

Some things we have been thinking about lately...

questions we ask ourselves

Q: What is plan b?

A: plan b can stand for Balham, Brighton, Bristol, and now Berlin and it can stand for all those who want to start again try another way.

We often talk of things not being 'the plan b way' we use this to make the other feel bad if they are mean, unkind, thoughtless, cruel, bitchy. I thought about an unwritten manifesto once in bed it went a bit like...

plan b will not shout in performances, they will endeavour to make you comfortable, they will have open hearts and be honest at all times, plan b is about you and me - you are free to come and go as you please.

And now if plan b were to be visible it would just be traces of places that have affected us or stopped us in our tracks - obsessions with clouds, writing in sand, scary fish, airports, shop displays, a winter wonderland and a ghostly house.

I would like to say that plan b could also stand for 'being here' (in a kind of dreadfully punning way, but seriously). What is it to really be in the moment, at this very location? Sitting in our studio, side by side, while I type this and Soph types some other notes for a proposal... The very things that are purposefully edited out of touring theatre work so that it can go anywhere, pretending that the black walls of studio theatres are all the same. Our work strives to respond to where we are now. That's why we spend our summers sweating inside a building making 1:100 scale models of the art institution we were in. In that piece *Me the City* we wanted to shrink the world around us in order to try and understand it and examine it. Research and stories that sprung from that place were then projected large again alongside our live manipulation of the model and miniatures – a world that from the digital images stuck on model buildings was nearly believable. From our 3 camera angles we tried to create a film that used the low tech aesthetic to make what we hoped would be urban voodoo: by playing on our carpet with our model could we in fact make it snow outside? Could we entice strangers to meet and kiss outside the

registry office?

Q: And as a 'duo' who inevitably work with dialogue why do we say that we work with 'Spontaneous text' instead of Improvised text?

A: Because Improvisation has all the wrong connotations and nuances from a completely different world, we're artists, for god sake and these things are important to us. *Improvisation* is a tool actor's use and it stays as a workshop technique within the framework of narrative theatre tradition. Spontaneous text as we mean it is something quite different – it usually involves the very careful defining of context and concept way before a word is spoken. It hates rehearsal and repetition. It is the utterances of people trying to be in the moment and in the context and here and now with as much of themselves as they can manage. It tries to answer the hardest question an audience member can ask of contemporary performance practice – why have you asked us here?

But to answer this question straight away is also a mistake and perhaps the mistake of dogmatic, narrative theatre making.

The art, as it were, is not to answer the question right away but to stay with the uncomfortable-ness and impossibility of the question because that is where the interesting territories are to be found.

Spontaneous text is a way of challenging The Text or previously constructed/crafted dramaturgy - rather one that responds to a 'nowness' of performing.

Q: How do you set up situations for Spontaneous Text?

A: we began with *How do you keep on talking even though you have said everything you thought possible?* In that piece we became the Girl and Clown from the infamous television test card F, which began in 1967 and has been shown more than any other program over 70,000 hours. We wanted to use this iconic, nostalgic and with the increase of viewing hours increasingly rare image as a way to talk about people stuck together. It was at times Kafkaesque and Beckettian and other times funny, banal, ridiculous and sad. We asked each other questions like; what is fluff? Do you think we are no longer needed? Are you real? What else could we do for a job? Do you think

anyone is watching? And were interrupted by the muzak of test cards reminding us to retake our original position of being in an eternal game of nougats and crosses.

In a way *Bed full of songs* was also a spontaneous text but of song. In bed we set ourselves the task of singing all the songs we could remember and writing them down on a duvet till it was full. In both these pieces the audience were made comfortable as if in a domestic space with carpet, cushions, inflatable chairs – anything that would be a contrast to the hardness of a theatre seat, which required you to stay. As they were both long pieces, between 4 – 5 hours, the audience was free to come and go as they pleased.

As a task *The Last Hour* wanted to limit this endless time experienced in these works and put pressure on our 'spontaneous text'. We were to say to each other truthfully what we would want to say to each other in the last hour – our confessions, affirmations and anger timed by a chess clock. As the statement was finished the other was forced to respond or move on, really listening was imperative and inescapable. Dressed as if this were a conference and directing the text to the audience and the listeners who were receiving the piece live on radio it was an intense experience for all. The end of the hour was not a clear state; was it the end of us, of the world or just the performance?

Q: What is the difference between the spontaneous text pieces and the more set pieces such as *Me the City* or your recent work in progress *Wonderworld*?

The more set pieces have always had a desire to continue the spontaneous text yet in making the works they have necessitated a framework, which gets nearer a 'show'. Therefore a structure is put in place and a rough outline is made but no lines are learnt and an openness is still required. Because both pieces are about trying to condense experiences in the world; one is the scale of buildings such as in *Me the City* and in *Wonderworld* it was about trying to condense a 133 km journey. On our tandem we set off for a castle where we had a residency and made the journey to the venue the focal point. The arduous task of working together on this joint venture of physical stamina and

co-operation made the end point, our destination, foremost in our minds. It quietened us. Yet we thought a lot about human power, inventors, efficiency, and coupledness. We were public and where we choose to position ourselves (front or back) played a large part in how we were viewed as in charge or not – yet our unusual tandem with brakes and gears at the back meant a finer more sophisticated set of negotiations had to be made. The performance took seven stages of this journey as opportunities to represent these experiences in different ways. Added by Kraftwerk's *Tour de France* and R. Kelly's *I Believe I can fly* we peddled our way through journeys that we take daily, make especially and the one that will end: life.