

Central's AHRC Creative Fellows

Recipients of AHRC funding discuss their practice and research in clowning and acting, telematic theatre, and the life and death of objects and puppets

Creative Fellows:

Jon Davison (JD), clowning and acting

Julian Maynard Smith (JMS), telematic theatre

Nenagh Watson (NW), the life and death of objects and puppets

Chair:

Andy Lavender (AL), Dean of Research, Central School of Speech & Drama

This event was held at Central School of Speech & Drama on 7 October, 2009

Andy Lavender: I'm very pleased to introduce Nenagh Watson, Jon Davison and Julian Maynard Smith. Nenagh, Jon and Julian are all Creative Fellows at Central and they're here as a consequence of the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Creative Fellowship scheme. The scheme allows for arts practitioners to be embedded in an academic institution in order to have time and space to explore and develop their own artistic practice, be more experimental than might ordinarily be possible, and feed back into the culture of the institution. I should say, at the risk of embarrassing any of them, that the scheme is very competitive and last year, where we won two of the awards, there were 58 applicants and only six awards made.

I'm going to introduce Nenagh, Jon and Julian and ask them to present for about 15 minutes. We'll take some initial questions in relation to each presentation and then open up for discussion.

Nenagh Watson is a puppeteer, performer and deviser and the co-founder of Doo-cot, an interdisciplinary puppet theatre company for adult audiences that operated from 1989 to 2007 and which received Arts Council funding. As part of a slight re-routing of her own artistic practice, Nenagh had a bursary from the Puppet Centre Trust to explore Punch and Judy, a Japan Foundation grant for a collaboration at the Academy of Performance Arts in Prague, Sasha Cower foundation and Arts Council England support for research on bunraku puppet theatre in Japan, which led to a touring performance by Doo-cot. She has received British Council grants for various things, a Barclays New Stages award for a production called *Odd if your Dare*, and a bursary to visit the Institut International de la Marionette in Charleville in France, to work with Tadeusz Kantor. Her productions with Doo-cot include *Fluid* in Manchester; *Die Young*, a Live Art commission for The Arts Bus in Fife; *Life's a Beach*, commissioned by Blackpool Grand Theatre studio; *Probe*, a seven-hour performance installation commissioned by the International Symposium on Electronic Art; and of course a more extensive back catalogue of productions. In her Creative Fellowship, Nenagh is exploring object animation and puppetry.

Jon Davison is in the third year of his fellowship at Central exploring clowning in relation to acting. Jon's training includes workshops and courses with Philippe Gaulier, Complicite, Franki Anderson, John Lee, Moshe Cohen and Fool Time Circus School in Bristol. He completed an MA in Drama Practices and Research at the University of Kent, so he comes to us already with a practice research profile.

In 1993 Jon co-founded Companyia d'Idiotes with Clara Cenoz in Barcelona where Jon has been based pretty consistently ever since. Consequently a lot of Jon's clown practice and teaching has been in Catalan and Spanish contexts. He devised and performed *Clown Klezmer* with Clara Cenoz at the

Street Theatre Festival in Madrid as part of the International Clown Festival (later presented in London) and devised and performed work for the Mercat de les Flors in Barcelona and the Esparaguerra International Mime Festival and the festival of humorous visual art in Barcelona and other locations.

Jon is a member of the World Parliament of Clowns and has taught for many years, principally at the Institut del Teatre de Barcelona and the Col·legi del Teatre. He's also a musician, playing accordion with different groups ranging across folk and world music, including Jewish and Gypsy music. In a shared past several years ago, Jon and I busked together in Brussels!

Julian Maynard Smith has been a visiting professor at Central St Martin's College of Art & Design, a mentor at DasArts in Amsterdam, and an artist fellow at Kettle's Yard, Cambridge. He is the artistic director of Station House Opera, a company, which now produces multi-media work and has a long history of producing a range of innovative and experimental projects. There is, for example, a lot of site-specific work in the company's profile, and Julian is taking that work further with an exploration into telematic theatre – looking at the production of theatre in geographically remote locations that are connected through the Internet to create a synchronised event. Productions include *The Other is You* (2006) and *Live From Paradise* (2004-2005), where Julian began to explore telematics, and (on a different note) *Dominoes* (2009), where thousands of concrete blocks were lined up as dominoes and then tumbled across East and South East London. A long-standing production in the company's repertoire is *Roadmetal, Sweetbread*, which has toured to Dresden, Kosovo, Baku, Vilnius, Ljubljana, etc, etc. This is how the company's website [www.stationhouseopera.com] describes the work:

'Occupying an alternative world bearing an uncanny resemblance to reality, a man and a woman compete with their own life-size video images for survival. *Roadmetal, Sweetbread* is recreated specifically for every venue it visits.

'Using video images and live performance, *Roadmetal, Sweetbread* is concerned with the mismatches that occur between people: the differences

between our private thoughts and behaviour, the success and failure of our conscious selves to deal with our physical predicaments. The piece is peopled by real bodies, by ghosts, and by entities that seem to be both. By bringing live art and recorded video so closely together *Roadmetal, Sweetbread* opens up new possibilities for performance that combines the real, physical continuity of the body with the spatial and temporal discontinuity of the imagined.'

So that's a taste of Julian's work and interests.

I'm very glad to welcome our three guests; three people with very interesting practices that have international scope and a lot of experimentation to them. They're here with us to test and explore and extend that practice. Jon has been with us a couple of years and will present first.

Jon Davison: Thank you Andy. Well, clowning is traditionally thought to be a very informal kind of performance practice. I'm going to endeavour to be rather formal in my presentation but being a clown and prone to accidents and failure, please forgive me if I don't manage it. Hence two laptops, a whole range of audio visual things to deal with, and a glass of water near the laptop. So here we go!

I dare say clown performance, or rather clown training as a preparation for performance, is the subject of my research, and clown performance is both familiar and rather unfamiliar at the same time: familiar in the sense that it's played a role in just about every and every historical period in some form or another culture (I don't think there's anybody on the planet who has enough knowledge of every culture in every historical moment to say with absolute certainty); unfamiliar in that it's seldom been the subject of serious research, at least academic research, or even practice-based. There's something about clowning that says, we don't need to think about it. Now I have various thoughts on why that should be so, but that would be a very long talk. I just want to point that up.

So the potential impact of clown research is rather wide, taking place in a field of activity that has the power to reach many but remains relatively unexplored. I think the position of clown as performance, at least in the West, if we can still use that term (I think it's applicable in contemporary clowning), appears consolidated. Analytical reflection is rather thin on the ground so the danger is that the field is left open to assumptions, lazy ideological thinking, fashions, and outdated ways of seeing things, all of which are all over the clown world over the past 50 years. When I talk about 'contemporary clown', it's a neat and tidy way to think of it in terms of the last half century for various reasons one, of which is the figure of Jacques Lecoq, the actor trainer, if I may call him that, who in the early 1960s introduced clowning into the programme of studies at his school in Paris. Since that date, he and those who have followed him have established a particular pattern, or I would say orthodoxy, of clown training and hence performance. So that's what I'm talking about.

Of course there are other strands that are particularly interesting and less well known in the West (again that term comes up) that were happening at the same time as Lecoq in the 1960s in the Soviet Union, but again that's a whole big area that I'm not going to deal with now. In short, there have been a whole lot of new practices happening from the 1960s, but the 1960s were 50 years ago. What has been happening that's *really* new? Sometimes when I look at contemporary clowning and contemporary clown teaching it seems like we are still in May 1968.

I've divided my three years up into self-contained packages, trying to reduce the whole big subject of what clown training is into something manageable. For my first year I looked at 'presence', a very simple thing to look at, you can do that just in a year. The question was – How is a clown to be convincing? This is really the age old question of actor training – how is the performer/an actor/a clown to be convincing? – and it's one that I think is at the root of all serious actor training methods or attempts to train the actor, certainly it's there explicitly since Stanislavski, and way before probably.

A short aside: I'm afraid I use the words 'actor' and 'clown' interchangeably. It's a bit naughty, I shouldn't really do it, but it helps us blur some of the distinctions that have been drawn up between clowns and actors. Clown particularly has been favoured as a method for training actors, but as one little piece of the training if you like, so clown could be a little sub-set of acting for me. Let's just say they are the same thing for now.

Back to the question: how is an actor, or clown, to be convincing? I wanted to look at that from three different angles. The first year would be: How is that presence established, how does one as a performer convince an audience that it's real, that it's convincing, what exactly is that question? This is the thing that comes up time and again, but I want to look at it in terms of clowning, because that's my field. Now that led me within the first year of the research to question a whole lot of assumptions. Contemporary clowning has very much focussed on one notion, which I'm keen to preserve, and that's failure, the notion that by failing, assuming one's failure, one convinces an audience that... what? That's the question! Be convincing of what? That it's real? That it's authentic? What is it that performers do that we need to convince the audience of? Like I'm trying to convince you now, trying to hold your attention, what is that? Is there something behind it? These are the questions I'm looking at. How does a clown do that? Principally by failing, admitting it, and thus attaining extra points for being more honest. That's a very rough definition of failure and success, and that's something that's quite familiar with those who have engaged in clown training over the past 50 years particularly.

We've extended that a little bit perhaps over the first year, but while looking at how a clown can be convincing I wasn't so happy with some of the other assumptions of this orthodox thinking, if you like the post-Lecoqian orthodox thinking in clowning, concepts such as clown as mask, clown as play, clown as improvisation, or even clown as theatre or clown as physical theatre. I was very happy to jettison all of these concepts, or at least put them to one side as not really being those mechanisms that make clowning happen. That's a rather strange thing to be saying in a drama school these days: 'Let's not use

games, let's not use play, it doesn't work, it's nothing to do with theatre.' I'm stating the case rather extremely but that's what I've done over the first year in order to see what's left. Can we have clown as clown? What is it? How can we describe what it feels like to be present as a clown? What is it? What is the phenomenology of the clown? And once we have an idea of what it is, how can we get there? How can we train people?

As I say I'm happy with the failure dynamics, but a lot less with some of the others. I think my impression is that they were again going back to May '68. They were very suitable then, but they're not so much now in the 21st Century. I know that's very polemical with a lot of clown practitioners, but that's why I'm here! My conclusion, in a way, is let's get rid of all this ideological baggage and let's end up with what clown is.

I did salvage a little bit of play, we did find that it was useful to use. Roger Caillois, who wrote about games and play, had four categories of play, one of which was 'vertiginous' play, which is that kind of activity that produces vertigo if you like, which in turn produces a de-censoring of the self, a loss of focus – for example, spinning, or jumping for a long time. We used chasing, but we tried to eliminate the rules so we were no longer playing rule-based games. We were using activities that could be termed 'play', very primitive play, in order to generate some kind of presence, which was not clowning but which was similar to clowning, a presence that could then get us into a suitable state in order to then clown. Again, it's trying to use something as a function of something else. It's quite difficult. It's very tempting, I think, for practitioners and teachers to go, 'Oh, ok, if clowning is a mask – for example, the red nose is the smallest mask in the world – then we can work with that and then we are doing clowning.' But maybe we're not. Maybe we are then working with the red nose, which historically and trans-culturally is not a necessary condition of clowning. It's a very culturally limited symbol.

What I'm getting at is – How do we do something for itself? And how do we train performers in that? I think contemporary dance, or even contemporary circus, has been several steps ahead of us in the sense that they've tried to

look at their own art form on its own terms. And that's where I basically ended up at the end of the first year.

I would like to show you a little bit of video that gives you an idea of vertiginous play might look like. This is a bit of edited video of some workshops in Barcelona in the first year:

Video plays

Ok, that's how we might get into a state for clowning, but what would we do with that state, once we're in that state?

I shall speed through year two. In the second year, basically what we did was look at what it's like to do clown, what do clowns do – and again that's challenging the orthodox contemporary clown view that your material comes out of your being, so your authenticity will generate your material – the actor as author. Again I wanted to challenge that assumption and see if we could look at the clown authorship away from the devising physical process, and we found that we could. We came up with a little encyclopaedia of clown, because there's about 50 ways you can write clown material or analyse it. We've used that this year to generate a little demonstration piece to show how that works; the sources have been anything from clown autobiographies to watching other people's shows. I've watched an awful lot of shows this year, good bad and indifferent, and I've tried to fill what I perceive to be a hole in the contemporary clown training method, which is to prepare students for feeling clownish and then leaving them with nothing to do. So that's been our reasoning this year.

Year three is going to be an attempt to put all that together in front of real, rather limited audiences. We have a number of projects on the go that will put the material out with higher production values and to a wider range of audiences to see if we've got it right, to see if this adjusted (I wouldn't say completely new) form of clown training is going to do the job, which in the end is to produce performance that will convince.

AL: I have a question to kick off with, which is to ask about failure in relation to acting and the notion that this project deliberately blurs a distinction between clown and actor. I can understand that failure might be crucial to characterising what clowns are and what they do. Does that apply to acting as well?

JD: That's an interesting question. In the first year, year I taught on several of the MA courses here at Central as well as workshops in other institutions. In the actor training and coaching MA, for example, there's an exercise in clowning where you have to cross the stage. You take one step every time you get a laugh, you can only move when you get a laugh, then you translate what you are doing into a rather more complex kind of scene, with this if you like, but every bit of action needs a laugh before you can move on.

Then we tried to imply that, but without getting the laugh, and we found we could. There was a mysterious way you could have the same process but leave aside looking for the laugh, which seemed to eliminate that reliance on failure that seemed to preserve a sense of complicity with the audience and that the audience were kind of writing this work, at least its timing, or its breathing because the laugh is also very related to patterns of breathing. I think we had some success there, but I think the theory behind it and why it worked, does escape me because we eliminated failure, there's a version of thinking a clown exercise but about doing it for something with more serious purposes. So yes, and no.

AL: Jeopardy in the moment.

JD: Yes, I think if you're not clowning, there's a sense as an actor that you're on the edge of a precipice that brings presence to your performing. So that's why that happens.

Audience Member 1: Jon, do clowns have a different relationship to objects than other performers?

JD: There, you see, the same question – clowns are not performers! I think they have the same relationship as other good performers but not the same relationship as other not-so-good performers. Of course there are other not-so-good clowns, which we won't talk about... I could talk about the relationship of clowns to objects. I think that is a real relationship. There's a sense in which clowning is real, it's here and now: this laptop is not a laptop which represents a laptop from the 18th Century; this is not a glass, it's a plastic glass and if I'm going to break it, and my hand crush it, it will behave as it will behave since it is very material. Clowning is very material, so we do have that relationship with objects. When we come to using complex props, that creates a problem for prop designers and makers because we're always saying, 'I want this!' then, 'It doesn't behave like I thought it would behave so shall I change the prop or shall I change my material?' So there is a lack of fiction in clowning, which translates into a real relationship with objects and I think that one can permit oneself to a higher level of a fictional world as another performer, which one cannot in clowning, and that applies not just to objects but to character and to time and to light and to space. Clowns are just here in this space, with this light.

AL: Thank you. I'm going to move on so we can leave a little time at the end for anything that might cut across two or three of the fellowships, so I'm going to hand over now to Nenagh Watson.

Nenagh Watson: Thank you very much. Well I took very seriously the 15 minutes so I've written my thoughts down so that I could be as clear as I can be and keep within time.

My Creative Research Fellowship is called 'The life and death of objects and puppets: immanence, intervention, presence and absence'. It draws on different notions of life and death to explore fundamental precepts of object animation. I will particularly look at the threshold where the lifeless becomes animate; memory within animation; tradition within ideas of the 'living' and the

'past'; and intimacy in engagement with puppets. I will also explore archiving in relation to the 'life' or rather 'death' of the object.

This is right at the beginning of my enquiry and I welcome this opportunity of introducing the focus for my first year of Creative Research; it is a search for a purity of animation. 'Ephemeral Animation' is a term I have created, this is where the random unpredictability of the elements (wind, water, light) generates an uncanny illusion of independent 'life' from discarded debris. The emotional evocative energy and subsequent narrative held within such fragile ephemeral moments of animation trigger this illusion.

I have a film that I took when I was on a boat and I happened to have a camera, so let's see it:

Film plays: Coca Cola

As part of this year's Festival Of, I worked with labyrinth artist Evelyn Silver to create a labyrinth from used plastic shopping bags. The 'audience' were then invited to walk the labyrinth, their natural movements provoking a frisson of movement (animation) from the bags. These bags have held a special presence of life as I sat within the space over the two days. These ephemeral, everyday, throw away, cheap and valueless bags have generated a work with different resonances for each participant of the event. I enjoy the juxtaposition of the environmental hazard posed by the plastic bag with such an archaic image as the labyrinth; I also wanted participation to heighten engagement and appreciation of the concept. It is the contextualisation of the 'presentation' which is crucial in encouraging a positive 'witnessing' of the concept Ephemeral Animation.

I have a short film of the labyrinth. It was in the New Studio; the floating bag is at the centre and there are two floating bags that make the entrance.

Film plays: Labyrinth

I was privileged to witness first hand Tadeusz Kantor's engagement with the object within the creation of *A Short Lesson*, a work he created in 1989. Being privy to Kantor's working process enabled me to appreciate first hand his articulation of 'the poor object', his *emballage* and fascination with the umbrella.

Firstly, let me read you the following. It's from an interview with Wieslaw Borowski in *The Secret Matter* by Jaromir Jedinski in Tadeusz Kantor Rysunki z lat (Cafe Europe)1947-1990 Galeria 86 ISBN 83-904237-8-2).

'Then I saw a man carrying a table and I realized this was an *emballage*: man covered up with the table. Something got changed here, an object had a different function. That heavy object started manipulating the man.'

I liked the turning around of the perception of the animator; here Kantor clearly saw the 'autonomy' of the table.

It's Kantor's fascination with the umbrella that has captured my imagination. Partly because, over the past 20 years, I have constructed several puppets from discarded umbrellas, the articulation of their structure readily conjures a potential for life. I am utilising the umbrella as a link between the ephemeral world and the world of art. The broken, contorted, abandoned umbrella lying on the pavement, a gust of wind attempting to resuscitate its wings...

This is Kantor talking about his practice as it was in 1948:

'At the time I collected old umbrellas. An umbrella would 'put up' and 'take down' space. It would thrust it into sharp arcs. As a matter of fact, I was more interested in the very skeleton of its metal strings. The umbrellas were bound to explode with their skeletons, like fireworks. In this way an enormous scale of tensions was achieved... I called that space 'the umbrella-like space'.

As you probably know, Kantor was a painter. Here he talks about the first umbrella ever fastened to the canvas:

'The very choice of the object was, for me, a momentous discovery; the very decision of using such a utilitarian object and substituting it for the sacred object of artistic practices was, for me, a day of liberation through blasphemy... I was not looking for a new object for a collage; rather, I was looking for an interesting *Emballage*, it is a "wrapping" over many human affairs; it shelters poverty, uselessness, helplessness, defencelessness, disinterestedness, hope, ridiculousness...

'The tension between the object and space was contained in the metal skeleton of the umbrella.'

That's from *Kantor, A Journey Through Other Spaces: Essays and Manifestos, 1944 -1990* (Pg 82 & Pg 280).

This 'tension' will be the starting point for a piece of my research practice creating a piece of work that's part experiment, part homage to Kantor. This is a searching for a language that articulates the authenticity of pure form, animation void of ego, particularly in relation to 'audience/witness' of the 'work'. This language echoes the discourse surrounding modernist aesthetics, particularly sculpture, and it is here that I focus my research, revisiting the polemic discourse *Art & Objecthood* by Michael Fried, written in 1967. I'm aware that it is highly problematic to utilise Fried, in fact Matthew Causey in *Mapping the Dematerialized: Writing Postmodern Performance Theory* goes as far to write, 'Greenberg and Fried's derriere-garde notions of authenticity, purity, essence, reside in a historical, foundationalist, and essentialist discourse that has been thoroughly discounted from a postmodern position, voided of relevance in a contemporary model of art.'

My research will navigate through our contemporary discourse, utilising the debris of Kantor's *emballage*, the minimalism of Fried, to negotiate a reframing of perception without expectation, 'as it is'. To offer 'presence' a place, however transitory and ephemeral, lending me a discourse to encourage 'witness' of moments of Ephemeral Animation. Thank you.

The films referenced are now on YouTube

<http://www.youtube.com/user/nenaghwatson>

AL: Thank you. I have a question about, I suppose, the inevitable shadow of anthropomorphism and whether one always inclines to associate personality, or character, or behaviour with the sorts of objects you're working with here. You talk on the other hand about exploring pure form. Do you try to avoid the attributes of personality in this work or do you look for it and work with it?

NW: I think I'm always looking for it really. I'm always searching to engage in a story. I think that's why I find Fried so exciting really because he talks about minimalist sculpture and the presence of that, and the energy of that, and then the progression of that engaging with a viewer. I don't think it necessarily has to be a human concept around the object, I think it's more to do with energy, but I love the Coca Cola film and I showed it to some students only the other day – so I'm sorry if you've seen it twice. They very quickly said, 'Oh, it's trying to get it's head, the top of the thing...' and already they were making up stories. We can't help ourselves.

Audience Member 2: I'm fascinated by the umbrellas. As a clown I have an invertebrate umbrella, which is quite a traditional prop, an umbrella with no backbone so it's completely floppy. Would you be interested in an umbrella like that?

NW: I think I might.

AM2: I realised watching you with the umbrella's, the ones with the holes in, I was particularly drawn to them as a clown because I saw the failure of the object and I suppose I'd like to ask about the relationship between you, the performer, and the object.

NW: Well I think the past work with Doo-cot really did explore the puppeteer in relation to the puppet, or the performer in relation to the puppet. Obviously I'm very, very conscious of my presence with the umbrellas and you know today, trying to show something and wanting to share the beautiful umbrellas with you, I was very conscious of my presence with them. That's partly why I'm in puppeteers' blacks.

Audience Member 3: Just a question about the relationship of space and the environment and putting those objects into the space. Those two films – one was the plastic bags in a room and taken into a different environment, a set up, and then you have the Coke thing, happening on a ship's path – and I was just wondering what your relationship is with those objects in different environments and the context of where that's taking your thoughts.

NW: The interesting thing about the labyrinth was fitting it into the space. That was quite an exercise in itself. Of course nobody saw that because that was the preparation day, but that was quite an interesting thing fitting it in. Obviously it's totally contrived and I'm a liar because I'm looking at ephemeral animation, but I'm also trying to contain it and it's uncontainable. The most evocative piece of ephemeral animation is when you walk outside the door and there's a ballet of the plastic bags blowing in the wind. I think that's why I'm looking forward so much to working with the students, so that we can really look at how we can engage the audience and whether we can in fact keep the essence of the ephemeral nature of the animation when we're trying to bring it into a performance, how we can capture it. I think I'm on to a loser really but it would be an interesting journey.

AL: Ok, thank you very much Nenagh. Let's move on and hand over to Julian.

Julian Maynard Smith: First of all I would like to say that I'm here to study telematic theatre but that this is a relatively new departure for me. All my early work and with Station House Opera has been very physically based and I identify a lot actually with what Jon was saying about failure, because we would put ourselves in situations that were inherently unstable so there was a real danger of collapse or failure. It was about how you deal with instability.

My interest in telematic theatre doesn't come from a kind of technical or video-based interest. It's not an interest in bringing images together from around the world, it's more to do with the sheer delight of being in two places at once, which is a very common theme in my work. I'm in two places at once now, I'm sort of here, but I'm also somewhere else, thinking, 'I wish I was somewhere else than standing here.' And if I'm in two places at once, what do I know about the two places and how are they different? And if I am in two places, what do people make of me when I'm in those two places? I'm talking spatially as much as anything.

I'll give you two very brief examples of non-technical telematics that are located in a single place. One was a long time ago when I went to the Pergamon museum in Berlin. You walk up a reconstruction that's been dug out of Iraq – the whole main street in Babylon, fantastic blue tiles – and you go through and you're immediately coming out of a Greek temple, which has similarly been hijacked from Greece and stuck in Berlin. And over the top there's this fantastic 1930s glass roof. And just the idea of being in those two places, actually *three* places, at once was very interesting. Another experience I had of being in three places at once was in the City museum of Eindhoven. I was there to do a show on a small stage and we were rehearsing. I went off stage and just wondered maybe ten, twenty feet and I found myself on the stage of another theatre, a big theatre. I thought wow, why aren't we here? It had a strange set and strange scenery. In fact there were three theatres all backing on to each other, representing totally different places. It just really excited me, the idea that you can have three different places in one.

Various pieces we did using video did do that, but the telematic or video streaming side of our work aimed to construct the global space and see what a global space would be like, what it could be like to put theatre in and to find potentials for drama. For example we did a piece called *Live from Paradise*, which took part in three places in Amsterdam. It was our first attempt, when the technology was barely capable of doing what we were asking of it, though it has always been our intention to use the available technology rather than working within institutions with expensive gear and hi-tech links. I've always been interested in trying to make it local and usable.

Again linking back to Jon, there are two kinds of failure: meant failure, performed failure and then the kind of failure that we've confronted all the way through. That's why I'm happy to be here because I've got a chance to do it right this time and I'll go through all the problems of trying to construct a global space.

In Amsterdam we used three locations: a bourgeois flat (Beethoven's flat), a disused pizza shop in a Turkish part of town, and an artist's loft somewhere. There was an audience for each place and live video streaming with two screens on the wall, which mixed images from the three places. You also have to bear in mind that there is a live performance that is seen only locally and there's live performance locally that is seen in the other places, and it becomes a very complicated thing to organise.

I'll play you the video but I think I'm going to carry on talking while it's playing because otherwise we won't get through.

Film plays: <http://www.stationhouseopera.com/project/6047/5/>

So you're getting pictures from three places. There were times when we tried to use a vaguely cinematic language but with double screens. We were trying to tell a story and the performers had immense problems. I think that, all the way through, the various versions of this idea that we performed really stretched our technical capability to the point where the performers had a

really hard time understanding what was going on. I think that possibly explains some of the hammy acting that you will see, because the performers were trying to respond to something that they can't see as a drama that's linking three places, and the performers are not aware of the three places. I think when you're trying to create a combined imaginary performance that links different places, the element of control is a real problem.

So that's one of the things I've been thinking quite a lot about, and one of the things that I want to spend some time here going over, because another one of the problems is that when you have three audiences in three places – and particularly if they're in three different theatres, in different countries, with different directors, and different kind of theatre managers who need a certain amount of revenue coming in and where the directors all have their own agendas – the issue of agreeing on what you're going to do in a combined narrative space becomes incredibly difficult even to come to terms with, not to mention the economics of it, because these tend to be quite expensive things to set up. The economics of it are that there were very short rehearsal times and most of those rehearsal times were dealing with technical problems like just being able to hear each other. In this first version, the actors were actually taking their cues from what they could hear directly from the PA coming from other places and this was very, very inefficient. So we tried to become slightly more technically adept,

Dramatically what we were doing here was to have three performers in each location. The idea of having a combined space in which to do something was that you would have versions of the same character in each location, so there would be a version of this chap in his dressing gown here... and there you see these two women in red dresses... and they would be, relatively speaking, identified with each other. So in a sense you would have three stories in each location that were seen by the live audience, plus a fourth combined story happening on the screens. That complexity was something that turned out to be completely overpowering and I think that's one of the problems of having a very short rehearsal time, and the pressures coming

from different places, and the lack of time to actually talk to different directors about how this all was going to work.

The other thing that was difficult to explore was the question of presence. What is the relationship between the live performer and their video image? And is one to care about what somebody is doing on the other side of the world if you can see them? The problem that I found is that it becomes a kind of clunky film. Narrative film works because it's edited really well; doing it live in different parts of the world is hard, the viewing is hard, the subtleties are hard, and you have one shot at it.

In *Play on Earth* (2006) there were three screens: one from Singapore, one from Newcastle and one from São Paulo. This was a very odd experience for me, being the supposedly artistic director of a thing that mixed three continents because I never got to see more than one third of the whole show. There was a guy sitting on a chair out in Brazil who never appeared on the video. I didn't know he was there. I had no idea the weird decisions that they were making, it was all to do with his kind of meta-theatrical take on what was happening and he would walk about the stage giving great long talks... It was quite strange: we had these kind of cool Brazilian meta-theatrical people; in Singapore we had soap opera stars; and in Newcastle we had actors from Northern Stage, who were quite good actors, actually, but of a very different kind from the other two. So there was a really weird mix of style, let's say.

Film plays: Play on Earth

It was very, very difficult to make it coherent. So apart from the technical problems of actually cuing, of understanding, I think the problem that I want to be able to concentrate on here for a while comes down to, 'What is the performer's job?' What is the game they are playing? It's not very interesting to perform by numbers if all you're doing is getting a cue from Singapore and saying, 'Oh, it's my turn to look at Jon, and you're not there so I don't give a...! I don't know how to react and then I'm stuck and I'm thinking I look like an arse here, Jon, and Singapore is "did that come through" and I don't know,

so I'll do something else...' So there's a massive problem about how you actually understand the job that you are doing collectively and how you can locate yourself in this global space.

I'll sum up very briefly: what I'd like to work on here is to simplify the complexities that I've been stuck on, to take things apart and actually work them out simply. A big part of that is having the time to have studio practice, which is essential. You need to be able to work in a studio practically. So I'm going to be running workshops here, internally connecting with Central, externally connecting with other venues in Britain, and also later on internationally. And if any of them turn into a really good idea we might be performing them publicly, professionally.

Another really important thing, not very interesting artistically but politically, is to find a technical solution that is cheap, easy to use, and widely available, so that people in India can get hold of it using freeware that they can download. Mobile technology is just about getting up to speed, so you're not stuck within the institution because until now, we've been stuck within places with the resources and the connections and so on.

Obviously I can't do these things on my own, it's not a single practice, so I hope to be able to do it through workshops and collaborations.

AL: Thanks very much, Julian.

Audience Member 4: Why did you choose three locations, not two or four? Why three?

JMS: Well the last one we did, with Shunt, was very experimental. We did it on no money so we did it in London. It had two venues: the Shunt Vaults and my flat, which was a few minutes away. But there's something about the number three which I really like. It triangulates the Earth for you; it somehow, encompasses the world. Though I did find it was rather an ambitious undertaking!

AM4: In terms of the triangulation, what happened there? Did that work for you, personally? Did the three thing work?

JMS: I love the idea of it, but the practicalities of it were so overwhelming that I learnt to start simple. There were three locations and three screens, but the screens were always in the same place so that bit was simple, but trying to make visual sense of three screens...

Audience Member 5: Is it the same story the whole time?

JMS: There was a story that only really existed on the screens and yet there were side stories going on. Stories where people linked one way were on the screen, but then the other side of the story was happening live on the stages and you didn't necessarily see it.

Audience Member 6: This might be a really naive question, but to what extent can you think about the clown as an object manipulator of his or her own body?

JD: Very much so. It comes back to this thing of presence, which it is impossible to attain and you will fail inevitably to be authentic. It's an impossibility, from a clown point of view. Everything is ridiculous as a failure: my own emotions, my own thoughts, my own movement, my own body... So you kind of separate yourself, you don't identify with yourself, you know you're playing away from yourself all the time, so there's a sense in which all these things – your feelings your thoughts, your body, your life – are in sense an object being manipulated.

AM6: What is it about being in more than one place at a time?

JMS: Well, one of the things I've been doing with these pieces is to look at questions of how one represents oneself in different ways and in different situations. I suppose we are all different when we're in different places and

there's a psychological way of writing a play that might talk about that, but if you have three places that are all quite real – different places but they meet – then from any one particular place they have different importance. For me, this place is the most tangible, but there's another place out there that I have some kind of knowledge of, possibly.

We all have our own ideas about things – I've always liked the idea that these things can co-exist. Rather than having one after the other, you have different places simultaneously. So what, for example, is our relationship with a farmer in India, working the fields? That was an example that came to me as a practical proposition not long ago because all the farmers in India have got mobile phones because there aren't any landlines that work. So the idea that we could have a mobile technology linking incredibly different places means that there's something very interesting about that possibility. That's the physical reality, and yet it's also something you only have in your head if you're here, just like someone there will only have us in their head. It's not about talking, it's not like video conferencing, it's almost the opposite of video conferencing. I don't know if you understand what I mean, it's not about communicating with each other, it's about presenting parallel realities, versions of something and seeing what the possibilities are.

Audience Member 7: Julian, do you like the sense of being in so many different places at once and the game being on a global scale? Do you think that distance is important?

JMS: No, I think it would work very well locally. I imagine a fantastic piece could be done in two identical houses, with the whole confusion of which one is the one we thought it was. That both in itself is sculpturally interesting and it also is psychologically interesting. My friend's mother is getting dementia; she went into hospital and then she came back to her flat and was convinced that the hospital people had rebuilt her flat a hundred yards up the road, so it wasn't the real one. There's that sense of how do we know we are who we are and how do I know that's Jon there? There's something weird in the mind

that allows you say, 'Yes, that's Jon,' with a bump on your head. So yes, it could be just next door.

AL: I'd like to ask one more question, which I'll put to Jon and Nenagh. It comes out of what you said, Julian. You talked about creating a combined narrative space so one can appreciate the challenges of making the technology work and the challenges for the performers. Dramaturgically I think you're interested in a storytelling, or at least creating a narrative experience. I wonder whether there's another theme that runs through all three presentations, the idea of presence and immediacy and some kind of instability and intimacy in the moment. But on the other hand, I wonder if you're also attempting to create things that work through sequence, through our understanding of narrative and story, which is a different paradigm perhaps than the paradigm of presence.

JD: In the case of clown, I think that's something I'm keen to look at in the last year of my research: what narrative, or if it's not narrative, what structure is appropriate for clown, beyond what has traditionally been the case, where a premise-driven idea is given in about 20 minutes, or 22 in the case of American sitcoms. How do you make a piece that is full length – if you like, an-hour-and-a-quarter – in clowning without being boring? Something that challenges and is up there with the greats of theatre authorship. The Shakespeare of clowning. How can you do that? I've never seen it. There are lots of issue shows around, and some of them are excellent, but they're not Shakespeare.

AL: The Holy Grail...

JMS: But why do you feel that need? Buster Keaton was fine with 20 minutes.

JD: Yes, absolutely, you see, you can't sit through a whole Buster Keaton. I suppose because it's been tried and hasn't quite worked. I suppose it's commercial as well.

AL: Nenagh, last word from you.

NW: Well I'm interested in the private and the public – my private relationship with the puppets and the objects, and then not spoiling that by being too contrived when I try to share that. I think the private and the public is really interesting with today's technology, with CCTV and things. My image is other places when I'm here, and how conscious we are of being in the different places and with the technology. I was just thinking, you need to talk to terrorists about their use of technology and the placing of image. The whole world is so full of private becoming public... I think it's time I shut up!

AL: You've just given Julian a fine provocation.

NW: I think it's time I jump on a train.

AL: Well, I think it's time for a glass of wine before you jump on a train. I'd like to thank Jon, Julian and Nenagh.

ENDS