

## **OPTIK in process: Jack Brook in interview with Barry Edwards**

**Jack Brook (JB)** I am struck by the way so many modernist dancers, dance trainers and choreographers have been inspired by notions of spontaneity and truth in performance and have tried to find an authentic and personally expressive language through physical action. I'm interested in the way these Romantic ideas relate to concepts whose roots lie in debates within literary, medical and educational discourses since the late c18th. In some ways I see your work part of that same project, a quest for the truly spontaneous and a search for the transparently expressive power of the body.

**Barry Edwards (BE)** I would separate the spontaneous and the expressive. In seeking spontaneity I find that my work has to avoid the explicitly expressive. By that I mean the performer is not implicated in meaning at the moment of moving. But this does not mean that there is no tradition or movement discipline within the work. I want the performer to lose the conventional sense of individual expression but then to discover a new kind of personal engagement.

**JB:** What do you mean by that loss of individual expression within a movement discipline?

**BE:** For the individual performer there is the opportunity to explore this or that moment. This is not presented as a negative rule, such as "You can't do this.. or 'You can't do that.'" It's always a proposition: "You can do this, if you *want* to..." The limits of this enabling framework are constantly being tested. For example, in a Berlin performance, a performer was abandoned in the space performing a very simple turning movement. The other two performers reverted to stillness which had the effect of isolating him. And they *stayed* very still. The other performer could have let the motion come to rest, but playing with the dynamics of what was happening, he found the turning was getting bigger and bigger until he was whirling like a Dervish, spinning round the space, not in a controlled performed way but letting the turn simply carry him into a

swaying turn until he became so dizzy he couldn't sustain it and the anarchic episode simply collapsed under its own weight. But there was duration involved here: it went on for some time. And that duration was the result of that very particular combination of circumstance: the coincidence of him being in that moment of slow turning when the others stopped, and his feeling at that point of a movement that was growing.

**JB:** Is that what you would call a moment of spontaneity in the performance?

**BE:** Spontaneity is a kind of unachievable goal which has always intrigued me. A kind of active response from the performer in which everything the performer can use *is* being used to deal with that moment. And that is not a recreation of something, and especially not the illusion of recreation.

Techniques have always attempted to produce spontaneity, but gradually, as we get used to them, they achieve the *illusion* of spontaneity, and we are always trying to get back to the thing itself. That's even more of a question today in live work.

**JB:** That certainly was one of the aspirations of modernism in its early stages. But those expressivist ideas which are now associated with notions of freedom in Duncan's performances soon solidified into a series of approaches for securing the *illusion* of that spontaneity which you describe. Is that paradox a problem in your own work?

**BE:** It's not so much a problem as an opportunity live art can explore. Performance has the potential for the unique, and that is what interests me about it. In my work I try to give the performer the ability to work with an absolute minimum of control. And that's another way of looking at spontaneity. Technique can become a fetish. It should be something illusive, a constantly moving goal. The moment that the training becomes linear and predictable, it ceases to be spontaneous and becomes instead a kind of routine. However, the idea that you have to do something different each time can itself become the routine and block the spontaneity. If you are constantly working in relation to what you've done in order to do something different, spontaneity ceases there as well. We

found doing five performances in Berlin that you need to avoid the trap of inventing newness all the time.

**JB:** There is another kind of innocence involved here. In order to participate in the group activity you are describing, the individual has in a sense to be deleted in order to take on the stylistic markers of the larger system. The performer doesn't come to your first session as it were in a state of grace. A whole lifetime of experience is inscribed on the body, its characteristic alignment, motor patterns, factors of weight, time, and so on. So it could be argued that in the preparation, in the training programme, as much *deletion* is going on as there is *addition*. Covertly, perhaps, but very deliberately, movement training programmes attempt to shape the body by removing the personal motor predispositions and gestural habits in order to arrive at what we call a style. Has the physical instrument to be neutral in order to reveal what you call the discipline which is bigger than individual expression?

**BE:** I know what you mean, but at that point there is a kind of contradiction. I'm not after purity of that kind. I'm not after an ideal. The individual mechanics and biologies of different bodies are supremely interesting to me.

**JB:** So in the technique there is no attention to the organisation and elaboration of movement and its characteristics in the way I have described?

**BE:** No

**JB:** And the performer's idiosyncrasies are allowed?

**BE:** Precisely. The specific individuality of that person, which is not the same thing as the expressive mask, is of supreme interest. For example how an *interior* (however that is constructed) comes through and is played out *on an exterior*. That is one way in which the work proceeds, and the individual spectators start to empathize, building their own stories and their own responses upon this play. So having said that the performance

is subject to the technique, there is no sense of stylistic purity in what is shown and there is no problem in accommodating individual movement characteristics.

**JB:** In the light of this, how do you respond to the point I made about the Optik performance I saw in London in 1993 when I talked about the rule system operating through the event. I noted how Derrida defined the function of language in what he calls *theological theatre* and I wondered if your performers are the *interpretative slaves* of such a theatre. Certainly, when things seem to be falling apart or going nowhere, it's as if you as author-creator pop up with a solution.

**BE:** It is a matter of defining a line - not a permanent line, it's one that shifts - as to the minimum constraints required at any one point. And to allow the performer to break free of these or test what they might be. A very obvious example could be the space itself. You can't go through a brick wall! Perhaps some practices say otherwise and perhaps it is true that you can align particles which could allow you to pass through that wall. But for our purposes you can assume not. But you can explore that potential when you head for that wall, and one day you might pass through it. You never know! If a door is there, however, or a window which allow photons to pass through the glass, that's all *given* and the performers can use the fact of seeing and being seen through such materials. I am saying that the space has to be revealed in terms of its actual conditions. The potential for leaving the space is something else, and that something else is inexhaustible. But the body brings constraints for the performer in that space. This is where it gets complex. Since there is no privileged front, and in time every point will be explored, then one of the constraints I have put into the work is a focus on the straight path and the front which is always mapped within 90 degree angles. The thing that is special about that is in relation to our own 90 degree awareness. We are defined by that, and have a biological link to that configuration in a way that is not a matter of individual choice.

**JB:** You say the configuration is biological? For me that restriction has less to do with how human perception functions than with a particular aesthetic, a desire for a certain

clarity that is achieved by a particular rule system. And it's in those rules that I detect your authorial signature!

**BE:** The restriction of the straight path relates to our *frontality* as a species. Of course we have the capacity to turn the head, but we are essentially forward facing. That is how our world is constructed. I have found that if the focus is fixed then the performer becomes more aware of that line of vision and can work the full potential of that line.

**JB:** So by restricting that turning of the head, you are encouraging acting into the body? You are wanting to convert focus and change of focus into those actions of advance and retreat we were discussing a moment ago?

**BE:** Yes. The body can turn. It can go round. And as you do so you change your front in space, you make a new front and you see a newly configured world within that new alignment. But within the act there is no seeking eye. The performers are not looking for anything.

**JB:** A new perception grows from action? For the performers, I can see that as a kind of disengagement from the usual patterns of attention in performance. For the audience, however, I am still interested in how the straight lines, right angles and grids operate at an aesthetic level. You see, not knowing that subtle moments of choice and motivation are being experienced in the minds of the performers, what strikes one above all else is the tidiness, organization and compositional elegance that keeps pulling chaotic events back into choreographic form.

**BE:** That same 'tidiness', though, can be seen in any number of training procedures. In certain martial arts training, for instance, you have to be absolutely square on to the opponent, with the line across the hips and across the chest at 90 degrees to the frontal axis. You always face full on. It is hard to do. A lot of actors conventionally have their own ways of escaping this discipline of the line. They will, for example, sneak in the sideways look..

**JB:** Which becomes for the audience a kind of skepticism - a note of irony or ambiguity within the text. The unambiguous system you are describing is one of absolute certainty and that certainty also relates to the conventions of the movement language you are using.

**BE:** I am interested in the chaotic, the complex and the dense, but as characteristics of performance *structure*, not as a performance aesthetic which sets out to create those things by *representation*. For me that is unsatisfactory. My work has a completely different starting point. If the performer is absolutely certain about certain decision options, you get an advantage. A real security, for example, which puts pressure on the performer. They can't say : "It's ambiguous" or "I'm using insecurity" or more simply "No". At all times they have to own what they decide, and that exposes them to the spectator in a quite frightening way.

**JB:** Which brings us to a certain tension in the practice, because for all that the discipline is grounded on the personal investment that you describe, there is also an apparent de-humanizing effect in the way the rules translate into a rather cool and *decontextualised* event, one which in important respects seems to lack a human dimension.

**BE:** But in a way not. If you look at the individual performer within the configuration of those bodies on stage, then the angles and the projections that arise from that situation are infinite. The individual performer is always part of the total. We are used to talking about performance and about the individual performer as if he or she had a kind of *independent* totality. But that's not so. Every performer exists for the work only as *part* of the whole. This issue is central. If I look at one performer, there is for me an insufficiency. I can only see that performer in relation to somebody or something else. If I just look at that one, in a way they disappear. They are just not there. I'm interested in how that happens. And that can be quite strange when you're looking at *one*. That's

very much where the play comes in. You're looking at that body but there's something not registering. That can be a complete disappearance if the performer, for example, goes very still, and the other two are moving. You don't see the still body in relation to the events unfolding.

**JB:** Though for most directors and choreographers, the still figure remains a powerful presence in the image, a ground note in the composition to which the other moving figures relate. Perhaps your work uses stillness in a different way?

**BE:** My work doesn't exclude such a reading. Both may be available to the spectator depending on the unique conditions of the moment.

**JB:** Does this idea of the performer disappearing also relate to the somewhat austere movement vocabulary you use. Your use of the term *discipline* is perhaps significant, because in an Optik performance the visual pallet is so very limited. From time to time, very little appears to be happening. As audience, we learn the conventions of a kind of minimalism in which *the simple action is meaningful and no action is absence*. Why do you to deny the usual resources of movement theatre to your performers?

**BE:** I'm not interested in *filling up*. In fact. I'm more interested in creating holes or horizons through which you can disappear or travel and see in a different way. What interests me now is the way in which work on something as complex as ourselves can be a mode of performance which is really investigative, that can make things apparent.

**JB:** What about the limitations you set on this exploration of the interior? Watching the performance I responded very strongly in terms of the elegance and economy I saw in the development of the simple movements which were being explored. But on the other hand, I wonder if in your quest for clarity the work is in danger of missing the essential characteristic of what it's like to be human. The performance is one of idealisations and of utopian certainties whereas human experience itself is infinitely complex and untidy.

Even at those points when we seem fully conscious, for example, we are more conscious of our uncertainties. Moreover, we live out those contradictions at all sorts of levels. Some performance practice has been concerned with a quest for the unambiguous and the *idealised*, but much modernist and post-modern work has explored these tensions and ambiguities. Admittedly this tendency can involve the kind of expressivist self-indulgences that I think you are trying to avoid. At best, though, much contemporary work tries to handle a range of perspectives on life with all its messiness and lack of resolution and closure. A simple example: "I would like to go that way, but at the same time I am drawn this way.." The holding of this conflict in a moment of contrapposto can define uncertainty in a single image. That's the kind of expressive potential you appear to exclude. Your movement range seems more detached, cerebral even. Everything appears resolved and unambiguous. Even in implied contradictions or confrontations there is no negotiation, only *pure states*. So I'm wondering if really it is only a small part of the world that that you're interested in exploring, a part which is capable of being handled by such certainties. You appear to exclude those parts of life which are problematic and so you exclude the ambiguous in your exploration of formal clarity.

**BE:** I'm very interested in elementary uncertainties, but you can't *pretend* to be uncertain. You have to *be* uncertain. And what is that uncertainty? In a performance, the performer has a decision to make. He or she can go left or can go right. But there's something maybe blocking this way even though the moment seems to point in this direction. In the training work, performers explore that tension *internally* but then go one way or the other. And having *gone* they've *gone*. The moment no longer exists. It's finished.

**JB:** So those moments are there, but have to be identified by the audience? They are not made present in order that they can be read? Perhaps you are deliberately deleting the signing of that process so that the only text is the resolved action?

**BE:** There should be no overt hesitation, no tension written onto the body. No message to motor response at all. There is stillness. At the same time you as performer are very aware of movement possibilities.

**JB:** Looking also at the relationship between your training and some New Dance approaches, you do not seem concerned with the performer's full consciousness of movement as a physical event. For example, you don't want to rediscover within the mechanically routine act of walking, the complex motor events that are involved. In what sense is your training concerned with movement at that level?

**BE:** To a degree it is. The moment movement is engaged, it is *movement in a direction*, an approach I have learned from Barba. Movement always has direction, which means that if the performer concentrates on that sense of direction, there are massive landscapes every time to explore. Movement is always *towards* and *away from*, and in these two there is implicitly *flight* from and *yearning* towards.

I don't ever talk about this with the performers because it's not really a verbal thing. I'm sure it goes right back through personal development phases to *pre-verbal* ideas of movement with respect to security, the loved one, the parent, or running away from the dark. That's why I put such an emphasis on forward motion and the forward look, so what's behind can't be accessed or brought to the surface by the look. But it's always there and it can be present in performance. Those sorts of resonances don't have to be verbalised in rehearsal. They can be felt and understood in the physicality of what the performers are doing. You can't create that by talking about it. You work on the objectivity of what they are doing, leaving such implicit textures within the work. This sets up a resonance, so that, say, total engagement in running fast, begins to connect with all the past running that you've ever done, and also what running means to the species.

**JB:** You are talking here about kinds of pedestrian action which are transformed by a kind of heightened attention, and you define the conditions by which actions are performed within a mythical landscape which is not a simple exteriorisation of feelings.

You are talking of an approach that finds layers of meaning buried within simple everyday action. Does the training approach every action and every moment using this kind of archeology?

**BE:** Performer decisions are very important. You can't just say: "Look for contact.. Look for engagement.." Those things have got to *arrive*. The performance is a picture of what happens. Just that. And everybody is totally responsible. Every action in performance has to be a *necessary* action. So you can't do something that is merely *expressive* or something you simply *do*. The performer tries to engage the movement as a necessary movement.

**JB:** So what is necessary?

**BE:** We move to move forward. Just that. That is what I would characterise as necessary, both in terms of the species and in terms of us and the work. A move perhaps into the unknown, the future. In the training work, most of our discussion is about simple physical tension or rhythmic shaping or fluidity and so on. Or we're looking to open up those basic responses to going forward. And the thing is you can see when the performers work, particularly in the earlier stages with a new performer, the blocks that get put up. To me it's a biological thing. None of us wants to face the unknown, we want security and one of the ways we do this is by trying to resolve everything, by wrapping things up in smaller units.. "That's finished.. and that's finished.." And we try to loosen ties in terms of resolution. The performer wants the satisfaction of closure: "I've dealt with that.. I've come to that point.. I've taken that step.. and now I can start again". When people first start the training, they tend to resolve very fast, and it's a constant series of starting-points. They reach a certain point and then they stop. But what happens if you start to move those points of resolution, so that it's not a resolution, but a moving on somewhere else? So you enter that state in a deeper way. An exploration of moving forward as a continuing process.

**JB:** In your desire for this kind of clarity and authenticity within the practice I'm interested how your performers cope with and avoid the sheer weight of attention that is involved. What you describe requires a kind of focus which is unlike most of what can be recognised in dance training. If he or she actually thought through what was involved in even a simple phrase in all its detail, a dancer would be immobilised. In every technique it seems that there has to be a sense of letting go, of allowing the body's own intelligence to bypass a consciousness that can only deal at a certain pace with complex information. You describe a practice in which every movement is inscribed with its own past and every moment of choice carries a heavy metaphorical weight. How do the performers deal with such a system and at the same time remain aware of their relationship with an audience? Or do they, despite what you are saying, go beyond conscious controls to a body that is naturally expressive?

**BE:** At the same time as it is all that complex landscape of past and future events that you describe, the act itself is only a step. It is in itself completely insignificant.

**JB:** If the significance of the event can collapse back into its simple physical properties, how does your technique of focusing inward towards intention, decision and motivation add to what is actually happening? Why not simply give the performers a sequence of rules that would generate the same results? The Cage/ Cunningham experiments with chance in the 1960's and some of the performance artists of the 1970s and 80s who used systems procedures might seem to be doing the same as your performers when they find the moment for action within consciousness. Why the need to think it through in the way you insist? If it is only a technical ploy, why such intense investment in meditative introspection?

**BE:** Because of the traffic between those opposites. That dynamic. The extremes are contradictory states and it's trying to play with those contradictions that is of interest. So for example, if three are walking together, and in an instant two simply take a turn right, for the other, in a sense, they *disappear* from that area of activity, leaving that performer

alone. Then immediately that is a very different spatial set-up, and you have to deal with that.

**JB:** Quite unnerving as a performer, being thrown back on your own resources in that way.

**BE:** Exactly. And the spectators pick it up as well. How do you then deal with that, without *closing* or *resolving* ? It's not enough to say "This is play. It doesn't matter". But how each person deals with that is up to the performer. It can be hugely funny or quite absurd that the performer is being abandoned. Or it can be tragic with a huge sense of loss within a silence of utter solitude. And not closing it down one way or the other is a mind numbing, head-ache making job for the actor, because they don't know how long it's going to last.

**JB:** I'm quite surprised how very narrative-centred your metaphors are when you discuss motivation, intention and the performative within the practice. Notions of plot, of tragedy and loss, of bewilderment in isolation and so on, all these allusions to narrative structures, are features you have distanced your work from in previous discussions. As we have been talking, I have also been conscious of the *performed* aspect of the practice. The character performing solo, for example, after the other two have *disappeared*. In that solo is he or she performing more or less? I'm trying to clarify here what we might mean by *performing* as distinct from participating in "Something which is larger than myself" .

**BE:** I think to a certain extent it's a critical moment, and there are moments when it can.. not *drift* exactly, but lie fallow. And then it moves, and then suddenly from nowhere a critical moment appears and you have to deal with it. Like an accident, it's not planned. Whether they are performing more at this point I'm not sure. They are certainly working harder. But then that is what the training helps them to do.

**JB:** One thing you refer to is an “uncoupling” of the interior and the exterior. We have spoken on other occasions about other ways of formulating that relationship, for example the William James’ essay What is an Emotion, where he talks about the physical expression of an emotion as part of the experience itself. In a state of fear or shock, for example, we cannot separate the experience from the motor sensations which are involved. Tension in the muscles or a characteristic facial expression or a quickening of the pulse all in part constitute the emotion. He doesn’t place the emotion as something felt here in the head which is then somehow projected onto the surface of the body. Your work, on the other hand, does make such a distinction. Sensation and feeling seem to be regarded as quite distinct from the body, the will of the performer, as it were, placing the body on hold ready for the mind to start the engine again and initiate action. You then seem to go on to explore not so much the nature of emotion but of memory and learning. As though the present can be separated from the past, as though there is a part of perception that monitors *now* and the performer is able uncouple from that present the imprint of memory. This aspect of the work seems very much the pursuit of that innocence which began our discussion.

**BE:** And of spontaneity. The spontaneous action of encountering the wall and not trying to recreate what happened last time or even to recreate the spontaneity of last time. To go for it *now*.

**JB:** The mental map you draw clearly separates its constituent parts. There is a constant sense of the mind as the driving force and the body as a kind of vehicle. You clearly separate *inside* and *outside* in expressive terms. You draw a line between memory and the struggle for an authentic present. I’m interested in the mechanics of this approach and your idea that the practice is a form of research. Given that research methodologies in the physical and social sciences in the recent past have increasingly acknowledged the significance of human factors within the inquiry, doesn’t your work look backward in its attempt to deal with the body as a kind of decontextualised machine?

**BE:** In my terms the brain is part of the body. I'm interested in the way the whole thing works- the huge complexity, for example, of the move *forward* which is more complex than, say, taking a step *up*, which is just lifting the leg. There is corroborative evidence for this in the experience of individuals who have a certain neurological illness which causes a kind of paralysis after a single forward step. The second step, as it were, will not come. But that step can be taken if a block is placed in front, forming the first tread of a flight of stairs. The patient can climb that and having moved *up*, can then somehow begin to move forward. We can observe these differences in the work. We can explore what it means to move forward in that way, not as a kind of expression, but in action terms. So whereas on the surface it might look as though it's clean cut in the way you have described it, in practice it's an enormous complex of impulse and action which you can never really pin down. You are always dealing with the unpredictable. So I don't recognise what you are saying about *laboratory work* in my practice, a feeling of keeping the parts separate. Quite the reverse. I find that it opens up and relates to absolutely everything. At certain points you can isolate, obviously, and concentrate on specific actions or body parts. But the moment you put that into a total situation, suddenly the whole thing is let loose. You can't control that. You find yourself observing such a density of activity that it's too complex to understand and use. I think it's very important that control does not come into it, because that would be quite a sinister force. You could begin to control the people you were working with in that they would be doing what *you* wanted them to do. But there is a sense in which the performers feel that they control the situation in performance, and that is an intricate question. All we can come back to is the fact that it is *performing*, and that is a mode of action in its own terms. A performer knows what that is and those conventions release the performance from these other areas. It's not about conflict. You are simply engaged in performance. You're happy with that. Strangely that can be quite unsettling for a spectator.

**JB:** We have used the words *express* and *expressive* and I wonder if we could look at how we are using these terms, and explore the extent to which something is being expressed in the work.

**BE:** What we experience as expression is actually a process that happens between a performer and other performers and crucially between the performer and a spectator. That is the expressive activity, though it's not located upon a single body. It's created invisibly in the fluid traffic between spectator and performer.

**JB:** What in your view is the meaning of what we see? Do you have any control over it? Are you interested in controlling it or do you see yourself as a facilitator of as many meanings as possible?

**BE:** I'm still influenced by work I did very early on in ritual performance. The idea that, say, ritual dance is not simply learned to tell a story, but is somehow already there in the dancer's body, innately learned and having a close relationship to the environment and the circumstances of the culture. It's not just one way of telling the story above all the others, it's specific and unique through the performer. In relation to ourselves outside of a *ritual* context, I'm attracted by the idea that the performers are holding many *possible* stories but are not telling any particular one. But we have an innate store of narrative which we can then read in this or that moment of performance if we choose to. At the same time, the performer need not actually be aware of this and may in fact be more conscious of a different story, or of no story at all.

**JB:** One could say that the rituals which celebrate the story of the tribe relate to a source myth, an over-arching narrative which articulates a particular world view. Would you say that your work relates to such a myth? Beyond the fragmentary nature of the text and the fact that you encourage your audience to find what they can, do you aim at some level for a unity of understanding beyond what we see which might allow us to make sense of the whole?

**BE:** I would say I was aiming for a *connectedness* of understanding and experience. Otherwise why try to locate the notion of the personal so much in the work? Why try to produce the performer as catalyst or dancer? And what does it mean to dance the dance when it's not your own story? And not even someone else's, like a writer's or a

choreographer's. So there must be a collectivity, a connectedness that goes on. The work is highly specific at each moment and yet at the same time the performers are not themselves generating the events.

**JB:** And yet you wouldn't locate the source of such automatic writing in the individual subconscious. Unless you are suggesting that some kind of tribal memory is operating here.

**BE:** If ever narrative emerges this is not because it has been invented by the performer.

**JB:** In the Optik performance at Brunel, the narrative appeared very much to do with aspects of social life: support, loss, misunderstanding, departures. These all spoke in the accents of domesticity, friendship, the emotional life, sexual engagement. For me, the formalities of these various encounters became a kind of ritualised interpersonal life. Nothing was presented outside that social context and group identity - *us* - seemed to be the organising metaphor. The performance became a ritual charting the quotidian, the domestic and social fabric of our lives..

**BE:** I've always been influenced by the idea that the normal, everyday, seemingly trivial, is remarkable. My pieces are concerned with routine, time passing, simple things happening. I look for the remarkableness of ordinary things.

**JB:** Yet these are also formally constructed pieces, even where they are apparently formless. I would argue that they are definable in terms of their choreography and that they are as close to dance as they are to practices whose origins are more clearly located in drama. Beyond the ritualised behaviours, I found the formal elegance of the performance very engaging. Maybe it's not what you intended, but the spare movement and the ascetic almost mathematical use of space was inviting me throughout to read the work as pure movement as well as the stories being carried.

**BE:** That's a way in. The elegance or grace is important, as in the released weight bearing down, pounding the floor.

**JB:** The movements I was describing as elegant are ordinary actions but abstracted from the way they appear in real life. Abstracted and clarified. And that I found surprising outside of theatre dance. Is there anything that still surprises you when you see the work, or have you seen enough now to predict what is happening next?

**BE:** I am constantly surprised. And like the performers, I'm constantly in a state of panic, a mixture of panic and amazement. There are moments of no response, complete aloneness, emptiness. You go out there with nothing. The training deals quite a lot with that sense of panic. That fear of the void, and the temptation to put something in its place. The performers learn how to let that happen and learn how to *ride* it. What you want is total confidence on the part of the spectators that the performers know what they are doing, without that implying that they know what they are *going* to do

**JB:** How does your your work relate to scripted performance, to text-based theatre? Where are the links with a mainstream dominated by practices which privilege the author, the metteur-en-scene and the text. Do you see yourself as a subversive, researching performance which is likely to stay on the periphery of that mainstream?

**BE:** If I apply how I work to text, I would need to look at the reading of those words, at learning and I'd investigate how at the moment of recall a particular way of delivering those works was selected. Why then? Why that speed or volume or pitch? So really it's a matter of looking at what the textual process is and seeing that where it stops is the point of vocal utterance. The performer cannot avoid looking at the book, at the words. at the meaning of the words. But there is still the question: "Why vocalise them?". The response to that involves a theatrical decision and you are back into performing: you have chosen to do that. The performer chooses to move into the conventions and at that point you might as well use those conventions and get on with it.

**JB:** What about speech in the work, then?

**BE:** It depends what you think of as performance, because spectators talk to each other during the performance, sometimes talking to the performers quite directly. There is also a complex and constant soundscape: coughing, laughing, spluttering, gasping for breath.

**JB:** Language as thought. Perhaps your practice could explore the articulation of those moments of choice and realisation which we have been discussing?

**BE:** But I have a problem with that idea. I think thought is *expressed* in language, I don't think it's *conducted* in language. So however you get round it, it's an expressive decision. Thought is going on all the time, but the moment language is involved it is communication. That's precisely what I'm trying to avoid: the performer trying to reach out to the audience to express something. What I want the audience to have is the privilege of watching another human being doing something which is not coming at them as an expression. I used to use speech a lot in the form of monologue, and there has been huge potential in that form as *bricolage*. But that's ultimately about *pre - selection*. So the universality disappears. Immediately you speak in a given language, the possibility of universality is lost.

**JB:** Universality *or* grand themes and the quotidian or domestic seem to define the ground we have been exploring.

**BE:** Yes, in a texture of insignificant occurrences or details and unexpected consequences. The chance encounter can set up entirely new circumstances. Events can occur that are both unique to the moment and also somehow universal.