

# RealTime

**RealTime at LIFT97. In this issue: Alicia Rios' *La Ferie*, Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg's *Stunde Null*, Maya Krishna Rao's *Khol Do*, Enrique Vargas' *Oraculos*, Christophe Berthonneau's *Un Peu Plus de Lumiere* (a little more light), Zuni Icosahedron's *Journey to the East Parts 1 and 2*, West Yorkshire Playhouse's *Things Fall Apart*, and Daily Dialogues on *The 7 Stages of Grieving* and *Oraculos***

2

**EDITORIAL** We're mid-way through LIFT97, and the delirium and the heightening of perceptions that fuel each other in festivals are vividly evident; so too are conflicting responses—between writers and, most revealingly, in individuals. Alicia Rios' *La Ferie* is greeted as a generous celebration of the senses but also, as works of art inevitably do in transcending or subverting their makers' intentions, as a provoker of complex feelings—about scarcity and nourishment (Wesley Enoch) and artistic form (Linda Marie Walker). The issue of the Real that pervaded RealTime 1, is consequently amplified in this edition. Likewise, Virginia Baxter and Zsuzsanna Soboslay talk the line between the real and the theatrical in that other manipulation of the senses, Enrique Vargas' *Oraculos*, in performance and in Daily Dialogue discussion. Authenticity of form and of culture also prove problematic in Zahid Dar and Indhu Rubasingham's accounts of Maya Krishna Rao's *Khol Do* and in an audience desire for the 'really authentic' in response to *The 7 Stages of Grieving*. In a companion piece driven by *Khol Do*, Richard Murphet and Zsuzsanna Soboslay highlight in dialogue the challenges to interpretation and knowledge that LIFT programming provides. In an edition that continues to query audience and performer bodies, Gabriel Gbadamosi temporarily donates his cultural organs to RealTime to assist in a developing account of bodies British and Australian (see RealTime 1 for Part 1) and, appropriately, spits out a phlegmatic response to *Stunde Null* from Hamburg's Deutsches Schauspielhaus. RealTime relishes LIFT's fireworks offstage and in Battersea Park, its theatres of the senses and sites, and the cultural and formal complexities it conjures. For some of us, at least, *Stunde Null* was the apotheosis of LIFT97 so far, formally and politically rich, provocatively foreign and a marker of differences that yield debate. Other articles by Virginia Baxter, Linda Marie Walker, Richard Murphet and Gabriel Gbadamosi survey a range of LIFT and London experiences and the challenges to understanding and writing.

Keith Gallasch

## Richard Murphet on LIFT as travel

*Journey To The East Parts I and II*, Zuni Icosahedron, IAC, June 3, June 7; *Khol Do* (The Return), Maya Krishna Rao, BAC, June 11

It's a Festival of Travel. Even the acronym suggests it, the etymology of 'lift' connected with air and sky—a transcendent journey, cf Gertrude Stein: "After all, anybody is as their land is. Anybody is as the sky is low or high... That is what makes a people..." Look too at the showtitles: *Journey to The East*, *The Return*, *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, *The North and Go, Go, Go*.

The key words I've picked up (apart from those late century familiars to do with culture and indigeneity and the body) have been rooted in travel. Viz: trans/formation (across shape), officially sanctioned by Rose Fenton at the launch as the word of the festival; trans/ition (across place), from the Daily Dialogue on Hong Kong; trans/gression (stepping over), a driving force in *The Geography of Haunted Places*; trans/lation (across shift), always problematic and sometimes wittily denied us; trans/cultural, more fluid than multi-, deeper than inter-; trans/local, versus global; and finally trans/port, how we get around in a big city and what should happen to our emotions when we get there.

I've been on the move—as festival goer and as tourist. London, everywhere, as stage, whereon the performances witnessed in both modes are now inextricably linked in my memory to the geography of the city: the Guards doing their Monty Python act on the amphitheatre with palace backdrop, Geshen's *K'Far* setting down its field of Palestine in Hammersmith, Deborah Mailman claiming her plot of land in Battersea, Madame Tussaud's fading rock stars jerking their waxen limbs off Piccadilly, Australia losing its honour off-off West End in Edgbaston, the three Chinas demonstrating their differences at ICA, under the arch, a stone's throw from those Guards. But London, beyond this, as ground to be traversed to get there, by foot, by bus, by underground, by train, by sightseeing coach. This aspect, as different as it is to that of the performances, is as fascinating and as affecting—a factor I am sure that is deliberate in LIFT's decentralising of the whole event. Within it, the division ("Mind the gap!") between the observer and the observed, so noticeable in (most of) the audience/show relationships, is dissolved.

... (A) quite different mode of seeing comes into play when, instead of focusing on the mobility of the eyeballs within the eye sockets of the stationary observer, we contemplate the runner, the dancer, the walker or the gondolier... The space around, the lie of the land, are neither 'given' nor intermittently resolved into stable forms; they are seen in relative motion, as choreographic extensions of the mobile body.

Paul Carter

*Journey To The East* was, of course, not a journey in Carter's terms. Sitting, static in the stifling ICA space, waiting to be done to, it was my eye balls that were mobile not my body. In fact the very scenic parameters that producer/director Danny Yung set himself and the other five directors (a table and two chairs), were reminiscent not of the epic feel of *K'Far* with its moving platform and mobility in space and time but of a kind of stripped sedentary naturalism, focused

http://www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/



RealTime at LIFT has been assisted by the Australia Council, the Australian Government's arts funding and advisory body as part of its involvement in newIMAGES

on the strategies of dialogue and the trading of power. This was metaphorically apt for a season of plays whose object was to reflect upon the current powerplay between China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. However, it could have been theatrically strangled and it was to the credit of several of the directors that they found the means to explore variations upon the given form. It proved fascinating to watch the range of uses—naturalistic, metaphoric, symbolic, lateral, and finally, in Yung's own work, semiotic—to which table and chairs could be put.

In the end, it was not to the East that this journey lead. How could it when these pieces claimed to be neither 'authentic' cultural artefacts, nor particularly representative of contemporary Eastern theatre? (Take a trip down to Sega World at the Trocadero if you want a blast of one contemporary Far East in London.) The journey of the best of the pieces was one which is familiar to both theatre and performance, one which is almost written into the form, the journey between the inner and the outer. It seems it was through the personal that the works could most clearly find their voice on the social and political.

*The thing is like this, it is all a question of identity...if the outside puts a value on you then all your inside gets to be outside.*

Gertrude Stein

*Piece* from Hong Kong filmmaker Stanley Kwan wove together, through skilful interlaying of media, his (and his mother's) coming to terms with his homosexuality (and his feelings for his father) with his admission of his love for Hong Kong. In Lin Zhao Hua's *Three O'clock in the Afternoon* from Beijing, two textual memories, one of a grandmother and one of the difficulty of applying for a passport were layered several times, with increasing aural complexity and fragmentation of authority, upon a formal visual pattern that constantly threatened to head towards conflict. The balance was a fragile one and was barely held. The constructed conversation between Wong Yiu Kwong and Wan Chun Ma (*Reflection of the Moon on Er-Quan*) approached Chinese identity obliquely, through the light ironic tone and deadpan seriousness of two young Hong Kong men, as they discussed the vibrant trivia of their lives in the West and shared views of their 'oriental' selves seen through that window. A nice turn on Orientalism.

The journey down south to Battersea is a trek—most definitely an event of its own making. The challenge once there, watching *Khol Do*, Maya Krishna Rao's cross Kathakali/western depiction of a man's search for his lost daughter in the Pakistan of the partition, was to stop my own mobility and to engage in the act of translation of the movement codes and the desperate journey they depicted. It was a challenge I failed. *Khol Do* felt unfortunately uncontextualised, an example of the festival decentralisation not working, sandwiched between two treks, suddenly there in front of us, story and form fighting for focus in the eyes of this uninitiated watcher, an enactment of Return but a performance not quite embarked upon. Perhaps it is a crossing between cultures that is still in process. It was not until I watched *Stunde Null* the following night that I realised that in *Khol Do* I had never been given the chance to arrive in the theatre and was never therefore able to engage with Rao's journey.

#### Ariadne @ LIFT: Virginia Baxter

*Un Peu Plus de Lumiere*, Battersea Park, June 7; Daily Dialogue, Royal Court Downstairs, June 10

In the dark in Battersea Park, hurtling towards Christophe Berthonneau's *Un Peu Plus de Lumiere*, following our noses, past the children's zoo, animals up late, finding a spot on the damp lawn, laying

out our takeaway curry, losing its heat and without sight and smell, its taste. Existential moment thankfully filled by spectacle—fire flying from gas jets and arc-welders, in windmills, fireballs puffing huge smoke rings, apocalyptic red smoke behind the trees looking like something from a Mitsubishi calendar, flaming phoenix, huge face, followed by more familiar—though here, tastefully colour co-ordinated—floods of falling light. Day for night? Not sure, but whatever it is catches my breath every time, even more here where we are shown the work of fireworks, moving beyond the vertical, exploring the circular, the horizontal, speaking of which, there's the inevitable journey back, the wait in the cold dark of Battersea station followed by the long trudge home with the countless others who came and who saw.

And speaking of others, apparently London permanently crawls with tourists. Like others of this despised grouping just above the cockroach, I have felt the cold shoulder of London's tourist hospitality. What if nobody is actually from here, I'm wondering, and to prove my point, some dumb Aussie spots Deborah Mailman and says, "Look, Janet, an Aborigine". Sometimes you just have to leave home to see the light.

To wit: In Australia, we joke about the English stripping off at the first sign of sunlight so I was prepared for a naked city but not the theatres dropping their gear. Thanks to the Lottery, some of them have thrown off their skins and are sitting around in their bones. Apparently, Sadlers Wells will reduce itself to a location. When the dust settles, not even the facade will remain. The Royal Court has temporarily moved from Sloane Square to the West End. Others are squatting in unfamiliar warehouses which, everyone is hoping, will give them ideas and they'll leave as workable spaces for others when they finally go home.

Which is why I probably found myself staring into the glass box in the foyer of the Royal Court at the Duke of York, where the architectural plans for their renovations float on a sea of £5 notes, wondering whether renovations will ultimately affect the programming policies of these theatres outside of events like LIFT. Alan Read said at a Daily Dialogue that one of LIFT's functions is to slowly chip away at some of the over-tight licensing laws that restrict London performance venues. Some British artists I've spoken to see the impact of LIFT's experiments with form and content on the programming policies of major theatre companies as similarly long-term.

Which reminds me, in Australia, the large state theatre and dance companies have tied up the prime arts real estate and secured a large chunk of arts money through their very own fund of the Australia Council—the Major Organisations Fund. For the most part, these companies are freed of responsibility for innovation; this rests with the smaller companies and venues who occupy less secure, more modest accommodations.

Which brings me in my roundabout way to the labyrinthine Daily Dialogue on Tuesday June 10 with Enrique Vargas, creator of *Oraculos* and psychotherapist and writer, Susie Orbach. Enrique Vargas is a man of the theatre who, inspired by the Happenings of the 1960s and then the installation movement, moved into new territory where he could more easily explore ideas like "framing silence" and "the intelligence of feeling". He spoke with emotion of the beginnings of *Oraculos* in childhood memory, of the way it was collaboratively created, how each chamber of the labyrinth is a "research laboratory" and how the whole thing is "charged" by the actively participating audience.

Being a little late, I missed out on a seat in the packed auditorium and was ushered instead to a seat on the stage beside the stars of the show.

It can only have been the setting and this odd re-positioning in the black box that made suddenly urgent the need for stage business. So I found myself copiously noting the language of the audience who, given the opening, wrestled the Daily Dialogue topic ("Trust: The Intelligence of Feeling") from the hands of the usually indefatigable Alan Read, forcing him to play Kilroy Silk ("Thank you for that") while they recounted their personal tales from the labyrinth.

People talked about losing themselves and being taken, being held—glaring at Ms Orbach—"unlike in psychoanalysis". They talked about moving from distrust to total trust, of being lifted, of fearing, feeling safe, of falling, of being wonderfully alone and yet linked to some collective consciousness, a virtual community; in an embrace, in states of lucid dreaming and near death. A blind woman spoke of it as one of the most remarkable experiences of her life. Others went so far as to suggest "radical uncertainty" and even further, something "revolutionary" and "not like art". There was a momentary pause in the flow when someone asked what happened to participants who transgressed (a desire expressed by many but contained by most) or ran amok. One of the actors explained that if people got too involved, they would be ushered to another chamber, another theatrical experience, or in extreme cases, evacuated from the labyrinth. Simple as that.

I missed the real experience of *Oraculos*, but from the audience's language I pieced together a work of theatre with more interaction and sensuality than your average theatrical experience. I also sensed a kind of longing which set me wandering whether the Royal Court's architectural solution out front with its rather small Studio Theatre Upstairs could adequately contain a labyrinth. Days later, watching the exuberant *Things Fall Apart* uncomfortably contained within the gilt proscenium of The Ambassador and earlier in the week, Anna Viebroch's wonderful set for *Stunde Null* just squeezing into the Queen Elizabeth, my fears were compounded.

So-oo, I was wondering, as I purchased a copy of Sarah Kane's *Blasted* from the smallest bookshop in the world, inside the Royal Court, whether the wave of shock-plays like this one and others, dripping blood on the shelves (like *Shopping and F\*\*ing* and *The Censor*, currently showing), might be the voices of new playwrights responding to this collective urge for more visceral theatrical experiences. It's a scary thought, but judging from my notes, maybe they just need to add a little audience participation, and managements factor in a few riot police in the aisles. Remember where you read it first.

#### Where there's smoke... : Linda Marie Walker

Daily Dialogues, second week, Royal Court Theatres; *Stunde Null*, Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg, Queen Elizabeth Hall, June 12

Suddenly silence, a lull more like, and certain words remain, or obsessions come back, are evident. I've finally landed amongst my fellow writers for instance, amongst a particular language. It might be this language ('theatre-talk'), and the forms it takes that jar, that are specific (someone quotes from a play, someone knows who played that role first, and where) and 'in' and circulate, and yet are familiar too. As the languages of other creative practices are also concerned with—discuss, argue, and question—names, naming, renaming. Quiet pervades this question of 'name', of what something is, and might be, later, eventually. Speech happens, and generates more speech, and this quiet, with its own agenda, gathers in and between words. It's necessary, and creeps up, comes while speaking, as if one is struck (it happens in *Stunde Null* during monologues, when a character cries 'Ursula', or when another just stops, frozen, then carries on, and the songs too serve as this lulled

or lulling 'space', beautiful, calming) dumb. The body pauses, waiting. Never to return. Having arrived somewhere unknown, and moving, terrible, to a remembered unknown, incomprehensible (a character speaks a broken language in *Stunde Null* as if it's whole, as if we will understand what he thinks he understands: he speaks the disaster), unavoidable. One is taken away, one goes away, for a moment, forever, like dreaming, and with this in mind, mindful, the body turns troublesome, craving, and thinks and eats and drinks itself into and out of various shapes and weights, and has as company: inconsistency. It's this body, driven by ghosts of hope and love and hate, which comes with you—and 'you' are 'not at one with oneself'—to the event and to the world (and this is the internal terror of *Stunde Null*, where no matter how the flesh and mind are being reprogrammed, and are receptive, the "not at one" cruelly cripples speech and manner).

I can't tell you who my body is, even momentarily. I would lie, as it disobeys, and yet I walk to see, I talk to hear, I sleep to wake. And I think of myself as gliding backwards into the space of space. And this 'I saw' when Gabriel Gbadamosi mentioned Walter Benjamin's 'angel of history' at a Daily Dialogue. Is going backwards a rite, is each step a rite, in that one falls from step to step, is always on the brink of falling (and in *Stunde Null* you sense the backward-force, a sucking, in the ceremonial cutting scene, which is actually about stepping forward, showing oneself, as the ribbon rapidly shortens).

On a brown board in gold type in the bar of the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, near the red curtains, is this sign: "During interval you are invited to smoke after passing through doors". Each word suits the work of saying, of gambling with voice. The strange combinations: during/interval, smoke/after, after/passing, passing/through. It's as if no movement is required, no leaving or arriving: a passing-on, becoming smoke. There's a moment when one first sees someone or something, and then it's finished (*Stunde Null*: after giving a tortured speech, one character is recognised as 'foreign', English, although he's been with them all along, and they noticed this when his back was turned, and then they all 'smoke'). Arrival. You, spectator, have come; there is talk at the Daily Dialogue with the Utshob artists and Maya Krishna Rao, which touches on economies: the economy of fixed language, of time, of pattern, of mismatches, chances, intensities, potentials. What laws do we continue to make, what does it mean to 'belong'. This city is big, it unfolds. I tread gingerly because my feet hurt, and my eyes are red from the fumes, and lack of sleep. I speak gingerly because I'm swayed by listening and reading, and just when I think, "Ah, I've sorted that out", someone says, "Well no, not 'really', because ...", and they are right somehow or other. Wesley Enoch said about the "real of ritual" in *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (and which like a chant was repeated, as a question, during his Daily Dialogue with Deborah Mailman, and which seemed to indicate longing—just as the songs do in *Stunde Null*) that the moment serves the moment, the moment is performance, the real moment of performance. "Everything has its time," says Mailman in *The 7 Stages of Grieving*.

The Daily Dialogues, and the productions in LIFT, might be subtitled: "everything has its time": or, "in language, everything has its time" (and this, as a motif, is internal to *Stunde Null*, where the desire for Zero Hour, "as if something new could begin from rock-bottom", results in helpless male bodies for whom nothing can have its time, ever).

The specific ritual that Wesley and Deborah were queried about, that troubled the audience, was the burning of leaves, a ritual that gestures toward the cleansing of space, the smoking-out of spirits. And smoking-out can also refer to an investigation which 'brings to light', which

reveals, uncovers the plot, the hoax, the lie. As the sign said: you pass through the doors to (the) smoke. Sometimes the chant, the rite, the ritual, is a way of creating silence, a space, and that space need not be literal. The space of conversation, music, dance, and story-telling, for instance. The space of community, say. The Daily Dialogues are—or I'd prefer to say the Daily Dialogue *is*, imagining it as a continuum—a fragmentary exchange which persists, and annoys, and resists, tolerates, encourages (so devoid of language are the men of *Sunde Null*, that they cannot speak to each other, or even manage to put themselves to bed: they do have, though, the ritual of song) the speeding up of time, in terms of language being the medium of travel, of traversing the spaces of land and people.

**Look... : Gabriel Gbadanosi**

*Khol Do*, Battersea Arts Centre, June 10; *La FERIA de los Cinco Sentidos*, BAC, June 11; Daily Dialogue, Royal Court Upstairs, June 11

Look, it was eighty degrees down there on the Northern line with the tube stuck in the tunnel. People were suffering. The ticket man had to hide away when they came up like black-face coal miners looking for Thatcher. Things are hotting up for LIFT 97. The heat is on for something good at the end of the tube ride. We want spasms on a human face of London Underground. We want circus animals tearing limbs to pieces in the pit. We want to see someone else suffer. We've a taste for blood since that time we cut off Portillo's head and shuddered with pleasure to hear the thud. We want some more. We want our historical trains moving.

Like Maya Krishna Rao in *Khol Do (The Return)*, facing her audience in open-mouthed horror that is also the bodily aperture of unspeakable rapes, the Angel of History recoils from the past, unable to tear away its eyes, while the wind of mounting collisions blows its body backwards into the future. This image of history from Delhi, fifty years after the events of Independence and Partition on the Indian subcontinent, was originally generated by Walter Benjamin in response to the rise of Fascism in Germany in the 1930s. Maya Krishna Rao is playing for big stakes. Sometimes, I think so are we all. History throws at us its twisted metal in the shrapnel of memory. And its target is our already wounded body.

After all, observed Ato Quayson, during one of the daily, wide-ranging and passionately argued dialogues Upstairs at the Royal Court ("Cosmos: Celebration of the Secular"), it is the live body which we all have in common, despite the fossilisations of our (racial, religious, political) beliefs. When there's no way of getting out from under the Juggernauts of schism and history—whether in the riots of Ayodhya or the racially-polarised playgrounds of Hounslow or at the bus-stops of Eltham—it's the human body that gets crushed.

Maya Krishna Rao recoils from us, we recoil from her. Well, even Roland, that mediaeval flower of French chivalry, recoiled from the blackmoors as devils out of hell when he met their faces on the battlefield. Before there were poppies of the indifferent dead, and before racialised armies fought the Hun and the Turk. But what happens when we recoil from ourselves? From our beliefs? Are we so wounded we recoil from considering our wounds, like legless soldiers at Gallipoli? What has happened to our bodies? Don't we dance?

Perhaps by way of healing these wounds, Alicia Rios from Spain has created an installation at the Battersea Arts Centre—a cornucopia of foods, smells, bells and no liturgy of paralysing cooking instructions:

*La FERIA de los Cinco Sentidos*. A sight for sore eyes—mirrored tables heaped with exquisite foods you can actually take and eat! Fresh fruits and vegetables ought to drive away those flu-bug blues and summer colds my Australian counterparts have illegally imported from outside the EU. Pink and white marshmallows might disguise from the public you're giving them a jab of food culture which is good for them. Perfectly respectable people like me were cramming that free food into their pockets and shopping bags and babies' prams. The good burghers of Battersea are my kind of people: they know a free supper when they see one.

But it was the mouths that struck me, blessing the name of Alicia Rios and LIFT 97 with every joyful mouthful that they crammed. They were smiling. They must have had their heads on back to front.

**Beautiful violence: Zsuzsanna Soboslay**

*Un peu plus de lumière* (a little more light), Christophe Bertonneau, Battersea Park, June 7

I have a suspicion of spectacles. All the marshalling of forces and finances, titillating toy wars removed from the battlefields. Guy Fawkes was a thug, an extremist, a separatist, celebrated annually in a fizz and pop night with various safeguards (in Australia now, illegal in one's home).

At LIFT's fireworks, torches spiralled the sky. We are in Vietnam with napalm, London with firebombs. Is it the shape of the burning dragon that appeases us? The ground-level rituals most of us couldn't see, an attempt to change meaning/appease us with paper baubles? Am I just a killjoy?

No, of course, I too gawped and craned and wondered how much further could they go, how much higher, brighter, more audaciously changing night to day (as do poets and lovers, more frequently, cheaply, intimately), but this is awful and awful, the crowd impatient with the inbetweens and jeering and leering and panting for the explosions once more. Our public hangings now going off with a bang.

We are cruel masters and cruel livers; we beat dogs and wives. Fireworks express and contain our violence, colouring in hues that make the skies incandescence or dappled green or white like stars that couldn't possibly cluster as closely, brightly. It is very strange to be there.

**Complicity and Desire: Wesley Enoch**

*La FERIA De Los Cinco Sentidos* by Alicia Rios, Battersea Arts Centre, 11 June

I arrive hungry to the show, not knowing what to expect. We gather in the foyer and are given a small bag of sewn mesh, a 'reticulum'. The gathering files into a narrow hallway, encouraged to kiss a line of mannequin filled gloves. Each glove, rubber, lace, boxing, sports, is scented. The scents bring back memories, feelings, people and places. I walk along to a collection of bells and then along to thunder sheets, the following crowds create accumulations of sound. Archways of dead flowers give a sense of a once beautiful walkway, their scent now replaced by the collection of pump action sprays labelled "living", fragrances of orange blossom, primrose and roses. A man, a reviewer perhaps, walks along with note-book and pen writing up his feelings. His stilted walk punctuated by a thoughtful pause and scribble, as if in search of the appropriate word filter to document the experience.

Meanwhile children run through, smelling this and touching that, lingering with that which excites and disregarding that which does not.

I enter the large room. A collection of boxes lines one side of the room, inviting passers-by to put their hands in, and perhaps recoil with the suddenness of the sensation. Some stand, wary, noting the reactions of those who go before them. Large fountains of vegetables and fruit overflow from mirrored structures, a feast of colour; a reflected sense of muchness. On a stage, two shepherdesses keep watch over a flock of plastic merino sheep, the audience pushing them aside to walk through. Down one hallway the audience remove their shoes and walk over sand, gritty stones, cellophane and sponge, before returning to the room. In the centre is a spray of tables, food neatly laid out in texture classifications. The tables tell me: rubbery, liquid, airy, hard. At first I approach the known, rice cakes, chocolate, butter-filled cakes. My mouth explodes with tamarind paste, my wincing a warning to those who wait and watch. I keep the substance in my mouth bravely trying to experience the wholeness of the sensation but find myself spitting it into my hand and, like the children, depositing it noisily into a bin secreted under the table. I return to the soothing texture of marshmallow. In a world where I demand to know the contents of any foodstuff, here I allow 'wickedness' to take root, to convince myself that the emotional fulfilment of the texture outweighs the chemical and calorie count. This is a contract of generosity, the giving of the creator and the trust of the audience.

The reticulum hangs forgotten around my wrist. The words of my mother replay, "Now, watch out that your eyes are not bigger than your stomach". Now the gathering mills around the large room, consuming the installation. Days later, the artist talks about the cannibalistic nature of her work, the need for people to ingest that which they feel connected to. Despite the limited size of the reticulum, people collect melons, spring onions and avocados, whole meals are carried about in a mock market place. The reflections in the mirrored structures reveal now the darker side of human nature. In this space I see the separation of the senses, the body broken to focus on smell or touch or hearing. My mother's voice again, warning about the sin of waste; to eat all that is on my plate. Those who are starving, who cannot afford the ticket price, sit in my mind like the Third World eager for admittance to the First World and all its opulence. When asked, Alicia Rios disallows the role of this sadness in her conception of the work, instead focusing on the joy. For me these two worlds co-exist.

The audience are the players and their 'greed' highlights the complex emotional connections to our senses, not complete with the knowledge of our ensured survival but in the need to exercise the power of our will. The relationship is not empathetic, it is immediate and visceral, unlocking people from formal constraints usually attributed to the 'feasts of words' theatre has become. It is both ugly and invigorating. The artist talks later about the second night being calm and sedate by comparison. She outlines that each performance is different because of both the make-up of the mob and the role that time plays. The installation is affected by the rotting of the composite elements, the depletion of the human need to ingest, and controlling structures exercised by the mob. The artist says that the first audience provides the thesis, the second the antithesis, the third the synthesis and the final audience is the destroyer.

I collect three Chupa Chups (all vanilla) from the lollipop rainbow and exit, to be confronted by the final image of a spinning mirrored shape which the children spin with vigour and the man with his notebook and pen gazes skywards reading an inscription on the ceiling.

I am reminded of the potency of children. The joy of opulence, their gusto for adventure. The way children are repulsed and lured by their senses. Children are also a powerful reminder of our own growth into cynicism, adults knowing the fate that awaits the young. We enter into a contract with the next generation that they will be better off through our labours and, to those who have gone before us, that we will take the best they have to offer and leave the worst to the annals of history. My ambivalence concerns me, as I sit watching the exiting mobs laden with the objects of their 'looting', unchecked by international media. Have I been complicit or an opponent to this darker side? Only with hindsight can I place the 'performance' of the audience as perhaps unexpected or unwanted. In the moment, there seemed nothing wrong with 'greed' cohabiting with generosity, the senses stimulated, taps into baser motivations. My stomach is full now.

### Sense and Sensibilities (1): Zsuzsanna Soboslay

*La Fera de los Cinco Sentidos*, Alicia Rios, Battersea Arts Centre, June 11

#### Nocturnal Love Feast

*A terrace in Capri. August. The moon pours a stream of curdled milk straight down on the table-cloth. The brown-skinned, heavy-breasted mama enters, carrying an enormous ham on a tray and speaks to the two lovers who are lying stretched out on the two deck-chairs, uncertain if they should renew the fatigues of the bed or begin those of the table: "This is a ham that contains a hundred different pork meats. In order to sweeten it and free it from any possible bitterness and virulence, I have soaked it for a week in milk. Real milk, not that illusory milk of the moon. Eat as much of it as you like." The two lovers devour half the ham. Large oysters follow, each with eleven drops of muscat wine from Syracuse mixed into its seawater.*

*Then a glass of Asti Spumante. Then the "War-in-Bed". The bed, vast and already full of moonlight, fascinated, comes to meet them from the back of the open room. They get into it, toasting each other and sipping from the "War-in-Bed." It is composed of pineapple juice, egg, cocoa, caviar, almond paste, a pinch of red pepper, a pinch of nutmeg, and a whole clove, all liquidised in Strega liqueur.*

Formula by the Futurist Aero-poet, Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, 1932.

Food is thrown: custard from the high-chair, eggs at politicians.  
Food is contested: on television in Japan, chefs do mortal battle over dishes.  
Food is fake: film crews hunger, filming plastic-coated food.  
Food is disowned: by unwell teenagers, ascetics, picky tourists, and sick children.  
Food is satire: cream tarts painting the face of the fool.  
Food is complicity: Scorsese's *innocents* have plate after plate placed before them like a moral code.

The prospect of a feast that is a sculpture is not new: ice-carvings defy both edibility and art, exaggerating both composition, their timefulness and decay.

The reticule sounds seriously like a bag in which to contain our excesses: the after-hours, hotel-room scoffings, at night, alone; a Roman orgy without the baths, Billy Bunter and his food parcels. How much dare I take? I am nervous being here. I'm not sure I can imagine packing morsels in my bag for two hours. (Do I have a starving horde at home to feed?) Maybe some foodophile will, excitingly, go wild on his knees.

Food is a strange world that, I would argue, always places one outside oneself. There is always a negotiation, a ramification of eating/not-eating that extends into matters of (cultural) habit and hygiene: to pasteurise or not to past-her-eyes, the watchful cook eyeing what is refused, a compliment (or adding condiments) making lifelong friends or severing kinship forever. Keep that condiment away from me. The Ubiquitous Sauce, longtime keeper of the King's palate in the colonies.

It is always the amazing thing about spectacles, restaurants, conventions...the amount of excess. The art of leftovers: in Moscow, the Sizzler chain sells it cheaper out the backdoor; in Sydney, the Merzies Hotel gives it to the men's home; in London, tonight, we are creating an art, a collection, out of what we take home. Why did you pick that? (Does it last as long in your reticule as does the collected seashell...)

Food is, daily, philosophy and anthropology. I wonder, in the end, whether I will be led by lust or fascination. This smorgasbord-for-eyes larger than what the tongue needs...

### The trouble with gifts: Linda Marie Walker

*La FERIA De Los Cinco Sentidos*, Battersea Art Centre, 11 June

A popular drink in the Spanish village where I've just spent several weeks is whisky and Fanta, mixed I mean. I couldn't believe my eyes. I like my whisky straight; I like coffee with whisky too, the way it was made there, in the little cup, and I liked asking for it around say 2pm, reading the paper. The market in front of Rosa's Bar each Friday morning had fabulous fruit, vegetables, olives, meats, and one very special stall of herbs, each labelled for a specific type of body trouble, heartburn, constipation, rheumatism, migraine. The body is often in trouble, being everywhere all of the time, and being a space for food. The body is architecture, or perhaps architectonic, designed merely and surely for the matter outside of itself. Food as stuff, to be stuffed in. I get up, restless, alone, and go to the kitchen to eat the remains of the croissant from 'breakfast'. My hotel: each morning, perhaps 7.30am, perhaps 10am, the doorbell rings, and it's my 'breakfast' on a white foam plate: the croissant, a brown bread roll, an apple (always a green one, and always between the breads), and sachets of butter, jam, marmalade, instant coffee, sugar and milk. I look forward to this arrival (a reference to the Daily Dialogue today, 11.6.97: what does a first arrival mean, can one arrive over and over?). I don't want to eat this food, and yet I want it to come/arrive, I have a growing collection of sachets, I have three apples. I have a bad relationship with food. My father grazes all day, he is thin. My mother eats very very slowly. I've a troubled, troubling, body. Forever, it has slowed me, threatened me (and others), changed me, hurt me. I kid myself about food. I go to bed worried about food. I admonish myself for eating, family admonish me for not eating. The body is food.

I now have two links with Alicia Rios' *La FERIA De Los Cinco Sentidos*: Spain (tenuous) and food (trouble(d)). I go, opening night, and afterwards in the cafe, drinking water, having sampled the foods (coarse, soft, hard, etc) on the tables, I am unsatisfied. Zsuzsanna was chastised for taking (helping herself to) a leek: it sits on the table, with the 'dead' rose (was there a rule she didn't 'read', or did she 'forget' the rule, or interpret the setting as ruleless). I was reluctant to call this rose dead (or the other ones I saw), but Jenny said it for me. I was sad (although 'blue' might be a better description), the flowers were wilting/dying on the floor. I wondered why they weren't in water, I must believe this was considered. Perhaps we were being reminded of our actions, at that instant being enacted, our laying to rest, our ending, of 'food'. Sooner or later the roses would have wilted anyway, we know

this. Perhaps I should have rescued some, or picked them up, one by one, to smell. It is impossible to separate the colour (sight) of the rose from its fragrance (smell) and from the effort of its growth (touch). Ending, rescued: grief. Why use this language? My belly is full, but my heart is empty (I get an apple from the fridge and peel and quarter it). I did not fill my 'reticulum', I couldn't bring myself to take away one single morsel. Not even a 'Chupa Chups', however I was given one, as a gift. (I eat a slice of apple, spread with marmalade.) The rose can be heard, and tasted. Tomorrow I will listen to a rose, I will lick petals. I will recover my body.

I sucked the gift. Kojak sucked 'Chupa Chups'. I think of my friends in Spain, of the paella they bought for me, as a going-away gift, that was lunch for fifteen, and the bucket of water they threw over me, and how I treasured that wetness for all of the hours I took to dry. Of how food and water and love are community.

I worry about the flowers. I did not 'enter' the touch-boxes. I did not want to feel trepidation, uncertainty. I don't know why. But I did want to touch the food, with my fingers and my mouth, the breads, the nuts, the sultanas. My son used to eat his food and with a huge sigh run his sticky fingers through his hair, I didn't mind, it seemed appropriate.

The gift is magic, and magic is tricky. I've just mashed a banana with a sachet of blackcurrant jam, and piled it on wholemeal pitta bread: I call this research. The gift is an offering, and offering is invitation. *La FERIA* offers. The senses are acute, wise, and delicate. They are in the world, assaulted, caressed, tempted, every moment of every day. And so they know offerings. Here, my senses were offered 'an installation'. The sense of me came to a specific place and time. Not to theatre, not to performance, although within that context. 'Installation' as a visual arts practice is a highly tuned form. Every single thing, every single surface, orientation, is readable, is read; it's the sculpting of space on one level, and the composition of objects in that space on another, as well as their colour, shape, sound, surface, fabric. It could be that 'installation' is the most autobiographical of all the visual art mediums. As, at its very best, or its most difficult, there is nowhere for the artist or art to shelter, even when, and perhaps most obviously when, the work is opaque. Complexity then is aligned to the difficulty, pleasure (Clarice Lispector wrote of the "difficult pleasure" of writing the personal-poetic), and dismay of being human, and making and showing oneself, and one's passions, publicly, and barely, minimally; and "so I tell my life to myself" (Nietzsche). And meanwhile the work itself trips, falls, 'fails' (and fails for being 'obscure', 'overdetermined', 'underdeveloped', etc). And goes on...

Last food move—rising, reaching, returning—for the day, watching myself: I break open the stale bread roll, scoop out the soft bit, and crumble it into the banana and jam paste. I eat trouble.

... however, a critical visual art audience recognises risk, values an artist's attention to detail. This audience knows film, literary, music, theatre, history, geography, whatever, references. Or if it doesn't, will suspect them, make them up anyway, engage, demand. It expects, and wants, the work to 'live' on several layers. It thinks Deleuzian, for instance. It looks closely, and is never amused or entertained by the experience of 'seeing' the installation. It's an audience of trouble. It brings trouble to (the) work. It's not a good audience/child, rather, it's delinquent, it won't do what it's told. It refuses to be a child, even. Or, will pretend to be one, and good, eat all the food, then yours, then the plate, the table, the guests, and you.

The pleasure of *La FERIA* is the pleasure of the gift. The gift though

requires acceptance: I must speak a speech. I must hear myself with the gift. And why, why did you give me a gift, do you love me? What are you telling with the gift? The gift has its own story, beyond being given. Am I obliged to take your gift? Thank you. I will hold it in my hands. And now, what do I do, as I write it, as it writes me, as it becomes writing? As I continue the ritual, perform the role, know the rules. Too late, it's dropped me.

I have three links with *La Feria*: Spain and food and installation (space). In other words my links are: tenuous trouble(d) space. In other words: a provisional body. As when I mention Spain I don't say 'Román', when I mention food I don't say 'fear', when I mention installation I don't say 'difficult'. I make for you a body that is me, writing, and is not me, flesh (eating). And there's no divide: me + not-me = to-you. So, to be present inside a work, and to wonder at its voice, at how it came to be precisely that, and to know, once more, that—as I look up and see the man fill his 'reticulum' with cherry-tomatoes, while glancing around to see if anyone is watching, and they (me) are, and see the large woman encourage the large child to eat more and more—this is not a picnic, this is not a party, a gathering of 'loved' people, it's an official theatre-event. And I name it instead, unfairly, unofficially, *installation* (a folly perhaps). And with that name I shift its frame, and bring to bear forces that it resists, and yet, as 'art', cannot resist, as art is vulnerable, like food.

Notes from the underground: Zsuzsanna Soboslay  
*Oraculos*, Enrique Vargas, Taller de Investigacion de la Imagen  
Dramatica, The Former Coach Station, June 10.

*Down with the museum-kitchen.*

Marinetti, 1931

I feel trapped in my hotel. The door swings shut on a small foggy room, a false fire alarm raises hackles every morning. Reviewing a festival programme is an overflow of input—talks, walks, undergrounds, the worry of brollies, babbles, the infliction of endless arts and the confines of London squares. A gaggle of Australians holding the fort makes me feel Australian, in that I never ever felt at home there. And in T.S. Eliot's London, the sweet Thames is indeed sweet, cleaner than when he wrote, absent of empty bottles, dead bodies, and the decay of European civilisation. To the traveller, the water is safe here. London is vibrant, swinging, hard to contemplate leaving, even for a daytrip; it seems to know itself and like itself (bar North-South divides): post-election euphoria, or anaesthesia? (In ten days, no-one has mentioned Tony Blair.) London theatres are being restored and rearranged. The Wasteland is only within.

Yestermorning, I was overflowing with words—a sense of body charged and charging over cobbles, into landscapes, fed with colours and what Virginia blithely calls Ideas in Every Window. But by the evening, wordless. What has happened to me here? Is it my tete-a-tate: the red room of Rothkos, maroons and blacks on red, reds on red, hints of window bars, a quiet scream. I am seeping, no I will not go down, will not go gentle, the quietness of disappearing squares. There is no vertical hold...I leave the room.

Baselitz' amorphous green angsts hold diagonals over me; elsewhere, Fabro's tall fluted marble, a heavenly aspiration, cool like an unsinging lute, looks for answers in the stars. I reach horizontal: my breasts, my tastebuds, the serpentine (re)calls...

What saves me from the edge is my own corporeality—the choice to

leave, feel similarities and edges, depart, or stay and assess and feel. Keifer's ash paintings confront and harrow but show me their edge. They do not *disappear* me.

Enter ZS to *Oraculos*, where I am invited to a sensual assault into mystery. I emerge from St Pancras station, enter another underground.

"Trust", we are told by Enrique; the first guide sweetly smiles. I begin to absent more senses than are exercised. Many hands in soft darkness guide me. It is clear the text is set, the Devil's tango fixed, an actor confounded when I touch him. Rendered childish, I play, half-numbered to questions, impulses, associations. My partner is "corrected" in the labyrinth, "failing" in a task for which, logically, sensually, there should be many options. By this, I am horrified.

As I shuffle from cell to cell, sands underfoot, I realise how narrowed the landscape has become. My associations cannot go where they need; I begin to feel what in this labyrinth is wrong. For years, I lived beachside, north of a New South Wales industrial town. The trees screamed the murder of peoples, mountains wept and prayed, singing like the Thames did to Eliot, demographic witnesses to life's battles and scarrings/passings. Sand underfoot meant quietness speaking to toes; rock undulations talked. My land, shoring and assuring me. And enacting me, making me sense the referents of balance and imbalance in my perceptions.

It is a quiet space (apart from the roar of oceans and leaves)—no-one smiles at me, no hands prevent me falling, aloneness is the state I learn. I am woven in a fabric so webbed to the wounds of the world that a butterfly fluttering flutters me. (And yet, crucially, in that sharing of flutterings, I would not presume to dance anyone else's tune.)

Theatre is work. Seeing is work, life is work. A piecing of patterns to make meaning, to have them shattered, to repattern, reshatter, until the shattering loses its glassiness and becomes more like water running softly within the song.

*Oraculos* is not my story. It is theirs. I am part of their research and know I don't fit in. The claims made for this work are enormous, supposedly supported by psychoanalysts. Save us, now and at the hour.

Although pleasant enough, that too is difficult. In all mythologies, the labyrinth, the underground, is an arduous journey, the element of struggle in one's ascent/descent crucial to knowing the question you need ask when you arrive. When we arrive, we are plonked at the door and asked to ask a question. (No matter how harrowing the underground, it's never that bad).

It is the tube, afterwards, the underground at violet hour: a man without verbal boundaries sings, welcoming all visitors, telling us the sights—a running commentary on where to find the museums, the schools, the Thames, where the ladies may swim without costumes. He should be paid. He reminds us Holborn's Piccadilly line is closed, admonishes us all to walk more anyway, and offers a complimentary imaginary glass of champagne. Welcome, welcome welcome he says, in a voice high-pitched like Edna Everage's, but better, to anyone who will receive the welcome. No-one sings along with him.

He grates and works on us. He is neither quaint nor disruptive; people feign offense, or ridicule, but it doesn't quite work. What he says is too poignant and accurate to be dismissed, and yet his proximity is not so much invasive, as paints my skin. He is real to himself and real to me: the fake sweet smiles of *Oraculos* begin to cloy.

**A Brisbane Murri in the Royal Court: Wesley Enoch**  
Daily Dialogue "Distant: Discovering The Other", Royal Court  
Upstairs, June 9

#### MIND THE GAP

the arrival at a place, a place of alighting, returning or for the first time;  
a complex intersection of fast moving....carrying people away or  
toward; beneath the surface

#### MIND THE GAP

a bastard nation, a maturation of relationship, no longer defining  
through deference to a source outside ourselves, a new place met with  
indifference, new traditions where traditions were born(?), a new world  
of new found exiles

the struggle to keep pure in a place; high tea and rose gardens, linen  
lace, a history of denial of place, of body; undefined but never  
unknowing

space affects the way you read a work, a word given meaning by one  
place is stripped of meaning in another, new references, a returning son  
refuses the fatted calf, "No, sorry, I won't eat the beef."

#### MIND THE GAP

the greatest fear—the blank page; the greatest wish—the space to con-  
sider that which lies between the spaces.

#### The wound and the taint: Zahid Dar

*Khol Do* (The Return), Battersea Arts Centre, June 10

How does one interpret or use a classical dance form to tell a new  
story, one that is relevant to the Indian Diaspora, rather than a tradition-  
al religious tale which may also be of value, but a soft option in the  
sense that it may not challenge the community dogma and, worse, may  
fuel prejudice? This is a question asked by many new Indian dancers  
who are classically trained. Breaks with traditional story-telling tech-  
niques have been made by contemporary British-Asian choreographers  
such as Shobana Jeyasingh using Bharatnatyam and, to a lesser extent,  
Nahid Siddiqi using Kathak. In eliminating the orthodox costume and  
make up of Kathakali, but also in her choice of subject matter, Maya  
Krishna Rao makes a welcome contribution to this modernising  
principle.

In his classic short story, *Khol Do*, Saadat Hasan Manto deals with the  
communalism of the partition of India in 1947. Trains travelling  
between Amritsar and Lahore would depart, packed with people hang-  
ing onto the sides and sitting on the roofs, but would arrive at their des-  
tination with their entire passenger load slaughtered.

As we have witnessed recently in Eastern Europe, history repeats its  
unimaginable horrors, re-named as ethnic cleansing, as if somehow the  
mere act of re-naming sanitises the atrocities human beings are capable  
of. In the re-telling of *Khol Do*, Rao's solo performance in a British  
context is a sublime experience.

An aspect of classical Indian arts is that an artist may present nine rasas  
(moods or flavours) during the exposition of an improvisation or  
rehearsed set piece. This range of feeling usually allows an audience to  
empathise with a work on different levels. Maya Krishna Rao's open-

ing minimal gestures are executed with the technical precision of a  
classically trained dancer and, enhanced by Gavin O'Shea's sound  
design, evoke the atmosphere of an Indian train journey. Overall  
though, I felt the emotions expressed in the work were limited.  
Viewing *Khol Do*, I felt the pathos of the father separated from his  
daughter and the desperation of his search, but not his love. The motif  
running through the performance is the daughter's expression of fear,  
Rao's gestures of fright being expressed to effect in Kathakali abhinayah  
(visual expression) of mudras (hand gestures) and facial movements,  
in particular, the eyes. The nritya (pure dance) element here was mini-  
mal and I thought could be developed further to convey a feeling of  
space. Instead of restricting the performance to the confines of the  
strong red central dais, it would have been liberating to see some of the  
explosive Kathakali movements outside this sacred space, in perhaps  
the profane space of the margins around the dais. Rao's Kathakali  
nritya, both in footwork and poses, transmits a high level of energy  
and consequently, is more convincing in delivery and reception than  
the earlier slower movements.

Maya Krishna Rao is courageous in dealing with the subject of ethnic  
violence during the formation of Indian and Pakistani national identi-  
ties. The bloody wound that opened up during Partition never healed  
and is now being salted by fundamentalist Hindu, Muslim and Sikh  
factions in the Indian sub-continent and supported by the Indian  
Diaspora. The religious premise for this sectarianism is again raising  
its ugly Janus head. In order to hold on to their imaginary homeland in  
their respective mother countries, Asian communities in Britain are  
unfortunately now more sharply divided than ever. In this respect, one  
welcomes any artist who transgresses absolutist ideologies. The gener-  
al disclaimer that Asian communities in the West make of this type of  
work, especially if it has been created by a migrant Asian artist, is that  
they are not speaking with an authority which is authentic—"the Asian  
community is not like this". They refer to the artist's "non-Indianness"  
for hybridising European and Eastern aesthetics. The artist is thought  
to be tainted by the vagaries of Western political, social and artistic  
preoccupations. British-Asian artists are described in the Asian com-  
munity press as having lost their roots in adopting new modes of  
telling their stories or to re-tell old stories.

#### Fuzzy Logics: topics for a conversation: Richard Murphet and Zsuzsanna Soboslay

##### 1. How to Receive?

-What can you say when something is not working?

-The problem as audience is the position of being the receiver in the  
gift process. Like a child who receives a Christmas gift from an aunt,  
knows that it's valuable, appreciates the thought, but doesn't get turned  
on by the thing itself. This is the problem of receiving a performance  
that is culturally not familiar—how do I relate it to something that I  
know?

-That's too simplistic. You had no trouble 'understanding' the Kathakali  
dancer you saw last year. You experienced her as riveting, were "elec-  
trified" by her performance. And this festival is full of experiences  
where we are asked to suspend the specific and share in supposed uni-  
versals: *Oraculos*, Alicia Rios, assuming smells are gateways to  
shared, sometimes culturally or geographically specific cognitions. In  
Rios' installation it is food that's being played with. Food universally  
incites hunger, consumption, overconsumption....

-It's also about giving....food is there, you take it as a gift....

-And the proportion of giving to not-giving at *La FERIA* was such that  
about 70% of the installation was not meant to be touched. I did and  
was made to feel guilty.

## 2. Counterpoints

- The power with the Kathakali dancer had something to do with stretching counterpoints.
- One thing counterpointing another creates a context, as when you walk through a landscape—different sculpturings feed you differently, proportions, smells, sensations, visual orientations, textures on your feet, and skin.
- I'm sure that Rao worked with counterpoints, variations, as she constructed the work...
- Whether we received them is another matter.
- Was her focus the telling of the story, or the presentation of the form?
- She seemed to be swapping between forms, fully extending into neither one nor the other...
- I like the way in Indonesian puppet-dramas the puppeteer emerges, shows his face, then covers it before re-merging: one is never fooled, but asked to focus on one, knowing about the other...
- In hybrid forms, we have to be patient to discover what we are looking at, and what has receded from our looking. There are so many assumptions about which features are necessarily part and parcel of established forms...

## 3. Context

- *Khol Do* perhaps suffered a lack of contextualisation at the BAC.
- But new features can create new contexts...
- Peter Brook once said that a vital role for a performance is to provide an initial bridge from the audience's daily life into the imaginative world of the show. In *Shunde Null*, the opening speech in front of curtain provided just such a bridge for the audience—a relation of outside to inside, of politics to irony, of political performance to theatrical performance.
- As a dancer yourself, how did you read the context of *Khol Do*?
- I suppose I'm used to reading the body itself as context. Reading what is or is not moving, is or is not engaged. I certainly saw the journey of one person, not of two (the father/daughter axis as explained in the programme notes).
- There's not much use contextualising a performance geographically if the body is not creating its own context within the performance. This can be a danger of the solo performance, created by the performer, without a director providing the consciousness of a viewer.
- The form of work itself can challenge you to go beyond it (e.g. in butoh, which challenges you to become your own director—a cross-sensing, an internal gauge to what is trying to show forth).

## 4. Focus

- The difficulty of talking about whether a performance is 'working' and of knowing on what terms one can assess this is complicated by the Daily Dialogues. They are often fascinating social and political exchanges but their focus on these areas means that the theatre work in the Festival seems to be there for the purpose of the political discourse.
- Is the work here as theatre/performance or as cultural document?
- Can they be separated?
- This strange land, theatre, we want it to be everything. We want it to be moving and involving and the best of voice, movement, song, political critique.
- The uncomfortable presence of the performer vs political statement.
- Interestingly, the term "presence" can often be treated as a fuzzy term in critical analysis—but to practitioners it's a term reflecting incredible discipline, skill and consciousness. Not in default of politics.

**Indhu Rubasingham on Authenticity and the Search for Form**  
Daily Dialogues, Royal Court Upstairs, June 9 & 12; *Khol Do* (The Return), Battersea Arts Centre, June 10

Cultural diversity is the by-word of LIFT. The festival presents London with insights, forms and expressions of theatre from all over the world. It offers the British public other ways of looking, seeing and hopefully, gives us an opportunity to re-examine ourselves and our own context. Optimistic, I know.

Not only do we have the work itself but the Daily Dialogues at the Royal Court Upstairs, which offer the opportunity to find out what is happening in the space between the audience and the performance. It's illuminating to discover the premise that if we (the audience) don't see it, then you (the performer) have got it wrong. But I wonder what is it that we actually see? Do we see what we want/desire/need to see? Is the work being offered to us as a challenge to our perceptions or are we simply confirming our pre-conceptions despite the work? Taken out of its context, do we drown work from abroad with our own meanings?

At the Daily Dialogue on Monday June 9 ("Distant: Discovering the Other"), examining the Antipodean experience and in particular, what constitutes the Australian identity/body and how that body perceives the British body, the contexts and identities sounded strangely familiar. The words may have been different but their use was the same and highlighted for me a fear of any homogenisation of national identity. We learnt from the speakers (Sarah Miller, Robyn Archer, Wesley Enoch, Keith Gallasch, Josephine Wilson) about the diversity and fluidity of Australian identity expressed artistically in a desire to reflect, examine and deconstruct itself.

Of course, we agree wholeheartedly, don't we? We don't believe in the swaggering Paul Hogan, g'day mate, kangaroo-riding, wombat-shooting Aussie. We expect a more complex, disjointed experience, don't we? We're certainly complex here in Britain.

But then three days later...

The desire to see authenticity in work from all around the world came starkly into the Daily Dialogue of June 12 ("Belief: The Power of Ritual") with the creators of *The 7 Stages of Grieving*. Even when performer, Deborah Mailman and director Wesley Enoch said that the piece was created from their joint experience, some of it was real and some fictitious, the tenor of the questions asked and not asked palpably indicated an audience desire for these people to be authentic. It felt as though people wanted them to be holding the future of Aboriginal vision in their hands, to come from an absolute sense of knowing—not to recognise their art as revealing or searching and drawing from an eclectic variety of cultural sources. Our desire for authenticity was far stronger than our need for seeing. We wanted to be educated rather than to examine, to seek answers rather than to question. Does personal projection swamp and suffocate work in an international festival? Do we expect the 'other' to remain static while we flow from thought to thought, move on or discard as appropriate?

What I noticed is how much we need an Indigenous Australian company to teach us what it's like to be them, to give us an authentic representation of their lives. It was hard to accept that this work was eclectic in form and content, to know that both the experiences presented and the form of their expression were not homogenous, that this was theatre, not therapy.

How much shared knowledge of a nation do we need to understand the nuances of its culture? What prevents the work on show at LIFT from simply becoming cultural exhibits? Do we need to accept more responsibility as an audience and perhaps a wee bit more humility...?

*Khol Do (The Return)* at Battersea Arts Centre is a movement piece based on Saadat Hasan Manto's story of a father's nightmarish search for his daughter who is lost during their enforced transit to the newly created Pakistan. We know this because the usher forces us to read the double-sided A4 text before the piece begins. I'm immediately alienated. I want to watch/project on my own. I'm not allowed to. But rather than let myself over-react, I start to question. The performer-creator Maya Krishna Rao has trained in Kathakali and has been working towards a new form where, as she says, "every action may set off different meanings and experiences".

Historically and culturally, India's dance-drama traditions are based on codified gestures (Kathakali has 600 hand gestures alone) understood by the community for which they are performed. Even if they don't precisely understand a specific gesture, meaning is easily derived because the stories on which the performances are based are drawn from a well-known canon of Hindu scriptures. Just as to understand the sweeping statements and nuances of Greek drama and the departures its writers took (particularly Euripides), the community was required to have a shared mythology and belief system, allowing the plays to become political, sometimes shocking social comments on contemporary society.

Maya Krishna Rao is searching for a new form. She therefore makes us know the story so that we can share in the meaning of the gestures and the piece. As an audience, rather than politely observing and examining an 'exotic' performance, we are invited to engage. She does not allow us to search for or demand authenticity. She closes that gate and makes us stay in the arena with her.

I am amazed by her face. I can't believe the amount of expression in just her eyes alone: they enlarge and contract; her pupils quiver. Her eyes make her look huge. Then it's her transformations that surprise me. Her face changes from human scale to a gigantic mask and back again. She looks old, then young, tender, then suddenly grotesque. Her performance is powerful. At times, I am moved, at others I observe her body and the power that just her finger carries and how she can isolate her limbs and imbue every movement with meaning.

Maya Krishna Rao is alone on a small, raised platform at the Battersea Arts Centre Studio, searching for form as a father searches for his daughter.

#### **Dangerous Attractions: Wesley Enoch**

*Things Fall Apart*, LIFT 97 & West Yorkshire Playhouse, Royal Court Upstairs, June 13

What role does 'attraction' play within the appreciation of performances?

In viewing *Stunde Null* I was aware of the attraction of the intellect. The intimate knowledge of place, character and the history of a style of work supported my appreciation of the performance, the expert manipulation of the form aided by the assumption of knowledge. In a similar way viewing *Things Fall Apart* attracted me physically. This is not to suggest that these two ways of viewing are mutually exclusive, *Stunde Null* is extremely physical with finely executed slapstick and vocal manipulation and *Things Fall Apart* has a very robust intellectual premise, but more to say that my initial attraction to the pieces operated on a very superficial level which, once engaged, encouraged me to look further.

*Things Fall Apart* is storytelling enlivened by physicality and sensuality. With the danger of a circus, the spectacle of dance, the anthropology of the other, this piece seems to beckon a familiarity with the audience which at times overrides my need to understand character development and plot. Actors slip in and out of storytelling roles, woven together with narration. I sit in my seat at the Royal Court Upstairs and am transported, not to the bushlands of Africa, but inside myself. The percussive rhythms in sync with heart beats, the movements of bodies evoking responses in my muscles, an intense sexuality pumping through my veins.

The "blackness" and the "otherness" heightens the attraction. I want to draw similarities with my own struggles/histories but resist the generalisation of black experience. My body keeps me engaged with the work, I want the performers to make eye contact with me, I want to be involved, to sit in the circle. The "exotic" is captivating. In conversation with fellow RT writer, Indhu, later, we continue an argument about ritual and traditional material in our work. Do we use these signifiers of difference to attract an audience or to truly celebrate our cultural heritage? In the extreme, I see tourist-oriented performance which manipulates traditional Aboriginal cultures to elicit responses of sympathy or to romanticise and homogenise for political and financial gain, but rarely as an accurate representation of the diversity within communities.

This is dangerous territory and open to misunderstanding. I am aware that the image of the Nigerian body, the ideology of the "noble savage" and "authentic" experiences are contained in my reading of this work and I allow myself to wallow here. My attractions disarm my other faculties for a time and on walking home I realise I have left them disengaged and wonder at my motivations.

#### **My Distemper: Gabriel Gbadamosi**

*Stunde Null*, Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg, Queen Elizabeth Hall, June 13

Apparently (I have it from an Australian colleague), there had to be an Australia, even before it was discovered, because without a Southern land mass, an Australia, the world would be unbalanced.

If I could roll back that discovery and speak in a spirit of un-balance, I don't like the German theatre, and particularly I don't like *Stunde Null*. To say so might be perverse of me, but too many of my Australian counterparts came out saying they liked two and a half hours of interval-less apology for *Deutsche Schuld*—German guilt.

'Don't let's be beastly to the Hun' was one of the numbers among its undeniable *coups de theatre*. But the number dates it—along with its delivery by the ex-pat British member of the cast—with the Goons. This is dangerous nonsense and I don't want any Australian to say no-one told them. German war guilt is alive and well and so much a part of the psyche (I shudder at the collective noun) it not only drives Chancellor Kohl's European policy but it burns Turks to a crisper turn than any mock-ironic *a capella* of would-be post-war politicians can do justice.

And justice is the key. The tone and text of the play is, *give us a break*, temper judgement with mercy. The quality of mercy is strained in this instance by appeals to puerile laughter from the audience. The play ends on forced laughter on stage. And the actors come out for their bows, looking cowed and sheepish (a) because some of them are visibly good actors compromised into a narrow—(alright, minimal-

ist)—vestige of their skill, and (b) because the slapstick, non-naturalistic, preserved-only-in-East Germany acting style cannot cope with more than the satirical cabaret in which it was pickled. Australian artists hungry for an aesthetic to feed their experiments in 'performance' might find it a feast. Germans—and this is *their* theatre—remember famine from their fathers and grandfathers. And they remember the Soviet/Allied rape of their mothers and grandmothers on a par with the pattern of rape in Bosnia.

*Stunde Null* doesn't deal with emotional subjectivity so much as measure its cost in the supposedly progressive aphasia of art after Auschwitz. For a country in which holocaust denial is a crime, *Stunde Null* is pointedly asking to forget in mute gestures of an emotionally petrified self-satire. It asks for mercy without being able to cross-examine itself. It cannot witness. It mouths injustice as cliché. It abandons a questioned rhetoric of the German poetic soul on its nightmare journey through history with which the show opens, in favour of a strangled gag on National Socialist tub-thumping—the opening shot in its subversion of the actor's text. It is in the denial stage of grieving, along with its discredited 'anti-fascist' State.

Programmatic debunking of the actor in favour of mechanistic, slapstick delivery systems is a serious mistake in my view. You lose not only heroes, but human subjects. And you destroy the value of human subjectivity at your peril. Though, it has been done before—in Germany, for instance.

**All that flows: Keith Gallasch goes with *Stunde Null***  
*Stunde Null*, directed by Christoph Marthaler, Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg, Queen Elizabeth Hall, June 12

I feel oddly at home in *Stunde Null*, even if I don't know quite where I am or where I'm to be taken. Very little German-speaking theatre reaches Australia—a smattering of local productions of Peter Handke, Franz Xaver Kroetz, Botho Strauss, Thomas Brasch—but some of us know it as well through Pina Bausch's dance theatre, recognising the musical construction, the sense of scene as image rather than narrative, the set as design-in-itself as well as dramatic context, the actor as performer *and* as integral to a choreographed and choral space. And this is an actor with integrity, and virtuosity. As Robert Wilson once commented (something like this) in explaining his difficulty in working with actors in a naturalistic and Stanislavskian tradition, "I ask an American actor to move a chair and they say, 'Why?' I ask a European actor to move a chair and they show me 50 interesting ways of doing it." Although anathema to the exponents of naturalism, this kind of performance attitude connects with the great non-western theatre traditions with their mix of the contemplative (that makes some theatre-goers restless with its rhythms and repetitions) and the cathartic.

For me, this is a theatre of reverie, of space with which to gradually engage, in which words share rather than dominate the space and the ear, in which personalities rather than characters emerge and states of being rather than character trajectories are lived out. In *Stunde Null* the space is a faithfully rendered old radio studio, save for the mark of contemporaneity with the set of modern microphones thrusting on goose-necks from both walls and into which the team of politicians-in-training mouth their platitudes of a regenerated post World War II Germany. This is also a temporary dormitory where grown men behave like little boys under the strict guidance of a house-mother (the beloved Mrs Zero Hour). Their ritual enactments of petty violence, joke telling, genital inspections, their training in waving, hand-shaking and ribbon-cutting, resonate with Klaus Theweleit's *Male Fantasies*

(Polity Press), a thesis about the male culture and male educational underpinnings of Nazism. He describes the rigid, authoritarian body as fearful of "all that flows"—women, other races, democracy—but as also enjoying its own controlled fluidity in sentimental songs and hymns, dirty jokes, parades and massive, flowing rallies.

The *Stunde Null* politicians are at once powerful (that is a given) and pathetic. Their sentimentality floods out in tears (in chorus), their contradictory messages of guilt and denial flood out in political and personal gobbledygook. Loss of individual control is always covered (the one exception becomes discreetly isolated), loss of collective control is subdued by sweet, fluid, controlled Romantic hymning or pipes in mouths like babies' dummies. They are not fascists, but they are dangerous—all the signs are there. We know they will succeed; like Conrad Adenauer in documentary footage at the end of Fassbinder's film *The Marriage of Maria Braun*—they will sell their message to themselves, to Germans, to the world, and at the expense of many. And for that they are brutally satirised in *Stunde Null*, made pitiable for what they lack and do not understand, however much we sympathise with the moments of apparent pain and doubt. They are (increasingly slapstick) clowns but they are also, in the end, sleeping beauties (the grim Grimm version read to them by Mrs Zero Hour after they battle their refusing beds) whose beauty will not wake, whose anima is trapped in thickets of proliferating microphones. That the opening and framing front-of-curtain speech is by a Helmet Kohl-like figure is a reminder that the lies of post-World War II live on in German politics and in the male body.

In his review of *Stunde Null*, Gabriel Gbadamosi's sweeping assumption of a uniform Australian adulation of *Stunde Null*, his belittling of performance as experiment (therefore without tradition?), his belief that the German performers are sorry victims of directorial manipulation (British naturalism serves the actor best?) and his quotable, cutting, epigrammatic style are more in line with conventional British theatre reviewing and the mimicry of it in Australia. When I arrived, a London journalist offered the opinion that if reviewers here could disengage from their passion for wit they would be better writers. No hard feelings. Gabriel highlights the very strong tensions between theatre and performance here, their nexus in *Stunde Null*, and the problems LIFT faces in presenting other forms to a theatre-proud culture working and re-working The Play, adulating The Playwright and perpetuating the myth of the Unfettered Actor genius.

**A fluid British body: Keith Gallasch talks with Gabriel Gbadamosi**

Part 2 of "New images, real bodies".

I'm enjoying being in the Polish Bar, Little Turnstile, Holborn, amidst the Friday after-work roar (including a few Polish accents, pumping British dance music), reflecting briefly on the other half of my family history (see RealTime#1): German Lutherans fleeing Silesia via Southampton to Adelaide in southern Australia in 1839. Actually, they're Polish Catholics, something an historian unearths in the 1980s, much to the consternation of some family members who had by then developed an intense dislike for Roman Catholics. In photographs reaching back across a hundred years, I see myself in their eyes, hair-line and stern looks as they pose for marriages and baptisms and, in one case, with their Aboriginal charges on a remote mission. This is a harder body to feel part of than that of the East London grandfather turned Australian soldier hero on the other side of the family. It is even more reserved, more private, and it does not easily fit the national iconography (during World War I, town and family names are

changed, some people are interned) even though in pockets of the Adelaide hills and the Barossa Valley, German accents, wine-making and diet proudly persist. However, it is agricultural, stoic and sporting and that is enough, even though it leaves a younger me with a new sense of a hybrid self.

Over red wine, spiced chicken breast and potatoes, I'm recalling and distilling a long conversation with fellow *RealTime* writer Gabriel Gbadamosi in a cafe the day before. He doesn't think the British body thesis promising, but we try. Gabriel is Irish-Nigerian.

1. *Choosing blackness.* Gabriel recalls both a South African development ("Black by commitment rather than by colour", Joe Slovo the example) and a flirtation between the Irish and Afro-Caribbeans in the "mid-early 80s". This attempt to transcend race through a refusal of colour ended, he says, "in an unseemly punch-up", and became the subject of his play *No Blacks, No Irish*.

2. *A fluid body.* "I have the head of a west African and the body of a west Ireland peasant. I look like my uncles." "I have three passports: Nigerian, Irish and British and hover between them like an international criminal." "Another image," he offers, "comes from a Yoruba proverb: *omi ko lota*—water has no enemy." The jokey 'criminal' resonates against 'water', the illicit against the natural. He recalls that the Irish in England were refused ethnic identity status and funding (another 'illicit'). The water image expands: both sides of his family migrated by boat to Britain, both are Atlantic cultures.

3. *(Tres)passing.* "I'm fairly at home anywhere; it's a body that doesn't offend in Morocco, Turkey, South Africa...I pass. I call it trespassing, because I don't go over finally." "Mine is a body in movement, an identity in movement." "At Cambridge, I was the only black person in the faculty." He recalls an incident though where he became visible. His play *Eshu's Faust* was performed in a 1000 year-old chapel ("tribal English territory") within a secular institution, a university college. His was a pagan Faust. The introduction of a profane, noisy, black body into the chapel lead to a ban on performances there, despite at least 500 years of its use for such. Gabriel feels that *Eshu's Faust* "re-awoke the sacred nature of that place", something the trespassing body can do.

4. *Speaking bodies.* "I speak with my father's voice in my mother's tongue: the taste of two peoples kissing." Behind his (father's) Nigerian English he can hear "pithy and epigrammatic" Yoruba, "it makes my English Senecan. The Irish is Ciceronian."

5. *Black and not black..* "I live the life of a black person, but I have no feeling of an existential black identity and I don't believe in race. Is race a thing? It was invented so recently."

6. *Prized bodies and fluid voices.* Black British bodies are proud bodies and Gabriel reminds me about the Dick Hebdidge thesis that black bodies, fashion and gesture catalysed white style. (I'm reminded too of a Daily Dialogue where someone working on LIFT's *Utshob* project reports surprise at hearing white boys using Punjabi English—something he said wouldn't have happened 20 years ago.)

7. *Kinship.* "My kinship with other bodies is sensual." "I see colour, and I celebrate it in a spirit of sensuousness. Colour is attractive, difference is attractive." He mentions a radio program on fashion that takes into account skin colour, matching it with materials, however this is rare given limited black access to the media. In the end, he surmises, it is an issue of class and powerlessness. I guess the British body is a

class body, a collection of class bodies and the least empowered is the black body.

8. *War body.* Gabriel notes the regimented and regimental body of the army—regional and colonial communities represented/absorbed into the Black Watch and the Gurkhas and other dominion regiments. The Falklands and Gulf Wars he calls "wars without bodies" (on the victor's side), having a media focus on the few tragically wounded, and exhibiting a problematic heroism—what were these wars really about?

9. *The wounded body.* "*The English Patient*," says Gabriel, "is about a wounded white man; it's written by a Sri Lankan living in Canada; it rehearses the wounding of an empire, looks to the past and tries to understand wounds now".

10. *Vaccinated.* This is a healthier nation. Working class bodies are taller. The body is feminised. "It is", says Gabriel, "a vaccinated body". Vaccinatory—a little bit of grit is a British dietary practice. Foreign, formerly colonial bodies were brought in to the UK not just to appease the conscience of the conqueror or to supply cheap labour, but to vaccinate British culture against the foreign body. Foreign bodies are good for you. "In *The English Patient* the act of adultery looks like incest. The Sikh and the French woman seem more healthy."

That's as far as we get. Predictably, as with the Australian body, this discussion projects a British body of bodies, a complex of cultures, shifting bodies, new embodiments. Gabriel's vision of his own body with its three way cultural heritage is fluid and apparently liberating, if nonetheless constrained by class, that oldest embodiment of difference and control in British culture. But I want to know about Gabriel's Englishness—what is embodied in him that he takes to other countries, to encounters like this. Is there, like the monolithic mythic body that lurks behind Australian culture, manifesting itself in bouts of restraining conservatism, an archetypal white British body (or one per class) that is impressed to some degree on every British body, whatever its origins and resistance to cultural vaccination? Another time. Another British body.

**RealTime, Australia's free national arts street paper, is a guest of LIFT97 and part of the Australia Council's involvement in the newIMAGES cultural exchange program. A team of Australian and British writers collaborate to publish four issues of RealTime, responding to performances and recording their experiences of the unfolding themes of LIFT as it engages with diverse cultures, forms and the city itself.**

RealTime c/o LIFT 19/20 Great Sutton St  
London EC1V 0DN 0171 490 3964

fax 490 3976

RealTime PO Box A2246 Sydney South NSW

Australia 1235 tel 62+9283 2723 fax 9283 2724

email: [opencity@rttimearts.com](mailto:opencity@rttimearts.com)

RealTime is published by Open City

layout by Tim Moore