

## Pathologies of Hope

Baz Kershaw talks with *Performance Paradigm*

**Performance Paradigm:** *As you know this issue is entitled 'The End of Ethics: performance, politics, war' in response to an emergent global socio-political dynamic initiated by a US led return to 'situation ethics' in which even the use of torture is seriously discussed as a defensible option for intelligence gathering. At the end of ethics what use is radical performance? Is there still room for a 'pathological hope'? Can you talk about your own understanding of the relationships between politics, performance and ethics?*

**Baz Kershaw:** The closer the world gets to the 'end of ethics' the more need there will be for radical performance activists who suffer from 'pathologies of hope'. Because the 'end of ethics' scenario simply reinforces all the premiums on pessimism and cynicism fostered by a modernism already gone well and truly rabid. Just look around you with an eye for glaring fixations. Politically and ethically the signs of the modernist disease are everywhere, whether in the strains of post-modern relativism (situational ethics) post-9/11 fundamentalism (positional ethics) or post-globalised capitalism (incidental ethics) or the dissimulated fevered craving for a post-ecological bio-meltdown yet to come (sacrificial ethics). Paradoxically, these forces seem to be working *together* to produce widespread forms of moral panic and abandon. These generate futures of delusion in which beginnings become ends, new absolutes become contingencies, long views on what's coming up for the human-animal become fantasy guesswork. For radicals wanting a change for the 'better' (of course there are some that want it worse) all this chronically ups the anti on how to act and what to perform. So it's no surprise to me when hope feels pathological, but that's no reason to give up on it. To the contrary, the discomfort of hope should make it easier to anticipate how small doses of hard won optimism, say, planted in the right places, might work as a pristine homeopathic agent. So for such counter-conditions to thrive it is crucial for humans to recognize that the broad historical story of modernism gone rotten may be a misleading reagent which *prevents* detection of effective ethical and political antidotes to its causes.

So for me the crucial issue becomes: what's the best way of identifying the common qualities, assuming there are any at all, of antidotes that will put an end to the 'end of ethics' before it begins? Of course, this is a complicated question that challenges reductivism head on, so there will never be a single factor on which any answers hinge. But I'd start by looking for a *sophisticated but accessible* approach to eco-socio-politico analysis suited to the global complexities of the current ecological era. And I'd contend that performance – including the notion of the performance paradigm or paradigms – would be a key component of that kind of analysis. Then I'd open the bidding on a better future ironically, with the *least convincing* antidote in face of the imminent end of ethics. You guessed it – hope as a pathology.

Now my argument gets a little tricky because we're dealing with a paradoxical situation. So consider the claim that pathological hope arises from nostalgia for a future that the end of ethics denies. We could call the object of that nostalgia the 'ethically progressive future', or if dealing with the modernist reagent of 'progress' gives you headaches, maybe a 'proactive ethical future'. But what might rescue nostalgia for the future from being just a golden glow of comforting illusion yet to come? More specifically, what kinds of performance might turn such a trick, making nostalgia not a retreat from the future 'real' of modernism gone rotten – war, terrorism, global warming, etc. – but an ethically progressive or proactive engagement with that 'real'? We need to take a leaf out of Hamlet's book and get crab-like – crabs being great survivors – by adopting paradox as an analytical tool. So let's think toward a future *with* ethics through that ancient saw: coming events cast their shadow before.

We might see what this might mean for radical performance, politics and ethics in light of Slavoj Žižek's acute observation that a string of catastrophe films from *The Towering Inferno* (1974) to *Titanic* (1997), when coupled to ontological comedies and thrillers like *The Truman Show* (1998) and *The Matrix* (1999), indicate that 9/11 (which in the UK is the 9<sup>th</sup> of November) was decisively *not* 'the unthinkable which happened' but the performance of a future that had already been well-rehearsed by many millions[1]. From this perspective, says Žižek, there is much more than raw irony in the greeting offered by resistance leader Morpheus to *The Matrix*'s hero when he wakes up from digital dreaming to 'real reality'. Says Morpheus (aptly quoting Baudrillard): 'Welcome to the desert of the real'. In the logic of the film the 'desert of the real' is the future foreshadowed, the product of a disaster that is already happening. Now, in our twenty-first century world the shadow of the future is characterised by deep catastrophe, principally in the forms of (a) a global war on terrorism which will never end because the 'enemy' will always be in some part invisible, and (b) a global ecological collapse so extreme that no human-animal alive will be spared its appalling effects. In more abstract and generalised terms, a deluded politics is somehow linked to a process that is going to produce the end of humanity, at least as we know it.

Now let's assume that the missing link between these two versions of a catastrophe already happening is *performance*, not performance in general, but very particular forms of political and environmental performance. Such as: promoting democracy as an ideological framework for globalised capitalism, or proposing technology as the primary solution to human degradation of the 'natural world'. If that assumption proves correct, then you will have my answer to your question about a performance, a politics and an ethics that is future oriented. Radical performance would then occur through any action that grappled with the political paradoxes of the current situation *both* as if the absolute of global catastrophe, like Morpheus's desert, was 'really real' *and* as if pathological hope could be a basis for a progressive, or at least proactive, general ethics. This is a lesson very well rehearsed in St Petersburg *and* Leningrad, where freezing point is called melting point.

**PP:** In your article *'Curiosity or Contempt: On Spectacle, the Human, and Activism'* you argue that *'because spectacle has become a major force in cultural evolution it has special relevance to activists as a means whereby progressive change can be achieved'*. Can you elaborate on works (broadly defined) that you think manage to achieve progressive change through the use of spectacle?

**BK:** I must start by saying that *'Curiosity or Contempt'* also argues that in the past thirty years especially there has been an uncoupling of spectacle from its traditional association with the large-scale and gargantuan. Also that spectacle is now much more dispersed, as Debord, Baudrillard and others have argued, than at any previous time in history. Spectacle has migrated globally in everyday life through the power of the pixel and the bits that make up the sound bite, thus creating a new kind of human sensorium. This makes spectacle more flexible in its key aesthetic constituents, such as extreme juxtapositions of scale or *trompe l'oeil* transformations, and more accessible as a force for radicalism in the twenty-first century. The article also argues that in recent decades effective radicalism is more likely to be found in *'deconstructive spectacle'*, by which I mean spectacle that produces a reflexive exposure, and at best a critique, of its own assumptions. A good deal of performance art or live art more or less meets that criteria – in the article I discuss works by Stelarc, Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña. But also, to the extent that performance art calls up the hegemony of its locations, say in art galleries and studio theatres, or of postmodern relativism, say in its tendencies to pastiche and infinitely recursive irony, it falls away from the key term of your question: *'progressive change'*. Obviously definitions of that term are especially context laden – *'progressive change'* in relation to what? – so works that show a fundamental ecological alertness to their environment may produce a potential for a *'progressivism'* that isn't tainted with a human hubris that is a major force in the prevention of positive change.

Such potential is also more likely to be fulfilled, I suggest, by deconstructive spectacular performance that is most fully articulated to the chief paradox of *'progress'* in the present, i.e. to a progress that destroys itself. This was why, I now fully realize, in the late 1970s I fell in with the radical performance group Welfare State International as they started to move their base from Liverpool to Ulverston in South Cumbria [2]. A paradoxical place, Ulverston, a small and friendly market town *both* graced by the natural beauty of the Lake District *and* central to a sub-region which at that time had the highest concentration of nuclear installations per capita head of population in the world. And subsequently I have looked for other companies and individual artists who have explicit interests in, and commitments to, environmental responsiveness and ecological activism through the challenges of paradoxical places. Most recently, for example, I have searched for telling contrasts of creative milieu by juxtaposing works by PLATFORM in London and Tess de Quincey's *Triple Alice Laboratory* in the central desert of Australia. On a longer time-scale I have also in various ways shifted focus in my own practice as research projects much closer to an explicit ecologically aesthetic agenda. I think it is easier confidently to locate *'progressivism'* in performance works informed by such agendas because, at least in theory, there is the possibility of something

like an 'absolute' reference point or points in the realities of current environmental change, the 'really real' of potential global disaster for humans. Moreover, it is an 'absolute' that is different in kind to those that shape religious fundamentalism or belief in the free will of the market, as no human has the option to stay alive and opt out of the processes of climate change and global warming.

In that sense the twenty-first century evolution of the Earth's ecology creates a new 'universal' condition for the human animal and so, potentially, the prospect of a proactive progressive eco-ethics that challenges the end of ethics. This could, of course, sound like just another master-narrative substituting for the dying ones of modernism, which is why Donna Haraway's idea of 'situated knowledges' is so helpful to thinking through new general notions of, say, the 'rational' or the 'objective' or even the 'ethical' [3]. Hence the precise relationships between *particular* environments and *specific* performance events become crucial to judging how works might be considered more generally 'progressive' or positively 'proactive'. The old ecological cliché regarding this was 'Think global, act local', but obviously capitalist globalization has knocked that into a cocked hat. How about 'Act local, become global'?

**PP:** *In your book 'The Radical in Performance' you talk about 'performance beyond theatre as a liberating radical force'. (23) Since the book was published in 1999 (and the subsequent global rise in the focus on 'terror' etc) how have your views changed (if at all) on the ways in which performance can act in this way?*

**BK:** So I do, and the critique I offered of Western traditional, mainstream or legitimate theatre that led into that perspective on 'performance beyond theatre' subsequently has been misinterpreted as another version of the 'anti-theatrical prejudice'. For the record, whilst that critique was pretty thoroughgoing I did not and do not give up on theatre, as my more recent work on twentieth century British theatre history clearly demonstrates [4]. My position in 1999 was that theatre is crucially compromised by neo-liberal capitalist commodification, not that it is dead or wholly irrelevant or severed from radicalism forever! What I actually wrote was: 'my argument does not foreclose on the possibility of radicalism in the *theatre* of the future', (p. 20) but quite a few commentators have chosen to ignore that! More recently the 'anti-theatrical' misinterpretation has been extended to my arguments about the late-twentieth century decline of 'political theatre' and the democratic political process as a whole [5], as if my manifest belief in performance as potentially a fundamental factor for revising and revivifying the global struggle for equality, justice and freedom was just so much hot air. I mention this because that criticism came from the United States, where reactions to the specter of terrorism seems to have frightened some otherwise intelligent theatre scholars into a desperation that prevents them recognizing allies in the most obvious places, and that has a bearing on the main point of your question. Because my views on the 'problem' of theatre have shifted in response to the coming environmental calamity for humanity, and terrorism's

part in that awesome process, in ways that I hope clarify and strengthen my arguments about performance beyond theatre.

The commodification of theatre is still a hugely debilitating pathology, but there have been developments, especially since the mid-1990s, that have begun to challenge it in the overdeveloped nations. In the UK, for example, the reinvention of the tribunal or verbatim play, initially by Nicholas Kent at the Tricycle Theatre then – surprise, surprise! – much later followed up at the National Theatre (via Out of Joint Theatre) by David Hare with *The Permanent Way*, is the mark of a different kind of politicization in British mainstream theatre. This is not primarily because *current* socio-political problems are troubling the repertoire once again (they've always been there in one form or another), but because tribunal and verbatim plays turn the audience into a different kind of spectator (as did, at its best, *The Laramie Project* in the USA). Some mainstream critics and commentators, ironically following an oversimplifying trend fostered by artists and critics of live art [6], have praised tribunal/verbatim performance for turning audiences into 'witnesses' or sometimes 'jurors' – indicating a new 'ethical turn' on the traditional boards, perhaps. But while that might transform spectators into ethically implicated citizens, they are still, above and beyond that, spectators of theatre. I stress this because I have come to think that the *production of spectators* is the primary business of theatres, regardless of what is onstage, and that possibly in some respects, at least, such business is profoundly anti-ecological. In other words, *spectatorship as such*, even though there may be many versions of it, historically is probably a major part of the theatre's contribution to the environmental crisis [7]. So, yes, I still think that 'beyond theatre' is likely to be the best place to look for the most radical potential of performance for liberation in the ecological era, but to the extent that sometimes its primary purpose is to produce spectators it will dissipate that potential. By implication, performance beyond theatre that challenges spectatorship to transform into something else, say, activist participation, has more chance of being on the right route to ecological sanity.

**PP:** *Could you talk about the ways in which the ethical questions that were raised in that book have altered since the book's publication? Especially in regard to your statement concerning the possible futures of inter-cultural encounters that 'if globalisation is increasingly placing us in the same predicament, then it may form the basis of a newly emergent egalitarian politics and ethics through which a new sense of global ecological community might be produced.'* (204) *Is the globalized cultural economy redrawing the lines of ethical inter-cultural encounters?*

**BK:** The 'possible futures of intercultural encounters' cut many ways in the ethical realm, as they will be more or less integral to the complexities of globalization, however it is interpreted. Your quotation is from the final chapter of my book, which discusses 'Performance, community and ecology', and now I'm embarrassed by its somewhat loose discriminations regarding globalization. I think I did not sufficiently get a grip on how to work through the key ethical questions the book raised in the context of 'the global', particularly with regards to the relationships between political empowerment for the many,

what that might mean for notions of 'global community', how that might work through in 'intercultural encounters', and so on. I would stand by my views about the radically eviscerating effects of the global network of international theatre festivals (mostly massive producers of spectators, despite any sense of inclusion in a grand cultural 'event'), and about the paradoxical powers of immersive participatory performances, such as the Columbian theatre director Enrico Varga's wonderful mazes (described in that final chapter). But these were both aspects of a 'globalised cultural economy' that in 1999 seemed to me to be an extraordinarily mixed bag of aesthetic tricks, outrageous treats, and potential political and ethical traumas. What I couldn't buy was the flim-flam of an international 'intercultural theatre' inaugurated by Western artists and academics whose agenda had become so transparently self-serving as to beggar belief. For me Varga versus Barba was no competition at all, yet Barba took home nearly all of the festival prizes, so to speak. But then the fantasy farce of the millennium bug that failed, the spectacularly gruesome tragic reality of September 11 in New York, and the subsequent absurd (but in their madness totally serious) announcements by the burning Bush of a war on terror and the 'Axis of Evil' followed up by the illegal attack on Iraq – all that certainly transformed my tiny slice of the world. Because those and other similar events rammed home more deeply than ever before the impossibility of a future that was so tunnel-visioned on the human.

These self-same events flung open the floodgates of a radical ecology that I'd been tampering with for years. Hence when in 2004 Tony Blair (Blurr?) and his chief scientific advisor Sir David (Daffy?) King had a very high profile public argument about what was the greatest threat to humanity, terrorism or climate change, I choked intellectually, emotionally, ethically (and the rest) on the fact that our 'leaders' could present such matters as a choice [8]. So to slip through an answer to your question in light of these reflections: the global *natural* economy has for me redrawn the lines of ethical inter-cultural encounters to create a new picture that in the late 1990s I began to see as an un-ignorable because all too possible future. Now I can't see human rights without the context of some form of biotic rights that makes the annual celebrations of the UN Universal Declaration of 1948, despite its many manifest positive effects for homo sapiens, look like an especially sick joke. So when you ask me about 'inter-cultural' encounters and their ethical implications, I cannot now help but translate that into 'inter-natural/cultural' encounters – or some such hybrid – despite all the ethical confusions that will certainly ensue. Add 'climate change' to 'globalisation' and I think my 1999 argument about the interdependence of egalitarian politics, ethics and global ecological community may be strengthened. Or, in a much more direct register, at least we might be ironically cheered up by the growing waves of international protest breaking in recent years against all the manifest ills that flow in the wake of neo-liberal global capitalism.

But I hope I don't still underestimate the potential for ethical confusion as the world drifts toward ecological nightmare. Recently I explored something of the miasma of such confusions through a 2006 creative performance-as-research project called Being in Between in Bristol Zoological Gardens, focusing primarily on working with non-human primates enduring an

incarceration that advances possibly justifiable claims to an ethics of inter-cultural ecological conservation. That particular 'globalised cultural economy' is profoundly paradoxical in its combination of human and biotic rights. So for me it already has some strong relevance for re-drawing the various human-to-human lines of intercultural performance already inscribed on the very messy map of festival cosmopolitanism.

**PP:** *In your recent article in NTQ 'Performance Studies and Po Chang's Ox...' analysing Schechner and McKenzie's books, you state that they (Perform or Else and Performance Studies) fail to maintain 'a disciplined critique of the crucial political and ethical dilemmas of the twenty-first century'. (51) Given this failure and using your notion of a 'paradoxology of performance' what model/antimodel might you propose to carry out such a critique more effectively?*

**BK:** Well, please excuse my pedantry but there is a difference, subtle for sure, between 'fail to maintain' and outright 'failure'. To different degrees both Richard Schechner and Jon McKenzie convincingly stake out productive ethical and political territories as unique to their various versions of performance studies and the performance paradigm. So what they have successfully maintained up to the *point of relative failure* is in both cases a very significant achievement. But your stress on 'failure' is also fair because my notion of a 'paradoxology' works by selecting the unexpected point as exactly what one might expect, ironically at least in retrospect. In Schechner's arguments this point occurs, in my view, at a classic moment of historical chiasmus when no fear of what could be said, cannot be spoken for fear. Free speech had to be heavily guarded. And this, it seemed to me, was a very specific effect of being an American in the United States of America on 9/11 (indeed in Richard Schechner's case in New York on a balcony with a view of the Twin Towers). In Jon McKenzie's case, in my view, the corresponding point occurs more subtly as the centre of a receding perspective, in the recognition of the high likelihood of global ecological disaster that segues into a cryptic puzzle about the performativity of technological disaster. The main event as an obscured side-show. In the article I evoke the publication dates of the two books – *Perform or Else* nine months before 9/11, *Performance Studies* nine months after – as corroborative 'evidence' in support of these interpretations. These *effects* of my paradoxology of performance arise, I argue, because it proposes to *discover homologies* between the paradoxical 'natures' of performance in its many guises, and what I call a paradoxological approach to analysis of analysis of those 'natures' in the two books. In other words, if performance in the contemporary world is in most, perhaps all, respects fundamentally paradoxical – and I believe it is – then we will need a paradoxical method of analysis to best understand how it is actually working for and/or against the future.

By trying to be highly alert to the reflexive paradoxical principles of its own performative protocols and procedures, such a method aims to see the wood *for* the trees, to tease out the general principles – of *ethics, politics*, what have you – in the more recalcitrant, hard-to-get-at relations between *their* specific expressions in performance. Hence the overall approach of the paradoxology

is modeled on a basic principle in ecology that draws on homologies between very diverse species – in this case the paradoxical qualities of performance itself and a paradoxical means of analyzing writing about performance – in order to spot fugitive coherence in the chaos of events. The homology of the five digits in both the bat's wing and the human hand is one of my primary metonyms in this game of ridiculous correspondences, as the bat's five facilitate the fabulous feat of flight while the human's five figure, say, the extraordinary ability to write. This seriously fanciful approach to the dilemmas of the twenty-first century, as refracted in performance studies and the performance paradigm, might reasonably be seen as an excuse for any failure on my part to carry out a more effective critique than my two American colleagues of the ethical and political prospects of performance in the age of ecology. But seriously, if I may disgracefully tweak Foucault just a little, every ecological thought is haunted by the necessity to think the unthinkable.

*PP: You also talk in this paper about the need to avoid 'the synthesis of radical philosophy' as it might obscure the 'specific (i.e. historical, political and ethical) purposes of the books in question' - could you talk about what your own 'specific, historical, political and ethical purposes' as a scholar and practitioner?*

**BK:** The trivial aspect of the 'synthesis of radical philosophy' in twentieth century performance studies and elsewhere was popularly called, scathingly but tellingly, 'political correctness'. In politer society it shaped up, I think, as a new set of ethical orthodoxies through which a trusty and predictable form of radicalism could flourish. Some called this no radicalism at all, especially where it sequestered itself in the relatively cozy realms of tenured academic posts in the richest and most powerful countries of the world. Of course, such places are, comparatively, not all *that* cozy – but then that is where I spend a good deal of my time and academics have always been a great band of complainants. So thanks for the relief of adding 'practitioner' to 'scholar' in your question, because the awkward lacunae between them is where I try to work out the mess of my own 'specific historical, political and ethical purposes' in any particular project, and of course they vary more or less according to their specific places and times. So excuse me curtailing my response to this super-question with a recent example.

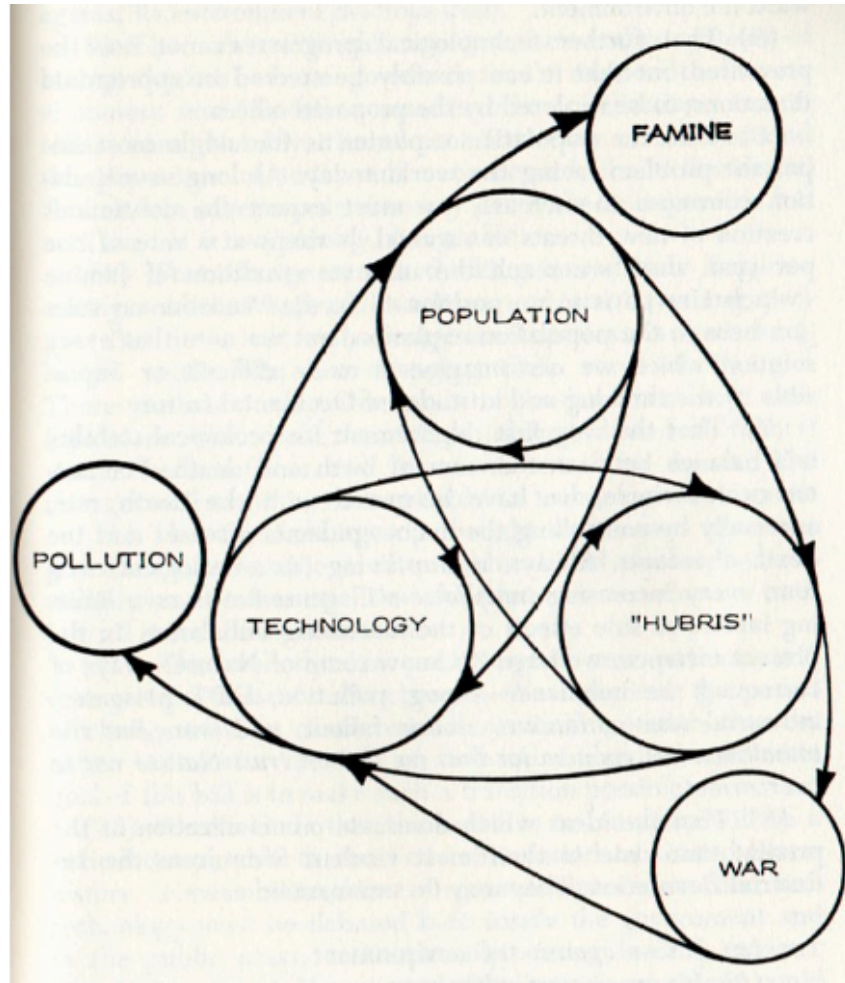
As I've just mentioned, in 2006 I worked in Bristol Zoo with an environmental movement artist, Sandra Reeve, two further performers of the species *homo sapiens* (Maya Cockburn and Alistair Ganley), and about twelve other primates – great apes and monkeys – in four custom-built enclosures. Our aim was to discover the most productive performance place 'in between' the non-human primates, the zoo visitors, the keepers, the gardeners, the educationists, the zoologists and so on. We had no idea really what that place might become. One of the incarcerated primates was a recently arrived male spider monkey in quarantine, which was due to be joined by a female companion. She had been detained in Paris, delayed by an illness. Following five days of on-site acclimatization, the performers for three days worked twice a day for 35 minutes in the open space between the spider monkey's large glass-fronted enclosure and the main entrance to the zoo (the rest of the



six hours of daily performances were spent working with the other primates, including humans). A repeatable routine evolved between the spider monkey and the performers that often placed visitors and sometimes keepers between the performers and the monkey. We could call the routine a 'dance', but it wasn't that, or it was more than that. It could be called an 'inter-cultural/natural performance exchange', maybe a 'barter', but of course we had no certain knowledge of what the monkey was gaining from it, if anything, though the routine had become 'tuned' to what we'd learned from its keeper about what she considered to be this particular monkey's signs of pleasure and displeasure. Ethically, so far as we could tell, the performers were, maybe, 'dancing' a number of lines between something like total exploitation/dominance of the monkey and total submission/adaptation to his actions and reactions, so perhaps – and it has to be a very resounding 'perhaps' – sometimes there was something we could call 'collaboration' going on. The hardest part, the performers said, was finding a 'gracious' way to end the routine in order to move to the next primate encounter. But of course: At the moment of meeting, the parting begins. And as the space of the zoo probably is nothing if not paradoxical there was no escaping the ethical responsibilities bequeathed by such over-riding truths.

Such difficulties were compounded by the fact that city zoos especially are such over-determined places – historically, ethically, physically, ideologically, psychologically, emotionally, what have you – so that it was extremely hard to make straightforward sense of what exactly we were doing at the time. But subsequently it struck me – the metaphor is telling – that the performers were trying to avoid as well as they could, especially in those moments of parting, doing any more violence to the spider monkey beyond what had already been done to him by humans. And in *that* lacuna maybe I can tease out something of my more general historical, political and ethical purposes. Because I want to use performance practice and analysis to find ways to cheat violence of its power, both in the specific conditions of paradoxical places like zoos and in the more general conditions of global meltdown. This is fundamental, because my research into performance and theatre ecology has led me to believe that humans are caught in a vicious circle in which violence on 'nature' begets violence between humans, and vice versa.

Intra-species violence, for humans, creates inter-species violence on other organisms and the environment that escalates intra-species violence for humans and so on, *ad infinitum*. Even more generally, violence on nature generates violence in culture, so generating more violence on nature and so on and on. This is not a new idea, of course. For example, the great radical ecologist Gregory Bateson drew a lovely but very scary diagram to illustrate it:



‘The increase of population spurs technological progress and creates that anxiety that sets us against our environment as an enemy; while technology both facilitates an increase of population and reinforces our arrogance, or “hubris”, vis-à-vis the natural environment. The ... diagram illustrates the interconnections ... each [part] is by itself a self-promoting (or, as the scientists say, “autocatalytic”) phenomenon:

the bigger the population the faster it grows; the more technology we have, the faster the rate of invention; and the more we believe in our “power” over an enemy environment, the more “power” we seem to have and the more spiteful the environment seems to be [9].’

However, I think that almost certainly what became *new* for this syndrome in the late-twentieth century were the myriad systems of human performance that had evolved both to elaborate the violence and to disguise it as something else. So now I hypothesise, evolving from Bateson’s ideas, that such vicious circles create double binds that turn certain types of human performance into a globally spreading addiction. And hence I argue in my forthcoming book on *Theatre Ecology* (Cambridge University Press, 2007) that performance addiction is a major characteristic of the contemporary performance paradigm. So now one of my over-riding historical, political and ethical purposes as both practitioner and scholar is to identify what might be considered as antidotes to a global performance addiction that I see as

fundamentally anti-ecological. I would propose that the addiction is a kind of insanity, so that in Bristol Zoo the performers' possible success in avoiding doing yet more violence to the spider monkey (and in the process perhaps wresting some power from the violence already done to him) might indicate a performing that was touched by eco-sanity. Not much of an affirmation, perhaps, but remember just a tiny bit of antidote can sometime catalyse recovery beyond imaginable bounds.

**PP:** *How can you broach the question of ethics in performance without tripping the wire of unethical action? Do you know if/when you've crossed the line? Has this ever been an issue for your work as a director?*

**BK:** To part one of this question I say: only by being very dull! Call me a dreary old dullard, but I'm attracted to performance because of its excesses, and where there's excess there's usually risk, ethical and otherwise. In this sense I hope that I've never done a totally ethically safe show, and where I knew that the 'wire was tripped' (sometimes, of course, you don't) I have never shied away from my personal responsibility to regard the resultant flak – critical, philosophical, emotional or otherwise – as a very significant response not to be in any way ignored, even when I've hated it. As to knowing where 'the line' is, part of my purpose in making performance has been to discover where the most challenging 'lines' might be, as a way of trying to better test out and understand how they shape the world. That's why I've always preferred creating performance beyond theatre. For me there are too many fixed lines in traditional theatre buildings, while beyond theatre the sometime lack of lines, the lacuna of the half-drawn or yet-to-be-drawn world, provides a chance to discover what is not known, what might be on the verge of becoming known, and sometimes what probably will never be known, hopefully through forms of sophisticated but accessible activist participation. So if 'crossing the line' *hadn't* been an issue, in all these senses, then I *wouldn't* have been doing the job of the kind of deviser-director with the kinds of performance that I've spent nearly a lifetime trying to become and to make. So now, considering that the lacunae in radical performance have been crucial to my work, I can honestly say, along with playwright Sacha Guitry: The little I know, I owe to my ignorance.

#### Notes

[1] Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 16.

[2] Tony Coult and Baz Kershaw (eds), *Engineers of the Imagination: The Welfare State Handbook*, re. ed. (Methuen, London: 1990).

[3] Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 183-201.

[4] Kershaw, Baz (ed.), *The Cambridge History of British Theatre, Volume 3, Since 1895* (Cambridge University Press, 2004)

[5] Randy Martin, 'Staging the political: Boal and the horizons of theatrical commitment', in Jan Cohen-Cruz and Mady Schutzman (eds), *A Boal Companion: Dialogues on Theatre and Cultural Politics* (Routledge, London: 2006), pp. 24-5.

[6] See, for example: Tim Etchells, *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 17-18.

[7] Kershaw, Baz, 'The Ecologies of Performance: On Theatres and Biospheres', in *Performing Nature: Explorations in Ecology and the Arts*, eds. Gabriella Giannachi and Nigel Stewart (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005).

[8] King, David, 'Climate Change: Adapt, Mitigate or Ignore', *Science* 303: 5655 (October 2004).

[9] Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 499.