

**“Don’t Give Me the Small  
Talk, Give Me the Big Talk!”<sup>1</sup>**

**By Stephen Bain**

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I had dinner with an actor recently. I was his only audience over spring rolls and noodles, as he started ranting about ‘what’s really wrong with theatre in this country’. I’m generally a pretty good audience for this kind of thing, but this evening I was especially good because he was screaming the lack of intellectuals in our media, for public interest in the big ideas rather than the little ones, and craving the level of detailed analysis that something like an All Blacks’ performance might generate in any public bar or café.

And I had to agree with him. Why isn’t there discussion in our media of the big ideas?

Why, when we produce a disproportionate number of artists and intellectuals in our training institutions, when we presume so much intelligent creativity, build concert halls and theatres, hone local government strategies for public arts, and export a vast array of performance art, do we not have a society with a robust interest in the big questions. What are we avoiding? What are we afraid of?

Early in 2011, I approached the EDGE (Auckland's Aotea Centre-based performing arts presenter) with a number of projects for consideration for co-production. I'd worked with them a number of times over the past five years, presenting theatre and public outdoor performances, so had a good relationship with their Programming Team headed by Craig Cooper.

One of my propositions lit his eyes up, that of a mini-festival of new performance works. I wanted to pull together a three-day festival of New Zealand work, from different disciplines, that appeared to be exploring similar performance phenomena. It seemed to me that very little of this work was being produced for the main stage in Auckland, despite being easy to find in the alternative-culture networks. As a relative newcomer to Auckland (I moved here in 2006), there seemed to be a very progressive performance scene that was locked out of the theatres and performance spaces, which upheld strong commercial imperatives. The EDGE encouraged me to expand the idea further, into a nine-day festival, including eight New Zealand performances, four international shows, three performance workshops and an artist discussion series. All performances were small-scale works with simple production values, linked by an experimental ethos. The international works were to be co-curated, since the EDGE would be producing these. The New Zealand works would be of my own choosing.

Auckland-based writer and dramaturg Fiona Graham, an eventual participant in the festival, would offer in an article, "Catalysing Performance", published in the festival broadsheet, a contextualisation of both the historical and current directions of a contemporary performance dramaturgy:

Critics of literary theatre argue that postmodern experiments in performance have moved away from a 'logo-centric' theatre where written text is the central and stable element, forcing us to re-think conventional approaches to texts. They question the assumption that a written theatre text should be privileged over and above the visual and embodied text... This work has been influenced by avant-garde theatre and the ideas of practitioners including Artaud, Meyerhold, Grotowski, Brecht and Beckett. Postdramatic theatre has embraced the possibilities of postmodernism through multimedia and fragmented narratives to reflect contemporary experience. Examples of this practice can be seen in the work of Robert Wilson, The Wooster Group, Goat Island, Pina Bausch, Impact Theatre, Forced Entertainment, La Fura dels Baus, and Desperate Optimists. This experimental work has also been described through ideas of intermediality and liminal performance because it crosses the borderlines between different media and creates new ways of working. This practice invites the dramaturg to re-think the principles of conventional ordering and structure to find new strategies and models of representation.

She cites a number of questions asked by British dramaturg Catherine Turner, to help stimulate thinking about writing influenced by such compositional strategies:

*Does it seek to provide some revelation of the 'real' that surrounds it? If so, how? Does it seek to represent it through fictional narratives? Does it operate as a frame? Does it offer an interaction with found material? Does it (also) evoke the dreamed or the lost, the failed, the broken or the impossible? Does it draw attention to its own mechanisms, failed or otherwise? Does the dialogue take place across a stage? Is there a shift of axis so that the dialogue is primarily between the stage and the audience? Does it do without a stage or an audience or both? Does it generate the architecture of performance? Does it contribute to (or interrupt) our experience of an architecture? What are its architectonics? What are its spaces? Does it present itself as material, sound, rhythm, dynamic? Does it flicker between opacity and transparency? Does it possess a spiritual or ritual performativity? Is it part of a continuing dialogue? Does it prompt or trace a live exchange, or do both? Does it explore, as surely it often does, the relationship between these different possibilities? Or is none of these an adequate way of expressing what a piece of writing might do?*

By the time we had confirmation that the season could go ahead, I was halfway through a European Tour with my own work, so it was fortunate that I could front up personally at the door of Hau Theatre in Berlin, where Rimini Protokoll are currently resident theatre company.

I'd seen a production of theirs, *Call Cutta in a Box*, which had impressed and surprised me, at a festival in The Netherlands in 2008. A single audience member experiences a one-on-one phone call, in an everyday office building, that eventually supplies a meaningful and surprising conversation with someone who turns out to be a Calcutta-based phone-centre worker, thus putting a personal face to the global phenomena of out-sourced labour markets. Rimini Protokoll is a trio of theatre makers who have been exploring their specific kind of reality theatre together since 2002. The more I found out about this group, the more I realised they would be a perfect centrepiece for the Auckland New Performance Festival. Embodying many of the principles of cross-discipline performance, *Call Cutta in a Box* is both intimate and gentle in the way it sheds expectations about what a theatre performance should be.

As planning for the festival developed, we became acutely aware that we needed to orientate the public towards being open-minded about performance, in what is most obviously a market-driven culture. From my own background and perspective in theatre, I saw Auckland as a place where the cult of celebrity and the language of entertainment and commercial values were the most common ways of connecting with audiences. Instead of these, we needed to create a platform where artistic discourse and artist-as-researcher were the points of reference. As an artist, this seems pretty straight-forward, since it means talking about what something is, potentially as well as actually, rather than something that it is not, or would be if it were on television or a film, or an easily digested or assimilated commodity.

I had hoped that in bringing together a collection of progressive performances, audiences would have more of a context for this kind of work throughout the year, if it could find a regular platform. Presenting it to general audiences might generate a sense of common movements, aspirations and aesthetics, rather than the reductive sales pitch of 'quality' or 'talent'. What we were discovering through producing and marketing the festival was that much of this has to do with the way we use language to describe what we do.

Just before the Festival, I watched a TV3 *Nightline* clip about a performance event, *Bathing with Elephants*, at the Civic



Theatre. As we have become accustomed to in mainstream media, the reporter focused first on sexual titillation, moved on to incorrectly describe the show as "absurd", then announced, "I'll let Jeff explain this one!", followed by the sound of the reporter's laughter. Far from this being an exception, performance art is often subjected to such derisory put-down, where the artist is brought to account by having to justify a work (in the briefest sound- or visual-byte) when challenged by we-the-non-believers.

The score is 2 – 1. Mark begins well with a strong serve, Fleur-Elise flips it back with backspin which catches Johannes off guard, and the ball pings off towards the bar and dribbles under a nearby table. The referee (myself) searches in his pocket for a new ball, Mark leans back arms folded, he wants to know what Fleur-Elise means about solitude in the studio, how this contrasts with the public face of showing the work. The score is 2 – 2 now but the players are in no hurry to serve, conversation has once again consumed competition.

On a Sunday evening in February, as the sun is still slowly melting on the back of the monolithic Aotea Centre in Auckland, players and spectators surround the table-tennis table at the inaugural New Performance Festival inside The EDGE theatre complex. At one end of the table is Australian performance artist Fleur-Elise Noble with her production manager Felicity; at the other end is Auckland performance artist Mark Harvey joined by visiting Swedish collaborator Johannes Blomqvist. The Ping Pong Pit is a daily event in the New Performance Festival programme; an opportunity to hear the makers speak about their work, answer some questions, and loosely engage in competition. It's no accident that the spoken word is put to contest against action in this environment that celebrates new movements in performance, where dance, theatre and visual arts share common space for the attention of its audience.

Befitting too that book-ending either end of the ping pong table are floor to ceiling screens, one reads ALPHA YOUR SELF, the other end reads CAKE LOVES ME. The words themselves have been pulled apart (by installation artist Sam Hamilton) to imply an active reading between the space that separates them and their obtuse meaning. The text must jockey for position within the interplay of performance disciplines, a language that complements rather than defines.

I am simultaneously participant and observer to this event. Somewhere between the space, the conversation, the clearly pronounced text and the live bodies that lurch for the ball.

Most of the New Zealand performances had completed a first season somewhere else in the previous 18 months, before coming to the festival. Hopefully, an overview of these paints a picture of independent artists working in specific fields of investigation. Two performances are discussed in more depth by way of scratching a little deeper into the mechanisms and residues of the festival.

*Ghosting Part 2 – Cabaret*, by Auckland artist Sean Curham; a collection of short task-based performances that weave in and around an audience-inhabited space. Curham and his two performing technicians (Anna Bate and Josh Rutter) ask the audience to choose the pieces from a long menu of possible performances with intriguing titles, like "Slow Legs, Fast Arms and Fast Legs, Slow Arms" or "I Feel Like a Teenage Boy". A central light sculpture spells out SHOW, with bright pink balloons like candyfloss as the audience moves in and between object, space and performer.

*The Risk of Learning with Tao Wells* sees the 11th remount of Wells's script-task performance since its conception at Enjoy Gallery in Wellington. Sitting atop a well-lit raised platform, Wells's face is unseen for the entire performance, shaded by his hooded sweatshirt. He cues the projected script on a wall behind him, so that the audience is able to read it at exactly the same time as the actors read it aloud. At the end of each scene, Wells closes his computer, the auditorium lights come up and the ushers open the doors of the theatre, inviting the audience to leave now, if they are ready.

*Be / Longing*, a verbatim play, is lead by an Otago University theatre research team of Hilary Halba and Stuart Young. Their practice-based research work on documentary theatre over the past six years has lead them to an unique verbatim style, utilising i-pods plugged into the ears of the performers, who actively listen to a source interview, and instantly, in the same moment, relay it live to the audience. *Be / Longing* was derived from interviews with a wide catchment of New Zealand immigrants, addressing an array of topics that articulated their sense of belonging here. This is finely crafted journalism presented through a profound theatrical mechanism of relay. The audience is simultaneously engaged in the performance craft and the mechanism, which ultimately acknowledges the theatricality of the experience we are part of.

*Vague Meditations and the Irresponsible Use of a Time Machine* was the work of Wellington theatre collective A Slightly Isolated Dog, lead by director Leo Gene Peters. Their new work is presented in development at the Civic Theatre Wintergarden, using Peters's familiar cinematic-style merging of casual language, everyday situations with consciously theatrical expression. Desk lamps litter the stage, a device for splicing narrative time and space that Peters has exploited in a number of previous productions, underscored by the amplified hypnotic voice of the director himself, as he skillfully lures the audience through casual direct address, then seamlessly transports them into the theatrical dimension.

*Show Pony*, presented by Show Pony, is the result of a collaboration between dance and performance artist Alexa Wilson and actress Nisha Madhan. Their pseudo chat show is a kind of theatrical road trip from mediated self-exploitation to sexual representation and narcissistic affirmation. The persona of the performers is foregrounded as a vehicle for subversion and surprise. Their early promise that "someone is going to get naked tonight" culminates in an ecstatic dance, where brave members of the audience are beckoned to strip off, for the sake of a hungry public, and the fulfillment of their promise.

*Providence* by Aucklander Louise Tu'u is a remount of a work developed over three years, writing about the lives of the homeless. The result is a charming interplay between the restless state of not belonging and not becoming. Regan Taylor and Lara Fischel-Chisholm occupy a state of impermanence, supported by Tu'u's text, leading the audience towards narrative but then consciously withholding resolution. The space, filled with impermanent cardboard boxes, shifts and fumbles for form, then disintegrates amongst the seated public. Chris O'Connor's cassette tape soundtrack is scattered throughout the space on ghetto blasters, playfully flicked on and off by the performers, to create single textures or dense collage.

*Wake Less* by Wellington collective Binge Culture was originally commissioned by Bats Theatre for their yearly STAB season of innovation. Binge has successfully developed a style of representation that draws the audience into an illicit encounter with the performers, who then vie for control of the narrative. *Wake*



Less drifts magically from the current moment in time, acknowledging the shared space and conventions of the theatre, to a conscious dreaming place where masked figures and faceless ghosts of the present wander. Eventually the theatre becomes a forgotten place that entices us further in an awakened state. Binge has a flair for comedy and a cool theatrical assurance that charms the audience, after discomfiting them.

A surprisingly theatrical production titled *I am A Wee Bit Stumped*, by Mark Harvey and Johannes Blomqvist, takes the function of the building as a starting point for a performance about working bodies. I say surprising because Auckland-based dance artist Harvey and visiting Swedish performance artist Blomqvist habitually create durational performances where a single task might be repeated ad infinitum, until they, or the audience, reach exhaustion.

Our first point of contact with the performers is at the entrance to the theatre where they politely ask small groups of the public to set out the room with corporate tables and chairs, and begin hole-punching vast piles of A4 paper. As the familiarity of the task, and camaraderie of the public-as-collective-workers become apparent, Harvey appears crawling across the carpeted floor with Blomqvist idly lying upside down on top of him. The extreme difficulty of the task can be heard in Harvey's voice, as he recounts working in this building as a part-time waiter when he was a student, serving ungrateful corporate clients and dismissive opera singers. In this way, our participation oscillates between active participant and passive observer.

Blomqvist, in his turn, recalls the working life of his grandfather and uncles who worked in manual labour jobs at the local furniture factory in his Swedish home-town, all the while climbing a tall A-framed ladder to the lighting rig, from where he drops piles of paper onto a sweating, heavy breathing Harvey below. In a later scene, Blomqvist delivers tea and home baking to the audience, increasing his pace until he is running maniacally, with the tea trolley dangerously close to toppling.

This series of task-structured scenes creates a highly theatrical work, gently opening and closing the playing space in and around a complicit audience, and culminating in Blomqvist standing in a partially opened doorway, the only light source coming from within. A voice inside demands papers for his right to work, but he insists his performance practice does not fit their definition of work. He falls over backwards, only to spring back up again to repeat the questioning. His falling and rising becomes a repetitive endeavour that erodes the will to stand against the voice of authority.

The audience at this stage are scattered throughout the space, their labour used and discarded like the thousands of plastic cups that now litter the room; cheap, impermanent and generic. Finally we are left in the darkened space of waste, like last year's corporate furniture waiting to be upgraded. My own view of the performance is through the viewfinder of a video camera, which allows me a certain objectivity toward the audience. To my surprise (and delight), I am able to roughly determine the hundred-strong crowd; personalities from the contemporary dance faithful, a smattering from the theatre scene, a visible presence from the fine arts alumni, a flutter of intellectuals, students, academics, a few architects, and a bubbling brook of animated un-identifiables.

The diversity of this crowd is an unusual occurrence in this town, where the marketing dollar can be a razor sharp tool of division. The geographical and cultural diversity of the city sees a common language of targeted marketing towards subscriber

crowds and easily identifiable social groups. The Aotea Centre, frequently home to popular international musicals that sweep through the country, has carefully guarded lists of subscribers to popular entertainment, but also developmental theatre, comedy, contemporary dance, literature events and music concerts. The need to niche market has added to the division of performing arts disciplines, so the diversity of audience at this event was a minor triumph of the ability to engage an audience on the strength of an idea. And it was largely to interrogate this conundrum that the New Performance Festival was aimed. The theatre of ideas has most certainly been swamped in recent years by corporate theatre, where performers, lavish sets, and predictable content are readily interchangeable in the cause of marketability.

The audience for *I Am A Wee Bit Stumped* is a tiny drop in the pool of our cultural landscape, but the fact that it was presented in Auckland City's biggest, most commercial performing arts complex, was a significant one. Harvey and Blomqvist found a meaningful way to dialogue, between experience and idea, through a complex understanding of performance disciplines.

In 2011, I had attended a workshop on what was titled "Spoken Critique", as part of a course I was taking called APASS (Advanced Performance and Scenography Studies) at DeSingel in Antwerp. The workshop facilitators were dramaturgs and critics who have written for print, television and radio. We were asked to attend six performances together at the annual Belgian Theaterfestival, and discussed approaches to how we might critique these shows.

On the second day I met an MA student from Utrecht whose research had delved into the similarities of discourse between Theatre and Fine Arts. Concepts such as duration, immersion, and the active role of the participant/spectator appeared to be common phenomena arising between disciplines, yet Theatre writing, in particular, appeared to be unaware of these interdisciplinary reference points.

I later wrote to Aukje Verhoog and asked her to clarify what she meant. This is part of her reply.

During my research I was confronted with a "schisma" between a discourse on performance (theatre) and visual arts (sculpture, installation art and performance art); even when it came to discussing interdisciplinary work, most academic discourse is not that interdisciplinary, describing these pieces of art mainly through what it is not – not typical visual art, not typical theatre – than what it is. I have to say, that this limited view is mostly present at the 'theatre side of things', since the discourse on performance art and installation art is quite interdisciplinary in itself.

—Aukje Verhoog, from an email dialogue

I decided, during the course of the New Performance Festival, to attempt an experiment of my own to investigate Aukje's findings. I approached four writers to view a performance on the same night, and write a one-page critique from within their own area of expertise. In doing this, I hoped to reveal some commonality in language and critical approach between distinct disciplines. Free from the constraints of commercial media, the writers were simply asked to write a response they felt fit to the performance. One of the performances, *Dance Like a Butterfly Dream Boy*, created by Josh Rutter, was a good guinea pig, since it was difficult for me to pigeonhole his performance as Dance, Theatre or Performance, as it drew on discourses common to each.

Initially, I had imagined a familiarity to the critical language on performance generally, but as the process continued I realised there was more to it. Perhaps a linguist was needed to help me clarify the specificity of each of the languages employed, ranging from academic-speak to newspaper-speak, revealing the formative background to each of the experts. But in essence, the language was secondary to the positioning of the critic in relation to the performance. Charged with the role of critic, are they meant to understand something over and above what the audience understands? Or are they enabling the non-audience to participate or anticipate in the performance from a distance?

The four writers are Kristian Larsen (freelance dancer and dance writer), John Davies (HOD at Unitec theatre studies), Victoria Wynne-Jones (MFA student), Carol Brown (HOD dance studies Auckland University).

#### Kristian Larsen

##### Dance Like a Butterfly Dream Boy made by Josh Rutter

This work is roughly the third or fourth incarnation of a growing set of ideas around performance, masculine identity, rituals, and physical culture that Rutter has been working on. Incorporating 13 men in workout clothing (many of them artists and/or affiliated in some way to contemporary dance circles) the performance is set on a kind of anonymously featureless old helipad.

*Butterfly Dream Boy* keeps a steady level of pressure on its audience via its absurd imagery and shonky transitions. Grotesque calisthenics, advertorials for crap male cosmetics and gladiatorial battles where violence never actually manifests make up some of the ritualistic games and protocols that the group performs. The audience laughs a lot but the piece is not a satire. Rutter is having fun but he's also perfectly serious about his Weird Dude Energy.

After the show I spoke to one woman who'd seen *Butterfly Dream Boy*. "Now I know why some women become lesbians." Harsh call but not as harsh as some of the male rite of passage rituals that Rutter was researching in the lead up. Those rites of passage are actually a deeply important aspect of being male. Without them we become lost boys. Rutter's work brings out how we try and fail culturally to find those rituals. We try to find those missing aspects of being male through physical cultures like sports, through drinking, through fighting and posturing. A lot of that shows up in contemporary culture and points towards the misguided and disconnected condition that many men exist in currently.

Another audience member pointed out there were no brown skinned men or Asians in the work. Aside from the fact the cast were all part of Rutter's immediate social circle, it could be argued that Western white skinned males are the ones who are lacking the most in terms of spiritual groundedness. Especially as many of us find ourselves part of a growing underclass made manifest by the economic rip tide relentlessly pushing the divide between rich and poor. Many of the cast are artists themselves and as such exist in a confusing binary as a kind of privileged underclass. It's this confusing status that is embraced and celebrated in *Dance Like a Butterfly Dreamboy*.

(Writer bias includes but not limited to being one of the performers in the cast of the show, being a close friend of Josh, and feeling a bit jaded about being an artist currently)

#### John Davies

##### Dance Like a Butterfly Dream Boy made by Josh Rutter

3 blokes in shorts with moustaches ,,,,,,,,,, a lion

roars,,,,,,,,, push ups,,,,,,,,,a hooter,,,,,,,,,tummy crunches  
S K I P P I N G

ro

I

I

i

ng

& rubbing in ice

push ups

TUMMY TUCKS

drink from cans of carbonated drinks then

spit over each

other

SKIP AGAIN

powder each other d

o

w

n

S H U F F L E

More tummy tucks

Soundtrack s t r e t c h e d  
words

AEROSOL BODY SPRAY-- SQUAT WALK WITH SKIP ROPES  
IN TEETH-- COMB HAIR -AEROSOL

Soundtrack instructions for workout drills

S K I P P I N G!

Soundtrack let him die... when should I starve?....

when he breaks my heart.....

what can I say...?

I'll be back ... I'll be back.....I'll be back then hard  
out beats...&....

!!!Manic Skipping!!!!

up close lion monkey ----- manimal -----?beast?

10 men enter—in workout modegear--celloaped handshakes--

boxing duet-- boxing solo

Ludus magnus & tractor tyres—slowsolo walk—blasts on the

whistle all obey—group huddle—

shuffle—huddle—gather about strobelightbeatbox & workout!--

--crawl to beer and guzzle—

!!! ? ? I N F L A T A B L E ! !

! ? ?

13 men crawl through a plastic passage into a large igloo, dry  
ice is pumped in with the air. Tribal sounds, rising falling unison  
voices. With a long moan they subside to the floor.

FIN.

Full filling its description as a "belligerent confused rite of  
passage" *Dance Like a Butterfly Dreamboy* shifts through a  
dreamscape of male bonding, athletic posturing, tribal sweat-  
shop and male vanity. Challenging the audience to be charmed  
by testosterone I was less than captivated. Whilst the premise  
and dramaturgical assembly constituted a discussion the piece  
signals itself and becomes predictable; set sequences went on  
too long. However this degree of self involvement is promoted  
by consumer culture and in this performance entered into  
with clannish glee. In a nation where male athletic prowess is  
religious raiment, what can a poor boy do?

#### Victoria Wynne-Jones

##### hard, then soft

"since I've been boxing I think I have become more aggressive,  
confident and classically masculine"



out in the cold, on a gravel-gridded roof in central auckland, three men enacted a triptych of testosterone, submitting themselves to a gruelling routine, rotating between sets of skip-ping, press-ups, sit-ups and miscellaneous forms of physical exercise. each action demonstrated a rigid, masochistic and narcissistic athleticism. these acts were punctuated by an air horn and alternated with olfactory equivalents ritualistically applied. lynx spray deodorant, old-spice smelling talcum powder, hairspray, ice, hair gel and sweat, they all contributed to the smell of men.

though beloved of boxers around the world, the art of skipping complicates matters, though masculine it is also quintessentially girlish. josh rutter and his performers embrace this contradiction and it then forms the crux of this piece. by exerting themselves, by skipping, at first conscientiously, then manically, then dreamily they playfully pull apart predominant assumptions about masculinity.

rutter's extended cast of butterfly-dream-boys create synthetic rites and hybrid ceremonies that fluidly navigate between primal, bestial becoming-animal to graceful, joyous and unabashed exuberance. Besides athleticism and virtuosity there was flesh gone soft with neglect or wiry with age. bleeding before us, rutter's men demonstrated camaraderie, tournaments, slap games, a packing-tape duel... a gesture that was a silent scream through a mask of shaving foam... a playful wrestle became the act of crying upon a mate's shoulder.

there were great ejaculations of energy drinks, there was a sculling back of swappas, there was the sharp scent that is the burn of scuffed sneaker rubber. folk-masculine-pseudo-liturgies took place manifesting yearning. transcendence was sought in a large ruck and in upwards clutching gestures, a grasping for respect, understanding, love, god or perhaps a rugby ball. here choreographer became ref, coach or dj. at one point the dishevelled tribe were assimilated into white-boy shuffles beneath strobe lights, sometimes battling each other for supremacy.

after erecting a giant plastic phallus, rutter's boys crawled inside it like retrogressive sperm, chanting, howling, hooting, then sinking down, post-coital, spent, curled within what resembled a flaccid used condom. it felt as though a new masculinity had been realised. it looked like bloody hard work, but it was wonderful.

#### Carol Brown

##### Sex Phantasms in the Domain of Abjection

Under red neon Rendezvous three men skipping, the bryl-creemed boys, skipping on broken glass, lip synching, 'I miss you'.

Shiny shorts, skinny and not-so-skinny men-boys keeping in time. The rooftop scene devolves to thirteen, thirteen men-boys enacting an anarchic, hypnotic and climactic series of rituals, games and fetishized sports routines before retreating into their 'cave'.

Shifting from hysterical displays of frenzied activity to collective ekstasis, the risk, addiction and shifting beliefs of playing for real becomes a kind of text. This choreography-as-text weaves action into an unrelenting enactment of joy, obsession, cultish body fitness, release and danger.

In *Dance Like a Butterfly, Dream Boy*, games and rituals of play become illuminating, an allegorical way of describing the isolation, hubris and solipsism of consensual hallucination

around the cult of the (male)body. This is not pretty. On a rough roof above the Aotea Centre, hemmed in by a low glass wall, it's a dystopic world of male bonding. These men-boys attempt to transcend death by unstoppable movement, phallic leaping about and worship of their amber beer-god bottles.

The category of masculinity, as a normative regulatory practice, produces these bodies and governs them. Under the force of regulatory practices and devolved biopolitics these men-boys demarcate, circulate and differentiate through 'man to man' combat, competitions, arcane rules and empty gestures. What is salutary is that they are sited under the symbolic force of the police force, a concrete walled staircase with the New Zealand Police Insignia emblazoned.

Repeating without resolving this is an idiotic call to abjection and the perpetual pathos of failure. Mobilising masculinist practices in this way underscores a dismantling and a queering of their regulatory force. Such a collective disidentification and devolution becoming a reconceptualising of the ways in which bodies matter. A form of biopolitics through a body laid bare. An evolution backwards becomes a devolution towards the undefinable. Shallow, masochistic, driven by fervent energy these diverse body-types howl at the moon. Recalling Beat generation writers and Iron John rites.

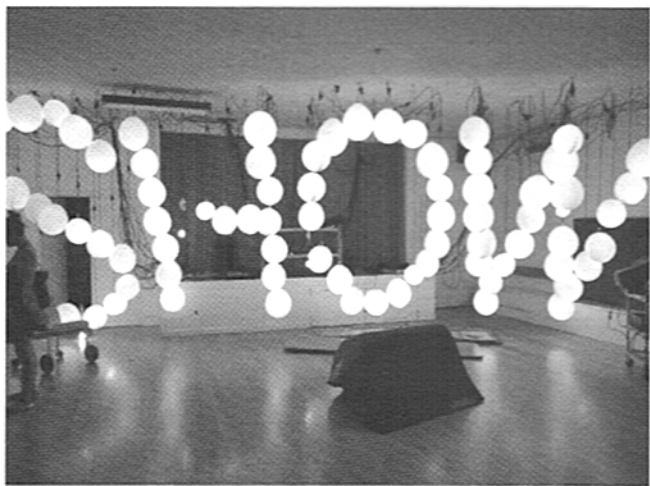
At times we are having a Plato's Cave moment and the shadows of the rave dancing are casting larger than life images onto the Police Headquarters wall. A long figure watches from the stairwell. It's a primordial moment. A rethinking of the power vested in the materialization of the masculine body projected onto the symbolic authority of the 'law'. But these Transgressions of honour and order stick thumbs in the bums of political fathers. Recasting the matter of masculinity as the effect of a dynamic of power The reiterative power of these ceaseless rituals is an insistent bloody-mindedness.

Compelled towards a materialization of gender, there is a failure to 'take place'. The beer is flat or worked into a frothy ejaculation. It is a mimetic relation to sexuality on display. Within this cult of a dystopic devolving masculinism, where the force of regulatory norms are turned against themselves, the spawning of rearticulations call into question the hegemonic forces that determine ceaseless repetition. The men-boys adherence to this choreography of operations averts the possibility of touch, the possibility of connection beyond the most enforced and idiotic display.

In the end, they turn in on themselves and stop being for us, at the service of the audience gaze. They inflate their cocoon, their womblike sanctuary and crawl inside to chant, rage at the dying light and to ultimately collapse in delirium. Without reference, reverence, to us their audience, the work collapses into its own solipsism. It has exhausted its terms of reference. Just as their inflatable shelter seems perilously close to deflation they are at the mercy of the elements. We are soaked in night-rain, their bodies of sweat, saliva and beery residue are anointed. It's a blessing to be over this ordeal to retreat downstairs, buy a drink at the bar, find some women-friends.

#### Concluding Comments

The strength of The EDGE marketing machine (Aotea Centre Arts Complex) meant a reasonably visible presence in print media, television, online news and arts sites, and local and national radio. To a large degree this was due to the skills and resources of New Zealand's largest performing arts presenter to market an idea through existing (and more often than not, paid for) channels. But surely the real mark of a cultural event



Top left – SHOW installation by Sean Curham, photo: Alexa Wilson  
Bottom left – Fleur-Elise Noble at Ping Pong pit

Top right – Audience member at discussion pit  
Bottom right – Dance Like a Butterfly Dream Boy

on the popular consciousness is reflected *in response* to the event. So how did the said newspapers, magazines, television, radio and online sites respond? Simply put, it was universally ignored by all mainstream media, except two.

The same TV3 *Nightline* reporter, mentioned earlier, had himself placed inside the Rimini Protokoll performance *Call Cutta In a Box*. Sitting in a chair, facing the empty office, he says after a couple of blinks, "I have absolutely no idea what I'm doing here!" He then went on to tell us what happens over the course of the 50-minute performance. "For the next hour Ashani makes me tea and turns on a light by remote control". Despite having a brief interview with the director about the thematic investigation of the piece beforehand, when the call centre worker showed him a photo of her place of work, which looked a bit run down and shabby, he winked at the camera, and told her, "Very similar to where I work at TV3. Actually, your place looks a little bit more upmarket!"

The second was a 300-word review in the *New Zealand Herald* of *Call Cutta In A Box* by Janet McAllester. While there were also number of online reviews that appeared daily on the theatre and dance industry review website (Theatreview.co.nz),

as well as a number of other smaller online sites (viewauckland, theatrescene, gatherandhunt), all producing meaningful written material reflecting a ground level support from performance practitioners, what happened to the larger publications and broadcasters, and particularly in relation to New Zealand's homegrown?

We can speculate a number of logical conclusions – it was the first festival of its kind; the duration of the festival was just nine days; there was no advertising spend for the publications; the pop-up nature of the venues; and so on. But the gaping hole is a sober reminder that there is an appalling lack of real discussion on performance art in New Zealand mainstream media at present. The cultural caché from our collected clippings describes a future event full of optimistic intrigue, but the event itself is missing from the collective media-bank-vault.

#### Notes

1. Ivor Cutler of Y'Hub.
2. Catherine Turner, "Writing for Contemporary Theatre: Towards a Radically Inclusive Dramaturgy", *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, vol.30, no.1, pp. 75–90.