

# RealTime

**RealTime at LIFT '97. In this issue: De La Guarda's *Periodo Villa Villa*, Juliana Francis' *Go Go Go*, William Yang's *The North*, Johann Le Guillerm's *Cirque Ici*, Saburo Teshigawara's *I Was Real—Documents*, West Yorkshire Playhouse's *Things Fall Apart*, Preliminary Hearing—Mary Ward House, Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg's *Stunde Null*, Daily Dialogues; plus audiences and the emerging LIFT body**

3

**Editorial: Breathing in, sitting forward:**  
Virginia Baxter

A composer-friend in Sydney who works with silence, believes that people hear music before it happens. Here at LIFT I am developing a theory along similar lines that it's the audience who decides when a performance begins. You watch, there's a collective moment before the lights go out when expectation overflows into silence and my theory is that this signal and not the stage manager's cue activates the performance. Before Johann Le Guillerm landed in his sack in the centre of the ring, the audience whispered a spontaneous "ssshhh", a signal to *Cirque Ici* that they were here too. Throughout the performance, they applauded in small bursts to remind those of us who were trying to forget that we were after all inside a circus tent where one act normally follows another, though Le Guillerm and his company of musicians had something more continuous (perpetually momentous) in mind in this clever piece of new circus. Fortunately, there are limits to the powers of the audience, proved here in the final moments when the combined breath of the audience could not extinguish a candle in the centre of the stage. Only the performer could swallow the flame and end the performance. New works like these challenge audiences, implicate them, activate them. Opening night of *Periodo Villa Villa*, the crowd had no control over De La Guarda. In this work, created to energise and wake-up a crowd, the audience became an entity. Submitted to herding, stifling claustrophobia, like children they (it?) let out an "ooh" when the lights finally went out, sighed collectively at the lightshow above their heads. At the centre, helpless, hosed with water, fondled and hoisted into the air, they gave themselves, mouths raised for angel kisses, seduced by the performers to become the performance—for an instant. Meanwhile, at the edges a growing number silently skirted touch and eye contact, activating complex peripheral vision to steer clear of total immersion and watch the wildness above them and the mayhem in the centre of the room from a distance, like an audience.

An audience also has a sense of itself. One of the pleasures of watching *Things Fall Apart* was being inside a crowd which included a large number of British-Nigerians who uttered sounds and clicks of recognition. On the other

hand, I had an uneasy feeling in the opening moments of *Stunde Null* when some audience members signalled their annoyance at others who picked up early the irony in the formal, flowery opening speech of the actor before the curtain—"What's so funny?". Interpretation aside, audiences don't even see the same things. Among the peculiar perceptions of *Stunde Null* revealed during the Daily Dialogue with dramaturg Stefanie Carp, was that the work was full of Nazi impersonators. Here I suspect the audience member had brought some other performance with him and slipped it in like a contact lens. He also perceived the performance was half an hour too long and offered this opinion to the dramaturg as advice. This sounded rude to me, like saying someone's sentences contain too many syllables. Presumably such observations are based on some internal audience body clock which indicates the proper time to be accorded to a visiting theatre company from Hamburg. Though I didn't immediately respond to Saburo Teshigawara's *I Was Real—Documents*, I would not begrudge him one second of his duration. In fact, I was willing to wait all night to see whether this dancer's own idiosyncratic movement vocabulary would really add up to a choreography for a company of ten. This performance didn't deliver on the night but then the day after the performance, in a conversation at my door, a piece of it fell into place, so it takes time.

Watching Juliana Francis on stage watching the audience enter, I sensed her fright and ten minutes in, could almost smell a mix of hostility and empathy from the audience. She is a frenetic, loquacious performer who looks like she could just keep go-go-going forever, so complex is the experience she is unravelling. But, see, context can snatch an audience's attention. Talk is a problem with American performers working to Anglo-Saxon audiences. Americans have a reputation for talking too loud and too much and this can get in the way. In the post-show talk after one and a half hours of gruelling performance, Juliana Francis said that only on the advice of her mentor Reza Abdoh did she write an ending for this work. In *Go Go Go*, as the performer turned herself inside out, constantly on display for the audience, I sat forward and backward in my chair—as well as having the potential to be moved, an audience has its own

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kinesthetics, it moves. British-Nigerians in the audience for *Things Fall Apart* nodded throughout the performance. Even further into *Go Go Go*, I sensed that Juliana Francis had got inside us and was splitting us in two and that this was no bad thing. I don't think it's simply a matter of 'identification' (that particular audience response could do with a book) or personal connection with the material. No, I was on her side from the beginning and it wasn't the rawness of her revelations that pushed me away. I am more easily attracted to understatement, so this performance sometimes seemed over-wrought, over-acted, over-written, and most of all over-theatrical—she grabbed at costumes, wigs, scraps of music, visual tricks, lights, walk-ons, curtains, magic tricks, effects, video clips, grabs from Japanese movies, from *The Three Faces of...* Joanne Woodward, 50s sitcoms, advertising images—here some missing context to be guessed at by the audience. Juliana Francis grew up with images from popular culture which needed some translation—not much: benignly malevolent father figures like the Weiner King, Oscar Mayer are pervasive, though the information about Jerry Lewis's telethons which exploit and patronise the disabled while raising money for Muscular Dystrophy research, required greater leaps of the audience's imaginative powers. But audiences are imaginative athletes too.

What brought me forward on my chair, was the scale of this performance. In attempting to illuminate the damage of sexual molestation on the psyche and body of child and adult, Juliana Francis uses everything in her power, every trick, every tug at the audience to try to describe what Nancy Riley McVittie referred to later as something indescribable, unnameable. "Like an artichoke", said Juliana, you just peel and peel to get to the heart. She refers to her text as a skeleton, a map, a guide for a performance. She speaks of sharing rather than choreography, a desire to touch, to set off moments of recognition or understanding in the audience. She speaks to those who have been through the same experience and to those who have not. She talks about displaying herself for the audience and allowing herself minimal privacy on stage. She claims this work is not didactic and while I don't agree, it doesn't really matter because the depth of this performer's personal enquiry is inspiring, her writing so good and the performance so fevered that it forces this audience member to enter another's sense of time. Like much of the work offered at LIFT, this work requires the audience to respond in new ways. Though she projects fright in her Rapunzel persona at the beginning of *Go Go Go*, Juliana Francis says she loves watching the audience enter, noting their handbags and their coats, watching the way they sit. Here, she says, she feels she gets to know each one of us. I hope she could feel us breathing with her.

**Where do you come from? We come from here.**

**Part 1:** Cirque Ici, *Go Go Go*, *The North*, *The 7 Stages of Grieving*

**The LIFT body, Week 3: Keith Gallasch**

The title of this piece comes from De La Guarda speaking at a Daily Dialogue about the cultural desert of an Argentina in which their audiences, astonished at the work, assume that the company must come from elsewhere. The word that hooked me was 'here'. Whether in the name Cirque Ici or in a dialogue I had with an

Australian living in the 'here' and 'not-here' of English (see page 12) or in the pieces by Linda Marie Walker and Zsuzsanna Soboslay in this edition of *RealTime*, it began to resonate like some of the key words from the Daily Dialogues—real, euphoria, grace, generosity. The 'here' I want to consider now is the place of the audience in contemporary performance and in LIFT in particular. This is a companion piece to Virginia Baxter's observations about audience behaviour.

Michael Balint, an English psychoanalyst writing in the 50s, divided humans into lovers of movement (philobats) and cherishers of stasis (ocnophiles). Philobats are only happy travelling physically or emotionally between two points, they are restless and unhappy standing still and are, therefore, inclined to enjoy risk-taking between here and there. Their saturnine counterparts are stay-at-homes, bad travellers, safe if at one point only, here. A good example of the philobat is the trapeze artist or tightrope walker and the more extreme the condition, the greater the risk taken—the safety net is removed, for example. Some ocnophiles enjoy watching philobats, and in doing so exercise philobat fantasies and enjoy the thrill—as long as someone else is doing it for them. And some philobats need their ocnophile audience to register the reality of their condition, its impact on others. In the late 20th century, with its expanding and transforming vision of the body, there are more and more philobats, encouraged by riskier sports (bungee jumping, abseiling) and more thrills for sedentary ocnophiles (IMAX screens, steady-cams, virtual reality games). This is true too, to a degree, in current performance practices inside and out of theatre spaces.

Cirque Ici is intimate arthouse circus. In a very small, crowded tent, one performer, propelled by and commented on by a group of musicians *on the move* (they do not sit at one end of the tent but constantly frame the action), pushes the limits of his skill and safety for the length of the show. The risks don't look that big—the tent is not high enough—but the tension is almost unbearable in a routine performed barely a foot above the floor as the artist traverses the space in clogs treading atop wine bottles that he distributes as a path and collects as he goes. The tightrope walking climax to the evening sums up nicely the postmodern engagement with the machinery of circus routines—the setting up of the rope and its dismantling as performance. Stage machinery becomes, in turn, machines with performing lives of their own, sometimes lurching at you. This is personal circus, not so much a one man show as one man's circus and with a pervasive artistic vision. And it is very intimate, the source of its power is in being that close, to be that privileged as an audience.

Cirque Ici is not that other kind of intimate, 'confessional' performance, a label sometimes disparagingly applied to performances that do not disguise and filter their personal concerns into plot and characters or abstractions. Of course these works are invariably, and in their own way, as carefully distilled and constructed and self-censored as other works of art. *The North* and *Go Go Go*, for example, are emotional and theatrical polar opposites, but both are intimate and both insist that they are real. You look at them, they look at you. No fourth wall. No one pretends that you're not there. *The 7 Stages of Grieving* is an amalgam of



the actual and fiction and signals itself as real (real tears, photographs, dirt, ice, fire, true stories, direct address), it offers itself as evidence, it wants the audience to 'feel' the set, from their seats—it does not create an illusory space. William Yang offers you words sustained by seductive photographic images of the real; Juliana Francis plays herself as real and as a set of frightening personae actual, pop-cultural and mythic that enable her to liberate herself/selves from a psychological burden. For one audience member (speaking in a Daily Dialogue) the most powerful image in Francis' *Go Go Go* "was just you talking", a moment of direct address when Francis describes smashing her pubic bone in order to avoid sexual abuse as a child.

But knowing that these works are directly personal faces an audience with its own naked curiosity, potential embarrassment and (as Deborah Levy pointed out in a Daily Dialogue on *Go Go Go*) with the downside of the apparent generosity of the performer, narcissism. In this kind of work, the audience have to be prepared to be very near the performer, be addressed directly and looked in the eye (and sometimes more, a near naked go go dancer sits in their lap). The personal is popular in our age—the proliferation of talk shows, best-selling biographies, news of the not-so-private lives of the famous. But television and books do not offer that look.

Curiously though, the Real of these performances is borrowed, from other forms—the slide show, the lecture, the Go Go bar, traditional circus, cabaret—and the audience is framed to match. You are a theatre audience but you also occupy another imaginary space: there are moments in *Go Go Go* where you are treated like Go Go bar clientele; it is not just a voyeurism of watching but of becoming, you're part of the act, you're complicit, you're travelling into another space between you and another, possible you. Some of you won't feel safe. But essentially you are only addressed as participant, as confidante, as imaginary partner. It's a different matter when you share physical space with performers (shoving by, hugging you), or when you choose to allow your body to be moved and manipulated (*Oraculos*) or when you are chosen and must go with the performance (plucked into the air in *Periodo Villa Villa*). This is philobat territory—between the here of theatre and the here of something else. It might not be 'real', but for the philobat it feels real-er, for the ocnophile, too real. (See page 7 for Part 2)

#### A pattern of ones: Wesley Enoch

Cirque Ici, Clapham Common, June 16; *The North*, Battersea Arts Centre 17 June; *Go Go Go*, ICA, June 19

Is there such a thing as a one person show? Why if there is one person on stage performing should that be called a one person show?

An Australian funding body once commented that a one performer show should cost roughly one-third of a show which involved four performers.

LIFT '97 has already hosted three one performer shows (*The Geography of Haunted Places*, *The 7 Stages of Grieving* and

*Khol Do*). A cynic may give pragmatic financial reasons for this but when placed in relation to three works which opened this week, I believe a pattern begins to emerge. Though this week's offerings of Cirque Ici, *The North* and *Go Go Go* are not strictly one performer shows they highlight for me the role of collaboration and the relationships of not purely performer-based ensembles. This collection of works have their base in the excavation of skills and biographical material, raising issues of authenticity, the specific as funnel for the celebration of the universal, the role of the body as site for performance. As a creator, I am aware of the levels of collaboration and interaction that design, sound, lighting, text, direction and performance must undergo. It is interesting then to experience the favouring of one element of the performance, namely the performer, over the myriad of others.

In Cirque Ici the audience witnesses the skills of performer Johann Le Guillerm, but he shares the stage with four musicians, who have not been relegated to the click of a play button, instead playing live as an integral part of the tension and performance. The presence of the designer/sculptors is evident in a series of perpetual motion machines which act as punctuation points between human acts. These machines roll, spin and unfurl across the stage with a gleeful certainty, sometimes just missing the mark, showing their perfection through their faults. Each element strengthens the performance through logical expansion not just reiteration. The design provides an expansion of the themes of body as sculpture, body as machine and the tension as the inevitable is subverted and made dangerous. The performer is not just clothed in the design or accompanied by the music, he is in *simpatico* with them, though he remains the focus of our attention.

*The North*, too, is characterised by a partnership on stage with a musician. William Yang shares with us the story of his journey both physical and spiritual to his 'homeland'. Called a monologue with slides, William delivers his story in a measured fashion, accompanied by his slide images of people, history, place and object. The story is a gentle meander through thoughts and memories, an eclectic grab which accumulates meaning for an audience as the relationship between image, story and music grows. Performer/composer Colin Offord plays live on stage. The soundscape acting at times like a cinematic soundtrack and at others as an emotional rudder for the audience to read the text of stories and images. This is William's story but the stage is shared. Images, music and spoken word distilled into three separate elements simply laid out on stage. The relationships and pace of the work allows the audience to break through their own implied passivity and internalise the work.

*Go Go Go* is a dense piece from writer/performer Juliana Francis, based on personal experiences and stories of surviving sexual abuse, working in the sex industry and the social phenomena surrounding the care and abuse of the young. As the audience enters, Juliana is standing centre stage with a hair piece which extends up into the ceiling, the mythic 'white woman'. She is stripped of her protective coatings and is thrown to the ground. She moves through images and monologue with the aid of a 'stage hand' who enters the performing space to execute costume

changes, move props and reveal objects from behind white curtains which define the space. Three video monitors spew out images of Jerry Lewis telethons, images of old movies (dancing girls, idle conversations which in this context reveal their sinister meanings), a young boy in a wheel chair. The 'stage hand' wheels out a box; opening doors to reveal separated parts of the performer's body, a peep show. There is a distance on stage, a detachment which intrigues. Like a TV chat show we watch the grossness of human nature, saying "Thank God that didn't happen to me" but we are engrossed by the misery of others, made even more tantalising because we know it to be authentic. Maybe a ritualised social therapy, like a flu shot—taking in a little bit so as not to get the whole nasty virus. Recorded voices tell us how to feel, giving alternative readings to the text of performance. Two performers on stage, one for the audience and the 'invisible' other for her.

These three performances tap into biographical material and the specific skills of one performer but expose their underlying relationships/collaborations on the stage. To varying degrees this arbitrary selection of works show an integration of elements to create the whole, not necessarily with an implied hierarchy.

#### Loving the Peace: Gabriel Gbadamosi

*Periodo Villa Villa, De La Guarda, Three Mills Island, June 19*

It's the first time that I've seen any public event involving Argentinians since that drowning war when my sister and her children went in fear. Someone had daubed "Argies live here" in guttural, ugly paint on the side wall of their council flat. It felt good that De La Guarda and I waited until that government was out.

They hung like corpses, drenched and dredged up to the ceiling, or stood on temporary, rigged platforms under pouring water calling, calling, calling. I wept for them.

I saw women and men in civilian clothes (knickers, skirts, ties—subterfuge in mufti, you could shoot them as spies). And a world in whose *mores* I would like to live—they kissing and hugging strangers in the moment's trance of eye contact and desire. (The next moment we may have to kill.)

My friend had just made a film on concentration camp survivor, Simon Wiesenthal, when the doors closed on the claustrophobic crush and gas started coming from above. I turned to apologise and couldn't see her. They didn't make it easy on us. I wanted to call out, "I don't want to live here".

Then the room opened, and there was air, and we were loving the peace with the drowned waking above us and running through showers among us with (it's in the detail) their socks fallen around their ankles.

#### Untamed audience: Wesley Enoch

*Periodo Villa Villa, De La Guarda, Three Mills Island Studios, June 18*

The audience is crammed into a small space whilst the humming through the speakers grows to a drone and then a tune. We are illuminated by the reassuring exit signs; above us a paper ceiling defines the space as cramped, low, capped. Upward gaze; these words look very optimistic here. The vertical is the space for performance. The performance begins with the angelic/devilish sight of backlit sprites casting shadows on the ceiling. Balloons, toys, fluorescent splatter spots fill the paper with joyful play. They are above us, beyond the ceiling, in another world, but we have access to this world. The ceiling is removed. Removed is too passive a word; ripped, dragged, sliced by human missiles, making the world above our heads available to us. Tickertape pours down from the heavens.

After the storm cloud of paper has passed, the performers are precision drivers doing daring manoeuvres except with no cars, no roads and no helmets. WARNING: Do not attempt this at home. Six hundred people, all of us thinking we are as close as we can get, find the space quickly when water gushes from the ceiling. A childlike sense of watching a thunderstorm roll in over the ocean and breaking on the Land; the fear of destructive power, counter-balanced by excitement and relief. The dance and music engulf me. The performers now unleashed from their harnesses hold the audience, hugging, kissing, encouraging us to dance. The energy I want to unleash is being played out in the space above my head. Women running up the wall, this is my Batman fantasy. Drenched and dripping, they pound the rhythms. This is nightclub, rave, concert, theatre, spectacle. I have no head space for theory here. This performance would not be possible where I come from. In Queensland, at our request to burn a few leaves for *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, the authorities went ape-shit, at one moment threatening to close the show. The laws (internal and external) that govern us would require so much compromise, but here I revel in this moment. There is no danger here, no personal danger that threatens my body. The danger lies in what I will expect from the theatre of tamed lounge chairs and fake velvet curtains. Euphoria.

#### The Sky Is Falling In!: Indhu Rubasingham

*Periodo Villa Villa, De La Guarda, Three Mills Island Studios June 18*

Herded shuffling into a black box, hundreds of us pressed up against each other, told to move closer and closer so more bodies could enter the pen, I am fearful that now might be the time I discover I'm claustrophobic; full of anxiety about the possible implications of hundreds of people crammed in. Warned that the first fifteen minutes will be performed in darkness, it feels like going on The Black Hole ride of Alton Towers for the first time. Then a fairy tale world erupts above our heads. Lights hint at shadows of bodies moving, scurrying along, teasing us, reminding me of Peter Pan and hearing the story for the first time at six years old. Coloured balloons are popped, paint thrown onto the surface, transforming it into a magical star-lit sky. No fear exists



now, just child-like anticipation as we stare up to this wonderful world, all around me, gasps of wonder.

Then the sky rips apart, bodies fall through, mocking us. A larger world is revealed, magic rains down on us and the shadows turn into swinging, mischievous, dancing acrobats. The music pulsates, strobe lights flicker and water gushes. The passionate performers join us, leave us, run along walls, stamp and pound drums, fill us with pure pleasure and excitement. I want to be one of them.

One friend described the evening as one of the best since 1990, the year he stopped taking drugs. Another complained it lacked narrative and that comment seemed to me to show just how obsessed we are in British theatre with narrative drive. What excited me was the sheer pleasure, spectacle and thrill offered by these highly energised, sexual performers. The work's unpredictability was stimulating. *Periodo Villa Villa* was, above all, an experience to be shared with hundreds of people. Along with everyone else in the black box, I danced, clapped and laughed.

#### Here and not-here—mysteries of intimacy:

Zsuzsanna Soboslay

*I was Real—Documents*, Saburo Teshigawara and Karas, Queen Elizabeth Hall, June 19.

These are documents of dusk—the finest hour for blurring objects, nightmares, dreams. Day or night? Real or unreal? This is a land where spiked grass softens and doubt is all.

A terrace. The parterre moves, a few furry figures like night animals rearrange themselves. Night birds crackle. Matter becomes non-matter, sliding past the eyes like sound.

Wings stutter, hieratic movements, this is a dusk that crawls. Trumpet notes slide a modal tune, rising, falling down the path.

Four men enter, soundlessly, bend down to pick up little soft sailor-like hats from the ground. They wear them, remove them, exit silently. They have hardly been here: one, two, then three more. One, then three more. Night slides further in. This bending becomes a motif: to enter and to bend, supplicant, an honouring, a humbling, the memory of a role. Pate vulnerable with the neck low, bare to the axeman. A bad dream.

The furry things are pulled from stage, the furry people go. Space slides open. Space listening. A single white figure enters, the tune becomes a violin. The way white glows at dusk. This whiteman [sic] dances like leaves stirring; his body is a tap dripping, his body is sound, the movement coming from where memory tricks the darkness. Watch lubricant oiling the joints of a machine. His shoulders distinctively fluid—a trade mark in Teshigawara's body that the other dancers do not quite achieve. This coathanger of the body: neck, shoulders, upper spine, the body thence hanging from it. Arms, soft tails without elbows, or whipping swords. Except Emio, the Italian, whose muscles remain solid as he turns. Then whitebody rustles, catches fire, prances across the stage as if on scorching coals.

Six bodies turn as if a flock of pigeons sweeps the ground.

On the floor, opalesque, an odalisque curves in on herself, her translucent skin almost peeled to the veins. Still. Another woman sweeps, turns, drops poignantly into a sideways curve. *Let sleeping figures lie*. Three men wheel in their own beds—strange beds braced with roll-bars; lie on them half-prone, neither able to quite sleep or die. I suddenly think of my father in hospital, cancerous, wan, legs crossed, in dressing gown. This is the place between diagnosis and death, between knowing where you are and may soon no longer be. Two thin black figures enter from the wings like insects into a dream.

The three beds line up across the stage, ignited with neon: they create a tiered platform for a small girl in white to run across. Below, a black-skinned one drags through on elbows, shadowing her like a fast reptile. Back and forth and through. She seems impossibly naive.

Switch to the projection of a circle crossed with diagonals, and marked by numbers. There is a strong colour here (I can't remember which—is it green?). Four bodies marking themselves parallel to the lines. A memory of a calculation, an order, a theorem explaining the world.

Thence, four columns form on the left side of a blank wall: one figure enters, bending slightly, straightening. He passes through a colonnade. A sanatorium, near dawn, the tubercular hour; the colonnade changes hues, as if this passing takes place over days. There is a coughing and hacking and spluttering, old blood stains faded on the far wall. Others have died before, but the passing takes place alone.

The columns disappear: there is just a man here, humming. He calls, the sound ripp(l)ing from and through the whole body. Echoes over mountains. He tries to square himself, mark the diagonal, stretch across; the struggle to repeat is great, but something else comes. Where is he? Here, or on the other side? He keeps screaming, wailing amongst vague scraps of news and voices pulled down telegraph-wires. He becomes outside of himself. A brighter yellow: the edge is sharper as the edge draws nearer. The ramifications of the wail amplify. I am no-one's daughter here. I find in this space, watching, I belong to no-one.

From here, however, the dance loses me. The wails become excessive—in number and in volume. There is a nightmare some people have of locusts eating their brains. I have one of having my organs bleached with sound. Perhaps I simply stop functioning here; but no, I have not disappeared: I see that sound no longer threads through the body: it simply screams. And the screaming goes on and on...

From here on, the piece loses me. As the whiteman flows forward, the muscled Italian, black-clad, appears going in the opposite direction, as if they are spirits sweeping/swapping paths. He is a hefty spirit, though: his solid body troubles me. After all this exploration of dusk, space, dissolve, this is a very odd place for

the body to become heavy. Other bodies enter, dance, touch, disperse and wail. The wailing is on-voice, but not pulled through the body. It is loud and pitched and on one level. This levels me right out. The moments when dancers touch seem heavy, not vulnerable. The Italian holding the girl slips away, is replaced by every other dancer (who also wails, mouth to mouth, scream to scream) and then returns.

"With voice you can find distance," says Teshigawara after the show. So can you with movement, movement breathed so in the body that, looking, I am there, breathing in the muscle, the fluid in the bones. (My lover thinks to me, come. I come: the asking is so small. Distance crawls with silences before sounds.) These shouts push me away, the shouts and proximal bodies render the touching bodies still. It is a very strange place, this. I am in a hard-edged, don't-know-where-I-am here, as opposed to the soft one before where almost nothing has been everything.

To end this section, dancers mark space with a stamp. It is starting to feel clever. Lights snap out; lift again to another dusk, to a clothed odalisque with her companion, both coy. Occasional bird-like movements twitch to the faded sky. Light squares and fades, applause ambiguous.

#### When one is little, when one begins: Linda Marie Walker

*I was Real—Documents*, Saburo Teshigawara and Karas, Queen Elizabeth Hall, June 19.

There is much to write about in the Teshigawara/Karas work *I was Real—Documents*. Like: time, space, air, breath, doubt, image, calling, composition, improvisation. I'm not sure what a 'good question' is, but I know it's directly related to the way the body moves, to its habits and intentions (see *Oráculos* review, p. 3, RealTime 1). Saburo Teshigawara mentioned, in his aftershow talk, "the importance of having a good question to work with", and he requests this of his dancers. The question, like the wish, is a serious endeavour, it can be the grid through which one sees the world. Both need care, attention, and love, and with the wish comes a warning: beware what you wish (for it might come true).

Air is a question for this work, and so is time, both invisible. And how one makes space with them, with the mouth and the movement of 'is'. 'Is' is the *now* that waits, is unavoidable by fact of birth, of the life one leads, lush, complex, Real (Karas's every move pushes the minor limits of Now's tone, letting themselves go forward: into the next moment). The lungs draw in air, the heart beats, blood flows. The flesh find its way. How then does one tell the 'is'? ("We are here to lose," writes Hélène Cixous.) How does one write it? When it's the immediate time of 'being' and 'becoming'. It's ringing a friend: "My relationship with a friend has become so simple and free that I often telephone her and, when she picks up the receiver, I explain I am not in the mood for conversation. So I say goodbye, replace the receiver and occupy myself with something else." (Clarice Lispector)

This is to do with never being able to start or stop speaking. And speaking here is the want of the body 'to-say', in whatever form: dance, text, song, etc. Calling: wanting to tell at the time, in the

time, while far away. Even if in the lover's arms. A lasting image from De La Guarda, and there were many, is of the man standing under the stream of water—the deluge, taking on the deluge faithfully, it crashing on his head, his hand raised—calling. Just standing there, alone, calling. The call, the cry, from wherever it comes, is unbearably sad. It is an extreme energy, it is exhausting, and carries with it a need to be called upon, to hear another's call. There's no escape from the space or the time of the call. In *I was Real* the 'music' began as a slow hard beat and gradually sped up until it was a high pitched squeal. The call marks waiting, and waiting marks patience; calling maps the underside of patience: terror. It is more terrifying to be struck dumb.

*I was Real—Documents* begins with death, with what appears death-like, with the solidity of stillness and silence, both of which are paid homage. Homage to the time when air is no longer enough. The last image, or document, is one of life, but life so quiet that perhaps we are seeing the space of a single breath over and over. And in-between (what may be breathing in and breathing out) are the other documents, one after the other, in various forms, shapes, rhythms, tones, of how it is to be alone, living (only once do two people come together 'to dance', or touch each other, to that point where one thinks 'yes, now they will melt differently'; instead, they stand there, hands on each other, faces close, calling, replying, but not receiving). And living at the exact time of everyone else, twitching, convulsing, collapsing, re-arranging. Movement as graffiti, movement like the mime-artists near Covent Garden Station, movement as trance, excess, engagement (both De La Guarda and Teshigawara draw their inspiration from youth culture, from the layered languages of clubs, from particular beats and repetitions). The movements are small and frantic, and slow and tender. Everything to do with the limbs, with the body falling, breaking, parting, learning fluidity. These documents are improvised, in the same way that we, in the everyday, do not plan the next moment, it comes, it is done, and we are already in the next and the next. Improvisation is the only way to attend to the 'stream' that time is, to the multiple-tense of past, present, future. This is 'the real' of doubt, of the unknown.

Overall *I was Real—Documents* is composed in the way music is, as discrete movements, that sometimes have obvious passages between, and sometimes abruptly end, so that two pieces just join. One has to watch as one listens, remembering that one plays a piece of music again and again. And that repetition is a generous act. It gives the chance to see again, like sports replays, like reading the novel for the fifth time. Repetition makes room, pushes out borders, creates the plaza, the plateau, where one gathers with the crowd. Repetition is a relentless and resistant way of 'speaking'. It is a force. Calling is repetition. Although only one of Teshigawara's documents uses the 'real' calling voice, the idea of calling seemed central to each of the others. The call is bare, honest, imperfect. And this is because when it happens there is no way around it, and nowhere else to be.



Where do you come from? We come from here.

Part 2: *Periodo Villa Villa*, Daily Dialogues

The LIFT body, Week 3: Keith Gallasch

In De La Guarda's *Periodo Villa Villa*, a work essentially about physical experience for performer and audience, the audience is partly framed in a traditional circus audience role—looking up, watching vertiginous acts on ropes and wires—but also as participant in a dance club. The circus and club spaces are magically transformed into something else but they are fundamental. The audience's two roles are merged from time to time spatially and physically as performers enter the audience, suddenly hugging, dancing with, kissing and abducting individuals into the space above. This is a shared space, ideal for those ocnophiles ready to cross over into the uncertain joys of the philobats—speed and movement and shifting roles as dancers become flyers become drummers. But as Virginia Baxter points out, there are those who watch on the margins, or who, like visiting director Nigel Jamieson, didn't feel the risk but just see the beauty of a work that generates images. Different bodies, different reponses, but as with *La Feria* and *Oraculos* there are different experiences, different choices on offer for our bodies.

We have long experienced actors' and performers' bodies as fluid, in their acts of transformation, of risk, of sharing; but in these contemporary works they share their performing space with us, touch and feed us, momentarily abduct us, speak eye to eye with us, cast us in roles, shape us in space, *our* bodies become fluid. We do everything short of talking back. In the case of Los Furas dels Baus in Australia in 1989, young men in the audience met machismo with machismo, throwing lumps of meat back at the performers, defying chain saws. De La Guarda said that their motivation is to create an experience for an audience and to encourage that audience to express that experience (easier in a dance club where everyone really wants to dance). They also want to transform public spaces, a reminder that one of LIFT's impulses is site-specific—artists responding to spaces and transforming themselves and the audience in the process in acknowledgement of the meanings of a place, whether it be Trinity Buoy Wharf or Mary Ward House.

Early in the Daily Dialogues, someone asked where can theatre get its belief from to attract and sustain an audience. Edwin Shirley, one of the developers of the site, showed us RealTimers around the Three Mills Island Studios, venue for *Periodo Villa Villa* but also, significantly, of the filming for a 3D-IMAX version of *The Nutcracker*. In the face of the Real of the dance club, sport, risk leisure activities and the Virtual Reals of film and the new technologies—all sites of transformed bodies and choice of bodies (whether for philobat or ocnophile)—it is performance which is already showing its own engagement with the fluid contemporary body in works ranging from the visceral De La Guarda to the quietly and personally reflective northern Queensland Asian-Australian body in *The North*. You don't go to see a play, you choose a performance in which you will play a role, be framed, choose a body, be chosen. In all the discussion about performer generosity in the daily dialogue on *Go Go Go*, it occurred to me that performance invites and requires an audience generous

with their sympathies (as confidante) but also with their bodies.

Whether the expanded role for audience will embrace a new theatre audience is difficult to say. Whether performance can offer belief is a complex matter. I'm reminded of Neelam Man Singh Chowdhry and Maya Rao speaking in a Daily Dialogue about the challenge for secular theatre in India to develop a power, a spirituality, to transcend fundamentalism, and of David Gale (formerly of Lumiere and Son) in the session on De La Guarda, speaking of the power of *Periodo Villa Villa* residing in the performers' behaving like the classical gods of polytheism, at once demons and angels, tricksters, unlike the god of monotheism who must be loved at all cost. It is unfair to performance and theatre to expect too much in times like these, but to recognise their capacity for change and transformation, the fluidity of performers and audience alike, is to generate new expectations in an era when utopian vision has been lost to pragmatism and fundamentalism. Perhaps that's why some of the Daily Dialogue themes sound optimistically transcendent—generosity, grace, euphoria—if a touch high Anglican; where, for example, is ecstasy?

**Earth, Water, Air: Richard Murphet**

*Things Fall Apart*, adapted by Biyi Bandele from Chinua Achebe's novel, West Yorkshire Playhouse at The Royal Court Downstairs, June 12; *Periodo Villa Villa*, De La Guarda, Three Mills Island Studios, June 18

Part 1: *Earth/Ground/Land*.

In *Things Fall Apart* it's not Mother Earth, more a masculine territory the land we see: land to be fought over, land to invade or to protect from invasion, land to kill on or be killed on. It is the land of heroic action and this is the tale of one such hero who dies when faced with the infiltration (it doesn't even have the character of an invasion, clothed as it is in the garb of Christianity) of whites into his land and the souls of his people. Just as evident throughout as the intercultural battle is the intra-cultural one, the sense of stress and armouring within a culture that believes that 'affection is a sign of weakness'. There aren't many women in this tale, it's fathers and sons and warriors and tribal elders. The ground rules for survival are decidedly masculine ones.

It is one of the strengths of this production that many of the key male characters are played by women and that the machismo is tempered throughout by the female energy. The 'hero' was described as 'tragic' many times in the Daily Dialogue. The lack of the female aspect within the character of the culture we are shown is finally the tragic flaw in the central character himself, as he ignores the advice he gave to others, reacts with violence and is forced to suicide. What else could he have done, one wonders, it is the ground of his upbringing? It makes him admirable in the old mould but finally not very interesting, or relevant in a contemporary world (who needs more heroes?).

In the Daily Dialogue, the writer said that his first instinct had been to focus not on Okonkwo but on his son. This young man is estranged from the ethics of the clan when his father murders his adopted son. His conversion to Christianity is as much a rejection

of these ethics as it is an embracing of another faith. I agree with the writer's early impulse. Within this character, played with beautiful restraint and inner tension by one of the women, lie the seeds for a deeper investigation of cultural invasion.

Sitting down in the front row of the Royal Court, covered in the dust kicked up by the dancing and the fighting, watching the sweat streaking down the sweating bodies, I'm impressed by the vigour of the cast, their joy at telling this 'tragic' tale. That joy communicates and is what carries the show.

At the same time, the irony of the whole event cannot help but hit home. This little patch of dirt, dragged in to represent pre-colonised Nigeria, packed into the tiny stage in the heart of the colonising country, ends up evoking only through its absence the untamed, unroaded, unflattened, uncertain land. Likewise, the tale itself feels limited by the modernist genres of western novel and drama within which it has developed. In the Daily Dialogue a couple of Nigerian women spoke of having Achebe's novel and Soyinka's theatre shoved down their throats at school. They felt that this adaptation may make the novel come alive for current Nigerian schoolchildren. I hope so. Invigorating as it is, the whole venture feels slightly out of date for a postcolonial age.

#### Part 2: Water/Storm/Jungle.

"No longer a theatrical accompaniment of colonial invasion, a knot in the linear thread of progress, it is understood as a gathering-together, as a local event, a convergence of elements latent throughout the region. A highly-charged pressure-point within the meteorological regime, it slopes away infinitely subtly towards the plain blue sky. Its energy is never dissipated, only discharged and condensed preparatory to subsequent evaporation and reformation." This is Paul Carter in *The Lie Of the Land* describing the phenomenon of the storm. It could well be a description of De La Guarda's *Perioda Villa Villa*. We converge in the warehouse complex on Three Mills Island, we are gathered together ('packed' is the less polite term) into a low ceilinged space within which we look in wonder (and some neck pain) at the light and shadow show above us whilst we wait in dread anticipation to be drenched (we have been warned by the publicity). When the sky finally breaks, the smoke pours down, the figure drops headfirst into our midst, grabs one of us and disappears again into the clouds above, we are prepared for the deluge.

This is the jungle, crowded, hot, dangerous, highly erotic and very, very wet. Bats (or are they Dorothy's flying monkeys?) swoop down from on high then up again to clutch onto the railings of the scaffolding that looms above us, sometimes they take another of us with them; a man stands shrieking under a down-pour with the power of a waterfall (I know his ecstasy); six figures dance with frenzy on a platform amongst us as the water drenches them (and us); a woman is flung horizontally again and again with increasing velocity into a tarpaulin as she hangs ten metres above ground; a man runs flat out on the horizontal around the walls of the 15 metre high balcony as the rest of the group beat out his rhythm on drums and horns.

On and on the music pounds as the wet air is filled. *Perioda Villa*

*Villa* opens the floodgates of terror, wonder and desire. "Its energy is never dissipated". Its performers are as charged as lightning. The audience is electrified. This is not deep theatre but like a storm it clears the air of the shit that flies around. At its worst it's cheap thrills. In this show, it does feel like the preparation for renewal.

Part 3: *Air/Space/Dream*: Teshigawara's *I Was Real*—Documents. Next Issue.

#### Apart: Indhu Rubasingham

*Things Fall Apart*, Royal Court Upstairs June 20; *Stunde Null*, Queen Elizabeth Hall, June 12

*Stunde Null* and *Things Fall Apart* are two pieces that examine history, one Germany's, the other Nigeria's. There the similarities end. In *Stunde Null*, we are given an expression of repression, a climate of sterility—a critical analysis of a particular moment in political history. In *Things Fall Apart*, we take a sweeping journey through the history of the Igbo people and their fall because of the white man's invasion. We are told the history of Africa before its encounter with Europe, together with Home Truths. *Things Fall Apart* is celebratory, personal, proud, invoking the history of a people. *Stunde Null* is a dark, cynical, satirical look at the German condition. The contrast in spaces is vast. *Stunde Null* is performed in the massive, anonymous auditorium of the Queen Elizabeth Hall, in the sterile, concrete jungle of the South Bank. *Things Fall Apart* is crammed into the hot, sweaty, intimate space of the Royal Court in the middle of busy, loud Leicester Square.

*Things Fall Apart* tells stories of the clans of the Igbo people in present day Nigeria, of their lives before the white man (and they don't mean Albino) and their subsequent oppression through European invasion. Personal stories are told through song and dance and a variety of storytelling devices including narration and multi role-playing by the actors. *Stunde Null* examines a collective psyche, where the characters gradually become anonymous and uniform. It is their *function* that is important. We are taken through a training school for politicians led by the matriarch, Mrs Zero Hour. These politicians are at once little boys and clowns. *Stunde Null* explodes the myth of deception that Germans have felt as victims since World War II. *Things Fall Apart* tries to tell stories of humanity and denial of pity. These people are not victims, but a proud and complex race with their own cultural identities. The cast are beautiful, strong, energised, physical performers. In *Stunde Null*, the performers are just as highly skilled but playing unattractive, unfit, pale-skinned, bespectacled figures of fun.

Surprisingly, I find *Stunde Null* engaging. I'm disturbed by watching these pathetic figures behaving like adolescent boys craving power for themselves, desperate for approval from Mrs. Zero Hour, learning how to deceive the public, rehearsing their public rituals (cutting ribbons, walking on red carpets, shaking hands). Their world is closed, isolated. The performance is repetitive and forgettable. These little boys want to be grown men, but have no sense of the journey they must take to reach there.



Though we laugh at them, their destiny is to rule our lives without thought or care, to become anonymous and controlling. We despise them but we must fear them.

I feel strangely distant from *Things Fall Apart*. Next to me, two members of the audience who are Igbo, finish the actors' lines with them. I cannot know what they share. I do not feel their excitement nor their sense of recognition at what they see. They tell me they know the book backwards and feel that this production is a true representation. They complain that some of the songs and dances are not authentic, which spoils the production for them. And I question again (see *RealTime 2*) this need for authenticity. For them their complaint is a valid point. Here is a piece purporting to represent their culture but which does not quite do so. I don't know any more where this line of authenticity should be drawn. In the case of this work, I would not know the difference. I find the dancing and singing exciting but remain strangely removed and am unmoved by the dramatic content. I want to read the book.

**I am expecting, she said: Linda Marie Walker**

*The North*, William Yang, Battersea Arts Centre, June 17

Often, perhaps always, we expect too much. We want, as if it were possible, everything from an event, whatever it might be: meal, film, play, talk; we imagine that it will be complete somehow, in itself, of itself. Satisfying us, completing us. A compelling symmetry. Events promise us too much, too, as they need us, we are part of them. We willingly go, seduced by language. We want this love affair. We want this pregnancy.

Yet, without exception, the event, the voice of the event, is partial. It's not the ground, the horizon, the sky. Instead it overflows with images, some small and fleeting, others large and intense. And in-between are spaces of all dimensions and dynamics: failure, disaster, mistake, boredom, chance, silence, etc. These spaces or openings—where, remembering ourselves, we dwell (we dwell in/on them)—appear loud and clear. And we appear loud and clear inside them, they occupy us, absorb us. We come to these places as if touched by them, their beauty perhaps, our shock or surprise or annoyance or disappointment. Perhaps we know something. (Saburo Teshigawara said, in his aftershow talk, "there are no mistakes"). There are moments, and the future-continuous, the 'is'. Members of De La Guarda said something similar: that they learn night to night, venue to venue, that places of failure are places of invention and renewal.)

Sometimes we compare one event with another, or imagine we've seen the event before, in the 60s or 70s. And this is an erasure, allowing us to move away quickly, to think we have it figured out—forgetting that it is the 90s, and there are dance clubs, say, where entire nights are composed of video (recorded and live), performance, interactive computing, dj-ing, dance, drugs). Still, we are an event before an event, readable via our speech/acts, and it's now, here, today, amongst particular people.

A body performs for another body. Why? William Yang stands alone speaking to us about the North. His voice is personal, his

body is 'William'. Sometimes it is strained, articulating deliberately, other times it is relaxed, more 'at home', residing with him, rather than alongside him. This voice is meant for 'me', and I believe it. It is believable. A strange word, that one, and not intended as 'truth'. It's not that simple. Instead it's something about sound and movement, about the tenuous threads between content and context, and process and product. As the 'between' is visible and knowable, even though longing for seamless 'experiences' makes evading 'between' possible. There is something almost physical between the two 'voices', something performing, that makes me stare, worry. Makes me watch 'William', not the screen.

A work is irreducible, and incomplete. A person, I/you, is present, and elsewhere. Perhaps I am paying scant attention, drifting off to some other pleasure/trouble. And so, where or when a work tries to complete itself, tries to tell me exactly how to interpret or feel, forcing me into line, then I am stubborn and restless. The music did this in *The North*, not continually, but enough to over-determine, for me, what were already determined and risky moments (like the image of the bird soaring), constructing a didactic edge. The music, though, is an amazing part of this show, composed and performed by Colin Offord, and played on an instrument called the Great Island Mouthbow. Offord's voice too was beautiful. It left one wanting more. Just as Yang's relaxed voice ('William') does.

Each of the parts which form *The North*—story, voice, bodies, slides, music—are finely separate. Crucially, they parallel Yang's method of storytelling, his way of beginning again, somewhere, or with someone else (going to another relative, or to one we've met before), like the wide divide between North Australia and North China, this negotiating of space; and this space is where he lives, and where his story comes from. This is the story of the story. When this is filled-in then I, as listener, am redundant, as the beauty of finish, is just that, a glorious locked door, displayed.

Photographs are wonderful things, mysterious documents, common, and magical because of that. Yang's slides are simple, direct; yet those of his family hold secrets that he and us will never know. The composite images of the land are familiar, and this familiarity made me long for home. Coming from a small town in the South of Australia, I recognized the changes which occur with time, especially to the 'family house', that building which keeps, still, imaginatively, one's first hopes and despairs. This remembering, this going back, raking up, is both difficult and necessary. The image of the stand of ghost gums was beautiful and the image of their burning was tragic.

The stories that we tell each other about ourselves, and the ways in which we listen, both to ourselves and to others, makes 'community', or, is a way of making community. It takes a long time to say who one is, who one might be, and was once; it comes bit by bit (it's like not being able to summarize the land that I was born in, I can say this and that, but you would have to wait forever, and during that time you would tell me about your land), and is mutable, resilient, contrary. As if each sentence, each uttered

sound, is a world. One begins again and again, stuttering, stumbling, changing this and that. Sometimes it is there to see, like going to Ellsworth Kelly's retrospective at the Tate Gallery, watching how he persists, painting and painting, telling and telling (the same story, different, revised), until the last room, now, where colours float.

Yang/Offord, De La Guarda, Teshigawara/Karas, and Juliana Francis (I love all this work), have reminded me of 'expectations', of how we, the audience gossip, and of the poetics that each of us brings to the work. And how these are always provisional, yet strong, inevitable, and necessary. That there is the moment in which the event occurs, and this is, in the case of the performers I have mentioned, so acutely present that it is unrepeatable. They have reminded me that I write.

#### A Sharpened Wit: Gabriel Gbadamosi

*The North*, William Yang, Battersea Arts Centre, June 18

William Yang is a wonderful lecturer. You hear every word he says and there is nothing you do not understand, however far it may be from your experience or imagination. For a Black British person it chimes beautifully (his voice rises at times like a swinging bell—it tolls for me): he is an Australian in a Chinese body, a Taoist and ironist, a delightfully waspish commentator on things Chinese and Australian and public and personal.

His delivery is formal, restrained—in bow tie and dee-jay—a gentlemanly combination of the Westernised and Oriental. His voice has a dry Australian wit, biting into the (God forbid) preconception that such a body could not possibly have shared a northern outback upbringing with eastern European immigrants. To a backdrop of slides (he is a prize-winning photographer with no fear of dying bitterly ignored), he takes you on a journey from termite-mounds outback to oriental rock gardens. He is terribly upfront, and apologises for any discomfort with a wry personableness that makes it impossible not to like him. Out in his public persona, he never gives you his back, but can't resist a little bit of side: *Good! I don't have to see you again...*

The angle of vision is important. He recounts an early tale of southern folk from his northern fastness. Of a man who shaved every day of the week. A tale of soft folk. But when the lights came up, alongside his microphone stand was an image of his lecture notes: a shaving mirror angled to see the images behind him. All that time he had been preening himself, looking at images of people and landscape in the formation of William Yang. He is enjoying his body, its jokes, its *trompe l'oeil*, its narrative economy, its discreet charm, its bristling wit. He deserves to hold himself in high regard: he holds a knife at his throat—one slip and the blood of China flows from his veins, a moment's inattention and he falls from his own esteem. I never saw anything so beautiful or so finely judged about the person or the place.

"Why," I ask Bev, who gave me my first job in theatre, "can't we do that?" "It starts," she says, nodding, "with the imagination." I ask William Yang if he cultivates a relationship with the land in

"a flourishing garden" like his parents. He dismisses the question with a cut of his hand. I trespassed; the piece is poised, and in balance. I caught a flash of the blade. "It starts," she says, "with the imagination."

#### An angle on agendas: Richard Murphet

*Stunde Null*, Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg, directed by Christoph Marthaler, Queen Elizabeth Hall, June 12

Every night when I return from watching a LIFT show there they are, on the telly, dominating the news waves, and the following morning puffing out the headlines, this clutch of Tory politicians wrangling for control of their failed party. They mouth the same clichés, they condemn others for the actions they do themselves, they express shock and horror with one breath and vow friendship with the next, they bed down with their enemies. What do they really expect us to believe? They lie, they know they lie as they lie, and they must know we know. And the media is complicit in this constant rending of language and meaning. They make the show of attempting to reveal, they push so far but they never never tip the bucket. Someone needs to tip the bucket. *Stunde Null* does so. *Stunde Null* is not about 'German guilt', it's about political chicanery, it's about rescuing language from its abasement at the hands of those who undermine its meaning. Uproariously, it's about taking politics seriously by ripping the shit out of the practitioners of political rhetoric.

Politicians have been attacked with laughter and corroded with irony since Aristophanes. Laughter in that form is a revolutionary force. It refuses to accept the world on the terms that the politicians or the daily media present it to us. It turns the world upside down, allows us another way of looking at it. It's the mad laughter of the carnival (which releases the thrilling, turbulent energy of De La Guarda). For too long our stages and screens have been dominated by wound-down versions of Roman comedy—the comedy of situation, which may flirt with taboos but finally leaves the world as it is. (It is a comedy mocked in *Stunde Null* by the hysterical laughter of the Politicians at the recurring thought that "our wives are having a really wild time"). *Stunde Null* is Aristophanic savagery let loose in a Platonic school for orators. Its humour is multi-faceted. The rhetoric is ridiculed by completely emptying it of meaning. Sonorous gobbledygook is piled up: "tattered over severed roots", "a leap into infinity", "the ark drifts toward the mountain", "cast out of the playpen by those who despise us," and again and again "That is good! That is good!". In one sustained piece these clichés are set amongst clichés of nature, teenage sex and childhood ("I need to do a jobby"). The tell-tale gap between word and action (like the politician on telly who scratches his neck just before he lies) is here the gap between the men who would be adults and the naughty boy mentality that pervades: bullying, picking your nose, comparing cock size, telling dirty jokes etc. This school is a primary school run by Miss Zero Hour who is teacher and mum and nurse and the object of pubescent desire. The very emblems of power are isolated, deconstructed and rehearsed as if part of a Phys. Ed. class: cutting the tape, waving the hand, projecting the image, the handshake and smile at camera, and always the convincing tone of the 'visionary' speech.



Recently in Australia, the prime minister gave the keynote address at the Reconciliation Convention: a three day symposium which attempted to move forward the practical steps necessary to reconcile the Indigenous peoples and the post 1788 settlers. Simultaneous with this was the release of a report on the Stolen Children, the systematic, enforced removal of Aboriginal children from their families in order to place them in the hands of state or church. Prime Minister Howard was expected in his address to give an apology on behalf of the Australian nation for this genocidal policy. He refused to do so and his speech was an object lesson in oratorical avoidance. At its most serious level *Stunde Null* is about such avoidance. "I am not here to express remorse," asserts one of the politicians when he finally gets to the point of making his speech. Another speaker is unable to say the word "war", yet another falls into a maelstrom of intercultural gibberish, possessed by what it is he cannot say. Their speeches often encourage us to reflect and remember in order to move on ("getting there is our thing"), but when they themselves pause and reflect, the memories that invade them are of the German romantic songs that are the heartbeat of nationalism. These unexpected pauses (like the aphasia that overcomes two of the men mid-speech) are theatrically welcome rhythmic breaks to the onslaught, but within them the irony does not let up. *Stunde Null* is thorough in its demolition job on political pomposity and hypocrisy right down to the silly slapstick bed routines at the end.

A friend of mine is of the opinion that there is no such thing as a hidden agenda—it's all there to be seen, you just have to look from the right angle. *Stunde Null* does so.

#### Open house: Virginia Baxter

*Preliminary Hearing: an inquiry into the loss of Mary Ward House story*, 5 Tavistock Place, London WC 1H June 21, 6pm

Dislocated in an unfamiliar neighbourhood, I almost lost the Mary Ward building, coming to it circuitously instead, up the garden path. This is a work of painstaking detail designed for an intimate audience who gradually piece together parts of the history of this 'lost' place from evidence gathered and presented by two young English theatre-makers, Ewan Forster and Christopher Heighes. In this performance, assisted by Sarah Dawson, Nicola Malin and Patrick Driver, they offer the umbrella-ed audience a witty performance created in and around the garden of this house, constructed from the evidence of their investigations within it.

This is the second of what Forster and Heighes call their 'reanimations of principled buildings' (their first, entitled *The Glossary* was created in 1994). *The investigation into Mary Ward House* was presented over six hour-long performances, each one culminating in an address by an expert witness (architect, biographer, historian). The work forms the first part of their theatrical critique of the building, a prologue to a larger work on the same site planned for 1999.

The artists see Mary Ward House as a forgotten link in London's social history. For them, the building is extraordinary, not only because the prolific Victorian novelist Mary Ward helped to inspire it and her popular fiction finance it, but because many

aspects of modern welfare and education were established there. Designed in the Arts and Crafts style by architects Dunbar Smith and Cecil Brewer, the building possesses a unique architectural narrative designed to engage the mind and activate the imagination. "It is a building hopeful of the future, not merely a monument to the past, grand by aspiration, not design; architecture as event, as theatre."

In this performance, the evidence is transformed into a series of exhibits, some simply positioned, such as items 30a, 30b, 30c—colour coded maps of London Poverty, in garden beds; another, "Mr Wicksteed's Astigmatism", is performed to the left of Item 35a-35c, "Various Vegetables Deprived of Light"; Item 26b, the studio of Smith and Brewer, architects of the building, is constructed and installed at the end of the garden. The enquiry presents evidence to the audience from platforms, one built around Item 28—an ancient ring-dated London plane tree. Evidence deals directly with the building—a clerk hangs out of windows as an investigator reads from an inventory: "Six bathroom taps", "Here", "White China Wash Basin", "Not seen". Evidence radiates to take in related issues: a woman gives evidence on the practice of Morris dancing; a 14 year old girl gives a passionate account of the practices of British explorers in Australasia ("You do know, miss, that you may choose to deliver your evidence on videotape?"). Later we are led through the garden gate, past chalked words on stepping stones, past Items 20-30b (a branch from a tree, each twig numbered separately) into the gymnasium where educational commentator, Keith Cranwell addresses us more formally on the play-centre movement to which Mary Ward made an important contribution.

Opened in 1898, weekly attendance at the Mary Ward Centre was sometimes as high as 1480 adults and 800 children. Local working class, middle class and professional people sharing the communal cultural and educational activities the settlement offered. By the time I left the building, walked across the floor where 200 children in iron-shod boots had played loopy-loo, passed the blue-tiled fireplace where Mary Ward read *The Iliad* aloud on Friday nights (anything to stop the children "loafing"), I had re-discovered my sense of place and happily found the house in question.

**The sound of one fly buzzing: an Australian speaks to Keith Gallasch about 'becoming' British.** Part 3 of "New images, new bodies".

Bar Italia (a home away from home), Frith Street, Soho. A meeting with Australian artist Lee Paterson. I ask her how the assimilation process is going after 18 months of being here. (In a faxed continuation of the exchange she replaces 'assimilation' with 'infection'.) I ask about her body and we quickly turn to speech, but without losing the body. (Someone asked me when will I get over this preoccupation with the body that is elemental to contemporary performance and performance art. I reply that this body has a head and a voice too.)

*1. Illness.* Lee says that she felt ill for the first six months, not, she subsequently learned, a sickness but an imbalance, a trying to



find a place and a voice in London. Some of her condition was London-induced. "It's a matter of scale, London is big, but it's small and too close. No horizon, no breeze, inside. You know one moment that blissed me out last summer, was the sound of one fly buzzing through the still house. And the first time I feel the wind on the skin of my arm, after six months undercover, I am all follicles."

2. *Slowing down.* Some enjoy Australian directness (brash, speedy, gauche even). "You get over the formalities quickly and you get on with the topic", said a cultural consultant to us over lunch. Lee says, "Someone called me macho when I first arrived. Though they didn't tell me until a year later. It's slow here. Fast (the city) but slow (the conversation). The body becomes frantic, bursting out all over this place, kicking over; molecule upon molecule, when I get a hint of a good conversation or a good feeling."

3. *Atrophying.* "I miss testing my muscles and that's not only about the agony of not swimming in the sea. It's about the muscularity of conversation, of meeting. Maybe some people thought it was an inclination of mine, but —it's a sweeping statement—I would say that Australians grow up testing their muscles, kind of expect to meet muscle to muscle, relish it."

4. *Cultivating distance.* Australians, even those restricted to cities, enjoy an expansive sense of space, and with it room for speed, muscle "with propulsion, and the capacity for momentum". With this comes the possibility of broad social contact. "I've thought a lot about the quality of distance in Britain and was fascinated by the way it was usually figured as 'keep back' or that hoary old idea of critical distance. I've entertained the thought of the salutary effects of the apprehension of distance, between one thing and another, and that it should be cultivated—that in the cognition that something *is there*, there is a perception of space, between you and it. But space and muscle, that's my definition of desire."

5. *Speaking and failing.* "I can vouch for the condition of being a *not-here* in England when I speak, or think I've spoken, but somehow it fails to locate a mass in space. What is it? An amphibian that knows it is there by bouncing sound waves...?"

6. *Spatially speaking.* "Maybe the English are a *not-there* sort of bunch, and the Americans are *here*. I was surprised by them when I was first settling into Los Angeles. You'd meet them and they'd be *on*, in-your-face. But I grew to value it, it suited me, and you could always tell them if it was too much. Cut me a bit of slack here, get out of my... Maybe when Australians speak (and listen) the paradigm is spatial, there is the sense that the conversation could range anywhere."

7. *Infected.* "To live somewhere else, you must apparently succumb to the local infection (in this place by the apparently benign) and hope to have some immunity."

I lived here some twenty years ago and recognise the symptoms of Lee finding herself infected by the space and body of English

in Britain and trying to be heard in its measured flow, its insistent formulae ("Do you know what I mean?"), its sheer confidence (enough to make many an Australian feel like a colonial child again), grand statements and qualifiers stacked up against them. Even though mainstream media and political voices are now markedly lower middle class, their shape and impulse are still of an older middle and upper-class authority. This firm body that expresses borders and conditions can induce a physical and vocal stillness in any Australian staying longer than a short holiday. It is a voice not necessarily marked by skin colour (you hear white middle class, you see black), but the dialects and Englishes of other skins and other places are those that Australians can sometimes feel an affinity for—South African, Argentinian, Hong Kong, British-Indian-African-Caribbean, as we most certainly have during a culturally intense LIFT '97. Lee wants to find a place in that British voice, but to maintain some immunity, to preserve her own voice, to work as an artist here, but as an Australian artist, in a body nonetheless constrained by space and pace that is in language, in the voice and in the body. She has chosen to be here.

This is not the same English voice we grew up with (and fought against), that "xenophobic monologue" (Gabriel Gbadamosi) some Australian monarchists still speak. "Language is no longer (if ever it was) a guarantee of paternity so much as a map of influences and—why not?—choice of menus." (Gabriel again). Gabriel quotes Simi Bedford's *Yoruba Girl Dancing*: "Africans can talk oh!" Aunt Rose often said. She was right, in our house we spoke four languages, and two of them were English... Similarly in Australia codes are switched, voices chosen and Englishes multiply, including a formally recognised dialect—Aboriginal English, a language of survival where mother tongues were erased by the one tongue of the monolithic colonising 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.**

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RealTime is published by Open City  
layout by Jamie Cason

**OUT FRIDAY 27 JUNE**

**RealTime 4, the final edition for LIFT '97**

**Join the RealTime team at the Daily Dialogue,  
Thursday 26 June at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs**