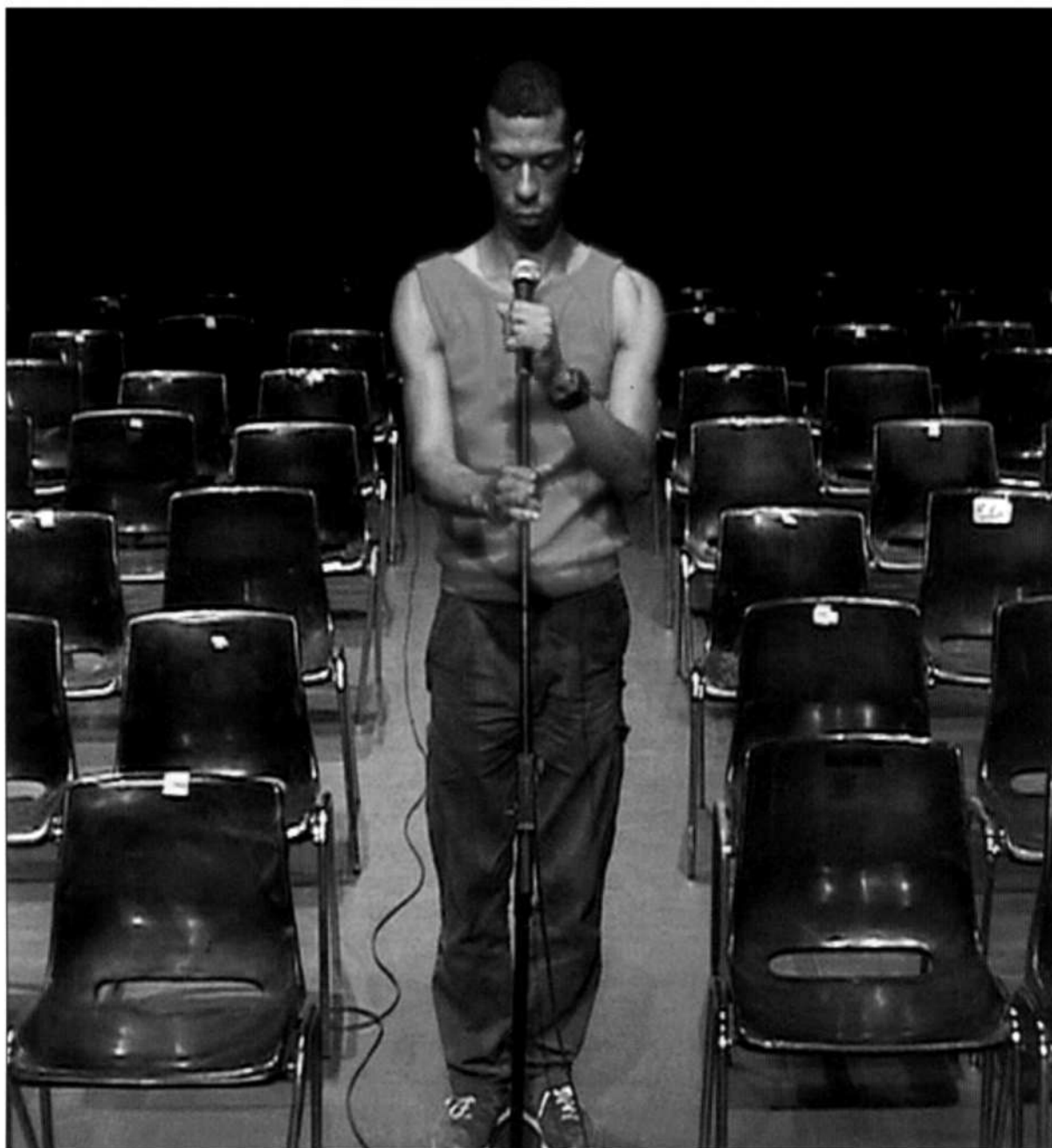


8th May 2003, lakeside arts centre, Miguel Pereira. Photo: Paulo Milhomens



MOVING IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS

Andrew Brown encounters dance in many guises at NOTT Dance 2003

What kind of dance festival is it that includes a film about a sculptor? Or in which one of the pieces is accessed via the telephone? Or where not one but two shows feature performers who remain seated almost throughout? NOTT Dance is that festival and this year seems to have finally outgrown the need to justify itself. The question firmly stressed in the publicity surrounding this

year's event was: 'Where can you find dance?' Dance was duly found and enjoyed in a multitude of forms.

Nottingham has become almost blasé about having a dance festival in which dance barely puts in an appearance, and the European artistic community has a high regard for NOTT Dance. That

experimentation can be carried out so openly and still attract significant and motivated audiences is a mystery to many, but is in reality no great secret. Determined programming against the grain and 14 years of audience development have reaped their own reward.

A particularly inspired piece of programming saw the film *Rivers and Tides* receive its English premiere to one of the largest audiences at the festival. Andy Goldsworthy is a widely respected sculptor who recreates, almost obsessively, natural forms in the landscape using materials close to hand.

On seeing the film I found myself unable to fathom why has it taken so long for Goldsworthy to work with a film-maker. He has always photographed his work in order to document what he has done and to approach it from a different perspective. Encounters with his work are generally through such photographs in book form. However, through this film it becomes apparent that still images, even those that seem to convey a strong sense of the work, are limited in their ability to communicate what Goldsworthy is really about. Film is able to reveal not only movement but also the decay and transience that are pivotal to Goldsworthy's take on art and life. Skilful use of the movie camera allows for unlikely angles and heightens the impact of works such as the wall sculpture in New York State that, filmed from a helicopter, weaves in and out of individual trees before disappearing into a lake and reappearing out the other side. Of course the filmic medium too has its limitations that would very likely be exposed by an encounter with the actual work in situ.

The film follows Goldsworthy through a number of projects, including some near his own home in Scotland. Director Thomas Riedelsheimer allows the artist to speak for himself and provides us with what appears to be an honest and intimate portrait of a man whom one suspects is not at his most comfortable as the centre of attention. Goldsworthy comes across as highly driven yet solitary, at his most content interacting with the natural environment. He lives a philosophy of respect for the natural world, leaving an imprint that is temporary and enigmatic. His process is thoughtful, instinctive and improvised.

Some of the most memorable sequences in the film occur when fragile structures collapse or are reclaimed by the tide or other natural processes. Structures taken to the edge of collapse reveal a great deal about themselves and the fabric of which they are comprised. The artist conducts a dialogue with his materials, working with bare hands despite the harsh elements, and in doing so explores balance, interconnectedness, and the 'laws' of nature.

Goldsworthy's works are fundamentally about the movement of form through time and space, markers of a journey and ultimately of a life. They could be viewed as a more thoughtful version of the marks carved into trees and stone at important landmarks and ultimately in marker pen and spray paint on urban walls and public transport.

One of the most effective scenes in the film is of Goldsworthy lying inert on his back on a Scottish road during a shower of rain. After receiving a thorough soaking he simply stands up to reveal the dry shape of a man on the road.

Miguel Pereira's *8th May 2003*, lakeside arts centre was based upon the premise that by revealing what is not supposed to be seen we can reach another level of understanding. A legitimate aim which has preoccupied many great thinkers and artists over the last 100 years or so. We were promised a glimpse of the backstage world and collectively hoped for revelation. However real life is rarely so gripping and tends towards the banal. Which is exactly what was explored, somewhat bravely, in this piece.

There is an assumption around time-based media, such as performance, that artists will take liberties with time in order to make their point more effectively. Pereira broke the rules by not only omitting to include any recognisable 'dance' (clearly not a problem at this particular festival), but also by refusing to compress the action. Thus a performance about banality, born of a desire to reflect the emptiness the choreographer felt towards his work and the environment, was in itself banal.

The three performers, including Pereira, initially appeared onstage as though receiving post-show applause, convincing patches of sweat on their

shirts. They gravitated to chairs centre stage and proceeded to converse about their health, holidays and the diverse uses of Coca Cola, working from a script in both English and Portuguese that communicated a universal banality. Unrelenting small talk was punctuated by a round of dressing and undressing and fiddling around with supermarket plastic bags containing food and drink. The tedium of the dancer's life was laid bare. However this was as nothing compared to the bleak vision of the mute technician, whose futile industry, seemingly located in a parallel universe to the performers, took on the aspect of a latter day Sisyphus.

Déjà Donné returned for its third successive year at NOTT Dance, this time as festival artists in residence. Thus instead of showing a finished piece to follow the acclaimed *In Bella Copia* and *Aria Spinta*, the company presented a work in progress and provided a welcome insight into their process. During the post-show discussion the company also revealed living through an all too common situation, in which the struggle for recognition and external funding caused them to lose touch with themselves. Déjà Donné has come through the crisis with a renewed belief in their method of work, with a desire to go deeper and become more intuitive. *There Where We Were* is envisaged as a transitional piece in which the company's artists revisit original questions, concerns and research and discover new approaches towards them. The piece is set to premiere in August 2003.

Confession Time by Norwegian company Zero Visibility Corp was an attempt to confront the integrity of modern-day confessional culture. Although there was some particularly pleasing movement in the piece, the style was deeply rooted in the tradition of devised experimental theatre pioneers Forced Entertainment. The scenario was of a group of people who, finding themselves thrown together in an isolated location, use strategic confession in order to gain the upper hand. Using diverse text sources such as *Blade Runner*, *dailyconfession.com* and *Amok Journal*, each performer took their character through the process of revelation. These declarations were undermined by compulsive behaviours, frequently of a sexual nature. Unfortunately much of what was said was lost due to heavy Norwegian accents or was lost beneath Zoviet *France's sound palette.

Some of the most effective language was in the form of a text message description of the original journey the company made to their retreat on a remote lighthouse. It managed to cut straight to the heart of the matter and yet also left a great deal to the imagination. Zoviet *France's live music was another strength, forcing sound into the consciousness and creating an energy that filled the space and gave an edge to the performer's behaviour.

The inconspicuous ending was intended to forestall a sense of closure and presumably to take the show home with us. Unfortunately the mental images and moral issues failed to linger in the memory for much longer than the applause.

Bock & Vincenzi have been exploring the ways in which work can be presented for several years. Their latest episode is a piece of dance mediated by a taped transcription and the audience member's own telephone handset, continuing the theme of invisibility that runs through their work. *invisible dances...from afar* rejects the ubiquitous video image and offers instead a throwback to the early days of wireless. Old technology perhaps, but no less effective in its own way.

You have dialed a number on your telephone. Listen. Listen hard. It is a woman in an empty theatre watching a show being performed to the dead. You'll hear a voice through the roar of the sound onstage. Listen. She is trying to tell you what it is like to be there. She is trying to get through.

The show apparently featured six dancers and was witnessed by a handful of people in a 'dark' West End theatre, one of whom can be heard on the lengthy answerphone message. Her voice is hushed as though eavesdropping and competes with background noise that resembles an industrial plant, but is in fact the amplified body sounds of the performers. She is compelled to keep talking, aware that if she stops the piece will disappear. The experience has the intimate feel of a late night radio play or listening to a friend recounting a traumatic event on the other end of a telephone line.

It is hard to create any meaningful sense of the stage show from what is heard, but then again how



Confession Time: Zero Visibility Corp.

often have people's avid descriptions of the performance/film/exhibition they have just seen failed to convey anything of the work? What one can glean is that the show sounds distinctly odd, with veiled figures, sometimes completely naked, engaged in highly physical activity. At one point the witness asks whether it is she or the listener who brings the meaning to the piece. Her faltering reflections on her own role alongside the breathless descriptions make for a compelling work.

Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion's *Both Sitting Duet* owed much to the musician's art. The pair strode purposefully into the Bonington Gallery and sat down on two wooden chairs as though about to perform a recital. Two A4 notebooks were set at their feet, one containing musical notation, the other a combination of text and symbols. The audience were hushed and senses heightened in the resonant space. Previously Fargion has composed music for Burrows's dance pieces and this was an attempt, in the spirit of true collaboration, to work in an area that did not obviously favour either one.

During the devising phase many different texts had been brought in but the inspirational point apparently came when Morton Feldman's violin/piano duet entitled *For John Cage* was selected as a 'found process'. Using the score sim-

ply removed some of the decision-making and left the duo free to construct the sequence of upper body choreography. This might sound like a dry intellectual exercise but was anything but. It explored counterpoint, the relationship between music and dance and the relationship between the two men in terms that were vigorous and human.

Diverse sounds were produced in the course of the performance but were not born of a deliberate attempt to make music with their bodies. However the feeling persisted that we were experiencing a piece of music, transcribed into another form. After some minutes of intricate movement, hand-claps suddenly exploded in the still air and from this point the musicality of the piece was foregrounded. The sudden ending was met by warm applause.

Questions abounded, particularly in the post-show discussions and late bar conversations during the festival. Whether dance is to be found on the other end of a telephone or in the way a leaf snake is carried downstream by the current, what matters is that artists have a context in which to explore their urges and the rest of us have a chance to engage with this process.

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