

THE RHYTHM OF OBJECTS

A TWO-DAY CONVIVIAM UNDER THE AUSPICES OF
P: A C E
PERFORMANCE: ART-CRITIQUE-EXPERIMENT



We live in a world of things. In what ways do we engage with them? How far can our words, gestures, song, dance and the shaping strokes of a sculptor reverberate in the force-field of physical objects? Can the rhythms generated in the performing arts reveal an understanding that differs from – or perhaps exceeds - the grip of transcendent intellection? These lie among the issues to be raised in discussion and workshop during this convivium.

PROGRAMME OF ECSTASIES

DAY ONE

CENTRAL SAINT MARTINS COLLEGE OF ARTS & DESIGN

1 Granary Square, King's Cross, London N1C 4AA

SATURDAY 27TH OCTOBER 2012

ENTER via the PLATFORM THEATRE DOORS

COFFEE/TEA/BISCUITS available in the Foyer Bar throughout the day

SANDWICHES, SALADS, SWEETMEATS available at the Airstream until 4.30 pm

12.30-1.00

Platform Theatre Foyer
Coffee & Registration

1.00-1.05

Platform Theatre Foyer

VLADIMIR MIRODAN

(Central Saint Martins/Drama Centre London)

Welcome

1.00-1.20

Platform Theatre Foyer

ROBIN KIRKPATRICK

(Robinson College, Cambridge)

Paradise Rag – poem

1.20-1.50

Studio Theatre

BENJAMIN ASKEW

(CSM/DCL)

The Rhythm of Object(ive)s: How 'character tempi' discovered through Object Exercises can inform the composition and interpretation of dramatic verse

Over the past hundred years or so, attempts to create original verse drama have in the main been considered 'failures'. Common criticisms include a 'lack of character', that the poetry is 'ornamental' or 'descriptive' rather than 'active', and that the plays are, therefore, essentially 'un-dramatic'. At the same time, a number of the acting techniques developed during the Twentieth Century have, as a result of encouraging actors to explore 'character' as something that exists independently of the text, been accused of being 'anti-text'. By investigating the links between prosodic rhythms, character tempi discovered through Object Exercises, and the archetypal movement patterns described by the *Laban-Malmgren System of Character Analysis*, we begin to see the possibility of a new approach to the composition of dramatic verse, one through which the rhythms of verse, action and character may be regarded as inseparable.

1.50-2.30

Studio Theatre

VASILIOS ARABOS

(IMALIS – Centre for Ancient Hellenic Theatre of Epidaurus)

with participation by MA Acting students from DCL

Rhythm of Sound and Bodies in Amphitheatric Space

Ancient tragic text - which includes historic primary sources drawn from cult, rite and iconology - presents the performer with a fundamental compositional score based on the placement and sequence of bodies in action and sound. Amphitheatric space is the establishment of a field of forces by the ancient performer, described in Plato's *Ion* as "a power such as there is in the stone Euripides calls Magnesia, or others the Heraclean stone." Developed over the course of the Drama Centre/Imalis Live Project in Epidaurus, 2012, by students of the MA Acting, two brief extracts from monologues drawn from Euripides' *Orestes* (*Orestes*' [v.268] and *Elektra*'s [v.960]) will be presented as preliminary drafts of tragic performance making use of amphitheatric space, prosodic vocalization and action sequence in Ancient Greek.

2.45-3.15

Studio Theatre

MARGARET COLDIRON

(East 15 Acting School/University of Essex)

With the generous assistance of Manuel Jimenez and Paula Friar (*Gamelan Lila Cita*)

Balinese Topeng Masks: Performing Objects in a Rhythmic World

The vivid intensity of Balinese performance shook Antonin Artaud to the core and provided him with a vision of what the Occidental theatre could be:

... that twitching of muscles producing studiously calculated effects...those heads moving horizontally seeming to slide from one shoulder to the other as if on rollers, all that corresponds to direct psychological needs as well as to a kind of mental construction made up of gestures, mime, the evocative power of rhythm, the musical quality of physical movement, the comparable, wonderfully fused harmony of a note...And the most impulsive correlations constantly fuse sight with sound, intellect with sensibility ... Our theatre has never grasped this gestured metaphysics nor known how to make use of music for direct, concrete, dramatic purposes ... ("On the Balinese Theatre")

Although Artaud understood nothing of Balinese culture, or the aesthetic and spiritual sensibilities that informed the performance he observed, he had a visceral comprehension of what it was all about. This intervention will explore the relationship and interplay of rhythm, object and performer in Balinese Topeng masked dance-drama.

3.15-3.45

Foyer

JOHN WHITE AND 'LES MUSICIENS DE LA CROIX DU ROI'

(CSM/DCL)

Concert: Three Original Pieces:

Drinking and Hooting Machine

Newspaper-Reading Machine

Latin Phrasebook Ritual

3.45-4.15

Studio Theatre

PHILIP BENJAMIN

(CSM/DCL)

The Rhythm of Bodies: reading character tempi?

The *Laban-Malngren System of Character Analysis* makes the assumption that the inner state of a character can be inferred from the way that character moves – in other words, different motivational energies or intentions will be expressed in the body through different qualities of movement. Through Laban's *Working Actions* (a set of archetypal movements that seek to describe the range of human movement and expression) the actor can seek to reverse this process of inner intention to outer expression in order to access character tempi that may be removed from his/her own habitual modes of movement and expression. Through the presentation of silent video clips of performed monologues, each proceeding from a different character tempo, we will explore to what degree the qualities of movement of the body alone might be meaningfully interpreted by an audience. There will also be a brief exploration of contrasting means of describing and accessing character tempi.

4.15-4.45

Studio Theatre

PAUL GOODWIN

(CSM/DCL)

With participation by MA Acting students from DCL

The Sound of Bones: How the Human Skeleton resonates in Performance

Elizabethan audiences went to the theatre to "hear" a play. To hear is to feel vibration: how much is this vibration communicated through the rhythm of language - the rhythm of vowels and consonants? Is there an underlying meaning, beyond the literal meaning, that is communicated through this rhythm, where text becomes language – perhaps something more profound than just the words on the page?

4.45-5.15

Studio Theatre

SOPHIE SEITA

(Queen Mary College, London)

Unfinished Business: The Making of the Fencing Project

This performative account observes, documents and thereby aestheticises Zoe Svendsen's *The Fencing Project*. Taking as its subject a performative process - and not a finished aesthetic object - it explores the difficulty of theorising such a processual aesthetic experience.

5.15-5.30

Foyer

ALAN DUNNETT

(CSM/DCL)

Tuning into the Slow Time – poem

5.30-5.50

Studio Theatre

SHONA MORRIS

(CSM/DCL)

With participation by MA Acting students from DCL

Are the Masks Coming Out to Play?

How can a piece of elastine moulded on clay trigger voices, characters and transformations? Are these transformations from the actors' imagination or from the masks? How do the masks connect to the audience? Character masks and the way they ask us to respond are playful and mysterious in equal measure. Once the masks come out to play there is no knowing what will happen. This is an open workshop that might bring some strange people onto the stage - or not, depending on what happens. At the end, the masks will explore a little *danse macabre*.

6.00-6.30

Foyer

A Glass of Farewell Wine

DAY TWO
ROBINSON COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE
Grange Road, Cambridge, CB3 9AN
SUNDAY 28TH OCTOBER 2012

10.30-11.00

Robinson Auditorium Lounge
Coffee & Registration

11.00-11.35

Robinson Chapel

CATHERINE PICKSTOCK & JEREMY THURLOW

(University of Cambridge)

Repetition and Things

With reference to Plato and Kierkegaard, this paper and performance will consider how our understanding of Things depends on our response to non-identical repetition. A poem, 'The Snowdrop Sequence', will be read and performed to musical improvisation to explore in practice the philosophical implications of repetition.

11.35-12.20

Robinson Chapel

SUSAN SELLERS, KITTY RANDLE & JEREMY THURLOW

(University of St Andrews / Moving Stories / University of Cambridge)

From Lighthouses to Paintbrushes: Things as Multi-Sensory Archives

In a letter to a friend about her novel *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf wrote:

I meant *nothing* by The Lighthouse. One has to have a central line down the middle of the book to hold the design together. I saw that all sorts of feelings would accrue to this, but I refused to think them out, and trusted that people would make it the deposit for their own emotions.

In this session, writer Susan Sellers, actor Kitty Randle and composer Jeremy Thurlow explore how images, objects and sounds were used as stimuli for imaginative possibility in the creation of a play about Virginia Woolf and her sister Vanessa Bell.

12.20-12.50

Robinson Chapel

JANE MONSON & HUGO AZERAD

(Cambridge University Press / University of Cambridge)

Francis Ponge and the Poetry of Things

2.00-4.00

Judith E. Wilson Drama Studio, Faculty of English

JANE MONSON

Writing Workshop

In collaboration with the Cambridge Festival of Ideas

A creative writing workshop in the company of objects. Discussion and written exercises based on the short prose of Samuel Beckett, Virginia Woolf and Francis Ponge.

4.30-5.00

Judith E. Wilson Drama Studio, Faculty of English

OLLIE EVANS

(University of Cambridge)

Belacqua: Breath Quad

A performance liberally based on Samuel Beckett's *Breath* and *Quad*, and Canto IV from Dante's *Purgatorio*. Fusing mime, voice, ephemeral puppetry, natural materials and a soundscape featuring the voice of Gertrude Stein. A piece about waiting in the body of a body.

5.30-6.00

Judith E. Wilson Drama Studio, Faculty of English

CHRISTIAN BRAIME

Vessels

Vessels is an installation which invites an open response from the viewer. It has been designed and manufactured with ideas to do with transition, journey and optimism in mind and aspires to a kind of toy-town finish. I have been endeavouring to make my work vaguer. I want a very deliberate openness that relies upon giving the viewer just enough clarity to set their imagination working. The older we get, the less we use our imaginations and, as such, much of my work has a childish or adolescent quality to it. Certainly, a lot of inspiration for my work comes from looking at my surroundings through the inventive eyes of a boy.

7.45-9.45

Robinson Chapel

**GIULIA PORTUESE-WILLIAMS, HANNAH MCCLURE CHALUT
(AKA SKYDANCER) & MATT KIRK/ABSTRACT DISCO**

Sculpture, Sound and Whirling

An installation performance featuring the delicacy and strength of alabaster and light, the movement and dance of the whirling dervish, and live mixing of original music with deep techno influence. Inspired by the heart this performance discourse asks questions about the role of tradition, mysticism, and creative process in a globalised world hungry for spiritual and practical solutions to our modern dilemmas of East-West, Secular-Sacred, and Body-Mind divides. Exhibition followed by performance and then discussion.

APPENDIX

ROBIN KIRKPATRICK

PARADISE RAG

A SUITE OF PERFORMANCE POEMS

These poems – the first having been written many years ago – arrived at their present form in November 2010, following a very enjoyable and fruitful collaboration with a group interested in improvisation, which included the choreographer Susie Crow and the artist Antonia Bruce. In conjunction with Malcolm Atkins and Anuradha Chaturvedi this group had developed a performance based around phrases from *After Prospero*. Other performances in this same period – notably interpreting Dante's *Commedia*, with music by Ian Dickson Cheryl Frances Hoad, Roxanna Panufnik and Jeremy Thurlow, – suggested how much artists in media other than poetry could derive from (and contribute to) the images and rhythms of a poetic text. As originally conceived, all these poems had been intended for a group of (at-that-time) imaginary musicians and dancers, who could be shown reacting to, and against, a sequence of stories that had been laid before them. There is now no need to *imagine* such a group; one knows that it exists – with even greater vivacity than I had originally thought possible.

The three short poems that make up *Trio Amoroso* have not yet been performed but were written to be so – by any artist, in any medium, who cares to offer a response.

The first of these three pieces takes its outline from events in the life of the composer Carlo Gesualdo, who murdered his wife – having discovered her *in flagrante* – escaped to Ferrara, famous at that time for its choir of women's voices, and also wrote the *Tenebrae*, a setting of the Passion Week ceremony during which candles placed on a candelabrum known as a 'hearse' are extinguished one by one in a meditation on Christ's Passion.

The second piece, intended to be accompanied by improvisations on Jerome Kern's *Smoke Gets In Your Eyes*, harks back to the heroic romanticism of the Second World War, evoking the old age of a woman such as might have been pictured in Sebastian Faulks' *Charlotte Gray* (with its depiction of Resistance fighters in France) or Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair*, where religious conscience is tragically at odds with the promises made between war-time lovers.

The final poem in the sequence responds to a tale told by both Boccaccio, in *The Decameron*, and Chaucer, in *The Franklin's Tale*. This tale tells of a loyal wife who is pestered, in the absence of her equally loyal husband, by a lover determined to win her hand. To divert his attentions, she vows that she will only yield to him if flowers bloom in mid-winter and the rocks which stand between her and her husband, disappear from the sea. Consulting a magician, the lover ensures that this impossibility is realised. The husband returns. The wife tells him of her dilemma. He insists that the only honourable course is to observe her promise. At this display of moral virtue, the lover is so moved that he refuses to press home his advantage. The magician, likewise moved, abandons any claim for payment on the man who had enlisted his aid.

AFTER PROSPERO

ENTER, as wearing no apparent mask
and so (where in Venice at Carnival
carmine raptors plashing out, rattle-eyed,
from deep arcades of shadow, never were)
free to smile, a figure who nervously -
being unknown here - does smile, and carrying

no staff, sceptre, whip, or biro, prepares
to say there is no world but persons. This one
is neither naked nor clothed but changes
(not with any frisson of transformation
from girl to spider or lozenge-bright snake)
nearer to us, as every glancing step
raises out of the coughing boards a gauze
of elm-dust in human shape, and calls
upwards like fallen grapes the glimmering
of brazen nails in hands that move towards
our own, where we in darkness imagined
no need to answer, alter or be happy.

Here (were this allegorical) we might
suppose we saw the figure of Gentle Death
in triumph over Dreams and Cruelty)
or else the Perfect Teacher, who - likewise
affirming nothing - reveals around us
the space that each of us has now to fill and then
make way. But that's not it. The moment is,
when presence rings a risk in mind and sense.

THEREFORE throughout - coming, in time, to know
who this transparency might be - we hear
a certain, though intermittent, music.
(Also - it's true - the turgid clocking-on
of rivers, and wealing squeals where compliant
elements - pulp, ore, steam - play together
at deltas with industrial reason.)
Rhythms and modulation here will not
even be the sound of wind or bird-song,
rather our own - our own being an ending
and echoing within and between us -
so that we follow, to hear again how
bone sings, in Joplin, to mock march-time,
or how, in nuances that Schubert frees
from frozen hurdy-gurdies, loss and fear,
a blush fans all through being, recognised.
Be realistic: old harlequinades
of fog, of course, will sneer and writhe around
the present action. Schubert and Joplin
knew they would, each dying of the same disease.
(The symptoms were: baroque incrustations
of stupid power around the arches of their
native cities, and filigree windows
of subtle enslavement.) Yet still they steal
their pickings home: ivories and glistening
string, reed and hollowed horn. So, nights like this,
we're fed, light-hearted, on melismata.

THE LIGHTS GO UP. It should, by now, be clear:
this could be paradise. Simply enough,
there is, nearly, no distance between us,
or none - as though, incandescent in air,
viewless, impassable, there were a brook -
we ever might cross by main-force. Movement
is over and even (as the actor
ought already have made us realise)
the appetite for staple themes: life, death,
the obvious screaming 'better be unborn'.
As for events, a single tree is seen.
Cool and colour-plumed, and all its scented bells
erect, this may still rise and, drawing up
fine milky roots like limbs so long caressed
by mosses and dark, trail out the vivid
funghi, desires and danger, then, folding
inward on itself, to leave a space only
for perfect attention. Or else may not.

Looking, for a last time, around this room,
you'll see, now scattered in free lights - fallen
from the stage-arc - the few there are who choose
to remain and ask neither for happenings
nor snarling traffic in fixed ideas
but hope in contingencies to see once more
our makings - feathered breath and lash; a touch
sounding in creases of death or down: a tone -
as if all this were all. And thus we begin.
