

## **Discussion: Barry Edwards / Geoffrey Smith**

A discussion with my assistant Geoff Smith who worked on the early stages of Optik's latest performance cycle, through platform shows like *Crossing*, *No Strings* and *Tank* to the proto-type shows *Physics of Human Pleasure* and *Tropik*.

**BE:** You see? That's the Matisse. 1953. When he was about 82. The snail. The snail!

He wrote about it: 'Everything we see in our ordinary life undergoes a deformation given by acquired habits. This is especially so in an age like ours. The necessary action of detaching oneself calls for a kind of courage, and this courage is indispensable to the artist who must see all things as if they were seeing them for the first time. All this life he must see as he did as a child'.

**GS:** You see our performances for the first time.

**BE:** Postmodernism was seen as a way of being more down to earth - using everyday materials... like the vernacular of imagery - as opposed to the classical lines of modernism. And in a way I think that's why postmodernist performance is all about being very referential - you come on with a mop or a wheelbarrow - some kind of vernacular object. And its useful to know that because I think that's not where we're at all. Not in any way. So also therefore I think that the use of objects is tricky. That's what we found with the flour ..

**GS:** I've been thinking about that. I don't think that objects are necessary at all.

I think maybe things like . . shapes. Or going back to the colour.. You know, you've had a spiral and the spiral spins. If you have a spiral on your finger and someone spins it..it's very interesting to see the spiral going round. It has no..no meaning whatsoever. It's just part of our whole make-up. You're like punctuation in the piece. It would be very strange..

**BE:** Yes, that's right. In other words that's the complete opposite of post-modernism. It doesn't rely on collaging references from everyday life.

**GS:** It's like when that guy was saying about that chair. How we built the chair but didn't..of course it was a chair..it was a chair - whatever you did with it. And if it was built out of ...I don't know..bags of horse muck .. it would still be a chair.

**BE:** It's also the case, as you work, the things that people see in it begin to grow - from what the performers are doing. And if you start to trim that down, either with words or with referential objects, then you lose that as well. You see an object and you think I'll bung that in and you don't realise what it is you're doing.

**GS:** But I think that all the new work is just about to start. It's on the border line of breaking it open. I mean there's just so much there now. I mean, someone lying down. The position of the head - what's the position of the head. What's lying down to standing up. And you were saying about not to go backwards. Not to regret, but to go forwards. That's a very interesting action but its..how do you work that through. Its speed, control.

**BE:** Also, the problem with objects is that you have to touch them, and that brings the whole question of contact. And I think also that the fact that our performers didn't touch each other in that performance, except in that one moment, is quite strange to a spectator. You'd expect in physical theatre everyone to be hurling each other about.

**GS:** But also the objects are there aren't they with the spectator. I was thinking that the spectator was an object. Because I remember when Paul rolled he collided into one of the spectators. The spectator had his legs out..like..here. Paul moved, and it was the spectator thinking..- well I'm not going to move, I'm not going to move, I'm going to just really upset his style and he just carried on. So there was a meeting between the two, spectator and performer. He collided then he readjusted himself. But there must also be a point where, his hand,

**BE:** Yes. Where the performer actually touches the spectator.

**GS:** I mean . how the hand goes on to the face. That might come on to the spectator's foot..

**BE:** The word singularity. Looking up what singularity actually means in this new physics. Singularity is when..they say..you go beyond the event horizon into a point where..all the normal rules of physics don't apply. So its not in time, its not something you can describe. And the most you can say about it is that it is. And they say that the Universe is a singularity. And this is a way of coping with the fact that we can't understand how the Universe can have a beginning. Because what comes before it? Therefore is doesn't have a beginning - it just is. And what Susan (Susan Melrose) talks about is the 'performer singularity' - and that's very interesting. We don't make any attempt to create what the performer actually is on the stage. It's like saying..accepting the fact say of the Universe and going from there. All sorts of things flow from that. That means you can't intervene in the way of interpreting the actions of the performer. You can't say well I think it would be quite nice if you did that. And that's why I think we've got a major problem every time they try to speak more than just a naming word, or make contact with each other. Because the only reason for making contact is..well.. because we ask them to. Why do we ask them to ? Suddenly you're into a whole.. You're into events. And I think what's interesting is that its the spectator that makes the events. The spectator is sort of..drawn..into making the event. What I'd like to know now is to what extent people are able to cope with this. You know..are able to actually deal with it. Because it could be that they're just so alienated from performance now that they..can't. I don't know. Or so used to it being referential. Obviously dance gets into this in a way, but not really because I think that dance.. you're let off the hook in a way aren't you ?

**GS:** I've been thinking about the post-show discussion. Just get rid. But gap at the end is then - that's also part of the performance. I really enjoy that it's just left and whatever happens..whatever.. when the spectator is unable to discuss it. Discuss it at that moment.

**That's exactly what he wants to do. Say that was rubbish, or this is crap. But they're left. They go. And there they are, they're on their own. Now its up to them whether they want to talk or not. But it doesnt matter. So they're left and they have to go away.**

**BE:** And just talk to each other about it, rather than to a group or whatever.

**GS:** Yes.

**BE:** That's right.

**GS:** That performance wasn't their best performance but it was really interesting. You know, that laughter, how a spectator can make a performer laugh. A performer can make a spectator laugh. By doing nothing. But it's that quick turn. I think it happened in Germany when we were rehearsing. It can go from laughter to anything.

**BE:** Yes. Also, the space is absolutely crucial, isn't it ? So it's always going to be a kind of..participatory type of space. Which I think is fine.

**GS:** Well I think the space is endless, now.

**BE:** Yes. The inside and outside of the space. Going outside. Then you come in. Really exploring that relationship. And I think the spectators can walk in and out as well. Because once a performer's gone out, a spectator could go out as well. That's another thing I'd like to experiment with, is the length of time of the piece. There's so much confusion about what people mean about things like..time based events and all this. The more I read about it the more I think they don't know what they're talking about. As though..clock time - that's time based. Then non time based. Like a sculpture or something. And sort of sits there and doesn't work in clock time. But it does.

**GS:** I also like the idea of the space outside. It would be lovely if the spectator could see the performance actually outside. And off he goes. Walk. You see him go.

**BE:** That was in that Valentini thing about transparent walls and about seeing through the walls of the space. I think gallery spaces would be very nice to perform in.

**GS:** Well. Like on the stage. They're working, and OK the windows are open it doesn't matter. You see them go out, you see them go outside. And then you think they're not coming back. And then you see them come back. And there they are. And then they turn. And then they start walking. And you just see them walk. And they carry on. And they've gone.