

ADSA Conference Keynote, "Boom or Bust: Economies of Production and Exchange in Theatre, Performance and Culture", Edith Cowan University, Curtin University and Murdoch University, WA, Australia, July 2009.

"Signs of Life, Signs of the Times: and if all artists are semioticians?"

1. Whose practice is this anyhow?

I have used the term "artists" in my title, but I have added the term, "expert practitioner" in order to raise the issue of expertise in an experienced performance-maker, how she or he acquires it, how, by whom and where it is evaluated and to what end. I have often indicated in other places, at considerable length, that the theorisation of practitioner expertise from a practitioner-centric perspective, continues to be singularly absent from the larger body of Performance Studies writing produced over recent decades, despite the fact that an engagement with precisely that expertise tends to be implicit in academic judgements of practitioners' work, outside the university, that is considered to be of interest.

While a research enquiry into training for performance has emerged over recent years, I find it curious in its limitations: it stops short of expertise and how one might acquire, develop and evaluate it, and its theorisation still tends to take an anonymous "the performer" as its object, rather than the performance-maker as researching subject.

Meanwhile a research-focused account of the creative processes specific to named, "signature" practitioners continues to be relatively rare, in part, as far as I can tell, because some of us, in the university, fail to acknowledge the research-methodological rationale for such an enquiry in all of its detail. Signature practices, where those practices are effectively inseparable from the engagement of a named practitioner, aspire to a singularity that social sciences-influenced theoretical writing finds hard to contemplate – even though this same notion of singular signature practices might equally have applied to the theoretical practices, in lecture halls or on the page of a Derrida, a Deleuze or a Lyotard.

I want to attempt to set up and pursue a number of lines of enquiry today, one of which, plainly, has to do with the currently fashionable and relatively under-theorised time and times – relatively under-theorised, that is, in comparison with many writers' engagement with the strongly visual spaces, places, bodies and faces of performance. My

approach to theoretical writing today, by the way, with time's constraints in mind, will be notional and gestural, rather than "deep" or rigorous, in part because I am more concerned with what I call "mixed-mode theoretical practices", in the context of research into performance-making, than with whatever one might normally understand the word "theory" to mean. A notional rather than thorough engagement with theoretical writing does also, in my own experience, characterise the uses of theoretical writing by PhD practitioner-students, where these same practitioners take creative practice as their primary focus, and use writing, on the basis of a sense of empirical fit with aspects of their own experience, to illuminate it.

2. *Process and product*

I want to introduce a particular line of enquiry of temporal implication at this point, by observing that the engagement I am calling for requires a shift in orientation away from "the event" of performance, as though it might be "the thing itself", to the highly particular notion of performance-making process that is bound-in to product, where it is clearly understood, from the outset, that the processes involved are expert, creative, and plausible in professional as well as research terms.

My further suggestion against that background, is that it is equally time that we enable certain researchers in applied performance research, as distinct from spectator studies, to pay proper attention to *the times of making, in the plural*, and to what I have called their internal differentiation over time, as well as to the question of how this internal differentiation - which seems to me to be remarkably consistent in some of its temporal and affective patternings - might be accounted for. Such an attention, however, would require access to the times of making, which are often long, desultory or intense, fraught, boring and still seem, in enough instances to allow us to generalise, to involve practitioner vulnerabilities and a well-justified practitioner anxiety as to what a non-participant researcher might actually want to see.

The shift in recent years to a concern with *process "itself"*, rather than process bound-in to performance production, seems to me to be flawed in this precise sense: expert making processes are quite particularly different, and distinctively-marked, in work that produces an outcome judged to be adequate in terms of professional criteria. Expert or professional making processes, amongst which I'd want to prioritise the expert-intuitive, are internally modulated when production logics and production values press back in on them, so to speak, from the performance future.

3. *Cases in Point*

With these opening remarks, and the requirement to provoke in mind, I propose to show you two short professionally produced pieces of performance work today: both clearly “have something to do with” the contemporary real although you might agree that “having something to do with” is far from a straightforward notion, as I propose to demonstrate: in the first, Rosemary Butcher’s *Six Frames: Memories of Two Women*, the piece was made in a research as well as a professional framework, as a result of an outside commission. I was able to be present in the role of *theor* - the ambassadorial role of the earliest recorded theorist, Solon - at many stages in the making processes.

The second, a staging to camera of Caryl Churchill’s *Seven Jewish Children*, was made in what emerges as a relatively curious professional context – i.e. by the daily newspaper *The Guardian*. I did not participate in either the dramatic compositional, the theatrical or the filmic making processes, yet I want to show it to you because it does itself assert, with some force, its relationship with the everyday and historical real, which it condenses and displaces, to some effect. (I’ll return a number of times to the notion that this compression and displacement can be best understood in terms of the ancient figuration called hypotyposis.) Churchill’s piece has the curious distinction of being the dramatic work most recently banned by the BBC, almost entirely, it seems, because its engagement with the contemporary real has been judged to be partisan, to lack balance, in a political economy in which the BBC as a major cultural institution, is almost entirely dependent financially upon of their ongoing receipt of the government-imposed licence fee. The issue of technical definitions of “balance” is not insignificant, it seems to me: “balance”, or rather its lack, is relatively difficult to account for discursively, although it seems nonetheless to be swiftly recognised.

I want to show you, in addition, a few recently published examples of visual art practice, by Steve Bell, each of which is professionally and one might say almost urgently embedded in the everyday. I want to look at the ways this particular and popular artist figures the political real, while also intruding explicitly into that figuration, those semiotic complexities that an onlooker might interpret, in everyday terms, as indices of or pointers to attitude, ethos, political position, and critical intervention through an everyday mode of cultural production. I am going to try to make the point, in what follows, that because attitude, ethos, and political position cannot be represented directly, an artist often needs to find the means to conjure them up, for a reader or viewer, indirectly but pointedly, and,

generally speaking, on the basis of the artist's recourse to an intuition shared locally, if not universally.

Gordon Brown's Iraq war inquiry 'whitewash'

© Steve Bell, *the guardian*, Tuesday 16 June 2009



I want to say a little more at this point about why I have included Bell's work here. Plainly it is swiftly and expertly produced, and required to engage critically with the political everyday; but it also seems to me to be the case that his art might allow me to ask what compositional strategies an expert practitioner will choose intuitively, in one or another set-up, and how those compositional strategies work, to animate an onlooker's own engagement with what that rapid sketch might be unfolded to reveal. In Bell's case, I would argue that his vivid sketches, in their considerable economy, can be unfolded, if the interest is aroused, to reveal a set of dramatic scenarios and, in time, a history of the same.

But Bell's work allows me, in addition, to entertain the notion that another creative practice, expertly worked, might provide an external measure against which other compositional decisions in performance-making might be tested, and evaluated. I have found over recent years that professional artists tend to recognise their fellows, and that the sharing of expert knowledge, of how things are made or might be made, or might be

dreamt of, rarely takes place discursively. In such a case, I have discerned that language use, in a making situation, by an expert practitioner addressing another, is required, often with great economy, to mean more, and do more than it says.

4. *Just in Time*

In everything I have said so far, questions as to judgements of quality – professional, expert and academic – come into play, and I want to raise the issue formally here, of how we measure quality, but also value, in the arts as well as in the research context of the university. The question of judgement will become explicit, once again, when I briefly reference the matter of certain ongoing problems for performance-making practices in the research context, which seem to me to hover around what philosophers have long called *the value of knowledge*.

My motive here is political, or “knowledge political”, as I prefer it: discrimination based on knowledges judged not to be of equal value in some cultural set-ups is no less discrimination, and may be informed by ancient prejudice, endlessly and sometimes involuntarily renewed. I shall want to refer very briefly, finally, and in passing, to the writing of one particular practice theorist, Karin Knorr Cetina¹, from the harder sciences, whose analysis of research practices themselves, and what she calls “epistemic objects”, seems to me to follow lines very familiar to anyone involved with creative decision-making in performance-making practices.

5. *Times Past, Present Lives*

To come back to signs of time or the times, and to the identification of the overall thematic focus of this conference, I couldn't avoid the issue of the impact of historical time on the present, and how some of us live it. I have found myself in a political double-bind of considerable force, since the Blair Government took the UK into the war in Iraq, and my commitment to the political Left, such as the post-Left has been in the last decade in the UK, has been shaken, perhaps irreversibly. I wondered, preparing for this event, whether it might not be possible that others in this particular place find themselves similarly bound-in, in the present, to older crises and dramas of knowledge in which we consider ourselves to have been implicated against our will:

¹ Karin Knorr Cetina, “Objectual Practice”, in T. Schatzki et al (eds), *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, London and NY: Routledge 2001.

***The Guardian* "Australian Aboriginal prisoner 'cooked to death' in van"
15.06.09**

A coroner has found that an Aboriginal man was "cooked to death" after he spent four hours in the back of a security van in searing heat with no air conditioning as it drove across the goldfields of south-west Australia. The 46-year-old Aboriginal elder suffered third degree burns after collapsing in the heat and falling to the floor of the van while it travelled 250 miles from Laverton to Kalgoorlie in 47C heat. Ward, whose first name cannot be used because of an Aboriginal cultural prohibition that forbids relatives from naming their dead, had been arrested a day earlier in January 2008 for drink driving.

He was given 600ml (one pint) of water before boarding the van but the coroner found he died before he could finish drinking it. His body temperature was so high that when he arrived unconscious at Kalgoorlie hospital, medical staff could not cool his body down, despite giving him an ice bath. He also had a cut on his head from falling in the van and a third-degree burn to his stomach from lying on the vehicle's hot metal floor. The West Australian coroner, Alistair Hope, found that Ward was effectively "cooked" to death and heavily criticised the state prisons department, the private security firm that operated the van and the two guards who escorted Ward.

"It is a disgrace that a prisoner in the 21st century, particularly a prisoner who has not been convicted of any crime, was transported for a long distance in high temperatures," Hope said. The security guards, who did not check to see if he needed a toilet break, food or water, had breached their duty of care. Even when they heard a thud in the back of the van they failed to check properly and instead threw water on Ward through the chained-up inner door, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's Four Corners programme reported. Hope also questioned the reliability of the security guards' evidence and suggested possible collusion, prompting the company that provides the transport service, GSL, to suspend them from duty.

It has been almost 20 years since a royal commission raised the alarm of the widespread lack of care for Australian indigenous prisoners. The 1987 commission noted the disproportionately high number of Aboriginal Australians who were incarcerated and recommended measures to address the problem. Yet in 2005 a government survey revealed that, while Aborigines comprised 2-3% of the population, they accounted for 20% of prisoners.

On that question of a past which haunts, I recently read Jane Goodall's essay on haunted performance and other places in Australia (in G. McAuley, ed., *Unstable Ground: Performance and the Politics of Place*, Brussels: Peter Lang, 2006) and wondered whether the ghost, or *revenant*, that is central to her ways of understanding in that essay might not actually mark her own eternal return to a time that time itself does not heal, and functions thus as a displacement of that weary anger and shame some so-called "newer" Australians have inherited and continue to experience when they are confronted by manifestations of what was once called, in the case of the British police force, "institutionalised [or indeed nationalised] racism". I will not adumbrate here the knowledge-dramas – amongst which challenges to "truth", "plausibility" and "belief in authority" play their role - that have shaken the British political since the mad Tony Blair committed war-crimes against the people of Iraq, Afghanistan, and, by neglect, against the Palestinians in all our names, and

in so doing, some say, bankrupted the country. Except perhaps to add that a constantly fed public fascination with truth, lies, expenses fiddling and weapons of mass destruction has taken its toll, as far as belief in the political is concerned, and goes on taking that toll from one day to the next in the present.

6. *Displacement: From One to its Other*

I want to ask nonetheless – and some might find this distasteful - whether it might not be the case that political outrage and crises of belief can excite constructively useful energies, in a maker of cultural “objects”, where others might feel despair and others still fall into inertia. However – to come back to signs of life and signs of the times - I wondered too whether some art-makers might not prefer to respond indirectly, by displacing those built-up energies, through a shift in focus, into one or another art practice or mode of cultural composition, into something that is both momentary and non-identical with the source impulse or trouble. Theories of displacement are strongly embedded into the history of the later 20thC theoretical, but I want to approach the issue pragmatically: displacement challenges the notion that a practitioner’s engagement with the real might be straightforward. But I’ll come back later to what I mean here.

7. *Expertise, again*

First I need to return us to the notion of expertise that I raised some minutes back, in order to consider some of the knowledge-political implications of a concern with expertise in the university. I have intimated that this concern is timely and it might actually be urgent, for some of us at least, and for a number of reasons, some of which I have already hinted at in my abstract: I am talking here about the entry of expert or professional art-makers as researchers, into the research economy of the university over the past decade, an entry that was relatively unprepared for by that university, and often poorly managed by universities themselves. Here political intervention and external funding forced a widening of opportunity, as we say. My own added concern has been, since then, with the lack of theoretical approaches to and understanding of expertise in general, and *to or of* the highly particular nature of expert and professional art practices more specifically.

In the terms of that enquiry, we might want to note that expertise is in fact a curiosity: while it *takes time for it to be acquired*, it tends to be performed at lightning speed, almost invisibly; it is more easily recognised, in addition, when it is absent - lacking

or inadequate. While its lengthy acquisition processes are perfectly clear in professional music performance, and in some dancework's use of trained performers, in both of which an element of technical proficiency – even disciplinary mastery - is far from a crime, it seems to be rather less widely *entertained* as vital in some other areas of performance-making, including some live art and devised interdisciplinary performances in the university, where expertise may well be present, without however its being much thought about: enthusiasm and a good idea can sometimes seem in university drama departments to take the place – and even challenge if not condemn the notion – of disciplinary mastery.

It may also be worth noting that expertise is likely, according to some so-called “post-humanist” writers in practice theory, to grow *in the doing of it* – by which I mean that it seems to exist quasi-independently of its practitioner, and that it is likely to develop in some practitioners almost without their awareness of it. A related point is that expertise is likely to be more readily acquired and developed, in some disciplines, through something like an apprenticeship, where its practices can progressively be mastered “on the job”, than it is in the advanced research contexts of a traditional university department of Performance Studies or Dance Studies, which often hardly have room for it and don't know where to put it.

When it comes to its evaluation by each of us, my feeling is that performance-making expertise, in my experience, is likely to be *sensed* very rapidly by many of us in universities as well as outside them, on the basis of our experience of its outcome, whereas attempts at providing an account of its operations, in whatever register of writing is appropriate, seem to emerge more slowly; in addition, many performance theorists, preferring to attend the event, are unlikely to want to attempt to grasp the intricacies of making operations, over the times they take.

Some of us, finally, may well prefer to disciplinary expertise, our own expert spectating: it is tidier, more portable, less noisy, and, after the event, available for our happy manipulation of an experience in which we ourselves figure prominently, even if it is also the case that no-one else is likely to pay to watch us at it. In other words, adequate writing in academic registers “about” expertise in performance-making in general, or even in the case of particular named practitioners, is thin on the ground, slow to emerge, and sometimes uncomfortable in its own skin.

I do nonetheless seem, as I have just indicated, to *sense* expertise at work, and the verb “to sense” suggests to me at least that such sensing might well constitute a significant way of knowing, or mode of knowledge, as far as the evaluation of performance practices

is concerned. Yet isn't it that same sensing, that serves the role of a major means of expert evaluation in all manner of contexts in which my own expertise is tested – whether I am examining a PhD dissertation, or a piece of performance work? Isn't it after the event, that I practice that reordering, justification, that logical account, in writing, that does the rest of the work? How curious.

8. *A Time to Write?*

I propose to turn very briefly now to the question of how one might enable expert-practitioner-researchers who have entered university via other than the traditional academic route, and for whom some academic writing might almost be repugnant, to engage in an effective and illuminating practice-writing. I want to bring the notion of writing as one *practice-theoretical practice* amongst others into the frame, by referring very briefly again to the writing of the practice-theoretical writer, Karin Knorr Cetina – from whom I take the terms “epistemic object” and “momentary instantiations non-identical with themselves”. I have wondered what her meta-theoretical writing practices might be able to contribute, in a timely manner, to some of the practitioner research issues I have begun to sketch out. Before I do so however, I want to refer very briefly to the issue of some of the philosophical grounds for a continuing “knowledge-scenario”, in the university, in which “expert arts-practitioner practices”, however these might be defined, continue to be perceived by some more traditional researchers to carry less research weight than the “theoretical”, where the latter continues to be identified with the writing that conventionally carries it. The philosophical issues at stake circulate around what I have already identified as the philosophical enquiry into the value of knowledge.

The key issue here is what I might dare to call the tenacious prejudice as to the knowledge status of certain sorts of practices, as these are measured against other modes of knowledge and the models of intelligibility that apply. By models of intelligibility I simply mean the ways of seeing, doing and understanding that apply in a field and tend to be shared by users of that field. I have already identified one mode of knowledge that seems to me to be curious, and it is knowledge obtained rapidly via sensing. In performance, a major knowledge mode is visual, and we often talk about experiential knowledge.

One significant issue, as far as PaR is concerned, then, concerns what I term the “knowledge-political” status of different sorts of “knowledge-practices” or “epistemic-practices”. To show you as economically as I can what I mean here by urgency I want to

cite Henk Borgdorff's *The Debate on Research in the Arts* (2006): his area of academic expertise is given as "Music Theory and Aesthetics", and "the epistemology of artistic research" – which suggests that he is a professional academic writer and educator.

Borgdorff argues that artists have "privileged access to the [practice-as-research and practice-led] research domain", and adds provocatively that "one could argue that *only* artists are capable of conducting ... *practice-based* research". What I find troubling, from the points of view I have begun to sketch out, is something he adds later:

Some contributors to the debate on the specificity of research in the arts entertain the belief that art comes into being purely on the basis of intuition, on irrational grounds and via noncognitive routes, and that this makes it inaccessible for investigation from within. This misconception arises when the nonconceptual content of artistic facts becomes confused with their presumed noncognitive form, and when the nondiscursive manner in which that content is presented to us is presumed to betray its irrationality. Yet the phenomena at work in the artistic domain are decidedly cognitive and rational, even if we cannot always directly access them via language and concepts. Part of the specificity of art research therefore lies in the distinctive manner in which the nonconceptual and nondiscursive concepts are articulated and communicated. Borgdorff, *The Debate on Research in the Arts*, 2006

There are 6 negative definitions here – you can identify them simply by his extensive use of the prefix "non-" to identify something - and there are a number of negatively-qualified or loaded terms, in a writer who otherwise seems to want to support PaR. A highly experienced writer, in other words, proceeds to identify a misconception with regard to art, intuition and irrationality, but he does nothing to recuperate intuitive operations in performance-making from that association that he himself articulates, of intuition with the irrational.

Perhaps I am over-protective of the role of what I call *the expert-intuitive method* in performance-making practices, because I have argued that it is central to those practices but widely ignored in Performance Studies discourses; but I would add that expert-intuitive input in decision-making practices is central to most professional undertakings performed expertly.

Old fashioned prejudice as to knowledge value, in other words, is likely to pop up where one might least expect it, and it has the status then of something like the *revenant* or ghost: it practises an endless return to older sites of knowledge crisis, which means that academic *places* are as likely as any other to be haunted by older prejudices, embedded even in the conceptual apparatuses drawn on by those of us engaged in working

professionally with artists or expert performance-makers, seeking to account effectively for the research status of their work.

Judgement as to the comparative value of knowledge-practices, in other words, may well be internalised in many of us, including the artist researcher-practitioner herself, regardless of the level and degree of access to some of the notorious critiques of dominant discourses or interpretative apparatuses, that continue to prevail in some parts of the postgraduate seminar circuit. My *sense*, as I indicated earlier, is that judgements of value are often performed very rapidly precisely to the extent that they can call on internalised evaluative mechanisms that make up a part of academic as well as other expertise. Plainly “internalisation” is a metaphor; however, in an attempt in part to move on from Borgdorff’s conflation of intuition and “irrationality”, I propose to make do for today’s purposes with an alternative account of the role of intuitive processes provided by E.Goldberg², who sees in intuitive decision-making an intrinsic relationship to experience. Goldberg writes that while intuition - or “expert intuitive processes”, in my own purpose-specific definition

... is often understood as an antithesis to analytic decision-making, as something inherently non-analytic or pre-analytic. But in reality intuition is the condensation of ... prior analytic experience; it is analysis compressed and crystallized. In effect, then, intuitive decision-making is postanalytic, rather than preanalytic or nonanalytic. It is the product of analytic processes being condensed to such a degree that its internal structure may elude even the person benefiting from it. Goldberg, *The Wisdom Paradox: How Your Mind Can Grow Stronger as Your Brain Grows Older* p. 150.

I want to confess, on that sort of basis, that as an expert *research* practitioner, I am likely to have a rapidly developed *sense that* something is excellent, professional, or “not quite at the level required”, even in the context of the production of theoretical writing. I tend to judge rapidly and to proceed as rapidly to predicate what I have judged, with one or another qualifier. I seem to know quality and the not quite good enough when I see it. Yet the rapidity of that response, its expert-intuitive nature, seem to me to depend entirely on what Goldberg has described as the condensation of prior analytic experience: it involves analysis compressed and crystallized, which means that my intuitive decision-making in the context of exercising judgement as to the quality of certain practices is postanalytic, rather than preanalytic or nonanalytic.

² My thanks to Steffi Sachsenmaier for her drawing my attention to Goldberg’s work.

With these sorts of qualifications in mind, I propose to argue that there may be a greater degree of empirical fit between the processes of academic judgement, rapidly exercised, and the processes of professional or expert judgement in the expert arts-practitioner researcher. Rather than assert that the expert practitioner needs to acquire modes of judgement that might more conventionally be identified as “academic”, I prefer to argue that as an academic working with professional performance-makers, I have arrived at a recognition of the often intuitive processes that are central to my own academic judgement. I would note, however, that whereas I tend, as an academic, to backtrack in order to arrive at a detailed and self-reflexive written account of the bases upon which that judgement was made, it has been my experience that some of the expert arts-practitioner researchers with whom I work are less likely to be schooled in the production of that detailed and self-reflexive written account - simply, perhaps, because that has not figured as a tool in the expert or professional practices concerned

9. *“Signs, signs, signs, I’m so sick of signs...”*

I have already indicated that I was carrying other burdens of a recent historical kind, when I went through Customs only a few days ago. I have suggested that these are possibly irresolvable, whether we want to call them “political”, or “knowledge-political”. I confess to being driven, albeit largely with no tangible effect, by a sense of outrage at historically-specific events and by certain embedded prejudices that I struggle to identify. I am, in other words, my own spectator, transfixed, in part, before historically-specific dramatic scenarios in which, as writer and presenter, I also perform.

What I find curious, in this state of things, is the fact of a historical co-incidence: war crimes carried out by the Blair government against the people of Iraq, in which as a British citizen I am implicated, have coincided with a boom and then a bust in financial but also wider cultural terms in the UK and it is in part on the basis of financial excess, experienced nationally, and in part on the basis of national audits, with which the UK government is now obsessively concerned, that some expert performance-makers have been admitted, with external research council funding, to that university as Postdoctoral researchers and/or higher degree candidates.

I want at this point to show you an edited extract from a piece of professionally commissioned work that was made by Rosemary Butcher in the context of her externally-funded postdoc research fellowship at Middlesex University. Before I do so, I want to

remind you of the question of artistic signature, and the curious mixture signature entails of the new and the reiterative.

Practitioner signature is realised over time, and far from being “in the work itself”, that signature depends upon others’ ratification, in which, in part, an artist struggles to identify her self and what her name might stand for to others. “Signature” is thus time-sensitive, and relational, locating itself in a “somewhere between” two or more instances of a practitioner’s work, and between that work and spectators’ own investment in it over time. In terms I raised a few minutes back, my sense is that I tend to intuit its presence and its working processes, rather more than I am able to identify its signifiers analytically.

For this piece, entitled *Six Frames: Memories of Two Women*, the British choreographer Rosemary Butcher worked on commission with two Irish performers – Liz Roche and Jenny Roche – following Butcher’s appointment as an externally-funded post-doctoral Research Fellowship at Middlesex University in 2005.

SHOW edited version of SIX FRAMES on dvd:

Six Frames: Memories of Two Women

A film by Rosemary Butcher with Liz Roche and Jenny Roche

Lighting design by Charles Balfour; Film by Rob Rae; Why Not Associates, London

Pre-recorded poetry by American poet Robert Lax

Commissioned by Rex Levitates 2005

Rex Levitates thanks the Arts Council of Ireland

Project Upstairs, Dublin, 2005

According to the choreographer herself, the piece was triggered by her seeing, in the press at the time, photos of a number of women identified as waiting for the outcome of the hostage-taking and the murder of school Children in Beslan.



Her concern, however, evolved in the making of the piece, which exploited the particular choreographic processes which she has refined over recent years, and also took contingency into account. The work produced evolved away from the triggering image:

she has described herself as preoccupied for some time by the question of what a face, caught in a kind of durational portraiture, can seem to a viewer to show, and whether or not it is legitimate - and for whom - to be drawn to gaze at it at length, as though to see to find something "in it", that does not, as a consequence, actually need to be there. She wondered what the photographic image of a face can seem to capture, of an individual's "experience of something" over an extended period of time, when as onlookers we do not have access to precisely what the subject herself is actually looking at. Her own succinct account of the compositional processes is this.

"[In compositional terms, it worked via] looking and identifying in memory, and then physicalising the memory, and then going back into the idea again. In *Six Frames* I started with a photo in *The Independent on Sunday* of two women in the Beslan tragedy looking at... The question began to fascinate me: how would two sisters remember their childhood? I started by showing them a film from Beslan, from a journalist's point of view. They then transferred the idea of looking at things that happened, that affected them, in their own lives, and each made a notated script, independently of each other, with drawings or a word or two. We went together to Jasper Johns exhibition, in Dublin, at the Museum of Modern Art. He was showing autobiographical work, and there were thirteen frames.

The two dancers are both highly analytical, one in philosophical terms, and one in strategic terms. They had no problem researching their own memories, as material to bring to the making process. They then made a score each, of thirteen pictures, from which we extracted seven frames of seven minutes each – forty-nine minutes. I timed them, and filmed them. They had to read what they had written as notation, not as a memory. They could move their arms and faces, but I only filmed the upper torso. ...But it is still quite clear that these are highly trained [performers] – from the ability to focus and to intensify minute detail, that I can film. I keep it choreographic, without using a dance vocabulary of any sort. ... It had to be as though they were seeing, through the notation, something with which they connected in their childhood. It is like an impulse score that each had produced, and the performance is never the same from one day to the next, but where it comes from is the same. I added in, to their memory and understanding, things that might give it some tempo - they had to state something, for example, and then counteract it, which would give something... and then *something else*. In other words the structure that I laid upon what they already had, allowed it to be once more removed, slightly, from what had been a personal memory. ...

When I look at the rushes, I know that I am not aware of what they are looking at. There is an element of endurance to it, just short of pain, and I wanted it to be almost fifty minutes to underline the sense that something [is going on]... and that perhaps an onlooker wants it to stop...What they are looking at is actually irrelevant to [what we see] because there is no reaction shown. So they are actually not expressive. (Butcher and Melrose (eds) *Rosemary Butcher: Choreography, Collisions and Collaboration*, Middlesex University Press, 2005 p. 202)

Butcher's film itself was made after a considerable but finite time of invention calculated upon the performers' originating performance material through a choreographic

process in which they were invited to engage with a number of instructions given by the choreographer. The film figured as a projection onto the rear wall of the performance space, while downstage right the performers themselves engaged, in alternation with the filmed images, with what might be called “the same performance material”. The resulting performance itself lasted more than 45 minutes, whereas this film has been edited down to around 12 minutes. The film plus the account, I will demonstrate, seeks to achieve empirical fit with the contemporary philosophical notion of *techne*, as providing an account of itself, to which I return shortly.

One major practice-as-research dilemma raised by my showing this short film here, with Butcher’s own account, relates to the fact that in so doing I am making us all into expert spectators, who bring with that role the modes of knowledge and models of intelligibility, the questions asked and the sorts of understandings that are specific to a time of spectating after the event. A second dilemma comes with the fact that this “film itself” is only an edited extract of the live event, and as such, *is non-identical with the research enquiry that informed the larger project*; third, it was produced collaboratively, although under Butcher’s own signature, which means that the discipline-specific engagement that contributes to the mode of enquiry is not wholly owned by Butcher.

In PaR terms, then, “the film itself” does not constitute, or even record, the advanced enquiry central to its making. The terms of that fuller enquiry may well be sensed, by some spectators but not others, and in some but not necessarily all of its details. The mixed-mode research meta-practical enquiry, on that basis, is concerned with what else needs to be made available, if “the work” seeks to make its own research case, within a research-specific context.

I raised the issue more generally of a written meta-commentary, and how to enable some researchers to produce one. One answer is provided, as I do here, by co-authoring; but it raises a further question: how extensive should the practice-meta-practice account be and in what medium or media? Where “to start”, as Annie Ubersfeld used to ask, and where, I have added “to stop”?

10. *Where to stop?*

At this precise stage, I want to try to bring the question of expert practices and the meta-commentary together with one or two observations regarding the respective value of different modes of knowledge, that come from the philosopher Richard Parry. I propose then to jump sideways, back into questions of composition, compression, displacement, and the everyday political.

In a short account entitled “episteme and technē”, the philosopher Richard Parry (2003 and 2007) observes, with regard to Ancient and more recent debate about the differences between the two, that contemporary translations of ancient texts may inappropriately harbour some of our own assumptions and judgements of value, as far as the relation between the domain of ‘knowledge’ and a concern of ‘craft’ or ‘art’ is concerned: Parry notes what he calls a still abiding scepticism outside of modern science, “about the relevance of theory to practice ” but adds that “ scientific theory cannot tell us how things should be, because such notion belong to “the realm of art or craft” .

Outside of modern science, there is sometimes skepticism about the relevance of theory to practice because it is thought that theory is conducted at so great a remove from reality, the province of practice, that it can lose touch with it. In fact, at the level of practice, concrete experience might be all we need. And within science, theory strives for a value-free view of reality. As a consequence, scientific theory cannot tell us how things should be — the realm of ‘art’ or ‘craft’. So we must turn elsewhere for answers to the profound, but still practical, questions about how we should live our lives.

Unlike empiric practice (*empeiria*), *technê* [expertise, as well as art or craft] has an account to give... Socrates returns to this ... ability of *technê* to give an account. He says medical *technê* investigates the nature of the thing it cares for (*therapeuei*) and the cause of what it does and has an account to give of each of them (501a). ... So far then, a craft is defined by its goal and is a kind of knowledge. Fully developed, this knowledge is knowing how to accomplish a goal on the basis of an understanding of the goal; the understanding can be articulated in an account. The account informs and guides the skilled practice. R.Parry, *Stanford Online Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2003/7, my underlining.

We must turn elsewhere, Parry notes, for answers to the profound, but still practical, questions about how we should live our lives. In terms of reality, he argues, judged to be the province of practice, *technê* variously translated to mean expertise, as well as art or craft, is interesting *because it has an account to give of itself*. “Socrates returns to this ... ability of *technê* to give an account”, he adds: medical *technê*, for example, investigates the nature of the thing it cares for, and the cause of what it does and has an

account to give of each of them. Caring for is interesting here: a craft is defined by its goal and is a kind of knowledge, and when it is fully developed, it involves knowing how to accomplish a goal on the basis of an understanding of the goal, which understanding can be articulated in an account. The account will then inform and guide the skilled practice. Expertise distinguishes itself from other kinds of knowledge – and I want to emphasise the points that follow - first *in its ability to give an account of itself*, and secondly, *because it exercises understanding and judgement and on that basis seeks the welfare of its object*.

I have seized upon this notional account for the simple reason of its partial empirical fit with my subject today, and it is in part on this basis that I have provided you with one account, from Rosemary Butcher, of some of the objectives and some of the means of attaining them, via one particular mode of choreographic process, through her production with skilled collaborators, of her *Six Frames*.

The fuller philosophical debate that Richard Parry hints at provides, along with this very short account of the making of *Six Frames*, one backdrop to my continuing return to the apparently peculiar notion that within the epistemic frameworks provided by the research context in the university, expert performance-making practices, and their outcome, *might themselves be identified as providing a detailed account of some of the modes of knowledge, ways of seeing, and expertise, that make up the discipline concerned*.

They may also be seen as *providing an account of the individual practitioner's position with regard to these*: that is, the practices themselves might be viewed as a practitioner's complex and compelling gesture to what, for him or her, *counts* in the contemporary scene, while gesturing, as well, at what something that might be called a philosophical engagement with that contemporary scene and how it might be accounted for through creative practices. Those practices might similarly be viewed as accounting for a way of seeing the wider culture, *while equally enacting* the notions of artistic signature, self-singularisation, and the aspiration to qualitative transformation.

Plainly, the practitioner-researcher in the university, unlike the artist perhaps, needs to be enabled to make that case, but so, too, does the academic reader have to be enabled to grasp it in the medium allowed. But I have found that in many instances this complex set of interpretations already coincides with a particular artist's sense of herself as a practitioner - this is the case for Rosemary Butcher, for Shobana Jeyasingh and for the Irish choreographer Mary Nunan, although each of these choreographers claims finds my wording more than a little rebarbative.

11. Circling back

I want at this point, if you will allow it, to try to circle back to some of the perspectives with which I began, which included in something of a jumble the notions of expertise, the historical and political in which the individual subject is implicated, and displacement; the eternal return to trauma or crisis; time, the economy, judgements of quality and value, and the notion that the arts practitioner might always be a highly skilled semiotician despite herself, whose work's reach is philosophical as well as specific to the discipline or disciplines concerned.

In order to draw some of these points together I want to make explicit an ongoing reference in my presentation today to things that are compressed, and able, if and when they are unfolded, to do more than they actually do: the rhetorical figure of hypotyposis is highly economical in its capacity to conjure or figure a world. Hypotyposis is probably familiar to you if you have read Kant's *Critique of Judgement* or parts thereof, in which he writes on intuition: all hypotyposis, he observes there, consists in making a concept sensible, and is either schematic or symbolic.

hypotyposis

ὑποτύπωσις

Etymology: Hypotyposis \Hy`po*ty*po"sis\, noun. [New Latin expression, from the Greek expression, to sketch out; to impress.]. (Websters 1913)

hy-po-ty po'-sis – from Gk. hypotypoein, "to sketch" (typos = "impression, form")
Also sp. Hypotiposis demonstratio, evidentia, adumbratio, representatio the counterfeit representation, word-picture

Synonym for enargia. Lively description of an action, event, person, condition, passion, etc. used for creating the illusion of reality

Hypotyposis literally means a sketch, an outline, or an *impress*, that is often qualified as vivid; it is a "form" with an emphasis, according to Rodolphe Gasché, on emptiness (which supposes, plainly, the need to another to "fill it in"). In schematic hypotyposis, an intuition corresponding to a concept formed by understanding, is already given and shared. Schemata involve direct exhibitions of the concept. In symbolic hypotyposis, which is less direct, we find concepts that can only be formed by rational thought. No sensible intuition is adequate to their expression. Instead, symbolic exhibition uses an analogy, in which judgement performs a double function: first, it applies the concept to the object of a sensible intuition; second, it applies the rule used to

reflect on that intuition to an entirely different object, of which the former object is only the symbol.

I was musing on Kant's distinction between the schematic and the symbolic, as one does, and on *techne*, and on their possible relation to Rosemary Butcher's work and her account of it, when it occurred to me that the language used by an expert practitioner in collaborative performance-making processes, which others might judge to be vague, might actually be the most precise means available to communicate the implication of something expertly-intuited, that might be central to a particular stage in the making, to another expert practitioner possibly from a different discipline. Take, for example, the British-Indian choreographer, Shobana Jeyasingh talking in my highly discreet presence to the composer tasked with producing original sound, at a particularly fraught moment of the collaborative making.

The two are standing side by side in the space, while the highly trained dancers, in costume, lean elegantly against a side wall of the dance space, in what appears to be a state of resigned readiness. Shobana says "I need a stronger sense right here of *yellow*". The artist-interlocuteur in question nods, makes small gestures, nods again, and says something affirmative, along the lines of "OK, yes, yes, I see, I see, a little more...OK. Do you mean right there? OK. But can you give me a couple of hours?".

The expression "a sense of", figuring in the performance-making work of Shobana Jeyasingh as well as Rosemary Butcher, otherwise signals, to myself as an outsider, a semiotic curiosity: I am sure of its efficacy, because the sound designer disappears and then much later reappears with the goods.

For myself I wondered whether it might be possible to argue that expert creative processes involve a priori intuitions that are shared between artists, and that can as a result be communicated directly between those expert practitioners who, in collaborating, have forged an often implicit contract on the basis of their mutual respect for each others' art-making, where that art-making figures as a complex epistemic or knowledge object.

Expertise, on that basis, employs a restricted code which is highly economical but productive: it compresses more than it says, and it takes into account the multi-dimensionality of the performance space, and what might occur in it to pleasantly surprise its makers.

My own *sense* was, and remains, that I simply did not know what they were talking about, and the tension in the air precluded my tactful probing. Some might say that they, too, did not know what they were talking about, for the precise reason that what

they were talking about could not usefully be talked about – not least with me. It needed doing, inventively, in terms of prevailing schematics. More anxiety-making, for me at least, with my concern for accounting, for evidence, and for research audit, was that after the event, the artist in question professed simply not to recall what had been said, or even the occasion, or was unwilling to speak the problem of what sort of sound might have a greater sense of “yellow”, at that precise moment.

What I found interesting, throughout the event, was the evidence I had been provided with that the choreographer had already taken the productive expertise of her collaborator into account. Secondly, that she would make use of the outcome, even though it would require revision of her earlier decisions, because it would have its own integrity. In other words, the apparently vague and economical verbalisations were adequate as a vivid outline of a creative need, and in use called forth something precise and meticulous, gesturing as well towards possible future actions, unknown in advance, but recognisable when they emerged, as lying within the systems of the possible.

On the basis of this very slender account, and without further evidence, I am prepared to say that the expert practitioner performance-maker often uses a highly economical wording, ellipsis, on occasion accompanied by gesture, when addressing her collaborator in the making processes, and can do so precisely because they have internalised, and “hold”, a considerable array of performance-making tools, specific to their own disciplinary expertise, that she lacks but can recognise in operation and has quietly evaluated in advance. Each may also draw on, and exchange, something else that is decisive but dynamic, in expert performance-making, that I cannot avoid - if this is not too challenging for critical theorists to envisage - calling the sensibility of the artists in question. I need immediately, then, to qualify the expression “a sense of” with the adjective “expert”, as in “an expert sense of”, which is, I am arguing, intuited on the basis of a priori expertise.

Let me come back now to hypotyposis, and to the issue of whether or not schematic and symbolic hypotyposes might be utilised as one key means by which art practitioners can seem to conjure up and figure possible worlds, and – in terms of schematics taken more generally and on a larger scale - provide instances of the measure of these in terms of the application of judgement specific to the discipline and its known manifestations. Into these they are likely to intrude highly dispersed indices that a spectator or viewer might use to infer something taken to be the artist’s political positioning, as well as artistic signature. Curiously, these fields and types of reference are

to phenomena that are, relatively speaking, abstract, unrealisable in and as themselves, or unrealisable in terms of contemporary technologies. Widely intuited nonetheless, schematic and symbolic figuring are likely, if effective, to be able to determine real decisions taken, in quantitative as well as qualitative terms.

It is on this basis, that I want to provide a further account of hypotyposis, which runs as follows: hypotyposis is a figuration, "which makes present, to the senses, something which is out of their reach, not just because it does not happen to be there but because it consists, in whole or in part, of elements too abstract for sensory representation" (Paul de Man, in Sheldon Sacks, ed. *On Metaphor*, University of Chicago Press, 1979).

12. Returning to crises, once again

I want to conclude by showing you in more detail two other instances of artistic practice that take up historically significant dramas of British political life through the different types of hypotyposis. In the absence of the possibility of observing how Steve Bell makes his art, how long it takes, and how many drafts he discards, I am keen to know how the artwork works as outcome, and how it *makes me work*.

The idiot inquiry



© Steve Bell, *the guardian*, Monday 16 February 2009

In this instance of highly economical art-making, the "vivid" outline or sketch in Bell's work, through which recognition and an onlooker's "expansion" to the everyday human and political occurs, clearly *does more than it does literally* - provided an onlooker accepts the accuracy or at least the plausibility of that skilled outline portraiture. Well and good - except that I have shifted from my professed interest in creative process, from a practitioner-centred perspective, into the role of expert spectator, who proffers hypotheses as to the making that might be good or less good, but that share the character, in each instance, of informed guesswork.

This fast footwork is dubious, in the terms I have set out above, but I am going to argue that I can justify it, to the precise extent that I insert a practice-meta-discourse concerned with that shift in positioning, which brings into play different modes of knowledge and models of intelligibility, and to the extent that I can argue on behalf of something of an analogy between what that arts practitioner performs, and what I am myself performing today. The differences in performance expertise, plainly, are legion, yet I am sure that you will bear with me.

As an expert viewer, then, with an interest in how this lightning fast and to some *ephemeral art* works, and how it seems to me to work me, my hypothesis is that Bell may well have proceeded from the schematic, which involves an intuition corresponding to a concept formed by a priori understanding – for example, a shared outrage, with many Guardian readers, over the recent history of actions performed by the Labour government - to symbolic hypotyposis, involving concepts that can only be formed by rational thought: that a member of the House of Lords, for example, might be a penguin in ermine, or that Gordon Brown can't open his eyes.

To remind you of the terms I hurried through earlier, in Kant no *sensible* intuition is adequate to the expression of concepts – like those I have just identified - that can only be thought. Symbolic exhibition instead uses an analogy, in which judgement performs a double function: first, Bell, as far as I can tell from after the fact of the making, applies the concept to the object of a sensible intuition; second, he applies the rule used to reflect on that intuition to an entirely different object, of which the former object is only the symbol. But what Bell also seems to me to achieve is something omitted from the traditional account of hypotyposis: that is he presses in, to the images concerned, with considerable economy, “something” - or “some things” - that I suspect viewers readily identify, reasonably or not, as pointers to attitude, ethos, political positioning, recent history, artistic sensibility and signature. None of these “is there”, because they are too abstract to be readily figured, yet their symbolic or schematic sketch is likely to conjure up, in another, the detail and complexity that they lack:

I'm not corroopt!

© Steve Bell, *the guardian*, Tuesday 12 May 2009



This little piggie ...

© Steve Bell *the guardian*, Wednesday 13 May 2009



Tucking in

© Steve Bell *the guardian*, Monday 25 May 2009



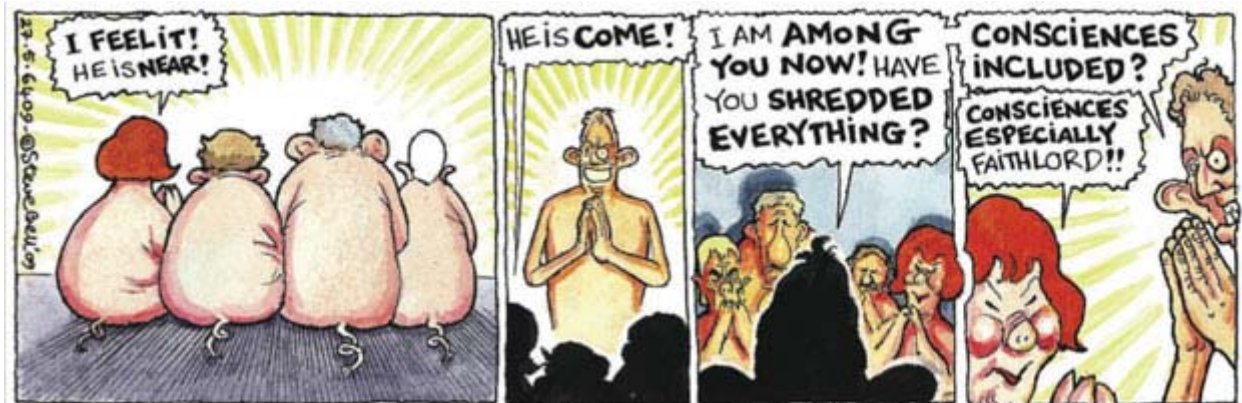
These little piggies said their prayers

© Steve Bell, *the guardian*, Tuesday 26 May 2009



We feel it! He is near!

© Steve Bell *the guardian*, Wednesday 27 May 2009



We believe! We believe!

© Steve Bell, *the guardian*, Thursday 28 May 2009



That Steve Bell links the squalor and venality of MPs' - from both major parties - fiddling their expenses, to "problems" of truth, respect and belief that emerged in the Blair era seems to me to be wholly reasonable: that is, Bell and I, and no doubt many other *Guardian* readers, share an intuition; yet it is Bell's ability to articulate it visually with such keen, singular and signature-specific economy that counts. Nor do I find it surprising that he makes a link between material emerging from investigative journalists at the *Daily Telegraph* who failed to gain access to documents relating to discussion and decisions taken in the lead-up to the British invasion, with the US, of Iraq and the leaked details of MPs spending after failure of yet another FoI request.

13. *The Failure of "the sign" (or signs of failure...)*

Now, a semiotic confession: if the images from Bell demonstrate his expert intuitions and his *sense of* the everyday-political and its little or larger dramas, recuperated via the logics of art practice specific to his discipline, I should be hard-pressed to identify within them what might be called, with textualist overtones, a "discrete visual sign", or "signifier", if you will. Instead, what I can identify are schematic compressions, on the basis of which I, as viewer, unfold a semiotic complexity. The notion of schematics, that Umberto Eco took up with considerable relish in his *Kant and the Platypus*, remained, in his coining, within the field of wordplay, whereas in my use of the term, I prefer to view schemata as *productive apparatuses*, into and through which energies can be both invested, by an expert practitioner, and measured by the same, such that they bring together compositional strategies, condensation of the thematic and their semiotic potential, on behalf of an onlooker. When these strategies are performative, that onlooker contracts in to their unfolding.

In addition, I might need to stress again, at this point, that whereas philosophical writing since Aristotle has distinguished between sensible intuition, as direct and unmediated, on the one hand, and mediated discursive knowledge of scientific demonstration, on the other, my own "knowledge-political" argument is that an expert-intuitive *method* in expert practice *draws on sensible intuitions specific to expert practitioners' knowledge of the discipline or disciplines involved*. In fact, I cannot stress this last observation enough, since it is via this development alone that I can begin to account

for what I am calling expertise in expert art-making. The expert practitioner, in other words, does double work as far as sensible intuition is concerned: some of these, she shares with me; some, however, are singular to her or his own expertise *in practice*. In the hands of expert practitioners, those sensible intuitions expand, in choreographic invention, in multi-dimensional as well as affective and interpersonal terms, while schemata determine the parameters of discipline-specific application.

In addition, in the case of Steve Bell's own take on the current state of the wider world of British politics, it would seem to me that his sketches and portraiture necessarily reference "some things" that are "out of [the] reach" of figuration itself, precisely because they are both "too abstract for sensory representation", yet are economically figured indexically. This indexical figuring, however, is activated on the basis of a contract: it works relationally, and needs to be unfolded, and the interesting question, as far as I am concerned, is what that invitation to unfold requires of a user; how that user knows where and why that unfolding might usefully stop.

I have argued elsewhere, again apparently contentiously, that "the work" in question will tend to seem to carry within it indices pointing a user to the wider body of the artist's work, provided an onlooker knows how to decipher them, while also carrying, in a highly economic mix, indices of a way of seeing, a political positioning – indeed, a properly philosophical engagement readily attributed to the artist. Such indexical marks, if I can put it this way, are required by the artist's judgement to be performative: they need to trigger a viewer's engagement, and then a rapid unfolding, provided that viewer experiences sympathy and empathy with the ways of seeing and understanding, as well as whatever else is thematised.

My second and final example of the hypothetical impact is provided by of Caryl Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children* (see Caryl Churchill, Jennie Stoller and Elliot Smith, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/video/2009/apr/25/seven-jewish-children-caryl-churchill> - which the writer argues emerged directly from her observations of the plight of the Palestinians and the double-bind in which some of us find ourselves. This piece seems to me to work, too as a highly-compressed, by implication multi-dimensional "sketch" whose fuller stories it leaves to others to unfold.

I want to step aside from these issues of compression and unfolding for a moment, in order to bring you back to the crises of knowledge and of trust with which I began and that have shaken some at least of the British people and the British political establishment since the Blair years. Anyone who has lived through the ongoing crisis of the UK political

system which arguably took on its own momentum when Tony Blair took the country into a war judged by many to be illegal, might well not have much to contribute to discussions in this particular place of boom and bust, unless we are talking in more general speculative terms about the impact of political crises or – as I prefer - crises of knowledge on art-making, or, more narrowly, on the production of “new performance work”.

The notion of “impact on”, however, or that work might on the other hand be “informed by” forces in the wider social context, should, following my earlier observations and argument, be viewed as far from straightforward: a little like “influenced by”, “impact on” tends to be difficult to quantify and qualify either from within the state of crisis, or from the position of spectating, after new work has been produced. Yet there are certain instances of work made where it is difficult to deny “impact”. Remaining explicitly in the position of spectating with the conditions specific to the aftermath of the Blair government’s invasion of Iraq, and the correspondingly outrageous issue of Blair’s appointment as an emissary of peace to the Middle East, in mind, I want to close with this particular instance of vivid compression that takes others’ experience to unfold in full.

The BBC, in a recently-acquired “wisdom” derived from threatened cuts in funding decided not to produce Churchill’s short piece as a radio play, justifying their decision by calling for balance. The upshot, interestingly enough, was that this most modest of playwrights has joined the list of BBC-banned writers. As a consequence, a controversial video production of the piece was made by *The Guardian*, and posted on the newspaper’s website on 25 April, where by last week it had achieved more than 20,000 downloads. One might argue that it has thereby reached an audience that theatre productions often fail to reach; it promotes the notion that political intervention of an other than conservative kind can be undertaken by a mainstream newspaper and its online site, and I would argue that it thereby articulates the notion that crises of these kinds – such as the war crimes of Tony Blair’s government, will tend to be lived widely, and to make themselves plain, even through displacement.

Susan Melrose

Perth, Australia, July 2009.