactly with complex specifics' (Geertz 1973: 28).

Shapes and trajectories

To adopt a more meta-reflexive perspective on this collection as a whole, central concerns include attempts to think through:

- the working regimes, poetics and pedagogies of certain directors, usually in collaborative devising contexts within which the creative agency of performers is privileged in the elaboration of 'resonant shapes for our present ambiguities' (Bogart 2001: 39);
- the processes and micro-politics of collaboration, devising, and dramaturgical composition; the dramaturgical implications of trainings, narrative structures, spaces, *mise en scène*, and of images as multi-layered, dynamic 'fields';⁹
- the predicament and agency of spectators in diverse performance contexts, and the ways in which spectatorial roles are posited or constructed by dramaturgies;
- the imbrication of embodiment, movement and perception in the 'sensuous human praxis' (Stuart Hall quoted in Diamond 1996: 6) of performance, and the plurality of modes of perception;
- the critical and political functions of theatre and theatre criticism as cultural/social practice and 'art of memory' (de Certeau 1988: 87), of dramaturgies as critical historiographies, and of theatre cultures (and identities) as plural, dynamic, 'contested, temporal, and emergent'

⁹ The core notion of image, and performance, as 'field' relates to certain artists' propositions concerning performance as multi-perspectival 'landscape' (e.g. Gertrude Stein, Robert Wilson), to John Cage's perception of Robert Rauschenberg's combine paintings as constituting 'a situation involving multiplicity' (Cage 1961: 101), to Merce Cunningham's reflections on Einsteinian relativity ('if there are no fixed points, then every point is equally interesting and equally changing': Cunningham 1985: 18), to Bill Viola's notion of 'field perception' (Viola 1995: 151-2, 242, 268), to John Berger's articulation of the field 'as an event in itself' (Berger 1980: 197), to Michel Foucault's discussion of heterotopias (Foucault 1998), and to James Clifford's account of a travelling anthropological 'field as 'a habitus rather than a place, a cluster of embodied dispositions and practices' (Clifford 1997: 69). Cf. Ric Allsopp (2000), in particular 'In a moment of flight' (30-1), his polemical text about the performance image as field event. Cf. also the 'field' of intersecting gazes in Antony Gormley's *Field for the British Isles* (1994). For a useful discussion of the implications and applications of quantum field theories in 20th-century performance contexts, see also Schmidt 1990b: 21-26.

(James Clifford in Clifford & Marcus 1986: 19);¹⁰

- performance as concentrated space for inter-subjectivity and the flaring into appearance of the 'face-to-face' (Levinas 1969, 1985: 85-92); the possibility of ethical, 'response-able' encounter and exchange with another (inter-face); identity as relational and in-process, alterity as productive event, the inter-personal as political;
- the poetics and politics of what seems an unthinkable surplus (and constitutive 'outside') to the cognitive reach of many conventional frames and maps in theatre criticism and historiography; an exploration of acts of writing as performative propositions and provocations ('critical fictions') to think the *event* of meanings at/of the limits of knowledge and subjectivity, to fall through the gaps in received maps¹¹ into 'the immense landscape of the *trans*-, of the passage' (Cixous 1997: 52), and tactically to navigate the ephemeral, the transforming, the overflowing, the undecidable, the mysterious, the open, knowing all the while that 'the ground will always give way, always' (ibid).

This partial listing of recurrent and evolving concerns ('shapes') within the collection traces a trajectory in my evolution as a writer and thinker, a gradual displacement from the relatively 'solid ground' of theatre studies and theatre history towards more fluid and tentative articulations of the shifting 'lie of the land' in contemporary performance and philosophy. This trajectory reflects an unravelling of conviction as to theatre productions as the core site of concern, a growing sense of the counter-productivity of theatre's formal institutional apparatuses, and of the entropic sterility of many of its representational

¹⁰ In *The Predicament of Culture*, within his discussion of the relatedness, syncretism and inventive processes of cultures, ethnographer James Clifford connects culture with a notion of identity as 'an ongoing process, politically contested and historically unfinished' (Clifford 1988: 9). Identity is always 'conjunctural, not essential' (11); if 'authenticity is relational, there can be no essence except as a political, cultural invention, a local tactics' (12). Such differential identities, Clifford argues, require 'other ways of telling: [...] hybrid and subversive forms of cultural representation, forms that prefigure an inventive future' (17). Cf. Zygmunt Bauman's suggestion, in a discussion of cultural identities in a globally mediated world, that it is their 'movement and capacity to change, not the ability to cling to once established forms and contexts, that secures their continuity' (Bauman 1999: xiv).

¹¹ Cf. Iain Sinclair: 'We have to recognise the fundamental untrustworthiness of maps; they are always pressure group publications. They represent special pleading on behalf of some quango with [...] something to sell. Maps are a futile compromise between information and knowledge. They require a powerful dose of fiction to bring them to life' (Sinclair 1997:145).

regimes. So, for example, I share Mike Pearson's polemical uneasiness as the spaces of conventional theatre economies threaten to become 'a field ploughed to exhaustion' (Pearson 1998: 39),¹² and his fears that theatre may already be a representational anachronism, lagging in the wake of other media. At the same time, certain materials here register a growing fascination with present process, conditions, practices, perceptions 'in the middle', and ways of thinking through performance as interactive and ephemeral event¹³ (e.g. 2.2-2.7, 3.2, 3.4-3.6, 4.2-4.3 below). Perhaps these materials also suggest a certain skepticism about particular claims to knowledge and its 'finishability', and, to borrow Jean-François Lyotard's terms, a desire to become a 'philosopher' rather than an 'expert' (Lyotard 1984: xxv),¹⁴ to know how not to know with interrogative momentum.

On a more personal level, having returned to these texts in this context, they now seem to me to constitute fragments of a shifting and incomplete 'autotopography' (Gonzalez 1995). The texts comprise *aides-mémoire* of an itinerary at the dynamic intersection of dwelling and travelling, a partial cartography-in-process of my own located and evolving senses of self in my

¹² 'I feel uneasy. I can no longer sit passively in the dark watching a hole in the wall, pretending that the auditorium is a neutral vessel of representation. It is a spatial machine that distances us from the spectacle, and that allies subsidy, theatre orthodoxy and political conservatism, under the disguise of nobility of purpose, in a way that literally "keeps us in our place". I can no longer dutifully turn up to see the latest "brilliant" product of such-and-such in this arts centre, where I saw the latest "brilliant" product of others only yesterday, a field ploughed to exhaustion. I can no longer allow the programming policies and the black boxes of a circuit of venues to define the form and nature of performance' (Pearson 1998: 39).

¹³ The recurrent notion of 'event' in this context has at least two sources. Firstly, in the discourses of 20th century science and their further exploration in post-Cagean aesthetics: 'In science it has come to be understood that the event is the basic unit of all things real – that energy, not matter, is the basic datum. In the increasingly widespread perception of reality as endless process, performance, not the art object, becomes primary [...] performance is an event rather than object' (Schmidt 1990a: 231). Secondly, in contemporary philosophy, notably in the work of Emmanuel Levinas (see e.g. 2.2), Jean-Luc Nancy (see e.g. 2.4), Gilles Deleuze (see e.g. 2.6), and Jean-François Lyotard in such passages as the following: 'Because it is absolute, the presenting present cannot be grasped: it is *not yet* or *no longer* present. It is always too soon or too late to grasp presentation itself and present it. Such is the specific and paradoxical constitution of the event. That something happens, the occurrence, means that the mind is disappropriated. The expression 'it happens that ...' is the formula of non-mastery of self over self. The event makes the self incapable of taking possession and control of what it is. It testifies that the self is essentially passible to a recurrent alterity' (Lyotard 1991: 59. Emphasis in original). For informative discussions of Peter Brook's conception of theatre as 'event', and its connections with Zeami's *johakyu* and quantum physics, see Brook 1992 and Nicolescu 2001.

¹⁴ 'The author of the report is a philosopher, not an expert. The latter knows what he [sic] knows and what he does not know; the former does not. One concludes, the other questions' (Lyotard 1984: xxv).

professional and personal practices as a doubled citizen of antipodal countries. Each of the texts that follows takes (a) place in my own ec-centric, experiential map of interconnected place-times in England, France and Australia. Reviewing them in retrospect here reminds me that identities are articulated and embedded in the world spatially, textually, corporeally, relationally, and on the move. The turbulences keep moving, the flows keep dancing ...

'Spaces of appearance'

'The distance that separates that night then from this night I'm writing in now. The sense of everything appearing and disappearing' (Calvino 1993: 89)

'What, has this thing appeared again tonight?' (*Hamlet*, I,i,21)

One of the primary impulses in Western philosophy has been to look for a reality that is not subject to turbulences and flows. In the face of the impermanence and flux of the phenomenal world of 'appearances' as perceived pejoratively, i.e. as illusory surface, many thinkers have pursued an essential(ist) 'Being' that transcends the instabilities and mortalities of cultural forms and mores, opinions, sensory impressions, subjective ideals. Amongst others, the Stoics, Plato, Descartes and logical positivists have conceived of 'appearance' and 'reality' as hierarchical opposites which draw their meaning from each other. As Andrea Nye summarises, for such philosophical dispositions 'appearing is the lack of Being which is true reality; true Being is the lack of illusory appearance' (Nye 1994: 137).

Hannah Arendt, one of my sources for the title of this thesis, was one of a number of 20th-century philosophers who conceived of the diversity and confusion of appearances as primary reality, our common world, rather than as fugitive illusions. For her, such idealist cleftings were instances of 'frozen thought which thinking must unfreeze' (Arendt 1971: 431). She located meanings not as fixed concepts, but moving measures inviting active negotiation. If truth is not a pre-existent, primal ready-made, but a function of multiple perspectives on the reality of appearances, Arendt suggested, all truths invite critical examination and responses that allow for revision. Appearances

appear to someone, they are relational.¹⁵ Their shifts and changes are responses directed to others, performative displays in turn inviting diverse responses - affirmation, say, or contestation, the will for things to be different. Each appearance thus contains the potentiality for beginning something new, for remaking relations and selves. In this way, Arendt located appearances as positive dialogic events in the unfolding of civic life rather than as failed reflections of some transcendent 'Being'. Although Arendt, like Brecht, recognised that the instruments and ideological structures of perception would change the appearance of what is seen to appear, here social existence is conceived as plural and inter-subjective. Its objects of 'inter-est' are constituted by relationships, by what is *between* (Arendt 1958: 182-3), and the play of appearance in this in-between affords the possibility of dynamic and communicative exchange.

For Arendt, endeavouring in the wake of Fascism to articulate the conditions of a participatory politics within which commonality is dependent upon diversity, one of the primary conditions was the existence of spaces of free speech and interaction, 'spaces of appearance'. Such spaces, which Arendt extrapolated from her reflections on the Greek *polis*, are founded on an ideal of civic encounter, responsibility, ethical engagement and self-revelation with and in particular contexts:¹⁶

'The space of appearance [is] the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men [sic] exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly' (Arendt 1958: 198-9).

Can theatre be one such 'space of appearance'? The director of the Paris-based Théâtre du Soleil, Ariane Mnouckine, suggests it can; indeed she has

¹⁵ Cf. 'Theatricality cannot *be*, it must be *for* someone. In other words, it is *for the Other*' (Féral 1982: 178. Emphasis in original).

¹⁶ Cf. Edward Said on the role of intellectuals in public life: 'The intellectual is an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public. And this role has an edge to it, and cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place it is publically to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose *raison d'être* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug ...' (Said 1994: 9).

sometimes used this same phrase - *espace d'apparition*¹⁷ - to describe her own ideal of a dynamically interactive socio-political agora for embodying and exploring thought-in-action (see 1.4 below). Yet, as Herbert Blau and Peggy Phelan *inter alia* have reiterated in their subtle articulations of the double-binds of representation, the play of appearances in performance (and of recursive reappearances and disappearances) is complex indeed. As a performance maker, I have been haunted by Blau's question: how to effect 'the liberation of the performer as an *actor* who, laminated with appearance, struggles to *appear*' (Blau 1990: 257; emphasis in original)? The struggle is all,

'at the dubious end of ideology, at the possible end of history, when our lives are still dominated (incredibly) by the prospect of an actual disappearance. All theatre comes against the inevitability of disappearance from *the struggle to appear*. The only theatre worth seeing - that *can* be seen rather than stared through - is that which struggles to appear. The rest is all bad makeup' (Blau 1982: 298; emphasis in original).

What is the nature of the event - what happens - at those moments of a flaring into visibility *through* appearance, of an ephemeral visitation in the active vanishing of performance, like that of a ghost (*apparition*) erupting through the walls of appearance to take (its) place? What then appears, and to whom? At the intersection of visible appearance and invisible happening, dream and event, the 'doing' and the 'thing done' (Diamond 1996:1), what is (to be) seen in the scene of the seeing-place, the *theatron*?

One of my primary interests as performance maker and teacher (and in this context, as writer) emerges from an interrogative pragmatism focused on the *happening in appearance*, above all in terms of what Blau has described as 'the fugitive relationship between the premonitory act and the actualization, the incipience and the immanence' (Blau 1990: 264). So, for example, one's experience of watching performers at work in this in-between is never uniform

¹⁷ *Apparition*: appearance of a person; manifestation of a sign; outbreak of a symptom; also vision, apparition, spectre. (From *Collins Robert French-English Dictionary*, New York: HarperCollins, 1998). In Patrice Pavis's *Dictionary of the Theatre*, the entry for 'APPARITION' reads: 'Fr.: *apparition*; Ger.: *Erscheinung*; Sp.: *aparición*. See GHOST' (Pavis 1998: 28). Mysteriously, and fittingly, there is no entry for GHOST; it has disappeared.

in terms of its *density*. In relation to the working processes of Theatre PUR, Joe Kelleher has described a serendipitous search for 'a certain sort of thickness':

'which maybe does involve a plank-like recalcitrance, but at the same time cracks into the accidental spaces where 'personality' - the who it is who works, but who also eats snacks, and reviews the situation, and takes pleasure, and suffers anxiety - appears to uncover itself' (Kelleher 2001: 84).

What then are the conditions within which the qualitative particularities or peculiarities of a performer - their micro-rhythms, dynamics, energies, desires, needs, not-knowings, embodiments, and so on - seem to be aligned or refracted or 'thickly' layered in such a way that that person, as multiplicity and singularity, *seems* to come into focus (i.e. they *appear to appear*)?¹⁸ What are the conditions within which they seem to be uncovered, to come to matter, and to be enabled to take (a) place here now? How might one make space for something akin to Lyotard's theatre of energetics, in which what appears is 'the highest intensity [...] of what there is, without intention' (Lyotard 1997: 288), as well as for the energetic perception of its volatility, its 'heat'?¹⁹ Similar questions about apparent eruptive emergence could be formulated and asked of an image, an object, a site, an instance of composition, a process of devising, an act of writing, as well as of (say) the education of a student, the training of a sports team or of a horse, the design of a garden, the unfolding of a relationship - all of them at least potentially 'spaces of appearance' for the becomings of identities in process.²⁰ In each of these contexts, one's

¹⁸ The *seeming* is crucial, if one is to avoid privileging any singular, original 'authenticity' here (i.e. a metaphysics of presence). Without wishing to discredit Grotowski, Brook or Mnouchkine - for many of their propositions and provocations have been, and remain, invaluable to me as a performance maker and teacher - it is clear that a deconstructive critique of their discursive accounts of performing would reveal that all three are founded upon variants of a metaphysics of presence. For such a critique, see e.g. Philip Auslander: 'When we speak of acting in terms of presence, defined implicitly as the actor's revelation of self through performance, we must realize that we are speaking at most metaphorically, and that what we refer to as the actor's self is not a grounding presence that precedes the performance, but an effect of the play of *différance* that constitutes theatrical discourse' (Auslander 1997: 36).

¹⁹ Cf. Susan Melrose's sketch of a theory of energetic perception where the spectator is drawn into the 'force-field' of the performer at 'the intersection of electro-magnetic fields, something like the clash and blend of body-heat' (Melrose 1994: 217).

²⁰ Matthew Goulish: 'A performer is an identity in motion in a particular direction. A performer is a BECOMING' (Goulish 2000: 79). Cf. also Jeanette Winterson re. the temporal-spatial mobility of imaginative reverie, and identity as event of fleeting appearance (and constitutive fiction) in the momentary conjunction of particular spacings and timings: 'Whenever someone's eyes glaze over, you have lost them. They are as far from you as if their body were carried at the speed of light beyond the compass of the world. Time has no meaning, space and

responsibility is to 'invent the conditions of invention' (Serres and Latour 1995: 86), to navigate and discriminate according to what one might call a situational or localised ethics, or an 'eco-logic' (Guattari 1989: 136),²¹ and to make (a) space that is generative, protective and en-couraging:

'There are two ways to escape [the inferno]. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognise who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space' (Calvino 1972: 165)

In addition to a compassionate attention to the predicament of performers, and the tactical development of processes that encourage a quality of actively intelligent listening, breath and energy exchange rather than stifled encumberment - or at least the delicate struggle to 'work out some liveable unison between panic and grace' (Blau 1982: 84) - such a focus necessarily entails a study of forms and what informs them (their contexts, conditions and modes of generation, their embodyings), and of processes and models of collaboration, training, composition, dramaturgies, energetics, and spatialities. What is perhaps the core question is expressed by Goat Island's Matthew Goulish's in a rather elliptical, Gertrude Stein-inflected formulation of a performance pragmatics: 'how does a work work where?' (Goulish 2000: 97).

place have no meaning on this journey. All times can be inhabited, all places visited. In a single day the mind can make a millpond of the oceans. Some people who have never crossed the land they were born on have travelled all over the world. The journey is not linear, it is always back and forth, denying the calendar, the wrinkles and lines of the body. The self is not contained in any moment or any place, but it is only in the intersection of moment and place that the self might, be seen vanishing through a door, which disappears at once' (Winterson 1989: 80).

²¹ 'The logic of intensities - or eco-logic - concerns itself solely with the movement and intensity of evolutive processes [...] Praxic openness constitutes the essence of the art of the 'eco' (Guattari 1989: 136, 140).

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Section 1

Contemporary directors:

Grotowski, Wilson,

Brook, Mnouchkine

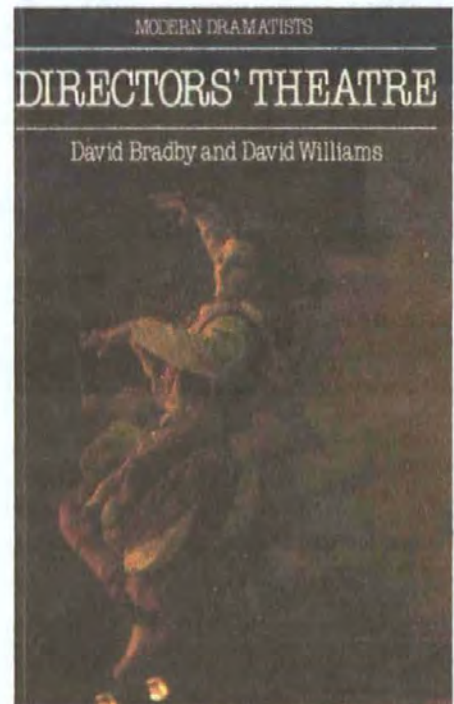
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1989

'Jerzy Grotowski',

in David Bradby and David Williams, *Director's Theatre*, Basingstoke: Macmillan,
112-44

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5 Jerzy Grotowski

Of all the directors under discussion in the book, none has enraged and engaged the imaginations of theatre practitioners and audiences over the past 20 years as profoundly as Jerzy Grotowski. Starting out as a director quite content to treat his actors as his raw material, he has changed and developed to the point where he now sees his role as simply that of a catalyst of others' creativity. The major performances by his Laboratory Theatre – *Akropolis*, *The Constant Prince*, *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* – served as slaps in the face of the largely unfocused and complacent experimental theatre that mushroomed worldwide in the 1960s. The rigorous exigencies of his ethic have had extensive repercussions for the members of his group, carrying them beyond the domain of theatre, determining a way of life. However, despite the mass of material produced around the 'Grotowski phenomenon', much remains misunderstood or shrouded in the obscurantist mysticism that *appears* to characterise Grotowski's own gnomic utterances (the fruit of a

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peculiarly Polish blend of Catholicism and existentialism). In this chapter, an attempt will be made to clarify Grotowski's quasi-scientific investigation of the nature of the actor's craft, of the actor-spectator relationship, the evolution of his conception of the director's role in the creative process, and the logic of his subsequent rejection of theatre's inherent limitations in the transition to 'paratheatre' and 'active culture'.¹

Grotowski was born in August 1933 in Rzeszow, eastern Poland, where he remained throughout the wartime occupation. In 1955, having been awarded an actor's diploma by the State Theatre School of Cracow, he attended a directing course at the State Institution of Theatre Art (GITIS) in Moscow, where he was able to make a thorough study of the work of Stanislavski, Meyerhold and Vakhtangov. During the 'Polish October' period of 1956, he was an active participant in the socialist youth movement, publishing a number of militant articles in support of the process of 'de-Stalinisation'. For the next three years, he continued his director's training at the Stary Teatr in Cracow; his productions included Ionesco's *The Chairs* (1957) and Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* (1959). (He was eventually to receive his professional director's diploma in 1960). In 1959 he became director of the small provincial Teatr 13 Rzedow (Theatre of 13 Rows) in Opole, Silesia, at the invitation of Ludwik Flaszen, a young critic of some prestige, formerly literary director of Cracow's Slowacki Theatre; Flaszen was to remain Grotowski's literary adviser, confidant and 'devil's advocate' throughout the existence of the theatre laboratory. The Theatre of 13 Rows received a minimal permanent subsidy from the local council, enabling experiment and artistic freedom. With this company in its changing forms over the coming years Grotowski would gradually be able to formulate a new

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function for theatre, through an obsessively purist re-evaluation of the actor's craft.

In general, the work of this period was an intellectually manipulative and heavily conceptualised theatre of effects and artificiality. It reflected a neo-constructivist emphasis on design and the technical media of production, in which the actor's role was highly structured, disciplined and stylised. Actors were seen as puppets supporting the vision of the director as tyrant and ultimately author of the text of the performance event. The work was also marked by initial experimentation into the possibilities of textual montage, the affective content of spatial relationships, and the allocation of roles to spectators (for example, in Byron's *Cain*, 1960, the spectators were designated as descendants of Cain). These were rather clumsy and fumbling attempts to rediscover a theatre of participation, myth and ritual in which the space itself would be as dynamic a protagonist as any other element. On this level, Grotowski's most accomplished and mature production in this period was of Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady* (*Forefather's Eve*, 1961). Here at last content began to be indistinguishable from form. Through an exploitation of the play's possibilities for audience participation, the design by the architect Jerzy Gurawski, integrated the spectators with the action, locating them on chairs in apparently random positions within the performance space. The actors' physical proximity, combined with the obligation to take into account their own observation of other spectators and their reactions, forced the members of the audience into an entirely new relationship of confrontation with Mickiewicz's patriotic 'myth' (*Dziady* is the most performed play from the Romantic period in Poland). This Gustav-Konrad carried a broom on his back, not a cross. In Grotowski's dialectic of 'apotheosis and derision'

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tragedy was counterpointed with the grotesque, play with holiness.

Early in 1962, shortly before the group changed its name to Laboratory Theatre of 13 Rows, the third season was set under way with a production of *Kordian*, by the Polish Romantic poet Julius Slowacki. *Kordian*, an idealistic patriot and failed assassin, is committed to an insane asylum for his crimes. Within that environment, his all-consuming passion for self-sacrifice is mocked; he is considered insane and sentenced to death. In Grotowski's version the asylum scenes became the kernel of the drama, the action located entirely within the hospital. In this way, *Kordian*'s manic individualism was presented as the impotent madness of the sick; his spiritual and poetic blood-letting (in the original enacted heroically on Mont Blanc) was here rendered as the prosaic physical pain of his medical treatment on a hospital bed at the hands of tormenting and business-like doctors. Flaszyn suggests that Grotowski aimed to analyse 'the meaning of an individual act in an era where collective action and organisation are the guarantees of success. Today, the man who tries to save the world alone is either a child or a madman'.² The highly structured staging signalled Grotowski's first successful realisation of his concern to create a new and meaningful spatial relationship for each performance. The floor space was multi-levelled, the only decor made up of hospital bunk beds: both platforms for the action and seats for the spectators, who had roles as patients imposed upon them.

Akropolis, presented at the end of 1962, further investigated from a fresh perspective Grotowski's preoccupation with the spectator-actor relationship, within the framework of an expressionistic and profoundly pessimistic reworking of Stanislaw Wyspianski's text. This material was employed as an instrument of social

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psychotherapy, a purge for collective complexes. Directed by Grotowski in collaboration with the celebrated Polish designer Jozef Szajna (and with Eugenio Barba as Grotowski's assistant), this work was to remain in the company repertoire throughout the sixties. During its evolution through five different versions, it was toured internationally; it met with enormous critical acclaim in the West, as well as vehement charges of disturbingly abstract and aesthetic formalism.

Wyspianski's original is constructed around an old Polish tradition that, on Easter Sunday figures from medieval tapestries kept in the Cracow Royal Palace are resurrected in order to perform biblical and mythological episodes. Grotowski's version was as darkly subjective and brutally guilt-laden as a Francis Bacon image. Grotowski seized on a suggestion that Wyspianski had made that the Palace was 'the cemetery of the tribes', a representation of a civilisation's values with which to confront modern experience. He transposed the entire work, using a fragmented montage of the original text, to Auschwitz. Here, timeless myths and impulses could be enacted by representatives of humanity *in extremis* within an infernal environment, the historical turning point that epitomises the crumbling humanist values of the twentieth century. The actors represented the dead; the spectators, seated in isolated groups on raised daises in and around the central space, were the living, incapable of comprehending the horror embodied by the dead. The spectators were deliberately alienated by the performers, treated as uninitiated outsiders, witnesses from the alien world of everyday life. The two worlds remained mutually exclusive, despite the claustrophobic physical proximity of the performers, heightened by the ceremonial erection of an oppressive architectural structure of ropes and metal

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pipes around and above the onlookers: the bowels of a crematorium, the Acropolis of our civilisation.

The spectator was impelled to watch with fascinated horror the brutalised actor-prisoner's re-enactment of various myths: the Trojan War, Jacob and the Angel, the Resurrection, here delirious dreams, brief moments of wistful escape from the real world of the camp. These enactments were seen as desperate attempts to find meaning in the poetic figures of myth, to reassert values (for instance, love – Paris and Helen) in a search for salvation. Inevitably homosexual, the love scene was a cruel parody, and the conventional image of the value itself was discredited and degraded. In addition, the enactments were continually ruptured by tortuously stylised and rhythmically insistent scenes of forced labour – echoes of the grotesque irony of the Nazi slogan *Arbeit macht frei* ('Work frees') – which had been developed in exhaustive detail during an improvisational period of rehearsal. The dream-like dissolve from reality in the camp to imaginary mythical reality was frequently highlighted or counterpointed by the actors' repetitive incantation of two focal phrases: 'Our Akropolis' and 'cemetery of the tribes'. Using minimal scenic means – a pile of scrap metal (pipes, a bath tub, a wheelbarrow: all instruments of work or torture), Szajna's stark and anonymous costumes (made of sacking, with wooden clogs as footwear), deeply shadowed expressionist lighting reminiscent of a Goya nightmare – and above all the actors' disciplined corporeal means, the production epitomised Grotowski's central concept of a 'poor theatre'. According to this concept, all that is deemed superfluous to the actors' presence and their manipulation of a limited number of objects (mobile metaphors) has been eliminated. So, for example, the actors employed a stove pipe and a rag to represent the bride Rachel in her

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14. *Akropolis* (1962): Cortège of the bride Rachel, represented by a stovepipe. Note the use of facial 'masks'

cortège; such use of compensatory objects was cruelly ironic.

The actors' own expressive possibilities here comprised the development of fixed archetypal 'masks' (death masks) using facial muscles and no make-up; a physical score of precisely choreographed, sculpturally defined movements; and a complex contrapuntal vocal score, composed of inarticulate shrieks, ragged whispers and patterned chants, underpinned by a percussive score of abrasive metallic clankings – words were treated as pre-rational incantation and physical sound. The result was an intricately constructed vision of the darkness of the human condition, an image of humanity destroyed. Contrary to the original, Grotowski's version offered no respite, climaxing in pessimism and death. The Christ–Apollo figure that the

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exulting prisoners bear aloft to lead them into their future was the limp and headless dummy of a corpse. Their suffering had blinded them to reality. Singing together in jubilation and ecstasy, they processed around the space, disappearing one by one into a large box – the crematorium. The lid banged shut with awesome finality. Seconds later, a gentle voice emerged from the roaring silence to tell us, 'They are gone and the smoke rises in spirals.' As victims of collective myth, their release had proved empty; the pursuit of an illusory ideal had led to the sterility and anonymity of ashes. There could be no applause.

A similar predicament awaits the central eponymous character of *Doctor Faustus*, the group's next production (1963). Grotowski entirely restructured Marlowe's text, placing Faustus's final hours as the opening scene. The tiny number of spectators, sometimes no more than twenty, were invited guests at a last supper, witnesses to Faustus's confessional and darkly magic re-enactment of episodes from his life: a secular passion. They were seated along two central monastic refectory tables (stages for past events, the stations of the cross in Faustus's journey) in unnerving proximity to the action. Faustus himself (Zbigniew Cynkutis) presided at their head on a third, adjoining table: the present. His symbolic costume, reminiscent of the medieval theatre, was the white robe of a Dominican monk, contrasting sharply with the Jesuitical black of the Mephistos (played by both a man and a woman). Further claustrophobic concentration and focus was established in part by the complete absence of scenic properties – the actors created them using only their bodies – and particularly by the compression of the space as a whole within a severe wooden wall-like structure. Much of the vocal score was delivered from behind this screen,

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surrounding the spectators in a vibrant web of sounds complementing or undercutting the physical images before their eyes; they were placed in the very eye of the storm. Grotowski's overtly manipulative spatial design was intended specifically to provoke and dismay the spectators into authentic human reactions, the actors' aggressive physicality and raw emotionality taking place literally inches from their faces. Within their roles, the actors had prepared beforehand a number of different behavioural possibilities to respond to the limited number of reactions they believed the spectators capable of making.

Typically, Grotowski inverted the myth of Faustus, to confront traditional religious taboos. He presented him as the paradigmatic secular saint, a rebel necromancer and Promethean martyr so obsessed with his search for knowledge and truth that he condemns himself to damnation. However, the individual's self-sacrifice proves to be an act void of meaning in this context. Like Kordian's, Faustus's moment of triumphant resolve and fanatical clarity is illusory, symptomatic of madness. He is both executioner and victim. As he is dragged from the space like an inanimate object, his body an inverted cruciform, 'out of his mouth comes a piercing scream and inhuman, inarticulate noises. Faustus is no longer a man, but a sweating, suffering animal, caught in a trap, a wreck who screams without dignity'.³

After a brief and unsuccessful experiment in the possibilities of collective creation entitled *The Hamlet Study* (1964), the group moved their base to Wroclaw, an academic centre in south-west Poland early in 1965. This was followed by a change of name to 'Laboratory Theatre: Institute of Research into Acting Method', a title clearly reflecting the nature of the group's concerns.

Since *Siakuntala* in 1960, Grotowski had been

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elaborating systematic actor training for the group. Gradually it had become much more than preparation for performance, rather a *process* comprising an integral part of their daily and individual research work. This training was to bear fruit in the collective public works from 1962 onwards. Grotowski has publicly avowed his debt to the challenge proposed by Stanislavski, in terms of the profundity and rigour of his exploration of the actor's craft and of his incessant reappraisal of what had already been achieved. Yet Grotowski has studiously avoided what he sees as the desecration and assassination of Stanislavski's work in its ossification after his death into a 'method'. He refutes the belief that an ideal system can be built, instead demanding the development of *individual* techniques and methods for confronting and eliminating whatever blocks a person's creative process; everyone's obstacles are different and changing, and individual methods must evolve organically with them. Any universal prescription can only impede authentic self-research (work on oneself) and spontaneous self-expression.

Specific techniques and exercises were nevertheless borrowed, in an adapted form, from a variety of sources. These included the Kathakali dance drama of India, source of the facial masks and the desynchronisation of limbs and face, as independent means of expression, in *Akropolis*. There the actors had presented physical configurations comprising elements of deliberately contrasting emotional content or rhythm – the feet tapping out an expression of joy, the hands a fluttering of insanity, the face locked in anguish. In this way the actors become charged polyphonic images combining contradictory associations. Grotowski also drew upon elements of classical Chinese and Japanese theatre training, hatha yoga, Meyerhold's 'biomechanics', Dullin's rhythm exercises and Delsarte's analysis of

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'extrovert' and 'introvert' reactions, as well as the work of certain scientists, psychologists and anthropologists who had studied the nature of human reaction and its relationship to collective myth (for instance, Pavlov and Jung).

The training exercises developed by Grotowski can be divided into two broad categories. First, the *exercices plastiques* comprise a series of fixed forms and kinds of movement, largely independent and arhythmic joint-rotation. As in T'ai Chi, once the forms are mastered they can be employed as springboards to improvisatory exploration of the rhythm of flow, of the composition or order of the forms. Liberation comes from a transcendence of discipline and technique. Such a process entails the rediscovery, each time afresh, of the personal impulses that led to the forms and gave them meaning during the initial period of mastery. Secondly, the *exercices corporels* are a continuous series of acrobatic jumps, somersaults and stands, all aimed at a liberation in relation to space and gravity. They were developed as a means of self-challenge, a provocation to find the courage not to hesitate before the physically (and therefore emotionally) dangerous and unknown. In order to be able to undertake a difficult somersault, the actor has to drop his normal defences and place trust in his body's inherent, animal-like awareness, an intuitive 'intelligence' that would thus be involuntarily activated. Once the somersault has been successfully completed, the actor can become aware of the potential mobility of his self-imposed conception of the boundaries of danger: in addition, a further challenge must be found for him. Grotowski believes that self-fulfilment exists as a possibility only for those ready to probe and extend their own limitations; the process is never-ending. Finally, Grotowski investigated vocal expression through a similar

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process. By bringing his actors to a recognition and subsequent unblocking of psycho-physiological resistances, he aimed to help them rediscover a 'natural voice' and means of respiration, an authentic *vox humana*, necessarily rooted in the body like all emotional expression.

The sum of this training process served as a continuously reassessed and evolving *approach* to creativity. Its primary aim was not athletic development or even corporeal fluidity, but the search for 'objective' laws and conditions determining or stimulating individual expression – the tuning of an instrument before recital. More particularly it aimed to facilitate the activation of what Grotowski refers to as 'body memory': a natural reservoir of impulses to action and expression stored within the physiological make-up of an individual, an intuitive corporeal 'intelligence'. Grotowski is at pains to underline that memory, in this context, cannot be a function of conscious ideation or intellectual analysis. Body memory is the root of all true expression, for it is the body's own retention of an individual's life experiences encoded into his very cells in a deep associational grammar of rhythms, energies and impulses. It is based on the notion that all emotions are linked with certain kinds of muscular activity or physical configurations. If tapped and expressed externally, pure and communicable signs of an archetypal nature may be released. The points of contact with the practice of a number of different schools of contemporary psychotherapy are not simply fortuitous, for the actor, guided by Grotowski as teacher-analyst, experiences a long and therapeutic process of psycho-physical release and reintegration, a means of full self-repossession. Grotowski's role in this process is necessarily very different from that of any conventional theatre director. The

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necessity of fostering a special and intimate relationship with his actors, based on a deep trust with regard to his sensitivity to their individual needs, marked a significant evolution in the group's work by the mid sixties: Grotowski's abdication of a directorial Olympus, supported by the ultimate recognition of the *actor* as supreme creator and of the actor's *presence* as the keystone determining the specificity of theatre. Grotowski has specified the implications of this relationship for him: 'This is not instruction of the pupil but utter opening to another person, in which the phenomenon of "shared or double birth" becomes possible. The actor is reborn – not only as an actor but as a man – and with him I am reborn.'⁴

It is essential to clarify one further and crucial aspect of Grotowski's conception of the training process. Traditionally, actor training in the West is inductive – the acquisition of a series of learnt skills, a 'bag of tricks'. Yet in all Laboratory Theatre training work Grotowski insisted upon a deductive approach – a practical and moral ethic of the *via negativa* (way of negation), characteristic of oriental theatre practitioners and martial artists. Such an approach necessitates the stripping-away of 'how to do', a mask of technique behind which the actor conceals himself, in search of the sincerity, truth and life of an exposed core of psycho-physical impulses. As in alchemy, it is a search for the pure essence, the *substantia prima*, of man. The actor must confront *his own* lies and inhibitions and clear the way for self-transcendence in creativity.

We must find what it is that hinders him in the way of respiration, movement and – most important of all – human contact. What resistances are there? How can they be eliminated? I want to take away, steal from the

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actor all that disturbs him. That which is creative will remain with him. It is a liberation.⁵

Grotowski's descriptions of the process are couched in religious terminology, for he had come to believe that art was by necessity a sacred spiritual undertaking. At the moment of authenticity and transparency that he refers to as the 'total act' (a moment of 'holiness' and 'translumination' in which 'the body vanishes, burns and the spectator sees only a series of visible impulses'), the actor-priest exists as the locus of epiphany. Internal impulse and external expression are synonymous and simultaneous, like a cat jumping or a Kendo swordsman anticipating and parrying his opponent's blow. 'The result is freedom from the time-lapse between inner impulse and outer reaction in such a way that the impulse is already an outer reaction'.⁶

As the Polish critic Jan Blonski has pointed out, implicit within the application of a *via negativa* are the assumptions that latent creative impulses lie dormant within the actor (indeed, are inherent in everyone), and that what remains after the process is common to humanity. The total act – an act of provocation and a public unmasking, a mortification of the flesh enabling spiritual illumination – offers the spectator and actor the possibility of experiencing revelation in exposure and a profound sense of community in shared confrontation. The actor as shaman gives of his own profound self in order to locate the way towards change for the spectator, travelling further on that road in his place. The Theatre Laboratory's next production suggested that the heart of this way lies in what Grotowski sees as the sacrosanctity of self-sacrifice and self-immolation. The act of theatre itself can be a means of salvation for the actor-martyr, a focal point in the creation

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of a 'secular sacrum' located on a human rather than eschatological level.

The Constant Prince (1965), based on Julius Slowacki's version of Calderón de la Barca's seventeenth-century Spanish original, has come to be recognised as the vindication of Grotowski's theoretical and ethical proselytising and of his group's private practical training. It was almost a year in preparation. In Grotowski's version, only the skeletal scenario and baroque tone of Calderón's work remained, and almost nothing of Slowacki's poetry; what little survived was used musically for emotive impact. The production was wholly freed from its original historico-cultural context. The action comprised the humiliation, acquiescence and symbolic castration of a prisoner by a band of persecutors, followed by (and set against) the torture and murder of a second prisoner – Don Fernando, the constant prince, a figure of uncompromisingly inflexible humility and inspirational spiritual fortitude. Showing no opposition to his fate, he passively accepts the role of martyr, offering love and kindness in response to the brutal authoritarianism of his relentlessly cruel torturers, who, in turn, are increasingly fascinated by his refusal to compromise and his 'otherness'; after his death at their hands, they bemoan his loss. The prince (Ryszard Cieslak) wore only a white loin cloth, a symbol of naked innocence and purity in contrast to the heavy cloaks, knee-length boots and breeches of his tormentors, metonyms of an inquisitorial power. His simplicity immediately sets him apart as an anointed figure in possession of true power; the excess of his treatment magnifies his defenceless nakedness. Unable to influence his spirit, they abuse him physically, in this way ironically functioning as agents of his ecstatic apotheosis. In short, it is the Passion of Christ, for

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15a. *The Constant Prince* (1965): Ryszard Cieslak and Rena Mirecka; the actor/martyr abused in a grotesque pietà

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this non-conformist set against society finds salvation through mortification and sacrifice.

However, here there was a marked change of emphasis in Grotowski's approach to the theme of sacrifice. In Slowacki's Romantic version, typically the prince had represented Poland, its resistance to oppression and its suffering indelibly stamped on the collective psyche; a nation epitomising Catholic martyrdom. Konrad and Kordian are revisited in this essentially Polish martyr myth, according to Flaszen 'a basic leitmotif of all the performances . . . a very vital myth in our society. It is part of the Pole's subconscious equipment.'⁷ Yet in his production Grotowski handled the theme in a less nationalistic, more personal way. Above all, the authenticity of the central actor's psycho-physical confession (for such is the fundamental nature of the 'total act') may be seen as an act of ritual redemption for theatre; the myth of the sanctity of martyrdom is reincarnated in the present in the actor's self-transcendence. Our conception of actor and theatre must die in order to be reborn.

The spectators were removed from the bare playing space, looking down on the action from behind the four high walls of a wooden box. This spatial design evoked associations of spectators at a corrida or medieval bear-baiting pit, voyeurs at a secret rite or onlookers at a surgical operation (Flaszen's programme notes made a link with Rembrandt's *Anatomy of Dr Tulp*). From the evidence of his earlier architectural experiments, Grotowski had concluded that direct emotive participation and psychic proximity would result in this case from a spatial distancing of the spectator and his acceptance of the role of witness-observer. In reality, for the spectator this production was an experience of uncomfortable fascination and guilty (if

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enforced) passivity, peering from afar at the prince's predicament below.

For Cieslak's magical and luminous performance was the very heart of the work's greatness. Here Grotowski's ethic – the holy actor, the total act – became indissociable from the aesthetic; his metaphysic became a compelling theatrical reality, in which an authentic spiritual act was made flesh in the present. Here the spectator was able to see how performance can be a means of personal expiation, the route to an attainment of self-realisation: the 'means' as 'end', the actor as subject and object of a revelation. Using his naked body and his voice, Cieslak succeeded in giving strikingly expressive form to a personal journey of self-transgression, punctuated by three increasingly climactic monologues, through physical pain and suffering (his skin became marked and sore as he bounced stoically under his tormentors' *real* blows and his self-flagellation) to psychic illumination as a visible totality of body and spirit, conscious and unconscious. Despite the homo-erotic overtones, no trace of narcissism coloured his work. He appeared as if in a trance-like state of grace, possessing numinousness beyond acting and technical perfection. This liberation of raw psychic energy, a sacrifice of the ego by the ego after a lengthy process of dedicated commitment, made his performance flower as a dense spatial poetry of personal associations and suggestive nuances: the perfect externalisation of an inner journey.

How was the actor's role elaborated and articulated during the rehearsal period? Over a period of six months working in private with Grotowski, Cieslak had built up a personal score focusing a network of primary, elemental impulses unleashed in improvisation and concretised in physical action (including attendant and involuntary physiological reactions: for instance, respiratory changes,

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15b. *The Constant Prince*: Ryszard Cieslak, the 'holy' actor

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profuse sweating, muscular spasms). Grotowski would suggest an image or a fragment of text, related to the tentative scenario he had prepared, a continually reworked montage of the original's essential impulses, for the actor to work and explore. During the actor's work, Grotowski would sit in silence, rarely intervening, to observe and note actions and impulses. Occasionally he would offer a broadly associative image to stimulate Cieslak's own associational response, refloating the exploration when it floundered. The director's role in this process was very different from the manipulative directorial authorship which had been imposed in earlier work, where Grotowski had fixed the actor's roles in a search for a realisation of the effects and images he had predetermined. Here the director was catalyst (provoking the actor's descent into his profound subconscious self), agent of selection and validation of the authenticity and communicability of impulses released in this extreme form of corporeal psychoanalysis; in addition he had to be able to withdraw when necessary so as not to block the flow of the actor's creativity. Grotowski's emphasis throughout was anti-intellectual and experiential: 'I do not believe in the possibility of achieving effects by means of cold calculation'.⁸

Once found in action, a process Grotowski believes only possible in relation to another being – in this case Grotowski himself – the actor's personal motivation would never be vocalised or analysed. Grotowski would locate crucial associational details of a moment of authenticity – an attitude, a rhythm – pointing them out to the actor as possible means of re-entry into the original 'true' impulse. It was then the actor's duty to relocate and reconstitute the detailed psychological processes that had unearthed these crystalline moments in improvisation. Grotowski refers to

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these moments as 'signs', which are *never* figurative or gestural illustrations of a situation or state to be read literally; rather they are associational motifs in the corporeal-spatial totality of the actor's role, points of contact helping the actor locate his own associational context in the process as a whole, each one an image within its own sphere of transpersonal resonances. The sum of these signs, interwoven from moment to moment by a web of personal associations, is the score (role) of each individual actor, while the sum of individual scores (whose coherence it is the director's task to ensure) constitutes the performance made available to the spectators-witnesses. The lengthy process of repetition and refinement eventually allows the actor's 'score', the artificial disciplining structure, to become fixed, a series of conditioned reflexes thoroughly assimilated and recorded within the body. Actor and role interpenetrate in a structure largely contrived by the actor with the director's guidance and encouragement. In performance, each sign (the 'notes' of the score) must be reinvested with the charge of spontaneity by the actor, retracing his personal route during the original creative process yet fully present in the moment.

Apocalypsis cum Figuris, officially premiered in February 1969, was the final Laboratory Theatre production, a work ultimately taking the area of common concern beyond the confines of theatre.⁹ In retrospect, it may be seen as an attempt to pursue the creative process outlined above in an amplified form, to include all of the actors involved in a search through collective creation for a sum of individual 'total acts'. The director's role was neither of instruction nor manipulation, but of respectful expectation and focusing; Grotowski tacitly guided the process, helping the actors to structure their own creative

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responses. Consistent with the group's obsessive evaluatory dissection of Judaeo-Christian mythology, they took as the starting point for exploration the Gospels – the provisional title during rehearsal – and, above all, the Second Coming. Their aim was to rediscover a contemporary significance in the myths, locating the way in which they lived on in contemporary experience, especially the group's own. Flaszen has explained the group's overriding need to avoid a natural tendency in their work to lapse into 'illustrations of the myth'. Consequently, they had to

depart from the myth to discover a point of reality – this being the awareness of the consequences of the myth. What would have happened to Christ if he revealed himself nowadays? In a literal way. What would we do with him? How would we see him? Where would he reveal himself? Would he be noticed at all? . . . then it turned out there is a passage in the Gospel: 'I have come and you haven't recognised me.'¹⁰

Once a physical score had been elaborated and articulated by Grotowski and the actors, the group recognised the need to support certain sections textually. The actors turned to their own concerns, responding to Grotowski's suggestions for areas of search. As a result, the final production contained passages from the Bible, Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, T. S. Eliot's poetry and the writings of the twentieth century ascetic martyr and secular saint Simone Weil: all central voices in the literature of modern human experience, responses to man's evolving relationship with the sacred. Tied to the expressivity of the actors' detailed spatial configurations in performance, the result was a delicately woven web of

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minutely nuanced mythical and historical motifs and images, a visible equivalent of music or modern poetry in the density and mobility of its associational resonances.

Before the hour-long performance, actors and spectators entered the confined darkness of the playing area together; the spectators, numbering just over a hundred, sat either on benches against the wall or on the floor itself. The only hint of theatrical artifice was in two naked spotlights positioned against, and pointing up, one of the walls. No specific costumes were employed and only minimal props: candles, bread, water, a knife – all elemental and archetypal symbols. Bread, for instance, signified the host, the staff of life; candles, spiritual illumination and enlightenment. Almost all scenic effects were achieved by the actors themselves in exploiting their relationship to the space, the light and, above all, to each other. The action of the performance began unannounced with the emergence from the spectators of a small straggling group of contemporary people, suffering somewhat from the after-effects of drink: Dionysian revellers at the prehistorical source of theatre or merely incarnations of contemporary aimlessness and spiritual emptiness? They came across the solitary figure of a simple tramp ('Ciemny', the Simpleton, played by Cieslak), an innocent and gullible outcast reminiscent of Dostoevsky's 'Idiot'; later he would give voice to the spiritual impotence of Eliot's Gerontion. With bitter and sadistic humour, and a growing suggestion of a deep sense of loss, the group played out fragments of myths at the outsider's expense. For their own entertainment, they enforced the role of the Saviour upon him, subsequently assuming similarly ill-fitting roles of their own (named as Simon Peter, Mary Magdalene, John, Judas and Lazarus). Manifesting an overpowering need to be accepted by others, the Simpleton willingly submitted to

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the role conferred upon him, increasingly suffering physical and intellectual abuse from the others as the role gradually entrapped him. However, the other roles also had an innate life of their own, struggling to possess the individuals involved; the game became ever more serious and dangerous.

The main body of the performance presented the characters' blasphemous struggles to accept or fight against the attractive but enmeshing allure of these roles. For example, Simon Peter was a cynical intellectual, cipher of the existential anguish felt by Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor under the burden of freedom of choice; Mary Magdalene was a sleazily sensual procuress, insistent upon a literal and profane embodiment of Christian spiritual love in an act of enforced physical sex with the Simpleton,



16. *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* (1969): Ryszard Cieslak (the simpleton) and Elizabeth Albahaca (Mary Magdalene); the theatre event as meeting place

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further debased by the gloating and snickering of the others looking on; she found her voice in the Song of Solomon. Eventually they were all consumed, and in growing darkness the action closely followed Gospel accounts of Jesus's final hours from the Last Supper to the Crucifixion, in the equivalent of which the Simpleton was garrotted. Simon Peter's final words filled the darkness: 'Go, and come no more.' The lights immediately came full up, the space was empty but for the debris of desecration: spilt wax and water, sodden and violated pieces of bread. The spectators were left stunned and alone to assimilate what they had witnessed. For some, it was an exploration of certain underlying psychological needs, elements of psychoanalytic transference taking form as a contemporary passion play, a bitter dirge for a paradise lost. Seen in this way, the play's blasphemous quality was symptomatic of confessional nostalgia, a means of reinstating values, in this celebration of the primordial instinct to lend meaning to experience by linking it to mythopoeic impulses within. For others, the play was a tragic farce, a collective exorcism of the imprisoning and illusory attraction of communing with ancient myths and motivation. The ambiguity was deliberate and necessary. For all, it was a validation of the possibility of direct human communication in a literal tangible event; something authentic had happened. The affective charge of the actors' presence, their emotive proximity freed from the insulation of so many of the trappings of conventional theatre and culture, left few unmoved.

In its evolving form over the next twelve years of its existence in performance, *Apocalypsis* came to represent for Grotowski a potential meeting place, a point of conjunction offering a further blurring, and ultimate elimination, of barriers separating actor from passive

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observer. The very nature of this evolution, besides investing the actors' relationship to their roles with new life, reflected the changing priorities within the group. It comprised the elimination of all traces of artificial theatricality and of the construction of an 'artistic' object to be appraised: for instance, originally the actors had worn symbolic costumes (all dressed in white apart from the 'outsider' Simpleton, in black with a white stick) and the spectators had sat on benches, which tended to inhibit participation. By the mid seventies, participation was tacitly encouraged at performances. By that time, *Apocalypse* was only performed as a prelude to inviting all those interested in participation to undertake further work with the group. The play's final performance came in 1979.

During the late sixties, Grotowski had become increasingly frustrated and disillusioned by the divisive limitations of theatre practice. He was saddened by the result of his group's extensive world tours and the dissemination of his own writings. The superficial trappings of the original work had been consumed, and had remained undigested, by 'disciples', particularly in America. They had ignored his insistence on the ethical foundations and responsible inner commitment underpinning these forms, without which they would collapse into ersatz expressionism and 'ecstatic' clichés denuded of any true impulse to ecstasy. Such work was a 'dance of whores'.

A second factor determining Grotowski's movement away from theatre stemmed from his vision of theatre as an arena for researching the quality of contact between actor and spectator. By 1965, his aesthetic had evolved as far as the realisation of a 'total act' by the actor, which he believed offered a provocation to a particular kind of spectator: one willing to 'disarm' by confronting his own motivations beneath the social mask, one who has

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genuine spiritual needs and who really wishes, through confrontation with the performance, to analyse himself . . . , who undergoes an endless process of self-development, whose unrest is not general but directed towards a search for the truth about himself and his mission in life¹¹

Grotowski believed that the total act would be an inspirational gesture of 'positive disintegration', a painful public confession of physio-psychotherapeutic value to the actor. As witness to the act, the spectator would be denied the security of an artificially imposed role – he was simply a human being present in the same space and time. Potentially he could meet the challenge of the act, in turn undertaking a similar process in an attempt to locate and transcend his own personal limitations. Such was the theory. In practice, Grotowski discovered that the very authenticity of the act reinforced and accentuated theatre's basic division into active and passive. The challenge would often lock the spectator into a kind of admiring but resentful distantiation, preventing the encounter that Grotowski repeatedly underlines as the core of any act of theatre. His logical conclusion was the need to redefine the structure of the work (theatre), and to develop instead a new form and a new relationship capable of assimilating those present who wanted to leave their traditional passivity behind.

Most importantly, Grotowski recognised the *process* of fostering and developing a special relationship between actor and director as human beings to be the most valuable element in his work. When this process was part of the production of a performance – an art product – traces of manipulation in the shaping of the artefact necessarily remained. The actor's impulses were somewhat re-formed

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in the structuring of a sequence of signs and ultimately of his role. As a *human being*, Grotowski felt unwilling to impinge in that way for the sake of a piece of theatre. He felt that his intrusion falsified and despoiled the creative relationship of human being communicating with human being.

I am interested in the actor because he is a human being. This involves . . . my meeting with another person, the contact, the mutual feeling of comprehension and the impression created by the fact that we open ourselves to another being, that we try to understand him: in short, the surmounting of our solitude.¹²

If art is 'a play between manipulation and inspiration', then Grotowski had to forsake manipulation – and therefore art – in favour of the search for a way of life permitting the reality of inspiration: the eradication of product in favour of process. There could be no more theatre. In 1970, after a solitary journey in India and Kurdistan, he announced in a statement made at New York University and subsequently published as 'Holiday', his abandonment of theatre as the means of his search. It had become a 'ghost-town' for him: 'I am not interested in the theatre anymore, only in what I can do leaving theatre behind'.¹³ At the same time, he asserted that the fundamental aim of the search remained the same: what were the conditions permitting human beings to meet and reveal to one another their authentic personal motivations – 'man as he is in his totality'¹⁴ – without fear?

Grotowski's pronouncements at this time were associative and paradoxical. Those who were able to find an intuitive echo for their own aspirations and needs in his

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words, those who felt in some way akin, would eventually be invited to participate directly in a search for

games, frolics, life, our kind, ducking, flight; man-bird, man-colt, man-wind, man-sun, man-brother. And here is the most essential, central: brother. This contains 'the likeness of God', giving and man; but also the brother of earth, the brother of senses, the brother of sun, the brother of touch, the brother of Milky Way, the brother of grass, the brother of river. Man as he is, whole, so that he would not hide himself; and who *lives* and that means – *not everyone*. Body and blood this is brother, it is the bare foot and the naked skin, in which there is brother. This, too, is a holiday, to be in the holiday. All this is inseparable from meeting. . . . In this meeting, man does not refuse himself and does not impose himself. He lets himself be touched and does not push with his presence. He comes forward and is not afraid of somebody's eyes, whole. It is as if one spoke with one's self: you are, so I am. And also: I am being born so that you are born, so that you become: and also: do not be afraid, I am going with you.¹⁵

The work of the period from 1970 to 1975 has become known as 'paratheatre'. For the first three years, the group (now enlarged to fourteen, to include a new generation of non-actor Laboratory Theatre members) worked in private. This work was focused around the renovation of a number of old farm buildings in a rural environment near Wroclaw; this activity was used as a means of establishing a different rhythm, and a new relationship between the group and the natural world and between individual members. In 1973, the work was opened up to the public in the first 'special project'. Participation was through a

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mutually agreed selection process in which the group looked for individuals not necessarily involved in theatre, but with an appropriately open predisposition, for whom the work would be *necessary*. All of the 'special projects' around the world over the next two years attempted to create conditions mirroring those of the group's own rural retreat in Poland; what happened within these conditions remained unprepared. In an isolated but secure environment, they looked for the means of facilitating practical, tangible experience, tacitly encouraging participants to channel any innate impulses into dynamic physical action: work or play. (In this respect, the group's aims were similar to the self-actualisation at the heart of much humanistic psychology, encounter and release therapy.) Space and action were literal, not symbolic, as in most theatre. Simple activities, conducted almost entirely without words, included digging, chopping wood, communal eating and washing. The normal frames of reference of alienated urban man were deliberately dislocated, and all supports and socially acceptable cushions to experience were removed; neither watches nor stimulants were permitted. The group was attempting to create a natural human rhythm, freed from normal social constraints and determined by the body's own impulses: an animal rhythm of waking, working, resting and sleeping.

In June 1975, this initial period of paratheatre reached its climax with the University of Research of the Theatre of Nations, held at Wroclaw. The fruit of private and small-scale work was made available to a wider group, numbering over 5000. There were performances, public meetings and private workshops with a number of distinguished directors: Eugenio Barba, Jean-Louis Barrault, Peter Brook, Joseph Chaikin, André Gregory, Luca Ronconi. Specialists from psychology, anthropology and medicine

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were also invited. Every day, consultative workshops and seminars with Grotowski and other members of the Laboratory Theatre took place; every evening, a different group or individual led paratheatrical sessions, called *uls* (beehives). There were also a number of smaller, more private paratheatrical exercises in neighbouring rural areas.

The next period of work, until 1977, was focused around *Mountain Project*, directed by Jacek Zmyslowski, a Pole in his early twenties; Grotowski kept a close eye on the development of the work. The project was divided into three distinct steps; each step (and, indeed, each project as a whole) was necessarily unique, its content determined to a large degree by its participants. The first section, *Night Vigil*, took place in Wroclaw: a night of free, silent improvisation served to determine the participants' suitability and readiness to proceed to *The Way*, the second stage. This comprised a journey of 'pilgrimage', on foot, across unknown country to a mountain. The route was physically exhausting, the distance sufficient to necessitate spending at least one night in the forest. The final section, *Mountain of Flame*, saw the pilgrims' arrival at their goal, a ruined and partially renovated castle (lent to the Laboratory Theatre by the state) at the summit of a heavily wooded mountain. The castle contained spaces for improvisatory work, stimulated by the participants' sense of release at overcoming the demands made on them to reach their goal, and by the intimacy born from shared extreme experience.

After 1977, the members of the group researched increasingly divergent and specialised areas of work, although retaining a common aim: the search for conditions encouraging the opening of innate energy enabling a meeting and co-creation with another, a genuine

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inter-human exchange in which exchange itself was the content. Posters from this period describe the Laboratory Theatre as 'an institute involved in a cultural investigation of the peripheral areas of art and in particular of theatre'; Grotowski renamed the work 'active culture'. Its climax came in a project entitled *Tree of People* (1979), a participatory work involving a large number, in which all elements of collective life were located *within* the work process.

Since 1977, Grotowski himself has led a more intimate, closed research project investigating individual processes within a variety of traditional, ritual means of awakening perception and presence. From 1978 to 1982, the 'Theatre of Sources' (*Teatr Zrodzel*) was to occupy him and an intercultural group of specialist practitioners (including Japanese, Haitians, Indians, Balinese and Mexican Indians) both in Poland and abroad. They studied archaic cultures' active 'techniques of sources' (yoga, Haitian voodoo, Sufi whirling, Zazen meditation, martial arts training) with the intention of locating the pure primordial impulses of celebration and meditation. All of these techniques seek to animate spiritual aspirations and a prerational numinous inner life by means of precise physiological movements and actions: movement as perception. Together with his group, Grotowski developed a series of simple movements and activities, in appearance similar to T'ai Chi or yoga. In 1980 an open group tested them for their accessibility, immediacy and meaning for others. Results were inconclusive, and Grotowski's research continues to this day (1987). In 1983 he became professor at the School of Fine Arts at the University of California, Irvine, where he currently leads a long-term research project.

In August 1984, exactly twenty-five years after the inception of work at Opole's Theatre of 13 Rows, the

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Laboratory Theatre officially announced its dissolution. As a cohesive unit it has ceased to exist. It is too early to assess the implications of its members' recent and current concerns. The development of its director shows how a concern for truth in performance and in actor-audience relationships can lead away from theatre to a broader concern for authenticity in human relationships at large.

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1. Throughout this chapter we are indebted to Jennifer Kumiega's *The Theatre of Grotowski* (London: Methuen, 1985), a thorough work of scholarship providing the most detailed analysis available in English of the sum of Grotowski's work to date.
2. Cited in Eugenio Barba, 'Theatre Laboratory 13 Rzedow', *Drama Review*, T27 (Spring 1965) 157.
3. Michael Kustow, 'Ludens Mysterium Tremendum et Fascinosum', *Encore*, Oct 1963, p. 14.
4. Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1975) p. 25.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 16. Cf. Peter Brook's avowed aim in *The Empty Space* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968) to 'bring the actor again and again to his own barriers, to the points where, in the place of new-found truth he normally substitutes a lie. . . . If the actor can find and see this moment he can perhaps open himself to a deeper, more creative impulse' (p. 126).
6. Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 16.

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7. 'Conversations with Ludwik Flaszen', *Educational Theatre Journal*, 30, no. 3 (1978) 311.
8. Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 47. To describe this process, Grotowski prefers the terms 'study' or 'sketch' to 'improvisation', which he feels to have been denuded of meaning by an American *avant-garde* which had misunderstood the links to personal consciousness and structuring.
9. See Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, pp. 239-71, for a detailed 'personal account' of *Apocalypsis* in performance, including translations of all textual material used.
10. 'Conversations with Ludwik Flaszen', *Educational Theatre Journal*, 30, no. 3 (1978) pp. 323-4.
11. Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 40.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
13. 'Holiday - the Day that is Holy', tr. from Grotowski's Polish original by Boleslaw Taborski, *Drama Review*, T58 (June 1973) 116. The Polish word for 'holiday' (*święto*) is used to designate religious and secular holidays; etymologically it is attached to the word for light. For Grotowski it signifies a holy day, a privileged, inspirational time and space for purity and celebration.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*

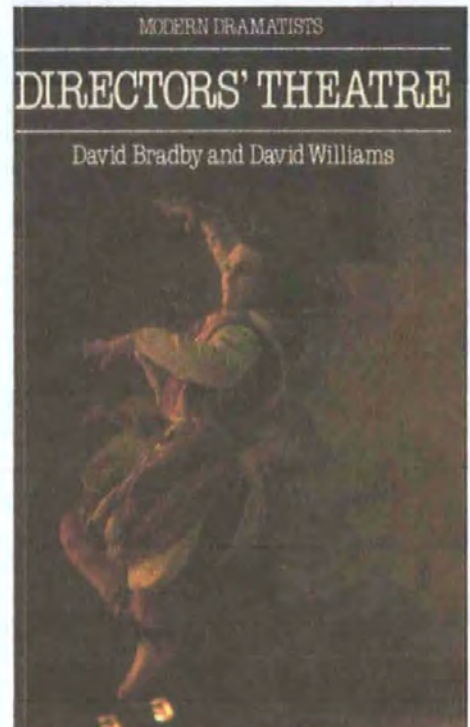
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8

Robert Wilson

Robert Wilson is the supreme example of director as scenic writer. He draws on a wide variety of artistic sources, from symbolism to the visionary architecture of the late twentieth century, from surrealist dream imagery to post-modern choreography and the perceptual modes of so-called 'maladjusted' children. He is unique in his uncompromising fidelity to the realisation of his own visions in performance, fuelled by a quasi-mystical belief in the therapeutic power of art as a stimulus to the individual imagination. He takes his place in the tradition of visionary mystics and romantic innovators of the last 150 years that has its origins in the 'music drama' of Richard Wagner and subsequently in the theories of Edward Gordon Craig. Wagner's principle theoretical legacy is the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*: a synthesis of disparate art forms – dance and movement, light, design, music – into a total work of art. Wilson's major work, from *Deafman Glance* (1971) to the monumental but ill-fated *CIVIL warS* fifteen years later, may be seen as an attempt to realise a

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Gesamtkunstwerk of and for our times. For Wilson's eclectic modernist sensibility is very much the fruit of the late-twentieth-century culture of televisual communication and image saturation. Unlike Craig's imagined artist of the future, he does not work merely with action, scene and voice, but also with playback, freeze-frame, slow motion and other related possibilities of video optics, such as superimposition and reverse negative.

Robert Wilson was born in Waco, Texas, in 1944. In the late fifties, he started a degree in business administration at the University of Texas, but he soon moved to the Pratt Institute, New York, to study painting and architecture; in 1965 he graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. As a student, he quickly became involved in New York dance, theatre and film circles. At high school, he had entered a drama competition with an entirely non-verbal piece: 'Two people in white sat in a room. Now and then there would be a knock on the door. One of them would get up and open it, but there was nobody there. That was all. It became a key piece; I keep going back to it' (*The Observer*, 4 June 1978). In 1963 he created the celebrated giant puppet protagonists of 'Motel', the third part of Jean-Claude van Itallie's *America Hurrah!* In Texas, he had also undertaken some theatre projects with children. As a voluntary worker with the welfare department in New York, he extended this area of interest to encompass brain-damaged or hyperactive children and 'terminally handicapped' adults. Through simple physical exercises, Wilson explored the relationship between mental and physical activity. He soon came to believe that the release of psycho-physical tensions and the location of internal kinetic energies and expressive outlets in motor creativity could stimulate a mental responsiveness. As a child, Wilson himself had suffered from a severe speech impediment until at the age of

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seventeen he met Mrs Byrd Hoffman, a dancer in her seventies, who helped him release certain blocks and tensions through relaxation and movement; the impediment disappeared. He continued to hold teaching posts in various institutions in and around New York into the early seventies: animating children's theatre, often with difficult children considered 'subnormal', leading dance and psychosomatic movement therapy sessions with adults. There were performances of pieces by paraplegics, even a 'ballet' for bed-bound iron-lung patients. Indeed, participants in his workshops – 'ordinary people, borderline psychotics', according to one of them, Stefan Brecht – made up the kernel of performers involved in his early theatre work. Plays were born from the workshops, these idiosyncratic individuals clearly defined and located as such within Wilson's own highly structured settings. Wilson's main concern here was therapeutic: the facilitation of self-expression by refusing to accept that individual peculiarities or handicaps were deviations demanding to be erased. Instead, these idiosyncracies were felt to be symptomatic of different modes of perception and being, inherently valuable both to the individual concerned and to the teacher. Difference was to be prized, stimulated and encouraged, not suppressed in a fallacious process of 'normalisation'.

The mid sixties saw Wilson pursuing a variety of concerns before concentrating his energies almost entirely on the creation of theatre pieces. Having worked with the futuristic architect Paolo Soleri in Arizona during the summer of 1966, in 1967 he was commissioned to create an enormous open-air sculptural environment, 'Poles', a mysterious arrangement of about 600 telegraph poles of differing lengths in a wheatfield in Ohio. Also in 1967, he collaborated at Jerome Robbins' American Theatre

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Laboratory in New York, where he was able to watch the formalist choreographer Balanchine at work. After two minimalist public pieces – *Baby* (1967) and *Byrdwoman* (1968) with Meredith Monk – Wilson began work on his first major theatre work, *The King of Spain* (1969). The production coincided with the formal establishment of a group of collaborators, collectively the Byrd Hoffman School of Byrds, under the organisational umbrella of the non-profit making, tax-exempt Byrd Hoffman Foundation, a small body set up to administer Wilson's work; the unit still survives intact.

Staged in the vast and semi-derelict Anderson Theatre, *The King of Spain* contained in embryonic form the basic constituents that would characterise Wilson's work with the Byrds until *Einstein on the Beach* (1976). At this early stage, he manifested evidence of an innocent, even naïve, theatrical sensibility. All the illusion-making elements of theatre were brought to the fore and fully exploited: stage machinery (drops, traps, pulleys, and so on), elaborate painted backdrops, intricate lighting designs, the framed distancing of a 'stage picture' resultant from an imperative use of the proscenium arch. Wilson has always searched for a classical theatre of surface pretence. To this day, the stage remains for him a prestidigitator's box of tricks, an enchanted locus to be charged with surprises, wistful dreams and dark irrational imaginings. In *The King of Spain*, the four legs of a giant cat traversed the stage, its invisible body out of sight, imagined in the flies above the actors. Concealed microphones distorted and magnified tiny and otherwise inaudible stage sounds – chairs creaking, the pouring of liquids – or disoriented the audience by locating the source of a voice in some distant corner far from its apparent origins. In this way, peculiar but otherwise imperceptible vocal mannerisms and

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textures could be conveyed in a heightened form to the detriment of the usual semantic significance of words. Wilson wanted to liberate the musical sound, colour and structure of language, as well as the individual's physical response to language chanted, intoned, ruptured or flatly declaimed.

Wilson's characteristic compositional approach was elaborated for the first time here. He selected a number of charged images, the fruit of his own or others' dreams and imaginings: the outsized cat's legs (reminiscent of Ionesco's *Amédée*); a fearsome King of Spain in an animal-like mask, seated with his back to the spectators in a high-backed chair; a Victorian drawing-room setting, its back wall shattered to reveal suggestions of a gentle Mediterranean countryside bathed in sunshine beyond. These were sketched, reworked, refined by Wilson in a frenzy throughout the rehearsal process, finally crystallising to determine the broad shape of a scene, its architectonic arrangement.¹ Within these formal givens, the inexperienced amateur performers would slowly and deliberately show themselves as they were, revealing the minutiae of habitual individual activities – incessant chattering, aimless wandering, fluttering hands, and a multitude of less obsessional tics – and widely different physical forms: Wilson's sparkling, regal eighty-eight-year-old grandmother; a pregnant woman; tiny children. One of the Byrds, an Ohio waitress called Susan Sheehy, stood 5 feet 5 inches and weighed 200 pounds (over 14 stone). Wilson's role as director-therapist was to liberate the individual natures and vocabularies of movement of the performers; to elaborate an unfixed score of sounds, movements and gestures sufficiently open structurally to permit the individual performers to act in accordance with their own profound individuality, without fracturing their

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awareness of their relationship to the group and to the space as a whole; to select and refine material and construct the spatial configurations within which to locate the activities; and finally to interweave the multifarious dynamics and textures to produce a kaleidoscopic theatre of images. In rehearsal, Wilson would give the performers purely physical choreographic directions, never psychological or interpretive instructions; he consistently refused to explain the 'meaning' of an image or a scene. He would firmly fix positions, entrances and exits, as well as the particular zone within which a movement or activity was to take place. Although specific cues would be set – normally at the beginning or end of another activity, although some were timed – he allowed the performer a great margin of freedom in terms of the length of an activity, the number of repetitions. So, from a lengthy period of collective movement therapy (with its echoes of Isadora Duncan, one of Wilson's few avowed influences) and vocal release work, Wilson draws impressions, fragments, moods, augmenting any traditional conception of a directorial role by confronting his personal responsibility as graphic artist, designer of settings and rigorously exacting lighting, choreographer, writer and eventually performer.

To a great extent, the nature of Wilson's theatre work was determined by chance encounters with two 'maladjusted' children, the first of whom was eleven-year-old Raymond Andrews, a deaf-mute black boy he met in New Jersey. Deafness (and later, with Christopher Knowles, what had been erroneously diagnosed as 'autism') offered Wilson evidence of alternative perceptual models, infinitely coherent and valid in themselves and perhaps superior to our 'normal' rational mode. Wilson felt that Andrews' paintings bore witness to an unfettered

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sensitivity to colour (which he appeared to be able to use to convey the nature of an individual object's or person's energy or activity) and to the dynamic relationships of figures to space. In addition, Andrews seemed to possess an extraordinary responsiveness to social situations, as well as to music and sound on a corporeal, vibratory level. He was, for Wilson, an 'accomplished artist' on a pre-rational level possessing a profound visual and kinaesthetic lucidity. Wilson believed that extensive contact with certain 'maladjusted' sensibilities and with the alternative channels of communication they exploited would promote in the other members of the group a liberation from socially imposed limitations (both physical and psychological) and a heightened awareness of different possibilities. The ultimate refinement of such work perhaps found its form – and fame – in Lucinda Childs' quirky obsessional dance of self-presentation in perpetual motion in *Einstein on the Beach*.

So Wilson and his group were attempting to adjust their own sensibilities, *not* to manipulate that of their models. Eventually they were able to learn to varying degrees alternative languages of communication and perceptual structures. By exploring and, increasingly, imitating Andrews' non-verbal body language and raw sounds in workshops, they developed a style of performance that was apparently anti-naturalistic in its broadest sense (non-narrative, non-verbal, psychologically acausal), yet for Wilson naturalistic in a profounder way. He suggests that everyone sees and hears on two different levels. In conscious cerebralisation, the stimuli of the external physical world are received by an 'exterior screen', the basis for assimilating most everyday impressions and information. There is, in addition, an 'interior screen' on which to see and hear; although one is only ever aware of it

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while dreaming, Wilson suggests, it is permanently in operation. The blind receive impressions largely on an interior visual screen, the deaf on an interior auditory screen, both of which have become infinitely more acutely developed than in 'normal' people. One of Wilson's primary aims in his early work was to create certain conditions which would induce a state of mind in the spectators in which the differentiation between 'internal' and 'external' becomes blurred, eventually fusing into one unified, unseparated mode of heightened perception. Broadly three areas of concern were explored to establish these conditions: the manipulation of time; the construction of visionary images, and the fracturing of verbal language.

Wilson reacted instinctively against the compression and condensation of time into the conventional theatrical time of the stage. He felt that the speed and surfeit of experience crammed into every moment was blinding to perception and communication. Instead he proposed an infinitesimal fragmentation and hallucinatory expansion of time to create a hypnotic, contemplative reality outside normal time, a reality in which time could be investigated as a spatial dimension. *Deafman Glance* (Nancy Festival, France, in 1971) with *The Life and Times of Sigmund Freud* tacked on as a fourth act, lasted for eight and a half hours. *Overture* (Paris, 1972), at twelve hours in length, was dwarfed by *KA MOUNTAIN AND GUARDENIA TERRACE* ('A story about a Family and Some People Changing') at the Shiraz Festival, Iran, in the same year; which went on for seven days and nights. *The CIVIL warS*, planned for 1984 but never realised fully, was variously estimated to last for anything between nine and seventeen hours. For *The Life and Times of Joseph Stalin* (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 1973), seven acts in twelve hours, the

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spectators were invited to doze, sleep, go out to the lobby for refreshments as necessary or desirable. With the images as infinitely slowly evolving objects in themselves, time was established as peculiar to each activity within the image as a whole. Different rhythms and dynamics were deliberately set up in counterpoint. Sheryl Sutton's darkly ominous Byrdwoman figure, raven perched on one hand, remained totally immobile for inordinate periods – a charged inactivity which must also have had repercussions for the perceptual frame of mind of the performer, like Zazen meditation or the intricate abstract geometrics of the Noh theatre; every so often a runner traversed the stage behind Sutton at high speed, as if he had completed another circuit of some enormous imaginary course located far in the beyond; figures with fish tied to their backs crawled along the front edge of the stage laboriously. At one point, a tightrope walker crossed high above the space, only the legs visible; at other times and other speeds, a naked man, a roller-skater, a St Bernard dog and a lumbering mechanical turtle individually passed across the stage.

In itself, each activity constitutes a permanent present; yet in layered montage it is somehow located outside the exigencies of external time. Indeed, any sense of 'normal' time trickling past comes to feel unreal. One loses an awareness of time as being linear and sequential. In Wilson's world it is relative, pulsing in slow waves between focused points of tension and areas of 'selective inattention'. Never able to formulate a fixed whole, but with ample room to breathe imaginatively, the spectator is free and responsible to choose where he is in relation to the whole or a particular element within the whole: where to look, what to see. In Wilson's theatre, the spectator literally has time to enter fully, withdraw from and re-enter the flow of images at will, his free associative imaginings

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encouraged to wander; liberated from any coercion to attend intellectually, therein lies his participation. After a lengthy period submerged in this decelerated reality, a state of reduced consciousness may take him beyond cerebral response, beyond boredom to a twilight state – like Molly Bloom's half-sleeping, half-waking – a point of renewal of certain perceptions, even hallucination of elements not presented on-stage at all.²

Wilson's anti-intellectual aesthetic is built around furnishing the spectator with an implacably beautiful flow of images, in the widest sense of the word: temporal and spatial configurations of sound, movement and their relationship to space – above all, an architectonic arrangement of simultaneously superimposed elements, like overlaid slides, the contents of which are above all their form. Intuitively constructed and ordered according to lyrical, musical criteria, the various images are presented as part of a continuously evolving tapestry, an apparently self-generating pictorial series. (Wilson's favourite metaphors are of watching clouds drift past, or gazing from a train window while daydreaming.) The series is nevertheless discontinuous in terms of the affect content of individual images. His aesthetic shows no respect for harmony and classical resolution, being coloured rather by deliberately constructed dissonance, rupture and dissociation at all levels: between gesture and verbalisation, between activity and setting, between textures, moods, dynamics, habitual frames of reference. The images have the quality of 'visions', fascinating associational ideograms which 'emanate' unaccountably (and therein lies one of the substantial points of contact with the surrealist images of Dali, Duchamp, de Chirico and above all Magritte). In constant mobility, their ideational content remains always out of reach,

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indeterminate, evasive and non-representational, for they make no reference to a specific external reality; constantly moving in and out of focus as they gradually evolve, they are irreducible objects encouraging the constant mobilisation of a vast network of momentary evocations.

Denied any of the structural supports traditionally employed to guide his responses, the spectator is lulled into a contemplation of the stage space as an encompassing reality within which the dynamics of evolution, change and transformation are precisely what he becomes aware of. The images are structured in juxtaposition, as in dreams (or *Alice in Wonderland*), with scant deference to the logic of linear narrative development or the laws of physics; chairs fly into and out of the space, an eye lights up in the tip of a pyramid (the masonic sign on a dollar note) before the tip in its entirety lifts off and disappears into the flies. These images are Wilson's most crystalline challenge to the limitations of the 'imprisoning' rationality of perception on 'external screens' alone. They offer a procession of moving pictures across the energy field of a stage, culled from the remotest corners of human consciousness, the dumping ground for private neuroses as well as half-remembered fragments of popular mythology and hagiography. The performance is the projection of a film of a mental landscape in which the configurations are Wilson's own, marked by a perfectionist's eye for detail, a painter's formal compositional and tonal sensitivity - from the monochromatic severity of *Patio* (1977) and *Death, Destruction and Detroit* (1979) to the Disneyland technicolour of certain sections of *Stalin* - and an architect's intuitive feel for the dynamics and tensions of spatial relationships. And yet, paradoxically, although the film remains within Wilson's own mental landscape, its coherence for the spectator does not result from his sensing

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the omnipresence of one ordering subjective intelligence or creative awareness. These reflections of deep mental processes take on a starkly impersonal archetypal quality, an 'objective' reality.

In June 1971, *Les Lettres françaises* published an open letter written by Louis Aragon as if to André Breton, who had died fifteen years earlier. As one of the founding protagonists of the original surrealist movement almost half a century earlier, Aragon described the revelation that Wilson's *Deafman Glance* offered him. Particularising the piece as an 'extraordinary freedom machine', and its eighty-seven performers as 'experimenters in a science still nameless, that of the body and its freedom,' he suggested it heralded 'the wedding of gesture and silence, of movement and the ineffable'. He went on to proclaim that this silent



34. *Deafman Glance* (1971): Raymond Andrews, silently observing the images unfolding beneath him; behind him, the pyramid

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somnolent reverie, an 'opera for the deaf' created around a deaf boy (Raymond Andrews) was the miracle the surrealists had awaited:

I never saw anything more beautiful in the world since I was born. Never has any play come anywhere near this one, because it is at once life awake and the life of closed eyes, the confusion between everyday life and the life of each night; reality mingles with dream, all that's inexplicable in the life of a deaf man. . . . It is what we others, we who fathered surrealism . . . dreamt it might become after us, beyond us. . . .³

It is pertinent indeed to see Wilson as an artist in a direct line of descent from surrealism, a legacy immediately apparent in his emphasis on the subliminal power of delirious 'convulsive images', on a pre-rational poetry of incongruity, 'savage beauty' and acausal dreamscapes. In addition, Wilson's relationship to language and text smacks of surrealist automatic writing and dadaist collage, the determination that their creators shared with Artaud to 'shatter language' in order to touch life itself.

Wilson's written texts are made up of a discontinuous montage of fragments from diverse sources. For example, *A Letter for Queen Victoria* and *Patio* both include deliberately half-heard snatches of dialogue from old 'B' movies and American *film noir*. By leaving the television on for long periods (or more than one television simultaneously), Wilson assimilates a flood of verbal splinters in an area of unconscious peripheral hearing while engaged in some other activity, such as painting; much later, he writes down a slightly distorted, deformed version in the manner of Burroughs. Similarly, *\$ Value of Man* was built almost entirely around insidiously repetitive TV

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advertisements as reshaped perceptually by the mind of an 'autistic' child, Christopher Knowles (see below). In *Stalin*, some of the material was drawn directly from discussions of problems in rehearsal: 'Keep that line!', 'But what does it mean?'

Wilson's early works were remarkable for their Beckettian use of silence as a charged entity and for the deliberate inconsistency of vocal projection. Often no attempt was made to communicate to the auditorium what was said on-stage, the spectator merely picking up traces of inaudible mumblings and mutterings. Like much of Gertrude Stein's writing, Hugo Ball's dadaist poems or Robert Desnos' surrealist trances, Wilson's texts are often structured musically as tone poems: obsessively repetitive, an associational aural collage possessing a shamanic incantatory quality. The performers seem to be possessed, oracular ciphers of some indecipherable but authentic experience. The interactional exchange of dialogue is never established; instead it is disrupted or parodied.

Discursive meaning itself is usually undercut through the juxtaposition and simultaneous counterpoint of voices, whether united in a recitative chorale, isolated in parodies of rhetoric or set against pre-recorded music in a sort of vocal Varèse. At moments the text swoops towards a nodal point of apparently cogent rational ideation, before beating a hasty retreat into irrational non-sequiturs, burblings, screams, or the meaningless paralinguistic debris of everyday conversation: 'huh', 'what', 'Hmm', 'yup', 'OK', 'well', or invented sounds such as 'spups', 'birrup'. The text of *Patio*, for example, seems to contain a fumbling attempt at a description of what it is we are witnessing – 'all things are subject to accidentally qualities in a big static space that forms the sculpture' – before departing into an entirely new area, seemingly

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unconnected: 'catch me later maybe I will'; 'what kind of child was he . . .'.

The performers somehow suggest being lured unwillingly by some compulsive force demanding verbalisation. Their simultaneous counter-resistance seems to come as the direct result of the inability of words to meet the more extreme moments of consciousness and imagination. The dynamic tension between these two contrary impulses serves to fragment and distort the word further, as well as providing a characteristic undercurrent of uncomfortable malaise. As for Artaud, Brook, Grotowski and the surrealists in their own linguistic experiments, Wilson's interest is to uncover a music of new sounds and shapes, sliding forms compounded in a process of wilful disintegration. Is it possible to burst through the confines of denotative fixed forms, to scabble through a verbal scree of broken phonemes towards a vital and evolving 'essence', a radiant but inarticulate energy which communicates at a pre-cognitive, subliminal level?

Much of the stimulus for this reappraisal of the nature and role of verbal language came from Wilson's work with Christopher Knowles, a boy seriously brain-damaged from birth. The obsessive behavioural patterns of this 'autistic' child were seen by Wilson as evidence of imaginatively coherent daydreaming on a highly developed 'interior screen'. Wilson first came into contact with Knowles when he was sent a tape the boy had made. Playing with a cassette recorder, he had stopped, started, overdubbed to produce a fractured layering of rhythms and sounds. Wilson saw in Knowles' different mode of perception a similarity with his own concerns; he therefore learnt how to communicate with and encourage Knowles, locating outlets for his creativity. Knowles' tapes and writings subsequently formed the basis of *Value of Man* and *A Letter for Q. V.*

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(the first performance for which a text was published); earlier they were included in *Stalin*, two particularly memorable highlights being a poem entitled 'Emily Likes the TV' and another, 'The Sundance Kid' (in Act 1, scene iv), from which this short extract is taken:

The sundance kid was beautiful
The sundance kid was very very very beautiful
To know the sundance kid dances a lot
The sundance kid was beautiful
The sundance kid was very very very very beautiful
Up in the air
The sundance kid was beautiful
Yeah boom
Yeah the sundance kid was beautiful
Yeah the sundance kid was light brown brown
A kind of yellow
Something like that
Brown a kind of yellow

Knowles went on to collaborate with Wilson on a number of smaller-scale pieces: *DIA LOG/A MAD MAN A MAD GIANT A MAD DOG A MAD FACE A MAD URGE* (1974), *DIA LOG* (1975-6), *DIA LOG/ NETWORK* (1978), *DIA LOG/CURIOUS GEORGE* (1979-80).

All of Wilson's early work until 1973 was really one single developing piece, involving amateur 'Byrd' performers. (After 1973, the number of Byrds involved gradually diminished, until they were replaced entirely by professional performers). *Stalin* contained sections of all the previous performances: the whole of *The King of Spain* and *The Life and Times of Sigmund Freud*, most of *Deafman Glance* and fragments of both *Overture* and *KA*

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MOUNTAIN. The last act was made up of new material. The production was epic in every sense: twelve hours in length, with 144 performers, including the dance critic Edwin Denby, Stefan Brecht, five children from the New York School for the Deaf and a seven-month-old baby, as well as a bestiary of assorted animals (a live goat, dog, sheep and boa constrictor, and a number of fake animals: a walrus, a turtle, polar and grizzly bears, ostriches, a camel,



35. *The Life and Times of Joseph Stalin* (1973): The Ostrich dance

a pink elephant), which served to tip the whole further towards magic and mystery. Protagonists included Queen Victoria, several Stalins, Sigmund and Anna Freud (the former performed by someone Wilson happened to see one day walking through Grand Central Station), Wilhelm Reich, King Philip of Spain, Helen Keller, Alexander

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Graham Bell, Ivan the Terrible and Icarus. The production used 18,000 pounds of scenery, comprising twenty-one major sets, which were financed by the Gulbenkian Foundation.

Freud, Queen Victoria, Stalin, and subsequently Einstein and Hess (the unnamed central figure of *Death, Destruction and Detroit*) – what is the role of such figures within Wilson's work? Although a wealth of biographical material is fed into the performances piecemeal, they are never really *about* any of these figures. In the *New York Times* (14 Dec 1973), Wilson referred to *Stalin* as 'a time construction of the 20th century' as seen through 'one of its forces'. These figures act merely as starting points for a metaphorical examination of or meditation upon the central human concerns and myths of our time; the performances are above all a 'progression of spaces' associatively structured around a central figure. Wilson has said that, instead of Stalin, he might just as well have chosen Chaplin or Hitler. In Brazil in 1974, *Stalin* was performed as *The Life and Times of Dave Clark* in deference to a politically sensitive climate; Wilson was quite happy to use the name of a little-known Canadian criminal he had read about.

Wilson's next major work, the celebrated *Einstein on the Beach*, was first shown at the Avignon Festival in July 1976. This five-hour opera, the most elaborate and expensive spectacle to date (it cost almost US \$1 million to stage), subsequently had its American première in November 1976 at the Metropolitan Opera, New York, the Everest of formal American culture. It marked Wilson's first extensive collaboration with professional performers, including the dancer Lucinda Childs, one of the original founders of the Judson Church Dance Theatre in the early sixties, and his first commissioning of a full score by a

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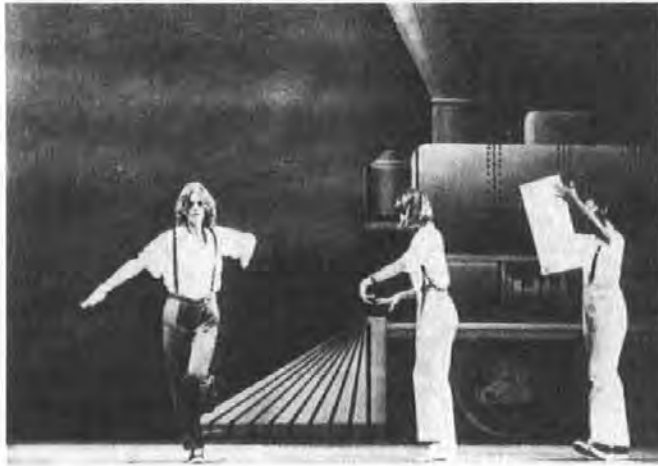
composer, Philip Glass. Wilson's libretto included texts by Christopher Knowles and a mass of semi-biographical details from the life of Einstein, researched extensively by both Wilson and Glass; in particular they latched onto his Romantic mysticism, his reputation as an innocent dreamer, his love of music. The usual stream of visual and aural oneiric images, entirely freed from the constraints of conventional dramatic narrative, was structured mathematically. Each of the four acts was preceded and followed by a 'knee-play', intermezzi which taken together formed a coherent piece in themselves. Each act was divided into three scenes, a dominant visual image recurring every third scene: a train-building; a courtroom and a bed; a field with a spaceship.

Philip Glass's music was written during the preparatory process in response to Wilson's evolving architectonic sketches, ultimately the basis for the set designs. As a series of hypnotic tonal colours patterned through augmentation, diminution and juxtaposition like oriental music, the score offered a perfect complement to and reflection of Wilson's concerns. The recurrence of visual motifs was echoed in the music's cyclical additive structure, its exploration of the interrelationship of stasis and movement. Through the repetition of minutely developing phrases and simple harmonic progressions, and a chanted chorale of numbers and the sol-fa syllables (do, re, mi, etc.), the structure became immediately audible, the process perceptible. The music's machine-like form was its dominant content, its libretto – uniquely made up of these primary elements of tonal and rhythmic structuring – descriptive only of itself.

Once again Wilson wove a tapestry of gestural, auditory and imaginal leitmotifs. Given the temporal concern at the heart of Einstein's research, and having discovered that the young scientist had worked in a patent office dealing

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primarily with clocks while he was elaborating his theory of relativity, Wilson made frequent use in performance of a variety of instruments for the measurement of time. One clock went back an hour every twenty minutes, another had its face covered by a black disc with two small lights set into it – an allusion to the eclipse of 1919 that proved Einstein's theory of the curvature of space. A gyroscope moved ever further along a wire suspended above the stage, representing the passage of time. Wilson also insisted upon the obsessive repetition of certain geometrical angles and shapes, particularly triangles; apparently representing the fixity of a Euclidean conception of the universe, these forms contrasted with Einstein's revolutionary vision of a space-time continuum (evoked in the music and plastic images). Most of the performers were dressed in an



36. *Einstein on the Beach* (1976): Left to right: Lucinda Childs, Dana Reitz and Sheryl Sutton; in the background, a slowly moving train

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Einstein 'uniform' – plain white shirt, baggy trousers and braces. A solitary violinist, made up to resemble the familiar image of the mature Einstein (tousle-haired, with luxuriantly drooping moustache, and so on), looks on from a position of detachment near the orchestra pit; is this 'trial of science' his dream? Thematically the piece seemed to be concerned with a loss of innocence concomitant on technological advancement, the abuses of scientific knowledge, the attendant dehumanisation of ordinary people, the imminence of an apocalypse; the title's allusion to Nevil Shute's novel *On the beach* is no accident. Ultimately, significance is ambiguous, inconclusive. For the penultimate scene, a spectacular vision of the future in a nuclear age, we were taken inside a spaceship which had been seen approaching, on a wire, during the course of the performance. It was a complex of cellular modules, flashing lights and throbbing synthetic pulses. In the final scene, two solitary figures confronted each other in a featureless, post-Armageddon 'no man's land'; they appeared to be lovers on a moonlit beach.

In 1977, Wilson changed direction (partly to offset substantial debts after *Einstein*) to stage a chamber piece of altogether more modest and austere proportions, despite its cumbersome title: *I was sitting on my patio this guy appeared I thought I was hallucinating* (also known as *Patio*). The full title comes from the opening lines of a forty-five-minute monologue Wilson had written, a montage assemblage of fragments of *film noir* stories. Most were of tension and failure, but were underscored by a sombre humour; all remained unresolved. Suggestions abounded of suppressed violence, an unspecified anguish, even of imminent nervous breakdown. However, the fragments refused to coalesce into any overt narrative significance; the piece remained a tone poem of sinister

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elegance and languid menace. For the first act, Wilson directed himself performing the text; Lucinda Childs delivered a contrasting version of the same text in Act II. As Vivian Mercier once said of *Waiting for Godot*, 'nothing happens, twice'.

The performance as a whole was as minimalist and monochromatic as the 'living sculptures' of Gilbert and George, as claustrophobic as a monodrama. Once again, the basic image was constructed according to formal, architectural criteria of harmony and proportion: a black and white interior with three tall narrow windows set into a black back wall. During a prologue, the windows were open, a bright diffused light beyond a uniformly white drop casting long diagonal shafts and shadows into the space, which pulsed with energy and tension.⁴ The performers, both clothed in black and white, were silhouetted. For the central section of each act, the windows filled with bookshelves, the space darkened, focused, closed in upon itself. For an epilogue, during which the last few lines are repeated, back wall and bookcases disappeared; the room was filled anew with a liberating light. The only objects within this rectilinear reductivist decor possessed fine clear sculptural lines, uncompromisingly modernist and 'unhomely', as well as possessing particular relationships to light; surfaces reflected, absorbed or distorted light. The objects were a steel couch, a champagne glass on a glass shelf, a brushed aluminium and glass table, a glass of water and a telephone. A small screen down-stage right relayed film images simultaneous with the 'action'; images included a ringing telephone, the actual 'phone now left off the hook. Body microphones provided a further dislocatory effect, the disembodied text becoming a stream-of-consciousness voice-over, the disjointed utterances of a mind wandering freely. Both acts were accompanied by a

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score composed by Alan Lloyd (piano for Act I, clavichord for Act II). Wilson's performance was steeped in scarcely suppressed hysteria; he suggested a fraught, self-defeating Fred Astaire. The second act was a quite different experience. Childs' tensions remained more discreet and equivocal, her hysteria more internalised, her minimal spiral movements more closely related to a recognisable conception of choreography; Lauren Bacall or Bette Davis sprang to mind.

By this time, Wilson had become a virtual expatriate. As the 'darling' of art-theatre circles in Europe, his work was lauded and championed; however, he has remained a peripheral figure in the United States, where financial aid has often been unforthcoming owing to the prohibitive expense of staging many of his productions. His next two major productions, both in 1979, were commissioned and produced in Europe: *Death, Destruction and Detroit* (at the Schaubühne am Halleschen Ufer, Berlin, in February) and *Edison* (at the Théâtre de Paris, Paris, in October). For *Death, Destruction and Detroit (DDD)*, Wilson returned to the epic proportions of his earlier work. The result was five-and-a-quarter-hour 'opera' in two acts (ironically referred to in the text as 'A Love Story in 16 Scenes'). Wilson considers it his best work to date, the most successful in terms of text and visual imagery; it has continued to fascinate him into the 1980s.

This period marks the apogee of Wilson's experiments, his veneration and celebration of light as an active dynamic protagonist, a vibrant spatial determinant as flexible and evocative as music. In a review of *Edison* in the *New York Times* (30 Oct 1979), John Rockwell described Wilson as a 'mystic of light'. There is a clear debt to the writings and designs of the Swiss visionary theoretician Adolphe Appia, forefather of modern theatre lighting. In his seminal work

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Music and Production (Die Musik und die Inszenierung, 1899), Appia had detailed suggestions for the staging of Wagner in terms of rhythmic space, formal shape, colour and, above all, light. He had dreamed of a neo-Platonic theatre of intimation and suggestion within which light would be the primary agent for the implication and activation of the numinosity of space, the brush with which to paint the vision. For the mixed group of performers involved in *DDD* – young unknown professionals, a number of old cabaret artists, a company of amateurs of diverse age, plus four of Stein's Schaubühne company (including Otto Sander and Sabine Andreas) – there were five months of preparation, including an unprecedented three and a half weeks devoted exclusively to full-costume lighting rehearsals. The final performance manifested Wilson's sensitivity to the affective and spatial possibilities of light and shadows. In a number of minutely detailed chiaroscuro images, Wilson established himself as the modern theatre's Caravaggio in his treatment of statuesque and often immobile figures set against his own backdrops. In themselves, these drops created extraordinary moments of ominous tension, focus and mobility within immobility. Their characteristically broad diagonal lacerations possessed the velocity, rhythms and dark spatial energies of the frantic graphite and ink sketches that were their source; these were blown up photographically and reworked through re-exposure and realignment before being painted onto the drops using the conventional grid method. In terms of lighting-effects, for scene 9 Wilson borrowed as backdrop Albert Speer's original design for a Nuremberg rally: eighty spots located in the floor at the back of the space projected parallel beams vertically, to create a veritable wall of light. The cost of this one effect contributed to the abandonment of a projected revival of

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37. *Death, Destruction and Detroit* (1979): Wilson's own backdrop: mobility within immobility

DDD at the Metropolitan Opera, New York, in summer 1979.

The starting point and central figure of *DDD* was the former Nazi deputy Rudolf Hess, although Wilson kept this a secret from the German press and audiences; indeed, a photograph of Hess was deleted from the programme at the request of the Schaubühne producers, who felt it to be misleading and too sensitive politically. As a result Hess's presence within the piece went largely unnoticed at the time, although foreknowledge of it would have made a significant difference to the spectator's perception of the work as a whole. As usual, a famous figure was treated as a numinous focal point for a formal investigation of what radiates from it within the playground of Wilson's own imagination. Given Wilson's poetic, conceptual concerns, the figure in question inevitably becomes both depoliticised and aestheticised; perhaps justifiably, Wilson

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has been attacked by the broad left throughout his career for his apolitical, even reactionary, formalism. Wilson found his initial stimulus in a photographic image of Hess raking leaves within the Spandau compound; this one image became the occasion for another epic Wilsonian associational daydream. Wilson was startled by certain formal elements of the photo—the quality of light on Hess's hand and stick, his withdrawn blank expression foreshortened by a degree of over-exposure, the texture of the prison wall. He made a huge number of copies which he enlarged to the point of dissolution of significance, echoing the way in which human activity had been treated in the early works; all that remained were compositional abstractions of greys and whites.

He then commenced research into the figure of Hess, uncovering a 'mysterious madman', a 'footnote to Hitler' who lives on in the solitude of a 'prison-palace'. In final performance, a mass of allusions were made to certain biographical details, some familiar (the Nuremberg rallies; Hess's abortive solo flight and parachute landing in Scotland; Spandau prison), others more obscure to us. One scene enacted a notorious incident when the young Hess placed a handful of earth from the four corners of Germany beneath his baby son's cradle. In performance, this fragment was portrayed without introduction or exegesis as a painfully slow ceremony, gradually developing into a tap dance and eventually a bizarre ritualistic series of wild movements, atavistic and fanatical. In another scene, in Hess's prison cell, Spandau's solitary prisoner was a self-absorbed old man dancing in silence to a Keith Jarrett piano improvisation. As the space filled with waltzing couples in full evening dress, he continued unabashed, ignoring them until they finally faded away into dark corners; once again, he was an old man dancing alone. Frau

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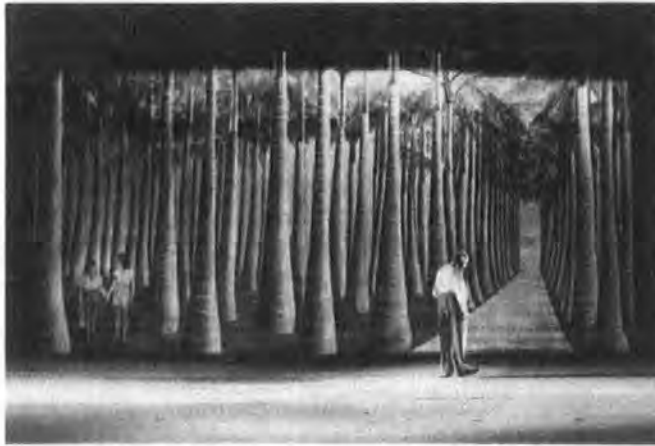
Ilse Hess and Hitler's architect Albert Speer – the latter originally imprisoned in Spandau with Hess – also appeared within the piece; Hitler, Goering and Dresden were referred to in the text, and there were echoes of monumentally cumbersome Nazi architecture in the designs (for instance in scene 7, 'A Contemporary Interior'). Above all, suggestions of Frau Hess's devotion and compassion recurred. The play's final image showed an old woman quietly lamenting her solitude, confronted by a huge, featureless and impenetrable wall. The form of the performance had been poignantly circular, for it had begun with the lone figure of Hess on the *other* side of the same wall. The subtitle referred us to Frau Hess's 'love story'.

It is possible to trace loosely some of the strands of the performance's associative development, a chain of collective clichés from popular mythology led through a maze of spatial and temporal leaps and incongruities by Wilson's private imaginings. So, for example, in scene 3 the figure of a parachutist (Hess) hung suspended above a group of berobed judges or priests; in a scene charged with a sense of chastisement and retribution, they danced, gesticulating at the impotent sacrificial figure above with their neon sticks.⁵ From Hess's fascination with flying (evinced by his journals) and the above allusion to his most famous journey by 'plane, Wilson contrived to imagine a meditation by Hess in Spandau on the future space race. This led to a number of science-fiction scenes; the programme located scene 4 'in the future, a thousand years later, on a different planet during an electrical storm', and scene 16 involved a race between two ovoid cars 'somewhere in a future desert'. Man's future technological capabilities were juxtaposed with scenes of his terrestrial origins and ancestors; spectators witnessed, for example, the battles of prehistoric creatures, including two

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psychedelic dinosaurs, 'one big and green, the other, small, fat and red'. The conquest of space was further linked both to Nazi *Lebensraum* (expansionism) and to the myths of the Wild West; in scene 10, depicting what the programme called 'a mythical struggle close to our time', cowboys and Indians battled in a Western landscape.

The text was constructed in English entirely by Wilson. For the performance, it was translated by the Schaubühne Dramaturg Peter Krumme into German, a language of which Wilson has almost no knowledge. In rehearsal, his only textual suggestions to the actors related to rhythmic and tonal form. His concern was to arrange the material architecturally, spatially, as an integral component in the artificial construction of image configurations. In performance, the text was apprehended by the spectator as a musical structure, a score of recurrent rhythmic and tonal



38. *Death, Destruction and Detroit*: The impermanence and fragility of relationships, set against a Wilson trompe l'oeil drop

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motifs. As in *Patio*, the primary semantic suggestion was of the impermanence of relationships; scenically and textually, the audience was offered fragments of fleeting encounters, departures, absences, unfulfilled desires, the loneliness of separation, memory, the passage of time. As the performance developed, semantic frameworks and apparent structures of exchange were increasingly ruptured. The incidence of echo and repetition heightened until a breaking-point was reached, when verbalisation collapsed into a juxtaposition of separate voices, or the separate constituent elements of the original whole.

The power of the production lay in its images. For example, in the scene entitled 'The Kitchen', a mother in a long black dress read a fairytale about Mother Bear and Red Robin to a small child on a tiny chair. They were inside an empty white room, at the centre of which hung a surreal oversized lightbulb. The child, a book in his lap, listened attentively while eating a green apple. The atmosphere of gently domestic suppression and confinement finally shattered at the end of the scene with the appearance of an elephant's trunk. The child quietly climbed into it; liberated, he floated away out of sight and into another reality. This image reflected the enchantment Wilson hopes to elicit from the acquiescent spectator, open to his magical reveries. Like the elephant's trunk, they exist above all as temporary 'freedom machines', inviting access to an exploration of and revelatory confrontation with the poetic sources of our own imaginations, their fears, hopes and dreams.

In the early eighties, Wilson continued to provoke acclaim and outrage in equal measures, with a small number of beautiful, if short-lived, works. The most notable of these was *Great Day in the Morning* (1981), a piece built around the dignity and hope inherent in the

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sources of black spirituals, and produced by Wilson in collaboration with his friend the opera singer Jessye Norman. Recently Wilson was awarded the Pulitzer Prize by the advisory panel, only to be rejected by the Pulitzer Board, a situation echoing that of Hemingway in 1940 with *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. The monumental *CIVIL warS* project, envisaged by Wilson as an intercultural 'shooting star', fell victim to the indifference of American funding bodies. Ironically, the work that would have brought Wilson's imagination back to an American audience stumbled at the last financial hurdle; despite massive financial commitment from those countries around the world involved in the production – Japan, France, Italy, Germany, Holland – last-minute support from the Los Angeles Olympic Arts Committee was unforthcoming. The project, whose separate parts had already been performed in their countries of origin, contained a pageant



39. *CIVIL warS* (1984): The Rotterdam section

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40. *CIVIL warS*: The Cologne section

of mythical and historical figures, including Voltaire, Frederick the Great, Mata Hari, General Lee, the photographer Matthew Brady, Henry IV, Karl Marx, Don Quixote, Admiral Perry, various characters from the works of Jules Verne, Marie Curie, Abraham Lincoln and his wife, Joan of Arc, Garibaldi, Hercules, Hopi Indians, ninjas, dancing and singing giraffes, lions, tigers, zebras and giant traveller parrots. After last-gasp attempts to salvage the project, including a proposed simultaneous broadcast of the projects from around the world, had come to nothing, Wilson was left embittered and heavily in debt.

There is one positive element to have emerged from the sorry *CIVIL warS* saga. It marked the genesis of a continuing friendship and collaboration between Wilson and a writer of considerable weight and maturity, the East German Heiner Müller, formerly *Dramaturg* with the Berliner Ensemble. Wilson and Müller first came together

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on the Cologne section of *CIVIL warS*, by all accounts the strongest; there, the friction of juxtaposing Müller's emotionally fraught, densely imagistic texts with the distanced formality of Wilson's staging produced surprising creative sparks, the one illuminating and feeding the other. In October 1984, Müller's *Medea* texts ('Despoiled Shore', 'Medeamaterial' and 'Landscape with Argonauts') served as prologue to Wilson's operatic version of Euripides' *Medea* (Lyons Opera and the Festival d'Automne, Paris) with music by the British minimalist Gavin Bryars. Finally, in 1986, two new works have brought Wilson back to American audiences, with fresh acclaim. Müller's *Hamletmachine* was staged by Wilson at New York University with an amateur student cast. The piece is a plotless but astringent meditation on Hamlet and Ophelia, sexual politics and the 1956 Hungarian uprising, studded with a myriad of other, more obscure political, psychological and historical allusions. In part 4 of Müller's text, Hamlet splits the heads of Marx, Lenin and Mao with an axe; in another scene, an actor tears in half a photograph of Müller himself with great deliberation and ceremony. Then in March 1986 came Wilson's first full confrontation with a classic text, which seems to have focused and not restricted his outlandish imagination; his first major première in the United States for a full decade, it was an unquestionable commercial success. His version of Euripides' *Alcestis*, with a prologue by Müller, was produced by Robert Brustein's American Repertory Theatre at Cambridge, Massachusetts. Having already been engaged to stage a version of Gluck's *Alceste* at the Stuttgart Opera at the end of 1986, Wilson was intrigued by the possibility of pairing the two very different works in the same year. (Similarly, Wilson's version of Euripides' *Medea* had been paired with a simultaneous production,

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also in Lyons, of the first revival for almost 300 years of Marc-Antoine Charpentier's baroque opera *Médée* [1693], with the original French libretto by Thomas Corneille.)

In his prologue, a thirteen-page unbroken sentence called 'Description of a Picture', Müller presents us with what he describes as 'a synthetic fragment of a landscape beyond death'.⁶ He has publicly detailed his sources for the piece: a drawing in his possession, the Noh play *Kumanaka*, book xi of *The Odyssey*, and Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*. He has appropriated and redefined elements from these sources into an entirely new whole, a process Wilson saw fit to extend in production. Originally entitled 'Explosion of a Memory', in performance the prologue was delivered in a fragmented form on tape by overdubbed and intercut voices (including those of Christopher Knowles and Robert Brustein), overlapping with live voices on stage; largely desemanticised and almost entirely incoherent, the piece was treated musically, Wilson contriving to create a distance between sound and image. Müller's original text both echoes the death and rebirth themes in Euripides, and reflects a number of Wilson's major production images and themes: birds, rock falls, the mountain range, the three trees, an eye, the relationship between death and sex.

For the performance's central section, Wilson dismantled a translation of Euripides by Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald, rewriting and reassembling to create his own distinctive collage. Wilson's text is essentialised, stripped of psychology; the choral odes are almost entirely absent. In performance, certain key words were repeated as a refrain both on tape and live ('nothing', 'death'). Wilson also wove in excerpts from Rainer Maria Rilke's poem *Alkestis* and from Müller's prologue, his determining

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criteria once again musical and affective. To underpin the performance as a whole, Hans-Peter Kühn designed an 'audio environment', a taped montage of sound-effects: dog barks, bird cries, the ticking of clocks, and at the very end what sounded like the roar of helicopters circling unseen above (in fact the amplified noise of a boiler underneath the rehearsal rooms in Cambridge). For the Cambridge première, this central section was followed by an anonymous Japanese Kyogen play, the seventeenth-century *Birdcatcher in Hell*: an oasis of riotous slapstick comedy parodying the lofty sacrifices and recriminations of Euripides, further enlivened by a Laurie Anderson score. All three sections of the performance were variations on a central theme, that of death and rebirth, their tone variously macabre and trivial, sublimely meditative and grotesquely knockabout.

The staging of *Alcestis* is pure Wilson. With classical symmetry, three cypress trees were transformed in turn into temple columns and finally (when Hercules, a fur-clad frontiersman, rescued Alcestis from Hades) three chimneystacks belching smoke, radiant fissures appearing in their sides. In this way epic temporal movement was suggested, from a natural pre-industrial state to contemporary nuclear technology (were the cracks images of a core meltdown?). From the representational, even nostalgic, to the abstract and contemporary, Wilson's eclecticism and cultural relativism reflect the identity crisis of post-modernism. Admetus's father struggled and wheezed, imprisoned within an oxygen bubble. Alcestis's death scene – with alarm clocks, a radio, a real modern bed, Admetus in pyjamas – contained apparent anachronisms, but these trappings of the contemporary bourgeoisie were depoliticised and rendered alien when located in the aural-visual environment, removed from a habitual frame

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of reference. Their 'otherness' was compounded by Wilson's own luxuriant lighting and by the abstract gestural choreography developed for the production by the Japanese classical dancer Suzushi Hanayagi, in which movement was rarely illustrative.

An invisible stream divided the front of the stage from the back. At the beginning and end of the performance, an unidentified young woman glided effortlessly along its course, her arms outstretched in some hieratic gesture of silent lament. Other women washed their hair and clothes in the stream. Like Ganga in Brook's *Mahabharata*, the stream carried a double charge: source of ritual ablution and renewal, and place of death, a Styx. Death, a huge white insect-birdman or harpy, rose up through the stone blocks of the back wall. This chorus-figure was represented by a 20-foot androgynous Cycladic statue, a smaller (human) figure harnessed to its abdomen, wrapped in mummy bandages. In the central section, apparently solid granite boulders rolled gently and silently down a mountainous scree as 'invisible spirits move[d] underground'. Embedded in the shards of rock were fragments of archaeological artefacts, silent testaments to the evanescence of cultural forms: the prow of a Viking ship, ancient Chinese terracotta funerary figures, a primitive carved stone head – pitted, worn, broken. References were recognisably multi-cultural, distant from the original Greek context. Perhaps this *Alcestis* could be seen as a tragedy of cultural impermanence, the collapse and death of civilisations and their forms, rather than the individual tragedy of the central psychological narrative, the story of Alcestis: the mountain debris as the scree of culture? At the end of the performance, a green laser beam projected an eye onto the mountain's flank, then gouged a hole in it; through this opening, a seeping wound, was

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suggested the presence of glowing magma just below the surface.

Wilson chose to eliminate Euripides' restorative 'happy ending', instead finding a positive force in the tale's ambiguous irresolution. Hercules re-emerged from Hades with the veiled figure of a woman, which then fragmented into three identical figures. The spectator could not be certain which of them, if any, was Alcestis. As these mysterious hooded women sat silent and immobile on rocks – Alcestis is forbidden to speak for three days on her return – the discomfort of her husband, King Admetus, grew. The audience were left to wonder what these figures would say and do at the end of their period of silence.

Wilson's current concerns revolve around finding the means to relaunch the *CIVIL warS* project. In the meantime he plans to pursue this new direction in his work with a production of another classic text; he has been commissioned to direct *King Lear* in Hamburg in September 1987, in a German translation by Heiner Müller. The story of Lear has intrigued Wilson for many years – one section of *KA MOUNTAIN* was drawn from Shakespeare's text, and it is surely no coincidence that the impact of losing a loved one was thematically at the very heart of both *Freud* and *Stalin*. He claims his interest now lies in the play's comic possibilities and its structural formalism. For the part of Lear, he has already engaged an old German comedian who spends most of his life in a mental institution. Before *Lear*, however, Wilson is to stage *Death, Destruction and Detroit Part 2*, again at the Schaubühne in Berlin, in February 1987. Just as Hess was the focal point for the first version, Franz Kafka will be at the heart of this new work, which is to be based on his letters and diaries.

In the course of his career, Wilson has taken the practice

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of scenic writing to its logical conclusion. We have traced the origin of scenic writing in the political work of Brecht and we have seen how it was developed by Littlewood, Planchon, Stein and others. There is nothing overtly political about Wilson's theatre: it might appear to stand more in the tradition of Grotowski and Brook, with its interest in therapy and its concern to probe the most fundamental levels of human awareness, communication and interpersonal relationships. Moreover, his control over every aspect of each production recalls Craig's vision of the single presiding artistic imagination at work in the theatre of the future. However, it would be a mistake to make too much of this control and to see Wilson merely as the exploiter of his performers, as if he treated them as raw materials with no creative freedom of their own. On the contrary, he leaves them considerable freedom and relies on their creative input to fill out the images or scenes of his productions. It would be equally mistaken to categorise his work as pure formalism. Though often hermetic, and containing no easy slogans, his productions embody in their very shape and method comments on both philosophical and political values. They achieve this by a highly developed use of the alienating effects that were the hallmark of Brechtian theatre practice. In particular, Wilson exploits the technique of using each element on the stage to undercut, contradict or comment on the others. Unlike most directors, he is content for these separate expressive elements to remain fragmented. He resists the temptation to synthesis and in this he manifests his critical commentary on our fragmented age. His productions do not, as Brook's so often do, end on an evocation of harmony and resolution.

In his researches into non-verbal communication, he does however resemble both Brook and Grotowski; like

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them he is sometimes treated as a prophet and guru. He also resembles Planchon in his search for a theatre of vivid and complex images. He differs sharply from Littlewood, Mnouchkine and Stein in not having started out with an objective defined in political terms and in not having developed an ensemble of professional actors. This study of only seven contemporary directors has shown how difficult it is for one person to reconcile all the different functions the director may be expected to fill in today's theatre; but it is in the way they combine these different functions that the great directors have acquired identifiable styles and have made it possible to speak of 'directors' theatre' at all. Wilson's productions bear the stamp of his particular style as unmistakably as Magritte's paintings do of his. Wilson has achieved this by treating production as primarily a visual art form – words are always secondary, although they may have a significant part to play, as in *Alceste*. This does not make him a greater director than those, such as Planchon or Stein, who have given greater importance to the verbal text. But it makes him the supreme artist of moving images working in the theatre today and the legitimate heir of those earlier directors, such as Edward Gordon Craig and Artaud, who looked forward to a time when the director would become the controlling magus of the modern stage.

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1. These drawings and paintings, as well as the scenic objects designed by Wilson for use in performances, have been exhibited in museums and public galleries. They have become collectors' pieces, the money they create being fed back into the theatre performances.

2. Cf. John Cage in *Silence* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1939) p. 93 – one of very few direct influences Wilson readily admits to: 'In Zen they say that if some thing is boring after 2 minutes, try it for 4. If still boring, try it for 8, 16, 32 and so on. Eventually one discovers that it is not boring at all, but very interesting.'

3. Louis Aragon, 'Lettre ouverte à André Breton sur le *Regard du*

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sourd: l'art, la science et la liberté', repr. in *Eclats*, by Jean-Denis Bredin and Jack Lang (Paris: Jean-Claude Simoën, 1978). In English in *Performing Arts Journal*, 1, no. 1 (1976).

4. The design bears an uncanny resemblance to the Swiss designer Adolphe Appia's 'rhythmic designs' for Dalcroze in 1909, created in response to the need for 'sets which established and emphasised their mass and volume unambiguously for the viewer, because only within the context of such an arrangement could the actor's body itself be seen to occupy and require space rhythmically – that is, to be engaged in active and living movement which could be perceived and measured in terms of the static objects around it. . . . Their rigidity, sharp lines and angles, and immobility, when confronted by the softness, subtlety and movement of the body, would, by opposition, take on a kind of borrowed life . . . a strong sense of rhythm' – *New Theatre Quarterly*, 1, no. 2 (1985) pp. 156–8.

5. In themselves, these sticks form part of a recurrent visual motif; they reappear as Hess' rake, Siegfried's sword in his cosmic battle with a dinosaur, the baton that an orchestral conductor employs to establish the rhythm of his delivery of a 'history of the earth'.

6. Asked what he regards as the function of mythology in contemporary theatre, Müller has said, 'The dead are in an overwhelming majority when compared with the living. And Europe has a wealth of dead stored up on that side of the ledger . . . you have to write for a majority. This is socialist realism.' And, echoing Wilson's aesthetic: 'the political task of art today is precisely the mobilisation of imagination'. Quoted in *Performing Arts Journal*, 10, no. 1 (1986) 96–7 and 105.

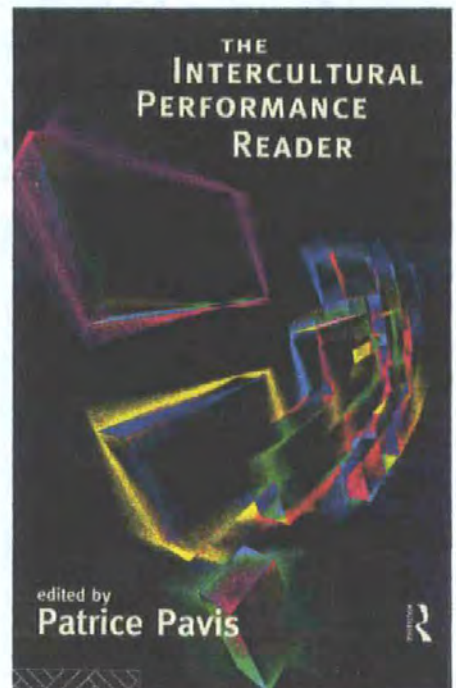
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“REMEMBERING THE OTHERS THAT ARE US”

Transculturalism and myth in the theatre of
Peter Brook

David Williams

INTRODUCTION

David Williams is the compiler most notably of critical anthologies on Brook's work (*Peter Brook: A Theatrical Casebook* and *Peter Brook and The Mahabharata: Critical Perspectives*). Given his wide knowledge of the range of Brook's theatre work, he is well placed to be able to provide an overall evaluation, and to situate Brook's aesthetic in relation to contemporary thought. One should wholly concur with his suggestion that Brook is only superficially postmodern: in other words, that fundamentally he isn't a postmodernist at all, in spite of certain stylistic approaches and ingredients which often constitute a kind of "postmodern" dressing. In this context, the term is inaccurate and misleading.

Brook is the last of the humanists. His discourse is "profound" on the level of his persistent return to an essentialist vision of humanity, to a belief in the possibility of "meeting" the Other, to a particular positioning of humanity in the universe. Brook's relativism stems from a pragmatic and sceptical philosophy; it is the product of a professionalism always on the look-out for new performance techniques. His insistence on theatre's foregrounding of its own theatricality simply confirms and underlines the mimetic, authentic function of the theatre in the context of the West. For here is a Western director who sustains a dialogue with a range of "other" cultures, as if to consolidate his own place in the universe and to ground theatre more effectively as research into the Other.

Each culture expresses a different portion of the inner atlas; the complete human truth is global, and the theatre is the place in which the jigsaw can be pieced together.

Peter Brook¹

That's what theatre is: the desire of all the others. It's the desire of all the characters, the audience's desire, the actors' desire, the director's desire, it's the desire of the others that are us.

Hélène Cixous²

Since the inception of his international company over twenty years ago, Brook has looked for the "Great Narratives" of the modern world in myth, repeatedly inviting audiences to see myth and archetype as dynamic, provocative and potential: transcultural paradigms for exploring present absences and possible futures interrogatively, rather than the fixed essentialist structures Jung, and even Lévi-Strauss, described. Brook has consistently sought to locate that quality Eliot described as "the present moment of the past", for his radical conviction is that theatre can only account for the modern world by "retreating" from it and re-enacting past narratives. Brook has described his work at the Bouffes as an attempt to rediscover something of theatre's lost role as an affirmatory and celebratory "oasis". His ideal remains a "shared space", literally and metaphorically, within which to "reunite the community, in all its diversity, within the same shared experience".³ How can the act of theatre assume something of the *fiesta*, enabling a community to taste *communitas*, to become "whole" for a moment?

In an ongoing research for those conditions that permit a continually supple and evolving relationship with an audience, Brook has come to believe that the theatre event is "richest" when audience, performance group and indeed work performed are made up of disparate elements – a mixed group made only provisionally homogeneous within a common experience. It is my contention that, in the context of a multicultural group, Brook's negotiations and rereadings of mythical narratives remain confrontational, rather than nostalgic, quietist or conservative. For they offer spectators and actors recurrent provocation to individual and collective action in personal and social contexts both within and beyond the theatre. According to Brook's Utopianist agenda for an artform in perpetual crisis, the theatre remains one forum within which these narratives can (and must) be embodied and re-presented, thus enabling aspects of our history to be collectively explored, deconstructed and remade; by rewriting it, we rewrite ourselves. In play at least, coercive and delimiting convention can be subverted, the seeds of fragmentation critiqued and difference cele-

brated. Only then can theatre once more become *necessary* – as social and spiritual meeting place. Brook's vision of a "living culture" is perhaps reflected by the composer Adrian Leverkühn in Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, who has dreamt of an art of "innocence" that would be "the servant of a community, a community united by far more than education, a community that would not have culture, but would perhaps be one ... an art on intimate terms with humanity".⁴

For the past twenty years, Brook has conceived of the material chosen for research and production in terms of myth. *Orghast*, with its point of departure in the core myth of Prometheus, was performed in an invented language of musical phonemes developed by the poet Ted Hughes, as well as in certain "dead" languages: Ancient Greek, Latin and Avestan, the hieratic religious language of the Parsee fire prophet Zoroaster. The project was an attempt to return to the very source of language as incantatory sound, when an act of communication was synonymous with an act of communion. One of the company's recurrent ideals has been to locate what, in a theatre language context, can be conveyed and received as music, that invisible and mysterious language that seems to have an ability to surmount barriers imposed by social, linguistic and cultural forms. Like Lévi-Strauss,⁵ Brook links music and myth, for both can communicate directly on an affective, pre-rational level, fusing form and content indissolubly. The means and meaning of myth and music are inseparable, for Brook believes both to be resolutely irreducible, untranslatable and, at the same time, readily apprehendable.

The Iks was an adaptation of Colin Turnbull's study of the demise of a Northern Ugandan tribe, *The Mountain People*. Brook believed that this material offered the possibility of a radical multitextuality, for it fused "a personal experience, objective facts and poetic, mythic elements"⁶: the empiricism of an anthropological field study as well as an allegorical vision of our own condition and predicament, with Turnbull's own horrified journey into the liberal humanist's "heart of darkness" as the point of union. Typically, Brook chose to present this material as a parable or cautionary tale about us. The production constructed and foregrounded implicit parallels with contemporary social problems in the post-industrial urban West: "The Ik survive at a cost – and so do we. For me it's the perfect metaphor, something which exists on two levels – real in the sense of life as we know it, and real in the deep sense of myth".⁷

Conference of the Birds, a twelfth-century Sufi poem by the Persian mystic Farid Ud-din Attar, is a lengthy philosophical and religious fable allegorizing human beings' search for meaning and truth within themselves. Continually returned to as source material for free improvisatory work during the 1970s, then finally presented as a full production at the end of the Centre's first decade of existence, *Conference* offered Brook the possibility of a theatre of transcultural myth. The production foregrounded the poem's archetypal narratives: the thematic elements of struggle and search; the thirst

for a beyond, a "something more"; the transcultural bird idiom as metaphor of humanity's inner aspirations, its desire to transcend itself into "flight".

In 1980, the company travelled to New York and the Adelaide Arts Festival in Australia, performing three of their major productions from the 1970s as a continuous sequence: *Ubu*, *The Iks* and *Conference of the Birds*. As a trilogy, these plays comprise a lucid reflection of the company's aesthetic, social and ideological concerns. *Ubu*, an explosive "rough" work about callous and murderous inhumanity, bobbed along with the playful violence of an animation or a children's game. *The Iks*, a sparse study of a dying tribe, was played out by the brittle human debris of the material and spiritual wasteland Ubu leaves in his wake: a sad and bitter song of disillusion and defeat. And finally *Conference*, with its starting-point in a recognition of the implications of an Ik world, represented an arduous journey in search of sense, self and understanding; a glimmer of optimism, the world as it could be. When read in this way, Brook and his actors were proposing a critique by recounting an epic fable that admitted humanity's greatest enemy to be humanity itself, yet ultimately rejected the despair of nihilism and even outlined a way forward. The mythical journey we share in this critique takes us from the desolation of rampant materialism and egotism towards reintegration, harmony and healing. The restorative movement towards "life" of an initiatory paradigm – an itinerary later echoed in another tripartite narrative, the *Mahabharata*.

The *Mahabharata* of Brook and Carrière traces the story – a collision of dreams – of two warring families, the misguided and venomous Kauravas, the "sons of darkness", and their exiled cousins, the Pandavas, the "sons of light". The narrative takes us from their magical origins in some fabulous prehistorical and Edenic "golden age" to their apocalyptic mutual destruction during an eighteen-day battle – a social and cosmic *sparagmos*: from Genesis to Revelations. Brook maintains that, as a vision of a society in discord teetering on the very brink of auto-destruction, this "great poem of the world" (the meaning of the poem's Sanskrit title as inferred by Brook and Carrière) affords us the closest mythological reflection of our present reality. Like the trilogy, the production was presented as a narrative of desolation and reconciliation, a mythic trajectory from disruptive division to reintegration.

Here was another cautionary tale, alarmingly pertinent to a divided post-nuclear world. The *Mahabharata* has been called a "Doomsday Epic", and indeed when Robert Oppenheimer saw the first murderous flash of a split atom, he immediately recalled a passage from this mythological holocaust: the blinding vision in the *Bhagavad-Gita* of Krishna's *visvarupa*, Arjuna's theophany as Krishna reveals his "universal form" to his disciple. Nevertheless, while the poem ultimately refuses any easy answers – politically, psychologically, morally – this Doomsday Epic never becomes a Book of Despair. The original Sanskrit *Mahabharata* repeatedly claims to be a beneficial poem; all who hear will be somehow "better" – empowered. And in all of Brook's productions with the Centre, myth becomes

concrete and immediate: it is implied that we all contain within us traces of the Ik, Ubu, the birds, the Kauravas and Pandavas.

In his most recent production, *La Tempête* (*The Tempest*), once again Brook presents us with a mythic narrative of initiation through Fall and Redemption, constructing a universalist fable of dissolution, rupture and renewal: as we have seen, a familiar Neo-platonic trajectory. And like the war in the *Mahabharata*, one is tacitly encouraged to read the "tempest" as metaphor, occurring on an inner psychic plane. Healing, it seems to suggest, stems from each of us acknowledging and embracing our own "things of darkness", a quality whose ambiguity Carrière's French translation (*obscurité*) succinctly conveys. More than conventional Romance strategy enabling what is lost to be found, the storm (like the very act of theatre that "speaks" it) becomes a metaphor for a Dionysian reappropriation of self, a process of individual and social re-membering.

As with his stripped reworking of *Carmen*, Brook attempted to discover (i.e. to uncover, to free from prevailing accretions) what he calls "the secret play" within: the "myth". It is a process he has compared to the restoration of an old master. In relation to *The Tempest*, he has described this kernel as a "mystery or morality play", a humanist allegory pointing to the present absence of certain "unfashionable qualities": reconciliation, forgiveness, acceptance, compassion, love. In many ways, such a description is inadequate and misleading for this meditation on the nature of freedom, for the allegory here is resonant and pellucid, irreducible to any pat doggy-bag formula. Brook's scenography eschews closure at every level – thematic, moral, political, representational – and there is none of the coercive didacticism or acquiescent quietism of moralities here. Like the *Mahabharata*, the production points us towards something that Rilke expressed in the following way: "What we call fate does not come to us from outside, it goes forth from within us."⁶ We inscribe our own histories.

For many years, Peter Brook has been convinced that Western culture – and its actors – have lost contact with an ability to access "invisible" aspects of experience. Logocentric materialism and positivism have devalued and systematically occluded those inner impulses and energies that precede ideational thought and verbal expression that, for Brook, form the core of our deepest relationship with the world around us: a mythopoetic consciousness that embraces magical and supernatural dimensions, accrediting them with an equivalent and perhaps fuller "reality" than the phenomenal reality of empiricists. Rather than being symptomatic of a stultifying Thoreauvian primitivism or an anti-intellectual mysticism, Brook's convictions form part of the radical Utopianism and deep-seated humanism that have coloured every aspect of his work with his international Centre.

In a recent interview, Brook suggested that the supernatural was "natural" for the Elizabethans too, and that much of the allure of certain Shakespearean texts today stems from their provocation to restrictive "ways of seeing": "Even though Shakespeare's words are inevitably

coloured by their period, the true richness of this writing lies at a deeper level, beneath the words, where there is no form, nothing but the vibration of a great potential force".⁹ This "great potential force" is precisely that "invisible" reality that Brook first attempted to formulate in *The Empty Space* in the late 1960s. Since that time, in pursuit of direct contact with amplified ways of seeing, knowing and expressing the world, a contact that he believes can only be restorative and empowering, he has taken his group to travel and perform in environments where traditional cultures survive: notably in Africa, India, with American Indians and Australian Aborigines. Structurally, his "Centre" (in itself at the geographical margins of the hegemonic theatre culture of Paris) acts as meeting point for practitioners from outside of the "margins" of a Eurocentrist culture: "others". This group has become increasingly multicultural, at the present time including performers from an array of Asian, African and Euro-American cultures. Perhaps, above all, it is his African collaborators who excite Brook, with their ability, in Merleau-Ponty's terms, to "describe the action which breaks the silence":¹⁰ "Mature African actors simply have a different quality from white actors – a kind of effortless transparency, an organic presence beyond self, mind or body, such as great musicians attain when they pass beyond virtuosity".¹¹ Again the musical metaphor for the transpersonal/transcultural ideal.

Maria Shevtsova has suggested, with reference to the *Mababharata*, that Brook's theatre practice "obliges performers and spectators alike to review routine assumptions about their own culture through its prism of cultures".¹² Brook conceives of culture in two ways. First, he locates "culture" as an artificial delimitation, an impoverishing shell of naturalized givens, constructed from ossified stereotypes of superficial difference: Shevtsova's "routine assumptions", the conventions of tourist culture, a corollary of nationalism. Second, locked within this shell, "beneath the chatter of words",¹³ is another originary "culture", which demands to be restored (cf. "the secret play"). Here, the "different portions of the inner atlas" comprise a liberating force (Brook's "great potential force"), for the space of *flux* they occupy stands in contestatory relation to the ideologically constructed, partisan "assumptions" described above. Potentially, these diverse symbolic structures of feeling exist as the site both of radical alterity and of transcultural commonality – the site of myth. For the Utopian Brook, theatre remains the forum within which these "different portions" can be brought together, re-membered. Perhaps it would be possible for actors in a multicultural theatre group – others-to-each-other, and to themselves (to their "other" possible selves) – to become cartographers of "other" ways of feeling, seeing and representing, to rewrite the map of difference ("the complete human truth is global"). And, in the process, to locate the *dynamic* parameters of their own difference, their individuality – to become *more themselves* in relation to an evolving "culture": a culture of becoming.¹⁴

Consequently, Brook has consistently avoided any token internationalist casting policy à la UNESCO. His transculturalism strives to resist those readings of his work that focus exclusively on race and racial stereotyping. "Why should an actor have to come on stage as a symbol of his people? Once he does so, there's no chance of his being perceived as an individual".¹⁵ So for example in *The Iks*, the Ugandan tribe was portrayed by American, English, German, Senegalese and Japanese actors. Similarly, in the English-language version of the *Mahabharata*, the five Pandavas are represented by a culturally mixed group, in some ways a reflection both of the pluralism of Indian society and of the cultural palimpsest that the *Mahabharata* has become over the centuries: a Polish Yudishthira, a Senegalese Bhima, and an Italian Arjuna, an Iranian and a Frenchman as the twin *asvins*, Nakula and Sahadeva. The Pandavas (and by extension the Centre group as a whole) may be construed collectively to comprise a human microcosm, the individual and different facets of one "ideal being", like the Hindu Maha Purusha. Most recently, in *La Tempête*, Brook endeavoured to short-circuit the crude colonialist readings of the text which have recurred in recent years. Such readings have repeatedly located Prospero (a white colonizer) as imperialist subjugating indigenous peoples (a black Caliban, the colonized). Brook's production reverses this received casting convention – here are a black African Prospero and a white German Caliban – then muddies any further attempts to impose doctrinaire racial criteria with, for example, a young Indian Miranda and African, Asian and European courtiers. We are obliged to read these actor-storytellers as individual performers, rather than as racial metaphors or cultural representatives – makers, rather than bearers, of signification.

In Brook's anti-naturalist "realism of suggestion", which seeks to problematize culturally fixed representations and the received referents of stereotype (including skin colour), performers offer a polyphonous, multitextual narrative voice. "Listen to stories", Vyasa advises the child in the *Mahabharata*; "it's always pleasant and sometimes it improves you".¹⁶ At their most basic level, all of the CICT (Centre International de Création Théâtrale) productions have been self-consciously framed as the recounting of a story by a group of mixed nationality to an assembled ring of spectators. Brook differentiates between an "actor", who fully inhabits a fictive character, sinking his or her own personality in an act of identification and self-transformation, and a "performer", a Piaf or Garland who only becomes fully present as his or her individuality blossoms in the contact with an audience. Brook has encouraged the Centre members to amalgamate the two in the skilled storyteller, who retains the actor's capacity for transformability and psychophysical empathy, and at the same time remains unencumbered by the superficial trappings of naturalistic impersonation and celebrates his or her individuality. The ideal relationship with one's role(s) in a storytelling framework can be related to both Brecht and puppetry: "detached without detachment",¹⁷ the storyteller can

either foreground the role, or slide towards a state of "transparency" and "invisibility" by effacing the role and prioritizing his or her function as narrative tool, available to serve the needs of the particular moment and context. So for example in the *Mahabharata* – the crystalline realization of the actor-as-storyteller *topos* – this presence/absence flux engenders an incessant movement between representation and presentation: a scenographic and affective oscillation between jolting savagery and dispassionate objectivity, incandescent passion and reflective observation.

Although Brook is not averse to self-citation scenographically – e.g. carpets, bare earth, sticks, etc. – there is no trace of either narcissism or closure (i.e. representational or narrative disclosure). Consistently foregrounding its own theatricality, the performative idiom itself evolves, erasing and rewriting itself continuously; stylistic discourse is "open", discontinuous and self-subverting, endlessly remaking itself. Analeptic and proleptic shifts, and recurrent slippages or collisions between different levels of fictivity, resist the linearity of classical realist narrative structures. As an active exploration of theatre discourses, entailing a critique of inherited codes and conventions, Brook's praxis releases Utopian and interrogative impulses. As spectators, we are invited to inhabit the liminal space between illusion and disillusion, the dynamic space of play and make-believe, of consciousness-as-desire, within which what Eugenio Barba has called "the dance of thought in action" can take place.

The structural principle of discontinuity, both synchronic and diachronic, reconfigures and liberates Brook's performers. The actor-as-storyteller is free to step out of his or her role at critical moments (e.g. in the *Mahabharata*, Maurice Bénichou/Bruce Myers as Krishna during the *Bhagavad-Gita*, or the *visvarupa* theophanies), interrupting the linearity of his or her portrayal to continue the narrative in the third person. With the absolute prioritization of the imperative to meet the demands of an ongoing narrative, it is inevitable that impersonation should be ruptured repeatedly. In narrative terms, this shifting distance between actors and roles (and indeed constructed assumptions about cultural "identity") proves very effective, furnishing them with the objectivity, lucidity and compassion of narratorial commentators or puppeteers.

In all of the productions at the Bouffes, temporal and spatial locations too are fluid, virtual, as open and mobile as the Elizabethan theatre's *tabula rasa*. Both time and space can be effortlessly redefined, compressed or distended in the twinkling of an eye. Structurally, productions celebrate the free play of concentration and dispersion, settlement and diaspora: an alchemical *solve et coagula*. Scenically, Brook's golden imperative remains "less is more". In *La Tempête*, for example, the performance space itself is spartan, even ascetic: a rectangular sandpit about the size of a tennis court, bordered with a frame of bamboo canes and raked in spirals like a Zen garden. In one corner, a single rock of rough marble suggests something of both Prospero's island and of the shattered hull of a beached ship. Here,

in the heart of the distressed shell of the Bouffes du Nord, is a place for play or meditation, like a beach. Sand-castles, footsteps and hieratic markings will disturb its surface temporarily, recording a Rorschach-like narrative itinerary, a calligraphic imprint of individual histories written by bodies in action. However, all representation in this "extra-ordinary" place, as in Brook's *teatrum mundi* as a whole, is fluid and transient. At the moment of Prospero's final mystical renunciation and plea for freedom from illusion, this "page" is wiped clean of its "writing" in an instant: an actor-spirit quietly rakes the sand, reconfiguring the zero degree that was our starting-point. As the lights fade to black, Prospero remains silent and alone, kneeling at the epicentre of the hieratic swirls in the sand, around him a squared circle of his once magical pebbles. However, just as inscription here cannot be synonymous with proscription, erasure is the inverse of closure. For, as well as offering a scenic equivalent of an incoming tide, or of Freud's cherished *Wunderblock*, the ending thus becomes a new beginning; an invitation to make new histories in a more resistant locus of possible futures, far from the shifting sands of *maya* on all islands of exile.

The language of Brook's actors' storytelling revolves around the use of simple metonyms and synecdoches, generated through the manipulation of transformable everyday objects (sticks, cloths, chariot wheels, etc.). These objects are semanticized through the actors' play, then abandoned and desemanticized, emptied of their referential charge and therefore available for further exploitation and redefinition. Like the actor-storytellers, they are rendered potential, in flux – mobilized. As signifiers, they snowball, accumulating associations and meanings. In a startling sequence at the opening of *La Tempête*, the storm is conjured up by Ariel (Bakary Sangaré) walking in silence across the sand, a decorated wooden log balanced on his head. With immense gravity, he comes to a halt and manipulates this hollow pole, suggesting the imminent storm in subaquatically slow wave-like movement and sound (the log is full of hissing sea shells). The spell is cast, and metonym blurs with metaphor. As a group of actors run into the space, an instantaneous geographical leap, as radical as a cinematic match cut, immediately relocates the space as the rolling vessel itself, its rhythm continuing that of Ariel's invocation. Bamboo poles serve as the ship's straining masts, its decks and railings, the rising water level as the imagined vessel subsides. Later they will be redefined as the bars of Ferdinand's grove-like cell, the frame of a mirror, weaponry and so on. On one level, this production explores the tension set up between the austerity of the setting and the sensuousness of certain minimalist representational forms. For Ferdinand, this desert island appears to teem with exotic life, as "invisible" Puckish spirits in Kathakali green enchant him by manipulating ribbons, springy bamboo twigs and sprigs of palm foliage to suggest dancing butterflies, birds of paradise, tropical flora and sweet springs. A billowing gold cloth covers the sand for the masque stage-managed by

Prospero for Ferdinand and Miranda: a satisfying ludic shorthand for the conjunction of nature and nurture.

Representation is never fixed or "closed", but rather *suggested* ludically. The fluidity and indeterminacy of suggestion, rather than determinate reference, in some sense disrupt and sabotage the received signifying conventions of naturalism, and its coercively imposed "ways of seeing". Actors invite spectators to participate interactively in their imaginations – to "beat the other wing", as the existentialist Jaspers said – for their creative complicity is celebrated here, too. As spectators, we come to understand how seeing need not be passive – the performance as object of a detached gaze. In relation to representational ellipses, it must be an action for meaning(s) to be constructed. As Barthes reminds us, reading *is* writing. Brook's intertextuality consolidates the central role of the spectator as producer of meaning(s), as co-creator.

Brook's practice (which one might fruitfully locate as *bricolage*) contrives to generate surprising hybrid conjunctions of complementary elements, a carefully constructed admixture of linguistic, aural, visual, affective and thematic (i.e. cultural) "texts". Colours, tastes, atmospheres are blended, or rather set up beside each other dynamically and dialogically, in a *salade juste*: a *synthetic* construct, rather than the elision of difference implied by syncretism. In performance, this non-homogeneous hotchpotch of forms, styles, accents and conventions – some borrowed then reconstructed, others invented and erased in an instant – promotes a dizzying multi/intertextuality (Barthes' "tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture").¹⁸ Paradoxically, unity and coherence here emerge from heterogeneity: *e pluribus una*. Each component of a polyphonous construct retains its particular savour in a heightened form, yet the sum of discursive elements co-existing temporarily creates something fresh and textu(r)ally "other": the space of transcultural community, of a "culture of links".¹⁹ The fabric of the narrative is refracted through the individual cultural identities of each narrator-performer. The sum effect, again perhaps best apprehended in musical terms, is of instruments of different tone, timbre and colour, their individual connotative qualities fluid, conjoining to inscribe a series of "chords". The individual's specificity is foregrounded in the process of being subsumed by the supra-individual, and paradoxically a fuller expression of individuality and difference is generated within the expression of the collective. Conceptually, this is at the root of the company's multicultural structure. Hybridization decontextualizes and relativizes cultural parameters – in the context of myth, it universalizes – while at the same time cherishing and embracing difference as the locus of both individuality and creative friction.

Superficially, Brook's theatre is postmodernist, in its multi- and intertextuality, its deferral of closed "meanings", its auto-citation and relativization of totalizing scenic discourse. Although this storytelling form with its humanist metanarratives seems to have little in common with much post-

modernist performance's wilful plunge into the lacunae of indeterminacy, the pluralism and mobility of its idioms joyfully celebrate the ludic aspect of theatricality. For Brook and his actor-*bricoleurs*, a play is always play; for it is in play that we meet "others", both within and outside of ourselves.

And thus one can hope someday to arrive at the point of fulfillment where the ego will hold fast, will consent to erase itself and to make room, to become, not the hero of the scene, but the scene itself: the site, the occasion of the other.²⁰

NOTES

- 1 Peter Brook, *The Shifting Point*, New York: Harper and Row, 1987, p. 129.
- 2 Hélène Cixous, "From the scene of the unconscious to the scene of history", in R. Cohen (ed.) *The Future of Literary Theory*, (translated by Deborah W. Carpenter), London: Routledge, 1989, p. 13.
- 3 Peter Brook, "Lettre à une étudiante anglaise", in *Timon d'Athènes* (translated and adapted from Shakespeare by Jean-Claude Carrière), Paris: CICT, 1978, p. 7.
- 4 Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1949, p. 322; my italics.
- 5 See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1970.
- 6 Peter Brook in Denis Cannan and Colin Higgins, *Les Iks* (Paris: CICT, 1975; French translation by Jean-Claude Carrière), p. 97.
- 7 Peter Brook in Philip Oakes, "Something new out of Africa", *Sunday Times*, 4 January 1976.
- 8 Rainer Maria Rilke, letter to Franz Xaver Kappus, 1904. Quoted in *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, London: Picador, 1980, p. 327.
- 9 Peter Brook in Michael Kustow, "Sovereign of the enchanted isles", *Observer*, 14 October 1990. Cf. Antonin Artaud: "Furthermore, when we speak the word 'life', it must be understood we are not referring to life as we know it from its surface of fact, but that *fragile, fluctuating centre which forms never reach*". *The Theatre and its Double* (translated by Mary Caroline Richards), New York: Grove Press, 1958, p. 13; my italics. Brook's "great potential force" resembles what Artaud referred to as "the life-force", *Collected Works*, vol. 1 (translated by Victor Corti), London: Calder and Boyars, 1971, p. 165.
- 10 Our view of man [*sic*] will remain superficial so long as we fail to go back to that origin, so long as we fail to find, beneath the chatter of words, the primordial silence, and as long as we do not describe the action which breaks this silence.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962, p. 184.
- 11 Peter Brook in Kustow, op. cit.
- 12 Maria Shevtsova, "Interaction-Interpretation: *The Mahabharata* from a socio-cultural perspective"; in David Williams (ed.), *Peter Brook and The Mahabharata: Critical Perspectives*, London: Routledge, 1991.
- 13 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, op. cit. See note 10.
- 14 Cf. Antonin Artaud: "[T]he highest possible idea of the theatre is one that reconciles us philosophically with Becoming", *The Theatre and its Double*, op. cit., p. 109. Brook's idea (see note 1) contains a conceptual similarity to that of the *Aufhebung* in Hegelian phenomenology, the "suspended dialectic" of dualism:

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the abolition of separation and alienation, alongside the preservation and expansion of individuality, i.e. the negation and conservation of both exemplarity and uniqueness. I am indebted to David E. R. George for bringing this connection to my attention.

15 Peter Brook in Kustow, *op. cit.*

16 Jean-Claude Carrière, *The Mahabharata* (English translation by Peter Brook), New York: Harper and Row, 1987, p. 92.

17 "[The actor] is called upon to be completely involved while distanced – detached without detachment." Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968, p. 131.

18 The text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the message of an Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.

Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1977, p. 146.

19 See pages 63–66 above.

20 Hélène Cixous, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

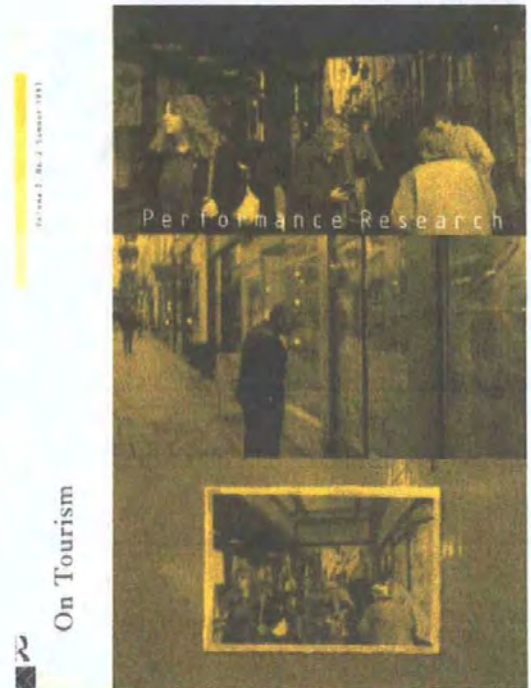
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'A Grain of Sand in the Works': Continuity and Change at the Théâtre du Soleil

David Williams

The 'end of history'? That amuses me. Saying this one risks the loss of language and the loss of the possibility of thinking; one risks becoming more and more passive, able to be bought and sold... Theatre is doubtless the most fragile of the arts, the theatre public is now really a very small group, but the theatre keeps reminding us of the possibility to collectively seek the histories of the people and to tell them. . . . The contradictions, the battles of power, and the split in ourselves will always exist. I think the theatre best tells us of the enemy in ourselves. Yes, theatre is a grain of sand in the works.

(Ariane Mnouchkine)*

* Mnouchkine interviewed by Eberhard Spreng (June 1991) *Theatre Heute* 9; quoted in Sarah Bryant-Bertail (March 1994) 'Gender, empire and body politics as mise en scène: *Les Atrides*', *Theatre Journal* 46(1): 1.

Turn on the television, and you will be invited to swim in a particular kind of performance according to which history, like coffee, is 'instant'. The terrible ethno-nationalist conflicts that have exploded as senescent empires unravel and collapse are played out prime-time in horrifying visual 'grabs'. Pyrotechnic displays over Baghdad, 'like the 4th of July', induce amnesia about the melting and shattering of bodies ('collateral damage'). Cameras tracking 'smart' missiles, invisibly tipped with depleted uranium, bring the obscene lie of a 'sanitized' war into our lives – bright flashes, but no napalmed faces, no dismembered children. Celebrity murder trials are transmitted live into our homes; star careers are manufactured; books and badges are on sale in the foyer. In the seductive society of the spectacle, poli-

ticians employ 'image consultants' and learn to exploit the coercive power of representation; Margaret Thatcher played the Iron Maiden, Bob Hawke played Pagliacci, Bill Clinton plays the sax (while never, ever inhaling). 'News', the great leveller, means infotainment, a commodity driven by ratings; simulational realities come to us cling-film wrapped, for instant consumption, while phenomenal embodied realities recede. I feel no nostalgia for the old empires or geographies of the selfsame, no yearning for a stable monologic Truth. But so many of our dominant cultural forms want us tranquilized, want us no longer to re-cognize ourselves. We suffer from the vertiginous dislocations generated by what McKenzie Wark has called *telesthesia*: mediated perception at a distance, constructing an illusion of

proximity.* Our critical faculties and our memories are failing, our compassion is fatigued, and yet we have rarely been more haunted by myths and ghosts.

Theatre is a local sub-set of global 'performance', and for many now a rather quaint anachronism. Yet certain kinds of theatre offer a site in which maybe we can redis-

cover 'an art of memory'[†] – in which

we can re-cognize who or what haunts us, apprehend what it is we are swimming in and turn against the current. Ariane Mnouchkine's Théâtre du Soleil is one European company that has tried to make oppositional interventions into popular culture by contesting the ways in which we are invited to live and represent ourselves in the self-generating hegemony of capitalism. Over the past thirty-something years, the Théâtre du Soleil has attempted to explore the social praxes of collaboration, creativity, resistance, pedagogy and the processes of theatre-making as the elaboration of a dynamic local culture.

Since its inception by a group of ten idealistic young students in Paris in 1964, the Théâtre du Soleil has become one of the most celebrated, indeed mythologized, theatre companies in Europe. It was christened Soleil as 'a tribute to certain film makers associated with light, generosity and pleasure such as Max Ophüls, Jean Renoir, George Cukor'.[‡] In the course

of its ongoing determination to privilege formal innovation, theatricality and a notion of theatre

as social practice, it has explored and reassessed the legacies of some of the seminal practitioners and theorists of European Modernism – Artaud, Meyerhold, Brecht and in particular Copeau, Jouvett, Dullin and Vilar. In addition, it has recu-

* 'From the telescope to the telegraph and telephone, from television to telecommunications, the development of telesthesia means the creation of, literally, dislocated perception and action. Dislocating the action from the site via the vector allows the use of power over the other without implicating power in the scene of the other'; McKenzie Wark (1994) *Virtual Geography: Living with Global Media Events* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press), p. 43.

† Michel de Certeau (1988) *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), p. 87.

‡ Ariane Mnouchkine and Jean-Claude Penchenal (1971) 'L'avenure du Théâtre du Soleil', *Preuves* 7(3): 120. 'Lightness', 'generosity' and 'pleasure' continue to be articulated as goals by/for Soleil performers.

perated and re-invented 'other' techniques and traditions, from the popular (*commedia dell'arte*, clowning) to the hieratic (projected, 'imaginary' Asian theatres).

Throughout its existence, Soleil members have endeavoured to articulate the problems and pleasures that emerge from their active engagement with a network of interrelated questions about theatre-making as a social practice. What are the functions of theatre in a society in which, to paraphrase a memorable image of Peter Hulton's, theatre has become like an orchid on a golf course? How does one collaborate with ethical and political integrity? What processes disperse and multiply creativity and power within a collective? What are the forms of a 'popular theatre' today, and what are its narratives? How can theatre dismantle and revision monolithic representations of History? Which performative traditions and forms from the past can create possible futures here now? Perhaps above all, how does one *act*, and how can theatre become 'a space of appearance'? From 1789 in 1970, the celebratory wake for the events of May 1968, to *Les Atrides* in the early 1990s, a tetralogy of Greek tragedies

tracing the fragmentation of a family at the mythical dawn of (a compromised) democracy, in and around each of its projects the Soleil has sought to engage with its sense of the specificities of its historical moment. So, for example, shortly before departing for Israel to perform *L'Indiade* as part of the Jerusalem Festival in 1988, the members of the company wrote an open letter to their hosts, explicitly

* Mnouchkine has used this phrase on a number of occasions in recent years. It carries traces of Hannah Arendt's 'space of appearance', a notion of civic responsibility, collaboration and ethical action with and in political communities, drawn from Arendt's reading of the Greek *polis*: 'The space of appearance [is] the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men [sic] exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly'; (1958) *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 198–9. In addition, there are echoes of Herbert Blau's articulation of the double-binds of representation: the 'play of appearances' in performance, and the struggle for 'the liberation of the performer as an actor who, laminated with appearance, struggles to appear'; Richard Schechner and Willa Appel (eds) (1990) 'Universals of performance; or amortising play', in *By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 257; italics in original.

criticizing the Israeli government's refusal to negotiate with the Palestinians.* I

propose to quote from it at some length here, for it seems particularly resonant in this

issue: a courteous greeting, a statement of a cultural and political credo, and an interventionist claim on a reconciliatory, pluralist future that remains little closer today:

You have invited us and we have accepted your invitation. But before we enter your house, you must know who we are and what we believe.

We, the writers, actors, musicians, technicians and director of the Théâtre du Soleil, originate from twenty-two countries.... We are Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus and atheists. We are white, we are black, we are yellow. We are from countries which, at different times in the course of their histories, have taken the roles of the colonized and the colonizers, of the oppressed and the oppressors, of the occupied and the occupiers. We are from countries which have all known, and continue to know, their times of pride and shame, of progress and decline, of dignity and indignity, of humanity and inhumanity. That is who we are.

And now here is what we believe:

- *We believe that the appropriation of territory by force is inadmissible;*
- *We believe that the killing of children, whatever the circumstances, and whether they be Palestinian or Israeli, is a monstrosity;*
- *We believe that the killing of unarmed civilians is a violation not only of the Geneva Convention but above all of moral law;*
- *We believe that a nation that oppresses another cannot be entirely free itself;*
- *We believe that it is madness to try to destroy by force what no military force can ever destroy: the love of the homeland and the spirit of freedom. The body can be broken, but the soul of a people cannot be crushed. And of all the peoples, the Jewish people have proved this for thousands of years;*

* The full text of 'Lettre aux Israéliens' was published on 15 April 1988, a month before the company's arrival, in the following Israeli newspapers: *Ha'aretz* and *Yedioth Ahronot* (in Hebrew), *Al-Ittihad* and *Al-Fajar* (in Arabic), and the *Jerusalem Post* (in English). A week later, it was also printed in *Le Nouvel Observateur* in France.

- *We believe that the Palestinian people have an inalienable right to self-determination and to a Palestinian State;*
- *We believe that the State of Israel has an inalienable right to exist here, in peace and security;*
- *We believe that there are two peoples in this Holy Land, and that it should be shared and its borders negotiated. In the hope that, in the future, once time has helped forgive and forget, an association of some kind may be created;*
- *We believe that there has been enough confrontation and collision, enough obstinate persistence in crime and error, and that there have been enough blind eyes and deaf ears;*
- *We believe that the leaders chosen by the Israeli people should agree to negotiate with the leaders chosen by the Palestinian people, even if these leaders are not to the Israelis' liking, and whatever their strategies have been in the past;*
- *We believe that it is now time for the right of the stronger camp to give way to the duty of the stronger camp; and since Israel is the stronger of the two, it must take the first step. The biggest of steps. Is Israel incapable of this? Could it be that Israel is more afraid of peace than of war?*
- *We believe that by refusing to countenance those Palestinians who hold out their hands in peace, Israel runs the risk of one day being confronted with those who only know how to brandish daggers;*
- *We believe that Israel and the PLO should come to a mutual and simultaneous recognition at the very moment negotiations begin; then the whole world will breathe and hope once more.*

We have hesitated about coming; we have talked, we have consulted a fair number of you, and we have decided not to add a facile refusal to the list of criminal refusals in the past. Nothing will persuade us to despair of the power of words, nor to renounce our faith in humanity as well as in art. We shall never renounce them. We are coming for the sake of peace and of those who defend it, out of admiration and solidarity with all those in both camps who, sometimes risking their own lives or braving some senseless law in their own country, attempt to 'build bridges', to meet and talk together – whether in Paris, Brussels, Beirut, Bucharest, Budapest

or Tunis, on one bank or the other.

Our visit pays homage to all of those in Israel – members of the Knesset, intellectuals, writers, artists, lawyers, journalists, citizens – who, tirelessly and for decades, have been weaving the fabric of peace which irresponsible leaders obstinately insist on tearing apart. We are coming because we believe that people change, that they have already changed – that many Palestinians have changed, and that if Israel fails to change, it will lose not only blood and lives, but the honour of internal civil peace. For we fear that the blindness of some is driving all of the Israeli people towards the massacre that engenders further massacre and civil war.

We are telling you all of this because it is not right to enter the house of a friend with a heart full of unspoken suffering and secret reproaches.

The Soleil's most recent production also exemplifies the company's determination to imbricate its work in contemporary histories. Molière's *Le Tartuffe* (1995–6) is an explicit critique of fundamentalism, in Israel, Algeria and elsewhere; it includes music by Cheb Hasni, one of Algeria's best-known Rai singers, who was murdered by extremists in Oran in September 1994. The newspaper-style programme for *Le Tartuffe* provides a multi-textural collage of historical documents relating to religious intolerance and racial extremism: from the Edict of Nantes and Jansenist condemnations of theatre, to recent press reportage of the *fatwa* against Pakistani feminist writer Taslima Nasreen, and of white supremacist groups in the USA. In addition, it contains information about a number of activist human rights organizations in France, pockets of organized resistance to fundamentalisms.* Many of the programmes accompanying Soleil productions over the years have adopted a multi-vocal, critically activist, historicizing approach of this kind.

Taken collectively, the company's projects represent the development and refinement

* These organizations included Mouvement contre le Racisme et pour l'Amitié entre les Peuples (MRAP), Groupe d'Information et de Soutien des Travailleurs Immigrés (GISTI), Ligue Internationale contre le Racisme et l'Antisémitisme (LICRA), Association Internationale de Défense des Artistes (AIDA), Ligue des Droits de l'Homme and Amnesty International.

of a body of interrelated work underpinned and informed by recurrent concerns and ideals. Both differences and continuities are informative here. So, for example, a number of developmental trajectories can be traced: a movement from collectively devised material (*la création collective*) to work that emerges from existing play texts; the development from a carnivalesque historiography to epic passion play and tragedy – an evolution that Mnouchkine once compared to the relationship between Kyogen and Noh; a refashioning of the ideological and party-political (a retreat, some would say) in favour of a collectivism of situational ethics that nevertheless remains wholly politicized;† an increasingly multi-cultural mix in personnel as the company has ballooned to over sixty members; and so on.

At the same time, continuities underlying these shifts include a negotiation of the implications and paradoxes of the idea(l) of collectivity and civic responsibility;‡ a prioritization of the actor and of the discipline of mask work as corporeal and imaginal preparation – the legacies of Copeau and Lecoq; a repeated rhythm of exploring forms from other times and places as a pedagogic *reculer pour mieux sauter*, a way forward into representing contemporary histories with critical distance (Cambodia, India, the recent scandal of contaminated blood transfusions in France, the French Resistance); a recurrent thematic constellation in terms of content – the impact of civil war, separation and displacement, in the widest sense of these

* cf. Susan Melrose's account of the Théâtre du Soleil's gradual 'dispersal' of 'any clear, univocal and strongly directed political action', a process which 'rankles with those in theatre who still warm to the crusading politics of, for example, the "Brechtian" or the 1968 leftist tradition' (italics in original). I fully accept Melrose's suggestion that 'this does not indicate a lessening of the political. It indicates, instead, the ways in which myths can change, changing with them certain sorts of polarized roles, certain notions of the enemy and possible modes of intervention.' Susan Melrose (1994) *A Semiotics of the Dramatic Text* (New York: St Martin's Press), p.41. See Melrose, this issue.

† The legal status the company adopted at its genesis, 'société coopérative ouvrière de production', underlined the group's commitment to co-operative structures; as did its decision a few years later that every member of the company would draw the same wage, a practice that continues to the present day.

terms ('the enemies/splits in ourselves'), and the avoidability of fratricidal conflict (what *might* have been);¹ and the generative centrality of the company's base since 1970 at the

Cartoucherie de Vincennes, a former munitions factory on the eastern margins of Paris – as theatre, workplace, school, Fourier-style phalanstery, community.

The presence of company director Ariane Mnouchkine throughout this body of work represents one of the most resilient and dynamic continuities of all. She is forthright, articulate, passionate, demanding and dissident; and the Théâtre du Soleil is inconceivable without her. In tandem with her work as a director, she has been an active campaigner for human rights – for workers, immigrants, prisoners of conscience, HIV/AIDS communities, and most recently the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina. In 1995, for example, in Avignon and subsequently at the Cartoucherie in Paris, Mnouchkine led a group of artists in a hunger strike, in protest against the inaction of Europe and the United States with regard to Bosnia.*

As director of the Théâtre du Soleil, Mnouchkine has been implicated in the collisions, rifts and ruptures that are part and parcel of a utopian project of such scale, intensity and heterogeneity. The Soleil's

‡ A recent UNICEF report, *State of the World's Children 1996*, records: 'Between 1945 and 1992, the world has seen 149 major conflicts in which some 23 million people have lost their lives. At the end of 1995, conflicts have been running in Angola for over 30 years, in Afghanistan for 17 years, in Sri Lanka for 11 years and in Somalia for 7 years.' Two million children have been killed in wars in the past decade. Quoted in *The Age*, Melbourne, 12 December 1995.

* Their collective action was the endpoint of a process that had begun in 1993 when the Sarajevo Association was formed at the Avignon Festival; meetings and petitions were followed up with material help to artists in Sarajevo. 'The Avignon Declaration' of 1995, which announced the hunger strike, marked what *Le Monde* (25 August) described as a break by artists and intellectuals with their usual petitioning by putting themselves personally at risk. On 30 August 1995, Mnouchkine received Bosnian president Alija Izetbegovic at the Cartoucherie; her words of greeting stressed the guarantee of human rights and liberties sought by the President's peace plan. She also referred emphatically to the 'multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, tolerant and politically secular' Bosnia-Herzegovina which Izetbegovic and 200,000 Sarajevo citizens, who had signed a declaration for a free and unified Sarajevo, continued to defend. (The full text of Mnouchkine's speech was published (1995) as 'Cette Bosnie – là: le message d'Ariane Mnouchkine', in *Le Nouvel Observateur* (7–13 September):

continually reinvented brand of collectivism has rarely entailed the erasure of difference

and the coercive imposition of some fictional consensus. On a number of levels, difference seems to have been privileged as a source of creative friction. As a result, it is perhaps inevitable that in reality there have been several companies called 'Soleil' over the years, a seismic upheaval every five years or so engendering departures and new arrivals. Mnouchkine seems fully aware of the paradoxical status of change in this context – as both an imperative in the avoidance of institutional ossification, and a traumatic dismembering (a 'civil war'). In a 1985 interview, she suggested:

The Théâtre du Soleil is one of the rare troupes where change and transformation are part of the very essence of the undertaking. To create theatre is also to work relentlessly at changing oneself. This doesn't happen without pain, nor without difficulties so terrible that they tear apart the very fabric of the troupe.¹

41.) Mnouchkine and her colleagues ended their strike after Izetbegovic's visit, with a pledge for further action for 'the principles of democracy'. (Note by Maria Shevtsova)

‡ Mnouchkine in Armelle Hélot (May 1985) 'Réve oriental', *Autrement* 70: 142.

This pulsional rhythm of fragmentation/dispersal and renewal/consolidation continues to the present, one of the most recent departures being that of an exhausted Georges Bigot, the most lauded of the Soleil actors in the decade following the production of

Richard II in 1981.¹ Endlessly rehearsing the fate of the good ship *Medusa*, Mnouchkine is now the only survivor from the early 1960s – the

matriarch of a very young group of performers, and a seasoned hand in crisis management. Mnouchkine appears to recognize that, to borrow a phrase of John Berger's, 'utopias only exist in carpets';² but her energy for 'weaving' remains undiminished.

Over the last decade, the Théâtre

‡ One of the great ironies of the Soleil as 'non-hierarchical' enterprise, and a factor that has generated recurrent problems within the collective, relates to media constructions of 'stars' in the company; and it has to be admitted that it has spawned a number of extraordinarily virtuosic performers, including Philippe Caubère, Philippe Hottier and Bigot himself.

§ John Berger (1984) *And our Faces, my Heart, Brief as Photos* (London: Readers and Writers), p. 18.

du Soleil collaborated extensively with the writer Hélène Cixous, who has become central to the company's work in the wake of the Shakespeare cycle. According to Mnouchkine, this cycle had been undertaken in order to learn how to produce a theatre that could articulate the complexity and poly-vocality of contemporary realities. And since the mid-1980s, the company has directly confronted aspects of the late twentieth-century world with three plays by Cixous. Broadly, these plays have dealt with colonialism and its disruptive legacies: the dismemberment of the Khmer people in *Sihanouk* (1985); the traumatic partitioning of India in *L'Indiade* (1987); and, most recently, the contamination of blood and ensuing government scandals in France in *La Ville Parjure* (1994).^{*} The importance of this determination to speak of and with the world in which we live should not be underestimated. Cixous's earlier plays have been dismissed by some critics as exercises in nostalgic or revisionist hagiography.[†] However, Cixous's writings-about-writing as an ethical practice, and their embodied exploration in the *écriture corporelle* of the Soleil's performers, suggest that to write (and by implication, to read, or to perform) is to try to do 'the work of un-forgetting, or un-silencing, of un-earthing, of un-blinding oneself, and of un-deafening oneself'; to speak history is to 'sing the abyss'.[‡] And I would prefer to locate these plays as critical meditations on compassion and remembering, as attempted reparation of oblivion and loss.

* For a useful discussion of *La Ville Parjure*, and of theatre as 'civic' intervention, see Maria Shevtsova (May 1995) 'Sur *La Ville Parjure*: un théâtre qui parle aux citoyens', *Alternatives Théâtrales* 48: 69-73.

† See, for example, Jennifer Birkett, 'The limits of language: the theatre of Hélène Cixous', in (1992) *Voices in the Air: French Dramatists and the Resources of Language* (University of Glasgow: French and German Publications), pp. 171-86. My own reading of Cixous's concerns in *Sihanouk* relates to the precarious predicaments of individual subjects within collective structures - in other words, the status of *difference* in relation to various hegemonic regimes of power and truth, regimes that represent economies of morbidity. For a fuller discussion, see my review of the recent English translation of *Sihanouk* in (Fall 1996) *The Drama Review* 40(3): 198-200.

‡ Cixous in Susan Sellers (ed.) (1994) *The Hélène Cixous Reader* (London: Routledge), pp. 83, 59.

They deal with histories of atrocity and trauma on an enormous scale, interrogating the ideological alibis employed to conceal complicities in erasures of alterity at a personal level; in a *theatrum mundi* within which micro and macro are intertwined, they remind us that it is above all the inter-personal that is political.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Soleil's provocation lies in its continuing wrestle with the implications of and for theatre in critical reinventions of democracy, a dynamic set of practices by definition always *in statu nascendi*, always 'to come', as Chantal Mouffe has described.^{*} It continues to speak of a desire for compassionate and ethical change, and of the possibility of renewal through a processual fashioning of *self-in-relation*. Each of the Soleil's projects has emerged from the interrelatedness of individuals within an always temporary and volatile micro-world; in each of them, the performers have rehearsed corpo-real dreams of an elsewhere that could be other-wise, a re-remembering of dis-membering. These dreams, which insistently inhabit the subversive spaces between here and there, near/far, self/other, are grains of sand in the works of a corporatized, multinational commodity culture: tiny local provocations that invite us to apprehend other (hi)stories, other possibilities - other ways of being in the present, in the presence of others, face to face.

*The experience of modern democracy is based on the realisation that . . . there is no point of equilibrium where final harmony could be attained. It is only in this precarious "in-between" that we can experience pluralism, that is to say, that this democracy will always be "to come", to use Derrida's expression, which emphasises not only the unrealised possibilities but also the radical impossibility of final completion.' Chantal Mouffe (1994) 'For a politics of nomadic identity', in George Robertson et al. (eds) *Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement* (London: Routledge), p. 112.

Section 2

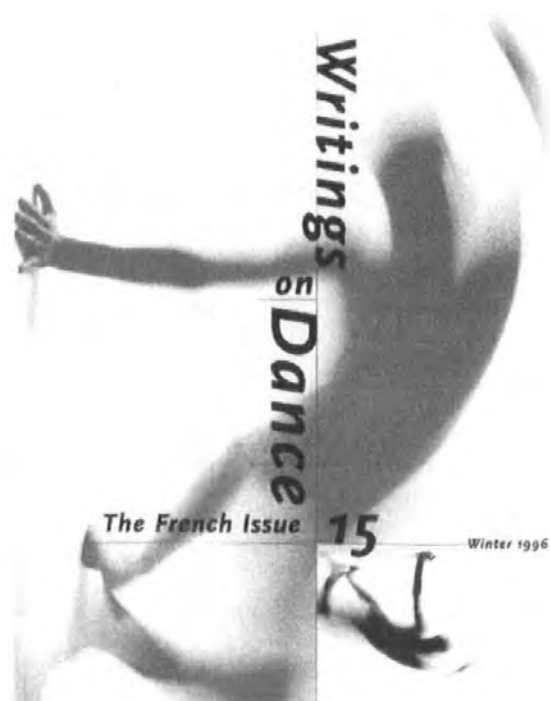
**Thinking performance,
performing thinking:
contact, place, fire, animals**

2.1

1996

'Preface',
in *Writings on Dance* 15 ('The French Issue'), Winter, 3-4

ISSN: 0817-3710



Preface

by David Williams

The title of this edition of *Writings on Dance*, The French Issue, may evoke expectations of a collection of materials discussing contemporary French dance practices, French dance-theatre of the 1980s, for example. However, the practice of dance in France is not the direct concern of this volume. So why 'The French Issue'? What issues here from France? Primarily, the work of two writers and teachers based at the Université de Paris VIII in Saint-Denis: Laurence Louppe and Hubert Godard. Secondly, the writings of certain critical theorists and philosophers, as applied to a range of body practices and contexts – in particular, Jacques Lacan, Emmanuel Levinas and Luce Irigaray.

In 'Hybrid Bodies', Laurence Louppe reflects critically on the 'eclectic bodies' of French dance-theatre in the 1980s; her essay provides a timely enquiry into the current rhetoric of 'hybridity', in the light of a resurgence of interest in some of the foundational body practices (and knowledges) of earlier generations of teachers and practitioners. In 'Corporeal Sources', Louppe offers an account of the work of one such teacher-practitioner, Trisha Brown, from her early 'equipment pieces' to her collaborations in France in the 1990s. In her continuing elaboration of a poetics of dance that explores and celebrates motility and/as instability, Louppe suggests, Trisha Brown endeavours to uncover the corporeal 'substrata' that in-form gesture – sensory and perceptual 'sources' generated through displacements from axial gravity, the site of an embodied imaginary.

Kinesiologist Hubert Godard develops Louppe's ideas through reference to a practice of kinesiology that draws on Lacanian psychoanalysis and phenomenology. His work offers an explicit critique of the positivism of disciplines such as biomechanics, through a recurrent concern for an apprehension of qualitative detail in individual gesture, and an articulation of a poetics of gestuality based on intensities and intentionalities. In the two interviews included here, Godard touches on a wide range of issues. Crucially, he describes the interplay of muscle tonicity and release central to the creation of any individual's gestural repertoire ('gestosphere') – in itself constitutive of a way of being in the world and of an 'entire history'. His account of the

application of kinesiology in work with cancer patients and their doctors is particularly engaging and moving. His resistance to reducing bodies to functionalities, and his determination to conceive of them as 'symbolic universes' always already in relation to an-other, suggest an ethical practice of great sensitivity and integrity.

Godard locates Contact Improvisation as a practice of 'deep communication' between gravitational systems, a 'tonic dialogue' that far exceeds touch. My own essay on Contact as a site for exploring an embodied ethics of alterity draws on the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas's notion of the constitutive dialogue he calls the 'face-to-face': an ethical encounter with the radical difference of an-other. As Mary Douglas has shown, borders (of all bodies politic) are conventionally sites of risk, taboo and possible contamination. They must be policed to deflect outsiders, intruders, any potential attack on the autonomy of the 'State'. But Contact inhabits and rides borders, and can provoke them into becoming temporary thresholds. Maybe it's possible for the agonism of mutual exclusivity to give way (at least temporarily) to an economy of interdependence, responsibility and exchange; in other words, to ethical inter-related-ness.

In 'Spirit of gravity and maidens' feet', Sally Gardner interrogates the discourse of 'neutrality' prevalent in post-modern and new dance contexts (including Contact), in the light of Luce Irigaray's feminist conception of sexual difference. Focusing on Irigaray's recognition of the imbrication of bodies with-in language, and on Lacan's formulation of the Imaginary, Gardner explores the possibility of 'a logic of movement, not of image', of a space for moving inter-play which would resist recuperation into an economy of 'the same'. And her account of walking as a figure of autonomy-in-relation for women brings us back to ethics as dynamic negotiation and articulation of difference.

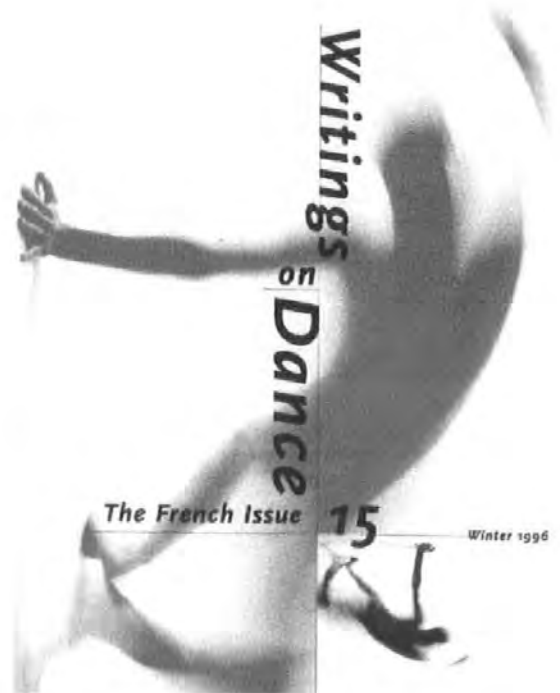
Finally, this edition of *Writings on Dance* revolves around issues of gravity. Almost all of the material here serves to remind us that we are gravitied beings, and that our processes of self-constitution are interwoven with our dynamic relations with experiences of gravity. My perspectives as co-editor have been ghosted by two gravity-related quotations. The first, by Paul Valéry: 'One should be light as a bird, not light as a feather'. The second, by Nietzsche, as cited here by Alphonso Lingis: 'Round every Here rolls the sphere There. The centre is everywhere'.

2.2

1996

"Working (in) the in-between": contact improvisation as an ethical practice',
in *Writings on Dance* 15 ('The French Issue'), Winter, 22-37

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Working



Photograph: J. C. Hatchkiss
Choreography: Paula Jose-Jones
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(In) the In-Between

by David Williams *[for Anne Kilcayne]*

Contact Improvisation As An Ethical Practice

With reference to an ethics of alterity as elaborated by Emmanuel Levinas, this essay will explore Contact Improvisation as a site for a playful and tactical negotiation of inter-subjectivity. As social praxis, Contact Improvisation can embody and inhabit *the spaces between* a range of conventionally hierarchical binaries, most of which constellate around the pairing 'self/other', perhaps the core opposition of Western onto-theological philosophy.¹ The boundaries between these supposedly discreet terms can be destabilised in Contact, allowing what are often conceived as oppositional borderlines to become dynamic and porous thresholds in an ethical economy of exchange and flow. And it is from Hélène Cixous's rather breathless articulation of such an economy at work in *écriture féminine* that I borrow my title:

*'... working (in) the in-between, examining the process of the same and the other without which nothing lives, undoing the work of death, is first of all wanting two and both, one and the other together, not frozen in sequences of struggle and expulsion or other forms of killing, but made infinitely dynamic by a ceaseless exchanging between one and the other different subject, getting acquainted and beginning only from the living border of the other: a many-sided and inexhaustible course with thousands of meetings and transformations of the same in the other and in the in-between ...'*²

Con()Tact: 'co-operation Becomes The Subject'

*The open horizon of my body. A living, moving
border. Changed through contact with your body.*

— Luce Irigaray³

Contact improvisation has its roots in the pedestrian (task-oriented) practices of American post-modern dance in the 60's, social dance, release techniques, martial arts (particularly Aikido) and sports.⁴ Its initiator in the early 1970s, dancer and choreographer Steve Paxton, conceived of it as an 'art-sport'. Contact is a non-hierarchical duet movement practice in which improvising partners share an attitude and an ideal of 'active, reflexive, harmonic, spontaneous and mutual forms'.⁵ The vocabulary of these forms is flexible, inviting the moment-to-moment specifics of relatedness, leverage, speed, (dis)orientation and so on to be re-invented with each partnership on each occasion. As Paxton suggests, if both parties' intent is minimal, and their sensing of intent maximal, then '*cooperation becomes the subject* – an "it" defined by the balancing of inertias, momentums, psychologies, spirits of the partners'.⁶

By working around and through the vectors of an ever-changing point of contact between their bodies, each person gives and receives weight, passes and receives information through touch, accepts or provokes imbalance and regains (an always already temporary) extra-daily balance.⁷ This nomadic and hybrid point of contact, which I will call con()tact, generates momentum and movement(s), as the partners endeavour to discover and work along 'the easiest pathways available to their mutually moving masses'.⁸

In Contact – in life – no two bodies, no two qualities of energy are alike, or even consistent. As Mark Minchinton suggests:

Of course, the giving and receiving of weight are not neutral things. Not all people give weight in the same way, even if they share the same physique. There are differences in the intensities of weight and support. People can be said to have intensive or extensive, flowing or blocked, centred or peripheral energy. Their physiques, experience and individual psychologies will go some way to determining the manner in which they use and are used by their bodies.⁹

Indeed no *one* body is identical with-in itself, it is always ghosted by its others; intensive alternates or coexists *with* extensive, flowing *with* blocked, centred *with* peripheral. As soon as a body in relation *has* flow it is not *in* flow. What's more, each body-self will be further displaced and marked by contact with the unfixable alterity of the

other, as well as by the dynamics and intensities of the *third party* in the dance, the point of con(t)act: that fugitive and always temporary centre and edge common to both yet outside both, a 'blind spot' through-in-with-around-for-and-by which the two bodies orient their play.

In his article 'On Ambiguity', David George describes the dynamic, relational space between the two terms in any binary that creates out of difference a third state of pure potentiality:

All binaries need now investigating not for their deceptively reassuring ability to be collapsed into stable – and static – units, but the very opposite: that all binaries are 'really' hidden – and dynamic – triads. Because any two terms necessarily postulate the notion of 'relationship' as the necessary – third – factor which simultaneously separates and joins any two related forces or factors ... The crucial factor here is not how many ways two different units can relate to each other, but recognition that this 'third element' is not a unit but an axis, not an entity but a state of being, less a relationship than an act of relating.¹⁰

Writers from many different disciplines have attempted to articulate this third party in the self/other binary. For Michel de Certeau, for example, it constitutes a 'frontier region', 'the space created by an interaction'.¹¹ For Deleuzian psychoanalyst and artist Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger, it is the 'metamorphic borderlink', 'the becoming-threshold of borderlines'.¹² For Luce Irigaray, it is the 'angel-as-intermediary' in an ethics of sexual difference.¹³ Hélène Cixous describes it as a 'non-place', the possibility of a contestatory *écriture féminine*: 'the breach, the opening, the entrance ... the entire surface of the domain, [which] enervates the limits and the traces, blurs the localisations ... the migrant that can be found everywhere'.¹⁴ For the radical semiotician Susan Melrose, it is the 'unseizable' of rationalist epistemologies (including conventional semiologies), a 'space of energetic investments ... not limited to or knowable in terms of any of its parameters'.¹⁵ For the poet Octavio Paz, it is the paradoxical space of writing, the 'dizzying repose' of 'worlds in rotation' that temporarily converge.¹⁶ Child psychologist D.W. Winnicott locates it as the 'potential space' of 'transitional phenomena' located between 'me' and 'not-me', a space of creative and constitutive inter-play.¹⁷ For post-Jungian psychologist James Hillman, it is 'the place of soul' and 'soul-making' that dismantles and de-means the Cartesian *cogito*.¹⁸ And in Japanese aesthetics, it is the 'filled emptiness' of *Ma*.¹⁹

In Contact Improvisation, the point of con(t)act – the dynamic fulcrum of what some contacters call 'mutual weight dependence' – becomes an ambiguous but palpably 'real' third party in the duet: an-other axis that both joins and separates the two partners, a hyphenated space of pivotal torsion, 'a sort of rubbing together of spaces at the vanishing points of their frontier'.²⁰ Con(t)act cannot be resolved in (homeo)stasis. As it shifts, it dances (the two partners) from and in the in-between:

This is a paradox of the frontier: created by contacts, the points of differentiation between two bodies are also their common points. Conjunction and disjunction are inseparable in them. Of two bodies in contact, which one possesses the frontier that distinguishes them? Neither. Does that amount to saying: no one? ... The frontier functions as a third element. It is an 'in-between', a 'space between', 'Zwischenraum' ... A middle place ... a sort of void, a narrative sym-bol of exchanges and encounters. ²¹

As it dances, con()tact marks the flux of partners' proximity and distance by tracing spirals around the surfaces of their bodies; at the same time, partners employ skeletal supports and levers within their own and the other's bodies. Both bodies therefore need to be segmented and multi-directional in terms of impulse, action and attention. In addition, they can become open to a synaesthetic blurring in the sensorium, facilitated by their adrenalised status;²² for here tactility can become an-other seeing and listening, peripheral vision an-other touch.

Contact is dependent upon and celebrates these surprising, risky and pleasurable detours of difference; the improvised 'saying' of what is 'said' is radically contextual, relational. And the literal and metaphorical *point* of con()tact, as in-between or go-between, is another space in which the 'I' is both implicated and (re-)conceived; it is the articulation of meeting-in-difference. For each of the partners, con()tact constitutes the possible coexistence of form and spontaneity, rules-of-the-game and dance, cause and effect, centre and margin, proximity and distance. It is the 'play' with-in the obdurate fixity of corporeal identities, its 'give', its supple-ment, its *différance*:²³ the unstable borderlands where an ethics of alterity occurs.

As a result, Contact can radically *dis-orient* one's constituted sense of self, as if 'self' it-self leaks, unravels or frays; it becomes impossible to locate intentionality, source of impulse and so on with any stability. As Trinh Minh-ha writes, here 'identity is a *product of articulation*. It lies at the intersection of dwelling and travelling and is a claim of continuity within discontinuity (and vice-versa)'.²⁴ Ultimately in Contact, identity as a concern can give way to a quality of inter-personal listening that is both active and passive, quiet but not quietist, an actively meditative²⁵ quality one might call *patient attention*: a *festina lente* consciousness of a self-in-process that is unmappable (*u-topian*) through any conventional cartography, and more-than-one,²⁶ endlessly (un)weaving itself through its acceptance of the pressing responsibility of relatedness. In this way, Contact can be a site of becoming, although it necessitates the deposition of a totalising ego, and a disposition that recognises the radical provocation and pleasure of moving elsew-here and other-wise.

con-

prefix, of Latin origin. The form assumed by the Latin proposition com (in classical L., as a separate word, cum) before all consonants except the labials ...

The sense is 'together, together with, in combination or union', also 'altogether, completely', and hence intensive.²⁷

Face-To-Face With Levinas

The irreducible and ultimate experience of relationship appears to me to be elsewhere: not in synthesis, but in the face-to-face of humans, in sociality, in its moral significance ...

First philosophy is an ethics

— Emmanuel Levinas ²⁸

In this discussion of Contact as an ethical practice, 'ethics' is taken in the French-Lithuanian-Judaic philosopher Emmanuel Levinas's sense of the word, as the exigency for a negotiation of an inter-subjective responsibility to re-cognise alterity. This responsibility, for Levinas, is inordinate, irreducible and infinite, a being-for-the-other *before* oneself. As Simon Critchley explains:

Ethics, for Levinas, is critique; it is the critical mise en question of the liberty, spontaneity and cognitive emprise of the ego that seeks to reduce all otherness to itself. The ethical is therefore the location of a point of alterity, or what Levinas also calls 'exteriority', that cannot be reduced to the Same.²⁹

Levinas's critique of humanist essentialism inverts the hierarchy implicit in what he refers to as the 'egological': the ontic imperialism and ethnocentrism of the narcissistic self/other binary, within which the ego-self is demarcated psychologically and corporeally in terms of proper(ty), capital and ontology. Ethics destabilises the assumed self-sufficiency of *être pour-soi*, Cixous's 'Empire of the Selfsame'.³⁰

In what Levinas names the 'face-to-face',³¹ the unique encounter with an-other where ethics *occurs*, the 'ego-I' (homogeneous, self-contained and either deflective or

recuperative of difference) is dislodged from its centrist axis in a dance of contiguity with difference:

The face is a demand ... a hand in search of recompense, an open hand ... It is going to ask you for something ... The face is not a force. It is an authority; authority is often without force.³²

In the 'awakening' of the face-to-face, the assimilationist ego-I is provoked off-balance by con()tact with an-other; this 'event of oneself' occurs only when the ego defects, and one gives oneself to the other, bears the other's weight.³³ In this way the self can be (re)made continuously in contextual and interlocutory proximity ('Saying') rather than in any constative and sedimental History ('Said').³⁴

The face-to-face eschews synthesis (the Same, the 'final solution') in favour of the asymmetrical and dialogical (the play of difference). The tact-ical saying of the dance of ethics, 'the explosion of the human In being',³⁵ requires a stretching towards con()tact in the in-between. A folding into the diachronic time that is the (im)possibility of both proximity and distance, into that 'most passive passivity' that 'coincides with activity'.³⁶ Into the 'meanwhile' between the diastole and systole of a heartbeat that cannot be said, but can only be ef-faced by death:

The interval between the I and Thou, the Zwischen, is the locus where being is being realised. The interval between the I and Thou cannot be conceived as a kind of stellar space existing independently of the two terms which it separates. For the dimension itself of the interval opens uniquely to the I and to the Thou which enter into each meeting.³⁷

Levinas interrogates and disrupts the tyranny of an egological either/or. His call to responsibility asks: What are the relations between my freedom, the freedom of the other(s) and justice? Does not my narcissistic and imperialistic claim to possess (to have) freedom deny the other's (and indeed my) possibility of being in freedom? Must my *proteophobic*³⁸ ego perpetuate the 'war' of mechanistic resistance and counter-resistance, all inter-personal con()tact reduced to the insistent click-clck-click of Newton's chrome balls? How do I prevent the in-different murderousness of my ego's self-constituting drive either to deflect and exile the difference of what-is-not-I, or to ingest and erase it by recuperation? By persisting in being-for-myself, do I not kill?³⁹

The true problem for us Westerners is not so much to refuse violence as to question ourselves about a struggle against violence which, without blanching in non-resistance to evil, could avoid the institution of violence out of this very

*struggle. Does not the war perpetuate that which it is called to make disappear, and consecrate war and its virile virtues in good conscience? One has to reconsider the meaning of a certain human weakness, and no longer see in patience only the reverse side of the ontological finitude of the human. But for that one has to be patient oneself without asking patience of the others – and for that one has to admit a difference between oneself and the others.*⁴⁰

Significantly for this discussion of Contact, Levinas tells us that '*The whole human body is more or less face*'.⁴¹ The face, like con(t)act, is 'what one cannot kill, or at least it is that whose *meaning* consists in saying: "thou shalt not kill"'.⁴² The face, like con(t)act, is uncontainable and unsynthesisable alterity; it 'leads one beyond',⁴³ outside the fortified parameters of a self constituted as integral, full(y present), a totality. It brings this self face-to-face with the vulnerability of other-ness, *both outside and with-in*. In this way, the face, like con(t)act, comprises a 'wind of crisis ... [a] spirit – which blows and rends, despite the knots of History which retie themselves'.⁴⁴

'I am I in the sole measure that I am responsible'

The expression 'in one's skin' refers to a recurrence in the dead time or the meanwhile which separates inspiration and respiration ... It is a restlessness and patience that support prior to action and passion. Here what is due goes beyond having, but makes giving possible. This recurrence is incarnation. In it the body which makes giving possible makes one other without alienating.

— Emmanuel Levinas ⁴⁵

In the face-to-face encounter, the other's alterity demands that I accept responsibility (response-ability), that I respond. To his/her call, 'Where are you?', my-self replies, 'Here I am'. *Me voici*,⁴⁶ 'here is me'. Here my-self is in the accusative (*me*); and subjectivity itself, in its claim to essential and autonomous 'totality', is under accusation. 'I' is *un sujet-en-procès* ('subject-in-process/-on-trial').

Levinas protests against totalisation by locating responsibility for the other (ethical inter-subjectivity) as the fundametal structure of subjectivity. Responsibility here means 'having-the-other-in-one's skin',⁴⁷ and 'I am I in the sole measure that I am responsible'.⁴⁸

In order to sense the heteronomous singularity of self-as-process, and to let go of nostalgia for the totality of ego-as-essential-being, Levinas proposes:

One must understand the subjectivity of the subject beyond essence, as on the basis of an escape from the concept, a forgetting of being and non-being. Not of an 'unregulated' forgetting ... but a forgetting that would be an ignorance in the sense that nobility ignores what is not noble.⁴⁹

In other words, individuation is an ethical (self-) forgetting, an actively chosen detour from egology that invites a continuous re-remembering and re-making *in relation*. So in Levinasian ethics, I (re)orient my-self through con()tact with an-other; 'cooperation becomes the subject' (Paxton). In this context, Arthur Rimbaud's 'I is an other' (*Je es un autre*) can slide from a figure of alienation to a site of potentiality and multiplicity, towards Kristeva's 'polymorphic body, laughing and desiring';⁵⁰ and the threat and negation of Jean-Paul Sartre's aggressively objectifying 'Look' (*le Regard*) can give way to mutual and interactive *regard*.

However, as Simon Critchley points out, Levinas recognises that the ethical relation of the face-to-face cannot ever be self-sufficient, hermetically sealed within an apolitical private space removed from the public sphere. Levinas insists that ethics is always already social and political, for 'the third party (*le tiers*) looks at me in the eyes of the other'; and it is this third party who 'ensures that the ethical relation always takes place within a political context, within the public realm ... [T]herefore my ethical obligations to the other open onto wider questions of justice for others and for humanity as a whole'.⁵¹ The inter-personal is political.

Like con()tact, the face-to-face does not endure; it must be recommenced perpetually:

The Zwischen is reconstituted in each fresh meeting and is therefore always novel in the same sense as are the moments of Bergsonian duration.⁵²

'Freedom' here is finite, difficult, it stammers as it makes itself up-and-over; although paradoxically the call to justice in responsibility for the other, and the rupturing of the ego's assumed self-identity it entails, are contiguous with in-finite possible futures: 'At no time can I say: I have done all my duty'.⁵³

tact

1.1.a. The sense of touch; touch.

b. *fig.* A keen faculty of perception or discrimination likened to the sense of touch.

2. Ready and delicate sense of what is fitting and proper in dealing with others, so as to avoid giving offence, or win good will; skill or judgement in negotiating difficult or delicate situations; the faculty of saying or doing the right thing at the right time.

3. The act of touching or handling.⁵⁴

Touch as 'inter-face'

Where does it come from? From both. It flows between. Not held or held back by a source. The source already rises from the two caressing.

— Luce Irigaray⁵⁵

It is clear that the enveloping epidermal surface of the body is particularly receptive to information from both inside and outside; skin constitutes a radically ambiguous limens between endogeny and exogeny with-in the world. And touch as contact sense is in a privileged position to entertain in coexistence both activity and passivity, mind and body, self and other. As Elizabeth Grosz suggests in *Volatile bodies*, in informational terms touch is impressionistic, successive and momentary (i.e. diachronic), its perception of qualities – shape, texture, heat, energy etc. – comparative and differential; it is 'a modality of difference'.⁵⁶

Inter-personal touch is coincidence in non-coincidence, an irreducible inter-lacing; it is reflexive and potentially reversible, it folds back in on itself in asymmetrical exchange. For touching by definition entails being touched. Both self and other participate and are implicated at the point of con(t)act; both toucher and touched experience the dialogics of being both toucher and touched. It is for this reason that Merleau-Ponty locates touch as the *locus classicus* of what he calls the 'double sensation':

*This is the twisting of the Möbius strip, the torsion or pivot around which the subject is generated. The double sensation creates a kind of interface of the inside and the outside, the pivotal point at which inside will become separated from outside and active will be converted into passive.*⁵⁷

Touch and balance are the two key senses in the practice of Contact Improvisation. Partners touch each other, the floor and 'themselves, internally',⁵⁸ and employ the informationally dense tactility of con(t)act to orient themselves in relation to (im)balance and gravity:

The point of contact is focused on ... because a lot of the training is to do with allowing your partner to sense your leverage potential through touch. What you can do, what you can support, how you might move – potential that exists in position; and at the same time vice versa, you are sensing your partner's level of potential, he [sic] is sensing your's, so you are moving ... mutually sensing by touch what is available to you through that medium.⁵⁹

In addition, the practice of Contact encourages a very particular form of visual perception that one might describe as 'tactile': non-possessive and open, in which peripherality, a receptive 'softening' of vision, has primacy over focus:

For many people vision is a kind of tool which reaches out and grabs things ... It's a probing instrument. For other people, it's a receptive instrument ... Peripheral vision training is partly to allow the world to enter, because it is softer, not so much a tool as focus is. Peripheral vision is more apt to allow you to hear and feel.⁶⁰

So the practice of Contact actively blurs and interrogates the conflation 'eye/I' of a totalising scopic epistemology and economy.⁶¹

Levinas also privileges the tactile over the visual, locating the primordial proximity of the touch or 'caress' as one exemplary manifestation of ethical inter-subjectivity. For the caress actualises a con(t)act with an-other that can neither overwhelm nor fuse with alterity, but can reveal the diffusion and vulnerability of the self-in-relation. For touch, the first sense to develop in the human foetus, is 'an expression of love that cannot tell it':⁶²

The caress is a mode of the subject's being, where the subject who is in contact with another goes beyond this contact ... The seeking of the caress constitutes its essence by the fact that the caress does not know what it seeks. This 'not knowing', this fundamental disorder, is the essential. It is like a game with something slipping away, a game absolutely without project or plan, not with what can become our's or us, but with something other, always other, always inaccessible, and always still to come (à venir).⁶³

Never completed, never exhausted, always to come. As Zygmunt Bauman has suggested, the future (*l'avenir*) – like alterity, like con(t)act – cannot be grasped; one's illusory hold on it can never tighten into a grip.⁶⁴ Both given and hidden, its virtual outline can only be touched or brushed in a way that can neither possess nor 'know', but can still make (a) difference.

Photograph: J. C. Hitchkiss
Choreography: Paula Josa-Jones
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Notes

- ¹ At the risk of reinstating them by speaking them, these binaries include: subject/object, identity/difference, fusion/lossion, closed/open, active/passive, leader/fed, demand/response, cause/effect, full/empty, momentum/inertia, stable/unstable, balance/imbalance, gravity/lightness, art/sport, knowledge/pleasure, mind/body, sigh/touch, power/desire, proximity/distance, inside/outside, private/public, centre/margin, here/there.
- ² Hélène Cixous, 'The Lough of the Medusa', cited in Trinh T. Minh-ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics*, London: Routledge, 1991, p. 142.
- ³ Luce Irigaray, *Elemental Passions* (trans. Joanne Collie and Judith Still), London: Routledge, 1992, p. 51.
- ⁴ For a detailed account of the sources of Contact Improvisation, see Cynthia J. Navack, *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990. For a comparison of Aikido and Contact, see Steve Paxton, 'Contact Improvisation', *Theatre Papers: The Fourth Series, 1981-2* no. 5, Darlington: Darlington College of Arts, 1982, pp. 4-5, 9.
- ⁵ Steve Paxton, 'Contact Improvisation', *The Drama Review* 19:1, p. 40.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.
- ⁷ For a discussion of 'extra-daily balance', see 'Balance', in Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savorese (eds), *The Secret Art of the Performer: a Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, London and New York: Routledge, 1991, pp. 34-53.
- ⁸ Steve Paxton, 'Contact Improvisation', *The Drama Review*, op. cit., p. 41.
- ⁹ Mark Minchinton, 'Notes towards Improvisation as a Body without Organs', in *Writings on Dance* 10 ('Knowledges/Practices'), 1994, p. 48.
- ¹⁰ David George, 'On Ambiguity: Towards a Post-modern Performance Theory', *Theatre Research International* 14:1, 1988, pp. 79-80.
- ¹¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (trans. Steven Rendall), Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, p. 126.
- ¹² Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger, 'The Becoming Threshold of Matrixial Borderlines', in George Robertson, Melinda Mash et al. (eds), *Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 44. *Metamorphosis* 'deals with transformations in emergence, creation and fading-away, of *I(s)* and *non-I(s)*, and with transformations of the borderlines and transgressions of the links between them ... *Metamorphosis* has no focus, it is a discernibility which cannot fix its "gaze", and if it has a momentary centre, then it always slides away towards the peripheries. In such an awareness of margins, perceived boundaries dissolve in favour of new boundaries; borderlines are surpassed and transformed to become thresholds ... *Metamorphosis* accounts for transformations of in-between moments'; *ibid.*, pp. 44-5. Italics in original.
- ¹³ Luce Irigaray, 'Sexual Difference' (trans. Seán Hand), in Toril Moi (ed.), *French Feminist Thought: a Reader*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987, pp. 126-7. See also Elizabeth Grosz, 'The angel as intermediary', in *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1989, p. 161-2; and Margaret Whitford, 'The between and the angel', in *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*, London: Routledge, 1991, pp. 183-4.
- ¹⁴ Hélène Cixous, in *Un k. incompréhensible: Pierre Goldman*, Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1976, p. 33; quoted in Verena Andermatt Conley, *Hélène Cixous*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992, p. 49-50.
- ¹⁵ Susan Melrose, *A Semiotics of the Dramatic Text*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994, pp. 13-4. Elsewhere Melrose articulates this 'space between' as the space of the 'play of subjectivity' (pp. 254-5).
- ¹⁶ Octavio Paz, *The Monkey Grammarian* (trans. Helen Lane), New York: Arcade, 1990, pp. 153-9.
- ¹⁷ See D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and reality*, London: Tavistock, 1971, in particular 'The location of cultural experience' and 'The place where we live', pp. 95-110; see also Winnicott's seminal 1951 essay 'Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena', in his *Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis*, New York: Basic Books, 1975, pp. 229-42.
- ¹⁸ See James Hillman in Thomas Moore (ed.), *A Blue Fire: the essential James Hillman*, London: Routledge, 1989, p. 121.
- ¹⁹ 'Ma, a cultural paradigm, is the empty space in a tea bowl, what is left unsaid in a *haiku* poem, the sound/silence ration in music, the foreground/background distance in an inkwash painting, the moments of repose in a Noh drama'; Vicki Sanders, 'Dancing and the Dark Soul of Japan: an Aesthetic Analysis of Butoh', in *Asian Theatre Journal* 5:2, Fall 1988, p. 161.
- ²⁰ Michel de Certeau, 'Spatial Practices', in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, op. cit., p. 113.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 127.
- ²² For a discussion of the implications of the endocrine system in Contact, and in particular the dilation of time, see Steve Paxton, 'Contact Improvisation', *The Drama Review*, op. cit., p. 41; and 'Contact Improvisation', *Theatre Papers*, op. cit., p. 12 *passim*.
- ²³ 'Différance is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the spacing by means of which elements are related to each other'; Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (trans. Alan Bass), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, p. 27. Italics in original.
- ²⁴ Trinh T. Minh-ha, 'Other than Myself/My Other Self', in George Robertson, Melinda Mash et al. (eds), *Travellers' Tales:*

Narratives of Home and Displacement, op. cit., p. 14. My italics.

- ²⁵ Cf. Buddhist meditation master Sogyal Rinpoche, quoting Jomyang Khyentse: "Look, it's like this: when the past thought has ceased, and the future thought has not yet risen, isn't there a gap? [...] Well, prolong it: that is meditation". *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, London: Random House, 1992, p. 75.
- ²⁶ Cf. The 'nighttime consciousness' that James Joyce celebrates in *Finnegan's Wake*, a consciousness that inhabits the space 'between twosome twiminds', and enables 'two thinks at a time'. Quoted in Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Ideas of Creativity in Western Culture*, London: Hutchinson, 1988, p. 368. Cf. also Octavio Paz: 'Our most intimate reality lies outside ourselves and is not our's, and it is not one but many, plural and transitory, we are this plurality that is continually dissolving, the self is perhaps real, but the self is not I or you or he, the self is neither mine nor your's, it is a state, a blink of the eye, it is a perception of a sensation that is vanishing, but who or what perceives, who senses? ... the self that perceives something that is vanishing also vanishes in this perception; it is only the perception of that self's own extinction, we come and go ...': *The Monkey Grammarian*, op. cit., p. 55. Italics in original.
- ²⁷ *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.
- ²⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo* (trans. Richard A. Cohen), Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 1985, p. 77.
- ²⁹ Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992, pp. 4-5.
- ³⁰ See, for example, Cixous's 'Sorties', in Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman* (trans. Betsy Wing), Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986, p. 78 *passim*.
- ³¹ See, for example, 'Ethics and the Face' in Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (trans. Alfonso Lingis), Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 1969. For a useful summary of the 'face' and its place in Levinasian ethics, see Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, op. cit., pp. 85-92.
- ³² Levinas in Tamara Wright, Peter Hughes and Alison Aintley, 'The Paradox of Morality: an interview with Emmanuel Levinas', in Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (eds), *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, London: Routledge, 1988, p. 169.
- ³³ 'The deflection of the ego, or already the defeat of the identity of the ego ... can finally be said to be the event of the oneself'; Levinas in Seán Hand (ed.), *The Levinas Reader*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989, p. 122. Levinas returns again and again to metaphors of weight-bearing, to describe ethical responsibility; e.g.: 'The self is a *sub-jectum*; it is under the weight of the universe, responsible for everything ... supporting the weight of the non-ego ... impassively undergoing the weight of the other, thereby called to uniqueness, subjectivity no longer belongs to the order where the alternative of activity and passivity retains its meaning'; *ibid.*, pp. 105-6.
- ³⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, op. cit., p. 42. Simon Critchley defines the 'Saying' as 'my exposure - corporeal, sensible - to the other, my inability to refuse the other's approach. It is the performative stating, proposing, or expressive position of myself facing the other ... It is a performative *doing* that cannot be reduced to a constative description [the Said] ... The Saying is the sheer radicality of ... the event of being in relation with an other': *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, op. cit., p. 7. Italics in original.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 121.
- ³⁶ Levinas in Seán Hand (ed.), *The Levinas Reader*, op. cit., pp. 104-5.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 65.
- ³⁸ I am borrowing this neologism from Zygmunt Bauman, who coins it to refer to 'the confused, ambivalent sentiments aroused by the presence of strangers ... the apprehension aroused by the presence of multiform, allotropic phenomena which stubbornly defy clarity-addicted knowledge, elude assignment and sap the familiar classificatory grids ... Proteophobia refers therefore to the dislike of situations in which one feels lost, confused, disempowered. Obviously, such situations are the productive waste of cognitive spacing: we *do not know* how to go on in certain situations because the rules of conduct which define for us the meaning of "*knowing* how to go on" do not cover them'; Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1993, p. 164. Italics in original. The apprehension familiar to many people in the practice of Contact relates at least in part to Contact's 'delinquent' provocation to 'knowing how to go on'.
- ³⁹ In an essay called 'Ethics as First Philosophy', Levinas foregrounds the political implications of his ethical interrogation of one's right to be-for-oneself: 'My being-in-the-world, or my "place in the sun", my being at home, have these not also been the usurpation of spaces belonging to the other man [*sic*] whom I have already oppressed or starved, or driven out into a third world; are they not acts of repulsing, excluding, exiling, stripping, killing?'; Levinas in Seán Hand (ed.), *The Levinas Reader*, op. cit., p. 82. Cf. Simon Critchley: 'For Levinas, I would claim, ethics is the disruption of totalising politics ... The philosophy of Levinas, like that of Adorno, is commanded by the new categorical imperative imposed by Hitler: namely "that Auschwitz not repeat itself" ... Levinasian ethics is a reduction of war'; *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, op. cit., p. 221.
- ⁴⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence* (trans. Alphonso Lingis), The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981, p. 177. Quoted by Richard A. Cohen in his introduction to Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, op. cit., p. 14.

- ⁴¹ Ibid, p. 97. My italics.
- ⁴² Ibid, p. 87. Italics in original.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 118.
- ⁴⁵ Levinas in Seán Hand (ed.), *The Levinas Reader*, op. cit., p. 98. Italics in original.
- ⁴⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, op. cit., p. 100.
- ⁴⁷ Levinas in Seán Hand (ed.), *The Levinas Reader*, op. cit., p. 6.
- ⁴⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, op. cit., p. 100.
- ⁴⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, op. cit., p. 177. Quoted by Richard A. Cohen in his introduction to Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, op. cit., p. 15. Emphasis in original.
- ⁵⁰ Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women* (trans. Anita Barrows), London: Marion Boyars, 1977, p. 19. Quoted in Alison Ainley, 'Amorous Discourses: The Phenomenology of Eros, and Love Stories', in Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (eds), *The Provocation of Levinas*, op. cit., p. 72.
- ⁵¹ Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, op. cit., pp. 225-6.
- ⁵² Levinas in Seán Hand (ed.), *The Levinas Reader*, op. cit., p. 65.
- ⁵³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, op. cit., p. 105.
- ⁵⁴ *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.
- ⁵⁵ Luce Irigaray, *Elemental Passions*, op. cit. p. 15.
- ⁵⁶ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1994, pp. 88-9. Emmanuel Levinas described his friend Maurice Blanchot's literary writing as providing 'above all a new sensation ... a new tingling in the skin as if brushes against things'; Levinas in Seán Hand, *The Levinas Reader*, op. cit., p. 153. Cf. Cixous's repeated recourse to metaphors of tactility in her accounts of Clarice Lispector's writings - a 'tact-ful' naming that keeps the other 'alive': 'How to bring forth claricely: going, approaching, brushing, dwelling, touching; allowing-entrance, -presence, -giving, -taking' (Hélène Cixous, *Coming to Writing, and Other Essays*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1992, p. 64). Cixous champions Lispector's ability to be 'in touch with the instant', and asks: 'But how do we obtain this lightness, this active passivity ... this submission to the process?' (ibid., p. 113).
- ⁵⁷ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, op. cit., p. 36. Emphasis in original.
- ⁵⁸ Steve Paxton, 'Contact Improvisation', *The Drama Review*, op. cit., p. 40.
- ⁵⁹ Steve Paxton, 'Contact Improvisation', *Theatre Papers*, op. cit., pp. 7-8.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 17, 7.
- ⁶¹ For a detailed analysis of ocularcentric discourse and some of its critical dissidents, including Merleau-Ponty and Levinas, see Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- ⁶² Noreen O'Connor, 'The Personal Is Political: Discursive Practice of the Face-to-Face', in Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (eds), *The Provocation of Levinas*, op. cit., p. 67. For an interesting critical reading of Levinas's notion of the 'caress', see Luce Irigaray, 'Questions to Emmanuel Levinas: on the Divinity of Love', in Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (eds), *Re-reading Levinas*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991. Irigaray locates Levinas's caress as subsuming sexual difference within ethical difference.
- ⁶³ Levinas, 'Time and the Other', in Seán Hand (ed.), *The Levinas Reader*, op. cit., p. 51. According to Edith Wyschogrod, Levinasian touch is not 'really' a sense at all: 'It is in fact a metaphor for the impingement of the world as a whole upon subjectivity ... To touch is to comport oneself not in opposition to the given but in proximity with it': Edith Wyschogrod, 'Doing before Hearing: on the Primacy of Touch', in François Laruelle (ed.), *Textes pour Emmanuel Levinas*, Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1980, p. 199. Although I accept Wyschogrod's reading, in con(t)act the implications of 'real' touch are no less 'real' for their saturated metaphoricality; there cannot 'really' be any clear-cut separation.
- ⁶⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, op. cit., p. 92. Cf. Chantal Mouffe on democracy as unfinishable becoming: 'The experience of modern democracy is based on the realisation that ... there is no point of equilibrium where final harmony could be attained. It is only in this precarious "in-between" that we can experience pluralism, that is to say, that this democracy will always be "to come", to use Derrida's expression, which emphasises not only the unrealised possibilities but also the radical impossibility of final completion'. From 'For a Politics of Nomadic Identity', in George Robertson, Melinda Mash et al. (eds), *Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement*, op. cit., p. 112.

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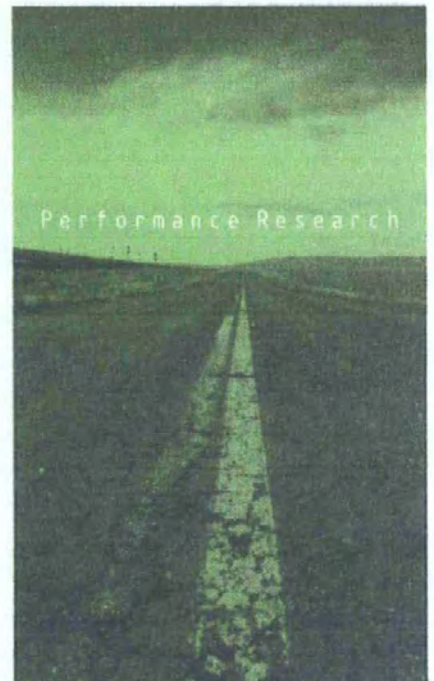
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On Place



Frontwords

There is always a place, a tree or grove, in the territory where all the forces come together in a hand-to-hand combat of energies. The earth is this close embrace. This intense centre is simultaneously inside the territory, and outside several territories that converge on it. . . . Inside or out, the territory is linked to this intense centre, which is like the unknown homeland, terrestrial source of all forces friendly and hostile, where everything is decided.

(Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 321)

'Place', with its extended range of generic and metaphorical applications, is an enormously multi-layered and ambiguous term in the English language. And places themselves are constructed

and distinguished in many ways. As repositories of public and private memories, for example, 'talismans' of dis/continuity (Etlin 1997: 310 and van den Berg, Walker, Danko, Stafford and

Kemp/Minchinton in this issue). Or in terms of scale, extending in sliding measures from individual bodies – the primary ‘place’ – to home and community, city, region, nation and globe (see Smith 1993 and Soboslay, Laing, Hill/Paris and Pearlman in this issue). Indeed, places are produced at any and every level of perceived identity and difference: economic, racial, gendered, sexual, religious, climatic, topographic, etc. If space is often conceived as ‘Time’s other, then place is enmeshed in contextual histories, (re)produced through praxes.

But what is the place of teleopic actions-at-a-distance, in which our territorial and animal bodies are displaced by the horizonless, gravity-free circuits, flows and sedentary terminals of real-time information technologies? Paul Virilio offers a rather shrill and absolutist vision of a crippling ‘grey ecology’ of ‘dromospheric pollution’ that

attacks the liveliness of the *subject* and the mobility of the *object* by atrophying the *journey* to the point where it becomes needless. A major handicap, resulting both from *the loss of the locomotive body* of the passenger, the tele-viewer, and from the loss of that solid ground, of that vast floor, identity’s adventure playground of being in the world.

(Virilio 1997: 33–4; emphases in original)

And what of the universalizing white cube of galleries, the black box of theatres, places deliberately voided of location? Or the con-fusions characteristic of those ‘non-places’ elaborated in the citationality of contemporary capitalism – shopping malls, airports, hotels, and so on?

Here in Southern California . . . I can go into the sterile and bizarre setting of a shopping mall to purchase a genuine leather bag, while a group of Mexicans with motors strapped to their backs are blowing away fallen leaves from indoor Australian native trees, while Mozart plays from concealed loudspeakers at a nearby Sushi bar.

(Zutler 1993: 39)

It seems ‘there is no there there’, to borrow a phrase from Gertrude Stein. And yet all such *utopian* sites, where referentially drained signs of place are dis-located and commodified as pastiche

style for consumption, will inevitably be construed, practised, resisted and inhabited in multiple and contrapuntal ways. As Michel de Certeau has argued, consumption may be productive, in a *poiesis* of ‘surreptitious creativities’ (de Certeau 1988: xi–xiii). I think of the graffito on a sign at the entrance to Highpoint, one of Melbourne’s sprawling malls, the ‘High’ erased and replaced with a ‘No’. Or of the Canberra child who was publicly ‘shamed’ recently by being paraded through the shopping mall ‘scene-of-the-crime’ wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with the words ‘I am a thief’; within a week, I am told, this sign of stigmatization had been co-opted and undermined as identical T-shirts were printed and worn around Canberra’s malls by many others. All places are heterotopias ‘really’, as many of the contributors to this issue of *Performance Research* attest.

Place is closely interwoven with a network of terms that relate to ownership and its attendant behavioural socius: proper, property, propriety, appropriate. Hélène Cixous’s analysis of the imperialist economies of morbidity, which she names *l’Empire du propre* (the Empire of the selfsame), traces this network and its strategies, as does de Certeau:

A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper (*propre*). . . . Political, economic and scientific rationality has been constructed on this strategic model. . . . The ‘proper’ is a victory of space over time.

(de Certeau 1988: xix)

The unadorned literality of such strategies’ repeated enactment in relatively recent history, as erasure-of-difference through reproduction-of-Same, is astounding. Here are two examples that recite an all-too-familiar figure of identity in re-siting the identical figure: in June 1938, the Nazis desecrated and demolished Munich’s main synagogue, turning place into the policed and parcelled uniformity of a carpark; and during the Vietnam War, General William Westmoreland declared with some relish that he was going to turn Vietnam itself into a ‘parking lot’. Terms related to proper/ty have a particular topicality and

discursive gravity in contemporary Australia (my adopted 'home' as an insider-outsider migrant) where the meanings of place and legitimized ownership of these meanings are now more fiercely contested than ever. In what follows, I take 'Australia' – like 'America' or 'Europe' – to be both a geophysical site and a set of ideas or constitutive myths jostling for position.

In traditional Aboriginal cultures in Australia, in which identities are inseparably imbricated in places, one's 'country' constitutes a series of texts, *mappae mundi* of lore/law. Creation myths, sacred teachings, cultural histories and geographies are inscribed on the 'maternal' body of the land itself. Physiographic features record the exploits of totemic ancestors, which may be read, like Braille, and re-animated in the present. 'Here and there they discarded pieces of their body – organs, limbs, hair, lice, skin, nails and teeth which metamorphose into physical features of the landscape' (Mundine 1996: 46): rock formations, trees, river courses, waterholes, and so on. In Pierre Nora's formulation, such interconnected features comprise '*milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory', rather than '*lieux de mémoire*', isolated monuments (Nora 1989: 7). For journeys through these places, with the narrative song cycles that articulate their numinosity for the initiated, constitute performative re-makings, re-earthings, re-memberings of originary happenings here now, fusing place, body and spirit at the intersection of secular and sacred time. To walk the story is to revisit and rehearse corporeally the itineraries of a tradition that maps the complex interrelatedness of cultural spaces and identities, pasts and possible futures. To walk the story is to privilege the route, to inhabit the space between here and there, between dwelling and travelling, and to respect its 'logic of intensities': an 'eco-logic', the evolutive process of which 'seeks to grasp existence in the very act of its constitution; it is a process of "setting into being"' (Guattari 1989: 136). To walk the story is to attend to landscape as inscape, and to take (a) place in the world.

In an essay entitled 'Teatrum nondum cognitum' ('Theatre of the not yet known') about the

limits of cartography as representation, Paul Foss proposes a psychogeography of Australia in terms of its early explorers' and colonizers' dis-placed relationships to their spatial environments, and the subsequent cultural impact of their narratives on modern Australians (Foss 1981). Foss describes a constructed 'antipodal space' – the other hemisphere, the place of the other – as being historically defined in terms of void, lack, or absence: a non-place, a *tabula rasa* on which to project anxieties and fantasies. From the moment of so-called discovery, European explorers chose to perceive this 'Great Southern Land' as a place of no visible contents, no inhabitants, no water, no inland seas, no songbirds: a stretch of nothing, a scorched and smouldering vacuum, a place of disappearance, a vanishing-point. *Terra nullius*, they called it, ascribing its features with names that memorialize their own senses of being 'out of place': Mount Misery, Cape Catastrophe, Lake Disappointment and Useless Loop. In such a limbo, there could be 'nothing out there'. Ideal for castaways – or for penal colonies to rid the so-called civilized world of its 'waste'. Imperial History taught Australians to view their island as a 'waste-land', an excess of space, way beyond the comprehension and possessive hunger of the representatives of an expanding empire. You can't possess it, went the story, but it may just possess and consume you – like so many of its early explorers, who entered this lacuna in the assumed order of Harmonious Creation and 'died of landscape' (Stow 1969).

Contemporary Australia is an island continent – a term which in itself, of course, infers both isolation and size – within which urban places still cling to the coastal strips: 'to the outer rim as if ready to depart' (Ireland 1980: 310). For Australia is built around an interior that, through European lenses, remains unplaceable (atopian), unknowable, terrifying, to be kept outside: the 'out-back', the 'dead centre'. Culturally, it seems, many Australians feel obliged to look 'out' rather than 'in', thereby privileging insularity to the detriment of interiority and futurity. As novelist David Ireland wrote in *A Woman of the Future*: 'Australia . . . sits

on the comfortable coast of life, where its settled nature is steeped in the past. The future is the greatest problem. The future is at the centre of Australia's problems' (Ireland 1980: 187). In recent years, this central 'void' has been increasingly colonized – by British nuclear test sites, American tracking installations, multinational mining concerns, vast properties – then abandoned to create new wastelands, toxic no-go zones like Maralinga or Wittenoom. Meanwhile the notion of an empty centre of deserts, desertion and desolation stubbornly persists, despite the fact that this is only a *simulacrum* of the void, a construction. Of course countless peoples, cultures, places *do* exist there; it is not empty at all.

[T]he very habit and faculty that makes apprehensible to us what is known and expected dulls our sensitivity to other forms, even with the most obvious. We must rub our eyes and look again, clear our minds of what we are looking for to see what is there.

(Malouf 1994: 130)

If they remain largely 'unseen', as do Aboriginal peoples and their claims to the places and lives stolen from them for so many on the 'comfortable coast of life', this lack of re-cognition stems from more than blinkered or flawed perception. It relates to a refusal to look in, or behind, to the enduring shadows. To listen to the 'empty space' at the heart, and to apprehend it as a dynamic place for re-reading and rewriting histories and geographies: a theatre of the not yet known, where everything is (to be) decided.

David Williams, guest editor
Melbourne, 24 March 1998

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2000

'Editorial: Openings' (with Ric Allsopp),
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Editorial: Openings

Openings that is, as two-way flow, as dynamic reaching outwards, drawing inwards and backwards, openings that displace the directionalities of time, visibility and expectation – seemed to be an appropriate fix for how performance work is presently being framed, discussed, rethought, contextualised, practised. Openings that is, as fluid, indeterminate, undecided, ambiguous fields for performance. The openness of performance, the increasing difficulties of positioning or defining or delimiting performance in old terms. Or perhaps opening a new book and smelling its pages, accepting that the traces of its processes pass through the openings of one's body and circulate, move (in) us stimulating the potential articulation of an exchange between inside/outside, visible/invisible, self/other. How to allow oneself to be open to displacements in the advent/event of meaning(s)? How to dance around the slide towards final solutions? To be open to not knowing, to the blindspots that ghost all ways of seeing. As the fields of performance shift and fracture in relation to altering contexts – whether contexts of media, of culture, of practice, of research – so the openness of the work, its capability of resisting conventional frames, of existing as a fragile, ephemeral flow or as resistant or playful intervention, becomes a significant vector of discourse.

The work of preparing and editing this issue is necessarily interwoven with our other activities in the field of performance. The conversations which have led to this particular set of materials are shot through with other readings, with work that we have made, that we have witnessed, with work that we were unable to include in these limited pages. We talked of Christopher Lloyd's Fester in *The Addams Family* film, lifting a book from a shelf in the gothic library, then opening it to unleash a storm that strikes his face and fills the room; its

covers contain a virtual tempest that can only be calmed by snapshot closure, replacement on the shelf, return to the orderly. All books, all writing should be tempest-machines. Vortices. Energetic overflowings. Landscapes of the passage. Why else would one write? Why else would one read? Where does the wind travel, and how to attend to the trajectories and transient forms of the aeolian debris?

On a cold, sunlit day in February, a young Israeli art student begins to move a vast pile of empty blue or white 50-litre translucent plastic containers from where they lie abandoned, at one corner of the goods yard in the now disused railway station in Jerusalem, to an equally derelict room inside the railway sheds. The sounds of each of her journeys, the physical effort of dragging a train of ten or more containers threaded together on a rope, across the yard and over the cobbled stone floor of the shed, are recorded on a dictaphone in her coat pocket. This solitary cyclical work continues largely unobserved and unremarked throughout the morning. The derelict room gradually begins to fill with containers. At a certain point this part of the work stops. For those who now come across the work as spatial object, as suspended event, the room is left either half-filled or half-emptied – a train of containers abandoned either half-in or half-out of the doorway. Indeterminate taped sounds emerge from deep within the pile of containers – ambivalent, difficult to pinpoint spatially or descriptively. The openness of this work – the simplicity and clarity of its structure and its process; the complexity and ambiguity of its associations – provides a marker of the articulation of openness with which this present issue is concerned.

The philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy in *The Gravity of Thought* (1997) writes of meaning as opening, and invites us to think on the limit, to be 'passible'

(xvii) to the open character of the event of meaning, its inappropriable opening up at/of the limits of subjectivity. Opening of meaning – meaning as opening. Meaning's exposure at the limits. Thought that is ex-posed to the irrecuperable excess of and in meaning which Nancy terms the 'figure': 'A figure would be the entire weight of a thought: its way, not of "thinking" meaning (of elaborating its signification) but of letting it weigh, just as it comes, just as it passes away, heavy or light, and always at the same time heavy and light' (82).

The work of the American artist Morgan O'Hara (pp. 41–2 below) provides us with two 'live transmissions' – traces of compassionate contemplations that displace the parameters of subjectivity by letting the elsew/here weigh, just as it comes, just as it passes away. The work is a small sample of an extensive and ongoing body of 'live transmissions' registering movement – particularly hand-movements – in all sorts of different contexts and circumstances. This work places itself at that opening between the fixity of registration and the ephemerality of what it registers, at the limits of attention to the solidity of event and the fluidity of its passing. It is surrounded in this issue by an array of articulations and propositions with regard to openings: in and of meaning, identity, perception, the mapping of memory, the materiality of writing and its processes, the textualizing of the ephemeral, of dis/appearance. Brian Catlin's 'invisible shapeshifting mass', the blur of truth and death on its forehead: the writing of sculpture as 'an obstinate gift to the imagination, a curve from the seclusion of possession'. Anna Furse's desire to 'make jargon sing', by inscribing embodied histories of resonances and associations lurking within the cinders of past events and experiences. Lisa Lewis's mapping of the volatile nexus of memory, place, identity, and of the thresholds between constitutive space-times in 'Welshness'. John Downie's discussion of a 'cinematographic theatre' practice in New Zealand, drawing on Deleuze's notion of cinema as affecting 'the visible with a fundamental disturbance, and the world with

a suspension, which contradicts all natural perception', producing 'the unthought in thought, the birth of the visible which is still hidden from view'. Carlyle Reedy's 'museum of the process' in work that Alaric Sumner celebrates as 'radically uncertain, constantly changing, unknowing – open to referential seepage'. Koen Tachelet's tracking of the inevitability of the 'meaningful absences' in blindspots, the no-man's-lands they create, and of interactive displacement as ethical responsibility. Valentina Valentini's account of the possible worlds in Heiner Müller's feral dramaturgy, of theatre as 'motion in a space studded with questions that have no answers'. The ambiguities and ellipses of Josef Nadj's work: the mysterious, the unfathomable, the labyrinthine, the blindness and in-sight of contemplation. Joshua Sofaer's analysis of positionality, the fixity of meaning, and the continual reappraisal and reinvention of the role of the spectator (the winner of our annual Essay Competition entry).

The next issue of *Performance Research* – 'On Animals' (ed. Alan Read) – will extend these reflections through materials which attempt to think (on) the limit of the 'human'. By way of a prefatory bridge towards this next issue, a fragment of Rainer Maria Rilke's eighth 'Duino Elegy':

We know what is really out there only from the animal's gaze:
 for we take the very young child and force it around, so that it
 sees objects – not the Open, which is so deep in animals'
 faces. Free from death (Rilke, trans. Stephen Mitchell, 1987:
 193).

For their invaluable help in the preparation of this issue, the issue editors would like to thank Clancy Pegg, Kevin Mount, Marta Braun, the Musée Marey in Beaune.

Ric Allsopp & David Williams

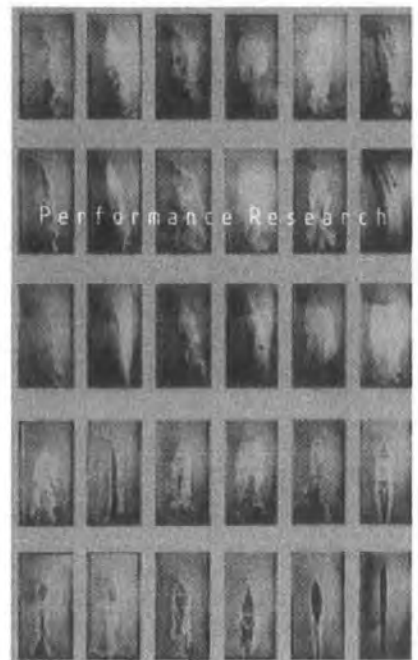
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2000

'Except the cinders: a fire trajectory',
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Except the Cinders – a Fire Trajectory

David Williams

For Vittorio Mezzogiorno

Ordinary human beings do not like mystery since you cannot put a bridle on it, and therefore, in general, they exclude it, they repress it, they eliminate it – and it's *settled*. But if on the contrary one remains open and susceptible to all the phenomena of overflowing, beginning with natural phenomena, one discovers the immense landscape of the *trans-*, of the passage. Which does not mean that everything will be adrift: our thinking, our choices, etc. But it means that the factor of instability, the factor of uncertainty, or what Derrida calls the *undecidable*, is indissociable from human life. This ought to oblige us to have an attitude that is at once rigorous and tolerant and doubly so on each side: all the more rigorous than open, all the more demanding since it must lead to openness, leave passage; all the more mobile and rapid as the ground will always give way, always.

(Hélène Cixous and Mireille Calle-Gruber 1997: 51–2. original emphasis).

OUT OF THE FRYING PAN ... PYROMANIA, PYROMENA, PYROGRAPHY

There's nothing to grasp onto except the cinders.
(Robert Smithson in Holt 1979: 176)

Fire is as evanescent as speech, as elusive as certainty,
as animate and unstable as identity.
(Blocker 1999: 30)

Burning bush and pillar of fire. The fire duel between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. St Anthony's Fire. St Elmo's Fire. 'Greek fire', the earliest incendiary weapons developed over 1000 years ago. The burning of the great library of Alexandria: the erasure of the archive. The nine-day fire in Nero's Rome. The destruction of the Globe Theatre in 1613 during a performance of Henry VIII, its thatch ignited by the firing of a

canon onstage; all those fires in theatres over the centuries. The Great Fire of London, in which over 13,000 houses were destroyed. The Hindu tradition of *suttee*: The burning of witches. The burning of Jeanne d'Arc. The burning of books. The fire-bombing of Cologne, Hamburg, Dresden. The Nazi crematoria. The burning of flags. Scorched earth warfare. Fire-throwers. 'The fire', a name given to the radical black militant movement in the 1960s. Napalm. The self-immolation of Buddhist monks in response to the Vietnam War. Necklacing. Petrol bombs. The Toxteth and Brixton riots. *Adittapariyaya-sutta*, the Buddha's Fire Sermon. The burning burning burning of T. S. Eliot's 'Fire Sermon' in *The Wasteland*. Brahmin fire fertility rituals. The burning ghats of Varanasi. Balinese cremation towers. Fire-walking. Arson. The fire I deliberately started in my family's back yard at the age of

6, then tried to stamp out, my shoe and sock on fire. Spitfire 'red-head' matches. Bonfire night. The branding of cattle, the blacksmith's forge, hot-shoeing horses. At the age of 9, seeing a running man with his shirt ablaze, rolled and extinguished by passers-by; the smell of burning hair. Bunsen burners, magnesium, phosphorous, glass-blowing in school science classes. Jean-Jacques Annaud's 1982 film *Quest for Fire*. Liar liar, pants on fire. Firing my first coil-pot, which looked as though it had been fashioned by someone with heavily bandaged hands. Fire alarms, fire extinguishers, fireflies, fireworks, firearms. Exploring the ruins of the Burnt Shirt Mine in the South Australian outback, imagining the origin of its naming. Sun-burn. Richard Leakey's persuasion of Daniel Arap Moi to torch Kenya's 80,000-ton stockpile of ivory in front of the world's media in 1989. Slash and burn, and the continuing 'fire economies' of deforestation. The stone and fire of Mary Beth Edelson's Great Goddess rituals. The burning house in Tarkovsky's *Mirror*. The fire paintings of Tim Storrier, the fire sculptures of Ana Mendieta and Clive van den Berg, the fire tables of Ric Allsopp. The fire performances of Zbigniew Warpechowski (who set his hair ablaze in Stuttgart in 1984) and Alastair Maclennan. Fire in the belly. Fired up. Firestorms. Ash Wednesday, Victoria, 1983. Oil wells ablaze in Kuwait. Waco. Spontaneous combustion. Seeing a fireball jump a road in Western Australia, strike and incinerate a bridge, like a missile. The range of 'pyrophyte' flora dependent upon fire for its own regeneration. The so-called 'firestick farming' practices of Australian aborigines. The lightning strike that shattered a tree with a terrifying boom not 10 yards away as I ran with R through a storm on Wilson's Promontory. Fire-starter. Back-burning backfiring. The bushfire I unwittingly started in 1998 in central Victoria - burning waste becoming a burning bush becoming a big fuck-off burning paddock. Fire engines. Fire fighters. Red-faced apologies. The self-immolation of a young Kurdish protester in the streets of London in 1999. The crazy dog I

met in Edinburgh in the same year, who had been torched after having had lighter fuel poured on his back. Lighting a candle for my mother in Trivandrum, remembering her cremation. Lighting the pilot light for the central heating after summer. Lighting a cigarette. The lifespan of a match flame.

PARIS IS BURNING: LES BOUFFES DU NORD

Fire is a privileged phenomenon which can explain anything. If all that changes slowly may be explained by life, all that changes quickly is explained by fire. Fire is the ultra-living element. It is intimate and it is universal. It lives in our heart. It lives in the sky . . . It shines in Paradise. It burns in Hell. It is gentleness and torture. It is cookery and it is apocalypse.

(Bachelard 1987: 7)

Fire . . . initiates a negative epistemology where knowledge is shrouded by the smoke of ideologies. Underlying fire is a system of heterogeneous values and convictions which, familiar and unquestioned, jeopardize with extreme prejudice the philosophy of science, the writing of history and the practice of theatre.

(Read 1993: 236)

Peter Brook's 25-year relationship with the Bouffes du Nord in Paris is rounded by fire. When Brook and Micheline Rozan found the Bouffes in 1974, it was in a very wounded state.¹ Having been out of use as a theatre for 22 years, and finally abandoned after a fire, its owner was in the process of demolishing it gradually to make way for a carpark. He had ripped out and torched the stalls seating, and set fire to the balconies; in addition, there was substantial water damage from leaks in the roof. Fire and water. Although he could not have conceived of it until that moment, its 'ruined splendour' (Brook 1998: 196) was just what Brook was looking for:

Suddenly a door opened and there was the Bouffes, a majestic volume with light streaming down through the dome and the dusty air onto what looked, at ground level, like a bomb site. There was a heap of rubble in the middle

of the space with wires hanging everywhere, evidence of destruction in progress. I was immediately certain that this was the right place for us. Even in its suffering condition there was an elegance to the proportions, a dignity to the atmosphere. It was clearly a theatre but it looked nothing like it must have done previously: the 'cultural' skin of architectural decoration had been cauterised away.

(Brook in Todd and Local 2000: 27)

Fire as *écorché*, a flaying of the anatomical surface of an anthropomorphized interior, a spatializing of interiority. Fire as transformation and revelation. Still today, much of the Bouffes' weathered texturing is the product of its fires, what Gaston Bachelard calls 'pyromena': phenomena realized through fire (Bachelard 1987: 58). The pyro-graphic 'writing of the disaster' (Blanchot 1986), i.e. the traces it leaves in its wake. Knowledge and memory of the disaster.

The changes wrought by fire are changes in substance: that which has been licked by fire has a different taste in the mouths of men. That which fire has shone upon retains as a result an ineffaceable colour. That which fire has caressed, loved, adored, has gained a store of memories and lost its innocence.

(Bachelard 1987: 57)

Furthermore this fire unsettled existing structures to 'leave passage' (Cixous), for here is an instance of elemental and human intervention conspiring unwittingly to turn what Brook calls a 'two-room theatre' – a divisive configuration separating the worlds of performers and auditorium – into a single 'shared' space. A 'derelict space' or 'zone of indeterminacy that bodies-in-becoming may make their own' (Massumi 1992: 104). A landscape of the passage.²

Impressions are strangely contradictory, for the Bouffes appears to be at an indeterminate mid-point between renovation and entropy or demolition. It bears the marks of transition from past traditions and forms in decline to signs of regenerative life within the 'forgotten, battered shell' (Brook 1998: 193); cracked mouldings, fissured and pock-marked

walls, a leaking dome in the roof at the apex of the space's soaring verticality sit alongside undisguised rough new plasterwork and holes punched in the side walls. The immediate reality of the setting is simultaneously epic and intimate, near and far, present and invisible in the double perspective of reality that a performance can effect; it pulses to the foreground of one's attention then recedes, its reality mutating and continually redefining itself:

Its walls belong to the same world as the auditorium, but suggest the possibilities of imagining oneself somewhere else: in a palace, a mosque, a vast landscape, a cave, a forest.

(Andrew Todd in Todd and Local 2000: 22)

As a whole this charged space possesses a quality of weathered, textured humanity, the environment bearing silent witness to the passage of time, revealing the traces of its pasts like stigmata. Its material presence exudes energy, warmth, conductivity, dynamic scale and a particular quality of active silence. In Pierre Nora's formulation it is a *milieu de mémoire*, a vibrant memory environment, rather than a *lieu de mémoire*, a monument to the past (Nora 1989: 7). In the present, its former lives are redundant, anachronistic, now no more than a spectral presence. Any space's functional status shifts as it is redefined through time, until it becomes a kind of palimpsest of cultural layers and natural processes. Here a dead place is reanimated, phoenix-like, from the ashes of its senescent pre-history, infused by play with the possibility of future histories, new spatial becomings. So one can come to see the space (and by extension other aspects of the realities rehearsed there) not as static, but as in process, in a state of flux.

In this context, Mohsen Mostafavi and David Leatherbarrow's *On Weathering: The Life of Buildings in Time* provides an illuminating account of the notion that, whereas 'architectural finishing ends construction, weathering constructs finishes' (Mostafavi and Leatherbarrow 1993: 5). The two authors celebrate both the memory traces that remain of a building's pasts and the possible futures created by the processes of weathering after

construction. They locate a building's 'continuous metamorphosis' as 'part of its beginning(s) and ever-changing "finish"' (p.16). In other words, they suggest: 'Weathering brings the virtual future of a building into dialogue with its actual present, as both are entangled in the past' (p.113). Their account has great resonance in relation to Brook's chosen work-space, and its intertwining with the worlds-in-transition invariably presented there in Brook's group's performances.

Then in late February 1999, a second fire started in the Gare du Nord next door to the Bouffes in some temporary offices. According to the British architect Andrew Todd, it soon spread to the theatre, 'engulfing Brook's office first. The firemen arrived just in time to stop the theatre being completely burnt down – another 15 minutes would have been enough, I'm told' (Todd 1999). Brook's personal collection of videos and other documents archiving rehearsals and performances over the years was largely destroyed by the fire, in conjunction with the collapse of a ceiling and the quantity of water pumped into the building. The out of bounds, the out-landish, the untimely, the disorderly on the 'inside'. Fire as the erasure of an archive, the destruction of a particular form of memory. 'Burn even the memory of it' (Galeano 1985: 274). A writing of the disaster which annihilates writing's trace. Knowledge and memory as disaster.

A FIRE TRAJECTORY

This world . . . ever was and is and shall be an eternal living Fire, kindled and extinguished measure for measure. . . . Everything is exchanged for fire, and fire for all things.

(Heraclitus in Zeller 1997: 46)

All is burning. And what is the all that is burning?

(Buddha, 'The Fire Sermon')

In public utterances, in his work with actors, and in the scenography of his work as director, Brook has returned again and again to fire as Heraclitean event-process that is always the same and always

different: its saturated hypertextual metaphoricity, its protean materiality (and their conjunction in what Bachelard calls 'material imagination'), the contradictory ideologies it attracts. If on the one hand it is undeniably 'destructive, irreversible, purposeless, self-generating' (Goudsblom 1992: 1), or perhaps because of these very qualities, fire's chaotic and mysterious form can be perceived as an un-settling 'phenomenon of overflowing' which spreads (like Artaud's plague) to reveal a 'landscape of the trans-, the passage'. And like performance, fire understands and enacts the generative possibilities of disappearance. Brook has talked, for example, of the actor's proximity to the task in hand in terms of shifting levels of temperature; of the materiality of energy and its circulation – complicity and energized connectedness as sparks and arcing, energies underlying forms as volcanic magma, etc.; of improvisation as 'trial-by-fire'; of the theatre event in terms of combustion (an economy of friction, stoking, growth, ordered disorder, expenditure); of 'meeting', 'presence', rhythm in terms of heating, flaring, burning, and a transfixing and ephemeral beauty (what is Zeami's *jo-ha-kyu* if not a tracing of the contours of the priming-emergence-dissolution of fire-energetics?); of the function of theatre in terms of the controlled fires of cooking and providing nourishment, and the temporary social integrations afforded by gathering around sources of heat and illumination to exchange stories; and of theatre itself as self-effacing mark, both immolant and ephemeral, 'a self-destructive art . . . always written on the wind' (Brook 1968: 37).

I propose to trace a fire trajectory of Peter Brook's work since the early 1960s, in the form of a chronological annotated list. An enumeration, an aide-mémoire, and a leaning. A conjunction and proliferation of fragments, with each fragment conceived in Blanchot's terms, as 'the little by little suddenly' (Blanchot 1986: 34). My aim in this critical f(r)iction is to revisit moments, narratives, actions, spaces, to stir the embers in the ashes, and try to 'make them sing again. Softly a-new a-gain' (Minh-ha 1989: 128). Let me preface this list with a

short passage from 'The Empty Space', about the pyromena of theatre-as-event:

When a performance is over, what remains? . . . When emotion and argument are harnessed to a wish from the audience to see more clearly into itself – then something in the mind burns. The event scorches onto the memory an outline, a taste, a trace, a smelt – a picture. It is the play's central image that remains, its silhouette, and if the elements are highly blended this silhouette will be its meaning, this shape will be the essence of what it has to say.

(Brook 1968: 152)

1964: 'The Theatre of Cruelty Season': Artaud's image of the immanent presence of the actor-as-martyr burnt at the stake, signalling through the flames:

The actor's work is never for an audience, yet always is for one. The onlooker is a partner who must be forgotten and still constantly kept in mind: a gesture is statement, expression, communication and a private manifestation of loneliness – it is always what Artaud calls a signal through the flames – yet this implies a sharing of experience, once contact is made.

(Brook 1968: 57)

1964: Genet's *The Screens*: tableau X, the burning of the orchard as action painting: performers frantically splash paint on the screens to represent fire, while others create the sounds of crackling flames by twisting and crushing pieces of bright orange paper in their hands. Comparing the performance with David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* (with its celebrated jump-cut from flaming match to sun), a film which gave him 'no feeling of heat', Russian film director Grigori Kozintsev wrote: 'I felt heat in the combination of light and colour . . . here they are seeking the white heat of passion. . . ' (quoted in Trewin 1971: 144).

1965: a rehearsed reading of Peter Weiss's *The Investigation*, a text comprising transcribed testimonies of people implicated in the Holocaust, both perpetrators and survivors. Blanchot has written of the Holocaust as 'the absolute event of history . . .

that utter-burn where all history took fire, where the movement of meaning was swallowed up' (1986: 47).

1966: *US*, with its starting-point and central image in the petrol-fueled self-immolation of a Buddhist monk in Saigon as a protest against the Vietnam war: the Buddha's fire sermon literalized, as it was by Jan Palach in Prague and the Quaker Norman Morrison on the steps of the Pentagon. The absolutism, courage, agonizing violence, futility and despair of self-sacrifice. 'Ideal, ideal, ideal/knowledge, knowledge, knowledge/boomboom, boomboom, boomboom' (Tristan Tzara, *Sept Manifestes Dada* 1924). Glenda Jackson during the performance: 'People don't just burn in Vietnam: we burn here, in one another's arms.' The performance's final sequence in which white butterflies were released from the stage into the auditorium from a black box (as in John Cage's composition *1960, no. 5*), before one final 'butterfly' was lifted out of the box and incinerated in silence in the flame of a lighter: an illusionist *coup de théâtre* and a provocation – it was a crumpled piece of paper. An illusion of life reduced to the silence of smoke and ash. After the first run-through, Brook addressed the company:

Think of the image of burning, and think of it in its most primitive form – rubbing two sticks together. . . . The harder these two sticks rub together, the more fiercely they fight with each other, the more candle-power will be produced. Finally, they have only one alternative: to break, or to ignite. So it must be with the contradictions of this Vietnam situation; they must be pressed and pressed harder and harder together, so that each person, on the stage and in the house, is forced into a more and more uncomfortable position, until he [sic] finds the spark that for him makes it possible to bear these antagonisms, these contradictions. For himself. In himself.

(Hunt and Reeves 1968: 142)

1971: *Orghast*. Ted Hughes's word 'orghast', which he located as 'the central image of the play' – constructed from two root sounds in his invented language: 'orgh' (life, being) and 'ghast' (spirit, flame): 'the fire of being'. In search of a

contemporary 'deep song',³ Brook and Hughes returned to the myth of Prometheus's defiant theft of fire – and language – and to Avesta, the incantatory language of the fire prophet Zoroaster. The second part of the performance occurred around the Zoroastrian fire altars of Nuqsh-e-Rustam in 'The City of the Dead' at Persepolis, with its ancient friezes of Ahura Mazda the sun god: the archaeological relics of pyroclastic. Light sources were a huge suspended ball of fire, torches, a full moon and the dawn sun. The timing of the performance, its ending coinciding with dawn, like *The Mahabharata*: renewal, rebirth, but also sublime undoing of knowing – an ambiguity Edmond Jabès has articulated: 'Day breaks. The night has conceived' (Jabès 1991: 53). 'Dawn is but a gigantic auto-da-fé of books, a grandiose spectacle of supreme knowledge dethroned' (Jabès 1996: 31). In the wake of a fraught rehearsal process and a volatile political context, Brook chose to remember 'the fire of the event itself' (Brook in Smith 1972: 257).

1977: *Ubu*. The tiny straw fire constructed by the peasants between two upended bricks: both metonym and metaphor of the fragility of the hearth, of sociality and refuge, before Ubu arrives on top of his 'voiturin à phynances' – a giant industrial cable drum which bulldozes its way through the family foyer, extinguishing and erasing all in its wake.

1979: *Conference of the Birds*. The birds' encounter with the phoenix, their witnessing of its death and rebirth in the ashes. The valley of annihilation (Sufi *fana*) with its story of three moths circling ever closer to a candle flame. Only one of them attains understanding in the direct experiencing of the heart of the flame, but this moth is consumed and the light is extinguished.

1981: *La Tragédie de Carmen*. An ambiguous erotics of fire. As Carmen and Don José consummate their love, three tiny votive fires hissed and crackled at the rim of an ochre circle inscribed around them. An image of plenitude, harmonious union, protection –

and of containment within a tragic cyclical destiny: the conflation of 'l'amour' and 'la mort'. Fire as material sign of celebration and destruction, fire as *duende*.⁴ Carmen/gypsy/ woman: 'in the cinder of a name, the cinder itself, the literal – that which he loves – has disappeared' (Derrida 1991: 49). Furthermore, as Mircea Eliade remarked, there is an 'intimate relation between the techniques and mystiques of fire' (Eliade 1958: 86). And the conjunction here of art and science in a scenographic pragmatics and poetics enacts what Henry James once described as a 'deep-breathing economy of organic form'. For these fires were made from 'a precisely weighed quantity of apple wood with a particular smell, timed to die out at a precise moment in the action, then just brushed back into the dirt' (Todd 1999). Image, love and life as active vanishing. 'The fire and the song' (Tam'si 1970: 141).

1985: *Le Mahabharata*. The great fire poem of destruction and creation, of desolation and renewal. At its epicentre, the blinding vision of Krishna's cosmic form (*visvarupa*) as revealed to Arjuna on the battlefield in the *Bhagavad Gita*: an image of apocalyptic conflagration, of 'horizons ablaze' with a 'thousand suns in the sky'. An image recalled by J. Robert Oppenheimer in the immediate after-shock of the first explosion of a nuclear device, on the Day of the Dead, a fire festival in New Mexico. The firestorm of the *Kaliyuga*, the age of Kali. Fire circles and fire trails springing from and snaking through the sand. Fire over water. The fireball of Pasupata, Shiva's ultimate weapon.

Fire is a boundary – between health/luck/fecundity and illness/bad fortune/barrenness; between light and dark, or between life and death. It is the universal symbol of transformation, of soul escaping from body, and it has always been associated with sacrifice.

(Lippard 1983: 175)

Pyrotechnics of such quantity and complexity that Japan's fire regulations had to be changed in order to accommodate the production on tour. Even the pyromena of fire-events were exploited scenographically; a residual circle of black burnt

earth around a pool, the by-product of an earlier sequence of ritual pyromantic invocation, serves to redefine the pool as poisoned lake; the theatrical equivalent of a cinematic match-cut; nothing is gratuitous.

1993: Finally *L'homme qui*. Here is Brook, in *Threads of Time*, describing an action in the performance which reflects his ideal of distillation and transparency:

Yoshi Oida came to the table, lit the candle with special concentration and then for a long time gazed intently at the flame. Then he blew it out, took another match, lit the candle and blew it out again. As he started once more, I could feel the tension in the audience increasing. The audience could read into the simple actions far more than they apparently expressed . . . it understood directly what was going on. We seemed at last to be approaching the transparency that for so long had been our aim.

(Brook 1998: 224)

Fire and/in performance. Fields of indeterminacy and potentiality. Heterotopic phenomena of overflowing. Landscapes of the passage . . .

Which does not mean that everything will be adrift: our thinking, our choices, etc. But it means that the factor of instability, the factor of uncertainty, or what Derrida calls the *undecidable*, is indissociable from human life. This ought to oblige us to have an attitude that is at once rigorous and tolerant and doubly so on each side: all the more rigorous than open, all the more demanding since it must lead to openness, leave passage; all the more mobile and rapid as the ground will always give way, always.

(Cixous and Calle-Gruber 1997: 61–2)

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NOTES

1 Le Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord, on the rue du Faubourg Saint-Denis between the Place de la Chapelle and the Gare du Nord, was constructed as a *théâtre à l'italienne* in 1876 by the architect Louis Marie Laménil. Having been a theatre of rather mixed fortunes, it was finally closed as a venue in 1950, and then abandoned to the elements after a fire in 1952. By the early 1970s, Les Bouffes had become a derelict, 'lost' theatre in the unfashionable, even seedy, 10th arrondissement of Paris. For Brook it seemed to furnish a context in which he could freely determine working conditions, and for the past 25 years it has served as rehearsal and performance space, refuge in the heart of the city, meeting place.

2 In a wonderfully inflammatory essay exploring a historiography of fire and/in theatre, and of fire as one of bourgeois theatre's 'others', Alan Read has suggested that: 'it was not the movement from the street to the interior that compromised a modern theatre, but the advent of the safety curtain. The intention, artistic principles apart, was to separate performer from audience in the interests of safety. . . . Hotel fires cut to the quick because of the expectation that a place to sleep is a safe place to sleep.

But what of theatre? We have come to expect theatre to be a safe place to sleep – but should we? Do we have a right to expect safety where there once was danger? And what price do we pay for that safety – has theatre not disappeared in direct proportion to the restrictions that govern its performance?' (Read 1993: 233–4).

3 '[Deep song] is much deeper than the present heart that creates it or the voice that sings it . . . It comes from remote races and crosses the graveyard of the years and the fronds of parched winds. It comes from the first sob and the first kiss' (Lorca 1980: 30).

4 'There are neither maps nor disciplines to help us find the *duende*. We only know that he burns the blood like a poultice of broken glass, that he exhausts, that he rejects all the sweet geometry that we have learned, that he smashes styles. . . . The *duende* loves the rim of the wound, he draws near places where forms fuse together into a yearning superior to their visible expression' (Lorca 1980: 45, 50).

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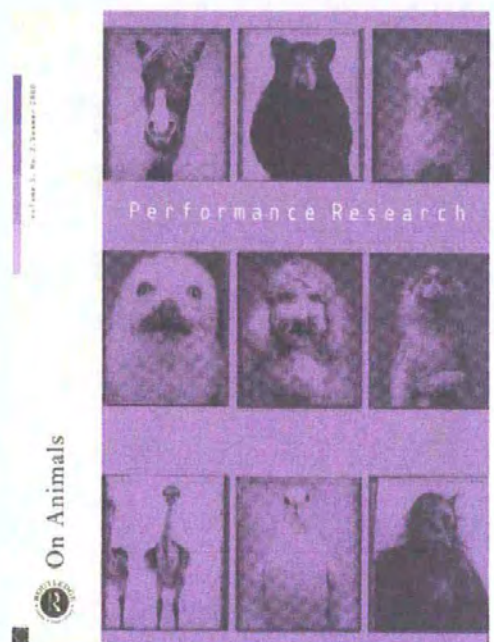
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The Right Horse, The Animal Eye – Bartabas and Théâtre Zingaro

David Williams

All at once, led out by a single man, ten horses were stepping, stepping into the snow. And there in the silence, at the mid-point of the day, in a dirty, disgruntled winter, the horses' intense presence was blood, was rhythm, was the beckoning light of all being. I saw, I saw, and seeing, I came to life. There was the unwitting fountain, the dance of gold, the sky, the fire that sprang to life in beautiful things.

(Neruda 1972: 86–9)

ALTERITY AS EVENT

The construction of the human is a differential operation that produces the more and the less 'human', the inhuman, the humanly unthinkable. These excluded sites come to bound the 'human' as its constitutive outside, and to haunt those boundaries as the persistent possibility of their disruption and rearticulation.

(Buller 1993: 8)

In this account of aspects of the equestrian performances of Théâtre Zingaro, my primary concerns are with the nature of animal 'performance' and the possibility of an inter-species inter-subjectivity. Bartabas's encounters with horse-performers seem to actualize certain core elements of the philosophical discourses of contemporary theorists of alterity and ethics. They rehearse, in the fire of the moment each time anew again, a constellation of questions relating to identity and difference, seeming and doing, being and the infinite works-in-progress that becomings make of identities. How might one interact with another whose difference is recognized as an active event, rather than a failure of plenitude?

What are the productive qualities of alterity? In what ways might one work (in) an existential in-between and perceive other-wise? How, in Jean-Luc Nancy's terms, might one 'think *on* the limit' (Nancy 1997:70) and *ex-pose* oneself to the event/advent of meaning?¹ In other words, if the 'animal' comprises a constitutive outside of the 'human', (how) can this limit-horizon be experienced as 'not that at which something stops but . . . that from which something begins its presencing' (Heidegger 1971: 154)?

Bakhtin's notion of 'answerability' and its relational architectonics, and Levinas's articulation of 'responsibility' in the tactical encounter with another he calls the 'face-to-face', have been of continuing stimulus in this context.² Each of them conceives of identity as act, verb, multiple becoming. Each conceives of alterity in terms of unrealizable surplus: that which exceeds the cognitive emprise of the selfsame, an 'outside' necessitating an opening towards a performative, dialogical response. And as Michael Gardiner points out, each of them argues that: 'ethics is

constitutively linked to corporeality, the direct experience of “lived” time and place, and our effective and meaningful relations with concrete others’ (Gardiner 1996: 122). Can Bakhtinian and Levinasian models of (human, all too human) intersubjectivity and sociality be opened up to concrete animal others?

Secondly, Gilles Deleuze’s conception of ethics as a pragmatic and evaluative micro-politics – his affirmation of attempts ‘to make life something more than personal, to free life from what imprisons it’ (Deleuze 1995: 143) – is invaluable here. In his cartographies of the assemblages, molecular becomings, lines of flight and black holes of ‘man [sic], *deterri- torialized animal*’ (Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 134), his recurrent disposition towards immanent vitality continues to provoke enquiry into the possibilities of ‘Life’ as a processual, event-based ontology, traversing ‘both the livable and the lived’ (Deleuze 1998: 1):

Making an event – however small – is the most delicate thing in the world: the opposite of making a drama or making a story. Loving those who are like this: when they enter a room they are not persons, characters or subjects, but an atmospheric variation, a change of hue, an imperceptible molecule, a discrete population [. . .] Everything has really changed.

(Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 66)

HORSE SENSE

[Man] was bound to fear the eye of the animal as *the carrier of a view of himself over which he had no control*. (Berger 1984: 99, original emphasis)

Animals – ‘trapped in a place of endless misrecognition’, like all of patriarchal humanism’s others³ – have often been defined in terms of lack: of reason,

memory, imagination, free will, conscience, language, and so on. Early Christian philosophers, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hegel and others, constructed hierarchies of the senses, categorized according to degrees of ‘humanity’ and ‘animality’. They tell us nothing about the particularities and differences of animal senses and perception; they

homogenize ‘animals’, and privilege human vision and its connections with the cogito (eye/I) above all else. Horses, for example, are often homogenized as a species, despite the enormous diversity of forms and types of *equus caballus*, and the very particular qualities of individual horses; and, like ballet dancers, their bodies are often defined in relation to an abstract ideal (‘conformation’). Furthermore, the mapping of an animal’s body, the naming of many of its constituent parts, tends to be effected through an anthropomorphic lens. For example, the ‘points’ of a horse

include forelock, jowls, throat, shoulders, breast, elbows, forearms, knees, heels, belly. The Empire of the Selfsame.

But what can a horse’s body do? Let’s take one example.

A horse’s ‘surplus of seeing’ (Bakhtin in Holquist 1990:36) is humanly unthinkable. Its eyes are the largest of any land mammal. Set laterally on the head, they have a field of vision of approximately 357 degrees, of which only about 60 degrees frontally are binocular. A horse holding its head level has two narrow blind spots: one directly behind its rump, one a few centimetres directly in front of its nose. In a horse’s eyes, active receptivity and blindness coexist. The placement of the eyes permits a panoramic view in the horizontal plane of vision; but with only limited accommodation in its lenses (about 1/5th the diopters of human eyes), a horse has restricted focusing ability. Its relatively

• Zimara. Photo: © Alchorse Art

fixed focal length is set at some distance, where it has a high degree of visual acuity; but without a fovea (enabling the tight, 'grasping' area of focus in human vision), a horse's vision remains planar, largely undifferentiated, i.e. peripheral throughout the panoramic vista, *tactile*. Like many mammals, horses are dichromates; they have red–blue colour vision, analogous to colour-blindness in humans. Like many mammals, and unlike most humans, however, they have excellent night vision.⁴

ANIMA(L) MUNDI: THÉÂTRE ZINGARO

In the eyes of a horse, sometimes I have even thought I've seen the primitive beauty of a world before the arrival of human beings.

(Bartabas in Pascaud 1997: 34)

Heaven and earth are one finger: all things are one horse.

(Chuang Tzu in Breytenbach 1990: 9)



• Bartabas and Zingaro, *Cabaret Équestre*, 1987. Photo: © Alphonse All

Over the past 15 years, Théâtre Zingaro have created six different productions: three versions of *Cabaret Équestre* (1984–90), *Opéra Équestre* (1991–3), *Chimère* (1994–6), and *Éclipse* (1997–9), as well as two feature films, *Mazzeppa* and *Chamane*. A new performance, *Triptyk*, opened in March 2000 in Amsterdam.⁵ This body of work is characterized by an aesthetic heterogeneity and the centrality of animal-performers, particularly horses; it has its roots in new circus, street theatre, impulse-based dance forms (e.g. contact), the corrida and, above all, Spanish and Portuguese 'high school' dressage forms (e.g. in the teachings of rider-philosopher Nuno Oliveira). However, although company director, trainer and performer Bartabas is an *écuyer* of exquisite finesse, his equestrian project is minoritarian; he is a foreigner in his own tongue. Here the machinic assemblage of classical dressage 'stutters' (repetition) and 'stammers' (suspension), it frays and unravels to produce impossible lines of flight. So, for example, Bartabas is only the second known rider this century, after James Fillis, to have realized the ('unnatural') reverse canter:

The way in which I work in dressage is very particular. I attempt to use the least possible physical force. What I do has almost nothing to do with classical dressage, which uses all sorts of aids, the hands, the legs. My approach relates to an old French training tradition which was then taken up by the Portuguese. The horse stands freely, supports himself; he is very well balanced. Physical strength has no role to play at all. Everything is based on sensation.

(Bartabas in Eyquem and Shungu 1997: 39)

Each of the Zingaro productions has been conceived scenographically and musically in terms of a particular horse-/traveller-culture. The company's stylistic trajectory has traced an itinerary from quasi-Orientalist spectacle to increasing sobriety in performances which have drawn in turn on the cultures of *Mitteleuropian* gypsies, Berber and Caucasian nomads, Rajasthani itinerant musicians, Korean shamanism and, most recently in *Triptyk*, a conjunction between the



• *Chimère*, Théâtre Zingaro, 1994. Photo: © Marc Enguerand

music of Stravinsky, Boulez and the Keralan martial art *kalarippayatt*. Above all, Bartabas structures every show – and every day at their communal base in Aubervilliers, northeast of Paris – around the primacy of encounters with horses. As well as core performers, the horses constitute a kind of *anima(l) mundi*, the cornerstone of a way of life for these contemporary nomads:

Horses have taught me everything. It is said [originally by the French natural historian Buffon] that 'the horse is man's most noble conquest', but I don't agree at all. Man is the horse's most noble conquest. For a horse is a mirror; it reflects back at us our mistakes and our moods. Every horse must be approached in a different way, just like people, and sometimes the encounter is completely disarming. Horses have taught me that there are no absolute rules. Nothing is ever finally acquired with them, and nothing ever happens as predicted. Working with horses means knowing how to adapt. [...] Loving horses and living with them also means being chained to them, like children. It's not enough just to ride them, you have to look after them, care for them, stay

vigilant; they didn't choose to be there, we chose for them. Horses have also taught me that there's a vast world between the dream one has and what one manages to do. But the greater the richness at the outset, the greater what remains at the end. At that stage, the relationship is no longer physical but psychic; one thinks of a movement and the horse does it. Sometimes the horse only traces the outline of the movement desired, and you must reward him for that, for he will have understood the work's essence. Time spent with a horse is never time wasted; it's fundamental, it's the soul. One mustn't let oneself be caught in the dissipations and dispersals that characterise our flawed lives at this century's end. One mustn't give in to comfort.

(Bartabas in Ciupa 1997: 79)

But in what ways do (the) animals 'perform'?

CLEVER HANS

The essential concern at the heart of all our performances is the relationship between people and horses. The theatrical subject is only a pretext.

(Bartabas in Eyquem and Shungu 1997: 37)

The animal eye perceives and reacts to the animal image in the other.

(James Hillman in Moore 1989: 68–9)

In 1904, a retired Berlin schoolteacher called Wilhelm von Osten attracted international attention when he produced public 'evidence' that a stallion, Clever Hans, was able to communicate 'verbally' and execute relatively complex mathematical, temporal and musical calculations; it was claimed, for example, that Hans could identify coins and musical scores, and answer questions about history, politics and geography. Using a blackboard, von Osten believed he had taught the horse a simple system correlating numbers with individual letters of the alphabet. Hans would tap a number on a board with his hoof to produce letters (1 tap = a, 2 taps = b, etc.), then words, sentences, 'thoughts'; he would also nod or shake his head in response to questions. Every correct answer elicited a sugar-cube reward. The Prussian Academy of Sciences was understandably

sceptical, and set up a commission to explore these claims of inter-species communication. Ultimately their research revealed that von Osten was unconsciously cueing the horse through subtle corporeal micro-tensions and releases, powerful catalytic triggers for the animal of which the human-trainer was not even aware. Hans was indeed sufficiently clever (and familiar with von Osten) to work out that if he stopped the tapping of his hoof at the point when von Osten relaxed, he would be rewarded.

Since that time, Clever Hans has been returned to repeatedly by animal behaviourists, psychologists and others as both cautionary tale and proof of the restricted parameters of animal ideation, and of the deep-seated projections and assimilationist tendencies of an anthropomorphism that yearns, like Dr Doolittle, to 'speak with the animals'. The so-called 'Clever Hans phenomenon', they suggest, underlines the fact that an animal's actions are little more than imprinted behavioural patternings (e.g. causal reward-based exchanges) or genetically hard-wired manifestations of instinctive response patterns (e.g. dominance/submission, flight/fight).⁶ But isn't the give-and-take of any dyad, human and/or

animal, marked to some degree by aspects of this phenomenon? And, to borrow the title of a Peggy Lee song, is that all there is? For Clever Hans also signals the humanly unthinkable sensitivity of animal perceptions in terms of an ability to apprehend the micro-details of expression, mood, shifts in skeleto-muscular tension, thermal skin patterning, olfaction, and so on. Oskar Pfungst, a scientist who published his study of Hans in 1907, concluded that the horse, when compared with his critics, was in reality a 'superior observer' (Hediger 1981:15). It seems an animal's 'dumbness' is really the measure of our 'deafness'.

Similarly, Bartabas contends that 'a horse's perception of the real is so much finer than ours. If intelligence is sensitivity to what is around us, then horses are far more subtle than us. The more one knows, the less one feels' (Bartabas in Pascaud 1997). For Bartabas, human-horse interactions represent the possibility of a conjunction of two very different ontologies and epistemologies – one sensory-motor/perceptual, the other intellectual – and, in riding, the temporary creation of a third composite assemblage much greater than the sum of its parts: equestrianism as a becoming-centaur for both rider and horse.⁷

• *Éclipse*, Théâtre Zingaro, 1998. Photo: © Antoine Poupel



A horse perceives us on an internal level, that's his great strength. All the more so if you work with him every day. He feels your internal energy. Your moods, your joys, your troubles, he senses them all. Since a horse is a kind of mirror, he doesn't miss a thing, and that's why he won't ever forgive you. Errors are almost always the rider's fault. [...] The work with horses, as with other artists in the company, is always directed at a heightening and focusing of sensitivity. How to sublimate the beauty of a horse's gesture, how to create conditions which will allow such actions to be produced with a certain warmth which is both emotionally rich and gentle, how to develop this affective aspect within the relationship between a human being and a horse. [...] In Europe there's a common tendency to seek reassurance by thinking of animals as humans. To my mind, animals in general, and horses in particular, have a highly developed instinctive perception – contrary to humans, who possess another kind of intelligence (which sometimes creates problems for them): reflexive awareness of life, death, time, which can be channelled into art, etc. It seems in the interest of both humans and horses to find ways to come together; what happens if you conjoin a horse's instinctive modes of perception and a human's intellectual reflection? The basis of all of my work is in trying to get closer to their perceptions of the world; and this is at the centre of my whole way of life. What counts is what lies behind the intention of a gesture, what informs it. Any gesture only has value if it touches on grace.

(Bartabas in Corre 1997: 14)

LOUSY ACTORS: 'THE THING WHICH IS NOT'

Yahoo as I am, it is well known through all Houyhnhnmland, that by the instructions and example of my illustrious master, I was able [...] to remove that infernal habit of lying, shuffling, deceiving, and equivocating, so deeply rooted in the very souls of all my species: especially the Europeans.

(Swift [1726] 1985: 40)

Ethologists have written extensively about animal display, their so-called displacement/redirection activities and ritualized behaviours, in terms of performance. But what kind of performance? In a

paper presented at a conference on the Clever Hans phenomenon in 1981, Paul Bouissac considered circus animal acts in terms of constructed and partial overlappings of different socio-biological and semiotic frames – those of trainer, audience, and animal:

On the one hand the trainers interact with their charges on the basis of their socio-biological competence, on the other they frame these interactions in particular situations relevant to the system of social interactions shared by the public for which they perform. Therefore all animal acts are the combination of a biologically patterned behavioural sequence and a constructed social situation.

(Bouissac 1981: 19)

For example, the bear who performs the 'kiss of death' on the mouth of his female trainer simply pursues and consumes bait (a carrot discreetly concealed in the trainer's mouth); spectators, however, see only the 'kiss' as part of a micro-narrative relating to, say, sexual power and an infantilized bestiality. In this way the trainer, 'a professional deceiver' (1981: 21) aware of both perspectives, manipulates hard-wired or imprinted animal responses by recontextualizing them to provide spectators with what they desire: charged narrative imagery and the illusion of an erasure of socio-biological 'otherness', i.e. the illusion that the animal recognizes and shares the world of the social situation in which he is placed, a world he is able to inhabit with 'pleasure'.

Bouissac concludes his causally behaviourist, zoosemiotic account of these constructed illusions of inter-species communication by suggesting that a circus animal can only be said to 'perform' in a very limited way:

... [it] negotiates social situations by relying on the repertory of ritualized behaviour that characterizes its species. [...] The trainer can elicit at will some segments of behaviour and frame them in a situation of his/her choice, but the animal's behaviour is never performed out of its own socio-biological context.

(1981: 24)

In other words, animals cannot knowingly enact the fictions of make-believe. Like Swift's equine

Houyhnhnms, they are unable to say 'the thing which was not (for they have no word in their language to express lying or falsehood)' (Swift [1726] 1985: 281).

Performance theorist Richard Schechner reaffirms this perspective when he suggests that, because most ritualized animal behaviour is genetically determined, animals lack one of the defining qualities of theatre:

[A] great difference between human and non-human performers is the ability of humans to lie and pretend [. . .] Although a few species specialize in 'deceit', most animal performances are automatically released, fixed, and stereotyped. There is no irony, no pliable back-and-forth play between the role and the performer, no trilogical interaction linking performer to performer to spectator.

(Schechner 1988: 225, 248)

In a more comic, anecdotal vein, Laurie Anderson has articulated a similar perception:

We built a big platform in my loft to do the 'angry dogs' film I needed for a song I was writing [. . .] Captain Hagerty, their trainer, promised: 'They're vicious! Really vicious!' But he could only get them into attack mode for a few seconds at a time before they began to smile those happy dog smiles they've all got. That's what I love about dogs: they're such lousy actors.

(Anderson 1994: 73)

However, if one shifts the models of performance and the nature of its interactions, it may be possible to conceive of an animal's 'lack' or 'inability' in rather more affirmative terms. In the mid-1960s, Grotowski had characterized his ideal of an actor's psycho-physical organicity in animal terms. He described a cat's ability to think with its body, short-circuiting the gap between internal impulse and external action; being is already doing. Bartabas's training and aspects of the Théâtre Zingaro performances seem to me to inhabit the space of an unpredictable play between task or work-game, horse-performer and human-performer, where 'performer' is conceived in the terms of Grotowski's later research as 'an *organism-channel* through which the energies circulate, the

energies transform, the subtle is touched [. . .] Everything is in lightness, in evidence. With Performer, performing can become near process' (Grotowski 1990: 375–6).

The very 'lousiness' of animal 'actors', in terms of their inability to sustain fictive bodies and effect a consciously ironic meta-braiding of a not-self with a not-not-self, makes for a particular quality of attention, conductivity and present-ness in the face-to-face encounter. While there are sequences in Théâtre Zingaro performances which reflect Bouissac's model of overlapping socio-biological frames constructing anthropomorphic images and narratives for spectators' pleasure, the model is reductive. It occludes another economy based on the circuits and intensities of an unpredictable



• The stallion Zingaro at the end of *Éclipse*, 1994. Photo: © Antoine Poupel

energetics, and a poetics of lightness.⁸ Furthermore, it ignores the ways in which the human is displaced by the call of the animal outside and required to respond by exposing something of the 'animal' within. When one watches Bartabas interact with a horse, there is no doubt that energies circulate and 'the subtle is touched'. The question is whether we have the (animal) eye to perceive the detailed 'matter' of these tactful exchanges and flows, without the need to laminate them with, and 'read' them through, theatrical situations and narratives of the kind to which Bouissac refers. As Wilhelm von Osten discovered, what is 'in evidence' is determined above all by ways of seeing.

WHAT CAN A BODY DO? BECOMING ANIMAL

One does not conform to a model, one straddles the right horse.

(Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 286)

Each Théâtre Zingaro performance is structured around a series of encounters, dialogues, singular interactional events ('haecceities').⁹

An encounter is perhaps the same thing as becoming, or nuptials [...] an effect, a zigzag, something which passes or happens between two [...] intermezzi, as sources of creation.

(Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 6, 28)

These encounters, 'doings in the now moment'¹⁰ in which the 'saying' takes precedence over the 'said', offer the possibility of what Deleuze calls 'becoming-animal':

In an animal-becoming a man and an animal combine, neither of which resembles the other, neither of which imitates the other, each deterritorializing the other [...] A system of relay and mutations through the middle

(1987: 50)

Consider, for example, the becoming-horse of Alexis *le trotteur* – 'never as much of a horse as when he played the harmonica' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 305), and of Little Hans, so absurdly

oedipalized by Freud (1987: 257 ff.). Or of Nietzsche, bareback-rider of unbroken thought, whose collapse around the neck of a flogged horse in Turin in 1889 was both a final s/tumble into madness (a becoming-horse) and, according to Milan Kundera, an apology to the horse for the barbarity of Descartes' soulless machinations (Kundera 1984: 290). Nietzsche's final break with human society thus occurred at the moment he wrapped himself around an animal face, and put the horse before Descartes.¹¹

Each of the Zingaro encounter-events emerges from Bartabas's training processes, his pragmatic recognition of the particularities and differences of individual horses, what is 'quick' in them as opposed to dead: their 'music', qualities of energy, intensities, sensitivities, disabilities; their *affects* and their circulation in relation to another. Like Deleuze with reference to Spinoza, he asks, 'What can a body do?'

You have not defined an animal until you have listed its affects. In this sense there is a greater difference between a race horse and a work horse than between a work horse and an ox.

(Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 60)

Thus, for example, Bartabas never obtains a particular horse to realize a specific activity (as in equestrian sports: a thoroughbred for speed, an Arab for endurance, a Selle français – the French warmblood – for jumping, etc.). Initially attracted by a face, an eye, a coat, a rhythm, a quality of attention, an aberrant behavioural energy, he works with horses of many different kinds: Andalusians, Lusitanians, Hackney ponies, Anglo-Arab crosses, Percherons, Friesians, Akhal-Tekes. Many of them are bought cheaply from the corrida or the army, because they were injured or unable to do what their owners required of them. Some are salvaged from abattoirs and knacker's yards. Most have been damaged in some way (like Bartabas, with both of his legs shattered in a motorcycle accident when he was 17), and considered physically or temperamentally flawed.

A delinquent, biting Hackney pony Félix (*le*



• *Triptyk*, Théâtre Zingaro. Photo: © Pascal Victor/MAXPPP, Paris, France, 03/2000

monstre), purchased from a dealer in Milan; in *Éclipse*, he dances a sinuous slow-motion *pas de deux* with Bartabas, their bodies circling and intertwined. Vinaigre, an aggressive Lusitanian originally bought at the age of 7 'because of his head', had been deemed untreatable on account of a floating fragment of bone in his pastern. After 2 years of training and osteopathy he calmed down, and now, at the age of 16, Bartabas considers him one of the finest 'dancers' in the company. A lame and formerly unridable Anglo-Arab, Mitcha-Figa, was bought for the 'radiance' of his coat and the attentive mobility of his ears. Quichotte, an Ortigon Costa Lusitanian bought cheaply from a corrida rider who found him wholly unresponsive, has become the performer of percussive airs-above-ground sequences and the reverse canter. And Zingaro, the black Friesian stallion who gave his name to the company, who took part in almost 2000 performances until his sudden death from a

'twisted gut' during the US tour of *Eclipse* in early 1999; acquired by Bartabas at the age of 1, this most imperious, playful and unpredictable of horse-performers was never backed during his 17 years of life, and trusted no-one except for Bartabas.

In preparation for the most recent Théâtre Zingaro performance *Triptyk*, and for the first time, Bartabas has spent about 2 years working with six Portuguese/Lusitanian horses, all of them blue-eyed albinos, through herd ('choral') interactions in the same space. In general, however, he trains each horse individually over a long period of time through an interactive floor technique sometimes called 'tackless' training, or 'free lunging': a *listening* 'beyond the ear',¹² rather than a 'whispering'. He shares a space with them, a close-up, haptic, smooth or 'nomad' space, with its imperative for a tactile or 'animal' eye.¹³ With them, through what he calls 'a series of controlled

accidents' (Arvers 1991: 19), he explores very fine, improvised dances of the im/possibility of contact, riding vectors, negotiating thresholds, sometimes dynamically, sometimes with an almost imperceptible slowness. He listens, watches, calls, attends to or provokes an impulse-based dialogue through a step, a shift in the angle of the head or gaze, a tension in the shoulders, a run, a sound, a pulse.

The aim of these inter-subjective encounters – which are event-based rather than structural, like much contemporary science and like Lyotard's 'dissemiotic' theatre of energetics (Lyotard 1976) – is to elicit trust and confidence, and to both encourage and witness the flaring into appearance of each horse's particular differences. The ideal is that self-generating, forward-moving impulsion and centredness that equestrian theorists call 'self-carriage': a practised and decided body rather than a docile body. If, for behavioural scientists, the horses' actions are simply hard-wired, Bartabas talks of learning through a common 'birthing' (*co-naître*), while in the same breath insisting that: 'The more one knows, the less one feels'. These interactions are the means and material function of a choreographic devising process that takes between 2 and 3 years per performance. They represent a tactical singularity, an ephemeral exchange, the possibility of *passibilité*: Jean-Luc Nancy's term for the respons-able activity of reception, the capacity to be affected by the irruption of presence. A delirious and deterritorializing provocation to 'love the elsewhere of the other' (Cixous 1997: 94) through qualities of attunement, of answerability, of an 'animal eye'/'I'. A becoming for both parties that is always 'in the middle'.

I am at a rather delicate moment in my life. My relationship with the horses has become so intimate, so private that sometimes I wonder whether I'm reaching a stage of incommunicability. I no longer ask myself whether what I'm doing is 'successful' or not. In my personal research, I constantly feel ahead of what can be achieved with the Zingaro company. One life will not be enough to achieve what I would like to invent with horses. [...] The last few months of training have excited me so much that for the

first time I've realised that I could let go of performing in front of audiences. I could give it away and stop directing Zingaro tomorrow. Then I would just shut myself away with three horses, working with them every day – but sparing them the cruel and contradictory requirements of daily performances in which what is most beautiful and rare is hardly ever seen.

(Bartabas in Garcin 1997: 91)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NOTES

- 1 "To be exposed" means to be "posed" in exteriority, according to an exteriority, having to do with an outside *in the very intimacy of an inside* (Nancy 1991, original emphasis).
- 2 For extended discussions of the 'face-to-face' and 'answerability', see e.g. Levinas (1985) and Holquist (1990). For a discussion of the relations between the 'face-to-face' and contact improvisation, see Williams (1996).
- 3 'Women and animals are represented as cohabitants of similar symbolic space – a kind of amorous disciplinary laboratory in obedience, tricks, and often bizarre balancing acts. [...] Women and animals are seemingly trapped in a place of endless misrecognition where they cannot gain access to symbolic space or to a recognition that proffers verification in a discourse of power' (Schutzman 1998: 136). For a comparison of the disciplinary regimes of equestrianism and patriarchy, see Griffin (1982). For an exhaustive critical account of constructions of animality in western philosophy, see de Fontenay (1998).
- 4 For a detailed analysis of equine perception, see Budiansky (1997).
- 5 *Triptyk* is built around three pieces of music: Stravinsky's *Rites of Spring* and *Symphony of Psalm*, with Boulez's *Dialogue de l'Ombre Double* as a bridging central section. After a European tour, including a season at the Festival d'Avignon, *Triptyk* will return to the

company's base in Aubervilliers, Paris, in October 2000. For further details, see Salino (1999). For more extensive discussions of the earlier Théâtre Zingaro productions, see Velter (1998) and 'L'étalon noir d'Aubervilliers' in Garcin (1998: 99–114).

6 For further discussion of the 'Clever Hans phenomenon', see e.g. Sebeok (1979), Sebeok and Rosenthal (1981).

7 On display in the Théâtre Zingaro *salle d'accueil* in Aubervilliers is a large sculpture of a centaur playing a violin, an object first used in performances of *Cabaret Équestre*. On both human and animal torsos, the ribcage covering the area of the heart is exposed, as in an anatomical *écorché*. Bartabas (*l'homme-centaur*, as he has often been called by French journalists) was the model for the human torso and head. The current Théâtre Zingaro logo is a violinist-centaur based on this sculpture. For Jorge Luis Borges, the centaur is 'the most harmonious creature of fantastic zoology' (Borges 1974: 37).

8 'Lack of mobility is always linked with the absence of lightness' (Oliveira 1988: 45).

9 Deleuze and Guattari describe 'haecceity' as 'a mode of individuation' consisting 'entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and be affected . . . the entire assemblage in its individuated aggregate that is a haecceity . . . It is the wolf itself, and the horse, and the child, that cease to be subjects to become events, in assemblages that are inseparable from an hour, a season, an atmosphere, an air, a life. . . . A haecceity has neither beginning nor end, origin nor destination; it is always in the middle. It is not made of points, only of lines. It is a rhizome' (1987: 261–3).

10 This phrase is used by Phillip B. Zarrilli to describe the goal of Asian performer training regimes in which performance techniques are 'encoded within the body': 'the state of accomplishment [Sanskrit, *siddhi*] in which the doer and the done are one . . . a state of stillness in motion [which] frees the martial or performing artist from "consciousness about", preparing him for a state of "concentratedness" . . . doings in the now moment' (Zarrilli 1990: 131, 134). Such bodily enculturation and its holistic accomplishment is wholly pertinent to both horses and riders in classical equitation/dressage.

11 I am indebted to Simon Persighetti for this astute inversion. For a brilliant discussion of Nietzsche's animals, including horses, see Ronel (1994).

12 For a fuller discussion of this notion, see Cixous (1986).

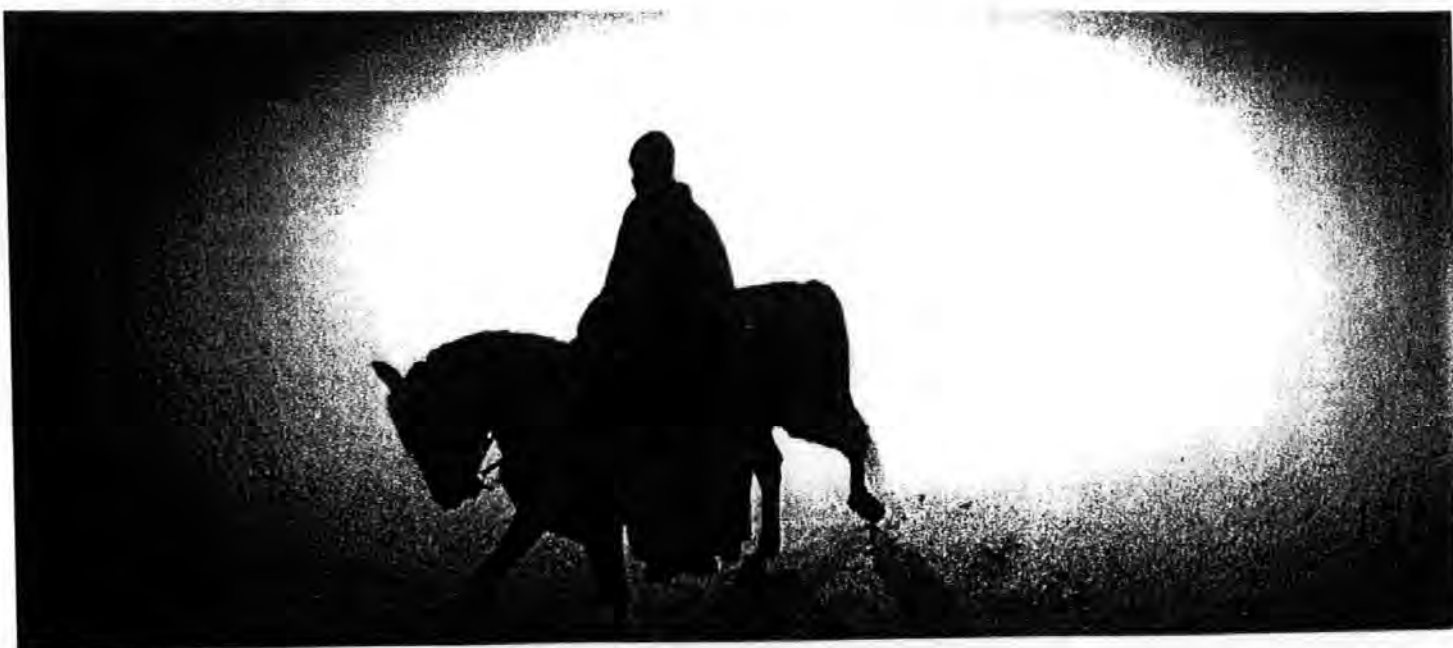
13 'The first aspect of the haptic smooth space of close vision is that its orientations, landmarks, and linkages are in continuous variation; it operates step by step. . . . The eye that beholds them [has] a function that is haptic rather than optical. This is an animality that can be seen only by touching it with one's mind, but without the mind becoming a finger, not even by way of the eye' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 493–4).

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* Bartabas in *Éclipse*, Théâtre Zingaro. © Théâtre Zingaro.

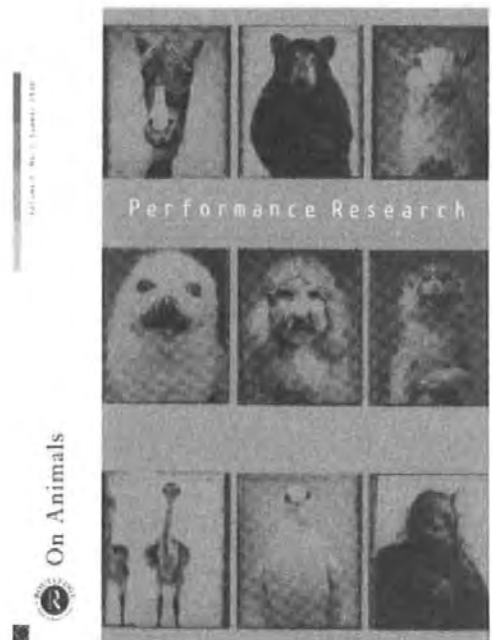


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'Wind, even when we do not move',
in *Performance Research* 5:2 ('On Animals'), Summer, 131-5

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PONTEFRACT

Going: SOFT

FIRST TWO RACES: Page 38

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£5000 added For 2yo fillies Weights 6st 11lb Penalties each Class F race won 2lb; for each Class E race won 4lb; for each Class D race won 7lb; for each Class C race won 10lb (penalties cumulative and maximum penalty 14lb) Entries 24 pay £25 Penalty value 1st £3,640 2nd £1,120 3rd £560 4th £280

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5 (2)	4 NOT JUST A DREAM 26 b f Mujadi-Red Cloud A Berry Norman Jackson	2 8-11 J Carroll (85)	
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LIGHT

When he was making a rare effort to come to terms with Descartes's legacy in Kant, Goethe suggested the horse as a kind of practical middle term, between the ideal and the real. He drafted an essay in 1794 to his friend Schiller, a great Kant enthusiast, and gave it a cumbersome title either of those thinkers would have admired: "How Far Can The Idea That Beauty Is Perfection Allied With Freedom Be Applied To Living Organisms?" Goethe found in the horse a partial answer to the Idealists. The horse evinced such a perfectly symmetrical design in nature that it seemed really to correspond to some beautiful freedom conceived by the a priori mind. There was, as Plato suggested, and Goethe now endorsed, in the very make-up of the horse a kind of confirmation of the rightness of rational effort and the excellent life [] a living symbol of some higher human potential.


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The very beginning of Genesis tells us that God created man in order to give him dominion over fish and fowl and all creatures. Of course, Genesis was written by a man, not by a horse.

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● **CHARMING ADMIRAL** will only run if there is rain before Sunday
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BETTING FORECAST: 4 Ledgeury Line, Royal Castle, 9-2 Give An Inch, 5 Jamaican Flight, 7 Little Brave, Protocol, 8 Charming Admiral, 9 Yes Keemo Sabee, 50 Black Ice Boy.

SPOTLIGHT

And still they carry us on, as **Broncos** and **Pintos**, **Mustangs**, **Pacers**, and **Colts**, and as the power hidden under the hood. Even driving across the lawn and the golf course, we're still riding horses. That horsepower still brings sudden death on the nightroads and highways to so many boys at the verge of bursting into full life, boys like **Hippolytos** and **Phaethon**, and **Diomedes**, that son of Mars and mythic king of Thrace whose horses ate his human flesh. For the steed who can so strongly carry life to its funeral in the solemn procession of the riderless horse.

But all this about horses is the easy part. This is symbolism and the history of the horse, but what of its mystery, the horse that asks to be relieved of carrying the hero on its back? What of the horse of the soul against whose neck a young boy can cry his loneliness and speak his secret wishes, the horse a young girl curries and combs and loves with more devoted passion than anybody anywhere?

Have you cared for a horse? Had its **saliva** on your hands, watched its colic, felt its patience when being shod, carried water on a January morning and heard its **mouth** suck it back? Have you ever had to put one down? Or **dreamt** of a hurt horse?

There is also a certain predilection for the horse in Galileo's metaphors and **Godankon-Experimenten**. In a study I once made on metaphor in Galileo, I counted at least eleven significant examples in which he talks of horses - as an image of motion, and therefore as an instrument in kinetic experiments; as a form of nature in all its complexity and also in all its beauty, as a form that sparks off the imagination in the hypothetical situation of horses subjected to the most unlikely trials or growing to gigantic proportions - and all this apart from the comparison of reasoning with racing: "Discoursing is like coursing".

POSTDATA Jamaican Flight **TOPSPEED** Protocol

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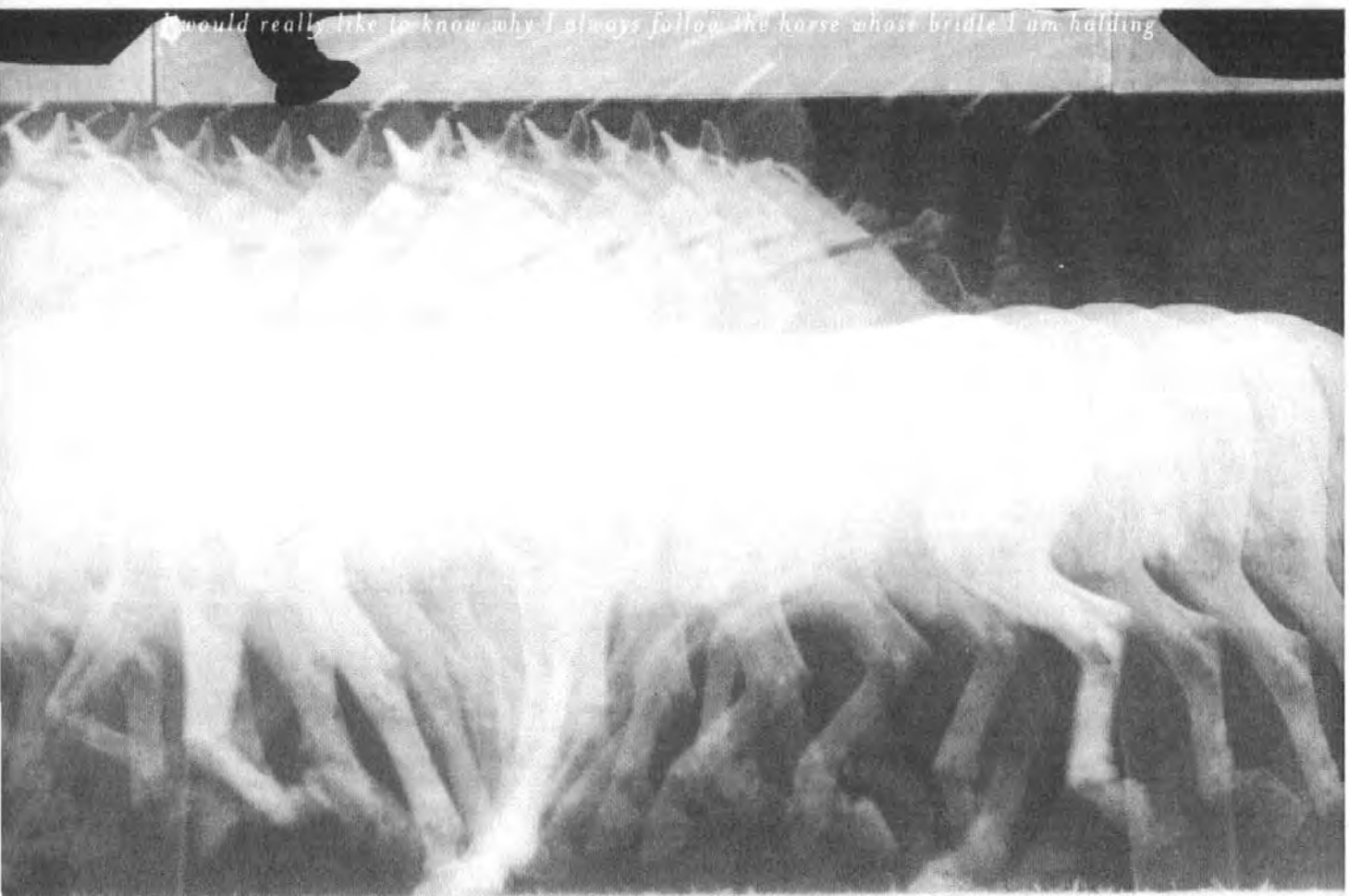
Images depend on how far the horse of association can travel as do textures which would be blank were it not for imagination - and there the finger goes galloping over uncharted regions covering unplumbed depths because the colour and the feeling of the above are determined by the life from which they echo forth. And life, the translation in other words, is nothing if not severable. The horse needs a rider.

- 1 Lesley Chamberlain, "The Right Attitude to Horses", *The Times Literary Supplement*, 1 March 1996, 35.
- 2 Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, London: Faber, 1985, 287.
- 3 Chuang Tzu
- 4 James Hillman, *Dream Animals*, San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1997, 48.
- 5 Italo Calvino, "Quickness", *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, New York: Vintage Books, 1988, 47.
- 6 Breyten Breytenbach, *All One Horse*, London: Faber, 1990, 9.

1
Hast thou given the horse strength? hast thou clothed his neck with thunder? Canst thou make him afraid as a grasshopper? the glory of his nostrils is terrible. He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in his strength: he goeth on to meet the armed men. He mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted: neither turneth he back from the sword. The quiver rattleth against him, the glittering spear and the shield. He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage: neither believeth he that it is the sound of the trumpet. He saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha: and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.

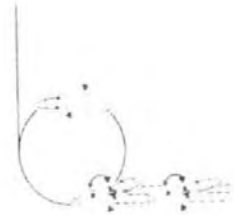
2
We divided every soul into three parts, two of which had the form of horses, the third that of a charioteer. Let us retain this. As we said, one of the horses is good, the other not. [...] The horse that holds the nobler position is upright and clean-limbed; it carries its head high, its nose is aquiline, etc., in other words, a follower of true renown; it needs no whip, but is driven by word of command alone. The other horse, however, is huge, but crooked, a great jumble of a creature, with a short thick neck ... grey bloodshot eyes ... shaggy-eared ... hardly heeding whip or spur.

3
I would really like to know why I always follow the horse whose bridle I am holding

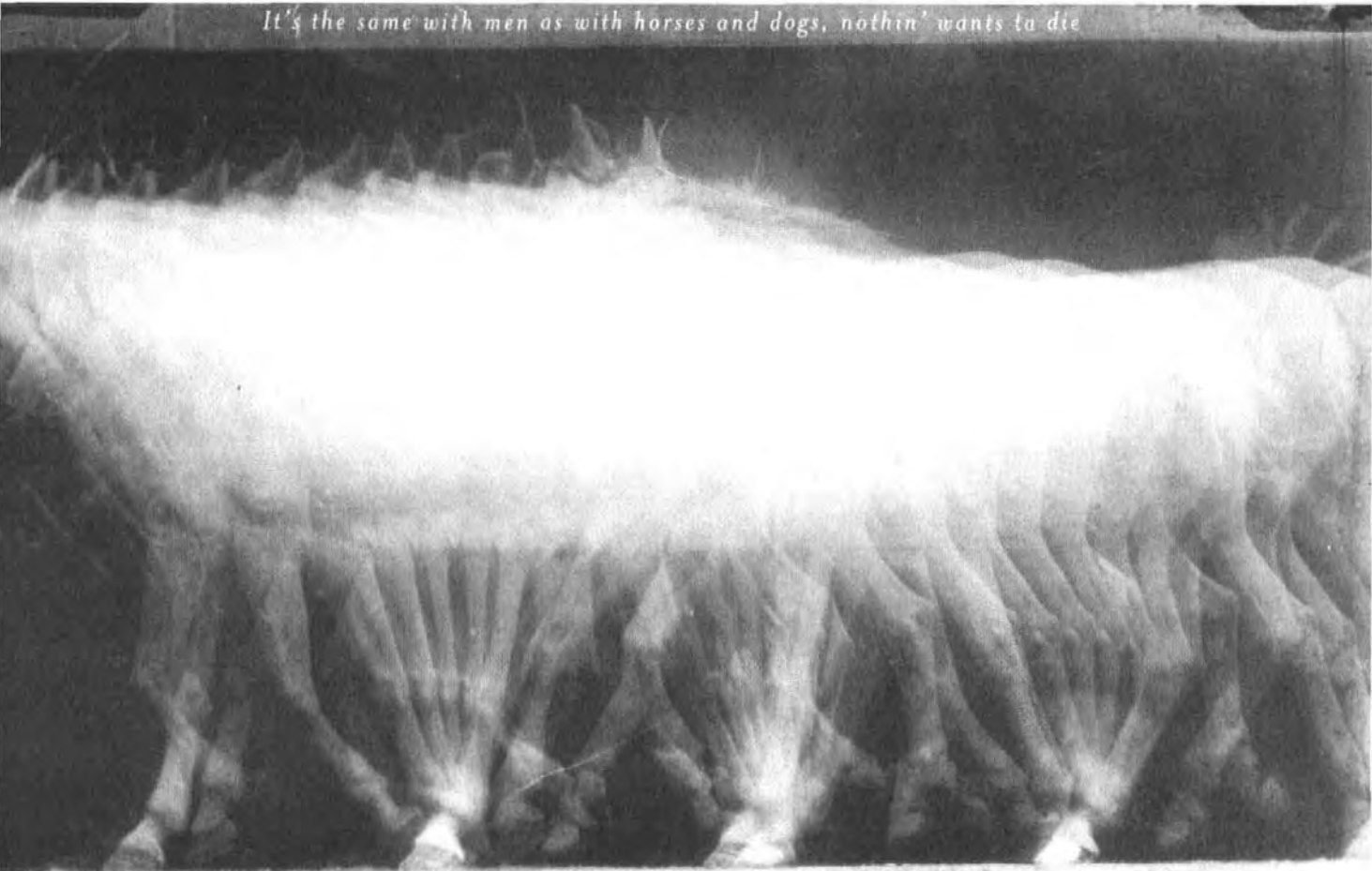


Yes, we all know the horse was hollow, but why didn't the Trojans suspect? Their imaginations were limited; they were still warriors; their horse had not been 'sacrificed'. The Greeks had taken the war to another level, from battle to the imagination of epic, from heroes to homecoming. After ten years of fighting, they got inside their own martial rage, their own need to conquer. They took Troy from the inside (not merely inside the walls literally), but metaphorically, imaginatively. They could imagine an end to the war - the hollow horse was an artful image of that imaginative act. They entered its belly, as in alchemy.

- 1 *The Book of Job*
- 2 Plato, *Phaedrus*. Quoted in Avital Ronell, 'Hitting the Streets: Ecce Fama', *Finitude's Score: Essays for the End of the Millennium*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994, 77.
- 3 Henri Michaux in David Ball (ed.), *Darkness Moves: An Henri Michaux Anthology, 1927-1984*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, 159.
- 4 Hillman, *op.cit.*, 51-2
- 5 Tom Waits, 'Fall of Troy'



It's the same with men as with horses and dogs, nothin' wants to die



N O

NAP, see CARD GAMES.

33

The novella is a horse, a means of transport with its own pace, a trot or a gallop according to the distance and the ground it has to travel over; but the speed Boccaccio is talking about is a mental speed. The listed defects of the clumsy storyteller are above all offences against rhythm, as well as being defects of style, because he does not use the expressions appropriate either to the characters or to the events. In other words, even correctness of style is a question of quick adjustment, of agility of both thought and expression.



343

Chrétien de Troyes constantly traced the line of the wandering knights who sleep on horseback, supported by their lance and stirrups, who no longer know their name or destination, who constantly set off in zigzag line, who climb into the first cart to come along, even at the expense of their honour. The knight's point of deterritorialization. Sometimes in a feverish haste on the abstract line which carries them off, sometimes in the black hole of the catatonia which absorbs them. It is the wind, even a wind from the backyard, which sometimes hurries us along, sometimes immobilizes us. A KNIGHT TO SLEEP ON HIS HORSE. I am a poor lonesome cowboy. Writing has no other goal: wind, even when we do not move...



344

Writing is a physical effort, that is not said often enough. One runs the race with the horse, that is to say with the thinking in its production. It is not an expressed, mathematical thinking, it's a trail of images. And after all, writing is only the scribe who comes after, and who has an interest in going as fast as possible. To go fast - and I am sure that one must go very fast, which does not mean to write just anything, on the contrary - we must vie in force and intelligence with a force that is stronger than our own.



I am tired of riding the high horse of this pretense. I am not yet even a human being



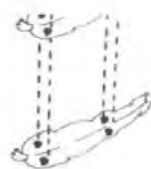
I discovered that the key ingredient to the language *Equus* is the positioning of the body and its direction of travel. The attitude of the body relative to the long axis of the spine and the short axis - this is critical to their vocabulary. It is their vocabulary. [...] Horses are 'into pressure' animals. If you place a finger against a horse's shoulder or flank and push, you'll find the weight of the animal swing against you, not away from you. To understand this phenomenon is to be half-way to achieving good results as a trainer.¹



333



"The word is a horse. Its gallop whirls up the dust on the road. It forces the passers-by to lower their eyes."
 "Your words have become our mounts, master," said Reb Lindel. "But we have not gone far. We went in circles as in the circus. No doubt, we are wretched horsemen?"



"Wind even when we do not move"
 compiled by David Williams

photographs on the previous spread:
 E-J, Marey, *Movements of a White Horse*, 1885-6.
 reproduced by permission of the Collège de France
 dressage line drawings from *Common Sense Dressage* by
 Sally O'Connor; used by kind permission of Half Halt
 Press, Inc.

quotations on this spread:

1. Calvino, *op cit.*, 39.
2. Gilles Deleuze & Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1987, 75.
3. Hélène Cixous, *Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing*, London and New York: Routledge, 1997, 40).
4. Calvino, *op cit.*, 230.
5. Monty Roberts, *The Man who Listens to Horses*, 1996. Quoted in Candida Baker [ed.], *The Penguin Book of the Horse*, London: Penguin, 1999, 56, 59.
6. Edmond Jabès, *The Book of Questions*, vol. 1 (trans. Rosmarie Waldrop), Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 199.
7. Jérôme Garcin, *La Chute du Cheval*, Paris: Gallimard, 1998, 14.

pages prepared by Kevin Mount

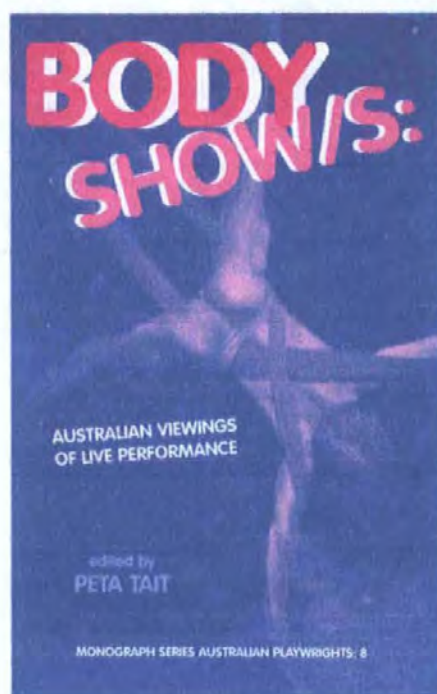
I feel that any time spent writing about horses is time not devoted to riding them, that the page can wait but not the horse: the horse is alive, the page entombs past happiness in the graveyard of words. It's at that precise moment that equitation stops being a sport for relaxation, a divertimento, a caprice, a privilege. For it can lay claim to being an art form, the grammar of which is eternal, as well as being a philosophy founded on natural laws - intelligent authority, supple firmness, the ministry of delicacy, the ethics of tact, the guidance, without domination, of free and equal natures: qualities that should inspire those who claim to govern us.

2.8

2001

'Performing animal, becoming animal: animal acts' (extract),
in Peta Tait (ed.), *Body Show/s: Australian Viewings of Live Performance*,
Amsterdam/Atlanta GA: Editions Rodopi BV, 44-59

ISBN: 90-420-1473-3



3.

Performing animal, becoming animal¹

David Williams

Animal Others

Do you know which animal you are in the process of becoming and in particular what it is becoming in you [...] a whole mob inside you in pursuit of what ...?

(Deleuze & Parnet 76).

My current research focuses on interactions between humans and animals in performance contexts in the broadest terms. From the performative bestiaries of Borges, Broodthaers, Beuys, Burroughs, butoh, Bausch and Bartabas, to the recent spate of animal hunting computer games in the wake of GT Interactive's notorious *Deer Hunter*. From Steve Paxton's so-called 'gland dance' improvisations with his dog, to Nipper the quizzical terrier in the celebrated HMV logo, listening to His (dead) Master's Voice on an Edison phonograph. From the aleatory choreography of the seagulls in Australian performance artist Jill Orr's *Lunch with the Birds* (1979) on St Kilda beach, to the perpetually frozen *mises en scène* of taxidermy and Damien Hirst's formaldehyde-borne animal sculptures. From the Russian clown Vladimir Durov's pig-Kaiser and their banishment from Germany in 1907 for 'treason', to the metamorphic theatricality of inter-species blurrings and couplings in contemporary fiction.²

At the heart of this research is a constellation of questions. How might one articulate the nature of an animal's 'performing', and what models of performance would this propose? What is the animal-body/intelligence/eye so beloved of certain performance theorists, practitioners and others (Jerzy Grotowski, Steve Paxton, Wim Vandekeybus, Deleuze and Guattari, Gaston Bachelard, Elias Canetti, John Berger, James Hillman, etc.)? And in what ways are 'animality' – and 'humanity' – being constructed in the animal discourses of, for example, performance, criminality and social conflict?³

Here I am indebted to Michel Foucault's post-humanist archaeologies of the 'broken dialogue' (Foucault x) effected through the disciplinary separation of those 'bestial' others deemed criminal,

sexually deviant, diseased, insane. His explicit critique of the 'anthropological sleep' in philosophy ('What is man?') ghosts much of what follows, as does Judith Butler's perception of the potentiality of the 'constitutive outside' of the 'human':

The construction of the human is a differential operation that produces the more and the less 'human', the inhuman, the humanly unthinkable. These excluded sites come to bound the 'human' as its constitutive outside, and to haunt those boundaries as the persistent possibility of their disruption and rearticulation (Butler 8).

Perhaps above all, my concern is with inter-subjectivity as ethical enquiry and tactical praxis. How might one interact with an-other whose difference is re-cognised as an active event, rather than a failure of plenitude? What are the *productive* qualities of alterity? In what ways might one work (in) an existential in-between and perceive other-wise? Bakhtin's notion of 'answerability' and its relational architectonics, and Levinas's articulation of 'responsibility' in the encounter with an-other he calls the 'face-to-face', have been of continuing stimulus in this context.⁴ Each of them conceives of identity as act, verb, multiple, becoming. Each conceives of alterity in terms of unrealisable surplus: that which exceeds the cognitive emprise of the selfsame, an outside necessitating an opening towards a performative, dialogical response. And as Michael Gardiner points out, each of them argues that '[E]thics is constitutively linked to corporeality, the direct experience of "lived" time and place, and our effective and meaningful relations with concrete other' (Gardiner 122). Can Bakhtinian and Levinasian models of (human, all too human) inter-subjectivity and sociality be opened up to concrete animal others?

Finally, Deleuze's conception of ethics as a pragmatic and evaluative micro-politics is invaluable in this context. In his cartographies of the assemblages, lines of flight, molecular becomings and black holes of 'man [sic], *detrterritorialised animal*' (Deleuze & Parnet 134, italics in original), his recurrent disposition towards immanent vitality – his affirmation of attempts 'to make life something more than personal, to free life from what imprisons it' (Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 143) – continues to provoke enquiry into the persistent possibilities of 'Life' as a processual, *event-based* ontology, traversing 'both the livable and the lived' (Deleuze, 'Literature' 1):

Making an event – however small – is the most delicate thing in the world: the opposite of making a drama or making a

story. Loving those who are like this: when they enter a room they are not persons, characters or subjects, but an atmospheric variation, a change of hue, an imperceptible molecule, a discrete population [...] Everything has really changed (Deleuze & Parnet 66).

In this context, my concern is with horses. Horse play. Horse flesh. Horse power. Horses for courses.

Animal acts: a flying and falling list

List. n. A border; a boundary (obs.); a destination (Shake.). A catalogue, roll or enumeration. Desire; inclination; choice; heeling over.

Pegasus, the Vedic *gandharvas* and the five kinds of Chinese celestial flying horses. Centaurs, ichthyocentaurs (centaur-fish), hippogriffs and sea-horses. Alexander the Great and Bucephalus, El Cid and Babieca, Napoleon and Marengo, Roy Rogers and Trigger. Mr Ed. The nomadic horseback warriors of Scythians, Mongols, Tartars and Huns. The centrality of horses to the Islamic prophet Mohammed's *Jihad*. The wind-drinkers of the crusades. The fifteen horses Cortés took to the New World in 1519. The Iron Horse. The Suffragette Derby Day suicide. The twenty ponies who accompanied Scott on his ill-fated expedition to the South Pole in 1911. The estimated 375,000 British horses killed in the First World War. Red Rum opening shopping centres. The game of *buzkashi* played by Afghan tribesmen. The padded mounts of picadors in the corrida. The privileged roles ascribed to horses in Siberian, Korean and American Indian shamanism. Ocyrrhoe's becoming-horse in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Jonathan Swift's equine Houyhnhnms and human Yahoos in *Gulliver's Travels*. The Italian trainer Grisone, author of one of the sixteenth century's most influential equestrian treatises, *Gli Ordini di Cavalcare*, who recommended persuading a 'nappy' horse to go forward by tying flaming straw, a live cat or a hedgehog beneath the horse's tail. The Horse Latitudes and the *Gulfo de Yeguas* (Gulf of Mares), areas of the Atlantic Ocean so named because of the numbers of horses who died and were thrown overboard during early crossings from Europe to the New World. The apocryphal terror of the Aztecs when one of Pizarro's riders fell from his horse; it is said the Aztecs had believed rider and horse to comprise one indivisible creature. Mr Green's equestrian balloon ascents in nineteenth-century London, astride his favorite pony. Géricault's death from a horse fall. The flogged horses who (appear to have) triggered psychological crises in Nietzsche and Little Hans. King and Queen, turn of the century

diving horses who performed ten-metre head-first drops into a lake at Captain Boynton's Coney Island pleasure grounds. Jerry Brown, Cocaine, Kilroy: three of Hollywood's best-known 'falling horses', all winners of the Craven Award for humanely trained animal stunt performers. The dead white horse suspended from the raised Leningrad bridge, then dropped into the river, in Eisenstein's *October*. The horse who s/tumbles down a flight of stairs in Tarkovsky's *Andrey Rublev*. Maurizio Cattelan's dead chestnut horse spinning slowly above the heads of the gallery-goers, its spine arched unnaturally around the harness support under its midriff – like those horses shipped live from England to the abattoirs of France, for human consumption. The direct descent of all thoroughbreds in the modern world from one of four Arab stallions brought to England in the early part of the eighteenth century: the Darley, Byerley, Godolphin and Helmsley Arabians. The New Zealand stallion Sir Tristram's recent ritual burial, with his tail pointing to the rising sun. The continuing struggle over Phar Lap's remains. The disappearance of Shergar. The White Horse of Uffington. The silver brumby. The equine chronophotography of Etienne-Jules Marey and Edward Muybridge. Byron's *Mazeppa*. *The Misfits*. *A Man Called Horse*. Jean-Louis Barrault's centaur in *Around a Mother*, as described by Artaud. Joseph Beuys's shamanic action with a white horse in *Iphigenia/Titus*. Lucy Gunning's video work *The Horse Impressionists*. Forced Entertainment's panto horse. Monty Roberts, the 'horse whisperer'.

Horses and fertility, divinity, warfare, prestige, commodity, the instinctive, the irrational, an elemental force, the apocalypse, the natural and free. Horses as ideograms of energy, life-fulness, speed, sexual drives, the disorderly, explosive danger-fear-nightmare-madness, abject 'beastly' suffering, kinetic and energetic event.

The gallery as stable: Jannis Kounellis

The poet, therefore, is truly the thief of fire. He [sic] is responsible for humanity, even for the animals; he will have to have his inventions, smelt, felt, and heard (Rimbaud 103).⁵

In response to an invitation to exhibit at the Galleria L'Attico in Rome in January 1969, the Greek-born artist Jannis Kounellis brought twelve horses, of different breeds and colours, into the gallery and stabled them there, tethered to three of the walls. The work was called *Senza Titolo (12 Cavalli)*. The horses were to be viewed frontally within a formally symmetrical pictorial framework; they remained

there for three days. The space of the encounter was carefully controlled as *theatron*: on one side the horses, restrained but not absolutely immobilised; on the other, milling spectators contained within a demarcated area.

Kounellis was allied with a disparate group of artists who called their work 'Arte Povera': poor or impoverished art. The term was coined by the Milanese critic Germano Celant in the late 1960s:

What has happened is that the commonplace has entered the sphere of art [...] Physical presence and behaviour have become art [...] *Arte Povera* is a refreshing phenomenon that tends towards 'deculturation', towards the regression of the image to the pre-iconographic stage. (Godfrey 178)

For Celant, Kounellis's provocation lay in his recuperation of 'a popular language, that of the senses', and his emphasis on the 'critical presence of materials'.

Kounellis has suggested that his installation endeavoured to redirect the assisted ready-made – animating, theatricalising and poeticising it. Furthermore, it proposed a critique of the commodificatory imperatives of commercial art (the object is unsellable), as well as of the antiseptic neutrality of the white-walled gallery. It aimed to amplify the gallery's diminished sensorium, in particular in terms of the olfactory and auditory. In short, for Kounellis it dramatised the contradictory relations between animate, dis-orderly, corporeal sensibility and the bourgeois, social structure of galleries (Kounellis 668). Shortly before creating this work, Kounellis had articulated, in explicitly theatrical terms, his desire for what he called '*basic authenticity*':

By basic authenticity, I mean the continuous 'gesture' which rebels against its pigeon-holing within a 'product', rebellious both as 'material' and as 'expression'. A rebellious, 'material' and 'expressive' gesture which puts the actor – as a permanent disturbance [...] – in contact with the viewer, who is also a permanent disturbance [...] [T]he 'real' and the 'living' as driving elements in performed actions ... must shake off both technicality and convention. (Christov-Bakargiev 248)

Most contemporary responses to the installation propose readings in terms of text and context, and almost all of them are determinedly post-iconographic (*pace* Celant). For the installation seems to have activated a dense field of personal, cultural and poetic intertexts, ghostly equine 'elsewheres' that visit and canter through the herenow

– war, heroic painting and statuary, freedom and the natural, the indomitable patience of herd animals, and, to borrow the ambiguous title of Jérôme Garcin's meditation on horses, *La Chute de cheval* (1998) – the fall from or of the horse, its reduced status in contemporary culture. Here, for example, is Rudi Fuchs:

Yes, they galloped through history before they arrived in that gallery in Rome, for us to see. At each individual moment art is the allegory of its troubled past. [...] No more temple, no more hippodrome, no more battlefield: the gallery as stable. (Fuchs 33)

Invariably, however, the *aesthetic matter* of the horses' 'basic authenticity' as live presences, and the disturbance of *their* conventions (rhythms, habits, environments) generated by them being installed in a gallery for three days, are wholly ignored in favour of *aesthetic* effect and interpretation. The horses are authentically displaced (aesthetically disturbed); and their concrete presence serves to trigger virtual displacements (aesthetic disturbances). Evidently, as signifiers, the horses were construed as 'hot', mobile, auratic, animistic. In themselves, of course, they did not signify any elsewhere; they were simply there, both near and far in the same space, in the process of doing what dis-placed horses do: an aesthetic event, rather than a sign.

In this context, the vectorial desire of signification is pasted on to the other without implicating power in the scene of the other; and the self-referentiality of the gallery context constitutes a kind of closed loop. In the process, of course, all sorts of other signs are glossed over by aestheticist reifying gazes; the animals' dumbness merely reflects the perceiver's deafness. Anyone familiar with horses looking at the published photographs (see for example, Fuchs, Kounellis, Christov-Bakargiev) will immediately recognise the palpable signs of animal 'dis-ease' in the puritan propriety of this interior. Some horses have their ears back; one is pulling against the rope, its head up. Their ropes are tethered at the wrong height for comfortable movement and are too short; over a long period of time without free head movement, the action of a horse's lungs may be constricted. The floor is too slippery for shod hooves, and too hard for long periods of standing immobility. It affords no cushioning, and the impedece of blood flow would eventually lead to swollen legs; for without the movement of grazing, the pump in the hoof – the 'frog' – is not adequately activated. The floor is an inappropriate surface for pissing; horses dislike being splashed. Horses prefer to shit in given areas,

contiguous with others in the herd. Enclosed horses prefer to have their backs to a wall, looking out, as in any stable. Their predicament here allows no possibility of rolling, lying down, mutual grooming, and so on. In short, this is a potentially traumatic site for horses; it stinks. Social herd animals alone together, without the possibility of their own forms of interaction. So much for inter-species communication.

I am wary of the little tyrannies within the aesthetic frisson of an urban gallery-goer transported by the smells of horse sweat, shit, piss / by the percussive *musique concrète* of metal shoes on the tiled floor, and the vibratory, tactile sounds of nicker, blow, whinny, neigh / by the unfamiliar intimacy of an exchange of gazes with 'others' looking back from the place of their looked-at-ness / by the surprising transposition of a familiar if distanced everyday to a claustrophobic, enculturated interior. But what happens if you reverse the terms, disturb the viewing positions, make the gallery *un-stable* in search of what Mireille Calle-Gruber perceives in Hélène Cixous's writing: a 'poethics' of the two-way '*passage de l'une l'autre*' (Cixous & Calle-Gruber 10,79)? Rather different smells and sounds – and the unflinching eye contact, from eyes set forward in the skull, close together, stereoscopic, like all predators in nature. Horses are unsettled by being stared at.

Horse sense

[Man] was bound to fear the eye of the animal as *the carrier of a view of himself over which he had no control* (Berger, 'Animal World' 99: italics in original).

Animals – 'trapped in a place of endless misrecognition', like women,⁶ like *Terra Australis*, like all of patriarchal humanism's others – are often defined in terms of lack: of reason, memory, imagination, free will, conscience, language, and so on. Furthermore the mapping of an animal's body, the naming of many of its constituent parts, is effected through an anthropomorphic lens; for example, the 'points' of a horse include forelock, jowls, throat, shoulders, breast, elbows, forearms, knees, heels, belly. The Empire of the Selfsame.

But what can a horse's body *do*? Let's take two examples. Firstly, horses are often homogenised as a species, despite the enormous array of forms and types of *equus caballus*, and the particular qualities of individual horses; and, like ballet dancers, their bodies are often defined in relation to an abstract ideal (conformation). The Akhal-Teke, a golden-sheened desert horse from Turkmenistan highly prized

by desert nomads, is all 'wrong' in terms of this ideal; in addition to its notorious disdain for humans, its back is too long, its hind legs marred by sickle hocks and lacking the 'second thigh' so valued by Western riders, its chest too narrow, its rib cage too shallow, its withers too high, its head held impossibly high 'above the bit', that is, above the level of the rider's hands, and therefore uncontrollable. In (classical Western) theory, an Akhal-Teke should be unrideable. Yet as a long-distance endurance horse its resilience remains unparalleled. In 1935, in a journey lasting eighty-four days, Akhal-Tekes were ridden from Ashkhabad to Moscow, a distance of over four thousand kilometres, almost one thousand of which were over desert; they covered four hundred kilometres through the arid Karakoum in just three days. The Olympic gold medal winner for dressage in Rome in 1960, a stallion called Absent, was an Akhal-Teke. At present, there are Akhal-Teke performers in Bartabas's equestrian operas with Théâtre Zingaro (see below).⁷

Secondly, like the early Christian philosophers, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hegel and others constructed hierarchies of the senses, categorised according to degrees of 'humanity' and 'animality'. They tell us nothing about the particularities and differences of animal senses and perception – they homogenise animals, and privilege human vision and its connections with the *cogito* (eye/I) above all else.

A horse's 'surplus of seeing' in Bakhtin's phrase (Holquist 36) is humanly unthinkable. Its eyes are the largest of any land mammal. Set laterally on the head, they have a field of vision of approximately 357 degrees, of which only about 60 degrees frontally are binocular. A horse holding its head level has two narrow blind spots: one directly behind its rump, one a few centimetres directly in front of its nose. In a horse's eyes active receptivity and blindness coexist. The placement of the eyes permits a panoramic view in the horizontal plane of vision; but with only limited accommodation in its lenses (about one fifth of the diopters of human eyes), a horse has restricted focusing ability. Its relatively fixed focal length is set at some distance, where it has a high degree of visual acuity – but without a fovea (enabling the tight, 'grasping' area of focus in human vision), a horse's vision remains planar, largely undifferentiated: that is, peripheral throughout the panoramic vista, *tactile*. Like many mammals horses are dichromates; they have red-blue colour vision, analogous to colour-blindness in

humans. Like many mammals, and unlike most humans, however, they have excellent night vision (Budiansky).

The art work as un-stable: Mark Wallinger

We know what is really out there only from the animal's gaze;
for we take the very young child and force it around, so that
it sees objects – not the Open, which is so deep in animals'
faces. Free from death. (Rilke 193)

In the early 1990s, British artist and horse-racing aficionado Mark Wallinger created a series of painted and constructed pieces inspired by horse-breeding reference books and the history of racing. Then in late 1993, in an action he described as 'a self-inflicted dare' (Bonaventura 46), he purchased a yearling racehorse for 6,600 Irish guineas: Lot 44, a thoroughbred chestnut filly yearling 'by the miler Keen out of an unraced dam Nememsha by Roberto'. Wallinger had never seen the horse before purchase; acting on his behalf at the sale in Ireland was Newmarket trainer Sir Mark Prescott, who had agreed to purchase, then train and campaign a horse through the 1994 flat season. In a gesture self-consciously reminiscent of Marcel Duchamp, Wallinger named the horse *A Real Work of Art*.

As Mark Bonaventura points out, Wallinger's choice of 'a flesh and blood ready-made, a speedy found object which remained as blissfully unaware of its role as a work of art as it was of its role as a racehorse', was a reaffirmation of an artist's right to name anything as 'art'. Furthermore, '[t]his designation builds upon Duchamp's original gesture by embracing the *unpredictable* not only in the process of selection, delegated to the infinitely more experienced Prescott, but in his inability to influence the filly's latent talents, either as breeder or trainer, or determine the course of her future career' (Bonaventura 46). The horse itself represents not only a displacement of the material art object, but an abdication of volition and artistic/'authorial' control over representation in favour of the unpredictability of her performative becomings as a 'real work of art'. This 'immediate relation with the outside, the exterior' is one of the attributes of what Deleuze has called 'nomad thought' (Deleuze, 'Nomad Thought 144). It encourages an unravelling of the self-contained identity of an art work, a dynamic in-stability akin to what John Cage has called 'silence' – in Nick Kaye's words, 'that which is always in occurrence beyond what would be the pre-determined parameters of the work' (Kaye 3).

To help finance the horse's training and racing costs, Wallinger exhibited a range of materials constituting traces of the absent Real (let's call her 'Real' for short): vet bills, letters from Prescott, race-sheets, hoofprints, and an edition of fifty rather kitsch die-cast metal statuettes, co-funded by his agent and a network of curators/dealers. So, the commercial art world and/as horse-racing: surreptitious deals and alliances, commodificatory tradings in 'horse flesh', competitive play with-in preordained but uncontrollable event-structures, unpredictable intensities and lines of flight. In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, machinic assemblages of desire ...

[...]

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Notes

- 1 An earlier version of this paper was given in April 1999 at the Performance Studies International Conference 'Here be Dragons' in Aberystwyth, Wales. With sincere thanks to Manolo Mendes, Bartabas, Barry Laing, Sarah Gray, Mark Minchinton and, above all, Rachel Ireland. This paper is dedicated to these animal others, to BJ, and to the memory of Zingaro; *Non olvidaré la luz de los caballos* (Pablo Neruda).
- 2 See, for example, three recent 'becoming-ape' novels: Boyd, Hoeg and Self, or two recent 'becoming-dog' novels: Berger and Auster.
- 3 The number of animal appellations in para/military contexts (relating to strategies, weaponry, individual combative 'styles', propagandist bestialisations etc.) is remarkable. In recent times, for example, 'Operation Desert Fox' was an attempt to 'shut Saddam Hussein back in his cage', according to British Prime Minister Tony Blair. The Milosevic regime's genocidal 'cleansing' of Kosovo was codenamed 'Operation Horseshoe'; one of its most infamous agents was the Serb police chief at the Smrekovnica jail, Vukcina (Wolfman). One of Britain's most shadowy white supremacist groups calls itself the White Wolves, in homage to a Nazi SS group.
- 4 For extended discussions of the 'face-to-face' and 'answerability', see for example, Levinas (*Ethics and Infinity*, 'Philosophy') and Holquist. For a discussion of the relations between the face-to-face and contact improvisation, see Williams.
- 5 Arthur Rimbaud, from a letter to Paul Demeny, 15 May 1871 (author's translation).
- 6 'Women and animals are represented as cohabitants of similar symbolic space – a kind of amorous disciplinary laboratory in obedience, tricks, and often bizarre balancing acts. [...] Women and animals are seemingly trapped in a place of endless misrecognition where they cannot gain access to symbolic space or to a re-cognition that proffers verification in a discourse of power' (Schutzman 136). For a comparison of the disciplinary regimes of equestrianism and patriarchy, see Griffin.
- 7 For further details of Akhal-Tekes, see Edwards (74-5) and Silver (178-80).

Section 3

Documenting practice

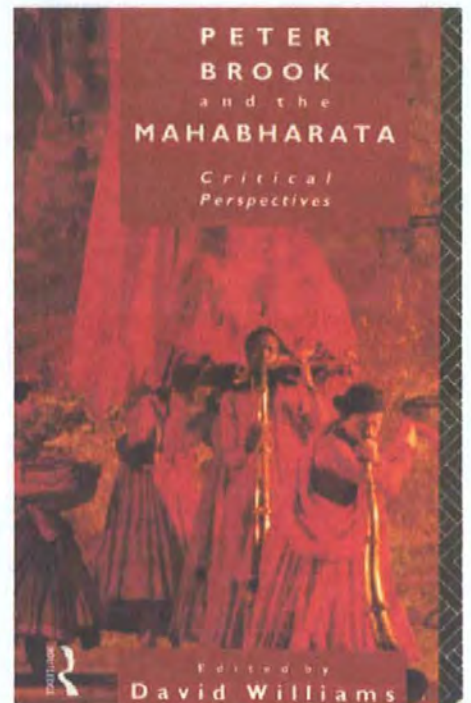
'Keep everything you can't'
(Anne Michaels, 'Stone', in *Poems*, Bloomsbury: London, 2000, 120)

3.1

1991

'The Great Poem of the World: a descriptive analysis',
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THE GREAT POEM OF THE WORLD

A Descriptive Analysis

David Williams

Nel suo profondo vidi che s'interna,
legato con amore in un volume,
ciò che per l'universo si squaderna:

La forma universal di questo nodo
credo ch'i'vidi, perche più di largo,
dicendo questo, mi sento ch'i' godo.

(Dante, *Il Paradiso*, Canto XXXIII)

On a rainy Saturday in March 1986, I was able to immerse myself in the marathon version of Peter Brook's and Jean-Claude Carrière's *The Mahabharata* at the Bouffes du Nord, Paris. All three parts in this epic cycle were presented as a continuum.¹ A marathon for performers – that is how they referred to it – and spectators. The performance began shortly after 1.00 p.m. and finished at 11.00 p.m., with substantial pauses between the separate parts – the equivalent, I am told, of staging the Bible in about 40 minutes.

In contrast with the other great Sanskrit epic, *The Ramayana*, which Hindu scholars have labelled *kavya* – an illustrative romance couched in elegant court poetry – *The Mahabharata* is described as *itihasa*, a history or chronicle: literally, 'thus it was'. The root of the Greek word *istorin*, from which we derive 'history', suggests travelling to find out for oneself; and indeed the performance invited an immersion in experience. In addition, I felt it to have been the ultimate refinement and crystallization of the Centre's ongoing work, and in some ways a summation of distance travelled.

My primary aims here have been to contextualize the production in relation to the original Sanskrit *Mahabharata* and Hindu culture in general, as well as the body of Brook's work with the Centre; to discuss the nature of Brook's interculturalism in practice; and above all to detail *mise-en-scène*, narrative structure and something of the production's dizzying intertextuality. It contains countless points of contact with epic literature inter-

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culturally – in particular with the Sumerian *Gilgamesh*, the Norse Sagas, *Beowulf*, the *Nibelungenlied*, *La Chanson de Roland*, the Homeric and Shakespearean canon – as well as with Hindu symbology and iconography, and a host of performative forms from around the world (although in production they are rarely foregrounded or made specific). I believe it is important to retain some record of the original production's scenography, for the text that has been published only hints at the nature of the performance text: here, more so than ever, is Barthes' 'network with a thousand entrances'. Despite the surprisingly central status of the word in this production, Carrière's dialogue comprises just one discursive component amongst many.

NOTE

- 1 Zeami's *johakyo* writ large, and an echo of the three great strides (emblematic of the three positions of the sun, at dawn, noon and sunset) that Indian tradition suggests Vishnu needs to pass through and reclaim heaven. See Francis Fergusson in *The Idea of a Theater* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949, p. 18), in which he proposes a tripartite structure for 'a tragic rhythm' of action. These parts, in some ways reminiscent of the components of initiatory paradigms, are *poiema* (purpose), *pathema* (passion/suffering) and *mathema* (perception) – the terms are borrowed from Kenneth Burke's *The Philosophy of Literary Form*.

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THE GAME OF DICE

We that are young shall never
see so much nor live so long.

(*King Lear*)

He that came seeing, blind shall he go:
Rich now, then a beggar: stick in hand,
Creeping his way to a land of exile.

(Sophocles, *Oedipus*)

Before the performance starts, the fight for seats. No empty *politesse* here, just launch yourself into the fray. Luckily, there is still an empty seat on the central benches downstairs. Having scrabbled in to claim my territory, I sit back to watch the continuing onslaught, horribly pleased with myself. Many crushed feet and angry exchanges later, Peter Brook suddenly, and surprisingly, emerges at the front of the playing space. Those still without seats, now immobile alongside the diminutive figure of Brook in the space, echo the calls for hush. Brook puts a question to the audience, an old favourite of his: 'What is the difference between theatre and life?' He goes on: 'In this case, the people coming from life – you, the audience – are not rehearsed. The actors who will play for you today have spent a long time rehearsing battles, an epic war. And meanwhile, before the performance even gets underway, an unrehearsed battle is taking place in the auditorium, for the best seats and positions. Please be calm: allow the only battle to take place on stage.' Laughter, applause, and miraculously a sense of calm. Before we know it, the performance has begun.

Vyasa (Alain Maratrat), a bearded ascetic in rags, an immortal *rishi*, appears from beyond the river. The yellow clay markings of Vishnu surround a glistening blood-red *tilak* on his forehead. He is primarily a storyteller, a troubadour, a poet in the original meaning of *poesis* – a creator. He carries a copy of an ancient stringed instrument, rather like a *tambora*. Suggesting musical accompaniment, it is also a multi-functional object to be used in the course of narration by this poet-magician. The son of Satyawati ('truth'), he was conceived in *maya* between the shores of a river: illusion comes naturally to him.¹

The elephant-god Ganesha (Maurice Bénichou), the jovial and propitious 'remover of obstacles', is invoked in India before any undertaking – a letter, a book, a journey. This tutelary deity of the *limens* (in himself a liminal being, between the divine and human/animal spheres) is also the divine patron of literature and the arts: a god embodied. Here he will act as Vyasa's scribe, his amanuensis. Piercing a hole with his thumb in a fresh mango, he dips his pen (the tip of his broken tusk) into a natural inkwell; this poem will be written in mango juice. The elephant's head mask fully covers the actor's own head. It is ornate, bejewelled, a plaything

– the storyteller's device to locate the character. As soon as it becomes redundant, it will be removed, manipulated at arm's length for a brief moment (like some of the masks in *Conference of the Birds*), then abandoned.

Vyasa and Ganesha immediately establish a direct contact with the audience, like the narrator's in Indian Kuttiyattam: intimate, comic, human. And the child to whom they tell the story – innocent, intelligent, demanding clarification – is instantly located as our point of entry into this world, for he is our representataive.

There follows a sequence of invented rituals to generate enactment of the story – like *holi* in India: a spray of richly coloured powders in the air and on the bare earth, vermillion, gold, as well as rice, garlands of flowers, leaves, and a splash of ochre beside the pool at the front of the space. The child had drunk from the pool when he first appeared; it is a 'natural' property, to be exploited and incessantly redefined within the story. The edge of the pool is now stained, evoking further resonances: an echo of Ganesha's own violent beginnings – he describes how he was decapitated by Shiva while defending his mother from the god's amorous advances – and an omen of the bloodletting to come. The water reddens and settles, now tarnished as a source of purification, blessing and refreshment.

An exposition of the 'origins of the human race' now commences. Ganga (Mireille Maalouf), realized through the invocation and formally introduced, locates herself in the pool. Her submerged feet suggest emergence from the water: as the river goddess, Ganga Ma (Mother Ganges), she is inherently part of it. She tosses her first seven children into the water – now the Ganges, a locus of liberation and deliverance, for her offspring are *vasus* (a class of Vedic gods), cursed to be born of mortals. The babies are suggested by simple manipulation of her long floating shawl, clasping a tiny bundle to her breast. As she unfurls the material to abandon each baby in turn, its tip touches the surface of the water to produce a tiny splash.

The oath of Bhishma (Sotigui Kouyate) is structurally and stylistically similar to a number of other scenes of parallel content, such as the gazelle's curse of Pandu, for example; all significant moments with deleterious *karmic* consequences are foregrounded and framed as such. So much of the drama of this *Mahabharata* stems from this unresolved tension between individual free choice and imprisoning predetermination. Although almost all of the characters are unwilling to accept the ineluctability of fate, here the eighth son of Ganga (a lone *vasu* trapped in the mortal world – is he aware of his past reality?) swears never to know the love of a woman: an altruistic vow of chastity, the brahminic *brahmacharya* – a blameless oath with formidable repercussions. For this reason, he is henceforth to be called Bhishma, 'the Terrible', an extension of his earlier name, Devavrata, 'he whose vow is Godly'. Fatality, determination – an invisible 'law' is



Figure 13.1 'The Game of Dice'. Ganga (Mireille Maalouf) drowning one of her new-born children in the pool (the Ganges): on the right, Vyasa (Alain Maratrat); seated, in the background, Ganesha (Maurice Bénichou). French-language production. (Photographer – Gilles Abegg)

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made palpable in a moment framed as 'heightened reality', a 'moment of truth'. A low-level fresnel on a diagonal illuminates the actor's full face, like cinematic lighting, while a didgeridoo throbs and pulses to a rhythmic gong counterpoint.

Ganesha crosses off a page in the hefty tome he uses to record Vyasa's tale – and we accept an instant leap of twenty years in the narrative, to King Salva's rejection of the young princess Amba (Pascaline Pointillart). Salva (Georges Corraface) wanders alone in meditative solitude, whispering penitences to the accompaniment of the chant of a musician in his wake. A way of life is immediately created, separated from the front of the space by the river – Salva is in a different geographical and spiritual 'space' by the back wall. Salva's nobility is established by a simple metonymic swathe of rich material around his neck, pure white with delicate gold needlework. According to Brook, his treatment of Amba shows him to be 'the perfect macho shit' . . . In the original *Mahabharata*, he will eventually meet with his 'just' deserts, when Krishna (his cousin) slices him in two with his discus, for having ransacked Krishna's city, Dwaraka, during his absence.

The death of Satyawati's son, Vichitravirya (unnamed here), is signalled by dipping the corner of a vivid scarlet silk cloak in the river, to the mournful cry of the *nagaswaram*, a brash and viscerally agonizing cousin of the western oboe or shawm: a voluminous wail of despair. Kim Menzer, the Danish instrumentalist who plays the *nagaswaram* throughout, claims that it took him three months to find a note during a period of concentrated study in Madras. In Indian culture, mainly in the southern states, the instrument is used to attract people to weddings or political rallies: never for funerals. Throughout this performance it is used at moments of great public celebration or mourning. It creates an awesome sound that fills the space, makes the hair on one's neck prick up.

As Vichitravirya died without issue, his half-brother Vyasa is obliged to enter his own story and 'generate' the protagonists of his fiction by making love to three princesses – a bizarre Pirandellian blurring of the interrelationship between creator and created, a singularly modernist device in a 2,000-year-old epic. To signal the moment of birth of Dhritarashtra, Pandu and an unnamed third brother, three rush mats are held up by concealed figures behind. Their silhouettes are visible, an imminent potential reality.² As Vyasa describes him, Dhritarashtra (Ryszard Cieslak) slowly lowers his screen to reveal himself: compositionally, a split-screen cinematic convention. His blindness is conveyed immediately and minimally, as he fumbles tentatively for the top lip of the screen, and an onlooker passes a hand in front of his unseeing eyes. The screen/mat focuses and frames the character's head and shoulders. It is also a storytelling convention established to convey directly a 'magical' revelation of

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birth, the introduction of a major protagonist: again a different 'order of reality' made palpable.

Ganesha and the boy observe with us, commenting and querying. They are directly allied with us. The boy is an 'everyman', involved and implicated as a spectator on stage, further focusing our attention on the storytelling element as a continual present. He is also the direct issue of these protagonists, the survivor, the possible future. The performance becomes a journey of initiation into experience, a complex morality, an educative and revelatory process resolutely irreducible to any pat formula or dogma. He must observe, listen, share the journey's cycle from Genesis to Revelations, then draw his own conclusions. The receiver of the story in the original *Mahabharata* was a young prince, Janamejaya, Arjuna's great grandson, the story itself used to bring to a halt his sacrificial slaughtering of all of the world's snakes. Brook's version foregrounds the storytelling aspects of the performance, and strips away the distancing insulation of high rank (prince) and culturally specific act (snake sacrifice): the child is more immediate, closer to us.

Pandu the pale (Tapa Sudana) has a fine layer of chalky make-up on his cheeks, rendered all the paler by Tapa's jet turban and beard. In a trice, he signals his nobility through a simple device, wrapping a piece of cloth around a stick, which is then held up as a mark of regal office. As he pursues two gazelles, he unwraps part of the material, and in his hands it becomes both a bow and the reins of a hunter giving chase, in some ways reminiscent of the stylized metonyms of Chinese Opera. The hunt is a formal, if comic, dance, its dynamic in Toshi Tsuchitori's percussive rhythms. The gazelles themselves offer an image of an innocent harmonious relationship with a natural environment. They gambol around the space with unfettered joy, bearing sprigs of foliage in their mouths. The leaves are taken from them on their deaths.

Kunti's invocation of the god Dharma and the birth of the Pandavas produces a flurry of ritual activity, some of it clearly invented 'play', some apparently 'authentic' – using the forms and trappings of ritual, but generalized and neutralized by deracination from sources in specific cultural contexts. From one point of view, meaningless exotica, decoration. From a less cynical perspective, the Centre group is multi-racial, containing members of a number of strongly ritualistic cultures – Balinese and Indian Hindu, Shinto, African griot-animist, etc. Certain aspects of these diverse cultural forms have been tapped for a vocabulary, and some will inevitably brand this process 'orientalism', in Edward Said's politicised sense of the word.

Furthermore, underlying the sequence is a strong sense of theatricality, of the actors' celebrating the act of theatre itself, using whatever comes to hand, natural properties (the root vocabulary of all ritual activity). Fire, water, earth. Earth, the source of all, is a 'mother' constantly touched in

respectful supplication. Natural juices – a coconut is smashed open, its milk sprinkled on the pool for Dharma to bathe in, and in a circle around the boy who kneels on a carpet in the central area, signalled as 'other' by its being surrounded by tiny votive candles and petals. Flashes of fire from magnesium powder, tossed into the air above the flambeaux, explode with a dull roar. The boy awaits palms up, hands extended in a position of meditative yogic calm. He is the agent of invocation, the focal locus of an act of sympathetic magic. Vyasa hands him a sword, then a bow and arrow, then a club – all apparently toys. There is immense visual excitement, while at the same time music and mantras fill the air. A whirlpool of simultaneous activity draws us in, invites us to select what we watch.

Suddenly the Pandavas appear at the base of the back wall, emblematically presented, already in their adult forms. Demigods all, like Hesiod's or Homer's Trojan heroes: Yudishtira, his sword drawn – a simple white tunic for the son of Dharma, the future 'king of kings'; Bhima, son of the wind god Vayu, an enormous mace on his shoulder; Arjuna, son of Indra – the world's finest archer, a bow in his hand; Nakula and Sahadeva, the twin deities, the Ashvins. The only sons of Madri share the same cloth drape, like Siamese twins. The family bonding is concretized visually and spatially. It appears that the Pandavas collectively compromise a human microcosm, the individual and different facets of one ideal being, like the Hindu Maha Purusha, the primeval 'cosmic man'. As a unit, they are interdependent, complementing each other. Five is Shiva's number; and there are associations with the five elements in Hindu cosmogony, the five senses and other quinary groupings symbolic of wholeness.³ In addition, the actors playing them in some ways reflect the multicultural pluralism of India itself. The scene also provides an example of Brook's repeated application in a scenographic context of cinematic depth of field/deep focus – it is for this reason that Michael Billington has referred to Brook as the 'Greg Toland of theatre'. The form of the Bouffes invites such techniques, and they will recur throughout the performance. Here we look through the dynamic movements of those invoking the Pandavas to the effect of that invocation – a distant 'magical' vision of them realized, 'conjured up', and at the same time patently and literally there.

The arrival of Gandhari (Mireille Maalouf) for her marriage to Dhritrashtra. Pomp, celebration and acclamation in movement and music, a majestic public procession created with simplicity and understatement. A stately queen, draped in luxurious trappings, is borne in on the shoulders of her attendants. Indian or African parasols lend height to the image: synecdoches of palatial vaults, scalloped arches, caparisoned palanquins, and metonymic suggestions of a particular way of life. The reveller-celebrants carry huge curling Indian brass instruments, like Tibetan horns. One of them at the front 'becomes' an elephant's trunk, the swaying

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rhythm of its progress rippling back through the body of bearers. The image, somehow more evocative than a dozen real elephants, is constructed instantly and with economy, then just as quickly dismantled as the ensemble disperses and the joyful illusion evaporates. For Gandhari's husband is blind, a state she determines to share. An agonizing moment in her first meeting with Dhritarashtra: he gropes and fumbles, eager to discover the form and face of a spouse never to be visible to him. Conducted in an all-embracing silence, his discovery of her blindfold is profoundly moving.

Gandhari's pregnancy. Vyasa and the boy, 'stage managers', visible agents and operators of narrative devices, sweep her away behind a hand-held curtain – a convention borrowed in a redefined form from the diaphanous *tira sila* of Kathakali, Kuchipuddi, Yakshagana, Kuttiyattam and a host of other Indian dance-drama forms, in which it acts as a membrane between the diurnal world and a magical beyond. The cloth curtain is used to great effect throughout this production. Its 'operators' remain unconcealed, and yet they are 'invisible', like the *zukai*, the puppeteers in Japanese Bunraku. Here it is above all a means either of focusing or of clearing the space, 'wiping the slate clean', leaving a void demanding to be filled anew. Brook has been using this device in various guises for a quarter of a century: for example, a bath towel was held up in similar fashion to introduce Charlotte Corday's third and final visit to Marat's house in *Marat/Sade* (1964).

The birth of the Kauravas is an ominous and agonizing process, in stark contrast with the ritual order of their cousin's birth. After a two-year pregnancy, the birth itself eventually has to be forcibly provoked by an act of violence. A servant strikes Gandhari's distended stomach with an iron bar, until a large black ball drops with a thud from her skirts. Cold and hard, it rolls across the earth into the pool – the very dirt and mud in which Duryodhana, the first born, will meet his death. The ball sits there, immobile, unwanted. Vyasa suggests fracturing it into one hundred pieces, then placing each fragment in an earthenware jar before sprinkling them with fresh water: a century of sons will emerge!

As a servant drags off the sphere to begin this strange process, another instant temporal leap (the equivalent of a cinematic jump cut) takes us to Duryodhana's birth. This event is greeted by the hideous and jagged ululations of a jackal, a cosmic warning of the disorder he will bring, an omen ignored by Dhritarashtra who is delighted at the birth of a son (like Laius in Aeschylus' *Septem*). Another 'moment of truth', at which the subsequent carnage could have been avoided, drifts past. However, within the confines of an implacable fate, Dhritarashtra, progenitor of the 'sons of darkness', is only following what he believes to be his own *dharma* – an elastic and slippery concept, endlessly unfixable. Broadly it refers to a natural law that upholds and sustains the universe. On a personal level, it means individual duty, order and truth. Truth to personal *dharma*

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(*varnashrama dharma*), it is suggested, will sustain social order, and indeed a wider ecological balance in the cosmos as a whole (*sanatana dharma*). If *dharma* is respected, micro- and macrocosm are indissoluble.⁴

At the very moment of his birth, Duryodhana (Andrzej Seweryn) emerges in the throes of a nightmare, yelling incoherently. A grotesquely disturbing Goyaesque figure scurries across our vision, wrapped in a torn blood-red cloth. An amorphous, deformed shape – headless, faceless, trailing the lining of his mother's womb as a shroud . . . A foretaste of the age of Kali, with which Duryodhana will come to be associated.

A radical change of environment and atmosphere takes us to the lyrical Edenic oasis of Pandu's love for Madri (Tam Sir Niane). A harmonious relationship with their forest surroundings is conveyed in the measured simplicity of their movements and of the musical accompaniment. In addition there is Madri's respectful symbiosis with water, now again a true source of sustenance and renewal. Pandu's death is rendered poignantly comic by a distended 'boing' from one of Toshi's invented percussion instruments. The five musicians, visible to one side throughout, participate fully, as in so much Asian theatre – sustaining the narrative, punctuating the evolving dynamic, observing the actors' work closely. The relationship between them and the performers is fluid and organic. They also provide a further level of focus, observing and responding with us, extending the circle of complicity and shared invention.

Madri's self-immolation (*sati*) on Pandu's funeral pyre is simply suggested by Vyasa burning a bundle of sticks he carries. A synesthetic appeal is made to all of our senses – tiny crackling sounds, the bitter smell of smoke, the hypnotic aerial dance of the sparks. Fire retains its primal mystery, purity and ferocity, and is here another active element in this protean play of elements. Then all is once again swept away behind the floating curtain, and the episode comes to an end with Vyasa's ominously prescient speech, announcing the chaos that is to come: 'The earth has lost its youth which has gone by like a happy dream. Now, each day brings us closer to barrenness, to destruction.' The beginnings of a separation from the sacred, the end of spring – *mundus senescit*: the stage is set for the entry of humankind into the realm of History.

Another twenty years pass in a flash: we are simply told so by Vyasa. From here on, as dramatic intensity heightens, the stories are increasingly self-generated. In general, Vyasa, Ganesha and the boy will appear only when their presence is necessary to the continuation or clarification of the narrative. The simple alienation device of the storyteller-observers in the outer frame of the performance is gradually dispensed with, as we 'descend' from the enchanted magical plane of a pre-historical 'golden age', a mythical time peopled by fabulous beings, to a more recognizable human level, characterized by familiar conflicts of jealousy, pride and

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ambition. The myth is made concrete and present as a theatre of suffering and violence, a theatre of war driven by the same impulses that underlie all collisions of dreams and intent. (For Jung, every individual was the locus of a continual battle between mythical time – restorative – and historical time – destructive.)



Figure 13.2 'The Game of Dice'. The archery tournament for the young cousins, supervised by Drona (Yoshi Oida, in black). Bottom right, Bhima's 'uprooted tree' frames the configuration. (Photographer – Gilles Abegg)

A dispute between the young Pandava and Kaurava cousins boils over, all one hundred of the latter conflated into the two central representatives (like Jarry's suggestion for Ubu's army): the first born, Duryodhana, and the eldest of his 99 brothers, Duhsassana – Seweryn and Corraface respectively. The confrontation, here merely sparring but presaging future violence, is brought to an immediate halt by a mysterious warrior-brahmin, Drona. Who is he? Where does he come from? The motives he has for engaging the support of these young warriors, as described in the original *Mahabharata* (his desire for revenge on a neighbouring king, the father of the future Pandava bride Draupadi), are never clarified in this production. In many ways, he remains an unknown quantity, but it is never

distracting. A central guiding principle of Carrière's work becomes apparent: whatever is not directly related to the central spine of the narrative is either dispensed with, distilled or circumvented.

Drona sets up a test of archery skills, a tournament to find the outstanding warrior. Both Arjuna (who is that star performer) and Drona are set apart by their costumes, the latter in the black priestly robes of a martial arts master. Further Samurai resonances are inevitably read in the guttural vocalizations and sinewy physicality of the Japanese actor Yoshi Oida. The mechanics of bow and arrow are based on sleight of hand and simple child-like suggestion. The bow is an unstrung bamboo stick, the arrow a thinner bamboo length. As an archer takes aim and fires, the arrow is swished through the air in a blur and pulled out of sight behind him. We follow, in anticipation, its invisible flight to the target, our eyes arriving as the goal is 'struck'. In *The War*, the victims snap arrows from behind them and clasp them to chests, necks, thighs, etc.; in this way, arrows can be caught 'in mid flight' in hands or mouths, then tossed aside or snapped with comic brio. Here the effect is as farcical. As Arjuna fires an arrow into the sky, Vyasa visibly lobbs an impaled dead bird (recognizably artificial) into the space. Bathos is one way of coping with, and staging, extraordinary heroic feats. However, the archers' firing position – solid base, imperturbable balance and focus – clearly stems from familiarity with real weaponry of this kind. The posture also contains something of the contemplative heroic attitude in classical Indian painting (for example, Mughal miniatures) and sculpture (see, for instance, the cave sculptures at Ellora, and the *Mahabharata* bas-reliefs in the Khmer temple of Angkor Wat, Cambodia), as well as of classical dance (notably Bharata Natyam).

Drona and Ekalavya, master and servant/pupil. Fanatical devotion to his master causes Ekalavya to set up idols. He sculpts a statue of Drona, quite simply Yoshi himself 'chiselled' from the air around him, immobile – a statue – but watching, aware of this misdirected zeal: echoes of Pygmalion and Aphrodite. Drona demands that Ekalavya chop off his own thumb; an agonizing moment, though all is discreetly suggested. Drona's determination to exact insurance for the future reflects an expedient and unflinching prudence he will share with Krishna.

Vyasa informs us that the lamp has been extinguished by the wind, as he openly snuffs out the flame, and Arjuna (Vittoria Mezzogiorno) is shrouded in darkness. This scene proposes an image of the perfection of a spiritual craft, for Arjuna the archer shoots 'blind', like the Zen master in Eugen Herrigel's *Zen in the Art of Archery*. Here the darkness is his blindfold, as it will be when he kills Jayadratha in *The War*. First, a moment of intimacy in great proximity to the spectators, a 'close-up' held for a meditative period of concentration during which he makes his inner thoughts available to us with gentleness and modesty. Then he takes aim in silence and unleashes an arrow into the darkness – a mysterious whip-

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ping sound, created by the *analapos*, a spring attached to a soundbox, an invention of Tsuchitori's friend Akio Suzuki: an otherworldly aural effect for the magical bow Gandiva. Instantly, full lights shoot up to reveal the court at the back of the space in all of its pomp and finery. Having assembled silently in the darkness, the company now cheers and applauds as a bird-kite with an arrow lodged in one of its wings floats down into the centre of the space from a great height and an unspecified source – it has been released from the tip of a towering scarlet banner. Someone catches it before it hits the ground. We have shared Arjuna's own 'journey', from the moment of concentration, immobility and blindness to sudden illumination and glorious sight: from darkness and silence to an explosion of sound, colour and light – the spiritual *satori* of the Zen archer 'firing at himself'. With the lights now full on, Arjuna performs other tricks and feats – for example, hitting one of the struts of a spinning wheel with an arrow (a distant allusion to the final chariot confrontation between him and Karna in *The War?*).

The arrival of Karna (Bruce Myers) now instigates a rapid series of spatial redefinitions engineered by Brook, a master of proxemics. Karna's challenge to Arjuna clearly prefigures their pivotal confrontation on the battlefield of Kurukshetra much later. The four corners of an inner square of focus, the arena for their combat, are marked out by the four red banners, held erect. As Kunti faints, for she has recognized her first-born son, the banners are laid flat along the edges of this square to define a new, more intimate space and focus: the onlookers remain outside its perimeters, immobile and silent. A flashback re-enactment of Kunti's love-making with the sun god Surya, father to Karna, is visible only to the privileged few – the boy, Vyasa, the spectators – but not to either Pandavas or Kauravas; this will become a rich source of dramatic and tragic irony. Once again the scene is stage managed by Vyasa: so, for example, his words 'I stop all motion' signal the temporal manipulation that enables the generation of the flashback.

A 'flash-forward' back to the present and the confrontation between Arjuna and Karna, the latter now seen in a different light – a demigod hero, brother to the Pandavas. The actor-spectators are reanimated, they complete the circle of focus around the central locus of collision. When the fight is cut short, the spatial configuration is broken down again and redefined, as Duryodhana makes the outcast Karna a king: a vivid *tilak* on his forehead (at the point of the highest of the six yogic *chakras*), a gilded white swathe hung around his neck. After an exchange of threats and maledictions – the establishment of enmities and alliances, for two camps are forming before our eyes – Karna leaves protected by the 'invisible' Surya (Clément Masdongar), the god's red cloak creating a shield behind his son. This is the 'mysterious aura', the ineffaceable stigmata of his origins, that Duryodhana perceives around Karna. Three of the banners

follow him out, one is left flat to mark out an area of focus for the scene's end: lying parallel to the river at the back, it throws our attention forward to the front of the space. Then it too disappears. The sequence as a whole offers an exemplar of Brook's notion of 'living illusion'.

Duryodhana has shown some humanity in welcoming Karna to the fold, but this is a benign blink in the narrowing focus of his vision. In truth his motives are rooted in self-interest: expediency and additional strength. Rivalries and destinies are being suggested with ever-increasing clarity. We already sense the inevitability of impending tragic confrontation. Like the house of Atreus, a family will be fragmented.

An entirely new space immediately illustrates **Pandava domesticity**. Four fawn rush mats are unfurled across the central area; the very process of unrolling produces a tiny hissing sound. Four candles along the nearside bank of the river delineate the perimeters of their dwelling. The new bride Draupadi (Mallika Sarabhai, the only Indian in the cast) enters from the darkness beyond the river, across the bridge: a tender lyrical appearance. The five brothers take her as their joint wife, forming a circle, their hands conjoined with one of her's in a central pile, the tactile union further bonded with a garland of marigolds. Draupadi (often linked with the goddess Sri, 'prosperity') remains the focal point throughout the scene, relationships concretized spatially in relation to her. Similarly in Hindu culture she is sometimes described in terms of a 'palm' uniting the five 'fingers' of the Pandavas. As a structural unit, they are inseparable, complete.

For the new polyandrous family's first night of shared sleep, all five brothers lie side by side, Draupadi at their feet, Kunti at their head. The bedroom itself has been established by laying one carpet on the floor, an idyll lit and enclosed by a small oil lamp at each corner. Structural and affective echoes of Carmen's 'union' with Don Jose in Brook's 1981 production underpin this image of repose, infinite harmony, balance, plenitude, shared interdependence: an oasis of ordered calm before the storm.

We step outside the narrative for a moment as the boy questions Vyasa on the battle that is to come; a jarring reminder almost inconceivable alongside the image of family bliss before us. Suddenly we hear Krishna's flute in the distance (in reality the Turkish musician Kudsi Erguner's breathy *ney*, a wooden flute, played visibly from stage left), and a low-level diagonal beam of light suggests the eminence of the divinity described: a mystical presence as the source of illumination. Is Krishna the avatar of Vishnu, descended to earth to restore *dharma*?⁵ Vyasa seems to suggest it, but in performance the tension between his humanity and divinity will lurk unresolved. For an actor in this context, his trickster aspect must be foregrounded, and he will be necessarily low-key, humanized (how do you play gods?): an equivalent to the version of Jesus portrayed in Renan's *Life of Christ*. Here the attempt is to portray Krishna as a Vasudeva –

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an exceptional man, given to worries and occasional flashes of anger, as well as a scheming and expedient pragmatist, and finally a mortal who in turn must die. At the same time, on a vertical axis, he is the source of miraculous feats and the agent who engineers each individual's realization.

Bénichou/Ganesha – for his elephant's head has long since been removed – describes to the boy the richness of the Hindu universe (in reality a 'pluriverse') and the complementary trinity at the heart of the pantheon, then goes on to relate mythical episodes from the life of Krishna. The words radiate, set up resonances in our imaginations on a sonic level alone: nothing is illustrated. He stands behind a saffron curtain held in front of him at waist height by Vyasa and the boy: there is already a suggestion of Krishna's presence in the yellow colour of the material, for all Hindus in itself an auspicious association with Vishnu/Krishna. A moment of puppetry, as Bénichou holds the Ganesha mask at arm's length just above the curtain, his 'final curtain' before he disappears from sight. Having referred to his exploits and prestigious powers, and underlined that he is a man, Ganesha bids the boy (and us) –

Watch carefully. His action is subtle, mysteriously clear. At the same instant, they say, he can be everywhere – here, there – he is water and the trembling of a leaf, he's you, he's fire, he's the heart of all that's invisible.

The Boy: Is Krishna you as well?

Bénichou/Ganesha/Krishna: Naturally.

An irony, for he is storyteller and incarnation, scribe and character inscribed. A moment of gentle comedy prepares the ground for the subtle smiling irony that characterizes this Krishna. As in a conjuring trick, the curtain is then whipped away to one side to reveal Krishna sleeping peacefully, leaning on one arm, smiling – an allusion to classical Indian iconography (cf. the many images of Vishnu reclining asleep on the serpent Ananta). The flute we have already heard in the distance is now lodged in the crook of his arm. Then the curtain is draped over his body – an instant bedcover; in the foreground, garlands of brightly coloured flowers, the whole image illuminated with crisp clear light.

The Pandavas, asleep in the background until this moment, awaken and watch from the shadows, and the narrative's central alliance is immediately established. Throughout the epic, Krishna will protect and assist the Pandavas – a relationship similar to that of Mars and Aeneas' Trojans in Virgil's *Aeneid* (there are a number of striking parallels). Kunti is Krishna's aunt, sister of his father Vasudeva. And later the bond will be strengthened when Arjuna marries Krishna's sister Subhadra.

It would be impossible for any western actor to attempt to embody Krishna: in India people talk of Krishna 'playing' the actor... Here Bénichou plays Ganesha playing Krishna within Vyasa's story. There is a

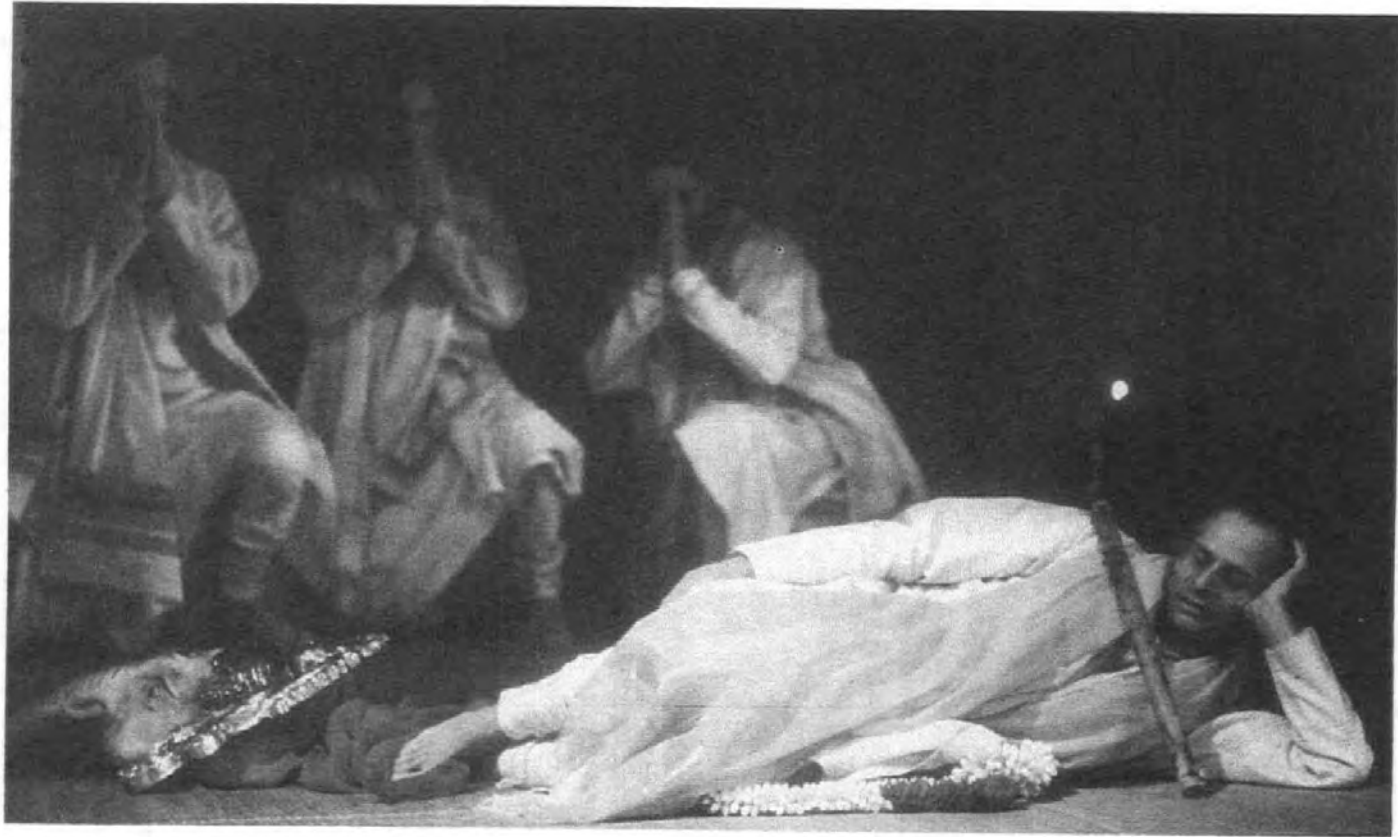


Figure 13.3 "The Game of Dice". The first appearance of Krishna (Bruce Myers) in iconic position, abandoned at his feet the mask of Ganesha. In the background, three of the Pandavas. (Photographer - Gilles Abegg)

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double distancing between actor and role, as densely textured as the polyphonous sliding structure of discourses in Weiss' *Marat/Sade*. Krishna will later ask Vyasa, 'Which of us invented the other?' These Brechtian/storytelling techniques of estrangement or alienation offer the possibility of multiple and mobile perspectives, engendering an ever-evolving relationship between audience and action.

Another piece of coloured cloth is laid on the bare earth, a change of light, including the relocation of the four lamps from the Pandava household – and we are in the Kauravas' home at Hastinapura. The blind Dhritarashtra plays chess on his own, his only means of ordering or impinging upon reality: his game dovetails meta-textually with the conflict of the powers of light and darkness that we see unfolding before us. At a moment of panic (the Herculean Bhima – Mamadou Dioume – roars with rage and comically threatens the Kaurava sons with an uprooted tree!), the old king knocks the table and scatters the pieces all over the floor. Disorder returns, he is incapable of taking charge, of truly acting. A tragic image of impotence as he scrabbles around in his darkness for pawns and queens.

The creation of the Pandava palace, the Mayasabha at Indraprastha, 'the city of the gods'. Vyasa informs us that it is being constructed by 'Maya's invisible workers', thereby ironically explaining away and theatricalizing any incongruity of the actors' dropping roles to redefine visibly the space on stage. There is of course an element of meta-theatrical self-consciousness in equating the actors with 'workers of illusion'. Pure white strips of material are unrolled, almost covering the base matting. Then a number of white cushions or bolsters are positioned in a symmetrical horseshoe, two banks of candles flicker beside the river – and the space resonates with suggestions of luminosity, peace, tranquillity and order. The candles promote a depth of field, conveying the size and simplicity of the palace, as well as its relationship to the environment (the river). But there is something fragile underlying this radiant light. The barely perceptible peeling scars and distant shadows of the back wall evoke an undercurrent of impermanence, decay and menace.

The investiture of Yudishthira (Matthias Habich) as 'king of kings' – *samraj*. White material is draped over the cushions to suggest a regal atmosphere, and a simple emblematic cloth is hung around Yudishthira's neck. In his hand he holds a single red flower (an unwitting echo of Don Jose's red carnation? This tale is another 'tragedy of *karma*', Brook's description of his own *Carmen*). When young Sisupala (Clovis) violently interrupts the proceedings, the flower drops from Yudishthira's fingers and lies abandoned, forgotten. Sisupala and Krishna confront each other across the central space, the others looking on from behind. With half-closed eyes and the suggestion of a smile, Krishna unleashes his magic disc – his *chakra*, Sudarshana. The missile and its trajectory through the

air are suggested in light and sound, an eery whistle from the musicians. A tiny flicking gesture from Krishna, and Sisupala's head drops to his chest before he collapses, 'decapitated', to be dragged away, his feet trailing like a dead bull's. The red flower remains in the centre of the white wash, a tiny splash of blood – a minimalist refinement of the clichéd cinematic symbolism of red wine spilling on to and staining a wedding dress or white linen tablecloth.

In the original *Mahabharata*, the nature of the enmity between Krishna and Sisupala, the king of Chedi, is complex. Krishna has abducted and married Sisupala's betrothed wife, Rukmini, despite the fact that he is in fact Sisupala's cousin. Furthermore, Sisupala, sometimes portrayed as an incarnation of the demon Ravana, is a devotee of Shiva, and is perhaps therefore antagonistic towards Krishna/Vishnu. Carrière's distillation leaves us with a sulky petulant troublemaker in Clovis' Sisupala; their animosity remains largely unexplained. However, the confrontation has obliged Krishna to reveal his divine powers for the first time, and there is an echo of the familial conflict to come in this slaughter of a cousin. 'It will have blood, they say, blood will have blood' (*Macbeth*).

Arjuna questions Vyasa as to the story's outcome: 'Do you know the end of your poem?' – 'I'm not sure it has an end.' By inference, we are still living it today. The characters' existential awareness of their reality as fictional 'enacted' beings also serves as a further storytelling device: some of the audience's own questions and interests are voiced in this way. The boy is now specifically designated as the survivor, a concrete glimmer of hope and future continuity. This story has a clear didactic quality; it is almost a morality play. The lessons of our collective ancestral past must be confronted and assimilated. We are still responsible, humanity's survival is in our hands.

The same spatial arrangement is retained for Duryodhana's furious entry to his own home, but immediately he kicks two bolsters apart with intense violence. So disarray and disharmony are reflected spatially: rupture and fragmentation are made visible in this disturbance of symmetry – the introduction of an anarchic, uncontrolled element into the scenic configuration. He is wracked with jealousy and bitterness. Gandhari tries to appease him by offering him a bowl of fruit: we have already seen a similar bowl being enjoyed in tranquillity by the Pandavas. He rejects her offering, hurling the bowl and its contents as far back as the river – a dump, like a Venetian canal. Food offered and rejected, the ordered mutuality and communion of shared sustenance refused: an archetypal image of fragmentation and impending disorder (one thinks of all those ruptured Shakespearean banquets).

A secret meeting between Krishna and Bhishma offers an ironic juxtaposition with the preceding scene, in which Duryodhana claimed he had nothing to fear with Drona and Bhishma unearringly allied with him. A

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single lamp defines the nature of both meeting and location – covert, only possible in the secrecy of darkness: in this way the misgivings both feel at the mounting tension and increasing omens are made apparent. Which is worse – the destruction of their people, or the destruction of *dharma*?

The scenic configuration for the **game of dice** (for the narrative now takes us into the second book of the *Mahabharata*, the *Sabhaparvan*) involves a re-establishment of formal order in the space, but once again not of perfect symmetry. An unresolved and dynamic spatial tension stems from this asymmetry, while the focal point is clearly located in the central gaming table – a forum for confrontation.



Figure 13.4 'The Game of Dice'. Duryodhana celebrates Yudishthira's loss at the gaming table – similar in design to the traditional Indian pachisi board. In the foreground, from left to right, Shakuni (Douta Seck), Duryodhana (Andrzej Seweryn), Yudishthira (Matthias Habich). In the background, from left to right: the blindfolded Gandhari (Mireille Maalouf), Dhritarashtra (Ryszard Cieslak) and, on the far right, the young boy (Lutfi Jafkar) complete the circle of focus in silence. French-language production. (Photographer – Michel Dieuzaide)

Initial wagers are made: gilded necklaces, pearls, beads, shells. An element of deliberately naive theatricality is foregrounded here, for these objects are all explicitly imitations, playthings. As the tension increases, spatial relationships remain fluid, constantly redefined. At first, everyone remains seated, but with further Pandava losses and the loutish and vituperative Duhsassana tirelessly scheming at one side, individuals gradually rise to their feet to watch more closely. The musicians' percussive rhythms

are repeatedly syncopated with a similarly rhythmic interjection by Shakuni, the wily Kaurava diceplayer, Gandhari's trickster brother: 'I've won.' A comic colouring to his relish heightens the sense of impending loss. When the Pandava brothers are wagered away, they step outside of the central space and into the Kaurava camp, like captured chess pieces. Stripped of their status, they are therefore stripped of their emblematic robes and neckscarves: a pile appears to one side. Silence and immobility for the final throw of the dice. Finally Dhritarashtra is forced to ask, 'Who has lost?' A pause as the actors freeze around the table, the dice invisible to us: we too are blind. Only Arjuna has seen Shakuni cheat, but even the world's greatest archer misses anything illegal in the replay. The *magister ludi* Shakuni tacitly invites Duryodhana to throw the last dice by dropping them into his palm, assuring him he cannot lose, but at the last moment the Kaurava prince places the dice back in Shakuni's hand. He fails to trust his luck in a situation he cannot afford to lose.

Draupadi's invocation of Krishna. A further change of light focuses attention on her full face, while Carnatic music suggests her inner mantra. Krishna appears to her, invisible to all others: once again, the spectators are in a privileged position. For the miracle of the inexhaustibly reproducing sari – Draupadi can never be forcibly stripped – she stands together with Krishna in tranquil immobility, in contrast with Duhsassana's frenzied wrenchings and tuggings. Comically, he is forced to give up, collapsing exhausted and bemused. Her curse of Duhsassana and the Kauravas is delivered to the distant cry of an enraged beast.

The Pandavas en route to exile. The gaming hall remains half-visible in the unlit forward section of the playing space. Only the back wall is fully lit as the Pandavas trudge along the far side of the river, specks of dust kicking up in their wake. The preceding space – the gaming hall – and its events are still fully present in their minds, as in ours: the cause of their present predicament. From our perspective, we look through that cause to effect. They disappear accompanied by Toshi's harmonium drone and plaintive song, adapted from the Bengali writer Rabindranath Tagore's Nobel Prize-winning volume of poems *Gitanjali* (Toshi had studied Rabindra Sangeet in India on one of his many preparatory journeys). Interwoven with the images of final departure and enforced banishment, the song colours all: a sense of immense loss, a yearning for despoiled innocence never to be recovered.

Vyasa recounts the final moments of the Pandavas' leaving – their ominous attitudes, etc. – to the blind king. The die is now cast but the story is just beginning. A bloodbath seems inevitable: revenge for outrages suffered at their cousins' hands. The spectator closely follows the narration to the blind king in his/her imagination. On an associative level, the words are invested with a heightened charge, for they exist as the only reality available to Dhritarashtra: the quality of word as sound, colour, image,

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taste is amplified. An appeal is made, through empathy with the blind king's predicament, to the spectator's imagination. Like blind Gloucester, we are able to 'see it feelingly' with him. This further illustration of Dhritarashtra's dependence upon others – his inability to act, his horror at his own weakness and irresponsibility, their repercussions – also serves to provide a naturalistic rationale for the 'suggestive' art of the storyteller at this precise moment: so an impulse for the form exists in the narrative itself.

The final image: Vyasa and Bénichou/Ganesha/Krishna return to the gaming table, the source of the exile and inexorable resultant conflict. Accompanied by the musicians, Bénichou sings an Indian folk song, 'The Song of Maya' (illusion), as they play their own game of dice. While their gentle lyrical humour affirms the song's content by reframing the game as 'play', the song itself in some way accounts meta-textually for what we have just seen (a 'song of illusion'), as well as for this temporary hiatus in the performance.

NOTES

- 1 Vyasa is traditionally accredited as author/compiler of all eighteen Puranas (lesser epics), as collector and arranger of the Four Vedas, and indeed as creator of Vedantic philosophy. His generic name means 'the arranger', and repeatedly in this performance quite literally he 'arranges' the construction of narrative representation. The word 'vyasa' is still used in India today for any storyteller. *Maya*, as David R. Kinsley points out in *The Divine Player* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979, pp. 10–14), is more than illusion or ignorance. 'For *maya* is also the power of the absolute, or the power of the gods. [It] is more than simply a negative concept, more than simply illusion. In the *Rig Veda*, *maya* means power, or the ability of the gods to change form and to create. *Maya* is the supernatural ability on the part of the gods to extend themselves.' In its earliest context, '*maya* meant the wonderful skill of the gods . . . It is as a vehicle of the gods' display, as their means of revealing themselves, that *maya* may be understood as the *lila* of the gods. For *maya* is their means of creating and sustaining the phenomenal order, and *maya* is always mysterious, unpredictable and bewitching. The gods are great *mayins*, great magicians, and the created order is the result of their trickery. They have conjured the world into being, and they similarly conjure it out of existence' (ibid p. 13).
- 2 The unnamed brother is the illegitimate Vidura, whose name signifies 'knowing much'. The wise counsellor is absent from this version, the only major protagonist to have been supplanted, most of his role now allocated to Bhishma.
- 3 According to Georges Dumézil, the Pandavas collectively represent the *locus classicus* of 'the ideology of the three functions . . . the conception according to which the world and society can live only through the harmonious collaboration of these three stratified functions'. The functions are: sovereignty (Yudishthira); force – *danda* (Arjuna and Bhima, twin aspects of this quality, like Odin and Thor, with his hammer, in Scandinavian myth); and fecundity (the twins, an undifferentiated union, who specialize in breeding livestock). This hierarchy of functions represents the king and his specialized auxiliaries (see Dumézil, *The Destiny of the Warrior*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press,

1968, p. 5). In terms of *danda*, Arjuna, the warrior-*yogin*, seems to be a representative of brahminic spiritual power (cf. Achilles), whereas Bhima represents temporal *ksbatrya* power (cf. Heracles).

4 Cf. G. J. Held on the central conflict in The Epic: '[it] concerns two parties representing the two halves of the cosmos . . . we have here to do with a cosmic ritual i.e. an event in which the entire cosmos is understood to participate' (*The Mahabharata, an Ethnological Study*, London: Kegan Paul, 1935, p. 332).

In *The Shifting Point* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987, p. 163) Brook describes *dharma* in the following way: 'What is *dharma*? That is a question no one can answer, except to say that, in a certain sense, it is the essential motor. Since it is the essential motor, everything that accords with it magnifies the effect of *dharma*. Whatever does not agree with it, whatever opposes it or is ignorant of it, isn't 'evil' in the Christian sense – but negative.' He goes on to point out the problematic (if inevitable) contextualization of The Epic in western 'readings', in terms of a reductive good/evil polarity, a diminution of complex Hindu syncretism: '*The Mahabharata* cuts to shreds all the traditional Western concepts, which are founded on an inessential, degenerate Christianity in which good and evil have assumed very primitive forms. It brings back something immense, powerful and radiant – the idea of an incessant conflict within every person and every group, in every expression of the universe: a conflict between a possibility, which is called *dharma*, and the negation of that possibility'.

5 Meher Baba: 'The Avatar appears in different forms, under different names, at different times, in different parts of the world. As His appearance always coincides with the spiritual regeneration of man, the period immediately preceding His manifestation is always one in which humanity suffers from the pangs of the approaching rebirth . . . Humanity grows desperate. There seems to be no possibility of stemming the tide of destruction. At this moment the Avatar appears. Being the total manifestation of God in human form, he is like a gauge against which man can measure what he is and what he may become.

He is interested in everything but not concerned about anything. The slightest mishap may command His sympathy: the greatest tragedy will not upset Him. He is beyond the alterations of pain and pleasure, desire and satisfaction, rest and struggle, life and death. To Him, they are equally illusions that He has transcended, but by which others are bound, and from which He has come to free them. He uses every circumstance as a means to lead others toward Realisation. The Avatar awakens contemporary humanity to a realization of its true spiritual nature, gives liberation to those who are ready, and quickens the life of the spirit in His time' (from *Discourses*).

I am indebted to the Jungian psychologist Craig San Roque for pointing out this passage to me as pertinent to the discussion of Krishna and of his role in *The Mahabharata*. See the *Bhagavad Gita*, IV, 6–8, for further discussion of the avatar.

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EXILE IN THE FOREST

This above all – to thine own self be true:
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

(*Hamlet*)

But where there is danger, there grows also what saves.

(Holderlin, *Patmos*)

The narrative is now fully self-generative, so there is no need for Vyasa and Ganesha to set us on our way. Centre stage, the musicians set up jagged percussive rhythms which immediately locate the gnawing unease in the Kaurava camp. Duhsassana awakens from a nightmare with a scream, to disturb his equally troubled brother. Merleau-Ponty's celebrated caveat hangs unvoiced on the air – 'We struggle with dream figures and our blows fall on living faces.' A low diagonal light casts ghastly deformed shadows behind them on the side wall: the darker aspects of their psyches stick with them, haunt them.

As the narrative moves into Book 3 of the *Mahabharata*, an immediate transposition to the forest exile of the Pandavas, 'wanderers in the scorching and barren wilderness of this world', to borrow a phrase from Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor. Draupadi's hair is now loose, tangled and natural. Yudishthira and Arjuna are both stripped to the waist, warrior-ascetics whose lives are worn down to simple constitutive elements – rags, sticks, stones, pots: the austerity of *The Ik*. Draupadi creates an altar with a single stone centrepiece, garlands, candles, mango leaves and petals. Religious observance and devotion (*bhakti*) continue, as a wife assures the gods' protection of her family. After Tsuchitori's initial song, a direct narrative bridge to the end of the last section, the nature of their forest existence is established in silence. An elemental way of life, involving two different kinds of fire – votive candles and open fires in the bare earth, tiny tenuous *foyers* of sticks and twigs for warmth.¹ Yudishthira also performs his own *puja*, creating two concentric circles of red powder around a jug of water: a prayer for sustenance.

Therefore we are presented with an immediate vision of a world of great simplicity, religious devotion, respect for and interdependence with the natural world. At the same time, the implied way of life is difficult, impermanent. Underlying this aesthetically satisfying reduction to the elements is a quality of privation, profound unhappiness and threat: hence Draupadi's *cri de coeur*, challenging Yudishthira to action. His mute acceptance of *dharma* smacks of passivity to her, she is frustrated and embittered by the sterility and hopelessness of inaction. The original *Mahabharata* often refers to Draupadi in exile as 'having husbands, but like a widow'. Compare her frame of mind with Sita's in Valmiki's *Ramayana*

during her forest exile, which she feels to be a delightful romantic dream. *The Mahabharata* is so much more contradictory and less idealized.

Arjuna recognizes the inadequacy of wandering aimlessly ('As the true method of knowledge is experiment, the true faculty of knowing must be the faculty that experiences' – Blake). He must search, learn, develop his skills and acquire new ones: he must 'live more abundantly', as Hesse would have said, by becoming a Nietzschean *Überganger* (a self-surmounter). His solitary departure recalls the journeys in both *Conference* and Gurdjieff's *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, as well as Gilgamesh's quest for ancestral wisdom: *solvitur ambulando*. This is a recurrent theme in Brook's work with the Centre: the searcher and the search, the imperative to extend one's boundaries, to find understanding by confronting and embracing experience – a process described by the Sufis as 'making a journey to the outer horizons' which corresponds to 'a journey to the inner horizons'. In one way, the forest is a metaphor, as much a spiritual and initiatory landscape as Dante's 'Dark Wood', or Gilgamesh's 'The Country': a locus of retreat as a symbolic death, facilitating a subsequent ontological 'rebirth'.

The remaining Pandavas sleep, their shelter a blanket suspended between two sticks embedded in the earth, their only light an open fire: a tiny pocket of humanity engulfed by darkness. The shelter also serves to focus a defined space: a cinematic screen, a frame in front of which Bhima sits on guard. The sudden appearance of two flesh-eating demons, the *rakshasas*, introduces Manichean elements of the primal human predicament: fire, darkness, the Beast – the latter a homologous motif in diverse mythological discourses, a component of archetypal 'initiatory' narratives. There are explicit echoes of tribal Africa and Australia in these masked 'devil' figures, a representation that has inevitably been read as racist, serving to underline and reinforce dangerous received ideas about tribal cultures. Brook locates the *rakshasas* in relation to shamanistic animism, or the pagan notion of chthonic *genii loci* – the protectors of places and the places themselves (cf. the Humbaba in *Gilgamesh*). One of them is covered in animal pelts, a faceless shadow with bells on her ankles; the other boasts a spray of menacing spines, like an oversized porcupine. The union of Bhima and Hidimbi – now transformed into a beautiful woman (Tam Sir Niane) – is narrated by her from Bhima's shoulders: they blend and merge, a two-headed beast.

The *rakshasa's* brother Hidimba (Clément Masdongar), returns to interrupt their love play and do battle with Bhima. In this scene of great dynamism and athleticism, the space is used fully, including the rungs up either side wall – and Masdongar in particular is a phenomenally compelling dancer. The noise awakens the Pandavas, who emerge bleary-eyed to observe this strange conflict; comically, they peer over the top of the blanket/shelter. Much of the energy of this titanic struggle stems from

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Tsuchitori's percussive battery: the earth itself seems to shake. Eventually Bhima snatches the blanket to use as a weapon, ensnaring his opponent in it, then crushing him. A comic 'panto' death – the defeated *rakshasa* as 'dead ant', arms and legs rigid above him. Nothing is gratuitous, however, for this position enables him to be carried off forthwith in a familiar (cartoon?) position of captured prey, suspended by all four limbs from a stick: we have seen it in every Stewart Granger film. Further slapstick occurs in the instantaneous appearance of the son of Bhima and Hidimbi, fully developed physically if not in other ways – no gestation period here (a quality traditionally ascribed to *rakshasas* exploited for narrative dynamism). At this point, Ghatotkatcha is a lumbering gormless 'child' of immense strength, the curls of a wig sticking bolt upright on his head. Masdongar, who had played the dead *rakshasa*, returns to portray him as a lovable oaf, mumbling ill-formed cries of 'mama' and 'papa' to his astonished parents. Later he will be summoned to the battlefield, his awesome physical prowess used to erase the threat of Karna's sacred lance.



Figure 13.5 'Exile in the Forest'. In the foreground, the Kauravas invoke Arjuna by making a circle of fire around the pool – an iconographic link with Shiva Nataraja's circle of flame (*tiruvasi*): in the background, Arjuna is overcome by Kirata-Shiva (Tapa Sudana). (Photographer – Gilles Abegg)

The Kauravas arrive in the forest, dressed in warrior black costumes, the very antithesis of the semi-naked, ragged and unarmed Pandavas. Vyasa is forced to intervene to prevent imminent violence. His fictional creations now possess an independent life of their own. His intervention is

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necessary, he says, to avoid crimes against *dharmā*. It is too early for the conflict, and at this time the odds are too strongly stacked in favour of the Kauravas. Like Krishna, Vyasa is apparently allied with the Pandavas, for they are purportedly the agents of *dharmā*.

A neutral empty space is re-established quickly. Fires are starved with earth or doused with water, leaving tiny mounds of steaming, smoking sand; rugs and materials are removed. Another somewhere/nowhere created in a blink by the actors; while to one side—

The Boy: Vyasa, I don't want to stay in the forest any more. I'm afraid.

Vyasa: But you are no longer in the forest

The invocation of Arjuna by Duryodhana is a scene of startling beauty, using the simplest of pyrotechnic effects. As Duhsassana creates a circle of fire around the pool, Duryodhana lobs petals into the water with little respect: a hasty nod at ritual by someone the original text suggests may possess very real magical prowess.² The circle of flame entraps them, forcing them to watch a vision they have summoned up, but in fact will not wish to see. At the same time, a lateral line of fire parallel with the front edge of the river springs up from the sand: naked flame, writhing shadows, reflections on the surface of the pool. Duryodhana faces the spectators, Duhsassana and Karna look on aghast as Arjuna breaks through the back line of fire to enter the central space. There is a sense of transgression, even initiation, in the movement of this figure from another 'reality'. The back wall twists in the flickering light, its leprous scars like drifting mist through Arjuna's mountain retreat — he is near Mt Kailasa, the Hindu Olympus in the Himalayas. Later, in *The War*, these same plaster stains (the Bouffes' 'wounded aspect', as Micheline Rozan calls it) will conjure up, Rorschach-like, momentary human faces and forms, like outlines branded into the walls and earth of Hiroshima.

Arjuna's battle with the hunter Kirata — Shiva in disguise — is a popular episode for representation in Hindu iconography and performing arts: it is also the subject of Bharavi's celebrated poem *Kiratarjuniya*. Here the Pandava's martial skills are no match for Shiva's cosmic powers. With prodigious acrobatic leaps and whirls, he scythes two tiny yellow flags through the air around Arjuna, producing the sound of distant muffled thunderclaps. A similar convention is used in Chinese Opera, but in truth the source of this image may well be in Indian lore. One of Shiva's traditional attributes is a yellow flag, attached to his trident, bearing the motif of the white bull Nandi; it is said to represent the necessity for dedication and patience when following the path of *dharmā*.

Here Tapa Sudana as Shiva deflects, catches or shatters Arjuna's arrows, using the same convention as described above. Arjuna perceives the presence of divinity and hastily constructs an earth *lingam* (in its widest

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signification, an aniconic symbol of the wholeness of the Hindu universe), crowns it with a garland – a supplication to Shiva, as well as a reconstruction of the Hindu evening prayer *arati* – and the deity reveals himself. He sports an identical garland around his head, a trident in his hand. Shiva at his most martial, immobile in his traditional ‘cosmic dance’ position – *Shiva nataraja*, ‘lord of the dance’. (The direct iconographic allusion must be recognizable to many in the audience: the Chola *nataraja* bronzes have become a virtual cliché of Indian culture in the west.) Arjuna’s *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* is underlined by a repeated gasp of ‘Shiva’ by all those present – the Kauravas are still observing, spellbound; the use of rhythmic stycomythia for a radical elevation in status. Yet the actual moment of protean transformation has been made available and visible to us: the ludic self-consciousness of storytelling is rarely far away.



Figure 13.6 ‘Exile in the Forest’. Tapa Sudana as Shiva Nataraja. (Photographer – Gilles Abegg)

Shiva grants the kneeling Arjuna possession of *pasupata*, the ultimate weapon, or rather one of a number sought and employed in The Epic; associations with the arms race are unavoidable. Arjuna’s hands are pressed together and held above his head in a *namaste* position of devotion, as

Shiva spins the tip of his trident along the outline of Arjuna's body, the blurred tip infusing him with numinosity, a palpable charge. In India, the three prongs of the trident (*trisula*) are said to represent bodily, worldly and heavenly suffering, as well as the interdependence of words, thoughts and actions: it is both destructive and protective, like Yahweh's staff. Some commentators propose that it represents a cosmic pillar holding heaven and earth apart, an *axis mundi*; and, like Krishna's *chakra*, the trident is said to have been moulded from shavings from the sun.

We turn back to the evident disillusion and despair of the Kauravas, entrapped in their dying circle, now an ominous black ring of scorched, sterile earth. Karna confronts Arjuna, despite the fact that they are in different fictive places and 'realities': such is the freedom of storytelling, unencumbered by the laws of causality and *vraisemblance*, the deliquescent materiality of the physical world. The two rivals (brothers) meet in an imagined no man's land, a mysterious liminal conjunction where the two 'worlds' overlap. Boundaries between reality and illusion blur and implode. An audience has no trouble reading or accepting this: in storytelling, 'truth' is clarity, an invitation to imagine . . .

Arjuna has evolved, he is enriched by the mountain penitence and search. The marks of an initiate/sage now colour his brow. He has travelled in different worlds, assimilated experience and understanding. Hence Madeleine Biardeau's description of him as 'the warrior-yogin',³ for he has unified the powers of both *kshatryas* and brahmins. It is now his turn to relate a story to the Kauravas, literally a 'captive audience'. He re-creates a past encounter with the nymph Urvasi (Pascaline Pointillart), an *apsaras* from heaven. *Apsaras*, often sensuously represented in Hindu temple sculpture, are in some ways similar to Valkyries, or the Irish Sidhe; in addition, traditionally they love to torment *rishis* rapt in meditation, or are sent to seduce them. Urvasi makes an extraordinary entrance, flitting across the stage, a trail of fire snaking through the sand in her wake: a comet's tail in the night sky. Tongues of flame flicker blue and gold across the sand and on the surface of the pool – for it too is now ablaze, in an instant transformed into its opposite but complementary element. This proves to be one of the most hypnotic and entrancing sequences in the performance as a whole. Like us, the Kauravas observe, but they are able to question, interject, dispute: they serve as our point of access. The scene also celebrates the coherence and potential resonance of doubling, for there is both an underlying logic and a continuity in the casting of roles. Here is a second rejected advance and vengeful curse from Pointillart (we look back to Amba). Compare this with, for example, Clovis' roles: Ekalavya, Sisupala, Virata's son Uttara and Abhimanyu are all variations on a theme.

As the fire dies, the scene fades and the space is freed to be redefined. Scenographically, nothing in this production is gratuitous, even the by-

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product of a pyrotechnic effect is embraced and exploited. A wash of light pinpoints the pool, now ringed with black charred sand, like kohl around a glistening eye. Something of the malignant Kaurava presence remains, and the pool is now a poisoned lake. (This movement seems to propose a scenographic equivalent for the match cut, that formal dialectic device in cinematic montage that links disparate scenes.) Then the booming voice of Dharma emerges from the periphery of the space, openly created by Maratrat/Vyasa to one side – he uses the sound box of his troubadour's instrument. The resultant hollow echo *suggests* a voice from afar (*vox dei*), but the actual process of representation – the mechanics of 'mystery', if you like – is made available to the spectators. Such a device expresses Brook's avowed determination since *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to show that there is 'nothing up our sleeves', to invite participation in the imagination by opening up and demystifying the creative processes of play.

Then Vyasa, as narrator, enters the central space to deliver the voice of Dharma. Once established, the echo device is abandoned as redundant: we move on, although by association Vyasa's ordinary voice carries within it something of its amplified resonance seconds before. Dharma poses a series of initiatory riddles to Yudishthira, who remains ignorant of the fact that their source is in fact his father.

Dharma: Give me an example of space.

Yudishthira: My two hands as one.

Dharma: An example of grief.

Yudishthira: Ignorance.

Dharma: Of poison.

Yudishthira: Desire.

Dharma: An example of defeat.

Yudishthira: Victory.

Dharma tests his own son, the agent of *dharmā* on earth. Yudishthira stands alone, bare to the waist, addressing his responses to a light above our heads: defenceless, unarmed, such as he is. The final question and answer bring us back to the one inescapable collective given – mortality – and humankind's imperative to locate meaning within it:

Dharma: And what is the greatest marvel?

Yudishthira: Each day, death strikes and we live as though we were immortal.

The residue here of a Vedic tradition of contests of enigmas, these riddles resemble Zen *koans*, the gnomic paradoxes of the 'Valleys' in *Conference*, or Oedipus' confrontation with the Sphinx. Later, at the threshold of Paradise, a similar interrogatory process awaits the Pandava king, once again a lone survivor: he is to be tested throughout his journey.

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A sudden transposition back to the Kauravas, now in possession of a fearsome armoury of real weapons – metal swords, shields, spears. As silhouettes, they are idealized, epic, virtual cartoons. Nevertheless they immediately convey the unmediated reality and horror of pain and death. And a stark dislocation is set up in our imaginations between their position of strength, armed to the teeth and fully prepared for battle, and the solitary figure of Yudishthira moments before, Christ-like in his semi-nakedness.

Krishna's return. Vyasa and the boy kneel by the pool, the dark ring now more or less erased: a brief hiatus in the narrative thrust as they discuss the story. Suddenly a tiny pebble splash in the water, the contemplative mirror disturbed by this image of life, perhaps a fish breaking the surface. And Krishna becomes apparent high on a side wall, hanging from a rung, his playful lob into the pool accompanied by the inevitable wry and enigmatic smile. The 'plop' precedes our awareness of Krishna's appearance, it is almost as if he had emerged from the pool. However his playfulness is only momentary as, full of foreboding, he admits to sensing a 'lake of dark water' within himself. He tells us this while gazing reflectively into the pool, its surface once more still and glassy, almost as if it had cued his utterance.

Parashurama, the brahmin hermit who is traditionally the sixth of Vishnu's ten avatars (Krishna is the eighth), is pursued by Karna. The latter is also in search of an 'ultimate weapon', for he had witnessed Shiva's gift to Arjuna. The hermit resembles a shaman, an Aboriginal elder or mendicant *Naga sadhu*. He shakes his stick and the axe that gives him his name. 'Rama with the axe' – a weapon with which a number of legends suggest that he broke off one of Ganesha's tusks, and despite which he lost a three-week long battle with Bhishma (also played by Sotigui Kouyate in this production). He sings a lament, his face and angular body stained with grey ash, his only garment a loincloth: a Giacometti sculpture infused with life. In this form, the West African *griot* Kouyate offers a direct if hybridized allusion to tribal cultural forms encountered in Africa, Australia and India: a funereal apparition wandering alone in search of his dreamtime ancestors, as well as a Shaivite holy man seeking empowerment deep in the forest. The echo of indigenous Australian culture is further strengthened by the use of a trio of didgeridoos. The musicians form a choral presence around Kouyate (interestingly only Tsuchitori has mastered the circular breathing technique). The image thus created is both radically 'other' and disturbing. Krishna, Vyasa and the boy observe from the shadows behind. As spectators, they help evolve the dynamics of space, never committed to a single, exclusive vantage point: a mobile focusing device.

The magical formula for the weapon is handed to Karna on a piece of bark, a fragment of living nature like the bark paintings used in Aboriginal



Figure 13.7 'Exile in the Forest'. Krishna (Maurice Bénichou) tells the young boy (Samon Takahashi) of his fears. French-language production. (Photographer – Gilles Abegg)

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ritual.⁴ Parashurama had the bark concealed beneath a tiny pile of straw and grass, his bedding and environment: another minimalist metonymic adjunct suggesting a way of life. As Parashurama sleeps on Karna's lap, a 'worm' chews – or rather *drones* – its way into the flesh of the Kaurava warrior's thigh; it is 'injected' by Tsuchitori through a didgeridoo, like the venom from some outlandish mosquito. Later it will be suggested that the worm was divine retribution, sent on behalf of the Pandavas to foil Karna's search: he will forget the formula when he needs it – an addition to the already complex web of oaths and counter-oaths, all of which will be implemented. The *karmic* balance is now back with the Pandavas. Toshi's hovering presence suggests a *deus ex machina*. A Japanese, face hidden in his swinging hair, carries and plays a sacred Aboriginal instrument as if it were organically part of him: a bizarre polysemic image, the collision of discourses in this configuration curiously satisfying. The didgeridoo is employed throughout to introduce a textural 'otherness', a transcendent quality. Interestingly, it finds its place quite naturally in this elemental world, any precise textual/cultural reference insulated.

The court of King Virata (Andreas Katsulas), a new space once again established with clarity and economy. Its representation is based on what are by now familiar structural ellipses, which engage our imaginations to complete a suggested reality: Brook invites us to 'fill in the missing half of the equation'. Ropes at least 20 metres in length are attached to the domed base of the cupola in the theatre's ceiling. Two on each side suggest the dimensions of the imaginary palace within which we now find ourselves. They are employed to suspend a pair of swinging benches of the kind beloved by late medieval maharajas. A similar device was employed by Mnouchkine at the Cartoucherie de Vincennes for the scene of John of Gaunt's death in the Théâtre de Soleil's *Richard II*; here the resonance of a slightly opulent decadence is less hieratic. The musicians move to a carpet centre stage behind and between these benches, to enact 'musicians' within the fiction. As they begin to play, the perfect image of a court at ease, united in harmony, blossoms before our eyes. A number of oil lamps flicker while tiny candles on silver bases are set afloat in the pool, now an ornamental pond or lake. Mats with bolsters from a circle of focus around an inner central space lit more sharply than its surrounds: an empty space, latent, waiting to be filled, for the focus is centripetal. Tapa Sudana performs a short Balinese puppet entertainment for the court's delight. It seems to be the comic tale of a king losing his head, which culminates with the puppeteer pursuing one of the puppets (a *wayang golek*) off into the 'audience' on stage: it has taken on a chirruping life of its own. However, as is so often the case in this production, no sooner has the activity been established than it is erased, perhaps before we have had time to assimilate it fully, to linger over skills and details.

The arrival of the Pandavas, introduced to the playing space from



Figure 13.8 'Exile in the Forest'. The *kshatrya* Karna (Bruce Myers) screams silently as a worm burrows into his thigh; his *guru* Parashurama (Sotigui Kouyate) sleeps on his lap. French-language production. (Photographer – Gilles Abegg)

behind the river by the back wall – located as somewhere ‘outside’. We watch them waiting nervously, preparing to convince the king (whom we have already seen to be amiable and warm) that he must take them in. For it is the final year of exile, and the Pandavas must disguise themselves, ‘in accordance with their deepest thoughts’, as Vyasa has said. In reality this means ludic carnivalesque inversions: Yudishthira as brahmin, a *sanyasin* – and, ironically, as dice teacher. Arjuna, like Achilles, is an effeminate eunuch or transsexual (Brihannada), it remains unclear which. Either one would suggest the very antithesis of his apparent status as *kshatrya*: the curse of Urvasi realized and the metaphorical impotence of exile, but also a holistic equilibrium, like Shiva’s manifestation in a composite male/female form called Ardhanarishwara or Shakta-Shakti. During his five-year sojourn in Indra’s heaven, where he learnt to use his divine weapons, Arjuna had received instruction from a *gandharva* – so he will teach dance. Bhima, a man of Gargantuan appetites, presents himself as cook. Sahadeva (the Iranian musician Mahmoud Tabrizi-Zadeh) will be a musician. And the loyal sustainer Nakula (Jean-Paul Denizon) a groom – comically he claims to know ‘all the secrets and desires of cows’.

There follows a sequence of great comedy and lightness of touch. Andreas Katsulas’ Virata is portrayed with great compassion as a very human king, worried by the expense but delighted with his new companions. Yoshi Oida’s Kitchaka, with its roots as much in Japanese Kyogen as in Kathakali, is an arrogant, self-satisfied and vainglorious Samurai – a vain buffoon and laughable peacock, dolled up to the nines, with eyeliner and silk kimono. His suspicions are aroused when he hears that Bhima has been juggling horses in the yard . . .

The Pandavas tell stories to the king and court, animating the central focal space. The scene is underscored with dramatic ironies: the Pandavas as lowly servants mask their true natures; Arjuna used the disguise to implement Urvasi’s curse; and Bhima enacts his own meeting with his half-brother Hanuman, the monkey god. Their counterparts are storytellers in village squares throughout Asia and Africa, using whatever comes to hand to tell their tales, accompanied by two musicians behind them. Toshi finds an astounding range of percussive slaps and burps by beating an earthenware jug, similar to the *ghatam* of South Indian music. (A few moments later, when Kitchaka is found ‘crushed’ into a sphere, he uses his talking drum to mimic one of the actor’s utterances: he then sustains an intelligible dialogue by modifying drum tension and pitch to mirror conversational intonation).⁵ Such music from a visible source enjoys a position of extreme mobility and freedom in relation to the diagesis, while self-consciously acknowledging the fictionality of representation.

A sudden jarring change of tone occurs in the Pandavas’ story – Hanuman’s warning prefigures the *Kaliyuga*, the age of Kali (‘The Black’), the fourth and final subdivision of the cyclical Hindu *Mahayuga*. Sanskrit

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scholars claim that the *Kaliyuga* will last 432,000 years, and at present we are only in the sixth millennium. At its end, it is said, world redemption will be possible only through its destruction by deluge, fire, and subsequent reconstruction. It is an era of mechanization, fragmentation, environmental sterility and violent carnage. Yudishthira's words are unaccompanied, they take flight in silence, painting an apocalyptic vision of a



Figure 13.9 'Exile in the Forest'. Kitchaka (Yoshi Oida) pleads with Virata's wife Gudeshna (Mireille Maalouf) to send him Draupadi; in the background, Toshi Tsuchitori. French-language production. (Photographer - Michel Dieuzaide)

bleak post-nuclear world. Echoes of the *The Wasteland*, as of the cosmic disorder and anarchy of pathetic fallacies in Shakespearian tragedy. Unaccommodated man on a blasted heath, locked within some endless nuclear winter; life as a metaphysical Beckettian farce, when seconds before there was joy and innocence . . . An affectively charged polar movement that reflects the performance idioms and textures in miniature, like an individual fragment of a shattered holographic plate: structurally, a discursive hypostasis.

For Kitchaka's 'boudoir' the ropes are pinned back behind the side walls, the swinging benches upended as wicker screens. Behind one of them, Kudsı Erguner plays a haunting melody on the *ney*. Oida warbles a hilarious lovesong, a pastiche with suggestions of Kyogen. An idiot seducer, he scatters powders and rice on the floor and, suggestively, on the bed (a length of material on the ground); finally an adolescent overdose of scent intended to wow Draupadi, or club her into submission. When she escapes, there is a change of light as Bhima clammers under the sheet and awaits Kitchaka – for it is now the following night, time for the 'secret' rendezvous with Draupadi in the dance hall: again temporal concatenation for narrative dynamism. Dramatic irony underpins and colours overt clowning as Kitchaka approaches the concealed shape, lingering with relish over his 'moment of glory'. As he slides his body under the sheet, his head remains framed above the rim of the material. We follow the dawning horror of gradual realization in his facial contortions. Eventually Bhima drags him out of sight, wraps him in the sheet and crushes him into a perfect ball, which he then rolls across the floor with his foot – the cartoon humour of *Ubu aux Bouffes*. And as with the *serio buffo* of *Ubu*, a darker undercurrent is present: Bhima's prodigious and merciless strength, a further death, a prefiguration of the treatment to be meted out to anyone who mistreats Draupadi.

Back to Virata's court, the airborne 'loveseats' down in an instant for a scene of ongoing everyday life. Gentle comedy as Arjuna teaches dance, mincing outrageously, as feminine as Desperate Dan in a tutu. Meanwhile Yudishthira is whooping Virata at dice, with comic brio. At the news of the Kauravas' raid – they have come to steal Virata's cattle – Arjuna/Brihannada is proposed as Virata's son's charioteer (a parodic distortion of Krishna's relationship with Arjuna during the forthcoming battle?). There is irony in the courtiers' scorn: 'what, *this* fey creature a hero?', fuller comedy in Arjuna's shy refusal. Presented with two shields, he appears dumbfounded: what could these possibly be for? Then a joyous moment of realization and recognition – when he holds them up at either side of his head, they become the most cumbersome earrings you have ever seen, an Amazon version of Zsa Zsa Gabor. Vittorio Mezzogiorno is loving this shift of textural gears, as is the audience which accepts this offer of some release from threatened danger in knockabout burlesque.



Figure 13.10 'Exile in the Forest'. Animating the inanimate, dynamism in stasis: Arjuna (Vittorio Mezzogiorno) fires on the invisible Kauravas, while his 'charioteer' Uttara (Clovis) executes a series of karate *kata*. In the top left-hand corner, one of the rope nooses used to suspend the swing-seats for Virata's court. French-language production. (Photographer – Gilles Abegg)

Confrontation with the Kauravas. The chariot is established using two industrial pallets, set up in profile. The forward one is supported by the young prince Uttara (Clovis) as he runs through an impressive display of karate *kata*, with Arjuna behind, immobile on the platform, firing his bow. Brook is fond of finding suggestive life in the abandoned debris of building sites. (One thinks of the electric cable spools used to such great effect as *voiturin à phynances*, war machine, throne, etc. in *Ubu*.) Here almost everything is suggested – horse, charioteer, chariot/fighting machine, pursuit, mobility – although in truth all is immobile, no enemy is in sight as yet. The dynamic stasis of the martial artist is used to invite

and then anchor a stream of imagined elements. Punctuating cries of the Hindi 'Achcha!' provide direct echoes of India, and at the same time energize the image.

The Kauravas eventually appear, watching, immobile, horrified vultures suspended from rungs high across the back wall and both side walls, scattered at different heights. Spatially fragmented as a unit, they seek refuge from the onslaught. Shadows with an ominous menace, their black capes flap lazily like those of the parasitic senators in *Timon*. Like us, the Kauravas recognize the denotative sound of Arjuna's bow, the *analapos* again visibly operated by Tsuchitori to one side: a vibrant chilling sound, which conveys the high-speed movement of an object through space, the spiralling friction of a missile. Drona and Bhishma – silent shadows – retire into darkness, refusing conflict. The Kauravas, transfixed by light in their eyries, look on as the victors return. The perspectival fluidity of this use of depth of field allows radically different and apparently incompatible images to be presented simultaneously. So the mood behind bleeds into the scene in front, colouring the triumphant court's rejoicing. Another *holi* celebration – garish clouds of powder and potions, a flurry of dance and music – then the image dissolves.

Another mood change for Vyasa's enigmatic fable, the story of Markandeya's initiatory journey away from the sterility, exhaustion and emptiness of mortal life through the mouth of a numinous and angelic child: we are not told here that the *puer aeternus* is Vishnu himself. The old man finds beauty, order, repose and life during the 100-year period he spends in the child's stomach. Then he is regurgitated/reborn back into this world, like Jonah from the whale. He emerges the same, but profoundly nourished and refreshed. Death to oneself, the myth suggests, enables contact with the infinite, out of time. This in turn is regenerative, immortalizing, in contrast to an endless imprisoning cycle of death and rebirth. There are similarities with Bottom's 'most rare vision', with the slave's night of love in *Conference*, or even with our epic immersion in this tale, and the perceptual transformation or evolution it claims it can engender.⁶ The narration of Markandeya's tale employs a double narrative voice – Vyasa's and the boy's – both in the third person. However, although the anecdote is an illustrative or didactic aside in terms of the central narrative, the child storyteller also enacts the child in the story told. As Pandavas and courtiers listen attentively, the circle of focus is complete. The back wall, now empty and apricot in colour, remains fully lit, evoking a substantial sense of space, distance, infinite horizons and realities beyond.

Krishna's home. A monastic existence is conveyed with a scenic minimalism, an asceticism in decor that in purely naturalistic terms is both pertinent and resonant here: a piece of rush matting, a swathe of material for a mattress, a blanket. Duryodhana is already there, impatiently waiting for Krishna to awaken. He has chosen to sit on a small table by Krishna's

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head (the gaming table?), the Kaurava's disrespectful arrogance immediately established physically, spatially. When Arjuna enters, in stark contrast he lowers himself gently on to the bare ground at Krishna's feet in an attitude of humble devotion. Seen first by Krishna on awakening, it's Arjuna who will be granted his desire. He recognizes Krishna's value to him in many more ways than uniquely as a charioteer. And, indeed, the Sanskrit word for charioteer apparently contains overt suggestions of 'leader' and 'guide': the martial configuration is a clear metaphor for a psycho-spiritual relationship.⁷



Figure 13.11 'Exile in the Forest'. Duryodhana and Arjuna seek Krishna's help in the coming battle. Left to right: Arjuna (Vittorio Mezzogiorno), Krishna (Maurice Bénichou), Duryodhana (Andrzej Seweryn). French-language production. (Photographer – Michel Dieuzaide)

Much of the growing sense of imminent, inevitable conflict is conveyed through the dynamic montage of scenes, their heightened speed. In addition, increasing exploitation of harsh low-level diagonal lighting casts long unnatural shadows, highlighting every facial tic, every bead of sweat on lips. **Krishna's final attempt at peace** is answered only by Duryodhana's obstinate and misplaced pride, his sulky short-sightedness: a chillingly rich performance by Seweryn. Krishna's sudden intense fury is profoundly shocking, given his tranquil smiling norm, his lightness in every situation. Forced to manifest his divine appearance (*visvarupadarshana* or *viratrupa*), and thus locate himself definitively as Vishnu's avatar,

he turns his back to the spectators and stands behind a transparent cloth: then a flute accompaniment and sharpened area of light as Bhishma describes his cosmic form. Significantly, Duryodhana turns away, refusing to countenance the transcendent. This revelation comes as a prelude to the celebrated theophany contained within the *Bhagavad Gita*, at the beginning of *The War*. Here Krishna's purpose is to make peace – the revelation is public. Later it will be to make war, to strengthen Arjuna's resolve – a private revelation for the exclusive benefit of his disciple, when he will become seraphic rather than human: *Logos* incarnate, the word made flesh. The nature of these two episodes juxtaposes the two faces of Krishna: creative or restorative, as well as destructive (but this in turn is regenerative). In the *Mahabharata* and in Hindu iconography, the *visvarupa* in itself exists as a *textum* containing a web of individual narratives, comprising a meta-history of the world from creation to destruction. Inevitably, and happily, in neither instance in this production is there any attempt to represent this divine form.

In order for him to perceive this vision (*darshana*), Dhritarashtra's sight is momentarily restored by Krishna. Cieslak's face is now ravaged, the radiant purity of his *Constant Prince* has crumbled with the passage of time. His face records his experience, like a map or a weathered stone. In this work, the paradigmatic Grotowskian 'holy actor' rarely demonstrates, almost nothing is explicit. He is an *expressive* actor, in the literal sense – inner impulses are squeezed out, as if under pressure, then embodied. It is a performance of tiny economical nuances, grasping the twin knettles that both Grotowski and Brook have consistently privileged for their performers: a 'deep libidinal surrender'⁸ and a 'deep-breathing economy of organic form'.⁹ An almost imperceptible increase in the brightness of the light on his face, a minimal hand gesture, a sense of focus in his eyes, a minor adjustment in the muscular tension of his lantern-jawed face, a real tear, 'And see, no longer blinded by our eyes' (Rupert Brooke) – and then he returns to darkness. Cieslak excavates for us an immensely tragic figure wavering on the very brink of decrepitude, disinterring echoes of Oedipus, Lear, Gloucester and Priam *inter alia*. He saws and spits his way through the text with a voice of rock and glass, his physical presence emanating what one critic had accurately described as 'blowtorch intensity'. Words become bitter balls of phelgm to be spat, or blows from a rusty hammer. Every utterance strikes percussively, then reverberates.

As Karna and Krishna embrace, the musicians' percussive cacophony grows to a climax. The carnage of battle is now unavoidable. Karna is also a tragic archetype – the 'outsider'. He is an ambiguous and contradictory figure, both illuminated by a personal sense of *dharma*, destiny, honour, pride and loyalty, and at the same time fuelled by bitter resentment and fury at his childhood abandonment to his fate in a river by his mother, like Moses, and his subsequent rejection by the Pandavas (his

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family).¹⁰ Karna is one of a number of protagonists in The Epic of confused caste status: a *kshatriya* by birth, a *suta* by upbringing and in others' eyes. One thinks also of Bhishma, a *kshatriya* turned brahmin through his vow of *brahmacharya*, or of Drona and Aswhattaman, brahmins who are consummate warriors. Must they all perish for violating an ordered caste hierarchy? Are their deaths part of a ritual re-establishment of purity, harmony, order, *dharma*? – a notion that in the post-Auschwitz west inevitably carries associations of a reactionary ideology. Just as the Pandavas' possession of 'ultimate weapons', justified in terms of defending *dharma* – 'the right way' – from the forces of 'darkness' and ignorance, might be read as smacking of something akin to Captain America in conflict with the forces of 'Spectre . . .

Karna is fired primarily by a sense of duty and of the significance of his role – a fire that is both obstinately dangerous and hypnotic. Here is a character born from a web of mixed motives and drives. In order to fulfil what he has determined and to meet allegiances made, he will have to deny his own origins; but then he has already been denied in turn. Karna's predicament is such that his only escape can be in death. Here he shows himself to be aware of what is at stake – the fate of humanity as a whole – in a feverish speech studded with grotesque images of cosmic decay and destruction: unnatural happenings, the omens of an apocalypse. Time and the world order are out of joint, dislodged from their axis. The immediacy of his nightmarish language contains echoes of *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, inter-textual chords that ring in our ears as the second part comes to an end without closure. A point of tension and irresolution demanding further development.

NOTES

- 1 The Hindu fire god Agni, the mediator between men and gods, is also known as Bharata, 'the sustainer', in Vedic literature. And incidentally Bharata is not only the ancestral forebear of these protagonists, and by extension the Hindu word for India, but also an ancient word for an actor. Cf. Bharata Natyam, the first word comprising the first syllables of the three primary categories in Sanskrit performance aesthetics: *Bhava* (expression), *Rasa* (flavour) and *Tala* (rhythm).
- 2 Cf. *Shiva nataraja's* attendant ring of flame, the *prabha mandala*. In addition, a warning in the *Hitopadesa* springs to mind: 'The spirit in thee is a river. Its sacred bathing place is contemplation; its waters are truth; its banks are holiness; its waves are love. Go to that river for purification; thy soul cannot be made pure by mere water' – a warning Duryodhana consistently shows himself incapable of understanding. One might read much of the narrative, like *Hamlet*, in terms of 'maimed rites'.
- 3 Madeleine Biardeau, introduction and commentary on extracts from *Le Mahabharata* (Paris: Flammarion, 1986; translated by Jean-Michel Peterfalvi), p. 125.
- 4 Cf. the oldest existing *Mahabharata* manuscript, dating from no earlier than the tenth century, which was discovered in Kashmir, written on birch bark.

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Or Bhasa's classical Sanskrit plays, which were found in 1912 inscribed on palm leaves: early media for recording significant elements of a culture that had formerly been oral. See also Edward C. Dimock in *The Literatures of India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974, p. 12): 'the materials used for writing, birchbark and palm leaf, were very perishable. The rigours of climate, the heat and the humidity, and vermin threatened them. It has been remarked that 90% of Indian literature has been eaten by white ants . . .'

5 Memories of his solo performance at the Almeida Festival, London, in 1983, when one entire number was built around 'playing' a styrofoam cup he had found in the audience: magic in the everyday, the musician as virtuoso 'multi-vocal' performer in his own right as well as integral connotative constituent of the narratorial ensemble.

6 There are direct parallels also with a passage in *The Koran* (II 261):

And God had him die for a hundred years, then revived him and said:

'How long have you been here?'

'A day, or a part of a day,' he answered.

7 In the original *Mahabharata*, even before the war Drona proclaims, 'Where there is *dharmā*, there is Krishna. Where there is Krishna, there is victory' (VI, 43.63).

8 Joseph Chaikin, *The Presence of the Actor* (New York: Atheneum, 1980), p. 20.

9 Henry James, quoted in George Steiner, *Language and Silence* (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 288.

10 The foundling figure is another archetype in mythological narratives: cf. the stories of Oedipus, the young Cyrus, Romulus and Remus, Iamus, etc. - of these, only Oedipus and Karna end in tragic *anagnorisis*.

THE WAR

Is this the promised end
Or image of that horror?

(*King Lear*)

The agents of force are the triumphant victims of the internal logic of force, which proves itself only by surpassing boundaries – even its own boundaries, and those of its *raison d'être* . . . Above all [in Indian fable] it is the warrior, on placing himself on the margin of the code, or even beyond it, who appropriates the right to pardon, to break through the mechanisms of hard justice: in short, the right to introduce some flexibility into the strictly determined course of human relations – to pave the way for humanity.

(Dumézil, *The Destiny of the Warrior*, 1968)

The *Wanderjahre* of *The Odyssey* are over, the time for war (*The Iliad*) is ripe. A huge Japanese drum pounded by Toshi Tsuchitori, centre stage, signals the beginning of the final part. There are immediate signs of something new in the ferocity of the music – a call to arms – and in Toshi's martial costume: the musician as Samurai, the way of the drum (*kodo*). At the same time, a fanfare of four immense Southern Indian horns bellows from around the theatre at different levels. For most of *The War*, the percussive undercurrent is constant, a concussing barrage that locates the changing dynamic, supports the narrative thrust and feeds tension. In many ways, music will be used to a similar effect as in Mnouchkine's *Richard II*. Early in this section, a prevalence of conch shells becomes apparent, an attribute traditionally associated with Vishnu, Arjuna and victory (indeed Arjuna is often referred to as Vijaya, 'victory'). An actor mimes blowing into a conch on stage, while the sound is created simultaneously and visibly 'in overdub' off.

As with Tsuchitori's, all of the costumes now have a military flavour: the pre-eminence of the *kshatrya* – leather boots and gaiters, multi-layered pleated skirts, simple tunics decorated with traditional patterns. Duhsassana sports a *kshatrya* chignon. They resemble warriors from medieval miniatures, although references are deliberately non-specific both geographically and historically – India, Central Asia, Anatolia, etc. Visually only the saintly Bhishma is set apart, dressed as he is in a pure white robe. Even though he fights at the very epicentre of the carnage, emblematically he will remain unsullied.

It is at this point that bamboo screens are introduced for the first time, mobile objects with limitless potential functions for the actor/*bricoleurs*. These screens will serve as war machines, archery platforms, tents, shelters, shields, beds, etc. Here they operate as a framing device for the disembodied heads of the protagonists, sustaining a frieze behind. The warriors

adopt a configuration of confrontation, a perfectly symmetrical military 'V' formation, like an air-strike squadron. A sudden flourish, and the screens become two shelters, places of repose: Bhishma's has a roof, Drona's is without cover. This new configuration is constructed, then held in position, by the actor/warriors who have momentarily dropped their roles. The drum has now been positioned at stage right.

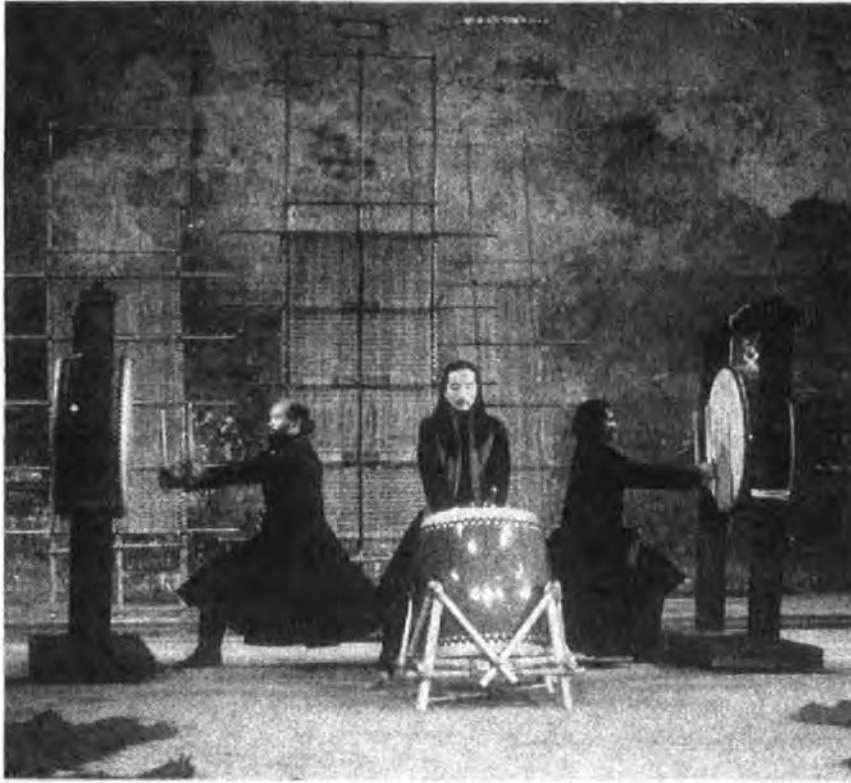


Figure 13.12 'The War'. Percussionist as warrior: from left to right, Tapa Sudana, Toshi Tsuchitori, Mavuso Mavuso. (Photographer - Gilles Abegg)

The perfect synecdoche for a chariot, a single naturalistic wooden cart-wheel, is rolled on by Krishna, Arjuna's charioteer.¹ Bénichou cracks a whip and mimes the horse's movements (another echo of Mnouchkine's *Richard II*), while Arjuna follows at a trot in his wake. A playful cartoon image, transparent and legible. Inevitably the wheel will be read as a metaphor, the shape of fate itself, the wheel of destiny - *karma* - the cycle of destruction and regeneration, although in truth it functions dynamically, as an *image* in Ezra Pound's sense of the word, something presenting an 'intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time':

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The image is not an idea. It is a radiant node or cluster. It is what I can, and must perforce call a VORTEX, from which and through which and into which ideas are constantly rushing...²

The wheel as *pars pro toto* conjures up an imagined chariot with infinitely more refined a lyricism than any 'real' chariot would in this context. At the same time, considered in terms of Pound's conceptual 'vortex', it suggests a diagrammatic representation of Hindu *samsara*, the round of existence – a vision of the shape of time, linked to the meta-historical pattern of a degenerative/restorative cycle of ages, in direct contrast to the apparent linearity of the narrative; the plenitude of a *mandala* or *orobouros*; a *chakra*, a *conjunctio oppositorum*; an archetype of the Self; an *imago mundi*...



Figure 13.13 'The War'. The *Bhagavad Gita*: Krishna (Bruce Myers) with his hand on the chariot wheel, on the left, and Arjuna (Vittorio Mezzogiorno). (Photographer – Gilles Abegg)

As the two opposing armies align themselves in a position of direct confrontation across the back of the space, Arjuna throws down his arms and expresses his famous misgivings to Krishna. His intense consciousness of self and surroundings obliges him to cease to act at the very moment when action must begin. The others remain silent, immobile, attentive, and slip out of focus in the background. This is the *Bhagavad Gita*, 'the Song of the Lord', the *Mahabharata's* own Upanishad: it is Hinduism's

most sacred and influential devotional work, which forms the central chapters of Book 6 of the original *Mahabharata*, the *Bhishmaparvan*.³ Brook recalls first becoming aware of the *Gita*, and intrigued by its central question ('Shall I fight?'), during the preparation of *US* at the Aldwych in 1966.

Here the words of the sacred text are whispered by Krishna into Arjuna's ear. The Pandava prince then repeats fragments aloud, to the accompaniment of a single bitterly piercing note from the strings of a *sarod* and a muffled gong. Krishna/Bénichou sits on the wheel, momentarily alluding to the iconography of the *chakravartin* ('universal ruler'): the wheel is now flat on the earth (a minimally raised status, like the Kathakali Krishna during the *visvarupa* – on a stool – or those Gupta-period Buddha images, where he sits cross-legged on a wheel, symbol of the *dharma* he taught). Half-*conteur*, half-impersonator, much is third person description. We are left with an evocative compression of the heart of the *Gita*, and of course suggestion here inevitably entails reduction. One inference that emerges is that the conflict is firmly located on an inner spiritual plane, the 'battlefield of the soul'. We are told that only those actions performed without attachment (i.e. with a dispassionate lack of concern for results on the part of the agent) are free from the laws of *karma*. What is interesting here is that, in this agonistic context, the *Gita* is very unfamiliar – partisan advice to one combatant, far from Gandhi's more familiar (decontextualized) 'reading'.

As the lights focus increasingly on this central spot, Krishna again reveals his *visvarupa*, his universal form. Everything is left to our imaginations, stimulated by the resonance of Arjuna's enchanted and terrified description of the god's awesome cosmic dimensions, Mezzogiorno's facial expression and a plangent lyrical flight from the *ney*. Krishna remains immobile and impassive throughout this second theophany on the central axis of the wheel – *axis mundi*. As he returns to his human form, he steps back to earth from the wheel, smiling. Lights are now full up: let the pageant of battle commence. As Arjuna is 'reborn', the shadow of his bow takes on mythical proportions on the side wall. He blows into his conch with renewed vigour, determined afresh to confront the situation, to commit his energies.

The wall of shields (bamboo screens) evolves constantly, redefining their function and the space, altering the dynamics and tensions of the playing area as a whole: now ramps for archers, now the panels of a martial formation – one slides away to allow a single arrow shot, as in close-up, then slams shut again. On occasions, Brook uses a classic cinematic shot/reverse shot structure: at one moment we are behind one line, at the next behind the other. Finally, at the end of the first day, a camp shelter for the night is set up, with mats, flambeaux and shields focusing the locus of action. Drona's private prayer is a ritual centred around a bowl

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of fire. As in the Pandava forest exile episodes, fire offers a tiny comfort and a flicker of illumination in the teeming life of the night.

Amba has been reborn as Sikhandin (still Pascaline Pointillart). In this magical world, a woman can become a man, we accept it immediately, no further explanation is necessary. (In the original *Mahabharata*, Amba had deliberately tortured herself through penitences so as to force Shiva to grant her the means of revenge in the next life.) She challenges Bhishma, but he is spirited away to safety behind an instant wall of bamboo shields, the impenetrable *testudo* of Roman martial strategy, only to return seconds later borne aloft on a platform from which he can survey all. His height and stature designate his status and sanctity, which are renounced when he drops his arms and jumps to earth. The shields are lowered and angled to catch him when he falls – a deathbed. Significantly his body never touches the earth – he is cushioned and suspended. Compare this with the ignoble deaths in the mud and filth later experienced by Duhsassana, Karna and Duryodhana.

This scene is another of great spectacle and formal beauty. While still towering on his platform, Bhishma is whirled around the space mirroring Sikhandin, who aims unflinchingly at his avowed target. The spectator is offered a variety of perspectives on the linear axis of tension, the point of incandescence. The spiral movement perhaps also reflects Sikhandin/Amba's hesitation at the crucial moment in his/her life. The original *Mahabharata* literalizes this inner division at a later stage in The Epic, at the moment of Sikhandin's death at the hands of Aswhattaman's avengers during their nocturnal raid on the Pandava camp. He is shot between the eyes and hacked in two with a sword.

On this tenth day of the battle, in the end it is Arjuna, egged on by Krishna and shielded by Sikhandin, who fires at Bhishma. The entire scene is built around the cinematic technique of slow-motion, although a similar convention does exist in Asian popular theatre. As the arrow is unleashed, it is carried by Krishna – the agent of Arjuna's resolve and of *dharma* – slowly twisting through the air towards Bhishma's heart a few paces away: further parallels with the 'invisible' agents in puppetry in general. By inference the predicament of the universe as a whole hinges on this one act. There is suspense in the extension of the instant between life and death, further concentrated by the silent immobility of those present and by the unsettling smile of Krishna (victim of his own prescience). The sequence provides a fragment of extemporal 'holiness' in the dislocation from habitual time of a 'moment of truth', like the deceleration of real time at the moment of a matador's delivery of the *coup de grâce*. The manipulation of the passage of time is hallucinatory in effect, the only sound a haunting pulse, like a heartbeat, from Tsuchitori's *analapos*: As the arrow strikes home – with childlike gravity, Krishna plants it in Bhishma's clothing seconds later – the onlookers erupt in a frenzy of cries



Figure 13.14 'The War'. The exploitation of a cinematic depth of field: Amba-Sikhandin (Pascaline Pointillart, right foreground) takes aim at Bhishma, Arjuna (Vittorio Mezzogiorno, left) at her side. French-language production. (Photographer – Gilles Abegg)

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and movement, Bhishma collapses mortally wounded, and the baleful drone of the *nagaswaram* sings out, like the cry of a wounded elephant. Linear sequential time returns, the narrative pursues relentlessly, renewed.

Suddenly Bhishma is transfixed by a massive number of arrows, like Saint Sebastian, or Washizu, the Macbeth figure in Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood*, who is pinned to a wall by volleys of arrows. Here they are wedged in clumps in the deathbed around Bhishma by onlookers and by those supporting him. Arjuna fires two arrows in a cross for the dying man to rest his head, a 'warrior's cushion'. In the original *Mahabharata*, Arjuna also unleashes an arrow into the earth, piercing its flesh with such ferocity that a spring erupts for Bhishma's refreshment: a mite tricky here. The deathbed scene is a set piece of carefully composed beauty and harmony. Brook has a painter's sense of pictorial dynamics, here reminiscent of Uccello. At this moment of sanctity, formal positional relationships to the dying sage are established: Drona, for example, prostrates himself in the dirt at Bhishma's feet. Light emanates from his pure white robes as he is carried off with great solemnity.

Drona, his cropped hair now grizzled to suggest the passage of time, is ordered to take command of the Kauravas. His unwillingness is met with open hostility, the Kauravas surrounding and pressing in on him. 'The wheel stops on me, it's my turn now,' he concedes, resigning himself to meet the wheel of fortune, the kiss of death. He describes his disc to the Kauravas – an impenetrable battle formation, with echoes of Krishna's own disc; a spherical unit, as self-sufficient as any circle. He sprinkles a circle of water in the dust at his feet. It is only momentarily apparent before being soaked up by the earth. Within its circumference he traces a diagrammatic pattern, like the I Ching hexagram or a Tantric *yantra*. Rolling wheel, self-perpetuating circle – a potent motif for Brook, as for such others as Zen master Gibbon Sengai with his calligraphic circles and Jung with his *mandalas*.

Karna's song by the pool, in worship of the sun god, his unknown father, is an intoned nasal prayer, a gentle Hebraic plea from Bruce Myers, a compassionate actor of an intensely gaunt vocal and physical presence. Kunti emerges behind him unseen, places a candelabra with seven candles beside the river, then approaches her son with a single flaming torch. During this *pietà* beside the pool, the inevitable iconographic inter-textuality of a mother's tender care for her demigod son is explicit, if ironic. For this relationship of harmony is soon ruptured and rejected by the foundling Karna, just as formerly he had been rejected. In this seamless performance, Myers, a most tactile man, is always looking to refuse contact, to break free, to turn his back, to lock his arms across his chest: all Karna's natural instinctive feelings are displaced and suppressed.

Fluidity, speed and energy characterize all battle scenes, the dynamism of movement underscored by a percussive battery. 'All men are dancers,



Figure 13.15 'The War'. The deathbed of Bhishma. Left to right: Duryodhana (Andrzej Seweryn), Bhishma (Sotigui Kouyate), Karna (Bruce Myers), Dhritarashtra (Ryszard Cieslak), Gandhari (Mireille Maalouf) and Duhsassana (Georges Corraface); on the far right, Yudishthira (Matthias Habich). French-language production. (Photographer – Gilles Abegg)



Figure 13.16 'The War'. Warrior as *samurai*: the Kauravas in battle formation – the prelude to Drona's 'disc'. From left to right, Andrzej Seweryn, Georges Corraface, Yoshi Oida, Tapa Sudana, Bruce Myers. French-language production. (Photographer – Gilles Abegg)

and their tread goes to the barbarous clangour of a gong' (Yeats, *The Tower*). The recurrent use of cinematic changes of perspective and a full exploitation of space at all depths and heights mean that our interest rarely flags, as it does to some degree reading the interminable accounts of weaponry and carnage in the original *Mahabharata*. On a number of occasions here, a charged reality out of sight is suggested with sublime economy and lyricism: for example, the distant voices of armies marching in unison, conveyed in song and rhythm.

Abhimanyu's moment of decision, for he is a true son to Arjuna and nephew to Krishna – he will attempt to breach Drona's disc, he proclaims, standing in the very centre of Drona's water circle, now almost dry and barely visible: metaphorically, the precise location of his imminent demise. He purifies and blesses the tip of his spear by dipping it in the water by the pool, thereby investing it with a renewed status as locus of holiness and benediction.

Drona's disc, an impressive sight, is a sort of revolving maze (it is referred to as a 'labyrinth' in the original). Three spinning scaling ladders fill the space, each perhaps 8 metres in length, two Kauravas and Drona as the 'hinge pins' of these overlapping threshing circles. The tips of one of the wooden ladders slashes through the air inches in front of our noses. Abhimanyu's leaps and thrusts are built around the vocabulary of martial arts, in particular Karate and Kalarippayatt. Jayadratha's 'invisible wall', a boon obtained from Shiva, is a piece of bamboo of similar length to the ladders, vibrated by Katsulas from one end. Eventually, and predictably, Abhimanyu is surrounded and succumbs, penned in by a circle of five stick-brandishing Kauravas. There is a certain sculptural plasticity in the flight through the air of the layered skirts in the warriors' costumes: a swirling fluidity and lightness that bring to mind Sufi Mevlevi dervishes, as well as certain folk dances of central and southern Asia. Further spinning dynamism is also present here in the ensemble stick movements of battle, the canes used like the *jo* of Aikido or the swords of Kendo (an echo of the group's exercises with sticks since the early 1970s, almost a trademark of Brook's highly somatic approach and the group's shared experience – an authentic sense of a highly accomplished ensemble unit, their shared dynamic extending to the very tips of the sticks).

Abhimanyu's death – a 16-year-old child spreadeagled on the wheel of his own chariot. When all else fails, it is the only weapon left to him, as though the chariot itself has collapsed into matchwood, the wheel all that survives the might of a combined Kaurava onslaught. He raises it above his head to crush his enemies – a clear parallel with Krishna's *chakra*. The Kauravas lock their sticks through its spokes, as if this were a Morris dance, then wrestle it from his grasp, suspending it out of reach above his head. A boy against men, but a *kshatrya* death. Clovis falls surrounded by his weapons on top of the wheel – a further allusion to Drona's disc

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and the uncompromising wheel of *karma*, as well as a momentarily raised status in death. Tragically, the youngest of the major protagonists is the first to die. There follows a brief oasis of respectful tranquillity, a charged pause for breath after a scene of immense energy and excitement: the climax of silence. Like the Kauravas, we are aware of the repercussions.



Figure 13.17 'The War'. The Kauravas lock their sticks to immobilize Abhimanyu's wheel. French-language production. (Photographer – Gilles Abegg)

This episode offers an instance of Krishna's dispassionate expediency. His nephew Abhimanyu has been thrown into the battle so as not to distract Arjuna from combat elsewhere, indeed to further stiffen his resolve. Later Ghatotkacha will be sacrificed in a similar way to free Arjuna and his brothers from threat. Krishna's morality is highly provocative in humanist ethical terms: the expendability of life as means to an end, the distancing of an individual death for the greater salvation of the whole. Mortality takes on a different hue in relation to personal and universal *dharmā* – and, as has been suggested, here the two are indissolubly intertwined.

Vyasa narrates the story of death (absent from the English-language

version). In an earlier golden age, 'the universe was free from destruction. But the creator, attentive to the complaints of the earth, decided that all living things had to have an end, and a new beginning. He created a black and red woman . . .' Vyasa's third-person delivery of the words of the creator Brahma are ironic, given his relationship to the protagonists, his own creation. This is perhaps the last enactment generated by Vyasa, and a real 'black and red woman' materializes for an instant in the background. Her tale of death and rebirth is central to our understanding of these events. The creator tells her to 'rid yourself of all love, of all hate. Strike down the living without any fear for death kills no one, creatures kill themselves and even gods die . . .' Draupadi adds that one should mourn the living rather than the dead. For a warrior, paradoxically it is only death that confers meaning on life: as Dumézil has pointed out, life in battle for a *kshatrya* seems to assume the character of an initiatory test for the life beyond. Those who live on continue to suffer without that resolution.

Arjuna returns from the battlefield to find his son. Lights full up on the back wall, a separate spatial zone for the tired but victorious warrior. Dark shadows in the foreground surround the corpse of Abhimanyu: a silent dumb-show of mourning. We peer through the silhouettes of death to a different space and light beyond, each separate constituent of the image *en somme* colouring the other, like overlaid slides. Arjuna is becoming increasingly stained and scarred by the battle. There is merely a splash of (overtly artificial) blood on his temples here, but with every new appearance there are further emblems of the despoiling effects of war. Indeed, all of the combatants – and none more so than Bhima, Duryodhana and Duhsassana, those most bestialized by the conflict – grow ever filthier: mud, blood, sweat stains. Arjuna, an altogether nobler being, will only ever reach a point where hands are bloodstained, temples are gashed. Compare this with Duhsassana's undoing at the hands (and teeth) of Bhima, or Aswhattaman's Macbeth-like scourge of the sleeping Pandava camp.

As Arjuna moves forward into the centre space, the lights come up on Abhimanyu's death scene – a literalization of Arjuna's own lacerating and tragic illumination. To the ominous throb of a didgeridoo, he swears to exact revenge by killing Jayadratha before dusk on the following day. Another song of lament from Tsuchitori as the body is quietly removed, the mother cradling her dead child's head.

The Kauravas look on in formation at the base of the back wall, Drona and his son Aswhattaman at their head. Jayadratha (Andreas Katsulas) is protected by a fortification, a seemingly impenetrable structure of bamboo screens and ladders. For Arjuna to survive, Krishna the trickster-god is obliged to perform a further miracle. Once again he manifests his divinity, by obscuring the sun prematurely – a simple lowering of the hand and

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the lights dim. We are happy to read the undisguised visual cue for the LX operator as 'magic'/*maya*. Arjuna and Krishna are allied spatially with the spectators. They stand close to us in the shadows, observing with us the distant celebrations of the Kauravas, for they believe it to be nightfall: the end of the day and of Arjuna – a parallel of the earlier 'blindfold' shot in the dark, as well as a prefiguration of Karna's eventual abandonment by the sun at the moment of his death. Arjuna's arrow strikes Jayadratha in the neck, he stiffens, twists and slumps to the ground. This act of stark violence brings the *nagaswaram* in its wake. (The original *Mahabharata* contains a further reason for this act of vengeance. Earlier on, Jayadratha, who is in fact Dhritarashtra's son-in-law, had attempted to seduce and abduct Draupadi.)

The invocation of Ghatotkacha, the son of Bhima and Hidimbi, now fully grown into a shamanic demon. In the deepening shadows there follows a slow-motion battle-ballet of torches, to the accompaniment of didgeridoo and clapping sticks: the dance of *thanatos*. A triangle of torches is laid on the earth, Krishna tosses fistfuls of magnesium powder through naked flame to produce belching flashes of fire. And Ghatotkacha materializes, his face lit from below by a single sputtering torch: garish Kathakali emerald-green make-up, red eyes, African headdress. He is thrown into battle at once, a scene that startles visually and sensually. Volleys of arrows in the half-darkness, cymbal clashes, spitting torches, tiny splashes of fire on the earth, the sharp smell of smoke. Flambeaux are slashed through the air, fizzing and flaring, by unseen hands. Stylization is simple, the mechanics unconcealed. So, for example, clouds of ochre brick dust are openly tossed by the fistful into the air from the side rungs – the dust and chaos of battle, the puffs of imagined canons, the filth churned up by invisible chariots, even sprays of blood.

The two central combatants, Karna and Ghatotkacha, narrate in the third person as they enact this episode: impersonation is distanced. As Karna cries, 'Karna exterminates them all . . .', he plunges the torch he carries into the pool, extinguishing its flickering life with a shrill hiss. The scene is structured to suggest horrendous carnage on an epic scale: a Passchendaele of mud, weapons, smoke, flames, shattered bodies strewn everywhere in the gloom. The air is full of the sounds and smells of war: the Forest of Bliss has become Shiva's Great Cemetery. To one side, Gandhari and Dhritarashtra ask a stream of fervent questions of the all-seeing Sanjaya – the boon of supernatural vision has been granted him by Vyasa, for Dhritarashtra's benefit. A repeated refrain, 'What's . . . doing?', serves to heighten the tension, as well as furnishing a rationale for multi-vocal narrative clarification in this chaotic pullulating half-light. Eventually Karna's spear (echoes of Parsifal or Arthurian legend in this gift from a god) is carried by him, slowly twisting across the space towards Ghatotkacha, its tip lit by a hand-held torch: another instance of temporal manipu-

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lation with this missile in slow-motion flight. It moves through the space and beyond, out of sight. Once used, this divine weapon is redundant, but Ghatotkacha lies dead. Bhima intones a haunting funeral plaint with Hidimbi, an African dirge, as they too carry out the corpse of their son. The shocking inhumanity of expediency.

Krishna dances, centre stage, in celebration of the expending of Karna's lance, and therefore by inference the inevitable demise of Karna himself. In silence, Bénichou performs an Indian folk dance of lightness and delicacy, a torch in each hand. They whisper minutely as they move through the air, the tiny sounds resonating unaccountably after the apocalyptic cacophony of the preceding scene. Then a final lingering hiss as they are thrown into the pool and extinguished. They have served their purpose of illuminating and focusing Krishna's dance, which was also an active prayer of respect and thanks to Ghatotkacha, a monstrous sacrificial lamb.

The sudden appearance of Dhryshadyumna (Alain Maratrat), a bizarre figure of death with iconic suggestions of sources in Chhau, Kathakali and Kalaripayatt. However these allusions are never formally specific and explicit – hybridization relativizes, creating new composite configurations. Jingling bells on his spiked mace and ankles lend him a jarring quality of frivolity, rendering him somehow more menace-laden. His tiny stamping movements possess a violent automaton quality. He floats, apparently propelled by the spring sword (*urmi*) he scythes through the air in a hissing blur above his head, a double-edged 2 metre metal ribbon integral to Kalaripayatt. Here, removed from its usual context, the blade remains an unparalleled armament, but also accrues suggestions of invisible force field, rotor blades, and unearthly vortex of wind and maleficent energy. With scarlet face, tunic and gloves, a green tongue and a hefty ceremonial sword in a stumpy black scabbard, he is a nightmarish ghostly presence: an animated blood clot hovering across our field of vision. Aswhattaman's clumsy human efforts to strike him are derisory, for Dhryshadyumna skips and pirouettes around the warrior's thrusts in slow-motion. In Carrière's version, he remains alien, unexplained, radically otherworldly. In the original *Mahabharata*, he has been born from the flames of a sacrificial fire, like his sister Draupadi (and Sikhandin), his express destiny to kill Drona.

The confrontation of Arjuna and Drona. The arrow-firing convention, now firmly established, is here used to great comic effect. Drona 'catches' arrows in mid-flight, or plucks them from a thigh with a triumphant laugh: he is proud of his protégé. At one moment, Arjuna is impaled with an absurd number of arrows; they bristle from his torso in clumps of more than a dozen. Although on one level the scene accords closely with descriptions in the original *Mahabharata*, there is something here of the self-conscious exaggeration and mock heroicism of comic strips, as well

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as the compositional lyricism of battle sequences in Kurosawa's Samurai films.

Another scene of comedy for the death of Aswhattaman, the elephant. Bhima's exit, wielding his cumbersome club, is immediately succeeded by the enraged trumpeting of some invisible beast off stage – a sound effect of the kind usually associated with children's animations. The scene is played for laughs, and what follows is all the more startling and horrifying in juxtaposition.

Drona's entrance is stately and dignified in his jet-black martial arts gown, in his wake the leaping Dhryshadyumna, his nemesis. Percussion, always more than just an affective lubricant, sustains the tension, punctuating dialogue and animating silence. Yudishthira (*satyadharman*, 'having truth as his principle') confirms the death of Aswhattaman, 'the elephant' mumbled by him as a stage-whisper from the corner of his mouth directly to the audience: a half-lie for which he will later be held accountable. The Sanskrit tells us that until this point the Pandava prince's chariot wheels floated 'four fingers' above the ground. As a result of this deception, they sink back to earth.

Recognizing that he must abandon the battle, Drona acquiesces passively to death with the controlled silence and dignity of a Samurai confronting *seppuku*. He strips off his black cloak to reveal a pure white shirt, then subaquatically slowly lifts a massive earthenware water-carrier as if to wash the dust and sweat from his lips for the last time – an immense weight for a man borne down by the sense of a destiny imminently realized. Instead of drinking, he empties the vessel's contents over his bowed head, for it is full of blood. Steeped in gore, death is a merciful release. Drona/Oida is literally inundated with blood: his shirt changes colour, pools form on the earth at his feet. He slumps into a meditative position before Dhryshadyumna slashes off his head with a blur of his giant blade. Drona's head falls forward to the floor in death, blood still dripping to the ground, seeping ever further through his white sleeves. Then a blanket is thrown over him: a headless trunk in a pool of gore. A ghastly and utterly disarming sequence.

The playing space is now littered with the debris and carnage of war: patches of mud, pools of blood, arrows and other weapons, the ashes of torches, a decapitated body. (Is this war a grotesque enactment *in extremis* of the wholesale sacrifice of animals in days gone by during the Hindu Durga Puja?) Drona now merges chromatically with his executioner Dhryshadyumna. A stream of associations scream within: Mishima's death in 1970, the self-immolation of Buddhist monks during the Vietnam war, even Stephen King's *Carrie*.

Aswhattaman's divine weapon – Narayana, another boon from the tenebrous Shiva – is to be used in revenge for this treachery. In Avignon, this was conveyed through a terrible white light, a blinding magnesium

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explosion of positively nuclear dimensions. The Boulbon quarry was filled with acrid smoke, engulfing actors and spectators alike. Here Aswhattaman (Jean-Paul Denizon) carries a flaming bundle of sticks, a silent ball of fire, along the base of the back wall. 'And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea . . . lifted up his hand and swore . . . that there should be time no longer . . .' (*Revelations* X, 5). Hypnotically, time stands still, the fireball's passage ceremonially slow: ground zero at a nuclear epicentre. Another plethora of associations are released – Dresden, Hiroshima, *The War Game*.

In the original *Mahabharata*, Karna's charioteer, King Salya of Madra, has secretly promised Arjuna that he will steer Karna's chariot in a manner favourable to Arjuna. Salya scorns Karna's courage and determination in an exchange that offers a savage parody of the relationship between charioteer and warrior in the *Gita*: part of the time-honoured tradition of *parodia sacra*. Both in the *Gita* and here, the charioteers are maternal uncles to the Pandava princes – Salya is the brother of Madri, mother of the twins.

Karna prepares to commit himself fully to the battle. He washes the blade of his spear in coconut milk, a ritual cleansing accompanied by a song of preparation before a bowl of flame. The song is comprised of hard glottal consonants and buzzing sibilants, as evocative as a muezzin's call. His assumption of leadership of the Kaurava camp is signalled by a thumb-painted single red *tilak* on his forehead: a third eye. (Karna's spear tip is said to be in 'the shape of a serpent'. There is much interplay between bird and snake imagery in the original *Mahabharata*: does an ideal being reconcile both mutually exclusive aspects into a composite 'feathered serpent', like the Mayan Quetzalcoatl?)

The battle resumes, our perspectival access now transformed as a whole. Whereas formerly much had occurred in profile, a lateral or diagonal dynamic, the axis is now towards and away from us. A wall of shields set across the playing space is crushed by the Pandavas, advancing towards the audience. They burst through this barrier screen with explosive energy, emerging in the central space in a blur. Both sides of Arjuna's face are now bloodied, and his hand also drips.

The back wall is lost temporarily in a pall of dust and smoke.

Then the first appearance by Vyasa and the boy for many moons: a pause for breath.

Boy: Will the war end one day?

Vyasa: Yes, it will end.

Boy: I'm afraid. I thought I was going to die when Aswhattaman launched his weapon.

Vyasa: So did I.

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Boy: But you told me, 'I am the author of this poem.' Could your poem kill you?



Figure 13.18 The disembowelment of Duhsassana by Raudra-Bhima, as performed by Kalamandalam Gopi Ashan of the Kathakali Kalamandalam, Kerala, Southern India ('The Game of Dice' at the Festival of Perth, 1989). (Photographer - Marcelo Palacios)

The creator is powerless, the lunatics have taken over the asylum. But before Vyasa can answer the boy, Bhima enters. Or rather staggers on – a horrific vision, caked in blood, grey mud matting his hair and clothes from head to foot. After sixteen days of relentless combat, he is transformed, denatured. Exhausted and wounded, he resembles a corpse preserved in a peat-marsh. The living dead. 'Is man no more than this?' He collapses onto a shield, his only remaining possession – his beloved club – as his pillow. Vyasa and the boy use two of the bamboo screens to construct a tent-like structure to cover him. Then Duhsassana, in a similar

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state, emerges into the space with a feral roar. Visually he is the perfect match for Bhima; he has seen and done as much; they are almost indistinguishable in this dehumanized state. (Does this scene contain a bitterly ironic echo of the traditional Christian equation of physical degradation and spiritual grace?) With sprays of fresh blood glistening on his axe-head and face, Duhsassana flattens Bhima's shelter with a crash. All of the screens now lie flat on the earth, instantly throwing open a cast and gaping empty space. A violent and sickeningly 'real' struggle ensues. The Kaurava's heavy metal axe cracks whole chunks of earth free from the beaten floor; each thud can be felt in the front rows. We flinch with every near miss.

Duhsassana's death takes place a matter of feet in front of us, the faces of both actors eminently visible. Bhima proceeds to tear open his enemy's stomach, driving his bared teeth into the exposed abdomen. He re-emerges triumphantly bloodied with a lacerated red elastic ribbon clenched taut between his teeth – a grotesquely effective use of a convention of stylized suggestion of a kind, familiar in Chinese theatre and Southern Indian dance drama, that Brook has cherished since his *Titus Andronicus* in the late 1950s. Overt artificiality and theatricality in no way diminish the charge. The muffled laughter from certain spectators operates as a safety valve, a release from horror. Bhima's vow to consume his enemy's guts and drink his blood is now fulfilled. A loathsome act, although no worse than the atrocious treatment meted out to Hector in *The Iliad*. Man as blood-bespattered carnivore, cannibalizing his own fellows; a graphic illustration of Sartre's profoundly misanthropic suggestion that mankind's greatest enemy is that 'hairless, flesh-eating creature, man himself'.

Draupadi then arrives to wash her hair in Duhsassana's blood. She washes away her longstanding sense of humiliation at his hands, for he had assaulted her during her period, dragged her unceremoniously by the hair into the gaming hall. She tosses that same head of hair back with relish, then ties it up in a bundle: she will carry his lifeblood away with her. While Bhima celebrates – giant footslapping steps to a grand percussive beat, like the bestial Raudra Bhima in Kathakali, – Dhritarashtra fumbles blindly over the corpse of his dead son. He has to feel the disembowelment with his hands. The *nagaswaram*'s brassy shriek hits us from the second balcony.

The central agon, an epic confrontation between Arjuna and Karna – the sons of Indra and Surya, the gods of storm and sun respectively – is preceded by a brief moment of much-needed silence. There is perfect symmetrical balance in this encounter, the scene as a whole a paradigm of understatement. The two archers mirror each other, aiming at each other across the space while their whip-cracking charioteers urge them on. The two actors maintain this balanced image of confrontation and equivalent strength as they walk back and out, disappearing behind the two side



Figure 13.19 'The War'. The final confrontation between Karna and Arjuna. In the foreground, from left to right: Arjuna (Vittorio Mezzogiorno), Krishna (Maurice Bénichou), Salya (Tapa Sudana), Karna (Bruce Myers). Notice the synecdochic chariot wheels. French-language production. (Photographer – Gilles Abegg)

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walls. Tension is compounded by a percussive climax from the musicians. Then all is suggestion. An exchange of a cloud of arrows across the back wall takes place on the far side of the river, a rate of fire of heroic proportions from invisible sources.



Figure 13.20 'The War'. Karna's death (Jeffery Kisson), his wheel trapped by the mud; in the background, his charioteer Salya (Tapa Sudana). (Photographer – Kay Jamieson, Perth)

When the two figures reappear with their 'chariots', Karna's wheel becomes entrapped by the mud around the pool – suddenly, inexplicably

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– rendering him impotent and defenceless. The elements conjoin to affect the course of the war, the earth itself crying out to stop the bloodshed which desecrates it: the elements themselves as active protagonists in a cosmic conflict. A silent tableau as Karna forgets the *mantra* for Parashurama's divine weapon, then a further tortured moment of stasis as Krishna urges Arjuna to strike him down – before Gandiva sounds and Karna slumps across his wheel, crashing to the earth with an ear-splitting percussive boom from Toshi Tsuchitori. (Similarly in the *Rig Veda*, Indra defeats Surya by disabling one of the wheels of the sun god's chariot.) Ultimately Karna's acceptance of death possesses a quality of ceremony and sacrifice. Resigned to his fate, he embraces the earth: for in his final moments of life, he is even abandoned by the sun, his father – reminiscent of the sudden solar eclipse that marked Christ's death. Again the *nagaswaram* in the deepening gloom.

Vyasa and the boy reassume their roles as 'stage managers' to suspend a piece of chilly blue-grey material over Duryodhana, who has retreated from the carnage to sleep in the waters of a frozen lake: another convention with its source in Chinese theatre. The lights glint off the silk's silver sheen, shimmering as its surface ripples. Spectators on the ground level are able to see both material and Duryodhana curled up below, singing some gentle Polish melody. This simple image in fact comprises another polyphonous construct counterpointing and blending different moods and tastes: the stylized water convention, Seweryn's plaintive song of yearning and repose, the comic banalities of two duck hunters who stumble across this scene.

The final combat of Bhima and Duryodhana, using the unwieldy clubs, is another overtly violent sequence: in the original *Mahabharata*, the Kaurava has practised on an iron statue with the express intent of being in readiness for this. They prepare themselves quietly by ritual washing, Bhima in the pool, Duryodhana in the river: another 'imitation' of the sacred ablutions and *pujas* of Hindus. A tranquillity which is soon shattered by the exultant bestial cries of the two warriors, then Duryodhana's screams of pain as his thighs are crushed – illegally, on the advice of Krishna;⁹ another problematic instance of the god's expedient rupture of the envelope of accepted morality and ethical conduct to add to the tally of deaths thus far: Jayadratha, Bhishma, Drona, Karna. Duryodhana had menaced Draupadi with his thigh, taunting her provocatively during the dice game; so it is perhaps appropriate that finally he should be toppled – 'emasculated' – in this way, the phallus-by-association smashed.

Duryodhana is abandoned on the threshold of death, his head partially immersed in the water of the pool. Having recognized Krishna's pivotal role, he hurls his last accusations and threats, decrying Krishna as responsible for all. Even now, his bitterness and egotistical hubris blind him to

his own profound nature. For the expedient Krishna, as we know, all ethical and moral structures are relative and malleable:

Krishna: No good man is entirely good. No bad man is entirely bad.
I salute you, Duryodhana. I don't find any pleasure in your suffering,
but your defeat is a joy.

A crushed and broken man, the vanquished *theomachos* Duryodhana lies alone, listening with us to the distant songs of Pandava celebration. A final bitter pill to be swallowed in darkness, solitude and filth. Collective festivity is set harshly against embittered isolation and exclusion. *Sic transit gloria mundi*. Aswhattaman arrives promising revenge: momentarily an alternative *pietà* in the arms of Drona's son. Any Pandava celebration is premature, the bloodletting is not over yet.

The return of Aswhattaman – a scourge, an avenging angel, his entrance prefigured by dark disjointed sounds. The original *Mahabharata* tells us that Aswhattaman has conceived of his mode of revenge in a vision he saw while mourning his father: a huge bird of prey swoops down on a flock of sleeping crows to massacre them. Here the brahmin who has lost all qualities of 'brahminhood' stumbles blindly along the river, lost in horror. A low lateral light projects his shadow before him. His entrance through the water is profoundly disturbing: it becomes his 'multitudinous seas incarnadine', a river of blood, just as in the original epic the battlefield itself is often compared metaphorically to 'a horrible river of bloody current'. The unhinged and apparently catatonic rigidity of Denison's expression implies experiences beyond understanding. As he emerges in the forward space beside Duryodhana, his knife a sticky mess still gripped tight, he sits, possessed and transfixed by something akin to Rilke's *grim-mige Einsicht* ('terrible insight'); the *Mahabharata* suggests he has been possessed by Shiva himself.

The accusatory light slashes a narrow passage through the darkness, as he goes on to enumerate a catalogue of horrors for Duryodhana's delight. He describes unnatural cosmic events, evidence of the repercussions of his adharmic acts. He can only blink through his veil of blood, his haunted stare unnerving. The words remain largely uncoloured by Denison; a deranged sense of calm pervades his flat dispassionate delivery. Meanwhile Duryodhana, despite his pain, revels in this account of a 'massacre of the innocents', atrocities as appalling as those in My Lai or Cambodia. Aswhattaman cradles the Kaurava warlord's head – another moral and affective inversion of the *pietà* configuration – and some of the Pandavas' blood now marks Duryodhana's own face. The episode in its entirety is conducted to a single gong accompaniment, the words so explosive and shocking they need little support. Contented, Duryodhana dies in the pool where he was born; the circle is now complete. 'Et pendant une éternité, il ne cessa de connaître et de ne pas comprendre' (Valéry). In the Sanskrit

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Mahabharata, Aswhattaman is later cursed by his nemesis Krishna to wander alone and detested for 3,000 years. Unable to die in glory as a warrior, condemned to a life of pain and disgrace as an outcast, 'the eater eating is eaten'. Law and lore are indistinguishable in The Epic.

After a prolonged moment of silence, suddenly a new space and an uncomfortably bright wash of light as all of the corpses are laid out on the ground. The *nagaswaram* stabs through the air, for victory in war can only ever be Pyrrhic. The women mourn their losses, their silk saris vivid splashes of colour against the earth and back wall: burgundy, magenta, emerald, indigo, set against ubiquitous pitch-black headscarves. Then Bhisma is carried in again, still immobilized on his funeral bed by innumerable arrows. He has observed all, able to choose the precise moment of his death, when the sun is at its zenith. The uniqueness of his sanctity and purity is further heightened when contextualized in the midst of the debris of war.



Figure 13.21 'The War'. Bhisma delivers his final words from his deathbed ('the taste of honey'), the battlefield now littered with corpses. *Lacrimae mundi*: widows and mothers mourn their losses. On the far left, Krishna sits, impassive; in the background, Vyasa and the boy, located in a 'different' reality beyond the river. French-language production. (Photographer – Michel Dieuzaide)

As one of the stunned survivors in this vast blood-soaked desert, Yudishthira is consumed with useless guilt and self-loathing. Like Timon, he wants to escape, to lead a life of solitude in embittered Thoreauvian retreat. In this tormented *mea culpa*, he refuses to accept Krishna's dispassionate observance of *dharma* – truth in personal and transcendental terms. Instead

he threatens to retire into extreme misanthropy, an emotional refusal of a scarred and imperfect world, plunged into absurdity. And who can blame him at this juncture? Both he and his brothers have been obliged to meet the demand to defend *dharmā*, even if the fight destroys them and everything around them. Is this hideous cost a prerequisite of clarity of vision and knowledge? Can it be worth it? 'After such knowledge, what forgiveness?' (Eliot's *Gerontion*).

Bhishma's final words, an allegorical account of the human condition, are all that remains of the lengthy volumes of instruction he delivers from his deathbed in the full Sanskrit *Mahabharata* (Books 12 and 13, the *Shantiparvan* and the *Anushasanaparvan*). And in fact these are originally Vidura's words from the 11th book, the *Striparvan*. The allegory is traditionally deciphered in the following way. The forest is *samsara* (literally 'passing through') – the cycle of rebirths; its creepers and beasts are disease and old age; the well represents the human body, the snake – time; the elephant embodies a year – it had twelve feet in the original; the mice – nights and days; the bees – desires; and honey is the illusory lure of enjoyment, the fruit of desires.⁶

It is an enigmatic and quietist death – Bhishma no longer desires to live, to taste the drop of honey, although he dies with a finger on his lips. This resonant and ambivalent image suggests some lingering glimmer of hope, an indestructible impulse to persevere with life against the severest odds. At the same time his self-willed death at this point undercuts that suggestion, extinguishes the glimmer. A paradox: is there no 'honey' left? or is that 'honey' really no more than an imprisoning bond, an illusory 'sweetness'? His readiness for the liberation of death is understandable in the light of his origins – as *vasu* condemned to life in a mortal frame – and of what he has seen become of his family. In the end, *The Mahabharata* contains no easy moral – politically, ethically, psychologically – no conveniently detachable 'message' to pop into some mental doggy-bag and take home. At times it suggests a deep misanthropic pessimism (as perhaps here), although this nihilist strain of thought is in turn counterbalanced by a repeated call to action, a positive humanist appeal to embrace a contradictory plurality of experiences, to go 'to the end of oneself'. Therein lies meaning.⁷

Dhritarashtra makes a final, despairing attempt to transcend his blindness and impinge upon reality, although in effect it confirms that he is doubly blind. Now 'a man cut to th'brains' like Lear, he will avenge the killer of his progeny by throttling Bhima. However Krishna anticipates his intentions and substitutes a corpse. Cieslak wheezes and grunts with the effort of choking someone already dead, before himself being crushed utterly, his expectations dashed for the last time. Visibly he dies within, convinced of his own impotence and worthlessness: the hollow shell of a man, a 'ruin'd piece of nature', an ashen relic. Like his fellow *paterfamilias*

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Lear, he will only ever be able to learn of humanity and wisdom through the tormenting madness of loss. As in Dostoevsky, suffering is located as source of knowledge. Cieslak's face empties of all emotion, a silent mask. His demise recalls Scofield's agonisingly slow backward fall out of frame after Cordelia's death in Brook's film of *King Lear*: a man toppled by the burdens of experience. All that remains is a blank white screen.

Gandhari's final condemnation of the role of Krishna. Her parting curse determines Krishna's predicament, and that of his people. Krishna accepts her accusations, but urges her that his intervention has been necessary. We catch a fleeting glimpse of Abhimanyu's pregnant widow in the distance by the back wall – the seed of hope for a future, the sole survivor bearing the human race (a son, Parikshit) in her womb – and Krishna quietly says, 'Even if you can't see it, a light has been saved'. His essential role has been to encourage each individual to pursue their own *dharma* to the very end. The blurring of a man-god differentiation embodied by Krishna seems to mark the transition from myth to history. As an avatic divinity, he has been imprisoned within his prescience, a curse in human terms: as a man, he has only ever been able to urge others tacitly to a point of self-knowledge. And this connects with a question that runs through Brook's mature work like a blood-red thread: how does one affirm and implement free choice and one's personal imperatives within the omnipresent framework of an ineluctable destiny? How can one embrace life, strive to live it abundantly, given the ineradicability of death? The poem tacitly points us towards something that Rilke expressed in the following way: 'What we call fate does not come to us from outside, it goes forth from within us . . .'⁸

An instant jump of thirty-six years to Krishna's death (Book 16 of the *Mahabharata*, the *Mausalaparvan*), which he has already admitted to be inevitable, 'like all life'. Once again the scene is staged by Vyasa and the boy. As Krishna slumbers in a forest (i.e. on a green cloth), an arrow is carried by a hunter called Jaras ('old age') and wedged between Bénichou's feet: a direct reversal of Krishna's own earlier agency as arrow-bearer. He dies peacefully, smiling in the calm detachment of *yoga*. Nevertheless there is no ideal, no utopia. Even the gods are destructible. The boy's unanswered questions hang in the air. A simple vanishing trick with the hand-held curtain, and Bénichou rolls off and out of sight, apparently swept away behind it (like a cinematic wipe), vanishing into thin air.

In Hindu tradition, Krishna's death marks a *yuganta*, the end of an epoch. The narrative has taken us through a pivotal juncture between a mythical heroic age – the yellow or gold *Dvaparayuga* – and the beginnings of our own historical age – the *Tretayuga*. With a further waning of *dharma* in the cycle, we move into the iron or 'black' age of Kali, within which the performance of *dharma* is almost impossible, and Time becomes a pitiless devourer: not simply an era, but also a quality of time.

The Epic seems to be located in a liminal period at the very end of the preceding age, within which all four ages of the *Mahayuga* are conflated and echoed.⁹

The final days of Gandhari and Dhritarashtra recall the simplicity and reflective solitude of the Pandavas during their forest exile. Kunti makes a circle of flowers around a candle. Grains of rice are scattered at the four corners of a square within the circle, then sprinkled with river water. A 'natural', if invented, ritual of offering and prayer for renewed growth. The forest fire that awaits them is signalled using the same scenic device as that for Pandu's funeral pyre in *The Game of Dice* – Vyasa carries a flaming twig bundle. The original *Mahabharata* records that this fire had started as a result of the negligence of some brahmins undertaking a sacrifice. So in effect they are to lose their lives in a beneficent sacrificial fire – the route to the beyond will be painless. In death, Gandhari and her blind king are to be united and illuminated at last. As they walk towards death, Gandhari has a rapturous vision of the hereafter:

I have just seen a whole army rise out of the river. All my sons,
smiling, their wounds healed, reconciled. An immense wave of men,
all white, mounting into the air . . .

Wish fulfilment as well as prefiguration of the final scene in 'paradise'. Kunti joins them as they head for the flames across the wooden bridge – now a literalized point of access to another realm. She too seeks repose, and will be as unbending in death as she has been in life.

Yudishthira's admission to paradise (Svarga) – the final step in his expiatory rite-of-passage, and all that remains of Books 17 and 18 of the *Mahabharata* (the *Mahaprasthanikaparvan* and the *Svargarohanaparvan*). Led by Vyasa, he is obliged to undertake an initiatory journey around the space, an Eleusinian enigma, like the final scenes of *Conference*. For the last time Vyasa enacts a role within his own fiction: is he Indra, setting up the ultimate injustice of 'the final illusion'? As the lights come up, Yudishthira's first sight is of the two Kaurava brothers – happy, calm, literally cleansed of the filth of war and earthly conflict, now smiling benignly in radiant white. Meanwhile the Pandavas are reported to be condemned to some grimy hell, which is described in lurid detail. The Pandavas' voices, Karna now amongst them, call to Yudishthira from behind the ground-level seats. He must confront the ultimate absurdity: what has been the point of his life given this eventual outcome? He curses the malevolent divinities that have stripped his actions in life of meaning.

The Mahabharata has often been interpreted by commentators as a treatise of royal initiation, the education and forging of a king, Yudishthira: an ideal being with one tragic flaw – a love of gambling. In many ways Yudishthira has shared the journeys of Colin Turnbull, the anthropologist in *The Ik*, or of Timon, into their own 'hearts of darkness'. A

journey from a philanthropic position of commitment to liberal altruism, through a crisis of enforced lucidity concerning the destructive and materialistic motives of others, to metaphysical pessimism and misanthropic *contemptus mundi*. Unlike Timon and Turnbull, however, Yudishthira ultimately refuses self-annihilation in anarchic despair and confusion. Like those birds who survive the journey across the deserts and valleys to the court of their king in *Conference*, he 'goes to the end of himself', and is able to find a point of transcendent understanding by confronting and assimilating the essence of all aspects of experience, including the 'final illusion' of death: in Hinduism, a living state coextensive with life. His journey is finally a restorative reappropriation of self, the acquisition through suffering of what the Greeks called *sophrosyne*.

Vyasa calmly delivers his final third-person speech:

Stop shouting. You have known neither paradise nor hell. Here there is no happiness, no punishment, no family, no enemies. Rise in tranquillity. Here words end, like thought. This was the last illusion.

The 'last illusion' as much for audience in this and actors as for Yudishthira, for the performance now draws to a close: the 'world' of performance, the 'world' of *maya* and the 'real world' blur.¹⁰ Ganesha, who has reappeared with his mask, repeats Vyasa's final words as he inscribes these last words in the great book. The final stamp of authority on the performance as story to be told and heard. Ganesha hands over the finished work to the boy, 'This is your life . . .'

Conference of the Birds climaxed with the birds' arrival at the threshold of paradise. Here the culminating image presents us with what some have chosen to read as a vision of paradise, a gently place of serenity, peace and dignity, an atmosphere brimming with congenial and harmonious ease. The actors are now all in white: the blind are able to see, the wounded and dead restored, all animosity is forgotten. I would suggest that these few minutes of tranquillity perhaps best serve as a liminal *diminuendo* marking the dissolution of the fictive world, a transitional bridge affording us a shared space to catch our breaths, to look back on what has happened and to look forward. There can be no more pretence, these are simply actors who have earned this time for relaxation and enjoyment. The five musicians have positioned themselves centre stage, the other performers loll around the space in small groups. Food, wine and music are shared. All members of the company have washed and drunk from the river, once more a source of life, a meeting point. Candles on silver foil lotuses float in both pool and river, as if it were *divali*, the Hindu festival of lights. As the music grows in volume, the audience clapping along, the candles are extinguished one by one, as in the Haydn symphony. Music fills the darkness for a moment, then applause erupts.¹¹

This final image is therapeutic, a gentle shared act of pre-fall, Gond-

wana-like reintegration and celebration at the culmination of a story told, the collective bringing into life of a resplendent *theatrum mundi*. As a coda, inevitably it eschews closure. We have come to taste directly what Hindus refer to as *lila*: the world as cosmic illusion and play, mankind's celebration of its humanity.

All theatre is written on the wind, but only rarely in a lifetime does it ride and soar on the wind in our hearts. The theatre can become our *fiesta*.

NOTES

- 1 The wheel replicates, in a somewhat essentialized form, any one of the twenty-four carved stone chariot wheels built into the walls of the celebrated thirteenth-century temple in Konarak, India, dedicated to Surya, the sun god. See also the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat in Cambodia (eighth to twelfth century AD), or the winged sun-discs for the Zoroastrian Ahura Mazda, reliefs of which Brook would have seen in Persepolis.
- 2 Ezra Pound, 'A Retrospect' (1918), reprinted in T. S. Eliot (ed.), *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (London, 1954, p. 4).
- 3 The book contains eighteen chapters in all, just as eighteen armies are engaged in an eighteen-day battle.
- 4 See Kafka's diary, 1910: 'Zeno, pressed as to whether anything is at rest, replied: Yes, the flying arrow rests' (quoted by John Peter, *Vladimir's Carrot*, London: Methuen, 1987, p. 168).
- 5 Incidentally this fight with Bhima forms the core of Bhasa's famous 1,800-year-old one-act Sanskrit play *Urubhanga* ('Thigh Fracture').
- 6 A Christian version of the same allegory was translated into a well-known bas-relief by the thirteenth-century Italian sculptor Benedetto Antelami. It can still be seen on the Porta della Vita of Parma's Battistero.
- 7 Cf. van Buitenen: 'The epic is a series of precisely stated problems imprecisely and therefore inconclusively resolved, every inconclusive solution raising a new problem - until the very end, when the question remains: whose is heaven and whose is hell?' (quoted in Hildebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle*, Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1976, p. 127).
- 8 Krishna should not be seen as a 'pious hypocrite' (E. W. Hopkins, *The Great Epic of India: Its Character and Origin*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1978) or as a Machiavellian figure, despite his being the guiding hand behind almost all of the Pandava 'crimes'. He has endeavoured to engineer a reconciliation, and he has never acted for his own ends. He has performed the role of agent of resolve in a number of individual struggles, tacitly encouraging all protagonists to confront themselves and their personal *dharma*, and no destiny has been accepted passively. We have seen the gamut of responses to the impingement of destiny, from defiance, courage and faith to doubt and self-discovery. His function is fundamentally restorative, a counterbalance to the destructive roles of Shiva and Kali.

Krishna himself has been caught in a double-bind. He has tried to prevent a war he knows full well must happen. Locked within a web of contradictions, Krishna is never fatalist or nihilist. His actions offer a direct and consistent provocation to the limitations of any imposed moral framework.

What may initially surprise audiences in the west is the distance between

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this Krishna and the familiar 'received' image of him, the frolicking lover of *gopis* in Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* or the *Bhagavata Purana*. As Dhritarashtra says of him in the original *Mahabharata*, just before the battle commences: 'Like the wind, difficult to seize with the hand: like the moon, hard to touch with the hand: like the earth, hard to bear on the head: Krishna is difficult to seize by force' – or indeed to pin down in any way.

See also Lao Tzu's 'Man of Tao' in the *Tao Te Ching*, XV:

He is modest, like one who is a guest.
He is yielding, like ice that is going to melt.
He is simple, like wood that is unplanned.
He is vacant, like valleys that are hollow.
He is dim, like water that is turbid.

- 9 Significantly the names of the four ages in the cycle (Krita, Dvapara, Treta and Kali) are also names given to the different dice throws that cause the Pandavas to lose their kingdom. Shakuni, the Kaurava gambler, is said to be an incarnation of Dvapara, the *asura* who lent his name to the third of the four ages; Duryodhana is supposed to be an incarnation of Kali. So the course of the game reflects in miniature the cosmic increase in the forces of *adharma*. And indeed, the course of the world as a whole is said to be the result of an unending celestial dice game between Shiva and Parvati on Mount Kailsa.
- 10 David R. Kinsley quotes Mircea Eliade on a 'method of release' through *maya*: 'To tear the veil of *maya* and pierce the secret of cosmic illusion amounts primarily to understanding its character as 'play' – that is to say free spontaneous activity of the divine – and consequently to imitating the divine action and attaining liberty. The paradox of Indian thought is that the idea of liberty is so concealed by the idea of *maya* – that is, of illusion and slavery – that it takes a long detour to find it. It is enough, however, to discover the deep meaning of *maya* – divine 'play' – to be already on the way to deliverance' (*The Divine Player*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979, p. 18).
- 11 In the marathon all-night versions of Avignon, and later in Perth and Adelaide, during the world tour, the sense of renewal and rebirth was further heightened by synchronizing the performance's end with the first light of dawn colouring the stone of the quarry: a new day for a new world – an idea Brook first explored at the genesis of the Centre with *Orghast* in the tombs of Persepolis.

POSTSCRIPT: BROOK'S SCENOGRAPHY

In conclusion, I will enumerate what appear to be the primary determining strategies and characteristics of Brook's scenography here – his *poetics*, if you like. In one sense, the divisions that follow are misleading, for each of these structural elements is complementary and interdependent: parts of a whole.

MOBILITY AND ESCHEWAL OF REPRESENTATIONAL CLOSURE

In *The Mahabharata*, temporal (and spatial) dimensions are fluid, virtual, mobile, as open and free as the Elizabethan theatre's *tabula rasa*, effortlessly compressed or distended in the twinkling of an eye. Structurally, the production celebrates the free play of concentration and dispersion, settlement and diaspora: an alchemical *solve et coagula*.

As a director, Brook has assimilated a great deal formally from film language. Our perspective is multi-directional and fluid, and indeed Brook's consistently articulate manipulation of space, at the very heart of his scenography, possesses something of the mobility, economy and clarity of film montage and focal/framing techniques. Images and situations are strung together like pearls on a string of energy, established then dissolved like camera shots. Although Brook is not averse to self-citation scenographically (e.g. carpets, bare earth, sticks, etc.), there is no trace of either narcissism or closure (i.e. representational or narrative *dis-closure*). Consistently foregrounding its own theatricality,¹ the performative idiom itself evolves, erasing and rewriting itself continuously. Like the original Sanskrit text, with its mobile narrative voice, the performance oscillates tirelessly (and dialogically) between jolting savagery and cool objectivity. Analeptic and proleptic shifts, and recurrent slippage or collision between different fictive levels, resist the linearity of classical narrative structures. Yet these are changes of gear in an affective rather than an intellectual dialectic, reflecting for Brook the 'painful but inseparable' coexistence of illusion and disillusion that characterizes life itself. Nevertheless this active exploration of theatre discourses, entailing a critique of inherited codes, releases utopian and interrogative impulses in relation to individual and social life beyond the theatre.

The structural principle of discontinuity, both synchronic and diachronic, reconfigures and liberates Brook's performers. The actor *as* storyteller is free to step out of his/her role at critical moments (e.g. Bénichou as Krishna during the *Bhagavad Gita*, or the *visvarupa* theophanies), interrupting the linearity of his/her portrayal to continue the narrative in the third person. With the absolute prioritization of the imperative to meet the demands of an ongoing narrative, it is inevitable that imperson-

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ation should be repeatedly ruptured. In narrative terms, this shifting distance between actor and role proves very effective, furnishing him/her temporarily with the objectivity, lucidity and compassion of a narratorial commentator or puppeteer – ‘distanced without distancing’. (In addition, in both examples cited, it neatly sidesteps the problems of embodying a god.)

Very few entrances and exits are made through the auditorium, perhaps only by Vyasa. This is a ‘heroic’ presentation, kept at a certain distance. Hence the magnitude and weight of gesture: there is much grand Samurai bravado, the ‘outline’ of emotions painted for us. Interpretation operates primarily on the levels of physical engagement and conviction, rather than of subtly nuanced sub-textual business, physical or vocal. *An epic style* – physically rooted, dynamic, immediately legible.

Representational flux is a constant on a technical level as well. So, for example, *The Mahabharata* seems to mark a turning point in Brooks’s conception of the role of lighting. Gone is the glaring and all-embracing wash that had characterized his work since *King Lear* over twenty years earlier. Light has become an active participant again, used throughout to establish location, concentrate atmosphere and generate tension: a further medium on the palette. Throughout the performance, light continually repaints the flaking back wall, from deep bronze to honey, mustard or salmon. When the back wall is lit laterally, a different space (both literally and metaphorically) is conjured up, a reality further separated topographically from the central space by the river.

In addition to providing an anti-illusionist shell for the action, framing it meta-theatrically as ‘play’, the soaring pock-marked wall itself can lend an immense depth and majesty to images. Sometimes its literality as wall is foregrounded, sometimes it recedes and dissolves: it fluctuates between presence and absence. On one occasion, the lighting designer Jean Kalman even bounced a bluish wash on to the wall from the river, like a ripple tank: the rock appears to dematerialize into tiny waves, to liquefy. Such effects are compounded by the hypnagogic quality of images for an audience on the threshold of a different state of consciousness, particularly so for those present at an all-night marathon.

Compare this with the expressionistic use of low-level lateral light on the central area. In general, it is employed either symbolically, often to undercut a superficial harmony with sinister undertones (e.g. the casting of distended, bloated shadows), or spatially, to frame and foreground significant moments, for a sense of emotional and psychological proximity equivalent to close-up.

Indeed, even all four elements are omnipresent, active and protean in this most elemental of stories: they are mobilized as a scenographic base for the performance as a whole.² The beaten red earth of the egg-shaped playing space – Mother Earth, source and end of all, and the storyteller’s

milieu in any Indian village; the free-flowing water of the river beside the back wall – the flux of life, movement and fertility in the holy Yamuna and above all Ganga, the ‘river of heaven’ and the goddess ancestor of the protagonists,³ and the enclosed water of the pool at the spectators’ feet – fixed, sterile, a reflective surface to mirror the action, a place for refreshment and ritual ablution, an *omphalos*, a place to die; naked candle flame as generative transformation, invocation, purification, illumination, creativity and *gnosis*, and sputtering ball of flame as weapon, force of ignorance, threat to humanity; and finally, particularly in the open-air quarry venues used, the air that we share with the actors – *prana*, *pneuma*, *ki*, the creative and empowering spirit of inspiration, the breath of life.

SUGGESTION THROUGH ELLIPSIS

The language of Brook’s actors’ storytelling revolves around the use of simple metonyms and synecdoches generated through the manipulation of transformable everyday objects. These objects are semanticized through the actors’ play, then abandoned and desemanticized, emptied of their referential charge and therefore available for further exploitation and redefinition. Nothing is ever fixed: all is suggested ludically with pellucid simplicity. Mallarmé’s ‘Suggérer, voilà le rêve’ has become a battle-cry: the fluidity and indeterminacy of suggestion, rather than determinate (closed) reference, in some sense disrupts and sabotages the received signifying conventions of naturalist representation and their coercively imposed ‘ways of seeing’. Actors gently invite spectators to participate interactively in their imaginations – to ‘beat the other wing’, as the existentialist Jaspers said – for their creativity is celebrated here too. As spectators, we come to understand how seeing need not be passive – the performance as object of a detached gaze; in relation to ellipses, it can be an *action*, engaging intellectually and socially. Brook’s chosen word ‘naivety’, an appropriation from Brecht, conveys something of the remarkable clarity and economy of form. At times, literal representation is not only impossible but also patently undesirable (e.g. Krishna’s *visvarupa*). In such contexts, special effects or pyrotechnic technology would run the risk of trivializing or blocking through over-literality. Repeatedly we are shown how suggestion, free from representational closure, can paint vivid pictures in our imaginations.

Above all, Brook’s scenography is characterized by a consistent avoidance of schematization. Everything has been arrived at pragmatically, rather than analytically. Scant respect is paid to notions of aesthetic continuity or an imposed uniformity of style and means. The ultimate theatrical sanction for all popular theatre practitioners like Brook, a director wilfully operating from intuition and instinct rather than any theoretical or conceptual base, is that if something ‘works’ in theatrical terms in a specific

context, then it is appropriate at that time, and perhaps only at that time. Of course Brook himself selects material and ultimately determines what does 'work', even indeed what constitutes 'working'. A paradox is in evidence throughout this production: the actors' creativity is repeatedly foregrounded and celebrated, yet at the same time the very fabric of the actor-based stage language(s) used visibly bears Brook's recognizable imprint. This production signals his final abdication of the directorial Olympus, and yet he is forever present in his absence: the king is dead, long live the king.

POLYPHONY AND MULTI-TEXTUALITY

'*What works, works . . .*': Brook's practice prioritizes narrative and referential clarity within formal discontinuity, while at the same time contriving to generate surprising hybrid conjunctions of complementary elements, a carefully constructed admixture of an aural, visual, affective and thematic multi-textuality. He blends colours, tastes, atmospheres, in search of a *salade juste*. A second paradox – coherence and unity here stem from heterogeneity: *e pluribus una*.

Each component of a polyphonous construct retains its particular savour in a heightened form, yet the sum of discursive elements present momentarily creates something fresh and texturally 'other'. The Pandavas, for example, operate as a multi-faceted supra-individual storytelling unit: they exist as a microcosm reflecting the centre group and its concerns as a whole. The fabric of the narrative is refracted through the individual cultural identities of each narrator/performer. The sum effect, perhaps best apprehended in musical terms, is of instruments of different tone/timbre/colour, their individual connotative qualities fluid, conjoining to form a series of chords. The individual remains true to him/herself while always being subsumed, and paradoxically finding a fuller expression of individuality and difference within a collective. Conceptually, this is at the root of the company's multicultural structure. Perhaps echoes of the cultural palimpsest that India is often perceived to be (the metaphor is originally Nehru's) are to be found in the multi-textual heterogeneity of both performance language and company structure, as also in the Bouffes' blurred overlaying in simultaneity of past, present and non-specific future?

For, as has so often been the case with the Centre's productions at the Bouffes, this space is thematically coherent with the material. Here is a civilization at an indeterminate transitional point somewhere between the dissolution of crisis and a new reconstructive ordering – the perfect frame for a scenography that subverts and remakes itself endlessly. The marks of demolition and incomplete renewal are etched into the very texture of this building, an elemental atemporal bowl apparently hewn from the rock, like the caves in Ajanta or the open-air quarries for which Brook has such

a strong liking. Above all, this space is a silent witness to the passage of time, bearing visible traces of its past. To borrow a phrase from one of Shakespeare's sonnets (no. 55), it is a place of 'unswept stone besmear'd with sluttish time'.

Evidently Indian culture is present at every level in this work. However, Brook's mythopoeic sensibility implicitly embraces a Jungian sense of the existence of a common pool of human archetypes of an intercultural kind; and the non-homogenous blend of forms, styles and accents in Brook's essentialized 'realism of suggestion' serves to free the 'universal' qualities of the epic. Whether one perceives his work as that of appropriator or liberating interpreter, Brook insists scenographically that *The Mahabharata* belongs not only to India, but to the world. Hybridization decontextualizes and relativizes, i.e. universalizes: at the very outset of this re-visioning, Vyasa had acclaimed his narrative as 'the poetical history of mankind'.

NOTES

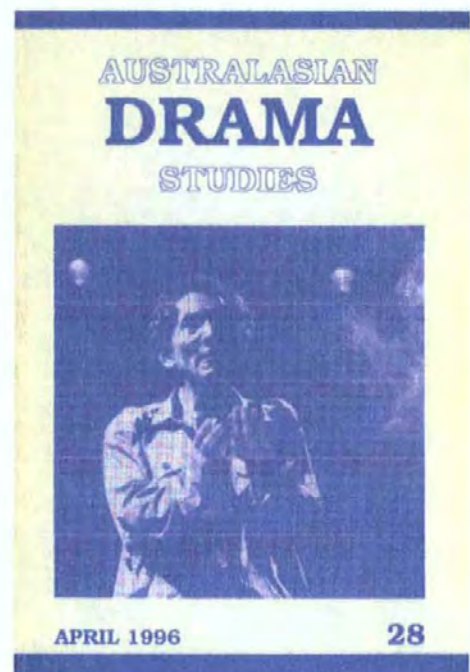
- 1 One remembers Barthes' cherished slogan, *Larvatus prodeo*: 'I advance pointing to my mask' (quoted in Jonathan Culler, *Barthes*, London: Fontana, 1983).
- 2 As Georges Banu has pointed out ('Le fleuve et la flaque' in *Alternatives Théâtrales*, no. 24, July 1985, p. 43), Brook's concrete use of the elements as scenographic base engenders what the phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard called 'material imagination', which 'can continually awaken and restore traditional images, and inform certain old mythological forms with life'. See Bachelard's *La Poétique de l'espace* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957), and his long series concerned with the elements: *La Psychanalyse du feu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), *L'Eau et les rêves* (Paris: Corti, 1942), *L'Air et les songes* (Paris: Corti, 1943), *La Terre et les rêveries de la volonté* (Paris: Corti, 1948), etc.
- 3 Scenographically, the functionally mobile river literally bears out Heraclitus' celebrated dictum, 'you can never bathe in the same river twice'. In his *Last Will and Testament*, Nehru wrote of the Ganges: 'The Ganga is the river of India, beloved of her people, around which are intertwined her racial memories, her hopes and fears, her songs of triumph, her victories and her defeats. She has been a symbol of India's age-long culture and civilization: ever-changing, ever-flowing, and yet ever the same Ganga' (quoted in Eric Newby and Raghbir Singh, *Ganga: Sacred River of India*, Hong Kong: Perennial Press, 1974, p. 9).

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*Listening to images:
pleasure and/in the gift*

*David Williams
in conversation with
David George*

'Il faut être léger comme l'oiseau,
et non comme la plume'

Paul Valéry, quoted by
Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millenium*

The following article is a condensation and reworking of several recorded discussions between David Williams and David George in the summer of 1994 in Perth. It focuses in particular on the interaction of practitioners from different art-forms, the role of images and the imaginary in generative and compositional practices, the possibilities of an open dramaturgy, and the ethics of collaborative performance making.

'Ek-stasis': an action of displacement, a movement off-centre, a movement away from stillness; a deviation; a dilation or stretching; an action which takes one outside or beyond oneself - an altered state of consciousness; disturbance, agitation, bewilderment, derangement; rapture, mental imbalance or aberration, trance, madness, ecstasy ...

STARTING-POINTS

GEORGE: 'There's a performance in there ...' That's a phrase I've often heard you use.

WILLIAMS: There are latent performances everywhere. In a paragraph in a book, in a photograph, a piece of music, an object, a landscape, a memory, or a dream ...

GEORGE: So what decides which ones are then pursued through to performance?

WILLIAMS: Initially, all of the projects are informed by at least a couple of core images that I can't resolve or get rid of; they keep happening for me, they replay themselves insistently in the back of my mind. Some have their origins in existing 'texts', some I generate.

GEORGE: What do you mean by an 'image'? Can you describe some of them?

WILLIAMS: Well, each of them is a narrative space of *possibility*, a dynamic conjunction of particular elements (emotion, desire, space, rhythm, musicality, texture etc) that invite explorings and inhabitings; so they're not simply visual pictures, they are 'worlds' and speak of those worlds. For example, the joy and fear of a woman who discovers her voice to be telekinetic – she can rearrange the furniture, operate the lights, eject intruders; or the confusion of a meat-market futures trader who falls hopelessly in love with a pig; or a grandmother comforting a child, her 'hush' a memory of the last breathy sounds of the Titanic as it subsides; or a tea cup hurled in anger, travelling around the world and dropping back into place on its saucer – all in the gap between two sips ... Lots of images of people and things who fly and metamorphose.

So they're all constellations of affect – and I guess they're in the category of obsession; and they're always on the margins between my dream-life and my rational envelope. I guess they are what Jung called 'complexes', shadow selves. I prefer to conceive of them in terms of a sort of critical surrealism. Many of them are critical metaphors, some of them even have names. I want to try to 'befriend' them without taming them, as James Hillman would say,¹ I want to entertain them as possibilities.

GEORGE: So you don't want to unpick them analytically; it could only be of limited interest if one simply wanted to understand them, or to reduce them to one's own biography. Nevertheless, certain qualities recur. Most of them have some quality of transgressive dis-orderliness, of breaking out: of rupturing moulds, offending formal structures, busting free of rigid codes and received restrictions. They explode, they're ex-static ...

WILLIAMS: Maybe. But the important thing is not what they might mean for me. I have to try them out on someone else. If *they* respond to them as core images, if they *listen* to them, if they find they can and want to use them to rehearse and enact *their own* versions of these images – that's when we start moving towards a performance. They become the core images around which other things can constellate – both centrifugally and centripetally. For they are magnets, they attract; and simultaneously, they are also dynamic, sources of energy, unstable, volatile. They are excessive, generative and productive.²

The performers don't have to reproduce what they might mean to me: in fact, they shouldn't, and happily won't be able to anyway. I recognise the images by some quality which shows that a transposition or transfer has taken place. I'm not sure what that quality is: sometimes simply a visual or textural rhyme, but ideally a particular quality of pleasure, a playfulness, a sense of

complicity, and a serious engagement with the now that conveys the inhabiting of a world. The images are *working* when they take the performers into a new analogous space, when their bodies are now being thought – a thinking-in-action accompanied by an awareness of themselves doing it.



Critical surrealism. 'Tomorrow's another day – you can always buy something'; Barry Laing, *Beautiful Mutants*, Festival of Perth, 1993. (Photo: Marcelo Palacios)

GEORGE: So ideally the images serve to create a space or field for the performers themselves. Once they've listened, once they attend to their own associations and begin their serious-playful journey with them, how do you see your role?

WILLIAMS: It shifts. Though some performers want me to, I try to resist locking things down, I resist saying OK, now let's put this back together the way I imagined it. Certain performers can then use me primarily as a sounding-board. I want to be there for them, in dialogue with them. I see my responsibility as being to create spaces for them to explore their own possibilities. I try to give performers a set of potential core images and see if and how they connect with them, and through them, with others. With other images, other selves, other performers.

GEORGE: And then with spectators ...

STRANGE ANGEL

A smiling angel regurgitates a silver watch on a chain. She inspects the watch, then sets it swinging.

Still smiling, she hypnotises herself

(From *Thunder, Perfect Mind*)

EPIPHANIC – AND OTHER – MOMENTS

GEORGE: I don't think either of us can see much value in continuing to try to come up with new metaphors for the moments when spectators 'connect' with performers: flowers, revelations, epiphanies, combustion, meetings, and so on.

WILLIAMS: But it is interesting how such moments can be – not predicted, that's too coercive – but facilitated, enabled. It's clear that they all involve some conjunction of structure and improvisation, of formal system and creative freedom. What Italo Calvino described in his last unfinished book, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, in terms of 'the crystal and the flame': the congruence of structural invariance and continuous agitation, two different economies of expenditure and growth, both containing structures and unpredictability.³ In other words, the coincidence of forces seeking closure and others which explode or ignite ...

GEORGE: So some fundamental and unresolved ambiguity ... It's clear that art forms which don't have fixed structures, formalities, codes and conventions have great difficulty creating such moments. This is a problem with some contemporary dance which, having fled the ossification of classical ballet, now finds a new freedom but no restraints to work against and within.

WILLIAMS: When anything goes, all you have to rely on is the assumption that if it works for you as a performer, it must work for the spectator. It can do, of

course; but 'if it feels good, do it' so often leads to narcissism or a mushy sort of therapy.

GEORGE: It's clear that for 'moments' to occur there must be improvisation, but for improvisation to occur there must be structure.

WILLIAMS: What happens in music is fairly clear. The listener knows the rules, knows the codes, the formalities, follows them and is moved by the unexpected variations, the surprising breaks, the shock of an unexpected development, one which expands, opens up gaps which reconstruct the form.

GEORGE: The same applies to classical dance, and to theatre in Asia: the spectators know the language, the grammar, and can therefore follow into other spaces when the rules are broken or transcended.

WILLIAMS: Similarly with sport: it's only if you know the rules and codes that you can feel pleasure watching skilled people play both within them and yet somehow stretch or dilate them. But that's a problem in theatre, at least in Western illusionist theatre, where there's a less structured set of such codes, less formality.

GEORGE: Yes, so much so that Asian spectators often say Western theatre is boring – too easy, too simple, not enough rules. The only codes and structures which the spectators of illusionist theatre share with actors are the conventions of pretend: the formalities of narrative and character enactment, the 'willing' suspension of disbelief, and so on. But even here the spectator isn't passive – that's nonsense, the passive sponge: what happens is that, as a play unfolds, each spectator begins to build up hypotheses of how they think the narrative might unfold. Simultaneously, they watch the actor and hypothesise how they might enact this. It's a game – a tension – between the opening up of multiple hypotheses and their closing down as authors and actors make choices. The narrative and characters close down other options as they go along: they enact only a few of the many hypothetical possibilities open at any moment in a play. And what's done and said also amplifies what is *not* done and *not* said ...

WILLIAMS: Absolutely; I think spectators get a lot of their pleasure from listening attentively, from agreeing and disagreeing with the choices being made. To that extent the role of narrative and character enactment in theatre is analogous to that of formal structure in dance and music. In all three cases, there is a conjuncture of openings and closings. A pulsional rhythm.

GEORGE: But traditionally in illusionist theatre closure is aimed for. The narrative is unknotted, 'order' is restored and the actor stops playing.

WILLIAMS: Naturalism's claim to 'truth' just no longer rings true, for it never reflects on its artifice and its discursive assumptions; and it occludes all sorts of realities that don't cohere with its positivist model of 'reality'. In this way, naturalism is patronising, deeply conservative and frankly rather perverse; as Darko Suvin says, it's 'necrophiliac'.⁴ But theatre doesn't need to be this way, its dramaturgy can be opened up and re-animated. To go back to those core

images with which we began, they can find connections in other people – the performers. The performers then attend to their own connections and rehearse them. They enact them – not my way, but their ways: they are re-read, re-woven, they evolve associatively and analogously as they are allowed to reverberate.

GEORGE: So ‘meaning’ is not reduced to an image’s origin; it is expanded by others. Spectators can then multiply that process still further. They find their own resonances in the enactments of those core images, which they now take on their own journeys. Mentally, they elaborate their own hypothetical performances ...

WILLIAMS: Yes. So when people say I take from theatre the key elements of narrative and character, it’s true – except that I try to take them in a fluid and ironic way. They are elliptical, only signals; if theatricality is foregrounded, actors can remain porous and mutable in their relationship to multiple *possible* characters, rather than reducing themselves to one character. Narratives can open up more possible tangents, instead of closing down to one dénouement.

It’s the same with objects. Often a particular object assumes a generative role similar to that of the core images; in the recent past, I’ve drawn in this way on a pool of water, a web of rope netting of the kind used by stevedores, industrial cable spools, an old tin bucket, white feathers, a huge black cloth, a shopping trolley, and so on.

GEORGE: In everyday life, and in the closed mimesis of naturalism, most objects are reduced to their functionality, they become inert, almost invisible. But a bucket put on stage is energised, it can be revealed in its possibilities.

WILLIAMS: Yes, it becomes more-than-just-bucket ... This is what some French practitioners call ‘*le détournement de l’objet*’: in other words, the object is appropriated, abducted from the everyday, then re-routed, re-territorialised: a continuous dis-membering and re-membering, if you like. This kind of play constitutes a knowingly play-ful *embezzlement* (which is in fact one of the secondary meanings of *détournement*). And of course it’s not only objects. There are possible *détournements* in terms of space, narrative, character, image, gender, the laws of physics, whatever.

This doesn’t mean that spectators therefore lose contact – quite the opposite. They can be invited to become actively and pleurably complicitous in these embezzlements. A ‘loop’ can be set up between performer and spectator, a feedback system – spatial and affective, as well as informational. Energy is given and exchanged, playing is centrifugal *and* centripetal. The ability to inhabit the space and rhythm of this tension is central to what I understand by that terribly misused word ‘presence’: the presence of spectators as well as performers ... Anyway, Barry Laing, for example, has worked for one version of this feedback loop quite deliberately, in a very particular way. In storytelling contexts, he has looked around the audience and selected one or two people there whom he feels are available to be contacted; they then serve to

create ripples, they act as conduits to other spectators, whose interest can then further energise him. In my experience, this kind of loop is only very rarely explored by dancers.



Le détournement de l'objet: a tin bucket, on which Macbeth has been crowned, is hurled through the air to land in a new space, as the focus of a banquet. Barry Laing, *Macbeth, a modern ecstasy*, 1991. (Photo: Brian Rapsey)

GEORGE: Noh actors are taught to do something similar: they actually scan the audience, make eye-contact with one spectator after another – ‘gathering their energies’ they call it, or ‘opening up the objective eye’. Zeami talked about the performer never giving more than seven-tenths; at least three-tenths has to come from the audience.

WILLIAMS: It’s another stage in the listening process. The performer makes contact with one or more spectators and ideally they act as conduits for others – but not to somehow suck everyone into the performers’ meanings, any more than I coerced them into my original images. They share it – their way. It’s the distinction the anthropologist Marcel Mauss,⁵ and later Hélène Cixous,⁶ and others, make between two kinds of giving, two different economies of exchange – the gift which empowers the giver (the gift-that-takes), and the gift which empowers the receiver. It’s the second kind I’m talking about: the gift the actor makes to the spectator, the gift of *their* empowerment, the gift which makes the possible real. It’s all based on a quality of generosity and the paradox of a self-confident humility, the ‘daring vulnerability’ you’ve alluded to in the past.⁷ It’s an ethical matter: an exchange of gifts requiring both a generous expenditure of energy and a vulnerability.

VACUUM

A young besuited businessman stands up to his waist in water, clutching a black briefcase and umbrella. He tells us he wants to be someone, but that he feels frightened and doesn’t know why; last night he dreamt he was sucked into the telly. Suddenly he is taken from beneath with a shout, as if by a crocodile; he disappears into the water. Only his case remains.

(From *Beautiful Mutants*)

‘WORKING (IN) THE IN-BETWEEN’⁸

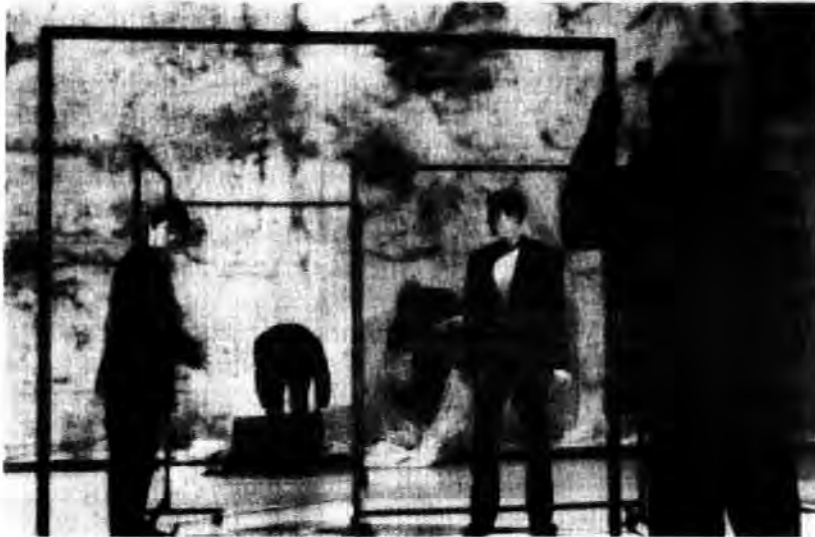
GEORGE: You’ve collaborated with actors, dancers, visual artists, musicians. Is this hybrid mixing of skills and forms another kind of détournement?

WILLIAMS: What interests me are the points where one means of expression meets another. Where something which comes out as ‘dance’ also comes out as ‘music’, or ‘theatre’ – and where they meet, or diverge. That’s what hybridisation really means to me – not some indiscriminate jumbling of languages, but their meeting points, and the impure spaces their conjunction creates. Most hybridisation seems in fact to collage bits of different media: that’s not interesting for me – glueing discrete bits together. What’s interesting are the commonalities – and the differences – between dance, music, theatre and the meta-frame of everyday life here now: where they cross over, where the categories themselves are interrogated and re-negotiated.

These overlaps are all about space and all about time, the space-times of rhythm are always implicated; it's not as distinct as Appia's 'movement is music in space, and art in time'. They share things and create out of that a third thing. It's similar to jazz: different musicians, playing different instruments, listen – it takes a particular *quality of listening*, much more active and volatile than 'hearing' – and then they dialogue with each other, generating a third thing. What interests me is where dancers and actors can join in with musicians, share that interactive and productive kind of listening, and the third thing it can generate.

GEORGE: So you're talking about the relational axis between two practices or forms that both joins and separates, that establishes both identity and difference – in other words, the act of relating itself as dynamic interplay and potentiality. Ultimately all binaries are in fact triads ...

WILLIAMS: For me, this 'third thing' constitutes the space between the relationships, what is meant in Japanese aesthetics, I think, by '*Ma*': a filled emptiness, a latency, the dynamics not of what is created but of the space of creation itself. It's Trinh Minh-ha's 'hyphenated space'. It's related to notions of liminality and threshold, of course, but yes, as you suggest, really it's simply the relatedness itself, the endless meetings and divergences between autonomous units that are marked and shifted by the contact. It's the space of becomings that can only arise from meetings, and so it can only be done in relation to an other.



Ma, a latency: *Still Life*, 1994. (Photo: Andrew Beck)

Practically, much of it relates to some of the exercises I return to again and again, in various different guises: for example, what I call 'loops'. Performers are given an image, a narrative, perhaps a piece of music: individually, they then devise a series of image-actions which form a journey, a scored itinerary informed by a very personal, subjective associational field. It's a travel-dance, if we can accept travel as '*travail*', as work. On this journey, they move from one point to another, one gesture, pose or frame to another, and then round again: they form a continuous personal loop. Each one of those points can be used to inhabit or extend; they can orient themselves through them, collapse into them, recharge themselves in them, or use them to create entirely new forms – the loop twists into a Möbius strip, or frays.

But where the 'third thing' can come in is in the transitions, the moves *in-between* one point and another along the cycle. Often these tend to be sacrificed to perfecting the framing-points; but performers can be encouraged to investigate those gaps, the gaps themselves can now be used as new launching pads. Some performers just want to perfect their loop, perfect the poses and gestures they move to and from; they don't want to mess with the way they get there, they don't want to expand that. But these are not 'empty spaces', they are useful. It's in there that a new stage of creativity can take place, a stage of abandoning the unnecessary – and of continuing to leave the images themselves temporary, hypothetical, dynamic. To leave them space. It's in those gaps, those transitional thresholds that the 'third thing' can occur and it's there the real work is done. Not in the narratives or images as such, which are personal to the performer, but in the in-between. And that's the space of the spectators' work too.

All of this takes special kinds of performers, of course: what Cixous has called 'border-runners'.⁹ People prepared to cross over into each other's territories, and find there other languages they can explore, other ways of connecting with the others and what they are doing, other ways of meeting the desires of 'the others that are us'.¹⁰ Some dancers already understand their movements as micro-narratives or images – though many don't; they work through textures, colours, counts, other formal metaphors. All actors know they have to use their bodies – though most actors tend to live in their upper thorax and faces, and have a projected, conical sense of space derived from that; dancers tend to have a wider, more multi-directional sense of space, a kinespheric context that can be reduced or expanded. So actors and dancers tend to inhabit different kinds of spaces, but both of them try to spatialise their interiority – what Ariane Mnouchkine describes as the simultaneity of maximum interiority and maximum exteriority.

Ideally what they both do is informed by the kind of pleasure sports people have, their play-fulness. The way they inhabit a set of structures and play freely within them – like the play or give between the individual components of a machine. (It's interesting to note in this context that, as nouns, 'play' and 'give'

are closely related to the possibility of freedom *within* structures; both describe the space of the 'third thing'). They can then share that pleasure with spectators who know the rules – both of the game and of the body, and of the way the player reconstructs the possibilities of the body as instrument. Musicians do something like this much of the time; in my experience, dancers do it to a lesser degree, actors hardly at all.

GEORGE: Music and musicality evidently have a central role in your work ...

WILLIAMS: For me, music offers a model. Musicians play with the possibilities of their instruments and the formal structures they inhabit, re-writing them continually. As Jacques Attali suggests in his book *Noise*, music can create audible mutations which prefigure new political models, 'possible worlds'; he claims that it can recuperate difference and herald change.¹¹ I understand this in relation to the recent work of Jan Garbarek with Anouar Brahem and Shaukat Hussain,¹² for example, or of Ry Cooder with Vishwa Mohan Bhatt and Ali Farka Toure¹³ – these are instances of a genuinely hybrid and radical interculturalism that make so much theatre look extremely clumsy.

I have seen actors play with the structures and relationships of illusion in a similar way. Recently in Melbourne I saw Anna Deavere Smith's *Fires in the Mirror*, a one-woman show about recent Black/Lubavitch Jew conflict in Crown Heights, Brooklyn.¹⁴ Smith performs almost thirty different characters in the show, all of them people implicated in some way in Crown Heights, using their words recorded in interview. She allows them to speak through her, but she never disappears. She plays with mimesis, sliding from role to role – sometimes temporarily retaining some residual attribute from the previous character, so that there is a blur, she animates and inhabits the gap between them, the 'third thing'. She never impersonates as such; she signals – the presence of her body, her voice, linking and in-forming all of these 'others': Blacks, Jews, men and women, young and old. In this way, she explores issues of identity, difference, community and, above all in this context, inter-subjectivity in extraordinarily compassionate and moving ways.

Another example might be Bruce Myers in India performing a version of Ansky's *The Dybbuk*,¹⁵ sliding in and out of his fictions, slipping from telling the audience a story to being one of the characters in the story. At one point, he poured a cup of water as he described to us the preparation for the wedding feast, took a sip as he looked out at us watching him, smiled – then in a flash poured the water over his head and slicked his hair back; he reconfigured the way he looked, suddenly becoming the father of the bride making himself suitably slick and smart. The audience understood, we shared that little leap; we found our pleasure there too because Bruce set up a pulse, invited us into the game, the playfulness of it, its rhythms, its intuitions – and his own ironic self-consciousness about what he was doing as a performer, his complicity with his looked-at-ness. It's the gift again.

I remember Peter Brook once describing the quality he most admired in one of his actors in terms of 'lightness'. I understand this quality through Paul Valéry's suggestion that 'one must be light as a bird, not light as a feather';¹⁶ in other words, one must recognise and bear the very real weight of what it is one enacts, its *gravity*, one must remain engaged and embodied, here now – but with a lightness of touch that is buoyant and ironic, that enables one not to be encumbered or consumed, but to take off, to move on. I see this quality as imbuing the play of performers like Anna Deavere Smith and Bruce Myers. To my mind, the myth of the necessity for suffering that seems to colour so much performance and its rhetoric is just bullshit. The spectator's pleasure is intimately connected to the performer's.



Lightness and the travel dance: Felicity Bott explores the spatialities of a personal loop, during development work on *Beautiful Mutants*, 1993. (Photo: Brian Rapsey)

FRIDUCITA'S MEMORY

When I was seven, I helped my fifteen-year-old sister elope with her lover; I opened the balcony window, and she floated away into the night. The next time I saw her, she was bathing herself with a hose, in a room full of light and birds.

(From *The Logic of Wings*)

ETHICS, POLITICS AND PLEASURE

GEORGE: It's a cliché that 'the role of the director' has to be revised. It's always being revised, by every director in every piece of work.

WILLIAMS: The term itself – 'director' – is a problem, as are the expectations attached to it.

GEORGE: Many performers have expectations of directors first allowing them some freedom to play around, and then stepping in and moulding the whole thing together.

WILLIAMS: Some of those I've worked with are very uneasy when I feel I need to step away, to give them space, while they expect me to step in and 'mould'. At some stage some of them want me to tell them what to do. And some of them are worried when I myself try something out and invite them to flip their perspective and watch me – not to learn 'how to do it', but simply to get a sense of how someone else *might* inhabit that space. Physically I implicate myself to be looked at, partly in order to destabilise the Ur-spectator director role – to make them spectators. And to make them directors.

GEORGE: The word 'direct' only need mean to point a way, but it's a more fundamental revision that's needed: the whole relationship between processes and performances.

WILLIAMS: Yes. The work done in rehearsal and preparation isn't discrete, it doesn't stop before being translated into a new interaction with spectators. Spectators have always been there – the other performers, me, the performers' own self-consciousness. These experiences and inter-relations don't disappear either when the performance goes on; indeed, a great deal of the work done in rehearsal shadows the performance, including particular kinds of audience pleasure.

GEORGE: I recall a friend, Pino Confessa, who now works in Bali, telling a group of Australian actors who were worried about whether the Balinese would be able to read what they would be doing, not to worry: 'They will see your sweat; they will know you are working for them. That can't be faked and it is that which will make them happy'.

WILLIAMS: But it's more than that: the weave of relationships, the sorts of ethical and political commitments made in preparatory and rehearsal processes shadow the performance. They appear in performance, they are palpable over and above the actions in performance. I'm very concerned with notions of training as the elaboration of an individual work ethos, and, above all, with the sorts of ethical/political micro-worlds that a group constitutes in terms of social praxis: temporary worlds that need to be re-negotiated at every level and in an ongoing way.¹⁷

Again for me it's a question of 'listening' – listening to each other, co-existing with the others, and listening to oneself: it's two-way traffic – convex/concave, giving/receptivity. I believe certain processes of collective

creation can offer paradigms of how individuals can be empowered; although it's crucial to recognise that collaboration must *always* be contextual, it's all about so-called 'situation ethics' and specific localised tactics. After all, we are here together because we know that we have to find and dialogue with 'the others that are us', that we can only be our-selves *in relation*. It's another variation on the key dialogic notion of giving, of offering without binding.

To give is not to negate the individual; it is to redefine individuality through others, through relations, a compassionate economy of inter-related-ness. And it is that which shadows and colours the performance too: the related-ness of these people, the fact that they have travelled and worked together. It is palpably present – and this is maybe as great a source of pleasure as anything else. What isn't generative just isn't helpful.

Any company learns that every individual has to take responsibility for themselves, for what they are doing, and for everyone else. That can only ever occur if the responsibility is spread, not located in the director, it has to become mutual, it has to pervade the work at every level. Anyway, that method creates the most engaging events. The most interesting decisions are always those which are most circuitous and serendipitous, multiply authored to the degree that you can no longer say who generated which 'bit'. It's supra-individual, it belongs to the group; yet the individuals involved feel pleasure in the complicity, in the fact that they are implicated.

GEORGE: That's a nice paradox. To shine you dim your own light ...

IN HEAVEN

A man and a woman sit together/alone, at either end of a long table. The man is in a large armchair, the woman in a shopping trolley. Both are sipping tea. Suddenly the woman stands in the trolley and hurls her teacup at the man; it spins very slowly through the air, strikes the man on the forehead, then ricochets off out of the space. As it disappears, another identical teacup spins into view from the opposite side of the space, as if it has travelled around the earth. It flies through the air, back towards the woman, then lands with a clink on her saucer.

She takes another sip.

(From *Thunder, Perfect Mind*)

This article is dedicated to the people with whom David Williams collaborated in Perth – in particular, Ahmad Abas, Andrew Beck, Felicity Bott, Anne Browning, Sarah Coxon, Kim Delurey, David Fussell, Robert Hannah, Anne Hearder, Mark Homer, Roger MacDonald, Mandy McElhinney, Andrea McVeigh, Imbi Neeme, Brian Rapsey, Marcelo Palacios, Ricardo Peach, Paul Tassone, Bronwyn Turnbull, Chris Waite and Jodi Wise; above all, Barry Laing and Janet Lee.

NOTES

- 1 'There is an invisible connection within any image that is its soul. If, as Jung says, "image is psyche", then why not go on to say, "images are souls", and our job with them is to meet them on that soul level. I have spoken of this elsewhere as befriending, and elsewhere again I have spoken of images as animals ... No friend or animal wants to be interpreted, even though it may cry for understanding'. James Hillman, 'An Inquiry into Image', qtd Thomas Moore, ed., *A Blue Fire: the Essential James Hillman* (London: Routledge, 1989), p.25. See also Hillman's 'Image-Sense', in *Spring* (1979): 13-43.
- 2 Cf. Ezra Pound's conception of an 'image' as an 'intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time ... The image is not an idea. It is a radiant node or cluster. It is what I can, and must perforce call a VORTEX, from which and through which and into which ideas are constantly rushing'. 'A Retrospect' (1918), qtd. T.S. Eliot, ed., *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber, 1954), p.4.
- 3 Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (New York: Vintage, 1993), pp.70-71.
- 4 See Darko Suvin, 'On Individualist Dramaturgy', in *To Brecht and Beyond* (London: Harvester, 1984).
- 5 Marcel Mauss, 'Essai sur le don; forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques', in *Sociologie et Anthropologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950).
- 6 See e.g. Cixous's 'Sorties', in Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1986), pp.85-87; or Cixous's 'The Laugh of the Medusa', in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds., *New French Feminisms: an Anthology* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1981), p.259 ff.
- 7 David George, 'On Ambiguity: Towards a Post-modern Performance Theory', *Theatre Research International* 14:1 (1990): 77.
- 8 Cf. Hélène Cixous, re. *écriture féminine*: 'Admitting that writing is precisely *working* (in) the in-between, examining the process of the same and the other without which nothing lives, undoing the work of death, is first of all wanting two and both, one and the other together, not frozen in sequences of struggle and expulsion or other forms of killing, but made infinitely dynamic by a ceaseless exchanging between one and the other different subject, getting acquainted and beginning only from the living border of the other: a many-sided and inexhaustible course with thousands of meetings and transformations of the same in the other and in the in-between, from which a woman takes her forms'. In 'The Laugh of the Medusa', qtd. Trinh T Minh-ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p.142. A different translation of the same passage is on p.254 of Marks and de Courtivron.
- 9 'That's what theatre is ... it's the desire of the others that are us'. In Hélène Cixous, 'From the scene of the unconscious to the scene of history', trans. Deborah W Carpenter, in R. Cohen, ed., *The Future of Literary Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), p.13.
- 10 Hélène Cixous, in *The Newly Born Woman*, p.92.
- 11 Jacques Attali, *Noise: the Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1985).
- 12 Jan Garbarek, Anouar Brahem, Shaukat Hussein, *Madar*, ECM/Munich, 1994 (ECM 1515).
- 13 Ry Cooder and V.M. Bhatt: *A Meeting by the River*, Water Lily Acoustics, 1993 (WLA-CS-29-CD); and Ali Farka Toure with Ry Cooder: *Talking Timbuktu*, World Circuit/Hannibal, 1994 (HNCD 1381).
- 14 *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn and Other Identities*, conceived and performed by Anna Deavere Smith at the Victorian Arts Centre, as part of the Melbourne International Festival of the Arts, October 1994. The Melbourne season of Smith's

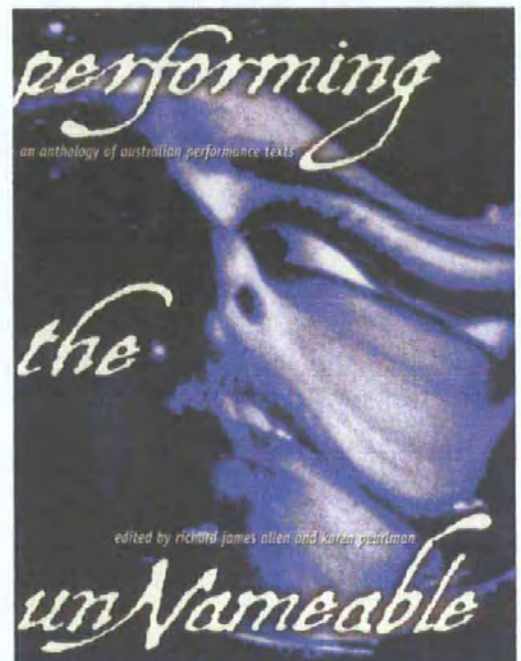
- performance had a particular immediacy for Yankel Rosenbaum, the Hasidic scholar whose fatal stabbing was one of the core triggers of the Crown Heights riots of August 1991, was on a study trip to New York from his home in Melbourne. For a fuller discussion of *Fires in the Mirror*, see Carol Martin's 'Anna Deavere Smith: The Word Becomes You', and Richard Schechner's 'Anna Deavere Smith: Acting as Incorporation', both in *The Drama Review* 37:4 (1993): 45-62; 63-4.
- 15 This version of *The Dybbuk*, performed by Myers and Corinne Jabber, took place in January 1990 in a grove of trees outside Bangalore. It was part of a series of workshops, demonstrations, meetings and discussions with the members of the C.I.C.T. organised to coincide with the release of Peter Brook's *Mahabharata* film.
- 16 'Il faut être léger comme l'oiseau, et non comme la plume': Paul Valéry, qtd Calvino, *Six Memos*, p.16.
- 17 'Ethics' here is taken in Emmanuel Levinas's sense of the word, as the negotiation of an inter-subjective responsibility to re-cognise alterity. As Simon Critchley explains: 'Ethics, for Levinas, is critique; it is the critical *mise en question* of the liberty, spontaneity and cognitive emprise of the ego that seeks to reduce all otherness to itself. The ethical is therefore the location of a point of alterity ... that cannot be reduced to the Same'. Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp.4-5). As Critchley goes on to point out, this ethical relation cannot ever be 'self-sufficient', hermetically sealed within an a-political private space removed from the public sphere. Levinas insists that ethics is always already political, for 'the third party (*le tiers*) looks at me in the eyes of the Other'; and it is this 'third party' who 'ensures that the ethical relation always takes place within a political context, within the public realm ... [T]herefore my ethical obligations to the Other open onto wider questions of justice for others and for humanity as a whole' (pp. 225-26). For a very useful discussion of ethics in/and performance, see Alan Read, *Theatre and Everyday Life: an Ethics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), esp. pp.88-102.

3.3

1999

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Beautiful Mutants

EX-STASIS THEATRE COLLECTIVE

FIRST PERFORMANCE

Beautiful Mutants was first performed on 9 February 1993, at the New Fortune Theatre, Perth, for the Festival of Perth. It was devised by the members of Ex-Stasis Theatre Collective from an adaptation by David Williams and Barry Laing of Deborah Levy's novel of the same name.

The performers in major roles were:

Mandy McElhinney (*Lapinski*), Felicity Bott (*'Krupskaya'*), Barry Laing (*'Duke', the Revenger*), Andrea McVeigh (*The Poet*), James Berlyn (*Freddie, the Painter*), Anne Browning (*Gemma, the Banker*), Kate Beahan (*Seashells*)

Directors: David Williams and Barry Laing

Designer: Ricardo Peach

Lighting designer: Margaret Burton

Soundscapes: John Patterson

Costume designer: Bruno Santarelli



BIOGRAPHIES

Ex-Stasis Theatre Collective (EX.T.C.) was co-founded in Perth, W.A., in 1991 by David Williams and Barry Laing. Their collaborations in Perth sought to combine aspects of theatre, dance, music and visual arts in corporeally-based performance forms that engaged critically with issues of contemporary history, representation and cultural dis-ease.

EK-STASIS (Greek): (1) action of displacement, movement off-centre, movement away from stillness; standing still no longer; a deviation; a dilation or stretching; (2) action which takes one outside or beyond oneself—an altered state of consciousness; (3) disturbance, agitation, bewilderment, derangement; (4) rapture, mental imbalance or aberration, trance, madness, ecstasy.

David Williams has made and taught performance in England,

France and Australia. He has worked as director, performer and dramaturg in theatre and dance, and spaces in-between: in Australia, with The Lightning Brothers, EX.T.C., Insomniac Theatre, Chrissie Parrott Dance Company, Alison Halit and many student groups. He has published widely on contemporary performance; his current research focuses on the 'equestrian operas' of Théâtre Zingaro and Rose English. He has taught Performance Studies at the Victoria University, Footscray, and presently teaches at Dartington College of the Arts (UK).

Barry Laing is a performer, director and teacher who has worked in theatre and new performance contexts, including dance and visual arts. He was assistant director and co-adaptor (with David Williams) of *A Mouthful of Birds* (1990) and *Macbeth: a modern ecstasy* (1991), in which he played Macbeth. He has worked and trained extensively with Monika Pagneux, Philippe Gaulier, Théâtre de Complicité and Pantheatre. He was the co-recipient of the 1997-98 Gloria Payten and Gloria Dawn Foundations travelling scholarship, which he used to develop a new work in France in 1998. He now lives and works in Melbourne.

Deborah Levy's published writings include the plays *Pax*, *Clam* and *Heresies* (for the Royal Shakespeare Company), a collection of short stories (*Ophelia and the Great Idea*) and a volume of poetry (*An Amorous Discourse in the Suburbs of Hell*). Her first novel, *Beautiful Mutants* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1989), was shortlisted for the John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize. Two subsequent novels, *Swallowing Geography* and *The Unloved*, are also published by Cape.



ARTISTIC STATEMENT

The major source for the production was Deborah Levy's novel *Beautiful Mutants*. This novel was adapted into a 'performance text/script' by Williams and Laing over a period of eighteen months, passing through seven written drafts before being submitted to the company. The seventh draft was the starting point for the material outcomes of the performance, which were collectively devised by the company (including performers, designers, sound artists); the performance was directed by Williams and Laing.

Beautiful Mutants is a novel of vast imaginative range and depth set in the crumbling world of late 80s capitalism and commercialism. With the scope and dexterity of a cinematic vision, Levy hunts in unexpected places and moves easily among the shadows in the lives and minds of people exiled from themselves, displaced, geographically and psychologically: their culture too near for comfort, the land of their dreams sometimes too far to realise. In a world of rampant materialism, the City becomes a 'Zoo', populated and echoing with squeals of desire, dances of obsession and dreams of flight.

Stasis Theatre's production was gathered around and written into the specificities of the performance site: the New Fortune Theatre, a 'reconstruction' of an Elizabethan theatre, with triple balconies on all sides of a large thrust stage, an audience 'pit', and a second open space behind the regular stage, and all open to the sky. We sought to defamiliarise the space and make its dynamics and potentials 'visible'. The orientation of the space was turned through 90 degrees, seating placed on three sides and two levels (including the conventional rear of the stage and its balconies), thereby configuring a 'new' performance space. In addition, the 'Shakespearean' audience pit was flooded with water to a level over a metre deep. This pool area, three-quarters of the thrust stage and all three levels of balconies were used by the performers throughout.

In terms of design, the core components were located in the pool: a metal 'island' with hinged struts, allowing transformation from a cage in the shape of cupped hands, a claw or a closed bud into, say, a sunflower (see 'The Age of the Great Howl'); a bridge—a pine, a trestle of bones—with articulated metal supports, which could also be manipulated; a silk-and-bamboo structure known as the 'pupa', a tubular tunnel that snaked around the lip of the thrust and into the water like some massive grey intestinal tract or larval invertebrate; a network of rope and chain rigging, onto which spectators were invited to tie small handwritten 'prayer flags'; and the water itself, able to suggest a tropical blue lagoon, a black lake of indeterminate depth, or a sulphurous burning reservoir. The water offered reflective surfaces, mirrorings/doublings and endless possible dis-appearances; it was conceived as the space of memories and of desires, of buoyancies, rips and drownings—in Breyten Breytenbach's words, water as 'the soul of the mirror'.

In this space were elaborated the major roles upon which the performance turned. Lapinski, a Russian emigré conceived on the marble slab of a war memorial, who leaves her home for a foreign land: an 'island', an-other place, an Elsewhere. She smokes, conjures the martyrs and 'love demons' who haunt her, befriends a Poet, loves a Painter called Freddie, and tells stories. She is a kind of narrator, her voice pervading the space of all the others, their stories enacting her story in turn:

Life is a perpetual to and fro, a dis/continuous releasing and absorbing of the self. Let her weave her story within their stories, her life amidst their lives. And while she weaves, let her whip, spur and set them on fire. Thus making them sing again. Very softly a-new a-gain.

Trinh T. Minh-Ha, *Grandma's Story*

In the flat above this woman, whose 'otherness' particularly confounds him, lives the Revenger. He exists crawling between earth and sky, swimming sometimes, mostly treading water, but burning with the struggle to turn his drownings into dreams. He's frightened and he doesn't know why, he wakes in the mornings afraid and there's no-one there to tell; but incredulously and comically he's determined to be 'Master of his own fuck-ups', and most of all amused by his own jokes.

The Poet works on a hamburger production-line in a factory on the edge of an urban wasteland—the 'Meatbelt'—with Lapinski and other women, blood under their fingernails. Among them is Seashells, a woman who can hear the sea, has visions, and loses her hands to the beast of the machine. In the Poet's eyes, whole continents flicker as she transports herself, her workmates and the audience across thousands of imagined miles, through borders of every kind, no passports required. She has learnt the art of metamorphosis:

The night shift is nearly over. Soon we will return to each other after our long separation. We will be startled by the distance we have travelled, even though we are standing shoulder to shoulder in the same room.

Deborah Levy, *Beautiful Mutants*

Freddie is an artist who glories in his own delusional ruminations on Lenin, Freud and Dali. He is a 'lover' fragmented by impossible past loves, including Lapinski, who realises himself in the very moment of his immolation in the lust and flaming mouth of Gemma the Banker. The Banker finds liberation in hatred and destruction. She is 'love's arsonist', a corporate raider who loots the city and every possible sexual scenario; ultimately she torches the Zoo in a maniacal, necrophiliac apocalypse of passion and pain.

Prupskaya, Lapinski's cat, prowls through these stories and spaces, transformed by them variously into a grandmother, a corpse, a blow-up doll, and other shadows and reflections between worlds.

The form of the work emerged from these darkly comic stories of exile and dislocation. Dramaturgically and scenographically, the

intention was to engender a cinematic fluidity that enabled radical jumps in space-time, sudden migrations, interweavings and collisions of discrete image-worlds: a kind of dissident, critical surrealism. The performance posited a cartography of multiple/possible selves using an episodic structure to speak of cultural 'death' and imaginal 'life', and the transitional spaces between. Conceptually, these transitional spaces were orchestrated as rips, tearings, bleedings, ecstasies—formally suture, montage, jump-cuts—in an attempt to articulate an increase in the buoyancy of the imaginal pool we are always already swimming in.

In this context, we conceived of images as 'worlds': collocatory syntaxes conjoining words, physical actions, music, sound and the articulation of space—dynamic sites of **possibility**. The 'images' were thought of as the visible/audible/palpable intersections of these sites. In this way we understood the pool as a *tabula rasa* re-definable under different lighting conditions, revealing its depth or solidified into a black, impenetrable void. The performers swam beneath its surface, emerging from darkness into the dreams or nightmares of their own stories, disappearing, then re-emerging in the memories of others.

The water, and the metal, wood, earth and canvas of the set and its structures—like the bridge linking the front of the auditorium to the thrust stage—were 'playable'. They served as musical instruments and pliable forms. The water deflected, reflected and re-animated sound, light and the performers' actions. In 'The Age of the Great Howl', the bridge, which served as one of the sites for the Meatbelt, was played with iron bars for percussive and melodic effect, alongside pre-recorded sound and the thrashing of water. In the 'Zoo Apocalypse', the water was set aflame—fire over water—as were metal, wood and cloth dispersed throughout the space. The pungent odour of fuel and black smoke mingled with human cries and animal murmurings as the flickering shadows kept time with destruction:

The zoo at night is the saddest place. Behind the bars, at rest from vivisectioning eyes, the animals cry out, species separated from one another, knowing instinctively the map of belonging. They would choose predator and prey against this outlandish safety. Their ears, more powerful than those of their keepers, pick up sounds of cars and last-hour take-aways. They hear all the human noises of distress. What they don't hear is the hum of the undergrowth or the crack of fire. The noises of kill. The river-roar booming against brief screams. They prick their ears till their ears are sharp points, but the noises they seek are too far away. I wish I could hear your voice again.

Jeanette Winterson, *Written on the Body*

The spoken words of the script were one of a number of 'texts' embedded in these composite images. In 'And all for Babies with Bone Disease', the Revenger tells stories that collapse time and space while the figure of his Father, enacted by the performer who plays Krupskaya, presides over his demise from a second balcony. Piano music, the hollow sound of drips and a distant helicopter threaten the singularity or primacy of the spoken/written words.

In addition, we located a series of speakers in and around the performance areas to allow the soundscapes to 'travel' through and around, ie to spatialise the movement of sound. One of the central audio images which recurred in different guises throughout the performance was of a helicopter with searchlight, circling ever closer, before hovering above the space, finally careering out of control and being 'sucked' into the water with the performers (see 'This Does Not Exist'). The performers enact roles of 'see-ers' and 'the seen', they can transport themselves; but they are 'policed', living under the watchful eye and scorching light of equally possible repressions.

- David Williams and Barry Laing

David Williams and Barry Laing thank Deborah Levy for her permission to publish these extracts from the EX.T.C. adaptation of her novel *Beautiful Mutants* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1989).



EPISODE 1: EXILE IS A STATE OF MIND

The first image of the performance. Soundscape: piano music, a lament, emerging from a sound of sampled water droplets, as the performers who play Lapinski and Krupskaya walk slowly into the space from opposite sides and meet on the bridge. Krupskaya carries an old, battered and threadbare umbrella, inverted above her, like a bowl; a black cloth over her shoulders, like a shawl. She gives the umbrella to Lapinski, who slowly spins it above her head to create her own 'snow-storm'; from the umbrella white feathers swirl and settle on her shoulders, the bridge and the water below. At the same time, Krupskaya wraps her head in the black cloth, for a few moments becoming the 'grandmother', bidding Lapinski farewell.

Both figures then step quietly out of this space, down from the bridge and into the water, as the journey to a foreign land begins. Lapinski moves through the water with the umbrella, looking straight ahead. While she wades, she trails Krupskaya in her wake. She is a 'corpse', floating concealed underneath what is now a black shroud: her dead 'mother'—a memory, a weight. As Lapinski approaches the metal cage, Krupskaya is released, floating abandoned for a few moments, then re-emerging to dance serenely in the water with the cloth. The umbrella floats nearby, like a giant damaged lotus.

A distant dog bark in the soundtrack greets Lapinski as she climbs into her 'new world'—an island, a cage. As the music slips underneath, she slowly looks around her at the audience, and begins to tell Lapinski's story:

LAPINSKI: My mother was the ice-skating champion of Moscow. She danced, glided, whirled on blades of steel, pregnant with me, warm in her womb even though I was on ice. She said I was conceived on the marble slab of a war memorial, both she and my father in their Sunday best: I came into being on a pile of corpses in the bitter snows of mid-winter.

On my fifth birthday, my father stole a goose. He stuffed it into the pocket of his overcoat and whizzed off on his motorbike, trying to stop it from flying away with his knees. We ate it that evening. As I put my first forkful into my mouth, he tickled me under the chin and said, 'This does not exist. Understand?' I did not understand at the time. Especially as my mother stuffed a pillow full of the feathers for me, and soaked the few left over in red vegetable dye to sew onto the skirt of her skating costume.

At the age of twelve, when my parents died, I was sent to the West by my grandmother. She said it was for the best. I was to stay with a distant uncle. When I asked my grandmother why he had left, she said, "Because he is faithless".

The 'mother' has disappeared into the water, and now reappears in deep focus, walking quietly along a side balcony and off into the distance, a blue light passing the plastic shroud that rustles around her: the memory recedes.

Which is how I came to be here. Where women were rumoured to swim in fountains of sparkling wine dressed in leopardskin bikinis. I unpacked my few clothes, books, photographs, parcels of spiced meat, and went into the handkerchief my grandmother had pressed into my hand. It was embroidered with one scarlet thread with my name—L.A.P.I.N.S.K.I.

The music has dropped out altogether.

Exile is a state of mind...

text excerpts

EPISODE 3:

THE AGE OF THE GREAT HOWL - THE MEATBELT

SFX: The din of the city/Meatbelt starts to grind up from under: a low hum, turning over. Lapinski is on the island, the Poet high on a balcony; other figures gradually appear in shadowy half-light in and around the pool.

THE POET: We on the meatbelt, blood under our fingernails, are not really in a factory on the edge of a freeway. We are somewhere quite different.

LAPINSKI: I myself am alone on the shores of the Black Sea...

POET: I'm sitting under a fig tree in the paradise of Adam and Eve. If you were to count the thousands of miles between us as the machines hum, you could cover the universe. We women take ourselves through borders of every kind, and carry no passport.

LAPINSKI (*moving through the water towards the bridge*): Women who work in their sleep and wake when the bell goes.

SEASHELLS: Women who sing lullabies and laments in time with the machine.

POET: Women who unknown to themselves make sculptures from meat.

LAPINSKI: The burgers take on the shape of our thoughts.

SEASHELLS: Great pyramids of thought sail across stainless steel into another life.

POET (*designating Seashells on a side balcony*): One of my friends threads shells through her long black hair. She can hear the sea. And she has visions...

SEASHELLS: Sometimes I see a flock of birds fall into the meat-mound...

POET: And who are we to disagree?

LAPINSKI: We have displaced ourselves.

SEASHELLS: Banished ourselves.

POET: We have been banished. We are in exile. This is the age of the migrant and the missile, Lapinski. Our time has come. Exile is a state of mind...

Soundscape explodes: metallic industrial sounds, with animal cries in the background. The Poet dances a version of her life to that point; she moves along the bridge as the others in the water around her—working, dreaming—manipulate the limbs of the bridge like automata. One performer bursts repetitively from the water on a metal limb, like an hydraulic piston; another 'plays' the bridge and chains with metal pipes, punctuating these percussive melodies with cries; yet another thrashes water up through the bridge with flailing limbs, like a water-wheel. This is the 'dance of the exiles' in the underbelly of the city, the Meatbelt.

The water churns with dark images, fleeting apparitions; disoriented, the Poet falls from the bridge and disappears from sight. Eventually she re-emerges to find her way through the water to the cage, climbs into it—the others now around its base, listening, helping her tell her story. The sound drops under.

LAPINSKI: Let us tell you the Poet's story. A migrant's story.

The 'arms' of the cage fold out and down, manipulated by the performers in the water.

POET: When I arrived in the slum cities of Northern Europe, I lost my health. Coffee cups, greasy cafes, dark and difficult visions. Then I lost my mind. Lost my self in the architectural, rational, cultural, political, anatomical structures of the city. I began to vibrate with confusion and pain. The sound of police sirens replaced the songs and laughter of the markets. Then one day I tried

to talk to my mother on the telephone, but found I no longer had a language we both understood.

LAPINSKI: In the end, she mistressed the skill of metamorphosis.

SEASHELLS: In your eyes, whole continents seem to flicker.

POET: I learnt I had to become many selves in order to survive.

LAPINSKI: You taught yourself to change from one self to another.

POET: If I have no identity, I will have many—

LAPINSKI: Identities... She learnt she was engaged in a war.

The arms of the cage are now parallel to the water, like a vast metal flower.

POET: I refused to be crushed. I waited for the storm inside me to be over. And when it was, in the parts that were torn, I planted sunflowers. I decided that the word—

LAPINSKI: JUSTICE!

POET: —does not mean law and order. And the word—

SEASHELLS: OPPORTUNITY!

POET: —does not mean organised human misery. I swallowed the humility of being confused. For I was a foolish casualty.

LAPINSKI: A bitten fruit.

As the others start to dissolve into the shadows, like rats back to their hiding places.

It is true she turns her male lovers into swine. It is true she rides over corn and heads of grasses. These are merely images. She is a Poet in the age of the Great Owl...

Lapinski extends this last sound, takes it out into the audience. She is 'transformed': with the voice of a deranged market seller.

Get yer Cornettos here, Ladies and Gents and dwarfs and sycophants and piss-stained nihilists and ruddy-cheeked ruralists and podgy little alchemists, get yer Cornettos here, like the Italians don't do it, we're all Americans now.

The Meatbelt has faded altogether. Just the two women together in the space.

POET: I'll be off, Lapinski. I can see from that glint in your bleary eyes you want to light another of your—um—'cigarettes', and summon a few demons... Oh don't deny it... Like all people who feel uncomfortable in an uncomfortable world, you want to make a map. Well, let me tell you, it's difficult to make a map in splintered times, when whole worlds and histories collide. *(They embrace)* When I first met you, you were attempting to brew vodka from peach stones...

As Lapinski sits to roll herself a smoke, the Poet walks away and out: distant gibbon cries overlaid into the next sequence.



EPISODE 4: LOVE DEMON NO.1 - LOSS IS IN THE AIR

Sitting by the pool, Lapinski lights her cigarette as the light comes up on her:

LAPINSKI: I have summoned my first love demon, and he has answered my call. This is no act of the supernatural, more to do with the art of suggestion. I journeyed from the iron curtain to the black Venetian blinds of a Western man's bedroom, and learnt love alone will not smash the atom... We all have so much to look forward to.

In the sequence that follows, the two figures onstage are not always in the 'same place'. At moments, their walk becomes a dance of partial actions, gestures and words. Sometimes they puppet each other, sometimes they are separate. They 'walk very different paths'. As a whole, the sequence is played large with a consciousness of the slippages between roles and spaces.

Bulgarian gaida (bagpipe) music emerges. Younger now, Lapinski slowly extinguishes her cigarette, as Freddie appears from the darkness; he slides down a pillar from the top balcony, drinks from the pool, makes his way into her space onstage. At moments, there is an ape-like quality in the way he moves. As he meets her, he engulfs her, tosses her high into the air: a brief fight ensues, then sudden calmness as the music drops under the words:

LAPINSKI (*walking along his body*): We are walking on damp cement. Hand in hand. A trail of destruction in our wake.

FREDDIE: She is wearing a dazzling emerald dress. (*She isn't*)

LAPINSKI: His name is Freddie. He is a painter.

FREDDIE: I am tinged with genius. Every time I make an inspired brushstroke on the canvas, I hear the voice of Salvador Dali whisper 'Olé!'... (*She's heard this before*)

LAPINSKI: His long-lidded eyes settle on my body like the Inquisition.

FREDDIE: Charisma depends almost violently on beauty.

Pause. He lopes out along the bridge, 'paints' himself in a mirror in the shadows, as she continues her story alone.

LAPINSKI: I dream of the possibility of love, yearn for the possibility of great love for ever and ever, two inches away from my singing heart.

Sudden shift of tone, as she moves along the bridge.

Freddie has been sleeping with a woman who plays the violin, and I am upset. He bought her a bottle of lime pickle, which seems to me a very intimate thing to do. Loss is in the air.

She is now still by the water's edge, as a small bell sounds in the distance (played live and visibly). During her words, Freddie approaches her from behind, fixes and 'fucks' her with his gaze; she is someone else for him, someone he desires. Then he lopes back off into the central space.

Just as my mother and father slipped away from me in a train crash on a bridge—months after their death I'd stand looking down at the water below, and imagine I could see them floating: a shoe, my mother's green skirt, my father's old overcoat—so I can feel his love slipping away from me and into another. I want him to declare his love so I can give him mine. Instead, he hunts around hungrily, loots other sexual scenarios—comes to me changed. Fumbling and shy. And we have to find where we last left off. Who we were before.

Freddie returns to her, takes her hand, lifts her into the air:

Loss is in the air. My dreams are full of its sensation.

Pause: they look at each other, as rhythm and space shift again.

FREDDIE: Oh your dizzy eyes. She looks like a gentle bruise.

LAPINSKI: He sucks all the green from my eyes.

FREDDIE: I am a reader of colour, texture, signs. Of the space between things.

LAPINSKI: He stands outside himself and observes.

FREDDIE: And yet I am sensual.

LAPINSKI: He is interested in sensation. He admires me...

FREDDIE: I admire you.

LAPINSKI: I tell him, 'When I was twelve, I ate spiced meat from Georgia, and sipped Pepsi Cola'.

FREDDIE: I like bizarre juxtapositions.

LAPINSKI: I love him with as much protest as I can muster.

She goes towards him, as if to embrace, then knees him in the groin; he collapses.

I make him cry.

FREDDIE: She makes me cry. My tears intrigue me.

LAPINSKI: He makes me cry. He stands outside my tears and sculpts meanings with them. He sings... *(She's heard this before)*

FREDDIE *(as they dance together):*

'In a fishing boat

When the light turned blue

You burgled me

Suddenly he picks her up, inverts her and dunks her head in the water:

And I burgled yooo-ooou.'

A brief flurry, then still.

LAPINSKI: The cold wars we rage on each other's skins... We are East and West looting each other.

She wriggles free from him, and they return to the fight.

Between us lies a wall. We declare an uneasy peace.

FREDDIE *(pursuing her):* War is more sexy.

LAPINSKI: We are afraid to make peace.

FREDDIE *(walking towards her like a matador, groin first):* We sharpen our weapons.

LAPINSKI: He prides himself on his.

The fight explodes, becomes quite savage now; eventually she knocks him to the floor, then jumps astride him and pins him down. She fixes him with her gaze.

If we were to make a peace treaty, to disarm, you would have to come to the conference table naked. And you are afraid of your nakedness.

FREDDIE: I am afraid of my nakedness.

Pause. She steps away. The 'war' is over, Freddie crumpled on the floor. They are together/apart, both staring out into different memories. Long pause.

I am thinking of my father.

LAPINSKI: I am thinking of his mother. She once told me she was 'merely alone, not abandoned'.



FREDDIE: I am thinking of my father.

LAPINSKI: So you fall in love with someone else to punish me.

FREDDIE: I have the body of Jesus Christ and the soul of Lenin. Are you going to crucify me then with a curl of your lips?

LAPINSKI (*very softly*): No. No, I am not.

Slowly and quietly, she removes her dress, and puts it on him.

I am going to abandon you...

She blows him a kiss as she moves slowly back out of the light, into the darkness. He reaches after her with his eyes, then starts to move after her. An abrupt change of light and the sudden sound of intense machine-gun fire. 'Freddie/Lapinski' tries to run, but trips and falls, 'shot' in a hail of bullets. The gunfire continues as the light cross-fades.

EPISODE 5: THE REVENGER (TRANSITIONAL EXCERPT)

The Revenger's briefcase comes flying into the space, with him following, shooting SAS-style and being shot, joyfully. He has red fishnet tights on his head (as a balaclava). SFX gunfire is massive: Freddie takes the 'bullets'. Then as the Revenger starts his story, the sound drops under.

REVENGER: I've bought myself a new toy. It's called 'The Revenger'. A compact disk that I slip into the dashboard of my Mitsubishi Starion whenever I feel like relaxing. Press the button, and you hear the sound of machine-gun fire as you crawl from red light to red light...

EPISODE 10: BLUE LAGOON - WHERE WERE YOU?

A montage of three images constructed in counterpoint, in different spaces, to Big Hard Excellent Fish's 'Imperfect List'.

In the water, Gemma the Banker lies on inflatable 'pool furniture', sunglasses, fully dressed, relaxing afloat in some imaginary tropical idyll. She appears to be asleep. A fully dressed and masked manservant appears out of the water with a 50s film noir phone for her, massages her feet as she talks on the phone, then is sent off for a drink with a gesture. Eventually he re-emerges from the water with an outrageous cocktail—then is 'drowned', exhausted, expendable. His body floats away as she sips.

At the same time, in a separate space, Krupskaya pushes a shopping trolley full of rough white sandstone blocks across our field of vision. She unloads the blocks, lays out a circular structure on the ground, dances in the dust she has generated; eventually she disrupts and destroys the circle, smashing some rocks together, cradling others tenderly, before loading the rocks back into the trolley and moving off into darkness again.

Meanwhile, Lapinski sits on the bridge by the water, smoking and drinking from a bottle, perhaps aware of both spaces.

The spoken lyrics to 'Imperfect List' are as follows:

Adolf Hitler—The dentist—'Terry and June'—Fucking bastard Thatcher—Scouse impersonators—Silly pathetic girly—Silly pathetic woman—Macho dickhead—Bonnie Langford—*Neighbours*—Lost keys—Phoney friend—Ungrateful accusing mates—The Royal Family—Stock, Aitken and Waterman—Smiling Judas—Half-raving lying friend—Myra Hindley—Acid rain—Stinking rich female in furs—Disloyal lover—Wife and child beater—Drunken abuser—Racist—Bully—*The Sun* newspaper—AIDS inventor—Leon Britten—All

nonsense—Massive massive oilslick—Jimmy Tarbuck—Loneliness—Cancer—Hunger—Greed—Gut-wrenching disappointment—Evil gossiping fashion bastard—Tasteless anile wanker—Hard cold fish—Overdraft like a mountain—*The Jimmy Swaggart Show*—The Tory invention of the non-working class—Poll tax—Commie bashers—Mr Jessie Helms—Hillsborough—Weird British judges—Apartheid—John Lennon's murder—Anyone's murder—The breakdown of the NHS—Death of the rainforest—Heysel Stadium—Rednecks—Rape—Homelessness—The all-American way—Clause 28—Tiananmen Square—Sexual harassment—Nelson Mandela's imprisonment—Nancy's turn—Ronny's turn—Miscarriage—Where were you?

(*Big Hard Excellent Fish, 'Imperfect List' by Josie Jones and Jake Walters, One Little Indian Records, 1990; reproduced with permission of MCPS, London*)

EPISODE 16: THE LION'S DREAM

Lapinski talks quietly with the spectators, as storyteller. As she speaks, gradually all of the other performers appear individually from the shadows, dispersed in space, looking on: one of them thigh deep in water at the mouth of the pupa; another hangs precariously from a balcony; another lurks in the dark recesses of the bridge/Meatbelt. They are all implicated in this moment of crisis, as the metaphors of zoo and urban 'underbelly' collide. An underlying soundscape suggests further blurring of industrial environments and zoo—metallic clankings, rasps, animal cries. The Poet listens from her cage in the water.

As Lapinski speaks, Seashells appears along the bridge, her hands ablaze—later we will find out how she has lost them at work, minced in the burger machine. During the story, she walks silently into the space like a somnambulist, staring at her hands, as if hypnotised by them.

LAPINSKI: The lion shuts his eyes. He dreams he is lying in the shade of an acacia tree. The sound of a piano from an invisible part of the city dips in and out of the pictures behind his eyes. To the lion, it is the wind. In his dream, he prowls over to a nearby water hole, only to find it is on fire. Fire over water... The smell of burning flesh wafts over the long bleached grasses. He opens his eyes. The grass has turned to cement.

Seashells is now at the water's edge, entranced, still staring at her hands. At the end of a sequenced gibbon cry, she hurls her flaming hands into the water and runs out. All of the others look on as the flames disappear with a hiss. Lapinski scatters a handful of seashells along the metal bridge; some ricochet and fall into the water. Animals mutter and call on the soundtrack, before the Poet performs a brief dance of metamorphosis; she is now a beached salmon, gasping for breath. Finally, she slithers into the water and disappears. Silence, stillness.

EPISODE 17: AND ALL FOR BABIES WITH BONE DISEASE

Lyrical piano music as the Revenger, in his suit, steps out of the preceding sequence. He splashes through the water with his briefcase and umbrella, bewildered and enraged, near the spot where the Poet has just disappeared.

REVENGER: What a cunt! When I told that Lapinski I am happy with who I am and what I've got, she told me I have 'no imagination'. No imagination? Well, when I see her walking to work, I see a different picture of her—lying face down on the pub floor with blood pumping from the holes in her back: just like one of those abstract sculptures I bet the cunt loves.

A besuited figure has appeared in the far background, on a side balcony; the face is hidden by a welding mask. The figure dances along the balcony in a blue corridor. The Revenger progressively shatters his umbrella, striking it against the metal claw, sounding alternating dissonant notes; he 'plays' it against the rising anxiety in his voice.

Who do they think they are? It's fucking unfair: I don't think patriots should get depressed. In fact I've got quite a lot of things to look forward to. When they privatise prisons and water, I'll be there for a slice of the cake.

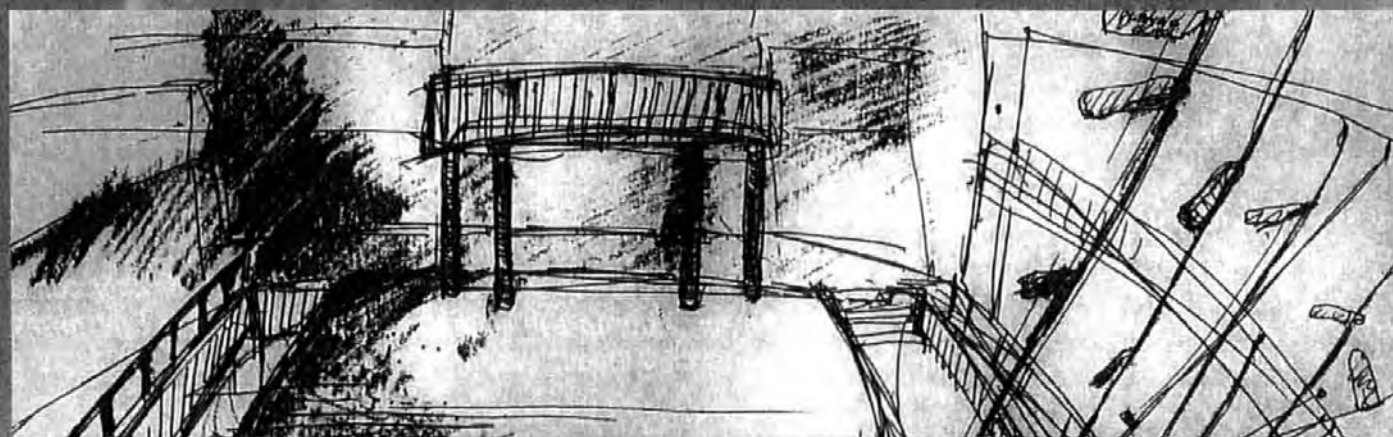
I want to be master of my own fuck-ups. I mean, look at my dad. That's him over there... A welder. Bust his gut eleven hours a day in the dark with fire and metal. Dreaming up songs about his life, stories about people he knew, thoughts and feelings that went through his head while he sweated and ached. Sang 'em in the pub, dressed in a suit the colour of granite. He was buried in that suit. Well I don't want to be a stone... There's too much fucking hurt in it, too many late night conversations about how to get by in it. Thoughts and feelings won't buy me a future. I prefer the winebar. In the city as long as you're bringing in the money, you can be a... a hamburger and no one will blink. It's what you're worth that matters.

The welder takes off the mask, stops, watches; it is Krupskaya, Lapinski's cat. The Revenger abandons the skeletal frame of his umbrella, takes a soggy piece of paper from his pocket, and holds it triumphantly aloft.

I got an invite to a charity ball to help raise money for a children's hospital. Tonight. They're raffling off a helicopter. If I win, I might just walk right into the blades of its propellor. If I don't, I'll just get rat-arsed on champagne, and watch the puffed chiffon of shimmering blondes ooze small clues to men in bow ties. And all for babies with bone disease.

I feel frightened and I don't know why. Last night I dreamt I got sucked into the telly.

Long quiet pause; then he's taken from beneath with a shout, as if by a crocodile. He thrashes around briefly, then stillness as he swims away under the water. He has disappeared into a vacuum, only his case is left.



EPISODE 21: ZOO APOCALYPSE

Music: God, 'Hate Meditation'

Gemma the Banker runs in with petrol cans, splashes and empties them throughout the space, then repeatedly goes off for more. Eventually, chest heaving, she comes in quietly with two flaming torches. Still point. Standing in the water, she dances slowly with them, one in each hand: like Kali or Shiva Nataraja, dancing destruction. Then she torches the Zoo. The cage bursts into flames; the bridge drips ignited fuel into the water; fire dances on two submerged metal drums; the canvas flags trail plumes of black smoke in the breeze...

An explosion of animal shrieks, smashing glass, angular/jagged percussive sounds, chaos in the shadows around the immobile, entranced Gemma. The others come into the firelight. Animal actions slip in and out of a choreography of human fear and pain. Light and flame project writhing, bloated shadows onto the walls, animating the entire space. Then, as the sound fades to an underlying drum loop, a cacophony of voices in different spaces comes in, describing the apocalyptic carnage: sometimes the performers are 'characters', sometimes unnamed witnesses.

Their voices overlap, as each of the performers tells fragmented versions of these narratives to sections of the audience in different locations: some dispassionate, some horrified, some pleased, lugubrious, turned on by the spectacle they describe. They tell their stories as if after the event, yet they are subsumed in its rapturous present.

The Banker has taken the unquenchable fire within her to the zoo. Her desire is to destroy, and it is hard to break desire. Even the Poet cannot do it. She tries desperately to become water, earth, sawdust, stone, but this is not enough... The zoo becomes a museum of murmuring, lit up by a thousand eyes.

— Birds spread their wings of fire and try to fly, but there is nowhere to fly to. They die in balls of flame in mid-air, colliding into each other, scattering feathers and seeds.

— A rhinoceros also attempts to fly, but there is nowhere to fly to. He digs his horn into the earth so that his body is in the air for one miraculous second, until the horn breaks, and he becomes a putrid hulk, a smouldering monster pointing its broken ivory stub at an invisible moon.

— A giraffe becomes a tower of flames, which collapses into itself: ankles broken, tongue hanging out, the seven bones of its neck bowing down, one by one, curving into the earth.

— The folds of the elephant's skin crumple as the rings of time within it burn. Some roll on their backs in the mud to put out the flames.

— There is nothing left of the chief gorilla except his liver, which lies burning on the floor of the cage, like some smoke sacrifice to a wayward god.

— The Poet imagines she can see three of the elephants sprout wings and begin their long journey back to the rivers and red dust of India.

— The lion sees the strange sight of fire over water, and roars into the dream he once had, under the acacia tree.

— In the aquarium the tanks shatter, and the fish who took so many years to fly jump straight into the flames.

— Sting rays spew out poison and writhe in flames that burn purple and black. The spotted piranha sizzles in its own oil.

— Fish with eggs in their mouths drop them into the flames. A cluster of tiny scaly stars.

— The last of the elephants roll on his back, legs in the air. There is so much of him to burn...

The chaotic sounds re-emerge—this time with sirens, helicopters. The Revenger pulls his head back and smashes it repeatedly on the lip of the stage, then careers through the space—he watches in shrill horror as his body is 'danced' by a contorted fascist stomp. The rhythms of drums, iron, collapsing concrete and slaughter merge with the chopper overhead. Dazed and excited, Freddie approaches the triumphant Gemma through the water. Finally, only the helicopter sound, pulsing.

EPISODE 24: THIS DOES NOT EXIST

The final sequence in the performance. Lapinski drops to her knees and quietly 'gives birth' to parts of her narratives. She takes various objects out of a bag, then lays them out on the floor at the water's edge—traces of a 'map' of her world: a handful of seashells; a rose; her mother's red shoe; a pair of red tights; some dried flowers (baby's breath); some white feathers. Meanwhile, in another space, Felicity also makes a kind of 'map'—a sculptural account of some of these narratives, arranging other objects from the performance around the metal cage, still smouldering in the water: a red cloth; a clear plastic sheet; a smashed umbrella; some sandstone rocks.

LAPINSKI (*laying out baby's breath*): I once dreamt I was Marie Antoinette. My bouffant of white cotton-wool hair was tangled with barbed wire and birds; soldiers shot puffs of smoke out of my curls. (*Scatters seashells*) I wore mirrored sunglasses, and my lips were as red as glace cherries. There was a huge cake on a silver trolley in front of me, iced with a map of the world. (*Rose*) I asked passers-by if they would like a piece of cake, and if so, which part of the world they would like me to slice up. (*Red shoe*) They pondered and pointed at small islands, whole continents, dictatorships, democracies, deserts, rain forests, arts festivals. (*Red tights*) And I put their portion of the world onto a banking slip with 'EAT CAKE' in the little box that says 'account number'...

After a pause, she tosses a handful of feathers in the air over the map she has laid out. As they fall:

But as you know, this does not exist...

As thousands more feathers drop out of the sky over the pool, a helicopter sound that has been underlying returns, very loud now; a glaring follow spot/searchlight starts to pick its way across the space. All of the other performers are in the pool—animated shadows, avoiding the light. It seems as though the helicopter is hovering right overhead in the night sky. Then, with the rotor sound filling the space, a moment of stillness as all those in the pool gather huddled together, like shipwreck victims, staring up at the 'helicopter'—caught in its beam; then as one they dissolve into the water. As they disappear, the sound sputters and breaks up, as if the engine has failed; it plummets, and is sucked into a shrill vacuum. The last tiny sounds we hear are of the fizz on a glass of champagne, then some echoing water droplets in the distance.

Lapinski is alone, looking into the pool, the space of her memories. The pool is still. Overhead, the feathers float and soar on thermal updrafts.

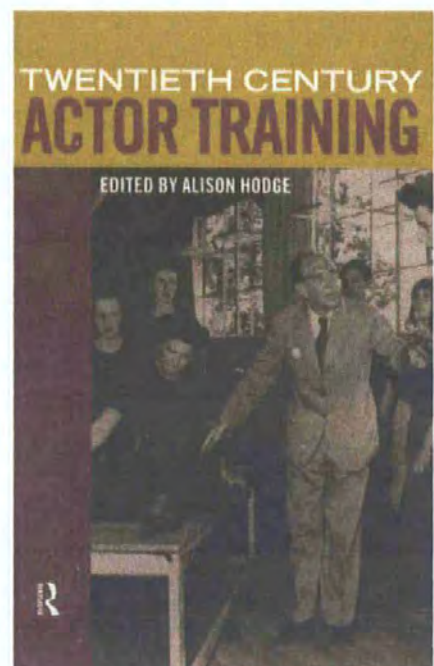


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9 Peter Brook

Transparency and the invisible network

Lorna Marshall and David Williams

Our primary concern in this chapter is to outline the evolution of Peter Brook's ideas on the preparation of actors. Our particular focus is the development of two interrelated qualities that are prerequisites for performers in his own company: a state of openness and immediacy he calls 'transparency'; and a state of connectedness and responsiveness he calls 'the invisible network'. As we shall see, both of these qualities are conceived and explored on internal and external levels. Indeed, like self and other, actor and character, performers and audience, for Brook inner movement and external action must always be in a dynamic relationship of exchange.

Context

Peter Brook's extraordinarily productive career as a director spans the half-century since the end of the Second World War, and includes over seventy theatre and opera productions and a dozen films. It will be useful in this context to divide his extensive body of work into three periods, despite the fact that such historiographic 'dismemberings' will inevitably be simplifications.

The first phase (1945–63) covers the years of Brook's professional apprenticeship in a wide range of performance contexts, forms and styles. At the age of twenty-two, he was already a director at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden; and by 1963, when Brook was thirty-eight, he had directed over forty productions, including nine Shakespeare plays and seven major operas. Landmark productions included a luminous *Love's Labour's Lost* for the Royal Shakespeare Company (1946), an explosive reworking of Strauss's *Salomé* (1949) designed by Salvador Dali, a startling *Titus Andronicus* (1955) with Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh, and an elemental, absurdist *King Lear* (1962) with Paul Scofield.

Although he was known primarily as a director of classical theatre, Brook also juggled productions of major twentieth-century European playwrights (Cocteau, Sartre, Anouilh, Genet, Dürrenmatt) and works by seminal modernists (including Eliot and Miller), plus overtly commercial projects – boulevard comedies, musicals and television drama. Brook's trajectory

reflects his deliberate immersion in a contradictory array of experiences, seeking to find a complex, composite reality through the exploration of opposites. In retrospect, he has referred to this period as 'a theatre of images', informed by an escapist aesthetic of illusionist decoration and artifice – a theatre in which the world of the stage was wholly separated from that of spectators, and where the director's 'vision' was omnipotent.

The second phase (1964–70) constituted a period of reappraisal, maturation and proactive research. Brook was becoming increasingly disaffected with the existing processes and forms of much contemporary theatre – a short-sighted, convention-bound theatre he stigmatised as 'deadly' (Brook 1968: 11–46). In his search for theatre languages that could more accurately reflect contemporary reality, he questioned the theatrical *status quo* at every level. Rejecting ossified ('deadly') processes, he returned to core constitutive questions:

Theatres, actors, critics and public are interlocked in a machine that creaks but never stops. There is always a new season in hand and we are too busy to ask the only vital question which measures the whole structure. Why theatre at all? What for? Is it an anachronism, a superannuated oddity, surviving like an old monument or a quaint custom? Why do we applaud, and what? Has the stage a real place in our lives? What function can it have? What could it serve? What could it explore? What are its special qualities?

(Brook 1968: 44)

This period of work reached fruition in a remarkable series of productions Brook has characterised as a 'theatre of disturbance' (see, for example, Trewin 1971: 199). An explicit shift in his concerns and processes became evident in an experimental project conducted under the aegis of the Royal Shakespeare Company, with a group co-directed with Charles Marowitz. Public 'work-in-progress' showings of this early, tentative research in 1964 were entitled the 'Theatre of Cruelty' in homage to Antonin Artaud. The culmination of this research occurred with the celebrated production of Peter Weiss's *Marat/Sade* (1964), a collectively devised response to the Vietnam War ambiguously entitled *US* (1966), and a choral, ritualised *Oedipus* (1968) in an abrasive new version by the poet Ted Hughes.

This transitional phase was also characterised by a growing awareness of the importance of the actor within an ensemble. The creativity of actors would be instrumental in challenging the complacency of prevalent practices and creative hierarchies, as well as finding theatrical forms as multifaceted as Shakespeare's. Brook took Elizabethan dramaturgy as his model; he particularly admired its shifts of gear in the mix of comedy and tragedy, its vivid language, and the directness of its forms. Shakespeare was his prototype for a conflation of the 'rough' and the 'holy' into a textured totality he called the 'immediate'.¹ This area of Brook's research reached its

apogee with his swansong with the RSC, a joyously airborne production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1970), which radically dismantled received ideas of the play. In this work, Brook and his group of actor-acrobats created a counter-image to the harrowing, confrontational tenor of the earlier work of this period with a bright circus-inflected celebration reuniting stage and auditorium.

In retrospect, the 1960s marked a period of significant development for Brook in terms of his conception of the training of actors. He used detailed exploration of improvisatory techniques to dislodge actors from reductive psychological behaviourism, and, as they began to tap other energies, Brook was able to recognise their creative primacy: 'It takes a long while for a director to cease thinking in terms of the result he desires and instead concentrate on discovering the source of energy in the actor from which true impulses can arise' (Brook 1998: 83).

Brook's goal, to amplify actors' capacities as instruments responsive to all the sources of the creative process, has been pursued and refined by him to the present day. Eventually, it took him from the restrictive working conditions in commercial theatre in England, and led him to a new base in France.

The third phase comprises Brook's work since 1970 with his international group in Paris, the International Centre for Theatre Research (CIRT). Its focus has ranged from private research behind closed doors, to explorations of theatrical communication in the field (on journeys to Iran, Africa and the USA), to recent forays into the fantastic inner landscapes of neurological disorders for the production of *The Man Who* (1993). Core projects have included *Orghast* (1971) in the tombs of Persepolis, Iran; *Timon of Athens* (1974); adaptations of Colin Turnbull's anthropological study of the demise of a Ugandan tribe *The Ik* (1975–6); a presentation of a twelfth-century Sufi poem *Conference of the Birds* (1979); *La Tragédie de Carmen* (1981); a nine-hour version of the Hindu epic *The Mahabharata* (1985–8); and a spartan staging of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1990) with the African actor Sorigui Kouyaté as Prospero.²

So, after almost three decades with his own company, what are the qualities Brook most admires and requires in his actor-collaborators? And what are the recurrent impulses and characteristics of the performances they have made together?

Briefly, all of Brook's work with the CIRT has been marked by continuing attention to the following ideals:

- 1 The development of actors with a capacity to articulate the trajectories of inner impulses, conveying these impulses in external forms with clarity and immediacy – 'transparency' (Brook 1998: 224) – and the search for a charged simplicity and economy in those forms, a 'distillation' (ibid.).

- 2 The actor as a primary creative source in an ensemble conceived as a 'storyteller with many heads' (ibid.: 197) – a team of players. Therefore actors need to be open, complicitous and responsive to the requirements of an embodied transform-ability Brook has called 'lightness'.³
- 3 The extreme pragmatism of improvisation as the key to the preparation of performers. Related to this, the importance of direct experiences of differing performance conditions and audiences. Work-in-progress is often presented in unconventional spaces to unfamiliar audiences (in schools, hospitals, prisons etc.). Such experiences aim to unsettle actors' habitual responses and open them up to different energies and qualities of exchange.
- 4 The absolute necessity for structure, and the conviction that forms can engender freedom for actors. Structure and play are seen as counterbalancing elements, interwoven supports for each other.
- 5 Research as 'self-research'; a process of evolution and individual development in which theatre serves as potent site and means, but rarely as the exclusive end. In other words, theatre as a means to go beyond theatre – theatre-making as the site for what James Hillman has called 'soul-making'.
- 6 The act of theatre as affirmative 're-membering' (Brook 1998: 225), in which a mythical narrative or fable is actualised here and now: 'reuniting the community, in all its diversity, within the same shared experience' (Brook 1978: 7).

Ultimately, all of Brook's work with the Centre at its base at the Bouffes du Nord theatre in Paris has been driven by the desire to discover what makes theatre 'immediate' (or 'un-deadly'). His diverse training exercises and rehearsal methods have been developed and endlessly reinvented to support and realise this desire. When examining Brook's work, it is essential to understand its open-endedness; he has no single form or style in mind, no pre-conceived vision of a desirable end product. Moreover, he has often reiterated the instability of the relationship between surface forms and the underlying processes and impulses that 'in-form' them: in other words, between 'means' and 'meanings'.

He suggests that all of his theatre productions possess two distinct, if closely interrelated, aspects. First, the external *mise-en-scène* is comprised of contextually determined forms emerging from the performance's physical conditions. Second, beneath these specific patterns of images, no more than tips of invisible icebergs, lies what he terms 'the hidden production': 'an *invisible network* of relationships' that can give rise to other forms and patterns without forfeiting a work's 'essential meaning' (Brook 1998: 151–2). In this context, it may be fruitful to view Brook's preparation of actors through the lens of this metaphor – as a collaborative 'weaving' of an 'invisible network' that feeds, generates and energises all aspects of theatrical communication.

Exercises

Preparation

Given the importance of actors' processes in Brook's work, appropriate training is evidently essential. However, 'preparation' is a more useful term than 'training' when considering the Centre's approach. Brook is not engaged in developing the skills of the actor from the ground up, of 'forming' actors for his own particular style of work. In general, Brook's actors come to the company with a distinguished track record. Most have had years of training within a particular theatre culture – in Japanese Noh, Balinese Topeng, African storytelling and dance, English or Polish classical theatre, and so on; and all have performed extensively in a variety of contexts. By most standards, they are already 'fully trained'. Their bodies, emotions and voices have already learned how to respond to the demands of different kinds of theatre-making.

At the same time, all of the CIRT's projects include an element of physical and vocal work geared towards further extending the actors' technical skills. Sometimes this takes the form of training in particular styles of physical or vocal work (for example, Tai Chi). At other times the approach is less familiar. During the Centre's early research, Brook often arranged contact with groups with particular perceptual abilities – for example, deaf practitioners (such as the American Theatre of the Deaf) and deaf audiences, who were usually children. Interaction with their amplified tactile and visual sensibilities was perceived to be as informative as any other more conventional 'specialist' training – perhaps even more so. In addition, performers in particular projects are exposed to appropriate training regimes under the direction of specialists within the group. For example, the CIRT performer Alain Maratrat passed on his extensive knowledge of south-east Asian martial arts to the *Mahabharata* company, as did practitioners of certain South Indian forms (such as Kathakali and Kalarippayattu).

However, the main thrust of Brook's 'training' lies in another direction. Through the preparatory work, the actors encounter the absolute imperative for responsiveness, openness, and the ability to operate as team-players within the group. Their earlier training is useful in terms of the depth of theatrical experience it can afford, and of the self-discipline required for a profession that is an ongoing process of learning to learn. But with Brook they are invited to work beyond or beneath enculturated theatrical conventions, whether it be the 'psychological truths' of Western naturalism or the codified gestures of Asian forms. Brook's processes resemble the *via negativa* of Grotowski; they necessitate an un-learning, a peeling away of habit and the known in favour of the potential and the 'essential'.

Brook's ideal actor has moved beyond ego-driven virtuosity to a kind of psycho-somatic integration that he calls 'transparency'. Alive and present in every molecule of their being, they have 'the capacity to listen through the

body to codes and impulses that are hidden all the time at the root of cultural forms' (1998: 167). At the moment of transparency, as in certain kinds of possession in which consciousness does not disappear, actors become a site or conduit for the manifestation of the 'spirit' or 'life' of words, song, dance – a 'life' that Brook believes exists beneath theatrical forms. At the point of transparency, *it* speaks/sings/dances them. Thus, actors need to become

instruments that transmit truths which otherwise would remain out of sight. These truths can appear from sources deep within ourselves or far outside ourselves. Any preparation we do is only part of the complete preparation. The body must be ready and sensitive, but that isn't all. The voice has to be open and free. The emotions have to be open and free. The intelligence has to be quick. All of these have to be prepared. There are crude vibrations that can come through very easily and fine ones that come through only with difficulty. In each case the life we are looking for means breaking open a series of habits. A habit of speaking; maybe a habit made by an entire language.

(Brook 1987: 107)

It is with such a goal in mind that, for example, Brook invited the internationally renowned Feldenkrais teacher Monika Pagneux to prepare the young cast of his *Don Giovanni* in Aix-en-Provence (1998) – to unsettle received *bel canto* habits, to stimulate individual and collective dexterity and economy and to encourage a fluid openness and integration.

The starting point for Brook's training is responsiveness: the ability to sense and play with, and off, material in a simple, direct way. This 'material' can be impulses arising within the actor or suggested externally, in the relationship with another performer or performers, or in elements of the text itself. Performers are encouraged to develop and exercise a tripartite attentiveness: to inner impulses, to fellow performers and to the space. For Brook, initially such 'respons-ability' is developed physically through the body and its intuitive intelligence, rather than intellectually through analysis or discussion. His preparation of actors realigns the assumed relationship of mind and body in Western cultures, reversing the conventional Cartesian hierarchy and traditional point of access to 'meaning':

It is always a mistake for actors to begin their work with intellectual discussion, as the rational mind is not nearly as potent an instrument of discovery as the more secret faculties of intuition. The possibility of intuitive understanding through the body is stimulated and developed in many different ways. If this happens, within the same day there can be moments of repose when the mind can peacefully play its true role. Only then will analysis and discussion of the text find their natural place.

(Brook 1993: 108)

Although the body is initially privileged as mediator of experience and storehouse of knowledges, the ultimate ideal is an actor who has developed to the point where all available channels – those of the body, the intellect, and the emotional faculties – are open, interconnected and active (Brook 1987: 232). Research and training thus constitute a 'clearing of paths' (Brook 1973). As in Gurdjieff's system of 'harmonious development', to which Brook's work is indebted, personal evolution stems from simultaneous work on the three core centres of body, thought and feelings. Once this internal network of relationships is active, it permits openings and connections to others, the wider 'network of relationships' that Brook refers to above.

In *There Are No Secrets*, Brook describes the preparatory process for *The Tempest*. The group began by withdrawing from its familiar base in Paris, and moving to a secluded rehearsal space in the cloisters of a former monastery in Avignon. Scripts of the play were ignored completely for the



Figure 9.1 Stick exercise with the American Theater of the Deaf, Paris, 1971

Source: Photo, CICT

Note: The sticks externalise and amplify personal impulses which harmonise as a collective impulse when individuals 'listen' to the group. At such moments, transparency and connection intersect.

first ten days, as the actors prepared their bodies and voices through group games and improvisations whose sole purpose was 'to develop quick responsiveness, a hand, ear and eye contact, a shared awareness that is easily lost and has to be constantly renewed, to bring together the separate individuals into a sensitive, vibrant team' (Brook 1993: 107).

Such activities are not warm-ups before performers turn to the 'real' task of acting, as is often the case in contemporary theatre. Instead, they are oriented towards amplifying spontaneity, responsiveness and complicity, whilst exercising the 'muscles' of intuition and the imagination.

In practice, these activities take many different forms: leader/led 'conversations' between actors involving physical and/or vocal exchange; collective exercises in rhythm, polyrhythm and counterpoint, of both auditory and spatial kinds; choral work in which individual actions feed and sustain collective images; and improvisatory play focused around simple objects – balls, cloths, doors, boxes, sticks. Brook compares this kind of preparatory work to the training of a sports team: 'only an acting team must go farther; not only the bodies, but the thoughts and feelings must all come into play and stay in tune' (ibid.).

'Tuning' here is a musical or orchestral metaphor. It represents a quality of listening and interaction in which the personal (individual instruments) needs to serve the supra-personal (the orchestral collective). Paradoxically the recognition of the primacy of the whole over its individual parts – the team over the player – can enable a deeper 'individuality' and sense of self to flourish in 'the projection of a collective imagination far richer than our own' (Brook 1998: 183).

In *The Invisible Actor*, Yoshi Oida describes one of the many exercises that invite heightened attention to the circulation of energies underpinning the 'invisible networks of relationships'. Two people exchange a conversation using only the actions of one hand. Each person 'listens' to physical impulses offered by the other, and responds to them, in a direct and immediate way using their own hand. Oida is at pains to point out that these puppeted hand languages should not be referential, like a code to be deciphered 'like sign language or a game of charades':

Instead, you try to concentrate your whole existence into that one hand. It is a kind of strange animal, communicating to another equally strange animal. When you find the genuine life of this creature, and it is able to develop a real and varied relationship with the other animal, it is fascinating to watch.

(Oida 1997: 75–6)

The aim is to condense the full sensitivity and expressivity of the body into one isolated part. Oida suggests that the quality of deep attention brought to bear in such seemingly banal interactions is crucial. When a connection is established, the space between the two hands is animated in a kind of small,

energised dance of relatedness. Here 'drama' is generated via the combustion of contact between two 'life forms', their particular qualities amplified because they are reduced and distilled:

What is interesting is the exchange. The 'acting' doesn't reside in the hand of each actor; it exists in the air between the two hands. This kind of acting is not narrative, not psychology, not emotion, but something else, something more basic. It is very difficult to describe exactly what it is.

(Oida 1997: 76)

On a micro level, therefore, this exercise represents a provocation to concentration (inward towards one's own hand) and openness (outward towards the other's hand). At the same time, it reflects the quality of exchange desired on a macro level within the company as a whole, and ultimately with those present as spectators. The network links the actor to self, to partner, to ensemble, to audience.

It is important to note that all such exercises can, and should, be re-made for particular contexts. The exchange could be exclusively vocal, such as improvised responses to the sounds of an existing text; or it could involve any parts of the body, with or without voice. There is no stable vocabulary of exercises, no immutable 'box of tricks'. What is central here is the *exchange* and its subtle repercussions – the pleasure of the changes it instigates:

You have to work at a level deeper than that of the intellect. As a result, each time you 'exchange', something inside you changes in reaction. From moment to moment you alter and respond. In this way, as the sounds and movements are exchanged, your inner being constantly shifts.

(Oida 1997: 78–9)

Responding to text

Once the sense of an ensemble has begun to be established, and individual 'instruments' are 'tuned' and able to 'play' in relation to each other, then the group turns to language. Often tied to habitual responses, words can enforce the 'deadly' and impede an immediacy of communication. Brook's preparation of actors includes a re-examination of all aspects of their use of language.

Like other external stimuli employed to provoke internal responses, texts are initially treated as materials to be explored and 'understood' physically and emotionally, rather than intellectually in terms of their surface content and meaning. In this context, the kind of responsiveness Brook seeks in his actors has little to do with intellectual understanding *per se*, or even with the ability to establish personal emotional identification with the words in ques-

tion. It is something more fundamental, like glimpsing the particular topography of a world or landscape. Brook's discourse in this context often describes patient and sensitive physiological discovery. He has talked, for example, of the voice as a mountain with many caves that the actor needs to explore, or of the imperative to treat a new word like a blind man finding a butterfly (Smith 1972: 76, 130).

As with any existing cultural formation or expression, Brook wants his actors to disinter elements underlying language through a sensitisation to its deeper resonances. The actors are invited to taste the textures and qualities of energy – the 'music' – underpinning its particular forms and to listen to the ways in which this 'music' impacts on their inner landscapes. To return to Brook's description of preparation for *The Tempest*:

After a few days our study included words, single words, then clusters of words and then eventually isolated phrases in English and French to try and make real for everyone, including the translator, the special nature of Shakespearean writing.

(Brook 1993: 108)

Indeed Brook believes that it is possible to respond with integrity to a given text even when the actor cannot understand the referential meanings of the words. In the early 1970s, this belief was the axis of the language work which culminated in the performance of *Orghast* at Persepolis. Brook describes his multicultural group's imperative to side-step the assumed consensus of an existing shared language:

The theme of the first year's work of the International Centre of Theatre Research was to be a study of the structures of sounds. Our aim was to discover more fully what constitutes living expression. To do this, we needed to work outside the basic system of communication of theatres, we had to lay aside the principle of communication through shared words, shared signs, shared references, shared languages, shared slang, shared cultural or subcultural imagery.

(Brook 1987: 108)

In preparation for *Orghast*, the actors initially experimented with the sound qualities of swear words, but soon moved on to the creation of their own language constructed from an accumulation of simple sounds. Oida explains:

We took words from various languages and jumbled them up together to create interesting sounds, e.g. 'Bashtra hondo stoflock madai zutto'. We had to create a meaning for this phrase according to the situation that was being improvised. Working with a partner (who obviously didn't know the literal sense of your words), you had to communicate

what you wanted to say through your uses of intonations and clarity of intention. We worked a great deal in this created language...

(Oida 1992: 47)

Subsequently, they experimented with 'dead' languages that had once communicated specific meanings through words and grammar, but that were unknown to all of the actors in the group. One exercise involved Ancient Greek, a language in which the meanings of words are known to scholars, whilst their precise articulation in speech still remains the subject of conjecture. Brook describes how a passage of Ancient Greek was given to the actors as a single unbroken unit, without any of its usual verbal or compositional divisions. Like any newly encountered word, this 'nugget of "unknowingness"' (Brook 1998: 168) had to be explored for its musical potential: 'It was not divided into verses, nor even into separate words; it was just a long series of letters, as in the earliest manuscripts. The actor was confronted with a fragment: ELELEUELELEUUPOMAUSFAKELOSKAIFREE-NOPLEGEIS' (Brook 1987: 108).

The actors were invited to approach this fragment 'like an archaeologist, stumbling over an unknown object in the sand' (Brook 1987: 108), deciphering its deeper layers by means of their own intuitive sensitivities and 'knowledges':

The actor's truly scientific tool is an inordinately developed emotional faculty with which he learns to apprehend certain truths, to discriminate between real and false. It was this capacity that the actor brought into play, tasting the Greek letters on the tongue, scanning them with his sensibility. Gradually the rhythms hidden in the flow of letters began to reveal themselves, gradually the latent tides of emotion swelled up and shaped the phrases until the actor found himself speaking them with increasing force and conviction. Eventually every actor found it possible to play the words with a deeper and richer sense of meaning than if he had known what they were meant to say.

(1987: 108)

Once again, Brook's linguistic model is musical: a communicative medium of the senses in which means and meaning are indissolubly interwoven. For Brook, such music represents an untranslatable language sufficient unto itself: pre-intellectual, emotional, physically rooted, and potentially trans-cultural.

Insideloutside

Brook has endeavoured to illustrate key elements of his perspectives on acting processes with reference to a familiar shorthand: acting as from the 'inside-out', and from the 'outside-in'. Although these two terms are often

used to describe two mutually exclusive approaches to creativity in acting, for Brook they are complementary and inseparable.

In the early 1990s, during a public forum on the Centre's work, he invited those present to enact and experience these different, but inter-related, approaches in a simple and direct manner. First of all, they were asked to respond to their own internal impulses in an external action:

Make a movement with your right arm, allow it to go anywhere, really anywhere, without thinking. When I give the signal, let it go, then stop the movement. Go! Now hold the gesture just where it is, don't change or improve it, only try to feel what it is that you are expressing. Recognise that some sort of impression cannot fail to emanate from the attitude of your body. I look at all of you, and although you did not attempt to 'tell' anything, to try to 'say' anything, you just let your arm go where it wished, yet each of you is expressing something.

(Brook 1993: 68)

A movement is triggered without conscious intellectual volition or compositional shaping; although it is of course in some sense 'chosen' by the individual participants, for they are its origin and site. Once this movement has been arrested at an externally determined point, participants are encouraged to explore this attitude; they are invited to 'taste' its expressive particularity and informational resonances and associations, as if it were a film still they temporarily inhabit. No gesture will be neutral or void, Brook suggests, for each one represents an 'attitude' in both senses of the word – a 'dis-position'. Each can be read in many different ways from both the inside and externally.

Brook then proposes something slightly different using exactly the same starting point, an unpremeditated arm movement stopped at a particular moment:

Now hold the attitude just where it happens to be and try, without modifying your position, to feel a relationship between the hand, the arm, the shoulder, up to the muscles of the eye. Feel that it all has a meaning. Now allow the gesture to develop, to become more complete through a minimal movement, just a small adjustment. Feel in this minute change, something transformed itself in the totality of your body, and the complete attitude becomes more unified and expressive.

(Brook 1993: 68)

Here the emphasis is on sensing relations between the parts and a whole, physically and then cognitively. The endeavour to transform an accidental attitude into a form that has 'meaning', through minimal adjustment, engages the will and imagination. The perspective used in

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this compositional refining is sensory and internal; at the moment 'meaning' comes into being, 'inside' modifies 'outside'.

At this point, Brook returns to the beginning of the exercise, once again shifting its parameters:

Instead of making a movement that is your own, take a movement that I give you; place your hand, open, in front of you, the palm facing the outside. You do not do this because you feel you want to, but because I'm asking you to, and you are prepared to go along with me without yet knowing where this will lead. So welcome to the opposite of improvisation: earlier you made a gesture of your own choice, now you are doing one that is imposed. Accept doing this gesture without asking yourselves 'What does it mean?' in an intellectual and analytical manner, otherwise you will remain on the outside. Try to feel what it provokes in you.

(Brook 1993: 69)

Here the physical attitude is defined from the outside, then projected inwards. Participants are invited to 'listen' and experience the inner associations thus triggered, without trying to decipher or impose conceptual signification; so 'outside' refashions 'inside'. However, once it has been allowed to resonate, and is both 'heard' and accepted, a fresh imaginal response arises within the actor, which in turn informs the external physical attitude. As Brook explains, this bridging of inner and outer constitutes a moment of openness in which energy circulates freely – in other words, a moment of transparency:

Something is given to you from the exterior, which is different from the free movement you made previously, and yet if you assume it totally, it is the same thing, it has become yours and you have become its. ... The true actor recognises that real freedom occurs at the moment when what comes from the outside and what is brought from within make a perfect blending.

(Brook 1993: 69)

Perception and reception now become active and creative, rather than passive. Inner/outer, subject/object and structure/freedom are now in dynamic coexistence, rather than being mutually exclusive (as they are so often assumed to be). Whereas a great deal of conventional acting is constituted by adding gesture to feeling, or vice versa, Brook looks for a state of responsive connectedness where feeling and gesture are indivisible and synonymous. If acting comprises the process of making the 'invisible' visible, the exchange between inside and outside needs to be two-way and continuous.

Production

The desired confusion of inner and outer, invisible and visible, is one of the cornerstones of Brook's preparation of actors from the *Marat/Sade* to *The Man Who*. For example, during an intensive study period in the preparation of *The Ik*, members of the group copied the postures of members of the Ik tribe, as recorded in documentary photographs. These postures were re-created in painstaking detail, with the actor 'listening' to information provided by the physical form. Whilst others observed and corrected, the actor would then improvise the action or movement immediately preceding or following the instant captured in the photograph. Through this highly disciplined form of 'outside-in' improvisation, where the precise still-point of a photograph would be passed through as if it were one frame in a continuum, actors were able to access internal responses and echoes outside the limitations of personal biographical experience. As Brook remarks:

This was a far cry from what is usually understood by 'free improvisation'. We found it enabled European, American, Japanese, African actors to understand something quite directly about playing starving people, a physical condition none of us has ever experienced and therefore cannot reach by imagination or memory.

(Brook 1987: 135)

For the production of *Conference of the Birds*, on the other hand, the group worked with Balinese Topeng masks to facilitate a storytelling transformability that reflected the fable's rapid shifts in reality. Brook viewed these particular masks as objective, archetypal manifestations of essential types which would help actors clarify and crystallise their own impulses. Extending their earlier study of the physiological attitudes of the Ik, the actors scrutinised and manipulated the masks at arm's length (like Balinese performers); then, at the moment of putting masks on, they would modify their own facial expression in the direction of the mask's physiognomy. In this way, actors aimed to make intimate skin contact with 'the face of a very strong, essential type' (Brook 1981: 63). Paradoxically Brook conceives of such masks as 'anti'-masks that *uncover*, offering 'a soul-portrait, a photo of what you rarely see...an outer casing that is a complete and sensitive reflection of the inner life' (1987: 62). Potentially these masks – like all such external stimuli employed to provoke internal movement – are both transformative agents of understanding for their wearers and 'lie-detectors' amplifying dissonances in circuits and flows:

A mask is two-way traffic all the time; it sends a message in, and projects a message out. It operates by the law of echoes; if the echo-chamber is perfect, the sound going in and the one going out are

reflections; there is a perfect relation between the echo-chamber and the sound; but if it isn't, it's like a distorted mirror.

(1987: 63)

Similar processes were employed in preparing the production of *The Man Who*. Through first-hand observation of, and contact with, patients in a Parisian hospital, the small, collaborative team involved in the project evolved detailed physiological impressions of the symptoms of particular neurological conditions. By imitating in detail the external forms of internal states, the actors' imaginations were activated. Recently, Brook has described a moment in the production's first public run-through that seems an apt summation of our discussion of certain core components in Brook's practice: inside/outside, transparency, distillation, immediacy, the invisible network:

There came a moment when I felt we had found a link with what we had attempted in Africa when we had first put a pair of shoes on the carpet in front of the audience to establish a common ground. In *The Man Who*, the pair of shoes was replaced by a table, a candle and a box of matches. Yoshi Oida came to the table, lit the candle with special concentration and then for a long time gazed intently at the flame. Then he blew it out, took another match, lit the candle and blew it out again. As he started once more, I could feel the tension in the audience increasing. The audience could read into the simple actions far more than they apparently expressed;...it understood directly what was going on.

(Brook 1998: 223-4)

Finally, let us return to the notion of the actor as 'team-player'. We have already seen how part of the actor's preparation focuses on amplifying sensitivity towards fellow actors. This 'tuning' in turn supports their ability to meet what is required of them in an ensemble of storytellers. Yoshi Oida uses Brook's sporting metaphor to describe collectivist ethics and practices of storytelling in *The Mahabharata*:

As in *Conference of the Birds*, we were a team of storytellers...[Brook] used the image of football to help us understand what he wanted. As if the play were a game of football, there were twenty-two team members and one ball, the ball being the story. Since we were all on the same team, it didn't matter who played which part, or if you changed characters in the middle. Together we told one story, keeping one ball in play. In order to continue telling the story, you had to be ready to pick up the ball when your scenes arrived.

(Oida 1992: 172)⁴



Figure 9.2 *Le Mababharata* at the Bouffes du Nord, Paris, 1985

Source: Photo, Michel Dieuzaide

Note: An archery contest. Bamboo sticks are used to suggest weapons and to construct a dynamically layered space. The actor-storytellers aim to produce an energised depth of field, rather than an absolute uniformity.

However, the imperative to 'pick up the ball' goes beyond training, rehearsal and even onstage performance. Oida has also described how actors did not stay in their dressing rooms during performances of the *Mababharata*. Instead, they would stand in the wings, watching and listening to the way in which a sequence was unfolding prior to their entrance. In this way, they could sense how to adapt their entrance and performance in order to keep the 'ball' in play (Oida 1992: 173). So the necessity for connection to the 'invisible network' even affected actors' behaviour offstage.

Therefore, one can see how the notion of a dynamic relationship between the inside and the outside ('transparency') manifests itself at many different levels of the creative process – from a sensitising of the individual actors to their own impulses and those of others, to methodologies for revealing hidden layers of texts, and for enabling character transformation that is not merely reduced to personal biography. It also influences particular choices of tools and artistic forms, both in rehearsal and in performance. The masks, for example, precisely enact Brook's propositions concerning 'transparency' and the 'invisible network'. The way in which such concepts permeate all aspects of his company's performances is characteristic of Brook's pragmatism. Concepts are only ever sanctioned in terms of usefulness; and more

often than not with Brook, they arise from working processes, rather than being imposed upon them.

Notes

- 1 For a detailed discussion of the characteristics of 'rough theatre' and 'holy theatre', and their conjunction in a prismatic totality Brook calls 'immediate theatre', see Brook (1968).
- 2 For details of all of the CIRT's work since 1970, with extensive bibliographies, see Banu (1991), Hunt and Reeves (1995), and Williams (1992).
- 3 In conversation in 1986, Brook described the quality he most admired in one of his actors, Maurice Bénichou, in terms of 'lightness'. This quality can be understood through Paul Valéry's suggestion that 'one should be light as a bird, not light as a feather'. In other words, one must recognise and bear the substantive weight of what it is one enacts, its gravity; one must remain present, engaged and embodied in the doing that takes us into the world – but with a lightness of touch that is buoyant and playful, that enables one not to be encumbered or consumed, but to take off, to move on, to be 'free'.
- 4 For an analysis of the workings of this storytelling model in performance, see David Williams (1991), in particular pp. 117–92.

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3.5

1997

'Material imagination',
in *RealTime* 18 (Open City, Sydney), April-May, 33

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Material imagination

David Williams at rehearsals of Alison Halit's *To Run—Sand* in Melbourne

Direct images of matter. Vision names them, but the hand knows them. A dynamic joy touches them, kneads them, makes them lighter. One dreams these images of matter substantially, intimately, rejecting forms—perishable forms—and vain images, the becoming of surfaces. They have weight, they are a heart.

Gaston Bachelard

In a cavernous iron warehouse at the back of the old Brunswick brickworks, behind the vertiginous chimneys of the kilns and the blackened skeletons of derelict machinery, an island of moist white sand floats in a sea of powdery grey brickdust and rubble. Prefiguring its future performance space in the city, the rehearsal space for *To Run—Sand* has been installed in the bowels of an abandoned industrial workplace—a site still palpably ghosted by its former function, and by those that worked and sweated and dreamed there. The only sounds now are the muffled wingbeats and cucurucus of pigeons far overhead. Until the digging starts.

Every session begins with digging. The island of sand, both setting and generative source for this dance-theatre performance, is on the move again. The impact of footfalls and bodies disperses the sand, it flows outwards, a slo-mo crystalline liquid. We rebuild two mounds, one as conical as a Hokusai Fuji, the other slightly flattened, volcanic. Our digging is punctuated with jokes about (im)possible careers with Vicroads. The remaining sand is raked, and the rehearsal begins.



Evelyn Switajewski in *To Run—Sand* (rehearsal)

Brad Hick

Heraclitus suggested that one could never bathe in the same river twice; similarly, every time the performers return to the sand its reality shifts, literally and metaphorically. It possesses the pulsional mutability and discontinuity Gastoa

Bachelard called "intimate immensity". At moments it suggests a pocket of coastal dune or beach, a lovers' retreat, a children's playground, or an island of enchantment and imprisonment, like Prospero's; at others, it becomes battlefield, labour camp, post-industrial wasteland, mountain range, moonscape—or desert, that core postmodern metaphor for the nomadic and the dis/appearing. And it is the fluidity of the sand's topographic referentiality that allows the performers (and those watching them) a remarkable associational freedom in narratives enacted and images inhabited.

Material is generated primarily through games, tasks, structured improvisations and free play; once Alison has set up an activity, she rarely intervenes. Images cluster around primordial transformations of status in the flux of inter-relations: playing, working, running, fighting, falling, burying, birthing. The three performers are developing quite different relationships with the sand, each one contradictory and polyvalent. And it is the materiality of these relationships that generates narratives, images and 'characters'. Today Evelyn's actions suggest elegant entrapment, a kind of perky buoyancy against all the odds, like Winnie in Beckett's *Happy Days*. Adrian is both ever playful and consumed by reverie, encumbered by the gravity of possibility; with the smile of Sisyphus, he moulds his desires and memories in the sand. Yumi is explosive, she leaps and digs with an energy that

irradiates far beyond the outer edge of the sand—but her contact with it is consistently light, she touches and brushes with quiet patience and focus.

In many ways, the group's recognition of the sand's active role as trigger and co-performer celebrates Bachelard's "material imagination", which, "going beyond the attractions of the imagination of forms, thinks matter, dreams in it, lives in it, or, in other words, materialises the imaginary". In Bachelard's phenomenological poetics of the elements, matter ("the unconscious of form", the "mother-substance" of dreams) reverberates to become "the mirror of our energy", producing images "incapable of repose".

In rehearsal the sand becomes a register of the actions and emotions that it has elicited from the performers; it mirrors their energy. Intimate, substantial afterimages of what was are retained within what is, although these trace impressions of the contours and gravities of presences-now-absent are always temporary, fleeting. Like memories, like identities, the marks in the sand are continuously overwritten or partially erased. But in the materiality of the instant, for those that work and sweat and dream there, they have weight, they are a heart.

To Run—Sand by Alison Halit, performed by Adrian Nunes, Evelyn Switajewski and Yumi Umiumare at the Economist Building, Spencer Street Power Station, Melbourne, April 8-20, April 22-27, April 30-May 4. For further details and bookings, phone (03) 9525 1634.

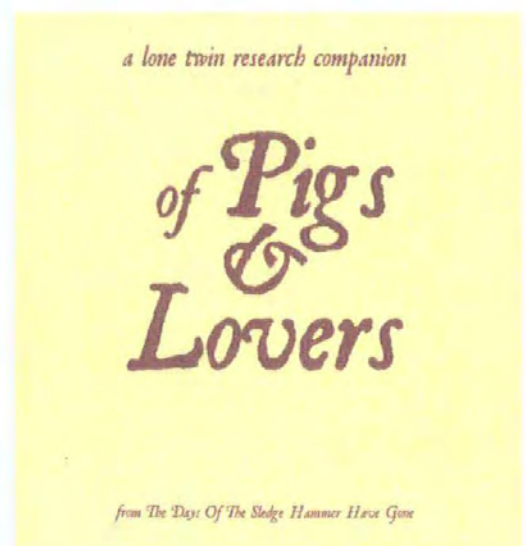
David Williams teaches performance studies at the Victoria University in Footscray. He is Artistic Adviser for To Run—Sand.

3.6

2001

'Las Ramblas: the memory of water, the water of memory',
in Gregg Whelan and Gary Winters (eds), *of pigs and lovers: a lone twin
research companion*, Nottingham: LiveArt Magazine/Arts Council of England
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(non-paginated)

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28. David Williams⁴:

Las Ramblas: a bustling, tree-lined boulevard bisecting the old city of Barcelona. Lorca once described it as 'the only street in the world which I wish would never end'. Its name derives from an Arabic word (*ramla*) for torrents or rapids, for at one time it was a seasonal watercourse, the route of run-off from hills to the sea. The memory of water.

Today Las Ramblas runs from Plaça de Catalunya in the north to Plaça Portal de la Pau in the south, with its harbourside monument to Christopher Columbus. Caked white with birdshit, with a hefty stone map in one hand by his side, Columbus points confidently out to sea, but in the direction of North Africa rather than the New World. This way, folks, must be.

How to remake a river? Or more modestly, for I'm uneasy with Columbus's unshakeable conviction as model, how to make a small action whose ephemeral traces might reconnect this place briefly and playfully with its naming, and with its past role in the micro-circuits and flows of the hydrological cycle? How to re-member a river? I discussed this with Gregg and Gary. Many triggers for me in what they do, and they have moist imaginations. We chatted in a cafe, quiet little rants and what ifs and didyknows about weather systems, bodies, maps, becoming-river, Snowflake the albino gorilla. Then Gary said what about ice.

In the end we slid a block of ice from the CCCB, past the Plaça dels Angels and along the Carrer Bonsuccés to Las Ramblas. We placed it on its side on the paving stones in the middle of Rambla Canaletes, near an old iron fountain, then wrung the melted ice from our gloves to start the flow. People watching, talking in the sun. The water of memory.

David Williams
Melbourne, Australia
2001

⁴ David, writer and performance maker, was also contributing to *Migrations*.



Section 4

Appendices

4.1

2002

"Towards an art of memory': Peter Brook, a foreigner in Paris' (extract),
in David Bradby and Maria Delgado (eds),
The Paris Theatre Jigsaw: Internationalism and the City's Stages,
Manchester: Manchester University Press, 37-52

ISBN: 0-7190-6184-9

1

Peter Brook and the CICT (Le Centre International de Créations Théâtrales)

'Towards an art of memory' : Peter Brook, a foreigner in Paris

David Williams

Crossing the frontier

Foreigners belong in France because they have always been here and did what they had to do there and remained foreigners there. Foreigners should be foreigners and it is nice that foreigners are foreigners and that they inevitably are in Paris. (Stein 1983: 20)

[A] person of the twentieth century can exist honestly only as a foreigner. (Julia Kristeva, in Moi 1986: 286)

This paper proposes to explore the evolving nature of English director Peter Brook's relations with Paris, from his earliest productions there in the late 1950s to his continuing work with the Paris-based international centre after his departure from English theatre in 1970. In this context, it may be useful to divide this extensive body of work into three periods:

- productions of texts by major post-war playwrights in commercial theatres in Paris between 1956 and 1963 (Williams, Miller, Genet,

Arden, Hochhuth), during a hyperactive period in Brook's career in which he shuttled constantly between theatres in London, New York and Paris;¹

- research work, first seeded by an invitation from Jean-Louis Barrault for an international exploratory group to pursue work in private under the *aegis* of the Théâtre des Nations in 1968, subsequently developed much more extensively over a period of three years at the genesis of Brook's international centre (1970–73);
- finally, the CICT's productions from 1974 to the present day, at its permanent base in the Théâtre des Bouffes-du-Nord.²

In his autobiography, *Threads of Time*, Brook suggests that the book as a whole comprises a 'relatively full answer to th[e] question: why Paris?' (Brook 1998: 155). A close reading of the book, and other material by and about Brook, suggests different responses at different times. Paris was a heterotopia (exotic and seductive other, conducive industrial context, cultural crossroads, meeting-point, refuge, work place, intermediary point of departure and return, u-topian home away from home) and potential site for the defamiliarising 'double perspective' of the displaced outsider-inside (Rushdie 1991: 19), for fostering the 'burdensome freedom' of a Parisian 'migrant sensibility' in the tradition of Picasso, Miró, Stein, Joyce, Beckett and Brancusi *inter alia*:

The migrant suspects reality: having experienced several ways of being, he understands their illusory nature. To see things clearly, you have to cross a frontier [...] Migrants must, of necessity, make a new imaginative relationship with the world. (Rushdie 1991: 124–5)

1 *La Chatte sur un toit brûlant* (*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*) by Tennessee Williams, Théâtre Antoine, Paris, 1956, with Jeanne Moreau; *Vue du pont* (*A View from the Bridge*) by Arthur Miller, Théâtre Antoine, 1958, with Raf Vallone and Lila Kedrova; *Le Balcon* (*The Balcony*) by Jean Genet, Théâtre de Gymnase, 1960, with Roger Blin; *La Danse du Sergent Musgrave* (*Sergeant Musgrave's Dance*) by John Arden, Théâtre de l'Athénée, 1963, with Laurent Terzieff; *Le Vicaire* (*The Representative*) by Rolf Hochhuth, co-directed with François Darbon, Théâtre de l'Athénée, 1963, with Michel Piccoli.

Reviewing the 31-year-old Brook's first Parisian production, *La Chatte*, for *Le Figaro*, Jean-Jacques Gautier could barely contain his horror at the arrival of this *enfant terrible* from Britain: 'This is one of the most ugly and tiresome scenes – for this display of filth is, nonetheless, dismally monotonous – that I have ever seen in the theatre ... melodramatic filth. With this triumphal entry, Peter Brook est arrivé à Paris' (quoted in Helfer and Loney 1998:85).

2 *Timon d'Athènes* (1974), *Les Iks* (1975), *Ubu aux Bouffes* (1977), *Mesure pour mesure* (1978), *La Conférence des oiseaux* (*Conference of the Birds*, 1979), *La Cerisaie* (*The Cherry Orchard*, 1981), *La Tragédie de Carmen* (1981), *Le Mahabharata* (1985), *Woza Albert!* (1989), *La Tempête* (1990), *Impressions de Pelléas* (1992), *L'Homme qui* (*The Man Who*, 1993), *Qui est là?* (1995), *Oh les beaux jours* (*Happy Days*, 1995), *Je suis un phénomène* (*I am a Phenomenon*, 1998), *Hamlet* (2000).

Erotics, economies, encounters

In England artistic experiment is always viewed with suspicion while in France it is a natural part of artistic life ... Paris has a long tradition of being a melting pot for artists from all over the world. (Brook 1998: 155)

Nowhere is one more a foreigner than in France. ... And yet one is nowhere better as a foreigner than in France. (Kristeva 1991: 38–9)

Brook has always located himself first and foremost as a traveller, someone whose identity is articulated in deterritorialising, hyphenated movement, someone who remains 'simultaneously "rooted and rootless"' (Minh-ha 1991: 335) like all nomads.³ In the mid-1950s, Brook's desire to travel away from the drabness of post-war London seems to have been fuelled by the allure of a cultural exoticism, and the Paris he constructed was informed by a rather clichéd *flâneur* eroticism, with its roots in early European modernism (from Baudelaire's aestheticised alienation to the Surrealist's voyeuristic strolls):

Often I had found excuses to visit Paris: the sharp scent of Gauloises was strangely exciting, and everything from the Métro to the cafés had a special sexual glow. ... Paris was the films of Carné and the photos of Brassai [...] London was still a place of reassuring slowness and calm. Paris was restless, feverish; a true Parisian was expected to be nervous and uneasy, and the city itself had a sensuality for which London had no equivalent. (Brook 1998: 60, 94).

Arguably such received stereotypes of Paris persist in many Anglo-Saxon imaginations. This is certainly how Paris continues to be mythologised and commodified in the discourses of tourism: as the site of a stylish sensuality and even carnality, of lovers being private in public and other spectacles for consumption, of an old-world 'special charm' (Brook 1998: 95) imbued with the heightened rhythms of a certain hedonistic 'passion' (Brook 1998: 98), within which art and artists are imbricated in the very fabric of everyday life. As a student of theatre in an English university in the 1970s in the wake of the theatricalised *événements* of 1968, my impressionable consciousness soon came to associate the Paris of Lecoq, the Grand Magique Circus, the Théâtre du Soleil and *la création collective* with a politicised and dissident physicality, an expressiveness of public actions and an unapologetically embodied style. Scarcely a very authentic mapping of a cultural moment, although as Maurice Blanchot

3 Cf. '[I]n the milieu of the immigrant, the refugee and the exiled ... identity is a product of articulation. It lies at the intersection of dwelling and travelling and is a claim of continuity within discontinuity (and vice versa)' (Minh-ha 1994: 14).

has suggested: 'If there is, among all words, one that is inauthentic, then surely it is the word "authentic"' (Blanchot 1986: 60).

Secondly, and in sharp contrast to his experience of prevalent conditions in British theatres, Brook was attracted to the unfamiliar fluidity of structures and means of production he perceived in particular Parisian theatres and their traditions of privileging artists and contextual differences:

They seemed on another planet, at another moment in history; in Paris there were no managements, no producers, agents had hardly been invented, let alone unions, and each theatre had its own identity, its own idiosyncracies, and its own audience. (Brook 1998: 95)

For Brook, 'a non-English talent obliged to flower in uncondusive surroundings' (Marowitz 1968), these perceptions became central to his decision in 1970 to leave the Royal Shakespeare Company and establish an international research centre in Paris. In the light of his convictions as to the deadly auto-conformity of the English theatre milieu of the 1960s, Brook determined that 'the present set-up of the theatre, with its formal institutional apparatus, provides the wrong arena for communication, ceremony and involvement' (Brook in Selbourne 1982: 41); three words that describe the parameters of his project with the Centre.

Finally, Brook's growing familiarity and confidence within the cultural milieux of Paris – in short, his gradual migration into what Salman Rushdie has called a 'translated person' (quoted in Hall 1992: 8) – in conjunction with his status as generative outsider, in-soluble and resistant 'foreign body' scratching away under the epidermis of these milieux without ever becoming fully assimilated (see Banu 1991: 23–4), facilitated certain core encounters which would lead to significant and enduring collaborative relationships of very diverse kinds. As Julia Kristeva observes in *Strangers to Ourselves*: 'Meeting balances wandering. A cross-road of two othernesses' (Kristeva 1991: 11). So, for example, in the late 1940s, Brook first met the designer Georges Wakhevitch, best known at that time for his work with Cocteau; in the 1950s, the producer Simone Berriau, the actress Jeanne Moreau, and the eventual co-founder with Brook of the international centre in 1970, agent and producer Micheline Rozan; in the 1960s, Mme Jeanne de Salzmann, the heir to Gurdjieff's legacy in Paris, and Brook's teacher until her death at the age of 101 in the early 1990s; in the 1970s, the screenwriter Jean-Claude Carrière – and finally the burnt-out, luminous shell of a nineteenth-century theatre, Les Bouffes du Nord, which has been Brook's company's home since 1974.

Georges Banu has suggested that Brook's interest in Paris – rather than, say, New York – relates to its status as an international city that

remains European, concretely and actively rooted in a particular experience of memory:

Brook ne conteste pas la mémoire, il demande seulement qu'elle soit humaine et non pas archéologique. Vivante et non pas naturalisée. Son but consiste à accéder à la mémoire dans le sens le plus vaste du terme et nullement à l'anéantir. (Banu 1991: 25)

(Brook does not contest memory, he simply requires it to be human and not archaeological. Living and not naturalised. His aim [in crossing the Channel] is to access memory in the widest sense of the term, rather than in any way wiping it out.)

With all of these collaborators, Brook has endeavoured to pursue a theatre that is 'an art of memory' (de Certeau 1988: 87) in the present. A narration of creative possibility grounded in the everyday, a mapping of what we may become. A practice of memory that Sue Golding has described, in another context, as 'a kind of practical romanticism rooted in an "as if"' (Golding 1993: 217).

The unfolding of a poetic: Paris in the Spring (May 1968)

Every voyage is the unfolding of a poetic. The departure, the cross-over, the fall, the wandering, the discovery, the return, the transformation. If travelling perpetuates a discontinuous state of being, it also satisfies ... one's insatiable need for detours and displacements. (Minh-ha 1994: 21)

I arrived in Paris. I had only known the city from pictures and films, and suddenly there it was, in front of my own eyes. It was the end of April. New leaves had just appeared on the branches of trees, and the buildings, the avenues, everything, were as beautiful as a dream. I could not conceal the grin on my face as I stood near the Louvre, looking up the Champs Elysées to the Arc de Triomphe. But this grin was accompanied by tears in my eyes. Tears caused by tear-gas that the police had thrown into a student demonstration. (Oida 1992: 6)

In the spring of 1968, shortly after the opening of his production of Oedipus in London, Brook accepted an invitation from the director of the Théâtre des Nations, Jean-Louis Barrault, to work for two months in Paris with an international group. The group included a number of actors who would later form the nucleus of the Centre Internationale de Recherche Théâtrale (CIRT), including Japanese actor Yoshi Oida, Bob Lloyd, Natasha Parry and Sylvain Corthay, as well as Glenda Jackson. Other collaborators included the directors Joe Chaikin from the USA (who brought over members of the Open Theatre), Víctor García from Argentina and Geoffrey Reeves from England. The group was housed in

a vast exhibition space in the Mobilier National in the Gobelins, a concrete storehouse for governmental furniture and tapestries, to the southwest of Paris. Initially, the goal was to produce an exploratory work-in-progress performance drawing on Genet's *Le Balcon* (The Balcony), 'a world made of mirrors' (Brook 1998: 146) offering a critical reflection of/on the political turmoil of France at that time.⁴ This focus for the work was soon abandoned in favour of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, a version of which was to be performed before invited audiences for one week in July.

Brook's intent was to return to certain root questions as to the specificity of theatre in contemporary contexts concerning the nature, function and forms of theatre as event and intervention, the relations between actor and audience, between voice, body and space, and the conditions that promote dynamic interrelations in the present. Above all, Brook was eager to discover whether: 'all that we had developed within one regional pattern could and should extend itself on to an international scale: whether, in fact, internationalism could be something that would strengthen rather than weaken theatre work' (Brook in Smith 1972: 23). With this international group, the aim was not simply to exchange methods and techniques from diverse cultural sources in order to create a synthetic 'soup', like some kind of theatrical esperanto: 'The signs and signals from different cultures are not what matters; it is what lies behind the signs that gives them meaning' (Brook 1998: 144).

In terms of *The Tempest*, a central concern related to how one might represent the extra-ordinary world of spirits, witches and fairies. Brook was convinced that Western culture – and its actors – have lost contact with an ability to access and articulate 'invisible' aspects of experience. Yet, for Brook, the inner impulses and energies that precede ideational thought and verbal expression form the core of our deepest relationships with the world around us: a mythopoetic consciousness rooted in concrete materiality and pragmatics, while at the same time embracing magical and supernatural dimensions, accrediting them with an equivalent and perhaps fuller 'reality' than the mono-dimensional, phenomenal reality of empiricists. This research with an international group had a common starting point in the body, but no consensual forms or short-hands for spatialising the impulses of interiority in external expression.

4 Genet (like Brook) went to some lengths to clarify his conviction that the theatre was not the site for social critique and political resolution. In his preface to *Le Balcon*, for example, he wrote: 'This play must not be played as if it were a satire of this or that. It is – and must be played as – the glorification of the Image and of the Reflection. Only then will its significance – satirical or not – amaze' (quoted in radby 1984: 175).

In *Threads of Time*, Brook suggests that: 'There was something inexpressible that I was trying to develop. This was the capacity to listen through the body to codes and impulses that are hidden all the time at the root of cultural forms' (1998: 167).

Evidently all of this was a far cry from the incendiary political unrest outside in the streets of Paris, with its own hidden codes and impulses, and Brook's disinterest is informative. He has dismissed the contestations and occupations as little more than inconveniences disrupting ongoing work 'in the tiny corner of calm that we had preserved' (1998: 145) in the studio space behind closed doors, and as idealist illusions whose impoverished tactics belied the slogan 'l'imagination au pouvoir'. As Albert Hunt and Geoffrey Reeves have observed, Brook's sole preoccupation was to continue the research work at all costs, and to that end:

he managed to negotiate the right of the group as an international one to go on without appearing to breach the general call to strike. The French actors were particularly concerned with that, and also showed a considerable ability to spend days talking. While de Gaulle fought off the threat to the republic with comments about dogs fouling their kennels, Brook meticulously took *The Tempest* apart. (Hunt and Reeves 1995: 138)

When the French actors involved in the work left to participate in events, Brook rather acidly admits to being:

less impressed than they were by the sudden discovery that everything needed to be questioned. This was after all what had brought us all together in the first place and I felt more than ever that we needed to carry on with what we had begun in our own field. Outside, it was often hard to discover what was concrete and what was dream. (Hunt and Reeves 1995: 138)

However, after a month in Paris, the government-funded workshop proved an unsustainable 'dream' in the context, and the group was obliged to leave their state-owned refuge in the Mobilier National, and to take the final phase of their work across the Channel to the Roundhouse in London. Ultimately, five public showings of work-in-progress were given to invited audiences in mid-July.⁵

Re-membering the jigsaw: The International Centre for Theatre Research

Each culture expresses a different portion of the inner atlas; the complete human truth is global, and the theatre is the place in which the jigsaw can be pieced together. (Brook 1987: 129)

5 For accounts of this *Tempest*, see Williams 1992: 135–43.

The foreigner is within me, hence we are all foreigners. If I am a foreigner, there are no foreigners. (Kristeva 1991: 192)

In the wake of the *Tempest* experiment, Brook spent a great deal of time and energy persuading various funding bodies to provide him with financial assistance in the setting up of what was to be called Le Centre International de Recherche Théâtrale (CIRT).⁶ From 1 November 1970, a group of actors and directors from Japan, Mali, Romania, France, England and the USA conducted private research work in Paris.⁷ After a short stint in the Cité Internationale, the group took up residence at the Mobilier National; this was to be their working base for an initial three-year research cycle, from which they would embark on 'work-in-the-field' in the form of journeys to Iran, Africa and North America.

Brook recognised that real experimentation could only take place once the financial exigencies of commercial theatre enterprises had been supplanted. Since the late 1950s, he had dreamt of being in a position of total subsidy which would free his work from the crippling impositions particular to the institutional 'glamour circuit'. In collaboration with the producer Micheline Rozan, he subsequently received unprecedented funding primarily from the Ford, Gulbenkian and Anderson Foundations, and in the first year from the Iranian government, who commissioned a work for the 1971 Shiraz Festival (Orghast). Grants were also received from the JDR III Fund, the David Merrick Arts Foundation and UNESCO.

Micheline Rozan's political *savoir-faire* was invaluable at this time, as it was when the group took possession of the Bouffes du Nord in 1974, and indeed thereafter until her retirement in the late the 1990s. Her intimate knowledge of funding policies and strategies, in conjunction with her skills as a lobbyist in ministerial contexts (with Michel Guy, then Jack

6 The acronym CIRT refers to the organisational umbrella for the research work from 1970 to 1973. The subsequent change of name in 1974 to Centre International de Créations Théâtrales (CICT) signalled a shift of focus from research to public performance, coinciding with the move to the Bouffes du Nord. The organisation still uses both acronyms rather loosely, although this dual identity perhaps reflects slightly different emphases at different moments in the centre's evolution.

7 The CIRT group included Malick Bowens (Mali), Michele Collison (USA), Claude Confortès (France), Sylvain Corthay (France), Miriam Goldschmidt (Germany), writer Ted Hughes (England), Daniel Kamwa (Cameroon), Andreas Katsulas (USA), Bob Lloyd (England), François Marthouret (France), Paloma Matta (Spain), Helen Mirren (England), designer Jean Monod (Switzerland), João Mota (Portugal), Pauline Munro (England), Bruce Myers (England), Yoshi Oida (Japan), atasha Parry (England), director Geoffrey Reeves (England), director Andrei Serban (Romania), Irene Worth (England), Lou Zeldis (USA), as well as composer-musicians Richard Peaslee and Elizabeth Swados (both USA) and administrators Bob Applegarth (USA) and Mary Evans (England).

Lang), were instrumental at this time in attracting subsidy without the obligation to generate commercial product and box-office receipts:

She manoeuvred us through the complex web of French politics so that our work was always independent, never connected with any social or political group, free from all pressures, from any obligation to haunt ministerial corridors more than absolutely necessary, from the need to attend Parisian dinners, or in any way to play the expected games in order to receive the subsidies that were vital to us. (Brook 1998: 196)

For Brook, the Centre had three equally important functions to fulfil. Firstly, it had 'a responsibility to theatre-going audiences, remembering that, as a performing group, we cannot survive without a relationship with the people who keep the theatre in existence' (Brook in Billington 1978: 849). However, his deepest convictions perhaps lay in the Centre's other two functions, the first of which was to create a relationship with 'the people who would never cross the door to a theatre in a thousand years, by seeing them on their own ground in schools, meeting-places and open-air spaces' (Brook in Billington 1978: 849). Since the Theatre of Cruelty season in 1964, the emphasis of Brook's research has been largely on the preparation of actors. Around the time of the *Tempest* experiment, there was a perceptible shift of emphasis towards the nature of actors' relations with spectators in changing environments and conditions, and on the development of a 'natural' encounter within each particular context. This remained Brook's central concern throughout the 1970s.⁸

During the first year of this research work, the group aimed to create a hieratic and poetic theatre work, a 'holy' work made up of esoteric vocal and gestural abstractions using both dead and invented languages (*Orghast*). The emphasis in the second year (the African journey) would be on simplicity and naïvety; the goal was to create popular 'rough' work, improvised and direct. According to Brook's prismatic Shakespearean ideal, ideally 'holy' and 'rough' coexist, and therefore the third year (the journey to America) focused on bringing the two strands together in a dynamic *plenum*.⁹ These excursions from the group's Paris base, centrifugal trajectories into 'life', constituted supreme exercises in the validation of the private research work, a dynamic and interrogative infusion through exchange, as well as a kind of radical sink-or-swim heurism or pragmatics. Furthermore, there were – and still are – many minor sorties to schools, hostels for migrant workers, hospitals, rehab centres and pris-

8 For a recent discussion of Brook's evolving practices in terms of the preparation of actors, see Marshall and Williams 1999.

9 For detailed accounts of the Centre's first three years of work and of the three journeys, see Smith 1972, Heilpern 1977, Hunt and Reeves 1995: 154–99, and Williams 1992: 168–237.

ons (such as Fleury-Mérogis) in the working-class areas of Paris and its suburbs, including the multicultural *quartier* around the Bouffes du Nord. To the present day, Brook's ideal remains a 'shared space', literally and metaphorically, an 'open circle' within which to refine communication, ceremony and involvement so as to 'reunite the community, in all its diversity, within the same shared experience' (Brook 1978: 7). How can an act of theatre assume something of the *fiesta*, enabling a community to taste *communitas*, to become 'whole' for a moment? And given the unique, mutable energies of any particular context, what are 'the precise conditions that govern focus and concentration' (Brook 1998: 171)?

This relates to the third function of the Centre, which concerned:

the responsibility of the group to itself and its craft, which means the actor knowing that he [sic] must constantly, and with equal care, try to develop himself in relation to others in other ways, through group exercises, which improve his possibilities of serving his craft well and, at the same time, increase the general understanding of the mysterious nature of the craft itself by trying out things that have not been tried before. (Brook in Billington 1978: 849).

Here the trajectory is centripetal, for the axis of such research is self-research, a process which can only take place in conducive conditions out of the public eye. In order to reassess discoveries made during work-in-the-field, and to further 'clarify, distill, discard' (Brook in Billington 1978: 849), the members of the group would have to return constantly to the conditions of the laboratory. The artificial clefing of 'inner' and 'outer' would have to be brought into conjunction in order to explore the concrete detail of: 'what an action is, what a scene is, what a rhythm means, what characterisation demands, and above all what can reflect the concerns of the shifting world around us' (Brook 1998: 175).

In his ongoing research into those conditions that permit a continually supple and evolving relationship with an audience, Brook had come to believe that a theatre event is 'richest' when audience, performance group and indeed material performed are made up of disparate elements: a mixed group made only provisionally homogeneous within a common experience. Most importantly in this context, with this resolutely heterogeneous cultural group, Brook's attention was trained on ways for actors to tap and articulate the pre-expressive substrata that underlie cultural stereotypes and imitations, and 'find the key to actions so transparent that they appear completely natural, whatever their form' (Brook 1998: 167).

Maria Shevtsova has suggested that Brook's theatre practice 'obliges performers and spectators alike to review routine assumptions about

their own culture through its prism of cultures' (Shevtsova 1991: 226). Brook conceives of culture in two ways. First he locates 'culture' as an artificial delimitation, an impoverishing shell of naturalised givens constructed from ossified stereotypes of superficial difference: Shevtsova's 'routine assumptions', the received ideas and representations of tourism, even a corollary of nationalism. Second, locked within this shell, 'beneath the chatter of words' (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 184),¹⁰ is another originary 'culture' which demands to be restored. Here, the 'different portions of the inner atlas' (Brook 1987: 129) comprise a potentially liberating force, for the space of flux they occupy stands in contestatory relation to the ideologically constructed, partisan 'assumptions' described above. Potentially, these diverse symbolic structures of feeling exist as the site both of radical alterity and of transcultural commonality – the site of myth. For the utopian humanist Brook,¹¹ theatre remains the forum within which these 'different portions' can be brought together, 'remembered' (Brook 1998: 225). Perhaps it would be possible for actors in a multicultural theatre group – others-to-each-other, and to themselves (to their 'other' possible selves) – to become cartographers of 'other' ways of feeling, seeing and representing, to rewrite the map of difference: 'the complete human truth is global' (Brook 1987: 129). And, in the process, to locate the dynamic parameters of their own difference, their individuality – to become more themselves in relation to an evolving 'culture': in other words, identity as a work-in-progress in a culture of becoming.

10 'Our view of man [sic] will remain superficial so long as we fail to go back to that origin, so long as we fail to find, beneath the chatter of words, the primordial silence, and as long as we do not describe the action which breaks this silence' (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 184).

11 Cf. Ruth Levitas on Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch's *The Principle of Hope*: she argues that Bloch 'makes an important distinction between abstract and concrete utopia, between the elements within utopian images which are purely escapist, compensatory, wishful thinking and those which are transformative and will-full in the sense of driving forward to action and a real, possible, transformed future; between expressions of desire and expressions of hope' (Levitas 1993: 262). In these terms, I would argue that Brook is a concrete 'hope-ful' utopianist, if always within the micro-world of a group, rather than in the theatre of social revolution.

[...]

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'Navigating the currents: an interview with Basia Irland',
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Navigating the Currents

Basia Irland
interviewed by David Williams

David Williams: Almost all of your work is concerned with water in one way or another: water as focus for a critical engagement with environmental and cultural issues, water as protean event, navigatory flow, material imagination: water as singularity and multiplicity. The work you're exhibiting here in Bath, *Non-potable Agua*, focuses on water as medium or carrier, in this instance of micro-pathogens. You've printed magnified images of cells, *giardia lamblia* and *escherichia coli*, to produce a blurring of micro and macro; the fact that they look like planetary bodies serves to highlight the terrible beauty of these organisms.

Basia Irland: Once the organisms were enlarged, I very purposefully wanted them to be beautiful. I'm usually attracted to things that are marked and weathered, muddied, things that have a toughness and grottness to them – objects that have a kind of life story. But these had to be alluring for the very reason you allude to: the dichotomy of a 'terrible beauty'. For the tragic reality is that such water-borne diseases cause the death of a child, somewhere in the world, every 8 seconds.

While I was in Indonesia I contracted *giardia*. On one of the scrolls in the exhibition here in Bath is an image of a skin sample cross-section infected with *giardia lamblia*, which appears to be an aerial view of a green fertile field. Other scrolls contain one large image of an individual *giardia* parasite. The scroll is another form of book. These can be displayed on the wall or rolled up, put into clear tubes and carried over your shoulder. On another scroll what looks like a planet with its orange moon is actually *escherichia coli*. Several years ago, the inhabitants of Walkerton, Ontario, Canada, turned on their kitchen faucets to get a drink, just the way millions of people do every day. But seven people died and hundreds were hospitalized because *e-coli* from a nearby feed lot had seeped into the city's drinking-water supply.

Since the 1970s, visitors and residents of Bath have been prohibited from soaking in the ancient Roman Baths after one bather died from amoebic meningic encephalitis. The 'Bath Bug' is *naegleria fowleri* and is found around the world in natural hot springs. *Vibrio cholerae*, *legionella*, *pleisiomonas shigelloides* and *acinetobacter baumannii* are a few of the tongue-twistingly named water-borne infections which will eventually find their way onto a scroll, their beautiful, colorful images belying their deadly nature. And you're right, I'm captivated by the relations between micro and macro. When you're flying over a river delta, you can see all those dendritic patterns that are formed by water flow. This connects with tree patterns, blood vessels and circulatory systems, synaptic activity, the branchings and connections in our brains . . .

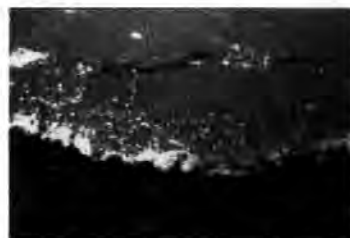
DW: These homologues recur in your work. As do marks, lines, graphic traces left by water in its various manifestations. In a recent catalogue, you write about diagrams you made on a beach, pre-Keplerian archaeo-astronomical mappings of the tug of planetary bodies on terrestrial bodies of water, with the rhythmic lap of waves gradually effecting an erasure. And you go on to describe scars on a whale's back, and the impact of a glacier's movement on rock surfaces. You seem to celebrate giving over 'authorship' to elements and natural processes, or at least a desire to collaborate with them.



•Estuary drawing, Salmon River, Oregon, 2000



•Erased drawing, Salmon River, Oregon, 2000



•Estuary Drawing, 2000: wood, salmon bones, earth, photos: 2'1" x 2'1" open

DW: Your work seems to encourage a quality of patient attention a little like the Renaissance 'festina lente': make haste slowly. In this way it resists certain contemporary commodity culture rhythms, proposing a realignment with the rhythms of organic processes, a deceleration into taking or making time . . .

BI: Well, the *Gathering of Waters* project, which I'll discuss later, took almost 5 years, and it's still continuing. I hope it will just keep on going at its own pace. Each piece I do develops over time, due to the research phase, travelling to places to gather natural materials, working with and learning from local residents, and detailed construction of each work.

DW: It's evident you have a fascination for boats, connected to your interests in water and journeys. The boats you've made are somewhat anthropomorphic, structurally reminiscent of ribcages, and they interpenetrate human and animal in both form and materials.



• *Celamaran*, 1985: willow; 22' long

DW: Additional ambiguities come from the fact that your boats often float in the air. They are present and absent, line drawings of vessels that may have been there once or are yet to come. They are both gravity-bound and airborne. For me, they are reveries, invitations to travel connecting up with all sorts of notions of journeying . . .

DW: Salt has recurred in your work in different ways, and I know it has a diverse set of associations for you. In an essay in which he talks metaphorically of salt as 'felt experience', the crystalline savour of lived experience,

BI: Yes. First of all, on a very practical level I love canoeing. My son grew up in a canoe on northern Ontario lakes. There's something very serene about being out on the water of a lake; rivers can be a little less predictable, I've capsized several times and it can be scary. I enjoy the physicality and practicality of travelling by means of self-propulsion on water in this way. It's a kind of swimming.

Some of my sculptural boats were indeed anthropomorphized or had animal aspects. Some had fish tails, a lot of them had wings. I like the image of a winged boat. In some cultures, boats are the carriers of the soul, just as the crescent moon was seen as a boat form of similar function. The Vikings buried their dead in rock formations in the shape of a boat. And I'm also drawn to paddles, sculpturally, and their relationship with the human body. The shape of a boat is often, though not always, a mandorla: the intersection of two circles. It's the vaginal form, an eye shape. Many of my portable pieces open up to make this shape.

BI: When I originally made the suspended boat pieces in Canada, they were bent willow covered with light-emitting diodes; in a darkened environment, as an artist I was creating my own constellations. In a Santa Fe exhibition, I suspended 40 boats, made from welded black wire, covered with salt crystals, in an open atrium area three floors high. In the low light, shadows were cast by the boats.



• *Navigating the Current II*, 1989

• *Liquid Ether*, 1992:
mixed media, salt: 11'
high



BI: Yes, I've used the alchemical symbol for salt in my work, it's a circle with a horizontal line through it. My interest in salt works at a number of levels. First of all, the practical: I like working with it as a material – white on white on white. I like the physical properties of salt. I did a series of pieces where I carved salt licks. In one of them, I carved into the salt lick and embedded in the niche salt

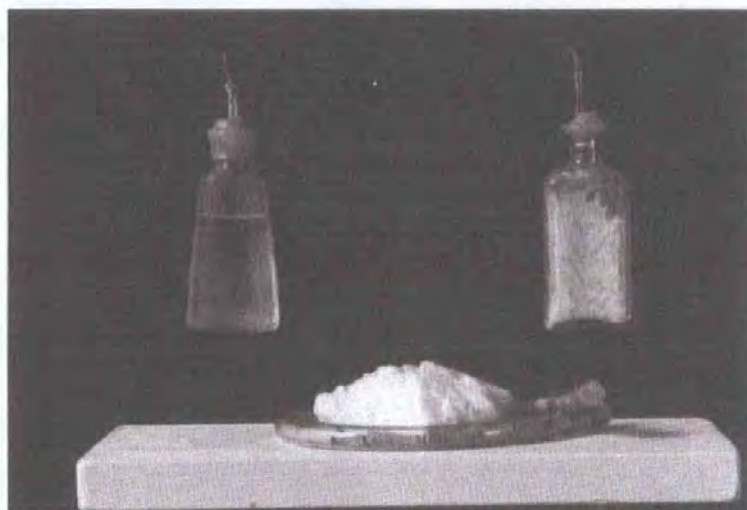
James Hillman quotes from an alchemical treatise *The Golden Tract*: 'He who works without salt will never raise dead bodies'. In alchemy salt is related to body, and it shares the same symbol as water, as I understand it ...



• *Salt Boat*, 1995: welded copper, salt: 6-5' long

crystals that had grown in the sacred lake at Zuni, given to me by a geologist.

My engagement in salt as a marine evaporate grew out of my research into water. I had a Fulbright in Indonesia, and spent quite a bit of time in Bali and Java; in Bali they farm the salt from the beaches. Salt is used in almost every culture in diverse ways. In Japan, for example, Sumo wrestlers scatter salt before their bouts. The history of salt is alluring – the ways in which it's been traded at various times ounce for ounce for gold. Gandhi's salt march in 1930 was a plea for independence and non-violence in the context of colonialization. I'd like to go to the Rumanian underground salt caves where salt has been mined for years. Sculptors began working down there and carved elaborate statues and even chandeliers out of salt. Then it was discovered that the miners rarely contracted tuberculosis. The salt takes moisture out of the air. Now they've opened one area of the mine as a hospital – hospital beds in a salt mine is an amazing image.



• *The Alchemy of Tears*, 1995

DW: Like water, salt is ambiguous as a material, both health-giving and highly toxic in certain contexts. A lot of the materials you use operate poetically in this way, exfoliating multiple and ambiguous associations . . .

DW: And the materials you use are often imbricated in organic or entropic processes . . .

BI Which is why I use them.

BI: I don't believe there is really any such thing as a static object. Everything, our bodies, that chair over there, an orchid, a piece of steel, is changing and decaying at various rates of speed. Secondly, as much as possible I like using materials from the site where I'm working, because they speak of that site. The rucksack that I made for *The*

DW: A lot of your work registers different actions and interventions of your own, and gives itself over to contexts and processes outside of your control; and at the same time it seems to encourage a kind of active embodied receptivity.

•Sage Book vol. 11, 1988: wood, red earth from Taos, NM, aromatic sage: 14" x 10"

•(far right) Oregon Book, 1989: wood, earth from shore of Blue Lake, Oregon, moss, bark and sticks from nearby forest floor: 6" x 8"

DW: Early on, you made a series of ephemeral floating pieces which seem to be a precursor to your later work with books: free-floating scriptable surfaces or 'pages' released into a range of other fluid processes.

DW: Your carved wooden books use materials that come from what's there in specific sites. There are narratives buried in these 'books of nature', or 'hydrolibros' as you've called them. The 'texts' they contain relate associatively to ecological issues. In one book made in the Dominican Republic, you used fragments of crocodile skulls. You've also used turtle shells, for example, or salmon bones, always from specific contexts. It seems you conceive of all of your work as a kind of library-in-process, a living transforming archive within which the gaps in maps are inviting and active. When did you

Gathering of Waters was constructed of wood from an old church in Albuquerque that was torn down; then I covered it with layers of pinon pine sap, so it's aromatic, it smells of the forest.

BI: Yes. And as I've suggested all of my work is concerned with process. I'm interested in ephemerality, what the Japanese call *mujo*, which is translated as 'the bittersweet impermanence of all life'.



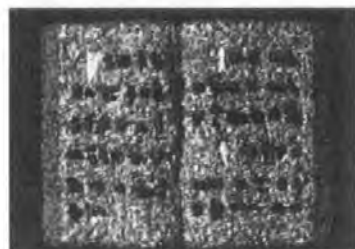
BI: I did a lot of floating pieces in Canada: academic 'lessons', chalk marks on canvas with some elements erased, which were embedded in ice and then floated down rivers. And I would follow them, track their journeys, and eventually retrieve the canvas from the shoreline. I would also go into university lecture rooms after classes to record photographically the traces, erasures, and fragments on blackboards – the poetics of traces and erasures that were left on the blackboards in the wake of a lesson. I documented them all over the world, often in languages I couldn't understand. A fragmentary, elliptical, found poetry. At this time, referencing the death of my husband, I created a large, complex performance work, *The Metaphysics of Erasures*.

BI: When I moved to New Mexico. These carved wooden book shapes are inscribed on the edges to resemble paginated volumes. Then I use small found natural objects from the site that have something to say about that specific place, and create a kind of international ecological language as 'text'. For example, *Molybdenum Mine Volumes I and II* commemorate a huge scar that gapes across acres of abused wilderness in northern New Mexico. Wandering illegally among the heaps of discarded mining equipment, the 'text' I found for this book was fool's gold and rust – poetic justice for this site, the tailings of which have killed aquatic habitat for miles downstream in the Red River. The names of a few of these sculptural books are *Mass Agate Archive*, about a trip along the length of the Yellowstone, the only major undammed river in the US; *Beaver Stick Encyclopedia*, using numerous chewed beaver sticks; *Rain Forest (Black Sand and Turtle Egg Shells)*, about Costa Rica.

There was also a series called *River Books*, which began when I discovered that some library had dumped part of its collection in a gorge

start making the earth-covered book pieces?

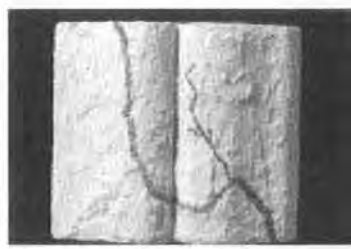
near Taos, and the books had been lying in the open air for years; there were rabbit turds on them, grass was growing up through the pages, people had used them for target practice, and they were completely rotten. These grotty objects attracted me as part of a generative cyclical transformation. These books had been trees once, then they were in a library in paper form, then were outside again, dumped into a huge pile – and it was as if those words were returning back into the earth. I took them into the studio, dried them out, then halted the process of deterioration into further decay by covering them in layers of beeswax, and then suspending them. Through the amber translucency of the beeswax, some of the words are still legible but not all . . .



• *Lamentation Poem for the Crocodiles of Lago Enriquillo*, 1992: wood, small shells from the shore of Lago Enriquillo, Dominican Republic, charcoal from hunters' fires, crocodile cranium bone shards: 12" x 9"



• *Desert Tides, Book III*, 1994: wood, lichen, seaweed: 200" x 15"



• *Rio Grande, Atlas I*, 1995: wood, salt, turquoise: 13" x 11"

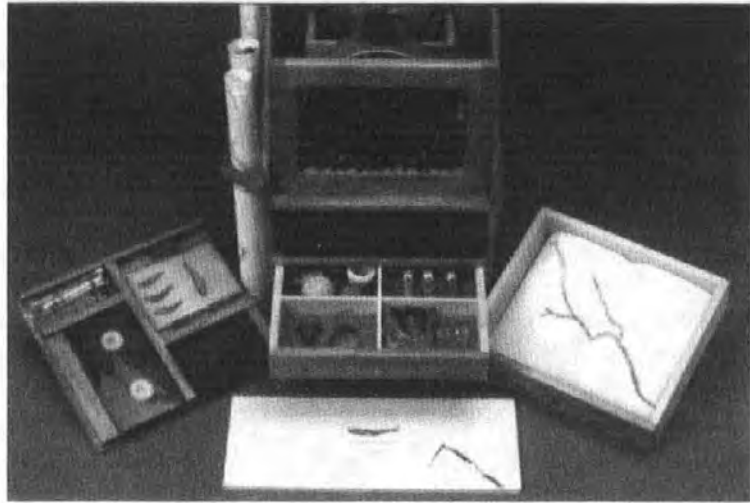
DW: A lot of the books, like your other work, construct a tension between information revealed and withheld, between transparency and opacity or containment: partial revelations. And I think it was Thoreau who wrote something about decayed literature making the best soil. This cycle of a return to the earth is a resonant ecological loop, another oroboros.

Perhaps it's inevitable that books, maps, charts, logs, registers and traces of journeys and fragile sites, and so on, should come together in the form of 'libraries'. I'm thinking both in terms of the portable repositories you make, and in terms of your unfinished novel *The Library of Waters*, which you've described as a kind of praise poem based on the hydrological cycle. I very much enjoyed the fragment I have read, its

BI: Absolutely. I love books and respect book knowledge. But it is only ever partial, a complement to experiential knowledges which are much harder to articulate but no less meaningful. In the video documentary I made for *The Gathering of Waters* project, I say that this is not about sitting in a boardroom or classroom indoors theorizing about rivers, it's about physically being at the river and experiencing it first-hand.



self-reflexive connections with your ongoing water work, as well as its interrogative relationship to the very project of a library: the claim to knowing represented by mapping, charting, collecting, categorizing, cataloguing, archiving. And related to this, its fundamental infinitude: it seems uncompletable. The very materials of the library – in this case water – resist the fixities and orderly containments of the institutional apparatus, and there is a great playful tension in this resistance and ultimate overflowing. Does the writing of *The Library of Waters* represent part of a navigation of your twin roles as artist and academic, working with very different kinds of knowledges and experiences?



•(opposite) *A Gathering of Waters*, 1995–2000 (carried)
• *A Gathering of Waters*, 1995–2000 (portable repository open): ponderosa pine, river drainage maps, water and flora samples, video, notebooks, water canteen
• Basia Irland, *A Gathering of Waters*, 1999

DW: That's very palpable in your documentary film, *A Gathering of Waters: The Rio Grande, Source to Sea*, showing people's individual and collective engagements in embodied ways with the cultures of the river, in terms of community, bio-diversity, connectivities and flows, and the enormous physical joy people have in relation to water in the film. As a proposition and an actuality, it's a wonderful project: a grassroots, community-based initiative to collect and convey water from a river's source all along its course to a release point in the sea at the Gulf of Mexico. How did it come about?

BI: *The Gathering of Waters* project came about for several reasons. Because the Rio completely dries up and becomes a river of sand in several places due to natural drought and human mismanagement, we wanted to help it do something it can no longer do by itself – flow all the way to the ocean. I also wanted people to be aware that there is always an upstream and a downstream, and to connect diverse communities along the entire 1875-mile length, to form an on-going dialogue.

I had been travelling internationally and making work, but I wanted to do something that was of the area where I live my daily life. The Rio Grande runs right through Albuquerque. I was attending river meetings and people described the river as if it were a cut-up pie with the middle Rio Grande disconnected from anything upstream or downstream; it had no beginning and no end.

Originally, there was a lot of skepticism about whether such a project could be realized. However, I refused to listen and in 1995 I began in Southern Colorado, at the headwaters in a beautiful alpine meadow area in the San Juan mountains, with pine trees and waterfalls. From there the river flows through New Mexico, forms the border between Texas and Mexico in the vast Chihuahuan desert, and eventually enters a Palm Grove at the Gulf. This is all the same river, but incredibly different contexts.

A special canteen, called the River Vessel, was passed by the carrier downstream from one community to the next. Small water samples were added from each community as hundreds of people extended a hand to someone upstream, received the Vessel, added their own contribution of water from the Rio, wrote in the Log Book, and passed these along to another person downstream. Folks travelled with the River Vessel and its accompanying Log Book by boat, raft, canoe, hot-air balloon, car, van, horseback, truck, bicycle, mail and by foot – all the way to the sea. My aim was for the gathering and passing of the waters to restore symbolically a natural function of the river and generate understanding, enthusiasm, a sense of continuity and a mutual understanding of riverside communities. It was a celebration of this great river and its cultures.

Native American runners carried the vessel through numerous pueblo villages. Running is a sacred activity for many tribal peoples around the world, it's considered a form of prayer; and they were really pleased to be involved in such a way, carrying the water by running. They ran about 150 miles in 2 days in a relay of mile-long sections. As we went into each pueblo – and none of this could be filmed – there was an exchange of water. They would put water into the canteen, and we would give them some of the water already gathered – an affirming of connections. People who lived half an hour apart but had never met encountered each other through this project. In the film, the ranger who hands on the vessel to the Kickapoo Tribe had never met any



•Kit for Paddling through Stars floating on a Lake, 2000
topen: linden wood, earth, carved paddles

DW: The structure of this project offers a very simple strategy for enabling and affirming connections en route, a navigatory reparation of separation. And it's endlessly relocatable and redefinable as a performative social score. I know you've made a simpler version by the Don River in Toronto, for example, which you describe as a stream 'straitjacketed' between a four-lane highway and railroad tracks.

*Kit for Paddling through Stars Floating on a Lake, 2000
(closed and rolled): linden wood: 5' x 2'

DW: One of your more recent works, *Kit for Paddling Through Stars Floating on a Lake*, which you made at Lac Jumeau in Quebec in 2000, is very much a navigatory score that seems to bring together a number of recurrent fascinations. Could you describe this work and its making?

members of that community; and they're still working together now. Those kinds of connections were one of the most important aspects of the project as a whole. They take on a life of their own.

The *Gathering* project took its own time. And when it finally arrived at Boca Chica in late 1998, we had a huge celebration down there at the mouth of the river by the ocean; people flew from the Upper Basin, the Lower Basin, at their own expense. They wanted to be there for that final moment of releasing the waters gathered from the river into the sea. It felt like an act of compassion, a gift. And such a 'gathering' could be created anywhere internationally; it doesn't belong to me.

BI: Yes. This project can hopefully help inspire other riverside communities anywhere in the world to find their common heritage. And each 'gathering' will be different, because each river is a different being.



BI: When I left New Mexico for the residency in Canada, I had no idea what I was going to do when I arrived. Three of us were invited by a group called boréal to make work in the Laurentian Mountains in Northern Quebec. The group's focus is on ecological issues. During my stay, there was one artist from Italy, one from Mexico and myself. The other two artists chose to go off into the forest and work there, but I walked out onto the dock by the lake and worked there the whole time. I would get up at dawn and paddle through mist, which was incredibly mysterious and beautiful. It was the one time of day when the lake was still, and you could immerse yourself in this thick fog.

As I said, I had no idea what I was going to do when I arrived. There was an old canoe which no one else would go in because it was very tippy. I decided I'd carve my own paddles. So I started out with these two huge linden logs, or limewood, and began carving. On one side of the paddle I

put images of the constellations, the night sky over Quebec in the winter; on the other side was a map of where we were, Lac Jumeau, 'Twin Lake'. I devised different handles for them and designed the two paddles so that they could even be joined together like a kayak paddle.

I made a long box to contain all the pieces, and put wheels on it so it could be pulled. I've returned again and again to this idea of portability. On the inside lid of the box were aerial maps of the lake, photos of stars floating on the water and mud from the lake shore mixed with matt medium.

The paddles worked well, and at night I would fill the boat with candles and ferry people out to a floating dock. There was an old Adirondack chair out there, and I made a shelter with aromatic cedar boughs. So the floating platform became a one-person arched observatory that you could sit within to contemplate the lake and stars – to be on a floating platform quietly by yourself.

DW: The video image from this work reproduced in your catalogue suggests an enactment of a nekyia, a night water crossing, to a liminal still point that hovers between a reflection of the sky in the lake's surface and the sky itself. It looks a little like being on one of your airborne boats riding through the sky . . .

•Video Still from catalogue, *Water Library: prow of canoe, misty lake with pontoon*

BI: That's a nice comparison. For the video of the Quebec piece, I floated candles in the water and they formed another layer of constellations. The image you're referring to, I photographed very early in the morning in the mist, so that you can't see the horizon and can't tell which direction is up or down. And I used that ambiguous image in the catalogue because I wanted the idea of the journey to something about which you're not quite certain – which is what our lives are like. Navigatory processes. We never know what's around the next bend in the river. A lot of my work relates metaphorically or literally to navigation. It's also concerned with currents: currents in water, but also being in the current of the present moment. In any negotiation of the moment, one needs to orient oneself by attending to energies that are actually there.



Bath, April 2001

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2002

'A thing being done: an interview with Peter Hulton',
in *Writings on Dance* 22 ('DIY'),

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'A thing being done' An interview with Peter Hulton

by David Williams and Ric Allsopp
May 2001, Exeter, England

DW: Peter, since 1977 you have edited and produced 5 series of *Theatre Papers* [1977-85] and then 5 collections of *Arts Archives* [1993-2001], and it's an extraordinary body of work: traces of processes, dispositions and trajectories in the making of theatre, dance and a wide array of contextual practices. I think of them as a kind of plural and thoroughly use-ful map of diverse making cultures and thinkings-through-performance. Today I wanted to ask you about you in all of this, how you've kept going in such a productive, patient and self-effacing way, what your engines and goals are. First of all, can you remember how you started, what your triggers were?

PH: I can remember very clearly two moments when I started. With the *Arts Archives* and the audio-visual side of it, it was just by chance seeing the single gesture that a student of Laban's made; it had been filmed at Dartington, and was in the archive there. When I saw this gesture, I thought if only one could understand the thinking and perceptual orientation that had arrived at the point where somebody, in this case a student, could engage in a movement or a gesture. Behind this one single gesture one can hear thoughts, ideas, perceptions and orientations, and I was so intrigued to hear more.

With the *Theatre Papers*, I had one of the original editions of *Towards a Poor Theatre*, the volume published in Sweden by Eugenio Barba. I was at university, and I remember one Sunday evening, sometimes I used to go and treat myself to a fry-up at the Shelbourne Grill Hotel in Dublin; I was by myself and I took the book in. And the first thing I looked at were the photographs of face masks, and I just didn't understand a thing; I wasn't studying theatre, I had no training in that area. I was absolutely intrigued, and started reading a little of what this man was saying in the book. And I thought, goodness, here's the same person not only putting words down on paper but also somehow enabling these men and women to produce extraordinary facial images.

So I suppose in both instances it was the density of intelligence, in the widest sense of that word, that was within these phenomena. And I was interested to find out if there were ways of meeting this intelligence in some way or other. It seemed to me that most of the publications I've come across over the years in their various formats did little to help me in this respect. In *Theatre Papers*, it was always a question of giving the voice to the practitioner, to hear the ideas, thoughts, insights, experiences that had informed their work. As simple as that.

DW: That's been a consistent principle throughout, that you make a space available for the voices of others ...

PH: Yes, it's about them being allowed to be intelligent about their practices, in their own manner, in their own language, their own pace of thought, their own set of references and nouns and verbs and images. And likewise in *Arts Archives*, that sense of voice, not only occurring within the practices but also giving space for them to articulate what they do. I once worked with Joan Skinner, spent time with her doing the work. There we were at the Greenwich Dance Agency with all these distinguished dancers of one sort or another who had come to work with this famous lady. And there she was, at one point in this extended period of work, saying 'And now we will do spongy dance'. If I had invited such a gathering of people to do a spongy dance, it would have fallen on dead ground. But precisely because she had worked with this group over a number of days, because she breathed the way she breathed, and because of all that phenomenally complex set of circumstances that make Joan Skinner who she is, she was able to say this and everyone was enabled to do a spongy dance! [See *Arts Archives*, 3rd archive, 1996-7, no. 2: 'An Introduction to Skinner Releasing Technique'].

I've always been interested in how people speak of what they do: their language, but also the rhythms of speech and its spacings. With *Arts Archives*, the video enables a registering of the silences, the gaps, the travellings that go on in someone's mind before they produce a word or sentence. I've almost come to the conclusion that there are no such things as methodologies, there are only teachers. At the end of the road, what is occurring are these fine, subtle meetings of people through spaces and times and breathings where nothing is being said at all; these elements are every bit as eloquent and interactive as anything else. And that kind of material evidence of practice can't possibly begin to be annotated, recorded, documented in published print form. I've always been astonished that more people don't seem to wish to attend to that kind of thickness of interchange that is going on; for a great deal of informational and perceptual richness is occurring in these interchanges.

DW: One thing that strikes me about *Arts Archives* is that they are extraordinarily information-rich resources in terms of dispositions towards pedagogy as dynamic process and communicative exchange. Qualities of watching and listening, which reside in the kinds of gaps you've referred to. *Arts Archives* and *Theatre Papers* seem to have a multiple pedagogic function, both in terms of thick descriptions or registers of teachers-in-process as it were, and as secondary research resources for students, researchers, teachers, practitioners to be used in different ways. Is one of your core concerns with the practices of teachers teaching?

PH: I know they seem like that, and of course many of the situations I observe involve a teacher, workshop leader or artist inviting people into aspects of their work that they feel are central and can be shared with somebody else. I am very often there at those points, and of course I'm intrigued by the manner in which they do that. But actually I don't have in my head such a clear notion of what these materials are. And in a way the pedagogic aspects are only part of being on a journey, if you like. If I wished to touch something at the heart of the project I'm engaged in, I don't think I would describe it in that way.

Let me tell you what I hunt. I risk getting into strange territory here, but let me try. What I love to see more than anything else is people at work in operation with imagery. I don't have any fancy notions of what imagery is, it's very open; I define it simply as possibilities rendered present. In a workshop, it's like going fishing; you wait, and of course often you don't catch anything. Sometimes you catch little ones, not that they are unimportant at all. Sometimes you're there when a bigger one is being caught, not by me I have to say. I'm a witness, or through what I'm doing a participant in the fishing activity. Sometimes it is so evident that a person or a group of people, through many different means, techniques, orientations towards what they are doing, and within many different contexts, are arriving at or touching a point where they are in operation with imagery and imagery is in operation with them. I don't define that in terms of any particular theatrical or performance form; I've been witness to it in the widest possible array of forms. Although of course the forms themselves contribute to these moments, and the ways in which they are generated.

I have to admit I don't go to theatre any more, unless it's free. It sounds terrible, I know, but the reason why I don't go is because the disposition and formal arrangements of what theatre has so often become in our society simply don't allow for the accessing of these particular operations or indeed for the witnessing of them. For me, the place where I can witness them, or be party to them, is often found within pedagogical situations, within the processes. It's almost as if these processes, when they are really happening, are crying out for different contextual places within which they can happen. Our culture in the West is beginning to find alternative sites where these phenomena might appear, but only rarely do you find them in theatre.

So what is it I find within these processes? I really don't want to give the impression of being an essentialist in this area, because what I am witnessing is as much a part of me and my performative engagement with whatever it is as it is part of the particular context of the particular person or people. It's a very contextualised and complex moment, and very often the highly mediatised form through which I'm watching it further blurs it. But I do think that during these moments - I call them moments, but they can have some duration in time - and into these moments come all of the

philosophical, aesthetic, artistic and intelligent activity that I wish to have there with it. I feel that when someone is really operating with imagery and imagery is operating with them in the sense I described, in these moments the potential for the conjunction of real intelligence and practice is most apparent: most explicit and implicit, if you like. Somehow the activity and the space within it allows for that, allows it to take place. So I find it immensely rich from that point of view.

There are other reasons I find these times so formidable. When they occur, I get an inkling of what for me is an emerging issue. At these moments I actually perceive an activity that allows forth a human person in relationship to imagery, imagery here as I've described: possibility rendered present. When I see this really at work, these moments shift or develop the performative moment away from what could be considered to be a very anthropocentric set of circumstances and concerns, towards something which allows in this fantastic evidence of a person in relationship to 'world': it could be the world of imagery, it could be the world of world, it could be a world. I see people negotiating, dialoguing, listening, being in a kind of ecological, streaming balance between the things that enable this moment to have the power that I think it has. And in such moments I feel that performance is beginning to reclaim something of the kind of power I think it does have, and probably always has had somewhere. In the real sense of the root word *dromenon*, the drama, which is 'a thing being done'. The moments can be very fleeting or an entire performance, and it really doesn't matter what kind of imagery it is: matrixed, non-matrixed, fragmented, or whatever. A thing is being done, and it's being done with me as part of the performance, as well as with the performer, as well as with the imagery, the 'thing'. A thing is being done which has all of the concrete existential evidence of the person, the tree, the cat, or whatever.

And then I think of the enormous intelligence, subtlety, fluidity at play, what Deleuze talks about in terms of the 'plane of consistency', immanent 'continuums of intensity'. These moments, which I call 'anthropomundic', occur as close to that plane of consistency as any I ever see. And I'm astonished at the human person's abilities and facilities in bringing to this moment all that they do bring. I'm reminded how rich that is in comparison to the streamings and intelligences and bases for decision-making that we might make in society to produce our educational system, for example, or our political systems, or our relational senses between each other. And at these moments when the things I'm on the hunt for emerge, I'm consistently amazed at how they remind us of the possible streamings.

DW: So these 'anthropomundic' moments are supra-subjective events: a flaring into appearance of the person, of the imagery, and of their dynamic and unfolding interrelatedness.

PH: Yes. I only use this word to myself; it's a shorthand way to hit my head on the thing, to keep reminding myself. To say think of that, even if you don't know what it means. By stepping on to that stone in the middle of the pond, somehow you see things from slightly different angles. Shorthand words like 'anthropomundic' are just little provocations, ways of stepping sideways and making sure I can stand there for a little while and have a look at something, think about something. And I find it rather pleasurable and productive.

I've just been teaching a course about the avant-garde at Bristol University as a sort of academic locum, and it's been really interesting to revisit some of this work. You begin to develop shorthand views of what happened, what these people were after, how it evolved, the recurrent concerns and motifs. In the end you abstract yourself off to a series of wholly indefensible generalisations, but which are very useful reminders to me about some of what went on and where things are at the moment. Ignoring for a moment who or what the 'avant-garde' was or is, and accepting that I'm operating at a kind of hysterical shorthand level, let me convey my sense of the five gifts of the avant-garde. One of them, for better or for worse, and Deleuze describes it far better than I can, is the question of becoming; this shoots through and on, underpins everything. Another is a problematic rather than a gift, and it's the question of narrative, non-narrative and spaces in-between in all their manifestations. A third gift, which is entirely indefensible although it makes some sense to me, is the notion of the thing itself; if I say that piece of shorthand to myself, I can rest happily on it for a while and gather sustenance from it. A fourth gift would be the body and issues of embodiment. And the fifth is the anthropomundic.

Ric, you remember years ago we talked at Dartington about an ecology of theatre? Well, I'm still hunting that one down, and have a slowly growing sense of how one might understand or practice this question of ecology; and the anthropomundic is really a question of ecology and ecologies of practice. For hundreds of years, so much of our art making in the West has been what I would call anthropocentric. Since the last century, the 'avant garde', drawing upon all sorts of influences and cultures, has reintroduced something of what I'm calling the anthropomundic, which is an image ecology between *anthropos* and *mundus*. *Mundus* not just being things - trees, flowers, animals, people, material objects - but also images, in their diverse manifestations. Between those two terms there are enormously dynamic streamings. Ostensibly Arts Archives is about very anthropocentric work, it could be seen in that way as simply watching people; but in the moments I'm looking for, it moves way beyond any question of anthropocentricity and you get a sense that you're entering the realm of the anthropomundic.

Years ago, when I first went to Dartington, I had never been trained in theatre or anything related, and I really

didn't know why I'd been appointed to train these teachers or actors or dancers. I had no idea what to do. I spent a long time in the studio just moving chairs and bits of furniture around, or drawing the curtains, doing simple task-based activities because I had an absolute horror of anybody role-playing. I really didn't understand or like anything to do with acting. After many years, I've come to the realisation that this anthropomundic quality is not determined by the kind of imagery that people are working with, it can happen in a moment or an entire play of Chekhov as well as with Yvonne Rainer doing a task-based activity. It just isn't predicated on those kinds of image distinctions at all. That's interesting to me, for it has meant that even within the highly anthropocentric nature of most Western theatre since the Renaissance there are occurrences of this other relationship and process, vestiges if you like. The thing being done has returned in the twenty-first century, and the avant-garde is partly responsible for reminding us of that, and reopening the possibilities.

If what I'm talking about has any relevance at all, then what kinds of sensations, perceptions, trainings, modes of preparation does one need to engage with in order to come by this anthropomundic relationship? And for me these are profoundly interesting questions. For example, in my work as a teacher over the years, I've become aware that there is a very simple faculty that people have great difficulty working with, myself included: and that is, how does one listen to the implications of material? Of course it involves the dialogue with oneself, but somehow it's more than that. How do you allow the implications of material you're working with to reveal or disclose themselves in an alignment with you? Because we impact upon our environment, our world, our images so much, we have an enormous difficulty in allowing this to occur in and to us. Do you know the word syzygy? It means a conjunction or alignment, as in planetary alignment. When you see people working with materials, they make repeated compositions of one sort or another, and more often than not they are laying too much on the materials, or laying too much on their own bodies. There is a reverse procedure which throws up something akin to syzygy, where you come into alignment with the material. Through and along the alignment come all the streamings. If you're not in alignment with your image, whatever that image is, whether inside or outside or both, then you won't hear it speak to you.

RA: If I look at the list of *Arts Archives*, one way I can see it is in terms of your eye moving from 1993 to the most recent one you've made. There is a consistency of your eye looking at this work. That process of placing yourself in alignment with the material you're working on is like a mirroring; you're doing it, but you're also trying to find out what it is, what that relationship is inside the material you're looking at. I wondered whether you'd come to any thoughts about this? What have you gleaned about that in

terms of how you're beginning to look? How does the experience now direct you to look at particular pieces?

PH: Well, two things to say about that. One is that my way of looking within Arts Archives is mediated entirely by the technology I use ...

RA: It's not entirely: it's heavily mediated, of course, but you still have lots of choices ...

PH: I do, but to be frank the more I work it, the more I realise how mediated it is. Which is fine, and I have to work with the grain of that. At the moment I'm working on a CD Rom with a French dancer, Dominique Dupuy. Let me describe the experience of beginning to make that. I'm there in a workshop situation, which is one I'm quite familiar with. He has a radio mic on him, I have earphones so I can pick up what he's saying. The camera is framed of course, and utterly predetermined in terms of what it's framing, how close or far, the speed of approach, how it's moving, and so on. My eye perceives through technology, as does my ear. And you can only get it once, it's very hard to edit this kind of material and try to overdub afterwards. I try to be in the flow of what's happening, to listen closely to the degree that I can to some extent prefigure where it will go; and this is my second point. As he's speaking, I'm already thinking about what it is that the lens must already be moving towards watching. I find it exhausting, but when it works, in a sense I'm filtering, and as he speaks I'm already moving towards his foot, say. If I'm connected to it sufficiently, aligned with it, I prefigure the logic of where to go next visually. That's when it's really working. As I described earlier, the moment of Joan Skinner's instructions, the spacings of her words, and the thickness of information in the gaps, you can't overdub any of this; or if you do, it turns into something completely different, and you have to recognise that.

I have become increasingly interested in using this CD technology. The workshop videos I make are much more delimited than what a CD can give you. The physical phenomena of the computer screen, what you can do with it and how it engages people, are very different. And it allows you greater analytical space to watch something, return to it, flick forward or back, come off at different angles from it; it's more rhizomatic than arborescent, to borrow Deleuze's terms. In a very simple way, it allows you to manipulate material and to journey through it individually in a rather different way from video where one has to guide the viewer to some greater degree. So with this CD technology, slowly I would like to move away from those situations like workshops, which is where I've been with my camera for the past eight years or so. I would like to take another set of angles on this material, to place my eye in relation to it in a slightly different way using CDs and, if I had enough money, DVD and

mpeg2 compression. CDs offer a site of reflection or meditation for the person viewing somebody's work; or at least one would like to believe they do. I would love to be able to encounter work with people in a much more personal and specific way. I once made a video of Julyen Hamilton working in the space [Arts Archives 2nd Series, 1994-5, no. 5: 'Dance Improvisation'] in which Julyen dances and talks about dancing at the same time; and I was always intrigued by that possibility even though it was just video. I suppose I want to work with people just to celebrate the ways that they are in the world that inform their making, what they see, what they think, their perceptions and how these surface in their work.

All you can do with this stuff really is treat it as a gift back to life, put it back out there. One of the nice things about what I've been doing is that I've enjoyed the strategy of the medium I've used. I enjoy the fact that there's a catalogue, so people can choose what they want if they want it. I like the strategy of a video or a CD, rather than say a book or journal. Not that books or journals aren't useful, but *Arts Archives* and *Theatre Papers* are an entirely different strategy. They get into nooks and crannies with the distaste that they deserve. [Laughter]

DW: They have very different kinds of circuits and flows of dispersal, and somehow they enable different connectivities. I remember a few years ago in Western Australia, there was a small new dance and contact gang who treated some of the *Theatre Papers* a bit like samizdat. They passed around these papers, and photocopies of them, and the materials seemed to take on a little quiet role of provocative anti-toxins, or toxins, I'm not sure; they entered the bloodstream.

PH: It's interesting in terms of circulation, because their effect is not immediate, it seems to me. They also have a knack of reappearing after about ten years, they begin to appear in people's bibliographies. They come back into another area of circulation, if you like.

RA: How was it to rework Mary Fulkerson's *Theatre Paper* as a CD Rom? [Arts Archives, 4th series, 1998-9: 'Release: Language of the Axis']. You first worked on it with Mary in 1978, and it must have been a very different strategy for CD. 1/

PR: Well, that was my first CD effort, and it was very crude. It was a different strategy, of course. But it hasn't been taken up at all. When *Language of the Axis* first came out in print, it went out to a community of people, and was circulated widely, and I knew that was happening. *Arts Archives* don't go to communities of people because I don't think they exist in the same way as they did then. They go to individuals, the cultural situation is much more atomised now, and they also go to communities of people working in higher education, in training and institutional research

contexts. And in a very tiny way I suspect that these kinds of materials have contributed to the recognition that practice can be a legitimate subject for research, that its bodies of knowledge are indeed worthy of scrutiny. That was certainly part of an underlying subversive strategy from the very beginning, to distribute these materials in such a way that they might play their part in extending academic notions of research. At the same time, over and above the actual content of a video or paper, perhaps it helps enhance the reputations of the artists concerned, it helps get them work, and they are able to use these materials as tools in applications for funding, and so on.

I think you have to use a 'Bavarian-type cunning', as Brecht would say, in pursuing these kinds of projects. I fully support any material strategy which can help declare the practice. If there is a biosphere of practices or images, let's call it a 'practicosphere', then it's under threat from so many different things within our society. Not least of which might be the revenge of the intellect upon experience that plagues so many of our university courses. Resistances and suspicions about other kinds of knowledges which cannot be conveyed in discursive ways remain entrenched. The gesture made by the Laban student I mentioned earlier on was in its own right a fragment of knowledge. And I believe there's a huge bank of knowledge in what I'm witnessing.

DW: One of the things I like about Arts Archives is a proposition included in the brochure. It reads: 'It is the policy of Arts Archives to include as much material as is practical in order that the viewer or reader may edit according to interest'. As well as being an encouragement to engage with these materials in the ways one finds useful, this seems to be a recognition of their unfinished quality, rather than claiming that this is, for example, the 'definitive' video about kalarippayattu, the Alexander technique, breath and the voice, or whatever. The archives offer an array of materials that are to be re-used, re-fashioned, re-edited. Am I right in thinking there's a seed here for your recent interest in the possibilities afforded by CDs, in terms of a greater agency for the watcher or reader, and relatively a greater fluidity on the level of the materials themselves?

PH: Yes, I think you're right. Maybe I wrote that to suggest that if you're bored, you've got a fast-forward function on your VCR. But I'd hate for the videos to be seen as packaging a practice with any claim to exclusive mastery or closure at all. When I make copies of the videos to send out, I just rewind them to a point mid-stream and go in there to check if they are working properly. So I have an enormous memory bank of little snippets from each of the videos, and that can be as informative as editing the whole video. I would like them to be tools for people's work.

You know, when I hear from people out of the blue and I send materials out around the world, I feel that these things are somehow going to settle into some fertile ground. I always feel the seed is going to spiral down and rest there and be taken further into something else. Perhaps what I least enjoy is bulk orders from university libraries; I've just sent a large number of videos from all of the archives to a university, and I know that they risk just sitting on the shelves collecting dust. And I don't have quite the same experience. But what does sustain me there is that someone by chance, by happenstance, might just take one off the shelf, put it in the VCR for fun, and might see something that touches them, gives them impetus. Even if someone rejects it, that defines a little bit of their own impetus to move forward or elsewhere.

DW: There is also a historiographic edge to what you've been doing for over twenty years now; these are oral and visual histories of often quite marginalised practices. I remember having a conversation with Mick Gordon, the director of The Gate in London. He asked why I wrote about 'famous' people, rather than the 'true heroes' of performance making, and then proceeded to list the kinds of people you've worked with on *Arts Archives* or *Theatre Papers*: the semi-secret and often barely visible engines and triggers for all sorts of practices, which hover on the brink of disappearance in our product-oriented culture. Do you conceive of this as one of the functions of these materials? As a sort of loose, serendipitous, and very partial mapping of processes and practices, all of them invitations to pause and look again, that inform so much of what hardens into forms and comes at us in high visibility institutional contexts. For versions of them are often coopted and used in these sponge-like commodity contexts.

PH: Well, I don't think I've ever conceived of this project in terms of the relationship to an energising substrata such as you've just described. On the other hand, I have conceived of these materials as part of a dynamic oral culture of connections, exchanges, knowledges. There used to be a debate about how to document oral cultures without immobilising or destroying them. But of course they are strong enough to go on in their own ways, they are resilient and evolve. Sometimes you meet someone like Andrei Serban - on one level a celebrated director with an international reputation, on another someone who works with stick exercises in the training of performers. [See *Arts Archives*, 4th Series, 1998-9, no. 4: 'The use of sticks in performance training']. And the stick exercises themselves belong to the kind of area you're referring to, bedrocks of particular knowledges that are shared and travel in an 'invisible' way, they don't belong to Andrei. Their movements and connections operate rather like oral cultures. And all sorts of specific exercises circulate in this way, they are handed on and

transformed according to needs and contexts; they are not owned by anyone. Over the years I've observed thousands of different practices. Do I use them in my own work? I might use one or two that I know about, not intellectually or by observing them, but by bringing them into my own practices in a substantial way, having the touch to understand and develop them. These are not recipes for people to follow. Sometimes you see a knowledge at work, you hear an echo, and something is possible. That's what I mean by my suggestion that there are no such things as methodologies, there are only practitioners.

RA: This relates to what you said earlier on about alignment, and it reminds me of something else you once said which has stayed with me. You talked about the ability to be to 'hang around things'. An ability to circle around something until it reveals what it is. It's a quality of listening.

PH: Yes. When you make your *Fire Table* performances, Ric, you have thought about them of course, but in a sense the pieces declare themselves to you; it's two-way traffic. It's a dialogue, a balance within our psyches and physicalities. I see it in Dominique Dupuy's way of being in his body, for example: it's not simply a question of letting outside in, and it's never only inside out. The anthropomundic is the dialogue and exchange of two-way traffic. I would almost call it a touch; touching something on the outside means being touched by it, and this is another way of perceiving alignment. Part of the etymological root for the word 'touch' relates to something that ignites: touchstone, touchwood. Touch that fires. The congruence and conjunction of inside and outside, which I find touching, moving. I can recall the anthropomundic just by feeling the air on my cheek...

I very much like Deleuze's description of the plane of consistency. He says that if you're off it, you're either early or late, which is related to speed. And then he talks about 'affinities'; you're either there with it, or you're not. And that's a little what I see, that underneath the organisational composition one senses connections with this plane, people working or beginning to work in touch with it. And they do.

4.4

2002

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'The quality of understanding': an interview with Bruce Myers

David Williams, The Rock Inn, Yelverton, Devon,
11 April 2000

After training at RADA, and working with the Liverpool Everyman and the Royal Shakespeare Company, Bruce Myers became one of the original members of Peter Brook's international company. He has taken part in most of the CICT's productions in Paris and on tour around the world: *Timon d'Athènes* (1974), *Les Iks* (1975), *Ubu aux Bouffes* (1977), *Mesure pour mesure* (1978), *Conference of the Birds* (1979), *The Mahabharata* (1985), *La Tempête* (1990), *The Man Who* (1994), *Qui est là?* (1998) and *Je suis un phénomène* (1999). In 1978, he acted in Joseph Chaikin's *The Dybbuk* at the New York Public Theatre. His own version of Ansky's story, *A Dybbuk for Two*, toured internationally in the 1980s and 1990s to great critical acclaim. As well as directing and teaching, he has performed in many television and feature films.

DAVID WILLIAMS Gertrude Stein once wrote, 'What good are your roots if you can't take them with you?'. You've lived in France for about thirty years now. What was your background in England? And in terms of your roots, what has travelled with you?

BRUCE MYERS My roots are in Manchester, and I still feel a strong contact with that city and the north of England more generally. I still like Manchester United! In Paris if there's any messing around with who's who, I tell people I'm from Manchester, not just your average Englishman, and there's a kind of respect straight away. [Laughter] When you come from the city with one of the best football teams in the world, there's a kind of pride. And they're a very beautiful team: their speed, precision and elegance.

Of course there were all sorts of other things about Manchester too. I was quite lucky. First of all, there was a determination not to be what I seemed to be. I was helped in that by my father. He brought me up in the Jewish religion; we had quite a religious family background. At the same time, there was his curiosity as a lawyer working from an office in Manchester with an extraordinarily mixed clientele. There were Sikhs and Jamaicans, as well as lads from his boxing team – he was president of the Amateur Boxing Association. So he was a man with diverse tastes, and I liked that diversity. There was an atmosphere of something English, Jewish and tolerant, incredibly mixed right from the very start.

DW What were your feelings about going to Paris to join Brook's company? Did the location in Paris seem an important factor?

BM I'm not sure about the fact that it was to be based in Paris. I don't really know how Peter felt or feels about going to Paris; that was simply where we were. It has never seemed not to be the right place. It's certainly been the wrong place in terms of becoming an English actor. But in terms of an incredibly unique and exciting adventure, it has always felt the right place to be.

DW Was the multiracial nature of Brook's group an important factor for you? In what ways did it seem productive?

BM For the most part, I've done nothing but work with an international company with people from different countries, different races, different colours, different notions of what theatre means. In a very natural way, I've been forced to see what those differences – and above all the similarities – are. There's no end point in that research. Quite surprisingly humanity becomes one, with many different facets. We've seen in our group that no generalisation stands up for very long. Nothing simple and reductive said about any one race stands up; I now know it not to be the case. And I know, because I've lived

it, that most simplistic views about the different capacities of different races are nonsense, and that diversity is what makes for a richer society. It's a way of working: creative, exciting, curious, and again it drives one back to take a good look at oneself and how things function. It's not the only reason for looking at oneself. Because behind all of that with Brook has been a very profound spiritual quest, which I don't think could have existed in the same way had it not been based on this very practical, material work in the theatre. There everyone could take a look at different races, different religions, different ways of believing, different ways of manifesting and expressing the most sensitive and sacred parts of our individual beings. Theatre's a lens that focuses, and this particular theatre company is endlessly rich in that way.

At the same time, having lived that with Peter Brook, having experienced these propositions for ways of working on the theatre and what the theatre can be, and what the meaning of respect for each other can really be, and what listening to someone else can really mean in terms of playing in a theatre, I don't especially believe in the idea of an international or European theatre. It's certainly not the only legitimate form of theatre. There are great national theatres in each of these countries, and this is something else, something that I don't do. But I can recognise it as being an incredible force. In general, the work made in theatre in England is often magnificent. And there's a connection to one's own language which I miss. I've worked in French all the time, and in fact have lived apart from the French. I have not become French, I don't even speak the language perfectly; so I've never been asked to participate in the Comédie Française. I have played a few classical plays in France – Racine, and so on – and it's always been a strange and difficult event. I've played a lot of Shakespeare in French, but I never will be French, or even part of the French theatre scene. And that's a disadvantage. It makes things quite difficult in terms of working ordinarily, just getting jobs. It's often a little easier to come back here and see what's going on, or to make things myself. So an international company is an exceptional position. For everything that we've learnt about a multicultural society, an international theatre is unusual. And in this case it depends a lot on the strength, individuality and passion of one man.

When we were in South Africa the last time performing *The Man Who* at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg, there was something exciting there, but it could have become a genuinely multiracial country. Having passed through the hell of the colonial British/Boer regimes, and of apartheid, with Mandela now out of prison and as a

leader giving such dignity to the country, something was possible there. And yet for all sorts of reasons there are new problems – unemployment, violent crimes, car hijackings, and so on. Johannesburg is now said to be the most dangerous city in the world. It was interesting working at the Market Theatre, where John Kani's now the director; there's a school there. They are obviously having difficulty choosing which plays to put on in South Africa today, what to say in a way. It seems a very exciting project, and it attracts me a great deal, working out what the Market Theatre can be today. It's clear that when Barney Simon was there, when everyone was fighting for freedom, there was a strong relationship between those involved, a kind of harmony of common purpose. Things were clearer, and now they are less clear. Under apartheid, the theatre had a genuine function in terms of taking on and explaining the issues. Like some of the theatre groups we've worked with in the past: El Teatro Campesino in California, for example, who articulated things on behalf of the Mexican farmworkers in their struggle with the winegrowers. The campesinos were involved in a strike which lasted fifteen years until they got the conditions they wanted, and we were only there for a month of it. Theatre and politics were very closely involved there, as they were for example in Prague, with Havel.

And more recently, of course, there are the events in Rhodesia, which don't surprise me in the slightest. You get Mugabe saying (and I'm sure it's partly true) that the whites have never changed; they shouldn't take our land. These are the farmers who had participated, whether actively and personally or not, in a whites-only regime; and Mugabe probably speaks for a hell of a lot of people who are saying exactly the same things, that the whites don't have a place there. That personally upset me because I'd seen in South Africa that there was a very strong connection to some of the white community. Part of the white community had worked incredibly hard alongside the black community to change the country, to free Mandela, to institute democracy. I would feel the same, I would be the same. But again, sadly, I think it's probably unusual, the exception. There is an incredibly powerful force in the world today. As we talk, there is also the situation in Austria, the popular election of Jorg Haider. People want this superiority. They feel they can get better jobs, their children will be better brought up, better educated than if there is this multiracial community around them which they have to accept. They don't want to, they don't understand their language or their culture, they think they are coming in and taking their jobs, and so on; that's how a lot of people think.

I used to think our theatre company would change the world, it would create a utopian world. We were saying such good things, that everyone was equal and people shouldn't be humiliated because of their race, that there was no way of classifying races through stereotyping, and so on. In certain ways, quietly perhaps it does influence many people in different directions, but it didn't change the world. Indeed the world is possibly more nationalistic now than ever before, because in the end it's simpler. I remember when I investigated orthodox Judaism I found it to be a possible way of life because, in a way, everything was given. After that, there's room for debate and analysis of the different facets of one's inner being and the associations of its massive faraway god. There is a possibility of individuality; and at the same time it would have been necessary first of all to accept certain rules and regulations, the laws of custom and behaviour, which I found impossible. Nevertheless one must be touched by people who accept that this is how it is: this way of dressing, this way of fervent prayer, four or five times a day in a particular form, the rituals, rites and ceremonies, the traditions of ancient religions. These structures bring a kind of order, but if this order is placed on top of a limited vision, then it simply reinforces the limitations of that vision. It gives a kind of legitimacy and dignity, which are not the real thing either.

DW So many issues, concerns and materials seem to collide in Brook's work, and one is invited to take them on board. A politics. An ethics. A poetics. An ecumenical and grounded spirituality. This collision was at the heart of what always interested me in this work: the serious play of what it might mean to be a human being in relation to other human beings, engaged in dialogue with other perspectives. It doesn't change the world, but in very local contexts it constitutes a very productive set of provocations and propositions, and not only for theatre.

BM Yes, this kind of research doesn't provide answers, but it opens things up. I suppose all of us involved in that company have found out surprising things about each other and about ourselves. Unexpected things. And it's a very long period of time – which is why I now feel able to say I know some things – thirty years which have been a unique experience. And you can't argue away anything that you've lived. That's one of the strong things I have learnt: it's necessary to live everything. Brook's research and its basis in many different cultures certainly gives me room for reflection for another lifetime.

But to return to the focus of your book, I think it's clear in an immediate way that Brook's work is quite different from any of the

other 'international' theatre contexts in Paris you mentioned. It's clear right away that most of the cast are not French, and don't speak French as their native language. So there's an immediate conflict, a provocation from the outset, to say something else; and Brook has a vision. It's not the same as, say, Savary, García, Lecoq. Lecoq attracted a lot of foreign actors because he was a gifted man, a fine teacher. Simon McBurney says he's one of the finest teachers of theatre there's ever been, and I suspect that's true. He was an inspired teacher, making theatre creative, spontaneous and connected to the human being. He revealed that we're really not the skilful actors we might otherwise seem to be. But his was a totally different project from Brook's. Peter's the odd one out: I feel it very strongly.

DW Salman Rushdie once described a particular 'migrant sensibility' that can be produced by displacement, the possibility of seeing things in a defamiliarised way, and the possibility of a 'doubled' vision. As an outsider on the inside, migrants perhaps can come to see their own cultural background afresh, removed from the deadening effect of habit, and at the same time the cultural context within which they find themselves as a lens through which to perceive this background differently – its forms, and its meanings underneath the forms. In your experience as a 'foreigner' living in Paris, dislodged from what were formerly familiar frames of reference, is this kind of displacement productive, or alienating in an unproductive way? And does Paris feel like 'home'? Or is home, like identity, always somewhat on the move?

BM In a certain way, 'home' doesn't really mean anything. Being at home is not in itself something useful, it doesn't do anything. Neither does going away from home. I know it sounds obvious, but it's what happens there in those places.

A gypsy or migrant life can be terrible. Displacement or exile can be very painful if they are enforced, if one is obliged to uproot. It isn't necessarily productive in itself. And neither is staying in the same place, necessarily; it depends on other factors. The actual growth of the human being, the evolution of the individual. The understanding, tenderness, openness – these things we consider qualities in a person. The ability to answer another's confusion with a certain lucidity, compassion or lightness doesn't only come from moving around. That has always concerned me, throughout the last thirty years, that I was getting taken away to something that has no end. Where next? Where next? And yet I think Brook himself is able all the time to come back to certain fundamental questions, that there was always one's self to be observed in action. And what he was provid-

ing were unusual circumstances and unusual groups of people. But what really counts is the quality of the understanding, hence the attitude, and hence the possibility of a real respect, not just a polite, 'politically correct' respect.

I don't really know what to do in the future, there's no natural way for me now without going *back* somewhere. If I want to keep working, and there's no reason I shouldn't work for another twenty years, it'll have to be something else. Then I'll see what Brook's work isn't: that's quite a serious issue for us actors. I would like to work with someone like Simon McBurney or, say, Tara Arts or one of the black theatre companies in Britain, to work alongside particular communities. Perhaps I could go back to the Royal Shakespeare Company or the National, it might be the easiest thing for me to do; at the same time I don't think I can or ought to do that, I think I'd pay dearly for it. It would be very tricky. The best solution is probably to find things I want to do myself.

4.5

1996

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The Terrible but Unfinished Story of Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia. By Hélène Cixous. Translated by Juliet Flower MacCannell, Judith Pike, and Lollie Groth. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994; European Women Writers Series; 230 pp. \$36.00 cloth, \$13.95 paper.

Hélène Cixous remains best known outside France as one of the major critical theorists of *écriture féminine*, a politicized poetics of the body and/of writing; "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976a) and *The Newly Born Woman* (1975), cowritten with Catherine Clément, will be familiar to any student of French feminism. Yet apart from *Portrait of Dora* (1976b), her deconstructive re-vision of Freud's clinical study of hysteria, Cixous's recent work as a playwright is little known in the English-speaking world.

The first of her large-scale "history plays," *Norodom Sihanouk*, was produced by Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil and premiered in Paris in September 1985, in the immediate wake of the company's Shakespeare cycle. On one level, *Norodom Sihanouk* represents a conscious attempt to apprehend and represent contemporary history in the light of a recuperated Shakespearean dramaturgy. Cixous has talked extensively about her "return" to Shakespeare (see, for example, Franke and Chazal 1989:156-60), without ever recognizing the banal conservatism of her construction of a transhistorical "Shakespeare" who is supposedly ideology-free and all things to all people. Nor has she chosen to address the profoundly ironic implications of her choice of model in the context of a play about colonialism and cultural imperialism. Having said that, and despite this play's overly self-conscious Shakespearean intertexts, *Norodom Sihanouk* reads like a Brechtian recuperation of Elizabethan dramaturgy: in other words, episodic and anti-individualist, a polyphonic multivocal *theatrum mundi* that invites us to inhabit spaces of contradiction.

Cixous's sprawling chronicle of the dis-memberment of Cambodia and the Khmer people is an undertaking of genuinely epic proportions. The play comprises two five-act parts ("epochs") of about nine hours duration in performance, covering a period of twenty-four years. Part one begins with Sihanouk's abdication of his throne in 1955 (a ruse enabling him legally to stand for elected political office), and ends with the U.S.-backed *coup d'état* that installed the incompetent and corrupt Lon Nol regime in 1970. Part two focuses on the growing Khmer Rouge threat, its overthrow of Lon Nol, and the subsequent evacuation of Phnom Penh; the play culminates in the mass refugee exodus from Cambodia to Thailand, during the Vietnamese invasion of Pol Pot's so-called "Democratic Kampuchea," in the final weeks of 1979. Close to 50 scenes are animated by more than 60 speaking characters, among them many of the power brokers instrumental in the complexities and atrocities of recent Indochinese *realpolitik*. Sihanouk encounters Chou En-lai, Pham Van Dong, and Alexis Kosygin, for example, as well as Khmer Rouge "brothers numbers 1 and 2," Pol Pot and Khieu Samphan—twin engineers of a Maoist collectivism so extreme it lead inexorably to a genocidal commodification of human bodies as laboring "oxen" (201), or "grade two fertilizer" (203).

In addition, Cixous sketches a veritable rogue's gallery of U.S. foreign policy officials, primarily from the Nixon administration—inept, abusive, and racist ambassadors, Ubuesque generals, and duplicitous CIA agents. Cixous's Holinshed is William Shawcross, whose *Sideshow* (1979) explored the criminal expediency and cynicism of U.S. geopolitics in Cambodia during the Vietnam War. So it is no surprise that the most damning representation of all is reserved for a deranged and demonic Henry Kissinger—a manipulative Spenglerian pessimist whose psychopathology has tragic consequences for Sihanouk and the

Khmers. He rationalizes the notorious Menu bombings—the illegal escalation of the war that took B-52's into neutral Cambodia—in terms of a purificatory “sanitizing” of a region “infested with parasites” (53): the purging and erasure of the unhygienic “stain” of communism, at any cost. “What do all the dissents, protests, restrictions matter?” he shouts in the face of Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird’s misgivings: “We must cauterize Asia once and for all” (82).

One of Cixous’s central concerns in this “epic of the heart”¹ seems to be with the precarious predicaments of individual subjects within collective structures—in other words, the status of *difference* in relation to various hegemonic regimes of power and of truth, regimes that represent economies of morbidity.² We are offered a range of political paradigms as a means of exploring the ethics of alterity: the last gasp of Sihanouk’s absolutist feudal monarchy, freely exchanged for an erratic but (relatively) pluralist democracy; Lon Nol’s disastrous version of plutocratic republicanism, in which absolute power is seen to corrupt absolutely; the total/itarian idealism of Pol Pot’s “agrarian revolution” and its murderous consequences; and the self-serving obscenities of superpower foreign policies—the machinery of a History that is unable to tolerate “Otherness,” the machinery of all “Empires of the Selfsame” (see Cixous and Clément 1975:78ff).

Philosophically, Cixous is marked by Emmanuel Levinas’s critique of History as a cruel process of totalization which subjects, appropriates, and erases the Other. The pathological colonization of difference and narcissistic reduplication of self that informs Khmer Rouge ideology, for example, or interventionist Western foreign policy, are central components of what Levinas calls “egology” (1985:117).³ Instead of this violently reductive economy of erasure, Levinas (and Cixous) propose the “ethical commerce” of “dialog” (1969:73), a relationship within which difference is maintained: in other words, a pluralist inter-/multisubjectivity that employs an ethics of compassion to redefine subjectivity in terms of heteronomous responsibility rather than autonomous “freedom.”

Nixon and Kissinger claim to act on behalf of “the free world” (54) while pursuing neocolonialist oppression and violation; and the Khmer Rouge cadres adopt a version of the Nazi lie of work making free. Cixous’s Sihanouk, however, for all his irascibility and petulance, suggests the *possibility* of an/other counterdiscursive model of freedom: in relatedness, in “being-for-the-other” (Levinas 1985:52).⁴ While his attempt to establish an inclusive “royal, Buddhist, socialist, neutral and independent Cambodia” (28) threatens certain communities of interest both within and outside of Cambodia, and ultimately leads to years of enforced personal exile, his sense of his responsibility to the peoples of Cambodia remains unshakable. To question the historical veracity of this representation is to misconstrue Cixous’s project here. In reality, Sihanouk has repeatedly shown himself to be capable of capricious and spiteful autocracy. However, this play need not be read as an exercise in nostalgic or revisionist hagiography, but rather as a meditation on compassion and re-membering as reparation of oblivion and loss. For Cixous, all writing represents “singing the abyss” (in Sellers 1994:59). “Writing is in the end only an *anti-oubli*. It is in one’s interest to write to both feel the passing of, and not forget that there is, hell” (Cixous 1989:7).⁵ The fact that Sihanouk’s “terrible story” remains unfinished to this day (and so very little, too little, has changed) may provoke us to countenance our own blinding and deafening amnesia toward the implications of “hells” elsew/here that might be other/wise.

—David Williams

Notes

1. Cixous quoted by Judith Pike in her introduction to this edition of *Norodom Sihanouk* (xviii).
2. For Cixous, all hierarchical binary oppositions engender "a universal battlefield. Each time a war is let loose. Death is always at work" (Cixous and Clément 1975:64).
3. Certain doublings in the Soleil's casting of *Norodom Sihanouk* reinforced the pathological similarities underlying extreme ideological differences; so, for example, Serge Poncelet played both Kissinger and Pol Pot, as well as Lon Nol's Prime Minister Long Boret. In this way, casting assumed a critical, *gestic* function. My primary misgiving about this edition of Cixous's play is that there is an absence of material relating to the Théâtre du Soleil production; its stylistic heterogeneity, amplified theatricality, and saturated metaphoricity, elaborated in conjunction with Cixous as writer, occupied and further developed the critical spaces in Cixous's text. In the absence of such material, Cixous's status as sole "author" is misleadingly enshrined, and the nexus between corpo/real performance and "writing the body" evaporates.
4. Cixous describes her heterogeneous model of (inter)subjectivity in the following terms:

I is always in difference. I is the open set of the trances of an I by definition changing, mobile, because living-speaking-thinking-dreaming [...]. [D]ifference [...] crosses through us, like a goddess [...] there is always room for you in me, your presence and your place. I is never an individual. I is haunted, I is always, before knowing anything, an I-love-you. (in Sellers 1994:xviii)
5. To write (and by implication to read, or to perform) is to do "the work of un-forgetting, of un-silencing, of un-earthing, of un-blinding oneself, and of un-deafening oneself" (Cixous in Sellers 1994:83).

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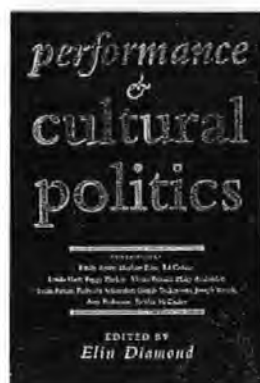
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4.6

1998

Review of Elin Diamond (ed.),
Performance and Cultural Politics,
in *The Drama Review* 42:4 (T160), Winter, 166-8

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Performance and Cultural Politics. Edited by Elin Diamond. London and New York: Routledge, 1996; 294 pp. \$18.95 paper.

For this invigorating new collection, Elin Diamond brings together some of the leading performance theorists in the United States, and the sites they explore are extraordinarily diverse: from the "representational crisis" (58) in gendered ontologies and imaginaries instigated by the dildo in lesbian sadomasochism (Lynda Hart), to a Baudrillardian analysis of the discourse and cultural economy of "liveness" in the mediatized commodification of "Unplugged" pop music (Philip Auslander). All of the essays possess the counter-discursive "edge" that Edward Said demands of intellectuals' critical interventions, their place being to "publicly raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them)" (Said 1994:11). However, rather than visiting each of the contributions in turn, this review proposes a *partial* (and perhaps ec-centric) itinerary through the volume driven largely by the particular purchase of certain materials from the perspective of an Australia(n)

preoccupied with issues of identity politics, cultural legitimacy, ownership and the law, and the contested ideological terrains of memory and history.¹

In her introduction, Diamond provides a judicious discussion of the relations between theatre, performance, and contemporary discourses of performativity and cultural studies. She goes on to sketch a polemical mapping of the attributes she understands to be fundamental to any contemporary cultural studies/performance studies project. In very diverse ways, and to differing degrees, these concerns—with rooted specificity, self-consciously performative writing, and difference with/in identity—underpin and inform each of the 13 essays in this collection.

Emily Apter, for example, explores the ambivalent and volatile interrelations of identity politics and stereotypes. She refers to Craig Owens' Foucauldian discussion of stereotype as subjection, constitutive of docile bodies, and Homi Bhabha's psychoanalytic work on colonial stereotypes and their imbrication in processes of subjectification, then considers the performativity of the stereotype in *posing*, where an identity is "pretended" into existence. Her essay examines gay and lesbian sexual identities as enacted in Orientalist stereotypes in turn-of-the-century performances by French women, in which "acting 'Oriental' becomes a form of outing, and outing is revealed to be thoroughly consonant with putting on an act" (20). As "a kind of psychic ossification that re-assimilates subjective novelties into the *doxa*" (28), stereotypes are recuperated as "politically strategic points of semantic connectivity among the blurred procedures of *acting, outing, being, doing, passing, and meaning*" (31):

Joseph Roach and Amy Robinson dissect the interplay of self-performance, appropriation, legal history, and institutional racisms. Roach grafts a detailed genealogy of the development of performance studies onto an investigation of the "secret history" (218) and "rites of passage" (222) of the racist carnival krewes of 19th-century New Orleans Mardi Gras; in so doing, he locates performance as "the principal mode whereby elite cultures produce themselves by contrast with the excluded" (223). Both Roach and Robinson refer to the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case at the Louisiana State Supreme Court in the 1890s, which resulted from a staged violation by antisegregationists of "equal but separate" legislation—Homer Plessy took a seat in a train carriage reserved for whites, then declared himself a "Negro" to the conductor. The Supreme Court interpreted Plessy's dissident intervention as an act of appropriation, "an unqualified theft of an identity imagined as property" (238), with identity here conceived as "natural" rather than performative. Robinson unpicks the paradoxes of passing as resistance, detailing its potential to expose the contingency of identities masked by the ontological fixities constituted in legislation, as well as to undermine the primacy of visual epistemologies. At the same time, and crucially, both in terms of Plessy's failed defense case and much contemporary advocacy of "minority" rights, Robinson is at pains to warn of the disabling political impasse engendered through liberal constructions of a nexus fusing privacy, property, and identity.

Vivian Patraka fruitfully coopts Michel de Certeau's distinction between "place" and "space" in order to analyze the performative historiographies of two American Holocaust museums: the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, and the Beit Hashoah Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles. Patraka takes "place" as referring to "a pre-scripted performance of interpretation," while "space produces sites for multiple performances of interpretation which situate/produce the spectator as historical subject" (100). She employs this oppositional grid to read ideological narratives enacted in each institution's fundraising processes, architectural design, and, centrally, each institution's technologies of representation, performative re-memberings, and the memory-making agency they afford spectators as witnesses. Both Peggy Phelan and

Herbert Blau brilliantly negotiate the tensions between the unitary pre-scriptive and the multiply productive in their respective excavations: for Phelan, of the repressed morbidity and homophobia buried within the public tussle over the remains of London's Rose Theatre; and for Blau, of the provocation to the "vanities of critique" (178), and to poststructuralist devaluations of the specular, actualized in a modernist discretionary vision: "that is, the capacity in seeing to distinguish this from that, which remains the basis of any moral measure we have, and without which a politics is only a question of power" (192).

Finally, Glenda Dicker/sun and Robbie McCauley embrace an activist politics that is *also* an ethics; both evoke the ghosts of African American cultural history through accounts of performances they have constructed from oral histories. With a remarkable lack of sentimentality, McCauley reflects on her career as a performer and director, her family, her diabetes, on storytelling as work, and on the indebtedness of her dramaturgy to jazz as embodied resistance. Her project revolves around performance as oppositional historiography, in which "the tightrope sways [...] between the parameters of the personal, the aesthetic, the political, the scholarly, and the hearsay" (282). In events she compares to "stations of the cross" (109), Dicker/sun's goal is to "liberate the uppity Black woman from the shroud of invisibility, [...] make for her a Blackreality space, a space to talk out her life, a sassy space to witness the act" (109). In writing that borders on song, or prayer, she re-members lost communities and endeavors to "sanctify the space so sullied by the obscene festivities" (126) enacted over their graves. Hold your breath for a Blackreality space during the millennial Olympics in Sydney...

—David Williams

Note

1. At the time of writing, the conservative federal government in Australia is endeavoring to rescind on legal recognition of "native title" as legitimized by the High Court. As its retrogressive amendments—privileging the interests of white pastoralists and industry—stall in the Senate, the government is threatening to trigger a double dissolution and to "fight" a divisive general election on issues of race and ownership. Furthermore, in recent passing/posing scandals, prize-winning writers and visual artists have been exposed as performers of assumed cultural identities including the most infamous, an Anglo woman posing as a Ukrainian to write a revisionist Holocaust work of fiction, and a male Anglo painter passing doubly as an Aboriginal woman. These events, in conjunction with a forthcoming constitutional convention to discuss Australia's possible transition to a republic, have served to further amplify the fierce contestation of the borderlands of identity and difference. Meanwhile, monoculturalists and xenophobes lurch from the shadows to center stage, infuriated red necks abulge.

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4.7

1998

Review of Peter Brook,
Threads of Time: A Memoir,
in *The Times Higher Education Supplement*,
23 October 1998, 22

David Williams

A director's pursuit of *li*

At its most immediate level, Peter Brook's *Threads of Time* is an accessible and hugely enjoyable mapping of the personal and professional evolution of one of this century's most consistently imaginative and indefatigable directors. The book is part critical reflection on a body of work that includes over 70 productions and a dozen films, part restless quest in the guise of travelogue, part philosophical enquiry into the nature of what psychologist James Hillman has called "soul-making".

Structurally, it employs a chronology that freely accepts digression, like memory itself. Part One covers the first three decades of Brook's life from his birth in London in 1925; here Brook details his earliest memories of the allure of illusion in theatre and above all film, and his hyperactive apprenticeship in a variety of styles and contexts. Part Two takes us from Brook's growing scepticism towards the genteel fictions of an escapist, image-based aesthetic in the mid-1950s, to the white-walled playground of the joyously airborne *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, his swansong with the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1970. Finally, in Part Three, Brook describes his work in Paris with his international group, from exploratory research journeys in the early 1970s, to recent forays into the fantastic inner landscapes of neurological disorders (*The Man Who...*, *Qui est la?*).

On a secondary level, this is a book of sources, an acknowledgement of teachers,

influences and primary collaborators. To paraphrase the title of the G.I. Gurdjieff autobiography that Brook made into a film in the late 1970s, *Threads of Time* might well have been subtitled "Meetings with Remarkable People". Over the past 50 years, Brook has worked with a bewildering array of artists, including some of the most acclaimed performers, writers and designers of post-war Europe, as well as the infamous, dissident, and eccentric: Satanist Aleister Crowley, Jean Genet, Salvador Dali. With a great deal of compassion, humour and relish for the telling anecdote and the arresting paradox, Brook reflects upon encounters that engendered creative frictions and combustions, flashes of recognition that unsettled, encouraged or energised. In particular, he offers some rare insights into his extensive study with two of the heirs to Gurdjieff's legacy, Jane Heap and Jeanne de Salzmann, and the gradual, inevitable interweaving of this private work with his public output as a director.

In terms of his theatre practice, Brook provides perceptive discussions of the evolving specificities of its deep grammar: rhythm, the nature of "presence", the radical heurism of improvisation, research as self-research, the centrality of direct experience and of collective work to the actor's individuation, and so on. In addition, he offers illuminating perspectives on the "transparency" he admires in those actor-collaborators he deems to have gone beyond ego-driven virtuosity to a psy-

Threads of Time: A Memoir

By Peter Brook

Methuen, 241pp, £17.99
ISBN 0 413 69620 0

chomatic integration. Paul Scofield's "alchemy of the imagination" in the incarnation of an internal image-action, Glenda Jackson's "instant complicity" and quality of attention, Jeanne Moreau's revelatory fluidity, Yoshi Oida's "making an emptiness": for Brook, all bear testimony to an embodied transformability, a sensitised capacity to articulate and distil the trajectories of inner impulses in external forms.

Brook reiterates here a perception he has often made regarding the unstable relationship between surface forms and the underlying impulses that "inform" them: in other words, between means and meanings. He suggests that many of his theatre productions possess two distinct, if closely interrelated, aspects. First, the external *mise en scène* comprises contextually determined forms emerging from the performance's physical conditions. Second, beneath these specific patterns of images, no more than tips of invisible icebergs, lies what he terms "the hidden production: an invisible network of relationships" that can give rise to other forms and patterns without forfeiting its "essential meaning".

Brook's neo-Platonic formulation of an originary core underpinning multiple and relative phenomenal possibilities provides a useful lens for reading beneath the surface of his autobiography. It brings into relief what seems to me to be at the heart of Brook's project here: through the lightest of touches over the topographic contours of a life remem-

bered, to apprehend what classical Chinese philosophy called *li* — the principles of an organic order subtending the chaotic markings in jade, the grain in wood, the events of a biography. Brook contends that such order is accessible through "mathematics, geometry, art and silence".

Inevitably in a book of such breadth of scope, there are occasional blindspots that will cause some readers to baulk. For example, in his account of the detailed study of documentary source materials for *The Ik* in the mid-1970s, there is something rather disconcerting in the dispassionate, decontextual formalism of actors honing their observational skills by poring over the minutiae of "how the shrivelled body manages to propel itself forward, or what muscle enables a near-atrophied arm to lift a cupped hand filled with water to the lips". As Kenneth Tynan pointed out at the time, the net effect is for the reality of these starving Ugandans to recede as it is translated into a kind of saturated naturalism for hip, Parisian theatre-goers.

However, such infelicities are rare, and the book as a whole will provide practitioners, teachers and students with substantial food for thought. Ultimately, *Threads of Time* attests to the fact that Brook's gradual transformation from post-war British theatre's *enfant terrible* to contemporary European theatre's *eminence grise* has entailed no diminution of inquisitiveness, energy or focus. Quite the reverse. For this most pragmatic of humanists has found ways to understand and inhabit the paradox of innocence and experience — not as entropic slide towards disillusionment, but as self-regenerative cycle and insistent wake-up call to look, listen and immerse oneself in the contradictions and possibilities of life's every moment.

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4.8

2000

Review of Steve Baker,
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Book Review

The Postmodern Animal

Steve Baker

London: Reaktion Books; 2000
207pp. ISBN 1-86189-060-5 (pbk) £14.95

Steve Baker's *The Postmodern Animal* makes an important contribution in an area of increasing fascination and generative friction for contemporary thinkers and artists – as the contents of this issue of *Performance Research* amply attest. In a beautifully produced volume which includes over 70 photographic illustrations, many of them in colour, Baker reflects upon a wide array of recent critical-philosophical articulations and art practices to offer an enormously engaging mapping of the poetics and politics of 'animal' provocations: to creativity, authorship, identities, bodies, post-structure ecologies, epistemologies and ethics, the 'natural', the 'posthuman', and so on. With its detailed reference to disparate artworks – in painting, sculpture, installation, photography, cinema, video, contemporary performance and fiction, and all sorts of emergent spaces in-between – this volume will provide an invaluable resource for students, teachers and practitioners working in interdisciplinary contexts.

The book includes a brilliant section on the limitations of irony in postmodernity via a discussion of British painter Malcolm Morley's birds, Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot*, and Peter Greenaway's early

film *The Falls*, with its proliferative treatment of 'birds, lists, and the precariousness of the collection and documentation of knowledge' (32). Another section outlines a distinction between philosophical creativity and claims to expertise, and affirms the potential for creative dissensus in the dilettante's interrogative not-knowing; Baker cites psychologist Anthony Phillips in *Terrors and Experts* (1995) praising 'the fluency of disorder, the inspirations of error' in his call for 'a new pantheon of bunglers' (64). Baker also gives an illuminating gloss on Derrida's recent writing on the animal, *L'Animal que donc je suis*, a perplexing exercise in 'zoo-auto-bio-bibliography' that constellates around the neologism *animots*: 'an awkward living word-thing', according to Baker, which attempts 'to think a new thing' (75) via the undecidability of the other-than-human.

Further highlights for me include an anatomy of meat, butchery and abjection in the work of Francis Bacon, Damien Hirst, Carolee Schneemann, Emily Mayer and Mike Kelley, and a final chapter exposing and contesting post-modernism's difficulties in coming to terms with its fear of domestic pets and the uncritical sentimentality they so often seem to attract ('anthropomorphophobia'); this section is triggered by Deleuze and Guattari's anti-oedipal contention in *A Thousand Plateaus* that 'anyone who likes cats or dogs is a fool'.

Rather than attempting any systematic 'masterly' overview of the book, I propose to take what is perhaps a slightly eccentric tack and engage in a dialogue with some of the images, ideas and practices that linger and reside within me after a couple of close, and enthusiastic, readings. Firstly, encounters with animal others, or inter-species (b)order crossings.

A man sits at a table with his Weimaraner, called Man Ray, and corrects errors in a written spelling test the dog has purportedly just completed; the dog stares back at the man, tilting its head inquisitively. The same dog, now sporting green flippers and bulging ping-pong ball eyes, seems to have become a preposterous frog in an encounter with a 'real' frog, dwarfed on the ground in front of its paws. A shark is photographed breaking the sea's surface at the moment of its attack on a sheet of paper bearing an acrylic and blood representation of a 'shark'; it tears the painting with its teeth, wounding it. In a video diary of everyday inter-species erotica, a celebrated performance artist lies prone on her back and actively receives the full-mouth kisses of her cat Vesper. In a becoming-moth, an artist determines to absorb the felt suits of Joseph Beuys by systematically eating them one by one. A number of women imitate the movements and sounds of horses, their impressions repeatedly unravelling into laughter. Two human figures dressed wholly

unconvincingly and uncomfortably as sheep tell bad sheep jokes: failed disguises, failed humour.

Much of the art discussed in this book (including that described above, by William Wegman, Olly and Suzi, Carolee Schneemann, Jana Sterbak, Lucy Gunning, Edwina Ashton, respectively) effects temporary blurrings and fluctuations in identities by engineering encounters with anomalous others. Many of these artists conspire to unsettle and fray assumed ontological stabilities, to set them in play or in collision with one another. Sometimes the irrecoverable and unrepresentable emerges from the outside elsewhere (like the shark) to leave its trace in passing, a mark of the real that unsettles the integrity of the authored art object – it becomes irreparably otherwise in an event of complex authorship. Like John Cage's notion of 'noise', the incalculable outside is welcomed in as co-creator, its aleatory interventions displacing and multiplying subjectivities, territories, meanings.

(At times, I find aesthetics such a twee conceptual fiction in the face of the fleshed and fragile face-to-face. What about the im-mediate (i.e. unmediated) shock of untimely corporeal 'noise', the sudden arrival of an unwelcome animal-outside that turns things inside out, wounding and changing them forever? The metaphor made material made metamorphic. The aberrant made abhorrent. I remember with unbridled alarm a woman I knew in Western Australia who had one side of her face crushed by the kick of a horse. Her daughter found her slumped unconscious in the stable, one of her eyes forced from its socket by the impact, hanging loose by the thread of the optic nerve. After more

than a year of reconstructive surgery, half of her face remained locked into a quizzical grin, her eye staring. The memory of the animal, the animal of memory. She still feeds the horse every day.)

Sometimes the mark of the outside effects an erasure, and the art object disappears to become part of other untraceable processes: Baker tells us that one painting by Olly and Suzi, for example, was dragged away and destroyed by a leopard, while another piece was consumed in its entirety by a rhinoceros. Sometimes temporary roles are ascribed across species, both defamiliarizing the coercive bestializations of the human everyday, and radicalizing the rhetorics of alterity in becomings that bewilder and overflow beyond the parameters of received categories of identity and difference. Sometimes becomings draw on the strategies of imitation, but the disguises are tawdry, compromised, incongruous conjunctions coming apart at the seams, active reminders of difference.

I think of Barthes on 'difference . . . the very movement of dispersion, of friability, a shimmer; what matters is not the discovery, in a reading of the world and of the self, of certain oppositions but of encroachments, overflows, leaks, skids, shifts, slips . . .' (Barthes 1977: 69). And of Barthes on the body, and how to write it: 'Neither the skin, nor the muscles, not the bones, not the nerves, but the rest: an awkward, fibrous, shaggy, ravelled thing, a clown's coat' (1977: 180).

Which brings me to Baker's notion of 'botched taxidermy', a term he employs to characterize 'those instances of recent art practice where things . . . appear to have *gone wrong* with the animal, as it were, but where it still *holds together*' (56).

Baker groups assorted examples under thematic headings, which sound not unlike a taxonomy of the feral dramaturgy of fucked-up-and-yet-ness in, say, the work of Forced Entertainment: 'Mixed materials . . . "Stuffed" animals not as taxidermy but as toys . . . Other uses of "wrong" materials . . . Hybrid forms . . . Messy confrontations . . . Taxidermic form reworked . . . Finally, tattiness . . .' (56–60). Baker goes on to explore his examples with recourse to notions of materiality and visibility, a kind of 'making the animal animaly' (to risk a rather clumsy paraphrase of Viktor Schklowsky's celebrated description of the function of art) through combinative assemblages: shaggy ravelled things, clowns' coats:

[A]cross these works, regardless of any ethical stance, materials count, materials create knowledge, or at least encourage open and imaginative thought . . . If tattiness, imperfection and botched form count for anything, it is that they render the animal *abrasively visible*, and that they do so regardless of how the artist thinks about animals. (61–2)

Why does this reiterated lack-of-regard balk in me? Is it the undifferentiated collapsing of morality, sentimentality and ethics that seems to underpin some of Baker's discussion? Surely ethics can be conceived in terms other than as a 'temptation neatly to divide (on the basis of existing categories, existing knowledge) the ethically sound and unsound, the politically correct and incorrect' (61). Such judgemental binarized imperatives subsequently give way as Baker hints at the possibility of an-other ethical relatedness. There is regard aplenty, for example,

in Donna Haraway's suggestion, approvingly quoted here, that certain manifestations of postmodernism take the form of 'an argument for *pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction' (8). Ultimately, with reference to the dynamic braiding Irigaray makes between love and philosophy, and to Gillian Rose's

astonishing *Love's Work*, Baker invites 'not love of the animal itself . . . but love of the work . . . to be done in taking the animal seriously, in thinking and rethinking it seriously' (188). Responsible pleasures, postmodern ethics: as awkward, shaggy and ravelled as a runaway merino herd in a storm. All sorts of botchings are inevitable, but

this is no reason not to take them seriously. . . .

David Williams

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4.9

2001

Review of Douglas Kahn,
Noise Water Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts,
in *Performance Research* 6:3, ('Navigations'),
Autumn 2001, 136-8

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**Noise Water Meat: A History
of Sound in the Arts**

Douglas Kahn
Cambridge, MA and London: The
MIT Press 1999, 455 pp.
ISBN: 0 262 11243 4 (hbk) £27.50

In this immensely articulate and energized historiography of sound techniques, practices and tropes from early modernism through the avant-garde to the inter-medial experiments of the 1960s, Douglas Kahn invites us to 'listen through history to sound and through sound to history' (2). His concern is to contest the historical insignificance so often assigned to sounds, and to 'hear past' the conventional selectivities of established auditive histories, with a view to recuperating and historicizing the complex dynamics of cultural context and sociality within ephemeral auditory fields and events.

Kahn's introductory listing of some of the central conceptual and practical sites visited here perhaps provides a hint of the extraordinary sweep of this work, although the intricacy of its structure remains impossible to convey in a review of this kind: 'noise, auditive immersion in spatial and psychological domains, inscription and visual sound, the universalism of *all sound* and panaurality, musicalization of sound, phonographic reproduction and imitation, Cagean silence, non-dissipative sounds and voices, fluidity at the nexus of performance and objecthood, William Burroughs's virus, and the bodily utterances of Michael McClure's beast language and Antonin Artaud's screaming' (3: original italics). The serpentine trajectory of Kahn's overarching argument takes us from sonic innovations and conceptual border delimitations in avant-garde literature, western art music and early cinema, through the unsettling blurrings and fluidities effected by mid-century drippings in painting, music, and performance, towards ecologies of carnality as articulated in the animal, medical, theatrical voices and sounds of 'meat', in the organismic poetics at the underbelly of inscribed and plural bodies (and Artaudian anti-bodies) in the second half of the 20th century.

Kahn's tracing of connectivities, continuities and flows is quirky and wilfully partisan, while his writing is characterized by an astute ear for the counter-discursive detail within received histories, an expansive frame of reference, and a consistently witty dissidence. The dexterity and complexity of his scholarship, coupled with the breadth of his interdisciplinary reach, make *Noise Water Meat* one of the most stimu-

lating and provocative studies of art practices and discourses in social contexts I have read for many years. It is an important work, and will be an invaluable resource for critically reflexive practitioners, as well as teachers and graduate students in music, performance, cultural histories, politics and poetics, visual arts, film studies, social semiotics, embodiment, ecologies, and innumerable spaces in-between.

On one level, Kahn's book is a study of '*significanti sounds*', so called 'not to differentiate [them] from insignificant or meaningless ones but to counter long-standing habits of imagining that sounds transcend or escape meaning or that sounds elude sociality despite the fact they are made, heard, imagined, and thought by humans' (4). Related to this are '*noise*, which can interrupt itself as capably as what it ostensibly interrupts, and Cagean *silence*, which has silenced other things, as it dwells at the problematic edge of audibility and attempts to hear the world of sound without hearing aspects of the world in a sound. In short, the sound and the fury never signify nothing or, rather, just nothing' (4).

Sound, noise, silence. Given such concerns, it is inevitable that Kahn should return repeatedly to John Cage with critical ear and eye, reading against the grain and honing in on Cage's own deafspots, as it were, not to knock him down but to locate him within the context of a modernist project as someone very much of his time. Kahn's analysis of the contradictions and political naiveties within Cage's discursive utterances and evolving practices is productively defamiliarizing in terms of the received hagiography of Cage as emancipatory iconoclast. As he explains in the central section of the

book, 'The Impossible Inaudible', Kahn's approach is to take Cage

at his word when he says *let sounds be themselves*. I merely refuse to accept how Cage reduces sound to conform to his idea of selfhood. When he hears individual affect or social situation as an exercise in reduction, it is just as easy to hear their complexity. When he hears music everywhere, other phenomena go unheard. When he celebrates noise, he also promulgates noise abatement. When he speaks of silence, he also speaks of silencing.

(163: original italics)

There are subtle and illuminating discussions of the unfolding of Cage's emblematic 'silence' and the mutings it entailed, of Cage's drift from *all sound to always sound* in a move towards a pervasive panaurality with unspoken extra-musical boundaries, of the hierarchical asymmetry of Cage's relations to small and loud sounds, of his masking of the signature-like mediations effected by technologies and modes of listening, of his 'deafness' towards the significance of sounds ['all their wayward empirical, semiotic, poetic, affective, cultural, and political noises' (199)], and of the politics and poetics of the core notions of disinterestedness, chance, and indeterminacy. Kahn proposes that a series of 'nagging categorical imperialisms' (195) in Cage's practices substantially relativized the radicality of his attempted democratization of sound through a tactical subversion of human centredness – he was able only to shift the centre from one of individualist utterance

to one of individualist audition through acts of centripetal totalization which retained all of the other features of western art music: 'he simply became quiet in order to attract everything toward a pair of musical ears' (197). Kahn contends that ultimately Cage's elaboration of sonic pervasiveness was compensatory, 'a space fulfilled by a dispersion of the density of the social and ecological' (199).

One of Kahn's secondary concerns is to think through the implications of new technologies, in particular the paradigm shift enacted by phonography as social inscription, with its construction of a 'new loop of utterance and audition' in which the voice, removed from the body, 'no longer occupied its own space and time' (8). Ultimately, Kahn argues, in constituting 'a veritable machine critique of the presence of the voice' (8), and in its capacity to 'listen, speak, write, and compose' (91), the phonograph produced a new model of audition and audibility, and the possibility of a totalizing 'all sound'. Kahn also provides animated critical accounts of a wide range of other technological developments, from the Italian Futurist Luigi Russolo's design of new instruments (the *intonarumori*) and experiments in asynchronous sound montage in Russian Revolutionary film and American cartoons, to microphony, erasable recording, amplification and the creation of designated spaces for isolating sounds: recording studio, anechoic chamber, and so on.

Perhaps, above all, *Noise Water Music* offers countless exemplars of close readings of practices and discourses that either make heard their inaudible assumptions and excluded or suppressed others, or open up

new areas and ideas for engaged critical listening. In these terms alone, the book contains an embarrassment of riches. Taken at random from the first half of the book, for example, there are outstanding sections on handwriting as noise, on Kerouac's modeling of his consciousness on the sea, on synesthesia as noise abatement, on the incursion of militarism into the musical projects of the Italian Futurists, and on the elasticity and corporeal implications of sound stretching across film cuts. For me, one of the most startling of such proximal engagements occurs in a section entitled 'Conceptual Sounds', in which Kahn proposes a reading of Yoko Ono's *TAPE PIECE 111/Snow Piece* (1963). First, Ono's score:

Take a tape of the sound of the snow falling.
This should be done in the evening.
Do not listen to the tape.
Cut it and use it as strings to tie gifts with.
Make a gift wrapper, if you wish, using the same process with a phonosheet.

(238)

Kahn begins with the paradoxical acoustical effects of snow falling:

It is a sound of blanketing bereft of warmth, a massive field of intense activity that is oddly quiet, and because the accumulation of snow acts to absorb sounds and the minute crystalline structure of snow breaks up sound waves at their own scale, it becomes progressively quieter as the snow mutes itself. . . . The irony of snow falling is that it produces the

conditions for listening closely but then absorbs the sounds that might be heard.

(238-9)

Kahn then turns his attention to Ono's poetical disposition towards technology, and its embracing of multiple inaudibilities. For the score involves:

much more than trying to listen, even though Ono has employed and displayed the technology of listening. She has actually employed a technology one imagines and a technology one ignores. Assume for a moment an impossible transparency of audio-phonetic technology. . . . A tape recording is made of falling snow using such technology and then ignored. Ono's score instructs the recordist not to listen to it because it is the best way to ensure its accuracy.

(239)

Finally Kahn highlights the ethical overlay in Ono's score between environmental and social relations, the tacit acknowledgement of multiple silences:

A refusal to listen complements both the silence of the imagined sound of snow falling and the silences involved in the very act of gift giving. Whatever else can be said about gift giving, something is always left unsaid. Although speech may revolve around the act, the delicacy of the gesture, especially in Ono's score, acts to absorb the sound waves of speech.

(239-40)

David Williams

4.10

Letters confirming publication, and authorship

Celebrating Thomas Holloway, born 1800
His legacy to Higher Education

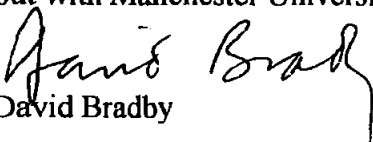
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27th September 2001

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN - PROFESSOR DAVID WILLIAMS

This is to certify that in the writing of the Macmillan title *Directors' Theatre*, published jointly under the names of David Bradby and David Williams, the authors divided up the chapters as follows: Introduction, Joan Littlewood, Roger Planchon, Peter Stein, Ariane Mnouchkine were written by David Bradby. Peter Brook, Jerzi Grotowski, Robert Wilson were written by David Williams. Although both had some input into the final process of revising and harmonising text, it remains true that the work was substantially separate and remained to all intents and purposes the work of the individuals identified above.

I can also confirm that he has contributed a very significant essay on Brook and some interviews of actors who work with him for *The Paris Jigsaw: Internationalism and the City's Stages*, due out with Manchester University Press in Feb 2002 (as listed in their current catalogue).


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24 September 2001

To Whom it May Concern,

Re: David Williams — “Beautiful Mutants”, *Performing the Unnameable*

In respect of inclusion of the above publication in materials for the fulfillment of the requirements of a PhD, I am able to state that the published article is substantially the work of David Williams. The article was conceived, proposed, facilitated and written by David Williams — and co-authored and edited by me in its final stages only.

Should you require any further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

Barry Laing

24. 10. 01

To Whom it May Concern

I confirm that the Chapter on Peter Brook, published in "Twentieth Century Actor Training" (Routledge) is substantially the work of David Williams.

Lorna Marshall

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Lorna Marshall

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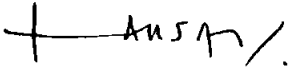
5th February 2002

To Whom It May Concern:

Declaration of Authorship

I hereby declare that the Editorial (pp.iii-iv) in Performance Research Vol.5, No.1 'Openings' (Spring) eds. Ric Allsopp and David Williams, pub. London: Routledge, 2000, is substantially the work of David Williams.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ric Allsopp", with a horizontal line extending to the left and a diagonal stroke to the right.

Dr. Ric Allsopp

Joint Editor - Performance Research.

SECTION 5

POSTSCRIPT

Critical fictions: the writing of swallow-space

Intermezzo: thinking sky

Critical fictions: the writing of swallow-space

‘The question is not, Is it true? But, Does it work?
What new thoughts does it make possible to think? What new emotions does it make possible to
feel? What new sensations and perceptions does it open in the body?’ (Massumi 1992: 8)

In the metaphorical discourse of appearance and its flarings as posited in the introduction to this thesis, it is important to clarify that I am not proposing a return to a metaphysics of ‘presence’. I write in the shadow of the recurrent post-structuralist discourse of disappearance as foundational event in the ontology of performance (see e.g. Blau, Phelan, Gilpin, George), with which I am broadly sympathetic, for it can act as an enabling strategic proposition in articulating what remains in the wake of performance. Such critical dispositions deconstruct the hegemony of the ocularcentric in cultural histories, for example, or ‘celebrate disappearance as a powerful source of compositional and hermeneutical information’ (Gilpin 1996: 106), or critique persistent traditions of non-reflexive description as solipsistic representation of representation, and thereby find ways to write out (of) this conceptual cul-de-sac.

‘We can never know what took place’, suggests Heidi Gilpin, William Forsythe’s dramaturg, ‘because the image etched in memory is transformed the moment we attempt to reexamine it’ (ibid). Yes, agreed, at an absolutist level: but does that mean one cannot endeavour to account for what appeared or might (have) appear(ed), aware of its very appearing as effect or product of a way of seeing, and of the incremental fictionality generated in the remembering? It rather depends on how one conceives of what such writing *does*, and whether appearance’s disappearance is failure of permanence, or active if ephemeral emergence. In writing (after) the event, memory *troubles* the past in the way that colour is ‘troubled light’ (Berger and Christie 1999: n.p.), a spectral refraction that allows partial and differential tonalities to appear. Transformation only constitutes loss, rather than, say, productive *poiesis* or *kinesis*, if one’s project is

recuperative, reproductive, restorative i.e. conservative *mimesis*; and 'why is it better to *last* than to *burn*?' (Barthes 1990:23. Emphasis in original). If the practice of memory is conceived as an 'art', as Michel de Certeau suggests (1988: 86-9), a *poiesis* defined by the active play of alteration (which only ceases when memory is in decay), a 'confusing and guileful mobility' (memory 'moves things about': *ibid*, 87), and a metonymic singularity of details in relation to an absent 'whole', then:

'Far from being the reliquary or trash can of the past, [memory] sustains itself by believing in the existence of possibilities and by vigilantly awaiting them, constantly on the watch for their appearance' (*ibid*).

According to Peggy Phelan, 'performance [...] becomes itself through disappearance' (Phelan 1993: 146); for Herbert Blau, 'in theatre, as in love, the subject is disappearance' (Blau 1982: 94). However disappearance is the function of appearance, it subtends appearance in the way that forgetting creates the ground for remembering's possibility: an imbricated loop of concentration and evaporation, emergence and dissolution, form and formlessness. Appearances, like love, are transformative becomings; although perhaps their burning may not last, they leave traces in our memories, desires, bodies, imaginations (see e.g. Schneider 2001). These traces will never be registered empirically - empiricism being the resilient, revenant myth of a liberal humanist desire for unmediated originary 'truth', a quantity surveying approach to reality that denies the disturbance effected by observance, and the contingent assumptions and partialities of modes of seeing and their blind spots.¹ Instead, they will be new texts, partial re-enactments and re-fashionings, at best the fictional, dynamic products of memories, desires, bodies, imaginings having taken place or to come: what the poet Paul Celan referred to as 'Singbarer Rest' (Celan 1995: 100), the singable remains. The return to the event in representation cannot effect recovery of what is lost, but it is in this very irrecuperability that there lies the possibility of an ongoing, unfinishable historiographic project, an enabling

'decomposition' (Wood 2000: 202),² a reflexive thinking and working through of memory and history, embodiment and inscription, as process.³ It is in part in this light - as qualitative *critical fictions* constitutive of realities - that I propose to try to write (about) appearances, and writing as a space of appearance.

In order to try to illustrate the constitutive capabilities of a particular kind of critical fiction, let me turn to Italo Calvino, a writer of fiction to whose pedagogy of the imagination I often re-turn. In *Invisible Cities*, one of Marco Polo's 'hidden cities' is Marozia, perpetually at the cusp of metamorphosis between 'the century of the rat' and 'the century of the swallow' (Calvino 1972: 154):⁴

'It also happens that, if you move along Marozia's compact walls, when you least expect it, you see a crack open and a different city appear. Then, an instant later, it has already vanished. Perhaps everything lies in knowing what words to speak, what actions to perform, and in what order and rhythm; or else someone's gaze, answer, gesture is enough; it is enough for someone to do something for the sheer pleasure of doing it, and for his pleasure to become the pleasure of others; at that moment,

¹ For a productive discussion of the 'meaningful absence' of perceptual and epistemological 'blind spots' in observation and interaction, and of their implications in terms of dis/placements, see Tachelet 2000.

² '[A]n act of decomposition: one that breaks up or disintegrates things already composite – things that have adhered or become coherent [...] Decomposition can thereby effect and perform further acts and ceremonies of composition and allow other possibilities or expansions of understanding and reciprocation to take place' (Wood 2000: 202).

³ Writing about 'spectacles of suffering', and in particular representations of the limit-event of the Holocaust, Vivian Patraka proposes: 'The struggle to represent the Holocaust in its goneness clarifies the limits of representation in general. Representation (viewed as process) assumes that there is a fixed set of norms or a closed narrative that can be translated, made 'real' through its own reiteration. Representation, however, is also an object, one that is always a reconstruction, a pre-framed, pre-narrativised set of practices that attempt to make visible certain events, practices, and/or beliefs assumed to be fixed, essential, and pre-existing. This is not to suggest that all representations constitute a closed system for producing knowledge, wherein the representation and its own reiterative nature are somehow elided. [...] I suggest that the relationship between representation and reiteration must be posited as a risky struggle (between object and process, between history and memory) that has certain consequences' (Patraka 1999: 4-5). I am reminded of architect Daniel Libeskind's comments about his Jewish Museum extension to the Berlin Museum, opened in 1998. He suggests that, rather than 'standing for' memory of the Berlin Jews, these disorienting (and originally empty) interiors provide space for the im/possibility of memory and its writerly processes; they invite one 'to explore a single name which remains forgotten, a single piece of music which remains unwritten' (quoted in Forty and Küchler 1999: 16).

⁴ At the beginning of an essay about dramaturgy in movement performance, 'an art form that exposes the impossible longing for performance to achieve permanence within any field of representation' (Gilpin 1999: 87), Heidi Gilpin quotes the same passage from Calvino's *Invisible Cities*. My reading of Calvino's text is in part a response to hers.

all spaces change, all heights, distances; the city is transfigured, becomes crystalline, transparent as a dragonfly. But everything must happen as if by chance, without attaching too much importance to it, without insisting that you are performing a decisive operation, remembering clearly that any moment the old Marozia will return and solder its ceiling of stone, cobwebs, and mold over all heads' (ibid: 155).

Calvino's account of the im/possible heterotopic city of Marozia, within which the 'rat' and the 'swallow' coexist, elegantly celebrates joyous, unpredictable appearance framed by the knowledge of its inevitable passing. The writing of such possibility is constitutive, and indeed 'a different city' appears. This other hidden reality's transformative emergence is mysterious, effected through the conjunction ('as if by chance') of words and actions in particular spatio-temporal relations, of dialogic encounters in the face-to-face, of infectious pleasures circulating. The 'as if' of illusionist theatre suggests that there are in fact deep structures at play in the actualising of elsewhere and otherwise, making of nowhere now here. Rat-like, one might stumble upon such appearances by chance, but perhaps ('perhaps') there are processes, dispositions, dramaturgical structures, ways of seeing that sensitise to the unexpected possibility of cracks in the overarching, self-reproducing stone, cobwebs, mold of the Empire of the Selfsame. Fleeting openings to possible imaginal architectures, connective inter-relations and lines of flight within the soldered structures of the consensual everyday. Fictions for rats of the possibility of liberation in a deterritorialising becoming-swallow:

'Marozia consists of two cities, the rat's and the swallow's; both change with time, but their relationship does not change; the second is the one about to free itself from the first' (ibid).

In a way that is poetic, Calvino writes swallow-space into appearance. He 'describes' it, as one might say that a jet's trajectory describes an arc across the sky, 'the curve of an opening horizon' (ibid: 154). An instant later, it has already vanished, but neither sky nor observer are quite the same. One still sees

something of it feelingly: *sentipensante*, 'feeling-thinking'.⁵

In the texts and images that follow – a rather unstable bridge between the materials collected within this thesis and my own possible futures, between what is past and what may be to come – I propose to try to sketch another kind of critical fiction, grounded in contemporary histories and aesthetic/critical practices. This partial mapping of materials-in-progress reflects certain aspects of my emergent concerns as writer and artist. They mark an early stage in the elaboration of a new writing and photographic project, and a performance. Perhaps they comprise 'the germ of a book that will always be a few necks ahead of its rider' (Cixous 1997: 132).

These materials might be read as a tentative articulation of a poetics, a historiography, an ethics and an epistemology. They might be read as a constellation of sites, or a topology of associational connectivities, in the germinal stages of a devising process, with the single word 'sky' as trigger and great attractor for multiple voices. They might be read as the preparation of conditions for creative thought, of 'a place to welcome [...] the face of the absent' (Berger 2001: 32). I offer them as a modest instantiation of 'relationships in process' (Serres and Latour 1995: 111), and a *sentipensante* expression of an uncertain but resilient hope.

⁵ Cf. Henri Michaux: 'A thought-feeling generates other thoughts, impulses, sometimes actions and a short-lived general transformation. But, without a certain extreme – extreme concentration – there is no direct, massive, permanent, magical action of that thought on the thinker. Intensity, intensity, intensity in unity is absolutely indispensable. There is a certain threshold beyond which, but *not before*, a thought-feeling counts, counts differently, counts genuinely and *takes on power*. It may even spread out in all directions ...' (Michaux 1994: 171. Emphasis in original).

Intermezzo: thinking sky

'Language: only medium that gives the time at once stopped and mobile
to inscribe the interstitial. The *interre sticiel*' (Cixous 1997: 80)

メリーの肖像 六
(空を見るための絵)

任意の二点に穴をあける。
空の見える処にかける。

PAINTING TO SEE THE SKIES (1961)

*Drill two holes into a canvas.
Hang it where you can see the sky.*

*(Change the place of the hanging.
Try both the front and the rear windows,
to see if the skies are different).*

(Yoko Ono 1995: 13)



Rarely has the sky been more contested politically and ecologically than at present. In recent weeks, there have been numerous media stories related to specific areas of sky, and events at ground level with implications in the air. Uncontrollable bushfires around Sydney. The privatisation of air traffic control in Britain. Continuing bombing raids over Afghanistan and Iraq. Israeli helicopter gunships over the Palestinian territories. Richard Reid's failed attempt to ignite explosives in his shoe during a transatlantic flight between Paris and New York. The economic repercussions of fears of flying in the wake of the terrorist attacks on the USA in September 2001. The effects of global warming and ozone depletion in Antarctica. Misgivings about possible nuclear pollution from Sellafield. Fears of heightened conflict between India and Pakistan in the mountainous flashpoint of Kashmir. The increasing occurrence of climatic anomalies including heavy snowfall over Saudi Arabia this month (January 2002). The possible collision with Earth by an asteroid called SG344 predicted for 21 September 2030 by the International Astronomical Union.

The same sky.

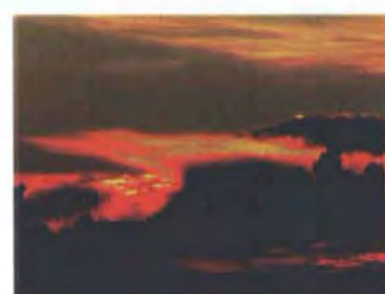
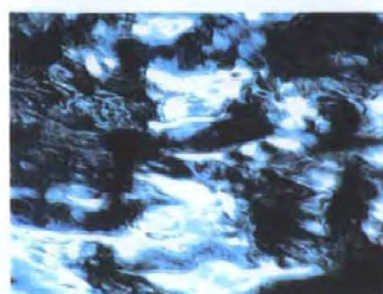
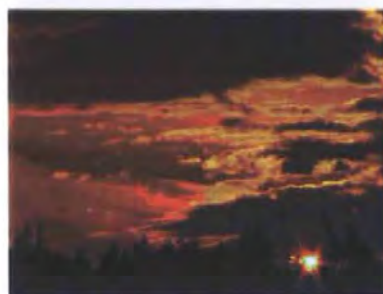
Different skies.

'Listen, I will make the clouds rain stories for you.
The shifting character of our passions can be read in the history of the air'
(Falconer 1997: 5)

It's hard not to be impressed by the navigatory skills of Phoenician mariners more than two thousand years ago. They oriented themselves using the sky and four winds blowing from the four cardinal quarters: Boreas, the wind from the north; Euros, from the East; Notos, from the south; Zephuros, from the west. They were able to estimate the approximate provenance of these winds using the movement of the sun by day, and the Polaris (Pole) star in the constellation of Ursa Minor as due-north reference point by night. As ships moved away from land mass coordinates into the wider seas, the system was later expanded to 8 winds, then 12, then 16, and finally 32 representing the 32 points of the wind-rose. It is said that Phoenician mariners could recognise these winds by their temperature, moisture content, strength and other phenomenal qualities, as well as their relations to the trajectories of planetary bodies. They are believed to have travelled in this way as far afield as the Azores and the Isles of Scilly.

In his book *Close to the Wind*, British sailor Pete Goss remembers his first transatlantic ocean race in 1986 with Chris Johnson in the sloop *Sarie Marais*. In a race from Plymouth to Newport, Rhode Island, determining to sail 'from the cockpit, not from the chart table' (Goss 1998: 15), they used the setting of the sun as their guide to America. Ultimately they employed a contemporary embodied initiative rather than any conventional navigational aids, turning eyes and ears to the late 20th-century sky for orientation:

'Believe it or not, we ended up following the vapour trails of aircraft flying from London to New York. When it was overcast, we relied on Concorde— if the sonic boom came from the north we tacked up, and if it boomed to the south we tacked down. It still amazes me to think of it' (ibid).



In April 1994, British photographer Paul Graham went to Northern Ireland during a 72-hour cease-fire announced by the IRA, and took a remarkable series of photographs - of the sky. Each *Untitled (Cease-fire)* image in this anti-photojournalist series is grounded in an allusive caption that locates it geographically and politically in particular communities implicated in sectarian unrest in Northern Ireland: the Shankill or Andersonstown in Belfast, the Bogside in Derry, and so on. Art historian Andrew Wilson has described Graham's project in the light of Roland Barthes's suggestion in *Camera Lucida* that 'ultimately, Photography is subversive not when it frightens, repels or even stigmatizes, but when it is *pensive*, when it thinks' (Barthes 1984: 38).

'At a time of uncertain and fragile peace Graham turned to the sky as the only part of the Irish landscape not touched by the history and scars of 'the Troubles'. The unsettled climactic conditions found in these April skies reflect the fragility of this first cease-fire, but the intention is not just to provide such a straightforward metaphorical charge. [These photographs] do not stand as a disinterestedly formalist device or within some personal metaphysical schema. As images of that unfocusable concealment that haunts the landscape of Northern Ireland and betrays the seeming difficulty of finding a solution to the conflict, they are as specific as they could be. In this respect these photographs indicate - or in a Barthesian [sic] sense 'think' - a state of fact, rather than merely exist as expressive metaphorical surrogates. Given their captions, these photographs prove that no part of the landscape, however removed, can actually be detached from the history of Northern Ireland' (Wilson 1996: 83-4).

For Wilson, all of Graham's images 'exhibit a lack of interest in the continued power of first impressions in the belief that deeper meanings, and the strong pull exerted by history, move in the shadows behind things, only to reveal their traces momentarily' (ibid: 80).



Shankill, Belfast, Cease-fire (April 1994)

Bogside, Derry, Cease-fire (April 1994)

Craigavon, Cease-fire (April 1994)



'The sky begins ankle-high. In walking we cleave the sky of the earth.
Elsewhere there is the sky of stars, of the sun'.

'Is it the same sky?'

'Are you the same from head to feet?' (Jabès 1972: 191)

'Stehen, im Schatten des Wundenmals in der Luft' (Celan 1995: 78).⁶

In 1996, while walking 'beneath the gaze of the sky'⁷ in the mountains of Gariwerd in Victoria, Australia, the sun was eclipsed for a split second as the shadow of a wedge-tailed eagle, riding thermal currents far above me, passed across my face. It touched me for a moment, sky to skin; I looked up at this 'impeccable motion in an expanse of amber' (Milosz 1988: 125), then it dropped like a stone towards its prey in a nearby valley, out of sight.

On August 11th 1999, I watched the total eclipse of the sun from a hilltop in Devon with a group of friends, on the edge of the 'path of totality'. At the appointed hour the umbral shadow sped across the countryside like a wave, rolled over us, and knocked me to the ground, literally.

On Christmas Eve 2000, again the sun was briefly interrupted as I sat in my garden in Melbourne, this time by the fleeting shadow of a plane, a skywriter returning to earth after its mission. I looked up, and the word 'GREED' hung over the city, traced in white on the scriptable blue⁸ of the sky, 'smoke-thin, breath thin',⁹ minutes later it had dispersed without a trace, but the infinitude of the perfect summer sky was troubled, 'embarrassed'.¹⁰

⁶ 'To stand, in the shadow of the stigma in the air' (trans. Pierre Joris). Cf. James Hillman re. image as shadow (Grk. skia) in the psychic 'underworld', and his invitation to try to sense the movement of one's own imaginal 'shadows': 'Like any visual shadow, [dream] images shade in life, giving it depth and twi-light, duplicity, metaphor' (Hillman 1979: 54). Drawing on the etymological connection between skia and 'scene', Hillman articulates a performativity of shadow images as personae, masks in a theatre of soul (e.g. *ibid*: 190-1).

⁷ I am borrowing this phrase from a fine essay by Georges Didi-Huberman about James Turrell's extraordinary and continuing investigation of sky, light and emplaced perception of the palpable event of light at Roden Crater, Arizona, and in his *Skyspaces around the world* (Didi-Huberman 2001).

⁸ For rather different accounts of the 'blueness' of 'blue sky', and of the protean poetics of blue, see Gass (1979), Bachelard (1988: 161-74), Hillman (in Moore 1989: 34-5, 154-6), Berger and Christie (1999: n.p.).

⁹ Such ephemeral two-dimensional marks traced by skywriters above Melbourne bring to my mind the poet Paul Celan's neologistic 'rauchdünn': 'smoke-thin'. Pierre Joris has pointed out that Celan's invented verbal formation contains within it echoes of the common German expression 'hauchdünn': 'paper-thin, literally breath-thin' (Joris in Celan 1995: 40).

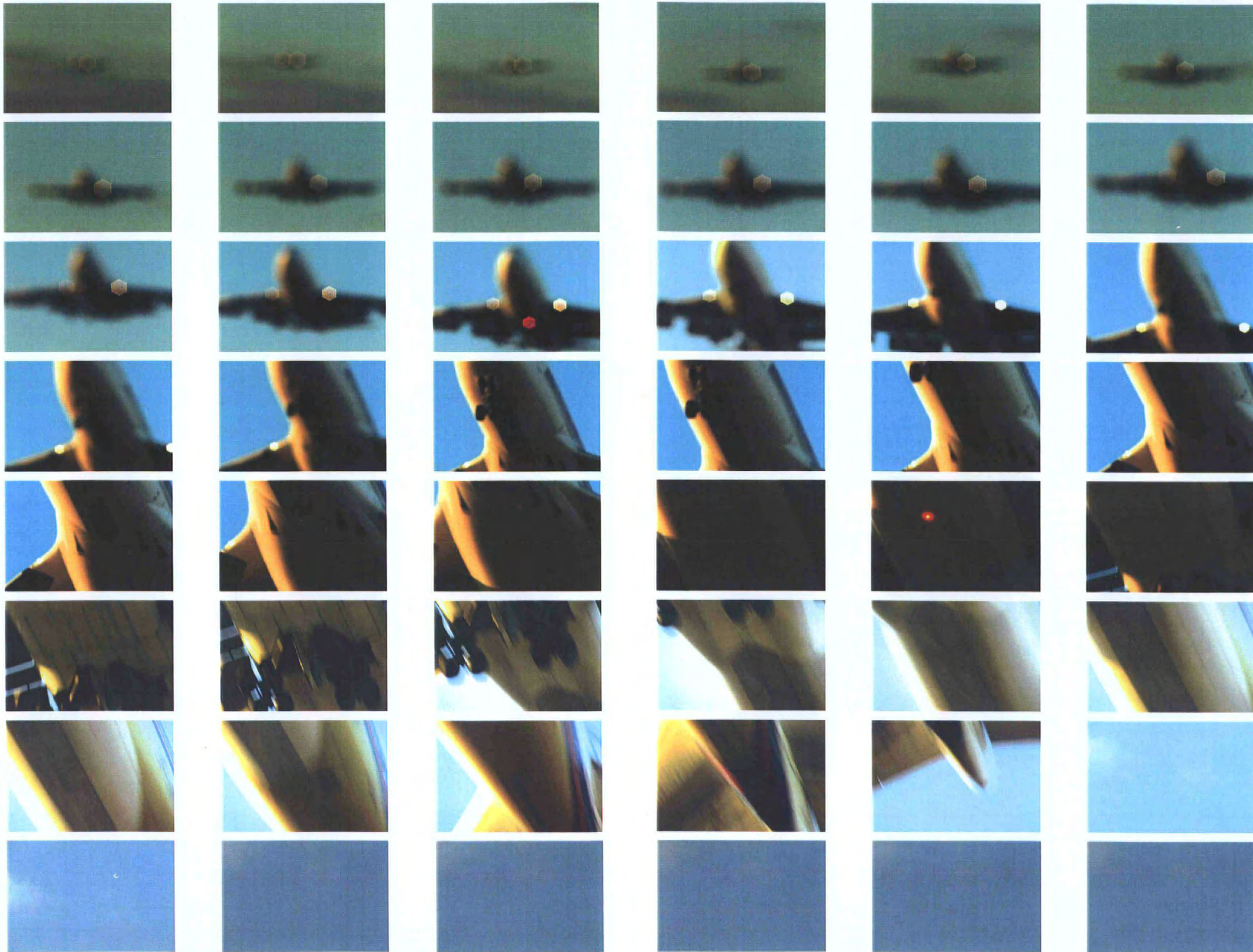
¹⁰ Cf. Anne Bogart's account of the etymology of 'embarrassment', derived from 'the French *embarrasser*, which means to entangle, obstruct or trouble; to encumber; impede, to make difficult or intricate; to complicate' (Bogart 2001: 115).



On September 11th 2001, I spent much of the day in Plymouth, Devon, shooting video footage for a short film called "Memory Says". Early in the afternoon I was filming a seagull in flight, when a wide-eyed passerby asked if I had heard the news from the USA: that planes were dropping out of the sky into buildings, that the Twin Towers had collapsed, the Pentagon was ablaze. Then the messenger disappeared. Startled by this new and horrifying shadow from afar come close, but uncertain as to whether her story was true, I turned back to the sky, switched on my camera and rather self-consciously recorded myself whispering Laurie Anderson's words: 'What next, big sky?' I soon lost heart, packed up my camera and headed home to the endless televisual reiterations of the point of flight (*punto di fuga*) as vanishing point.¹¹ Terror's choreography and *coups de théâtre* appearing out of the indifferent blue skies above early morning Manhattan, the skyline suddenly and literally altered. 'There is something empty in the sky' (DeLillo 2001).

'We are not free, and the sky can still fall on our heads. Above all else, theatre is made to teach us this' (Artaud 1970: 60).

¹¹ Here I am indebted to West Australian artist Pete Stafford for his thinkings-through, in his eco-political paintings, performances and writings, of Alberti's *Punto di Fuga* in the light of Virilio's 'aesthetics of disappearance'. See e.g. Stafford 1998.

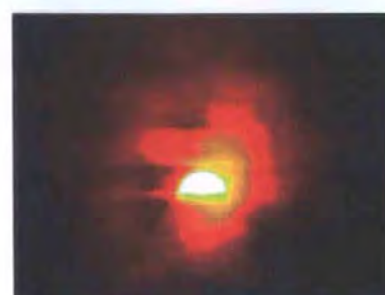
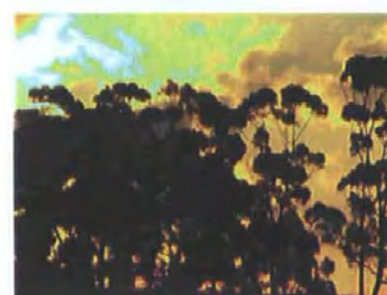
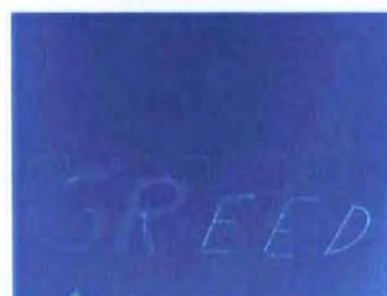
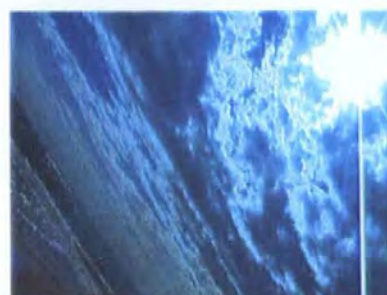


On August 4th 1997, an Australian ski-instructor Stuart Diver was pulled from the rubble of buildings devastated by a rain-induced landslide in the New South Wales mountain resort of Thredbo. He had been trapped in an air-pocket between blocks of concrete for almost three days; during that time, his wife had died beside him. As paramedics lifted him from below ground into daylight, camera crews recorded the moment of his emergence, his eyes transfixed on what lay above him, his first words: 'That sky is fantastic'.¹²

¹² The Age (Melbourne), 6 August 1997.

During the Festival of Perth in Western Australia, in 1994, I had the good fortune to meet the Estonian composer Arvo Pärt. In a mixture of French and broken German, I suggested to him one reason why his music seemed to have such purchase in Australian concert halls, where audiences were highly attentive and enthusiastic. Their attuned sensitivity, I proposed, perhaps related to a sense of open space and a quality of light so many people seem to experience corporeally in the island-continent of Australia, and that similar space and light were somehow generated within the sparse architecture and active silences of his music. He smiled and nodded gently, then looked up above his head and pointed: 'Big sky', he said.







“Mr. Klein’, I asked, ‘if the sky over Nice had been grey on the day in 1946 when you and Arman and Pascal decided to divide the world between you, would you still have chosen the sky and signed it on its underside as your first monochrome work?’

‘No’, said Klein, ‘if the sky had been grey, we should not have been on the beach’

(Jasia Reichardt, *Yves Klein Now* (1995), quoted in Berger & Christie 1999: n.p.)

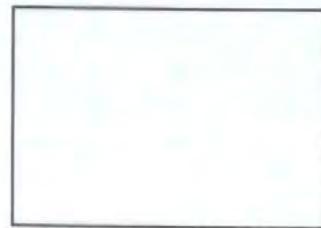




'The *Skyspaces* are, basically, *Structural Cuts* that are completely above the horizon line. The openings of all *Skyspaces* cut through ceiling and roof, though the roof may be slanted. These pieces deal with the juncture of the interior space and the space outside by bringing the space of the sky down to the plane of the ceiling. They create a space that is completely open to the sky, yet seems enclosed. The sense of closure at the juncture appears to be a glassy film stretched across the opening, with an indefinable space beyond this transparency that changes with sky conditions and sun angles. The *Skyspaces* have both a day and a night aspect, and the greatest change over time is noticed at the juncture of day and night' (James Turrell 2001: 96).

'the genius of the heart who makes everything loud and self-satisfied fall silent and teaches it to listen, who smooths rough souls and gives them a new desire to savour – the desire to lie still as a mirror, that the deep sky may mirror itself in them ...'

(*Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, quoted in Chamberlain 1996: 161*)



1. Platonism, Christianity: The sun is still shining in the sky.
2. Romanticism: The sun turns black. It's a nightly phenomenon (Novalis).
3. Nietzsche: The sun must be thought of in the plural. We are all "dancing stars" – the Superman is the sun to come.
4. Surrealism, Bataille: The sun is rotten, the eye is blinded.
5. The sun of the future ... ?
(Daniel Birnbaum 2001: 231)

'Not even the sky.
But a memory of sky,
And the blue of the earth
In your lungs'
(Auster 1998: 75)

'Imaginary air is the hormone that allows us to grow psychically' (Bachelard 1988: 11)

Of the great contemporary sky-writers - Jabès, Milosz, Berger, Cixous, Ondaatje, Tarkovsky, Greenaway – one of the most compelling, to my mind, is the South African painter-poet-novelist Breyten Breytenbach. He has reflected on his 7-year incarceration during apartheid in terms of prison's enforced deprivation of sky, sun, weather, or at best restricted, fleeting glimpses of the sky as 'happening-horizon' (Breytenbach 1984b: 139). One half of his autobiographical *True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* is entitled 'A Memory of Sky'. Breytenbach's sky becomes a space for more than meditations on the oppressive heaviness of institutionalisation and attendant, wil-ful dreams of flight.¹³ For this dissident inspired by Zen Buddhism, it becomes an element for exploring the dynamic immanence of the imaginary in the real, the parade of the mobility of images¹⁴ that cannot be policed, a means of survival in 'No Man's Land': a resistant, blooded politics of the imagination.

'On summer days when you were cleaning your corridor you could see through the grill clouds passing along the blue highway above the yard wall facing you: boats on their way to a dream, bit actors always dressed in white being taken to an empty space where Fellini would be filming a saturnalia, a wedding feast. There was wind which you never felt on your face but which you got to know through its aftermath – the red Transvaal dust you had to sweep up. There were the most impressive summer thunderstorms tearing and rolling for miles through the ether, slashing and slaying before big-rain came to lash the roof with a million whips. It was like living underneath a gigantic billiard table. Behind the walls with no apertures to the outside, behind the screen of your closed eyes where you hid from the boere – you still saw the stabs and snakes of lightning. There was also the defiance of those singing their death' (Breytenbach 1984a: 124).

¹³ Writing about Nietzsche and 'the ascensional psyche', Gaston Bachelard reminds us that "I want" and "I fly" are both "volo" in Italian. There is no way to investigate the psychology of will without going to the very root of imaginary flight' (Bachelard 1988: 156).

¹⁴ Breytenbach's imaginal dissidence offers a politicised revisioning of a Bachelardian poetics of dynamic reverie and 'material imagination'. Cf. e.g.: 'A psychology of the imagination cannot be developed using static forms. It must be based on forms that are in the process of being deformed, and a great deal of importance must be placed on the dynamic principles of deformation. The psychology of air is [...] essentially vectorial. Every aerial image is essentially a future with a vector for breaking into flight' (Bachelard 1988: 21. Emphasis in original).

In his book *39 Microlectures*, the Goat Island performer Matthew Goulish writes about the experience of the event of rain, as singularity and multiplicity offering infinite approaches to someone who seeks to 'understand' the rain. In the following extract, in the spirit of Matthew's own re-writings and by association, I have substituted the word 'sky' for 'rain', and minimally reworked some of the text accordingly:

'As our approaches to the sky increase, so too increases our understanding of the fleeting and fragile qualities of human life. And as our ways of under-standing the sky multiply, so too will we begin to see the presence of sky in even the earthiest of subjects' (Goulish 2000: 47).¹⁵



¹⁵ 'As our approaches to the rain increase, so too increases our understanding of the fleeting and fragile qualities of human life. And as our ways of understanding the rain multiply, so too will we begin to see the presence of rain in even the driest of subjects. We will realise at last that our objective all along was to understand that it is always raining' (Goulish 2000: 47).

sky:skin skein

a clear blue under the open praise her to the sky's the limit

the limit the limit sky high sky diver

skyjack skylab skylark skylight skyline

skyscraper

skyward

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In Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books*, one of Prospero's 24 volumes is
'A Book of Motion!'

'This is a book that at the most simple level describes how
birds fly and waves roll, how clouds form and apples
fall from trees. It describes how the eye changes its shape when looking at
great distances, how hairs grow in a beard, why the heart flutters and the
lungs inflate involuntarily and how laughter changes the face.
At its most complex level, it explains how ideas chase one another
in the memory and where thought goes when it is finished with'
(Greenaway 1991: 24).¹⁶

¹⁶ In his work, Greenaway returns repeatedly to the sky and flying/falling: see e.g. *The Falls* (1980), and *Les Bruits des Nuages* (*Flying out of this World*) (1992). His *100 Objects to Represent the World* (1992) included a cloud and a crashed aircraft.

Leave this text for a while, and go outside.

Stand beneath the gaze of the sky.

Feel gravity's pull, the ground.

Let your spine fill with air.

Take your time.

'Ten, Chi, Jin': sky, earth, human (Oida, 1992: 84).



'Only now and then in the theatre can we hope for something of the quality of a thing in nature (a tree, a melon, a sheet of water, a flight of birds). The point in such a case is not that it is beautiful or not beautiful, but that it lives in itself' (Stark Young on Gertrude Stein's *Four Saints in Three Acts*, 1934, quoted in Marranca 1996: 5)

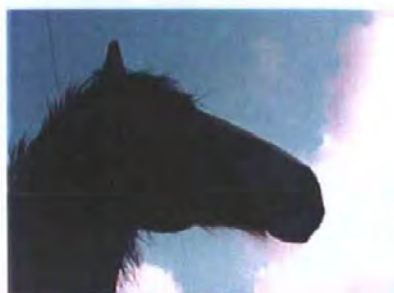
Any and every sky is in continuous transition, in process, 'an eternal present whose past lies in the future' (George 1999: 15). With neither inside nor outside, beginning nor end, a sky is a field for the study of change, a 'book of motion', a 'landscape of the passage', a dynamic 'angel space',¹⁷ a rhizome, a space of pure becoming. It is 'the *ground* of the events which are taking place within it' and 'an event in itself' (Berger 1980: 204). Like performance, a sky offers an epistemology.

In his book on the relations between Buddhist philosophy and contemporary performance theory, David George outlines such an epistemology:

'As an epistemology, performance offers: a rediscovery of the now, relocation in the here; return to the primacy of experience, of the event; rediscovery that facts are relations, that all knowledge exists on the threshold and in the interaction between subject and object (which are themselves only hypostatisations); a rediscovery of ambiguity, of contradiction, of difference; a reassertion that things – and people – are what they do' (George 1999: 34).

I have looked for something of the quality of a sky in the performance work I have made, and I have seen it elsewhere in performances. I remember sky in the best work of Theatre de Complicite – *Lucie Cabrol*, *The Street of Crocodiles* - in some of Brook's productions at the Bouffes du Nord, and in Impact's *The Undersea World of Erik Satie*. There was sky in the work of Jan Fabre, Pina Bausch, Boris Nieslony. There was sky in Zingaro's *Chimère* and *Eclipse*, and in Goat Island's *It's an earthquake in my heart*.

¹⁷ Michel Serres: 'Look at the sky, even right here above us. It's traversed by planes, satellites, electromagnetic waves from television, radio, fax, electronic mail. The world we are immersed in is a space-time of communication. Why shouldn't I call it angel space, since this means the messengers, the systems of mailmen, of transmissions in the act of passing or the space through which they pass? Do you know, for example, that at every moment there are at least a million people on flights through the sky, as though immobile or suspended - non-variables with variations? Indeed we live in the century of angels' (in Serres & Latour 1995: 118-9).



And there is sky in many of Lone Twin's performances. I think of the poignant, comic poetics of grounded lightness in Lone Twin's *How to make your own cloud* (2000), for example: Gary rain dancing, the real-time rhythms of expending energy to create heat, then water poured over his sweating body to make it steam, like a racehorse, like a morning stream, like a shower on a car bonnet, like 'Bruce Springsteen' (or so Gregg says). The hydrological cycle in local and intimate immensity:

'I'd like my steam to form a cloud and pour down rain on some hard ground making it go soft. I want to be a part of things, to be of use, to get my hands dirty. I want to blur my edges [...] I want my steam to form a cloud and to meet with other clouds and block out the sun so I can't see my baby walk away with another' (Whelan & Winters 2001: n.p.).





I have often taken photographs of the sky and its protean appearances, endeavouring to track the events and 'haecceities'¹⁸ of the 'presenting present' that unfolds upon it (as surface) and within it (as relational field or pure depth): weather systems, vapour trails, the logic of wings and 'flight spaces',¹⁹ refracted light and its epiphenomena. Many of these photographs, part of an ongoing series related to the hydrological cycle, are reflections of sky and clouds - water in flight - in rivers, lakes, puddles: the body of water as eye of the ground, or mirrored underworld that reflects but lets pass, does not grasp (unlike the camera).

I do not turn to the sky to find Romantic reflections of the climates of my own moods in some sympathetic fallacy, 'my head in the clouds', nor simply as a repository for metaphors,²⁰ but perhaps better to register the limitations of my own perceptions while seeking to let something of the fragility and dynamism of what's out there in-here: above all, the sky as field and stimulus for 'slow thinking'.²¹

¹⁸ 'It is the entire assemblage in its individuated aggregate that is a haecceity [...] It is the wolf itself, and the horse, and the child that cease to be subjects to become events, in assemblages that are inseparable from an hour, a season, an atmosphere, an air [...] Haecceity, fog, glare. A haecceity has neither beginning nor end, origin nor destination; it is always in the middle. It is not made of points, only of lines. It is a rhizome' (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 262-3).

¹⁹ Cf. the American artist-pilot James Turrell on Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's accounts of 'flight spaces': 'He described spaces in the skies, spaces within space, not necessarily delineated by cloud formations or storms or things like that, but by light qualities, by seeing, and by the nature of the air in certain areas [...] some were visual, some were only felt' (Turrell 1996: 575).

²⁰ Cf. Georges Bataille's *Critical Dictionary* (1930) re. metaphor: 'It is hard to know where metaphor begins and ends. [...] Not only language, but the whole of intellectual life is based on a game of transpositions, of symbols, which can be described as metaphorical. On the other hand, knowledge always proceeds by comparison, which connects all known objects to one another in relations of interdependency. Given any two among them, it is impossible to determine which is designated by the name proper to it and is not a metaphor of the other, and vice versa. A man is a moving tree, just as much as a tree is a man who has put down roots. In the same way, the sky is a rarefied earth, the earth a denser sky. And if I see a dog running, it is just as much the run that is dogging' (Bataille 1995: 61. Emphasis in original).

²¹ Matthew Goulsh: 'Most of us live in fear of slowing down our thinking, because of the possibility that if we succeed we might find that in fact nothing is happening. I guarantee this is not the case. Something is always happening. In fact, some things happen which one can only perceive with slow thinking' (Goulsh 2000: 82. Emphasis in original). Cf. Bachelard's suggestion that one of his aims is 'to school us in slowness' (Bachelard 1988: vii), and the implications of duration for perception in Bill Viola's work (see e.g. Viola 1995: 150-1). Finally, it is worth noting in this context that, in the French language, the same word (*le temps*) is used for time and weather, and of course they are intimately interconnected. (Cf. e.g. Serres & Latour 1995: 57-62).

I do not turn to the sky in order to turn my back on events at ground level, but perhaps better to attend to them in their relational unfolding at 'the present's speed' (Cixous 1998: 79), and to re-cognise their unpredictability and the impossibility of their fixity; I used to try to photograph the wind.

I do not turn to the sky out of mystical, quietist reverence for this traditional arena of cosmology, but perhaps better to look again (re-spect) at 'the features of the world's face [...] apparitioning' (Cixous 2001: 8-9) via a politics, an ethics, a poetics of attention:²²

'[The] very habit and faculty that makes apprehensible to us what is known and expected dulls our sensitivity to other forms, even with the most obvious. We must rub our eyes and look again, clear our minds of what we are looking for to see what is there' (Malouf 1994: 130)

²² Cf. Anne Bogart: 'Attention is a tension. Attention is a tension between an object and the observer or a tension between people. It is a listening. Attention is a tension over time' (Bogart 2001: 74). See also Bill Viola's remarkable essay about his 1986 video work *I do not know what it is I am like*, which ghosts much of my writing about human/animal interactions, and my teaching practices in relation to site/landscape work, in its conception of a reciprocity - the observed object as processual subject-in-relation in an event of exchange: 'Then there is the moment of awareness of the other [...] restated from the first conceptualization of persons and objects in a space outside the skin, to the first encounter with an animal in the wild. The power of the gaze crystallizes these moments, and the eyes become the conduits of the exchange of energies between the organism and the environment, between the observer and the observed. A line of sight can just as easily slice through the separation between subject and object as it can define it. [...] It is through this black [of the eye's pupil] that we confront the gaze of an animal, partly with fear, with curiosity, with familiarity, with mystery. We see ourselves in its eyes while sensing the irreconcilable otherness of an intelligence ordered around a world we can share in body but not in mind' (Viola 1995: 143).



In the reading of these texts, perhaps a mutable, unmasterable sky has 'made a present of *what it could leave behind of itself*' (Berger 2001: 19). The gift of what it can leave behind of itself - what Paul Valéry once called 'the stains of the pure instant' - will be neither uniform nor stable in the present, its shape, rhythm, affect, meanings, 'faces' refigured over time by context, memory, imagination and language, desire-machines arcing with the possibility of connectivities and radiations:

'I take quick notes
like this
winter morning light
and a black-winged gull
keening over the hut -
no more than that
no metaphor-mongering
no myth-malarkey
I think of lines
like lightning flashes
lines that in their flying energy
would make things touch and
radiate in the mind'

(Kenneth White, *The Bird's Path*,
quoted in Berger & Christie 1999: n.p.)

Under the sign of 'perhaps' - and both theatre and writing exist under the sign of *peut-être* - between the coming into appearance (*venir*), and the futurity of what is to come (*à venir/l'avenir*), between the residual and the emergent is the dynamic intermezzo-event of becoming (*devenir*).



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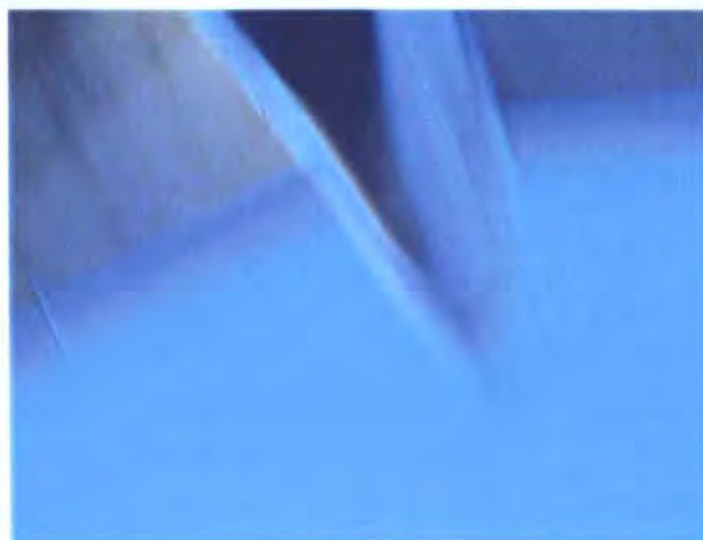




Photo credits

Paul Graham: Shankill, Belfast, Cease-fire; Bogside, Derry, Cease-fire; Craigavon, Cease-fire (April 1994)

Yannis Behrakis, *The Guardian*, 15 January 2002: B52 bomber over Afghanistan

ECM: Arvo Pärt

The Age, 6 August 1997: Stuart Diver (in sky sequence 2)

James Turrell: Skyspace 1 (1975), in Peter Noever (ed.), *James Turrell: The Other Horizon*, Vienna: MAK

Linda Trueller: Calistoga Hot Springs, 1992

Brian Rapsey: Ahmad Abas in *A Mouthful of Birds* (dir. David Williams, Perth, 1991)

All other photographs by David Williams

Locations: Devon, Skye, Victoria (Australia), Barcelona, Prague

Plane sequence: Melbourne (December 2000)

Horizon sequence: the Outer Hebrides from Uig, Skye (August 2000)

Sunrise sequence: Slapton, Devon (September 2000)

Performances: *A Mouthful of Birds*, *Beautiful Mutants*, *Hallelujah: an audio apocalypse*, *The Debris Field*, *Saturday Night at the Grosvenor* (with Forced Entertainment)

Image of Antony Gormley's *Field for the British Isles* taken in the Salisbury Cathedral cloisters, 2000