CHAPTER 5

Practice as Research through Performance

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In Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts. Ed Hazel Smith & Roger T. Dean. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009.

1. PRELUDE

Ludwig Wittgenstein dreamt up the foundational idea of his philosophical masterpiece, the *Tractatus*, while reading in a First World War trench. A sketch in a newspaper showed a sequence of events leading to a car accident, triggering the sudden thought that language was a picture of the world. But less than a decade later the philosopher dramatically lost his faith in the imagistic power of words. A memoir by a Cambridge don describes the occasion:

> Wittgenstein and P. Sraffa . . . argued together a great deal over the ideas of the *Tractatus*. One day (they were riding, I think, on a train), when Wittgenstein was insisting that a proposition and that which it describes must have the same 'logical form' . . . Sraffa made a gesture, familiar to Neapolitans as meaning something like dislike or contempt, of brushing the underneath of his chin with an outward sweep of the fingertips of one hand. And he asked: 'What is the logical form of that?' . . . This broke the hold [over Wittgenstein] of the conception that a proposition must literally be a 'picture' of the reality it describes. (Malcolm 1958, quoted in Mehta 1965: 85)

The brush of Sraffa's dismissive gesture is the moment of performance as research. One kind of knowledge – language, theory, philosophy, books, libraries, archives – is challenged profoundly by another. The performing body bites back at the thinking mind in a prospective quintessential practice-as-research experiment.

The example of Sraffa's 'contempt' of course raises many issues about the nature of knowledge in the long history of modernism. The issues are prodigious, yet a single question can serve to indicate their extent. In the

instant of the brush off where was the knowledge it produced located? Was it in the moving hand, in the philosopher's body, between the two minds of the protagonists, in the published memoirs, in this analysis, or in some relationship between all these and more? In other words, once live performance is introduced directly into the equations of knowing, conventional views of how knowledge is best produced, accumulated, stored and transmitted may be called deeply into question. This is because the most crucial effect of performance practice as research is to *dis-locate* knowledge in the manner indicated by the example of Sraffa's gesture. Such performed moments can unravel all established forms of representation, becoming irresistibly viral to any assumed stability of thought. The source of that power is paradoxical, as it makes the commonplace extraordinary. It can even, perhaps, call into question Samuel Butler's famous observation that: 'Nothing is so unthinkable as thought, unless it be the entire absence of thought' (Butler 1951: 154).

2. INTRODUCTION

Towards the end of the 2000s 'practice as research' became a well-established approach to using creative performance as a method of inquiry in universities in the UK, Australia, Canada, Scandinavia, South Africa and elsewhere. In less than two decades creative processes had been established as providing crucial new approaches to research in theatre, dance, film, video, digital-media and performance studies, complementing and in some ways profoundly challenging traditional methodologies. Placing creativity at the heart of research implied a paradigm shift, through which established ontologies and epistemologies of research in arts-related disciplines, potentially, could be radically undone. Hence, as early as 2006, Swedish theatre scholar Ylva Gislén could confidently present an international word map of 'research in the artistic realm', which included rough estimations of dates for its emergence, (see Figure 5.1). The bigger the font the greater the volume as well as range of variety in practice. What linked these practices across countries together, argued Gislén, was 'research in relation to . . . higher education in the arts'. However, there was a telling tension in her formulations, as the differences between research 'in' *and* 'in relation to' the arts suggest fundamentally contrasting procedural modes, the first treating creativity as a means of investigation, the second implying it and its products as constituting a field to be studied by some other means. Her observation that a current concern in university systems welcoming these developments was the generic titles of research degrees reflected this tension: 'Should they be called PhDs or Doctors of Arts or PhD by project or PhD by publication?' (Gislén 2006: 132).

Here was a strange irony, given the diversity of the fast-growing community

Great
Britain
ca 1997

Finland

80s–90

Norway
ca 2000

USA
90s

Sweden
ca 1997–1998

Demark

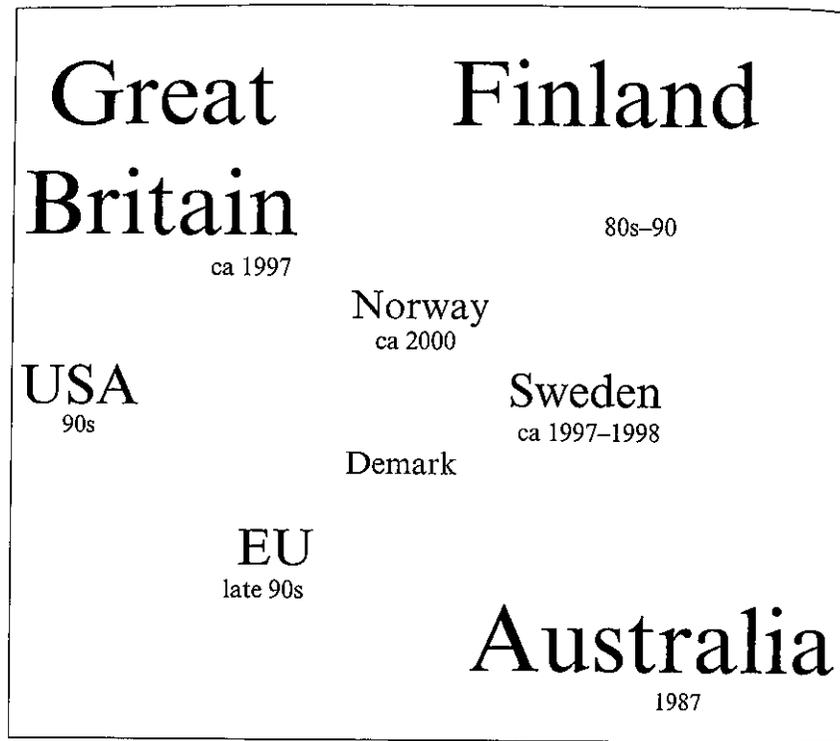EU
late 90s

Australia
1987

Figure 5.1 Gislén's international world map of 'research in the artistic realm'.

of practitioner-academics using theatre, dance, live art, inter-medial perform-
ance, video, film and so on that was radically stretching the bounds of research
in the academy. But as the doctorate most commonly is the highest-ranked
university diploma awarded for original research internationally, it was clear
that practice-based research in the performing and media arts was coming
of age – though not without some definitional confusions and significantly
strong resistance. When the challenge of 'artistic research' meets established
hierarchies of knowledge, the result might match that mythical moment in
physics when an irresistible force meets an immovable object: an inconceivable
disturbance.

To assess the sources of such seismic controversies, this chapter will analyse
fundamental issues of 'knowledge production' in the creative arts when they
are generated by live and mediated performance practice as research. The 'as'
in the phrase functions to problematise conventional notions of theatre and
performance practice, which if they reference research at all – rather than,
say, entertainment or other cultural forms – tend to link it to the preparatory

work that leads into a production or an event. The actors research their role
in, or directors the 'background' of, a play. But the 'as' makes a claim that the
performance or theatre event itself may be a form of research. What exactly
might make this difference is a key point at which the complications and
debates about practice as research begin, with radical practitioners contesting
that time-based cultural events – productions, installations, films, live art and
so on – may be research 'in themselves', while their moderate colleagues would
expect some supplementary material – articles, journals, interpretive accounts
of various kinds – for the 'research' to become manifest.

This is to address the issues of practice as research mainly from the angle of
its presentational protocols. But these issues also touch on notions of 'research
method' per se, ideas about the nature of human 'knowledge' and the pur-
poses of innovative creative arts beyond university campuses and precincts.
Fundamental to practice as research, whether in or beyond universities, is the
radical dis-location of ways of knowing exemplified by Wittgenstein's sudden
revelation: a process that turns all notions of stable criteria that aim to 'finally'
define it into a fool's illusion. To partly circumvent this problem, my focus
in this chapter will be on specific examples of practice as research that may
be representative in their potential to trigger radical challenges to established
research paradigms. Yet I think this potential is not especially unusual, as it
aligns with a widespread 'turn to practice' in the late-twentieth century that
emanated from many loci, including poststructural theory, postmodern capi-
talism and perhaps even post-ecological activism (Schatzki et al. 2000; Ingold
2000; Thrift 2004). The main emphasis of this turn was away from abstract
theorising and scientific rationality in favour of action-based investigations
oriented toward practical engagement in the world. Hence anthropologist Tim
Ingold crisply characterises this radical shift, arguing that 'it is necessary that
. . . we descend from the imaginary heights of abstract reason and resituate
ourselves in an active and ongoing interaction with our environment' (Ingold
2000: 16). From Althusser to Wittgenstein through Bourdieu and de Certeau,
practice became crucial to new economies of knowledge in many domains.

I will focus on crucial areas of performance as practice as research under the
headings of Starting Points, Aesthetics and Documentation, and as a means
eventually to draw out some speculative implications for global futures of its
key generic challenges. I will aim for this result through applying an analytical
method based on what I call the 'paradoxology of performance' (Kershaw
2007: 101). This has evolved in light of my creative practice as research
projects undertaken since the 1970s, but latterly informed by my investigations
into theatre and performance ecologies. This treats theatre and performance
as operating in a continuum with natural phenomena, such as seashores and
forest perimeters, so that the same principles of ecology can be seen to shape
both cultural and natural processes. Two broader research projects have also

influenced my arguments. First and most recent, the IFTR (International Federation of Theatre Research) Performance as Research working group, with a roster of members from twelve or so countries, has met annually since 2005 to investigate international practices ranging from environmental time-lapse video installations through extended voice performance to theatre in telematic space as part of a detailed exploration of key methodological questions (International Federation of Theatre Research: Call for Papers 2008). Second, between 2000 and 2006 I directed PARIP (Practice as Research in Performance), a project that involved over 600 practitioner-researchers in an inquiry which included three conferences, the meetings of six UK regional working groups, the compilation of eighteen representative case studies, the production of four interactive DVDs exploring live-performance practices, and more (Practice as Research in Performance 2008). One of these DVDs, *The Suchness of Heni and Eddie*, provides the last of the three case studies that inform this chapter's analysis. The second case study draws on one of my own projects, *Being in Between*, while the first discusses a pioneering PhD production, *Slightly Cloudy, Chance of Rain*. The UK bias here reflects my conviction that while performance practice as research is always especially rooted in particular environments – including even its most abstracted digital experiments – it also works through practices which are often highly representative with regard to the research issues they raise. Moreover, the successful growth of the practice-as-research movement internationally attests to the frequent power of its inquiries in addressing much broader dilemmas of the human animal in the twenty-first century.

3. STARTING POINTS

The voice on the audiotape cassette *Self-Hypnosis for Motorists*, slotted into my car's sound system, quietly and calmly speaks as in 2002 I drive north on the motorway to examine a practice-as-research PhD presentation.

> They were travelling on the southbound M6 which, due to roadworks, had been reduced to a single carriage-way, and a fifty mile an hour speed limit. They remained within the speed limit, whereas the car in front on them, a five series BMW, was exceeding it, greatly. At approximately eighty-five or ninety miles an hour the BMW suffered a blow-out. It veered to the left, to the right, to the left and to the right again, before careering into the coned off area where the road works were continuing. As the car left the road it ploughed into a portable toilet, provided by BorderLoos of Carlisle. The force of the car sent the lavatory in an upward trajectory, at the top-most point of which the

> door swung open, and out fell a man, wearing a hard hat, his trousers round his ankles, and a bemused expression on his face.
>
> He struck the bonnet of their car and was pronounced dead at the scene.

Arriving at the Sandbach Roadchef Service Station (between J16 and J17 on the M6) I am greeted by the two internal examiners as the other external examiner joins us, and we joke about wearing our smart suits and ties for the examination performance by the two joint candidates, Bob and Lee. A corner of the café has been cordoned off and we sit on each side of an aisle surrounded by their families – parents, aunts, uncles, cousins and half-cousins spanning three generations – facing a makeshift altar with silver vases full of flowers. All is as it formally should be for a reaffirmation of the candidates' wedding vows by the priest who married them, which is done with solemnity tinged by humorous light irony, but also made surreal because the café is 'open as usual' and the public behind us stand watching amazed, amused, bemused by this obviously authentic but highly out-of-place ceremony. As the confetti and the bride's bouquet are thrown to whoops of joy, celebratory music plays through the service station sound system and the congregation divides into two groups to be taken separately by the happy bride and groom on tailor-made narrated tours of the site, here and there catching glimpses of the ten duplicate wedding couples, in full formal attire, also treating this as the best ever place to be for such a happy event. All finally regroup on the newly mown grass between the café and motorway where the serried wedding pairs dance a graceful waltz and the passing trucks loudly honk their klaxon horns and within minutes the traffic in all three lanes is slowed to a crawl as the driving public eyeballs this extraordinary scene (Whalley and Miller 2005)

Fifteen months later I'm up the motorway again to complete the examination process, having read the standard-length thesis jointly written – with no indications of separate authorship – by Lee and Bob. The four examiners have agreed, as approved by the university, a rigorous sequence of joint and single *viva voce* meetings with the two candidates, designed to ensure that each has contributed equally to the impressive qualities of the analysis and that no advantage has been gained over other PhD awards through the non-standard examination process. The examiners agree on some areas where the written part of the submission – the thesis accompanying the performance as research – could be improved, and six months later Bob and Lee are formally informed that they have successfully met the standards required for the award of doctorates by the university. A few months on and Dr Joanne 'Bob' Whalley and Dr Lee Miller are each in possession of their own separate doctoral scrolls. The first ever fully collaborative UK performance practice-as-research PhD was successfully concluded. Back near the lawn where the waltzing wedding

Figure 5.2 *Slightly Cloudy, Chance of Rain*, at M5 Sandbach Roadchef Service Station, Cheshire, UK, 2002. Devised by: Joanne 'Bob' Whalley and Lee Miller. Photographer: Martin Nealon. Reproduced with permission.

couples almost brought the motorway to a halt a new wooden garden bench bears a small brass plaque. It informs the many travellers who use it that this was the site of the first collaboration between a motorway service station and a university, which just happened to have the performed reaffirmation of a successful marriage at its heart.

My starting point here is that this project's complexity, especially given its highly public but intimate collaborative ethos, suggests many different possible starting points for practice as research in performing arts. Yet despite the strongly unconventional match of venue and aesthetics for *Slightly Cloudy, Chance of Rain*, the written thesis was unexceptional in beginning with a single, carefully framed question. In fact, in this context, the singularity and form of the question is more important than what it asked when set against the obvious paradoxes of the performance: a private ceremony in public space, an artwork as formal examination, and so on. This contrast between a highly focused discursive inquiry and a creative event that was wonderfully multi-faceted – in, for example, predictably producing several accidental audiences and unpredictably bringing a busy motorway almost to a standstill without accident – serves to illustrate some deep and highly challenging tensions of method in performance practice as research. Try to figure out, for example, what its starting point (or points) might have been and you should quickly gain a sense of why the process of judging its research value had to be complexly structured. Yet even a much simpler practice-based project would produce a

similar problematic. That, of course, has profound implications for research funding agencies' judgements of projects before they start, as well as for examiners (whether or not they choose the way they arrive) at their end.

The recent history of 'official' *starting points* set by UK research councils can serve to prise open the Pandora's box of practice as research for its international relevance, as similar terms of reference were evolved in Canada, Australia and elsewhere. The current national system for evaluating then funding practice as research in British universities began in the late-1980s. Evaluation led the way, in the form of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), a four to five yearly peer-review-based process that judged the 'outputs' of every university researcher in the land. The performing arts were first included as a separate subject in 1992 with the creation of a peer-panel for Drama, Dance and Performing Arts. However, practice was not explicitly part of its criteria until 1996, when practice-as-researchers were asked for a 'succinct statement of research content' together with 'supporting documentation' (HERO RAE 1996). In 2001 the criteria also advised that practical research should 'interrogate itself' and 'be located in a research context', but above all it should be 'driven by a research imperative', perhaps a default phrase for 'starting point' (HERO RAE 2001). In 2008 'research imperative' appears again, potentially clarified by an accompanying 'descriptive complement', but potential starting points are reduced to 'questions addressed' (RAE 2006). This evolution of phrasing is politically interesting as it begins by allowing individual practitioner researchers to decide how best to present the nature and methods of their projects but ends by becoming pretty prescriptive in its requirements. The assessment system shifts from a relatively liberal and democratic framework for evaluating practice as research to one that was much less open to the inbuilt diversity of creative research as it was, and is, actually practised. And this was a uniform pattern for both PhD scholarships and post-doctoral grant schemes, effecting a kind of flattening out or, more critically, a dumbing down of the research base of practical creative research in UK universities.

It is ironic, then, that the newly emergent funding regime for arts and humanities in the UK moved in the opposite direction to the RAE, though only slightly. Founded in 1998, the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) from the outset followed the RAE by including practical research in the performing arts as eligible for funding, even offering 'Small Grants in the Performing and Creative Arts' in its inaugural portfolio and, from 2001, Fellowships in the Creative and Performing Arts for professional artists (AHRC: Arts and Humanities Research Council 2008). But from the start, for virtually all of its grants schemes, the AHRB required applicants at all levels of experience to formulate a 'research question or questions' that their projects would address. This clearly was a hedging of bets against possible criticism of a lack of 'rigour' in its operational framework, as the rule surely reflected

the traditional requirement that doctoral researchers start by framing a question – a move that, of course, significantly restricts the exploratory quality of research as all questions imply a limit to their potential answers. Yet, ironically, the AHRC requirement fell short of starting-point liberalism for *post-doctoral* researchers in the sciences, who generally were simply asked to state *project aims* or *objectives* in applications to their Research Councils (EPSRC: Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council 2008). However, the upgrading of the AHRB to Council status in 2005 seemed to produce a new confidence – plus a new logo – and a modicum of greater choice in research starting points. In 2006 the Small Grants scheme was replaced by 'Research Grants – practice-led and applied routes', which had a more liberal rubric. If questions had been too narrow a launch pad, then researchers were invited to provide 'questions, issues or problems' in their practice-as-research applications (AHRC 2008).

So the shift from 'research imperatives' to 'questions' and 'questions' to 'problems' may be seen to represent highly ambivalent 'progress' regarding required starting points for performance-practice-as-research projects in UK official funding systems. But how does that square up against the gap between the written-discursive and practical-creative components of projects such as *Slightly Cloudy, Chance of Rain*? Is there a clue to solving *that* conundrum in the differences between 'questions' and 'problems'? The main objection to 'questions' aired in the UK practice as research community has been that even the most open and carefully expressed queries inevitably imply a more or less predictable range of responses, which flatly contradicts the qualities of radical openness and excess that the creativity of performance practice at its best can produce. That is not to suggest that questions are necessarily poor opening gambits for practice as research, but including them *as a rule* does imply that, say, the equivalent of – admittedly increasingly rare – 'blue skies' research in the sciences will tend to be ruled out of court. The AHRC's addition of 'problems' was no doubt intended to assuage such concerns. But the dominant modernist traditions of definition had tended to stress uses of 'problem' in logic, mathematics and chess, which since the seventeenth century had linked it closely to 'questions'. However, the word's obsolete uses might provide an etymological chink that throws light beyond the problems of 'problem' for performance practice as research. Its main meanings in the late medieval period had centred on 'puzzles' and 'riddles', which resonates with the paradoxical qualities that are fundamental to most performance practices in the twenty-first century (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* 2002: 2353)

I drew attention to derivatives of key general paradoxes of contemporary performance in Bob and Lee's doctoral project: a private ceremony in public space, an artwork as formal examination. These and cognate paradoxes – a carbon emission-reducing dance, a seamless pairing of bodies united in

a text – operated across *both* its main practices of academic writing and creative production. So paradoxes are very suggestive of further starting points that might be especially appropriate to this new style of research. Of course puzzles and riddles can be 'solved' by analysis, but equally – like paradoxes – they can require intuition, insight and maybe even instinct to determine their potential as creative springboards for performance research. These alternatives could be triggers that launch new creative research processes, but what might best trigger those triggers because it matches the radical potential of those processes? Could it be that the august institutions charged with supporting advanced research in universities worldwide should adopt 'hunch' as a dynamic addition to the practice-as-research lexicon of starting-point terms?

4. AESTHETICS

As visitors enter the zoo they face a large glass-fronted enclosure housing a single male spider monkey. Inside the transparent cube hang ropes and nets between big branches, suspended spars and fixed wooden platforms. The spider monkey has a prehensile tail and hands and feet that grip like powerful hydraulic clamps. Hanging from a vertical rope some three metres back from the glass he swings in a long elliptical arc back and forth to close in on two dancing human figures on the outside of the enclosure whose agile movements are brightly reflected in the transparent shield. They wear khaki bush-trousers and tight pinkish tops with lacy frills like delicate flaps of skin that undulate in the wake of their reactions to the flying primate. Arms swirl and bodies arc backwards and return as weight shifts from foot to foot in a ground-bound to-and-fro traverse that answers the monkey's aerial circling with precisely relaxed syncopation. No imitation but a dance-like analogue of its fabulous antigravity skills (see Fig. 5.3, p. 114) that so far has lasted for over seven minutes, long enough for two clusters of exiting visitors to be stopped in their tracks, long enough for a small child to detach from its family on the bench beneath the beech tree and prance across the sunny space with his own version of the monkey's acrobatic feats, long enough to reward the tight-knit group of animal keepers and zoo gardeners gathered to watch at the end of a hot busy day with proof that the cross-species divide has been significantly shrunk again. Again the dancing had entered an in-between place where a trio of primates could seemingly share something in common through the glass wall, beyond the horrors of quarantine and incarceration.

This was the second of three days for *Being in Between* in Bristol Zoo, a durational performance that aimed to engage the paradoxes of the species divide. I worked collaboratively with highly experienced environmental movement artist Sandra Reeve, plus a professional team: the two performers, a

Figure 5.3 Spider monkey and dancers upside down (his head in top left-hand corner of lower pane). *Being in Between*, at Bristol Zoological Gardens, 2005. Performers: Maya Cockburn and Alistair Ganley, with co-director Sandra Reeve. Photographer: Drew Yapp. Reproduced with permission.

costume designer, two documenters, a research assistant and various zoo staff, most crucially the keepers and gardeners. The performances ran from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., developing through two main styles. First, performer 'walkabouts' through all of the zoo's public areas, introducing playful forms of disruption into its daily routine. Second, regular 'dances' between 10 and 40 minutes long, spread throughout the day at four primate enclosures: Madagassy mongoose lemurs, owl-eyed monkeys and Madagassy ayes-ayes, African lowland gorillas and the lone South American spider monkey. Four 'identities' were evolved with the performers, marked by different costumes: zoo visitors, zoo-keepers, primatologists, feral animals. For the paying visitors these occupied a performance spectrum from invisible to highly visible. We had thought the

performers might become 'naked humans' once a day on the gorillas' island while the latter were feeding in their indoor enclosure, but health and safety and ethical considerations demanded protective blankets, making them look more like 'misplaced refugees'. A rigorously flexible system of movement afforded continuous improvisation by the performers as they searched for creative spaces in-between four ever-present groups across the zoo's many environments: non-human animals, visitors, keepers, gardeners. The performance's research imperative was to transform those spaces into places of cross-species creative encounter, responding interactively and *equally* with all four groups. To gain funding from the AHRC our stated main aims included: to investigate the aesthetics of body-based interactive small-scale spectacle and to enhance the zoo's conservation messages.

The aesthetics of performance practice as research are highly sensitive as they automatically spark off major issues regarding, for example, standards and virtuosity, rigorous protocols and creative unpredictability, inadequate resources and the nature of appropriate infrastructures. The underlying dynamic producing these issues aligns with the 'questions or hunches' conundrum outlined above. Because 'hunches' -- or, more conventionally, 'intuitions' – problematise the well-worn modernist oppositions between mind and body, spirituality and materiality, creativity and rationality, arts and sciences, and so on, and can issue in aesthetic forms that confound those distinctions – whether through the raw economics of 'production finish' or even in hopes to prove a thing of beauty is a truth forever. Hence contemporary performance practice as research generally may patently fail to conform to the schemas of modernism through its principal defining feature: a radical diversity of approaches producing an incongruous field. So general agreement among practitioners about aesthetics as a catalytic factor in creative research is likely to prove as elusive as the Loch Ness monster or the Himalayan yeti – as indeed is the case in, say, mathematics and the sciences, where issues of elegance or stylishness, for example, are by no means ignored. Not surprisingly, then, a common tactic to avoid accusations of chasing after arty chimeras through practice as research, especially as it emerged in the UK, has been for practitioners to devise transparent methods of inquiry in the form of explicitly stated protocols or procedures that include both artwork and its documentation – and sometimes to test them to breaking point. At its most recursive this last approach uses procedures that severely challenge the aesthetics of even the best-designed projects. These could do worse for a motto than adapt a paradox – What are husbands for, but to keep our mistresses? – that misquotes novelist George Moore (Moore 1998): What are methods for, but to ruin our experiments?

Body-based interactive aesthetics were indispensable to *Being in Between*, so the biggest threats to its durational ambitions would come from research

methods – including the creation of documentation – that dealt with time and participation in entirely routine ways. Hence the project produced forms of documentation that are now exceedingly common in practice as research, but which could also be detrimental to its aesthetic research agenda. A continuous two-camera video recording of the event was made on all three days of performances. So how did the process of the video production promise to totally ruin the aesthetic strategies that the research crucially depended on for its success?

The two aesthetic qualities most relevant to this issue were, first, the potential invisibility of the performers for the visitors and, second, the styles of movement developed with the performers to create what Reeve calls the 'ecological body' (Reeve 2006: 8). She characterises this with admirable specificity as dependent on

> . . . altering the movement patterns which seem to be leading us into
> ecological turmoil [by devising] somatic skills which refuse to ignore
> this somatic approach . . . By working *with* the elements/environment
> in different conditions and at different times of day, for example
> walking on sand, on the rocks, in the sea . . . I am required to investigate
> . . . and to adopt an attitude of adaptability and flexibility in order to
> discover what is possible . . . (10, my emphasis)

Of course, this is what she trained the performers to do through responding to the non-human primates as wholly equivalent to sand, rocks and sea in her description. This established an interdependence between research aims and aesthetics that was designed to work as follows. The spectra of invisibility–visibility created by the costumes and movement styles – from 'visitor' to 'bare human' – were evolved to provide high degrees of semiotic and somatic flexibility for the performers. At best this afforded them highly responsive integration into any 'scene' as they responded and adapted interactively to the energy flows between animals, visitors, keepers and gardeners, for example in visitors' efforts to gain good animal 'views'. Then, by continuously exploring the opportunities for improvisation that the movement styles afforded them, they could work to open up channels of communication that might stretch the bounds of conventional zoo behaviour and reception, as happened, for example, when the young boy joined in the 'dance' with the spider monkey, a sight that stopped some exiting punters in their tracks.

Our research interest in this 'ecological' manner of inhabiting the zoo demanded the two-camera video shoot so that we could study it retrospectively in detail. The decision led to some wonderfully farcical encounters, because the closer the camera operators got to the actors the more they had to find ways to make their highly visible cameras (and themselves) invisible so as not

to reduce the performers' scope for invisibility. The spectacle of an intensely concentrated film-maker, camera clamped to eye-socket, walking carefully backwards into a thick clump of rose bushes was reminiscent of *Monty Python* at its absurdist best. Gradually, though, the documenters reduced this potential to destroy our research objectives by themselves developing skills for moving in and out of visibility that matched those of the performers; in effect, they became a 'shadow' aspect of the movement aesthetics. So these side effects of our research methods, even at their most absurd, were incorporated into creating the invisibility–visibility spectra. This increased the power of the project's aesthetics. For example, it destabilised the routines of perception of many zoo visitors who, as the keepers often pointed out, often seemed to be looking at the animals without ever really seeing them. As the performers and primates 'danced' together, *Being in Between* offered a radically subtle challenge to such unintended blindness.

The fundamental point here is that the cameras worked through performative paradoxes *within* the research process, thus possibly creating homologous synergies with the inevitable paradoxes that the zoo *qua* zoo itself could not help but be performing all the time. For example, the camera operators' presence served to refine the techniques the performers evolved to make themselves invisible, hence *exposure enhanced invisibility*. Also, the zoo created high conservation profiles for animals under greatest threat of extinction (such as the lowland gorillas) that were intended to make a difference beyond its walls, hence *visibility protects endangered species*. Such structural homologies, in this case between patterns of perception shaping human/animal interactions, are a key factor in my 'paradoxology of performance'. Through this, even relatively incidental reinforcements of the key aesthetic strategies of *Being in Between*, such as the effects of the presence of the cameras, may be seen as significantly improving the project's potential for successfully delivering on the objectives of its practice-as-research promise, which (as mentioned above) included exploring ways to strengthen the zoo's conservation programmes. Formal feedback from keepers, gardeners, artist and academic observers (from experimental theatre and circus, philosophy and archaeology), as well as a variety of visitors, indicates that this was partly achieved, especially through the sessions with the primates.

So from the perspective of this theoretical territory, the more rigorously consistent the research design the *greater* may be the chances of missing out on producing reflexive results. Unexpected, accidental or improvisatory events – such as the young boy joining in the 'dance' or the cat-and-mouse interactions that evolved between the performers and the cameramen – opened up new perspectives on the purposes of the project. A fly in the ointment *can* raise its game. And this method for identifying potentially useful homologies between arts and environments can extend to more everyday performances,

and perhaps even permanently bridge the gaps between sites that seem ethi-cally incommensurate: such as zoos and indigenous animal habitats. Hence people who avoid zoos on principle might do worse than reflect positively on Ambrose Bierce's wicked dictum: Abstainer – a weak person who yields to the temptation of denying himself a pleasure.

5. DOCUMENTATION

My strongest memory of using the DVD *The Suchness of Heni and Eddie* is of the two dancers, male and female, standing side by side but not touching. They are dressed simply in t-shirts and loose tracksuit bottoms and both wear ordinary trainers. They have their eyes closed and in complete silence the woman reaches her left hand towards the man below shoulder height where she stills and cups it palm up, then he moves his head towards her and is clearly searching for the hand through their eyes-shut darkness which can't be seen but maybe we sense it somatically. Following the head as it lowers towards the floor the man's body arches sideways into a difficult balance until it rests into the stillness of her hand. The finely found poise is held a few moments and they slowly return to standing to then run the sequence several

Figure 5.4 Head finding a nest in *The Suchness of Heni and Eddie*, at ResCen Nightwalking Conference, Greenwich Dance Agency, 2002. Performers: Henrietta Hale and Eddie Nixon. Choreographer: Rosemary Lee. Writer: Niki Pollard. Photographer: Vipul Sangoi, Raindesign. Reproduced with permission.

times again, each move of head to hand becoming more demanding as they explore the limits of extension and balance, perhaps testing the edges of an extraordinary comfort zone. The sensitivity and accuracy of this blind col-laboration is remarkable in demonstrating the graciously awkward meetings of everyday body-minds. Each time a head finally rests in a hand like an oversize egg in a fragile nest a poignant collaborative poise is born.

Click on 'menu' on the screen and the image of the two dancers shrinks to become a sub-screen but the scene continues to run alongside a same-size black and white photograph of them doing the same exercise. Move the cursor over the photo and a red frame appears around it. Click there to view a full-screen gallery sequence showing several pages of a written 'score' listing actions that precede the hand-head routine with a title that tells you Eddie Nixon and Henrietta Hale first worked with choreographer Rosemary Lee on *Passage*, premiered at London's South Bank Centre in 2001. Two colour images of this show appear in sequence followed by a title screen announc-ing: '. . . the first showing of *the Suchness of Heni and Eddie* at *Nightwalking – Navigating the Unknown* . . . September, 2002: a 3-day artist-led conference event bringing into view processes of artistic creation' plus more photographs of them dancing at that event, ending back at the two-picture starting point of the gallery. Clicking on 'main' jumps you to four sub-screens side by side, all showing moving images with titles below: 'the performance' (Heni and Eddie dancing), 'performers' (the hand-head sequence), 'process' (cameraman filming the dancers), post-performance (woman in a loose grey shift talking to . . .). What am I looking for? Click on 'process'. Two sub-screens: 'the filming process' and 'rehearsal to performance'. Choose the first and another two sub-screens display 'multiscreen view 1' and 'multiscreen view 2' both taking you to simultaneous two-camera views of the rehearsal process at different stages on the same day, including shots of the head-hand exercise, with the choreog-rapher – *that's* Rosemary Lee – giving brief instructions to the dancers. You're in a digital maze, so fast forward to >> 'main' and the four side-by-side sub-screens to choose >> 'performance' because you really want to see head-hand as it finished up in the show.

But – oh no – *another* sub-screen choice 'multiscreen view' and 'full per-formance Nottdance 06', the latter being five years on from your DVD starting point. Go for it >>, to get Lee in that grey shift introducing the piece, so fast forward to 'head-hand' and there it is as Heni and Eddie search each other out in their blindness always finding a balance as Lee speaks quietly from her notes

they don't know who's going to put the ledge out, they don't know where the hand is, they can't see, we're not trying to fake anything . . . paring it down to the simplest things, because the simplest things

you can see the complexity more easily [*sic*] . . . Dilemmas of day one. Am I doing what I said I'd do? How do I see their suchness without structures, and how do structures make me see their suchness? . . . Dilemmas four years later, day one. Am I doing what I said I'd do? Set or improvised? . . . How do I refine a structure or a task without the dancers getting better at it, and then the excitement goes, the struggle goes, the learning in action goes, the more they do it the more they learn, is it possible not to know, can you unlearn? (Lee 2007)

As I re-run the sequence in my head and feel an aching shimmer as her head finally finds its nestling place in his waist-level outstretched hand, [there's] an egg-head forever poised in past time but also right here alive in my mind's eye *now*.

I never saw any of this practice as research live, nor ever meet Eddie and Heni face to face, though I did see Lee twice during production of the DVD and I viewed its alpha-version to advise on structure and navigation tags. It was the last of four that PARIP produced/funded, which together created some methodological and political disquiet and controversy in the UK practice-as-research community. Wouldn't these high-tech (for then) and relatively high-cost items issued by a high-profile project set expectations against which other, cheaper forms of documentation would be found badly lacking? Wasn't this yet another move by an already privileged research university to consolidate its 'lead position', thus inevitably overshadowing the excellent work being done elsewhere? Little in advanced areas of creative arts research is not ambivalent, so 'no' and/but 'yes'. Though PARIP took care to always underline 'the need to respect the diversity in approaches in PAR', there was always a powerful undertow running through the community of researchers in the UK and elsewhere that was extremely wary of *any* kind of documentation: 'If . . . artefact-based outcomes [alone] are seen to "embody" the research as the "serious" output, we might suggest that that reproduces the systems of commodity exchange . . .' (Piccini and Kershaw 2003: 122).

A key source of this wariness of documentation was Peggy Phelan's insistence on ephemerality as *the* essential quality of performance, but an even more thoroughgoing vision of time-slipping identities had been bombshelled in by Judith Butler's performativity theories and a fast-mustering host of like-minded advocates (Phelan 1993: 146; Parker and Sedgwick 1995). From this perspective, the 'documentation' of practice as research in live performance easily could seem tainted by technology and teleology. If the high-ground of advanced technical mastery was a key component in any 'proof' that *ephemeral* performance could produce *lasting* 'knowledge' as an *ultimate* goal, then the devil of commodification through documentation always already would be dancing rings around the conflagration of radical hopes, political or otherwise,

in performance practice as research. Never mind that such documentary digital derring-do might create new aesthetic qualities to establish emergent synergies with the events that egged it on – much as the advent of the quill pen did for spoken poetry, perhaps – in this game the double bind of collusion with capital in the name of 'capturing' art was a dead cert. But what is lost in this line of thought is an appreciation of how memory may newly play through various mnemonic systems, such as, say, texts, still images, DVD interactivity with moving images, links from these to the growing richness of Internet resources, and so on.

Nonetheless, from the perspective of the doctrine of ephemerality, despite being a total of five years in development, the process of creating interactive analogues between *The Suchness of Heni and Eddie* as live event and digital document was a lost cause. The authoring of synergies between super-tight choreographic and onscreen visual tropes *and* body-based and finger-clicking improvisatory freedom was doomed when the first move in making the digital quill was made. Even the most super-sophisticated representation could not reactivate a quality or condition that *by definition* was absent from the event in the first place. Moreover, in this performance theology 'suchness' was for certain an automatic loser. This is because 'suchness' indicates an *essential quality* that is total anathema to the postmodern relativism on which, ironically, the doctrine of ephemerality as an essential quality of 'live' performance is founded.

It also automatically follows that the dream I have just evoked, of somehow reviving the liveness of Eddie and Heni's virtuoso display of improvised precision through interactivity with a precisely calibrated digital object, is a fool's foregone – i.e. logically certain – illusion. And of course the circularity of *that* formulation, especially in proximity to a political double bind, would conventionally signal a classic logical quietus. But then what sense might one make of resonant notions such as Picasso's 'Art lies in concealing art' or Dubuffet's '[Art's] best moments are when it forgets what it is called'? As Rosemary Lee's choreography was in practice deceptively simple, in the sense that its constant imperative was the impossible injunction to Heni and Eddie to 'be spontaneous', why should that process *not* find a homology in the practice of an interactive DVD that *structurally* reproduces its choreographic principles?

In the live event those principles were created as between a simple but highly rigorous formal system – the choreographic 'rules' – and a complex but finely tuned simplicity of improvisatory response *within* that system – the dancing of Heni and Eddie. In any one screen-space on the DVD the viewer can see *that* under construction in the creative process and/or 'completed' in the 'final' performance. But *also* in the live event Lee provided mediating material – in her spoken commentary and through interpretive postcards handed to the audience, for example – thus opening further reflexive channels

that provided spectators with overt choices in how they might engage with the dance/dancers. Such channels are reproduced technologically *as between* the DVD itself as fixed-but-flexible system (= structure/choreography) *and* how the choreographer/dancers may be variously represented by the choices of the DVD user (= improvisation/creative freedom). Hence, *both* sets of relationships together create a doubled injunction for users to 'be spontaneous' in their interactions with the screen and its materials. Of course, there is no guarantee that either the live-event spectators or the DVD-event users will engage that process, but the structural and thematic homologies between live- and DVD-events are the basis of its possibility in *both* processes. How can you tell the dancers from the dance? How can you tell the moving images dancing from the dance?

As with the paradoxical processes analysed in *Slightly Cloudy, Chance of Rain* and *Being in Between*, it takes a paradoxology of performance to recognise how documentation of a live event might reactivate in the present of its user a sense of performance life from the past. In this sense the homologies between document and event work as multi-channel reflexive opportunities for recreating qualities of the processes of the latter in the former. Hence the vicious circles produced by the doctrine of ephemerality in live performance may be transmuted into *virtuous circles* that challenge the assumptions of the theology of 'liveness'. Paradoxes are crucial to such transmutations because they *both* incorporate the contradictions on which the theology rests *and* indicate 'truths' that potentially override them. In the case of *The Suchness of Heni and Eddie* both as live and DVD event the operative paradox was: be spontaneous! And the effect of its operation for live-event spectator and DVD-event user was, as it were, through interactivity to share out a sense of the live as existing between the two. Hence the operations of a paradoxology of performance in response to absolutism in the doctrine/theology of the ephemeral/'liveness' open up what I call 'degrees of ephemerality' between a live event and its documents. Such degrees, I suggest, afford a prospecting for performance ecologies that can become more sustainable through the live in both events and documents. So I fondly like to think that recognition of this potential in performance practice as research could introduce a little more eco-sanity into the world.

CONCLUSIONS

I trust these tightly focused reflections give a modest indication of the expansiveness of creative performance practice as a research methodology – or methodologies – in the twenty-first century. Such expansiveness arises from two main sources. Firstly, the powers of practice as research to create methods that *dis-locate* knowledge (or its equivalents) in the multiple dimensions of

performance events. Secondly, the flexibility of practice as research as a methodology that can encompass many (if not all) disciplines through the paradoxical rigour of its specific procedures and protocols. Together, these indicate something of the radical challenge that practice-based research may offer to established methods of knowledge production. And though such challenges are perhaps becoming increasingly familiar, they remain quintessentially important to the efficacy of practice as research in the arts and humanities disciplines and, of course, in others beyond them. The widespread 'turn to practice' in many disciplines in the late twentieth century was clear indication of a major shift away from logocentric and modernist paradigms. Likewise, the widely recognised spread of 'performance' and 'performativity' as key concepts for process-oriented systems of knowing underlines the potential of research that fundamentally incorporates the creative protocols of innovative performing arts (McKenzie 2001). It is hardly surprising, then, that performance practice as research typically generates generic research issues relevant to an especially broad church of research methodologies. This is because it inherently challenges binary formulations – such as conventional polarities between, say, theory and practice, rationality and creativity, process and product, artistic and academic – through the degrees to which it successfully evolves methods that are holistic in conception and operation. Which is to imply that it does not eschew binary modalities, any more than the complex system that is this computer on which I am working does, but rather incorporates them into the specific ecologies of particular performative/performance research processes. My invocation of this general tactic produces the 'paradoxology of performance' explored in this chapter as a means to explication of what is ultimately inexplicable. Which is just another way of saying that the 'findings' of performance practice as research are likely to be always already provisional. Want something finished? Never say never!

Hence, I chose my case studies as examples, in part, for the oblique approaches they might afford to some emergent contradictions and conundrums of the twenty-first century, in order by indirection to find direction out. Motorways, zoos and dance studios may seem collectively random in their relevance to, say, environmental devastation, fundamentalist wars, global capitalist exploitation, but a performance practice as research that fully embraces their constitutive paradoxes might, just, gather in a little unusual illumination for a future that looks increasingly dark. Thus, on a rising scale of improbabilities: a widening range of options for research *starting points* might be more likely to produce projects that imaginatively reduce carbon emissions; more extravagantly, establishing the indispensability of *aesthetics* to the reformation of perception could conceivably increase diplomacy by revisioning intra- as well as inter-species divides and conflicts; and moving into the realms of pathological hope, modelling new technologies of *documentation* to reactivate

the economies of past energy exchange just conceivably might help to generate more sustainable equities of common wealth. Of course, such high-flung speculations are a sure-fire target for scepticism, even ridicule, so I advance them simply as piquantly absurd aperçus. Yet if one were looking for the key qualities of research inquiries that could actually begin to address such stupendous impossibilities, then the prodigious creative compass potentially available to performance practice as research could well become one of them. Or as the poet Louis Aragon once so wisely said, *without* brushing fingers under his chin: 'Your imagination, my dear reader, is worth more than you imagine.'

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