

29/09/2006
Case Study
Bodies in Flight: Sara Giddens and Simon Jones
3rd June 2004

Tape 1

1:44

AP

It is... the... 3rd of June, 2004, we're here in Bristol talking with Simon Jones and Sara Giddens, otherwise known as Bodies in Flight... and... first of all I wanted to thank you very much for participating in the PARIP case studies... I should also say that this is tape one for future reference. I talked to you a little bit about how this runs... I just... again ... I'll just go through the questions one by one; if I feel that you've... developed answers enough for our purposes, then we move on to the next one. But hopefully by the end of it it does become a lot more conversational than it might on paper appear to be. Then we talked about whether you wanted to give a general overview of the work, but you felt that it was OK to just go into the difficult questions to begin with, so really I wanted to...

2:36

SJ

Well we could... we could say something very briefly about the history of the company, if that helps.

AP

That would be good, yes.

2;43

SJ

Well, I mean, it... started in eighty-nine and it was driven by the students to actually form... to actually go to the National Review of Live Art in 1989 and so... and then Sara came on board a year later with Project Three so the first two projects were with students and then with Project Three... in 1990 was the first professional project, so very quickly after its inception it became... totally professional and I think certainly the reason for the two of us collaborating, I think, at the time was to prod-... was to... was to have a... professional practice... outside of the academy. I can't remember then whether you were actually... at Nottingham Trent at the time.

3:34

SG

No I was... well, I was visiting a lecturer, I think... maybe at Dartington, and then at Nottingham.

3:42

SJ

Yea. So... Practice as Research did not exist, and... it was very much seen by my... senior management as a kind of "professional development"... aspect to my work, rather than research, and for me very clearly... it was very clearly the necessary... the necessary, sort of... OTHER part of my work was to have a professional context... for the practice that would se-... be in some way be set in relief... "opposition" isn't quite the right word, but in a kind of tension between professional practice and what I could do within the Academy. It wasn't un-... really until 1996 that practice as research really began to figure as a means of articulating those two... that tension, in a way, a different way of articulating that tension between... between work within the Academy and... and professional practice. So the company exists to all intents and purposes as a professional practice, and, by... I was trying to work this out... I think over eighty-five percent of its funding over the... ten years or so... has come from various arts councils or promoters or funders ... and only about fifteen percent one could actually identify as being AHRB or... sort of... institutional research funds.

(Track 02)

00:05

AP

And was it in 1996 that... did Bodies in Flight have a presence, then, in the 1996 RAE, for example...

00:15

SJ

I... I did... I've... I've always entered performances... The category for entering performances was Category 22... was then, in those days, in comparison to Category 1 for single-authored work, and I've always pointed out that that, in those days, demonstrated the relative significance of those research outputs... so yea there's always been a category, Category 22... in... in the previous RAE... but it was only really... in 2001 that it really took off.

00:56

AP

OK

00:57

SG

And I remember entering it on... on my RAE submission at Nottingham in ninety-six... but I suppose I'd come at it from a very... from a different place 'cause I... I wasn't... a lecturer when I first came to Bodies in Flight; I had my own theatre company with... with members of... other people that I'd graduated with at Lancaster, called Glory... and so I had that kind of professional practice... and

then started to work with Bodies in Flight and THEN went into Nottingham Trent after visiting lecturing... before that... so... similar but different ways.

1:41

AP

So moving on to the more specific questions ... as you said, Simon, earlier, the most difficult question is "What are your research questions?" Now that... why we're interested in talking with you is because... it's a much broader project for us... our involvement with Bodies in Flight... it's not simply one performance... work... it spans from Double Happiness through to Who by Fire and... this afternoon you're giving a research seminar on that... so... I wondered if you could talk about... the research questions that have governed the project more generally but then also specific questions, I guess in... in Double Happiness and... Skinworks and Who by Fire...

2:26

SG

Shall I do some general conCERNs... of the work?

SJ

Yea, go on. Yea... definitely.

2:33

SG

Which I think have been with us... from the very beginning of our collaboration but certainly from Do the Wild Thing which was in ninety-six? Five? Six? Ninety-six... which is about flesh meeting text and... the... ephemeral event of... of live performance and... a very... CLOSE relationship between audience and performer... I think, you know, I think... there's a number of things that take us right through the work and those things just keep on coming up... and then... the other thing that I think we've always been very interested in is... collaboration as a research topic in its own right and working with, particularly, filmmakers, video makers, musicians... and... how you kind of... set up... possibly certain kind of laboratory conditions that allow you to collaborate and where that can then go... and I think those are the ones that keep coming up for me and then I think in each show obviously we're also asking much more specific questions, you know, often related to issues or topics within the shows.

4:09

SJ

Yea... I mean I... I think there's a... there are on-going concerns and that's where the phrase "research question" is slightly... problematic for me because it implies an answer... and I see what we're doing as a... an activity of knowing, that's how I'd phrase it. And if one is charged as a... as an artist philosopher working within the Academy to... pursue one's particular discipline to the limits of what is possible where one is, which is all that one can possibly do... then... it's

pur-... it's like an itinerary of... on an unknow-... on a journey... a series of expressions of... an investigation of an activity of knowing, I mean I know that sounds terribly vague, but it isn't really phrased as a question that "the show " or even the various documentation outcomes , 'cause that's another aspect of our recent work is, we wanted to try and do different kinds of documentation of things. I know we're coming on to that later, but there are no answers in any of that. And the problem for me is... is the problem of this activity of knowing is really one of constant unfolding and expressing so that one finds each particular theatre event, each particular show, common parlance, each particular show... is a different kind of manifolding, enfolding and unfolding of this partic-... of this activity of knowing which is performance.

Therefore... I mean, just to slightly gloss... Sara's statement about flesh and text, I think one of the reasons why the series of events continues is because that problematic is irresolvable ... The encounter of... the encounter of what one... one might like to think of as the kind of "material world": the flesh, as we configure it and... various texts of various kinds of languages and in that we might include music, we might include choreography, so we're not simply talking about verbal text words, any kind of text: visual, you know, visual images, on a screen text is that it... it cannot be resolved... that there is, in... in that Foucaultian sense, a kind of, a poorer kind of gap... at this... at the heart of this very encounter, and really, in a way, that's... that's what we're exploring, so all of our... all of our works are trying to draw an audience's attention to... if you like, the blind spots, or the gaps, or the... almost the... the ungraspable, unknowable parts of performance, which is, as you say, do to with the ephemerality of it all, in one instance, but it's also to do with the... the unknowability of the instance of it, and isn't that interesting... to... to have that activity within institutions that... have a tradition of trying to conserve knowledge which obviously all processes of conservation are processes of control and XXXXX so that it can then be transferred... to the next generation. Which is fine and good and I don't disaGREE with that, but I think it enriches the Academy to have within it an activity that is almost about the opposite, is almost about that... those bits of knowing that one cannot grasp, and bringing people together into a room to do that seems to me to be a... an interesting... problem... for us within the Academy and is obviously stimulating for general audiences beyond that. So yea, I mean, the short answer would be that those are the concerns and that they don't get phrased as questions but as kinds of particular expressions... of a general problem.

(Track 03)

3:34

SG

And the other thing that we do with those concerns is... that it is ongoing... they are... we're picking up at the end of one show often that is the beginning of another show, or another piece of work.

3:49

AP

Well that was going to be the next question about the processes of devising and refining these concerns.

3:55

SG

So you... so, again, it's kind of... you know... it's not... we can't say "And this is the..." "This is the THE question for the show" 'cause so much of it has been ongoing and yet it's always changing, it's very fluid in that... respect and... it's only when we've got to the end of something... whatever that may be... that you can th-... we can then begin to see where we might want to go next.

4:22

SJ

And what's fascinating is that there is no communication ... if one thinks about it very strictly logically... choreography cannot talk to music, music cannot talk to text, text cannot talk to choreography... so there's these... even in the process of collaboration, there's a dialogue between people who are not talking the same language and whose.... master repertoires, if you like, or their masteries as Susan Melrose might put it, are all very very different... you know, whereas I could... I, for example, could move a scene, and often DO move a scene and... and Sara will comment on... on what she thinks about "the verbal text", for example, but... there are clear areas of expertise and that's one thing that we were very interested in, I guess it's worth saying against... when we entered the live art scene there was quite a preponderance of, sort of, anti-mastery, incompetence and playing around and with this level of "Wha-... "you know, "What makes good acting?" or what makes good... construction of a narrative... so... we were not interested in that, I mean we were very much interested in the idea of... of working with specialists, people who had a real artistic and imaginative... engagement and mastery of their own particular fields... and... and putting those people together, and then working out... why we... couldn't speak to each other! Or why... why trans-... why "translation" is an inappropriate verb, and that problem of... of the gaps between us, and that's why... in my PARIP keynote paper I was referencing David Bohm's ideas of dialogue, this notion of "How can you have a dialogue when everyone is, kind of, talking different languages" and... and it IS about an idea of suspending judgement which again is a very interesting concept within the Academy... less in, you know, less problematic out in the... out in the profession, the suspension of judgement, but... very problematic within the Academy... so there was this interest in... in each particular field... in a way going as far as it could... and a kind of internal investigation of... of choreography, say, and an internal investigation of the construction of a verbal text... whilst... whilst collaborating.

(Track 04)

1:53

AP

So how then... appropriate, I suppose is the word, do you feel that notion of research question is? I suppose... obviously you... it's not appropriate for Bodies in Flight XXXX what you were doing but in terms... in more general terms for the Academy for practice as research and do you want to talk a little bit about... that sense of appropriateness... or do you have any... feelings either way, or is that a generalisable... issue?

2:26

SG

I think it's very useful to be... I think it's very useful to reflect upon one's practice and to... be... put into a position where research concerns need to be articulated within acceptable frameworks... but that's kind of as far as it goes for me.

2:54

SJ

I mean it's fair to say, of course, that... that Arts Council Fund XXXXX were, but Arts Council funders in any event require not dissimilar kinds of phrasings of one's aims and ambitions for a project, the development from the previous project, and how... and to what extent those aims and ambitions have been met. What I think I'm talking about is the very epistemological basis of such phrasings as a... as a political game and as a socio-cultural game, yes, because it's lovely... you know, it's necessary and lovely to hear feedback from people so you can't say...! You know, you... you... at a pragmatic level you are constantly phrasing in terms of questions and answers how one's work develops, but if one thinks that the very point of one's work is that kind of... epistemological investigation of... of how different kinds of discursive fields might come together in a performance event, then there's a deep... there's a kind of philosophical problem with it, but there isn't, in effect, a pragmatic... professional problem with it 'cause... but what's interesting for us, of course, is that we played across, you know, two different fields, and it's only been relatively recently that the, sort of, Arts Council way of phrasing has come quite close to the... to the... academic way of phrasing and... that it's been possible to think about things genuinely crossing in a very overt way.

4:34

SG

'Cause it certainly didn't used to feel anywhere near, you know... and you felt that you were having to use very, very different languages for, you know, those two different things.

4:46

AP

But what's quite interesting is the way in which the work of Bodies in Flight engages with research epistemologies... that issue... is working in tension with

what seems to characterise the notion of research which XXXXXXXX this issue of questions.

5:02

SJ

I think there are certain kinds of research... practice-led research... that can be phrased with questions where one can get answers and one can think "OK that's complete, we'll now move on to..." ...there's a logical step in the progression of questions in the same way that one might, sort of, forensically investigate a particular topic or... problem... in a sort of quasi legal sort of way... I think there are projects, they're just not the projects that... that's not what we do is I think the only answer that we have chosen to engage in this project precisely because it's awkward and precisely because it's awkward and because it doesn't fit. And I believe, although I have no proof... I believe that... that's why people still go to the theatre. And behind all of this, there is this question, you know, why... why bother with performance in our particular... you know.... cultural moment and why does it persist? And so there seems to be an imperative on... on artists and that's certainly why one would want to gravitate towards... why I DID gravitate to... I'm not speaking for Sara... but why I did gravitate towards the live arts sector was because it was asking those questions of performance whereas mainstream theatre of one kind or another assumes that its activity is, ipso facto, done and socially approved and... fits.... and I think that... live art is much more prepared to kind of ask questions of "Why am I bothering to do this" in the first place?" or "Why are you bothering to come and... and those very kinds of basic questions of the event itself, and that's what intrigued me about it.

Track 5

2:05

SG

Particularly when we've moved... I don't know... from Constants? Or before which is about ninety-eight, wasn't it? into working more and more into digital and documentary documented work... which obviously totally throws up those questions again of "What is this live event?" and "What is this... body...?" that close to you, sweating and... you know, being so there, so present... apparently... and the more that we worked with video in particular and the idea of documenting... which I think... I think was... was created more and more by the fact that, certainly I was in an institution where they wanted to see this... documented evidence and I think we got support... we got financial support to make these documents and catalogues and brochures and talk about the work so, we were driven in that way, weren't we?

3:27

SJ

Yea, I mean, I think until... until Do the Wild Thing which was in ninety-six... I had a complete antipathy to documentation and the only reason things got documented was because... we happened to know a very good photographer and he loved our work and he wanted to photograph it! So I kind of... I was, you know... I saw it as a kind of adjunct to the artistic process of making the work and I had a... yes, I guess I had a, sort of, almost... quasi-religious hatred of documentation as a way of trying to... as a way of trying to emphasise the ephemerality of what... what's happening...

4:16

SG

And then AHRB support was... you know...

4:21

SJ

...to produce a... yea, to produce an archive...

4:25

SG

Eight months to... to... well, to make Double Happiness but then to reflect upon the work since the inception of Bodies in Flight...

4:34

AP

But what's quite interesting is the way in which you bring in documentation to become part of the research concerns, because I was thinking... the questions about how does your practice engage with issues of epistemology with professionalism and pedagogy... the way in which Bodies in Flight seems to work is... is about an interweaving of those and I just wondered... wondered if you could talk a little bit about how that notion of research works with your particular ideas of professionalism because Bodies in Flight was set up to work, at least in the initial stages, as solely a professional entity.

Track 6

00:10

SJ

Well to me it all... it relates to the question of pedagogy as well, in that one of the reasons for me personally for doing Bodies in Flight was because it was not teaching, and certainly the... the... from Do the Wild Thing which I think is the kind of cusp... event for us in terms of... took us in a very different... very different direction in ninety-six... it was about... a kind of... inter-... heavily internalised, heavily personalised investigation of the self and one's own particular... mastery... of a particular... skill... in my case writing... writing words and... and it was the very opposite of the practices that I use in terms of teaching, which are about objectifying method... are sort of identifying methods in other companies, other artists and saying "Here is an identifiable method... let

us examine it through... you know, performance analysis, criticism, essays, practice... whatever... and it's... it's... in a sense... about providing an external quasi object which is a company or its method or a series of work or a kind of work or whatever... whereas for me, what professionalism allowed was a kind of dwelling on the self as a writer and an ability to look very intimately into myself, which I don't do in teaching! I'm not one of those kinds of teachers! I don't... and I don't do that... so it was a kind of... that's why I say opposition is... or tension is sometimes a useful way of thinking about it, but not in an unhelpful way but in a very sort of positive way... and so that's what it meant for me personally.

2:21

SG

And I always felt like I needed both of those outlets like the teaching and the research... Bodies in Flight... felt to me like they fed each other all the time and also that feeling of mainly teaching, you know, I was teaching contemporary arts, live art, whatever, and you're engaged in that work professionally and I think that makes a difference to the students and how you can talk about... creating work and how it's funded and all of those things, you know I really do think the two are... can be hand but are separate and different activities and need different time.

3:09

AP

And what about... the issue of the professional being, you know, the artist being invited into the Academy... how have you found that transition from being seen as separate to actually now being much more XXXX sense of your activities "out there" also being your activities "in here".

3:32

SG

See I think we... this is going to be a very different answer for the two of us. When I was... taken on at Nottingham it was because of my professional activity, and it was because I, you know, I had this reputation as a choreographer with different companies and... they were looking for practitioners that had teaching experience as well... And now... and now I feel like... because our work has so much more history about it and we are so much more well-known, I don't know how well-known "well-known" is, but... that... I think the work is becoming in a way more mainstream... and I think that the kinds of venues, that I know it's a funny, but the venues that we're playing... feel more and more mainstream for me: international festivals... all that kind of thing, so... I suppose that... it's less about a kind of academic context for me now and much more about a professional context... you'll have a very different answer!

5:00

SJ

Well I see it... I see it as the... I mean I made a choice when I was twenty-two that I couldn't take the insecurity of the professional world and I couldn't take a kind of entry-level role within it, uhm, that was too subservient! That's how I thought of it and I thought that in a sense academia would give me the space and time to pursue a series of artistic and intellectual explorations, which is what it has done. And so I see practice-led research as simply being the institution and its funders catching up with the logic of the subject. You know, I bought at the age of eighteen, totally the logic that in order to pursue performance studies one had to... perform, as well as... study, in the conventional senses of... of, you know, library-based research and analysis of events as an audience spectator. And I... it never occurred to me that there would be any other logic and... it's simply taken a while for the... for the institution to catch up with the logic. So I feel now the time has come, in a way, or that... and, you know, especially with the Labour government coming in in ninety-seven and suddenly their awareness of the value of cultural industries has suddenly added a real injection of interest by the institutions in "What are these... weird people in drama?"! and various kinds of performance departments, various kinds of media departments: "What are they doing?" and suddenly it becomes "Oh! There may.... there may be... money in them there departments" ... so, that's what it feels like from my point of view.

Track 7

1:57

SG

But it feels like the Arts Council are catching up as well, because I think that you are able to be funded for "research" now through Arts Council grants in a way that you weren't five years ago, ten years ago.

2:15

SJ

Yea. No, I think that that's... that's analogous to the synergy that's been existing in technologically based industries and engineering and computing, for example, for some time now... that the... the sort of different... kinds of funding, including industry, see... see a value in working with, and alongside... "alongside" is my preferred preposition for almost everything... alongside the institutions of universities and research centres.

2:49

AP

And speaking more specifically, bringing it to the... the prev-... the most recent three shows... how... how are you seeing that work as engaging with research, professionalism... not so... perhaps pedagogy if you want to touch on that... but within those specific contexts of, you know, "the political climate"... has there been a change?

3:19

SJ

Less so than those... specifics, I mean I think we have been able to take advantage of... funding and putting funding together, in a way, that has enabled us to... to really go into areas that, you know, we would have explored earlier had the funding been available, I'm thinking in terms of the, sort of, international stuff that we've done... because that really has been quite a complex web of funding in terms of institutions, AHRB, Arts Council, British Council... you know, if you take a show like Skinworks, for example... that's a show that... that is a kind of a relationship between artists working in Chicago, artist working in... in Britain, but also involving... an artist from Singapore that has allowed us to kind of operate across three continents, in a way, and sort of produce work that THAT'S opened up, on the top of Double Happiness, has opened up this area that we've not been able to explore, I don't know, I can't... for whatever reason as... as the way that... the way that cultural inflections of the various... texts and fleshes encounter one another and... and I see it... it's interesting to see a show like Skinworks because it operated... although it was largely rehearsed in Britain, a significant element of it was, in a way, done remotely with Chicago and based... artists and then it performed at an international festival in Singapore... so, there's a... and it involved a Singapore performer so it's interesting, it's interesting for me as a writer seeing all of those different kinds... those three very different cultures encounter text, and also encounter choreographic instruction, and uhm... and that was really beca-... that was really enabled because we were able to put together of package of British Council, Singapore Arts Council, Arts Council, AHRB Research Exchange... so it all kind of came together to facilitate and extend the life of that project, so instead of just working with a Singapore performer, which was our original ambition, we found that we could work with Chicagoan performers and then we found that we could do an instillation version of it in Chicago and then we found that we could do a performance of it in Singapore, so that's...

Track 8

1:09

AP

I think that's really interesting because people tend to focus on this funding context as being negatively constraining, but it sounds as though the mix of things actually allowed certain other questions or themes of concerns to be raised that otherwise wouldn't necessarily happen.

SJ

Yea.

SG

1:26

And we... you know, we've been in the same boat as many other individuals and many other companies of... of... changing semantics, you know, same concerns, same piece of work that we're going to produce but, the way that you're talking about it, the way that you're writing about it has constantly needed to... to change and now I think Simon's right... I think NOW just with Who by Fire probably we are more able to be transferable with those different languages from one thing to another.

2:12

AP

That's interesting 'cause... the question of representation... how you represent your work to those different funders and how... can you... give me a bit more detail on... think about XXXXXX

2:41

SJ

With something... with something like Skinworks, uhm... it kind of relates to Double Happiness which in a way relates to both the previous two shows, Deliver Us and Constance, is that once we've started to introduce technology, very explicitly, introduced digital technologies in terms of video and sound... effectively what we were introducing into our concerns was... time . Do the Wild Thing had been very much about "the present moment": how is it that we can investigate, or how can we come to investigate this present moment of performance where you are looking at me... speaking. And the show is very much about an intensification of looking at that present moment and arriving at a sense that it is not knowable, it's not graspable. When we introduced digital technology, in effect we kind of introduced time and at the same time we began to be interested, because Constance after Do the Wild Th-... I am getting to your question, one sec ... Constance after do the Wild Thing we had... we decided that we would... we would take a body... we would take two performers... a woman, a young woman who was twenty-three, I think... just graduated, a dance specialist within her own particular study, just beginning her professional career. And we took an old woman who had not performed for family reasons, not performed in an awful long time professionally but had begun her... her sort of... she was a professional actress... and we, in a sense we began to be interested in time and we began to be in-... and it was at the same point that we began to be interested in digital technology and this idea of "capturing time" and what does that mean... and that in a sense naturally flowed through Deliver Us which sort of looked at time in terms of a love story... time rather than in terms of two different ages, time in terms of a kind of narrative of a relationship, to Double Happiness which looked at time in relationship to space, in relationship to distance, so Double Happiness was... predicated on this idea of an internet romance of two couples meeting, two in Singapore, two in the UK, and this idea of... digital technology... in a way we were exploring what is this interface between digital technologies and flesh in different kinds of ways and if one can think of it as partly to do with a form of... exteriorised memory and a form of repeating the

past in the future... or you can also think of it as a way of either conflating or... producing distance, so there's all sorts of questions between space and time, and then I think when we... got into... Skinworks, there was a logical step of then looking at how... how one encounters the digital in terms of... the web and... the simple idea behind Skinworks was to physicalise a chatroom so that the audience is put physically into it: physical room as if it were a chatroom, and the performers perform as if they're in a chatroom and... the kind of excessive, libidinal, erotics that occurs within the chatrooms that we were interested in... was the very thing that powered the show. And what was interesting then... Am I getting around to your question? ... of being put... being able to put the... put that simple situation to various kinds of funders and to articulate it through... anyone could find... any funder could find a way in to that scenario. For instance, I was always amused when I read, although please don't quote me on this!, 'cause I can't quite remember it, but the British Councils... the British Council was looking for young British companies that would... what was it?... "promote Britain as a young, funky, hip place to live! And I think... I think you could not get two people who feel less young, less funky and less hip than us! So, I mean it was a... Skinworks is a... I think a very... I see Double Happiness and I see Skinworks as a kind of diptych, as a kind of double act of... the first one is about marriage and in the great Shakespearean tradition, it's comedic, and it's positive about the possibilities of... flesh encountering flesh via digital technologies... Skinworks is the tragedy... it's about the horror of... of these technologies as profoundly alienating and... damaging to identity and to self-identity and to all of that follows, to quote XXXXX. So I saw those two things and it was interesting to take that show back to Singapore, because the Arts Council in Singapore had been so positive about Double Happiness and to show them a work that was in a sense the very reverse of all the things that, as a nation, they aspire to these technological developments, the British Council wants to appear... wants it...

Track 9

4:01

SG

But much more Bodies in Flight as well, wasn't it? ... Skinworks...

4:04

SJ

So... I mean that was... that was amusing, but it was possible because of the situation, and what we call the situation of the piece was this... very simple proposition: what happens if you physicalise, if you turn an ordinary, every-day room into a chatroom... and everyone could get a handle on that... and it... is a sufficiently hot topic on everybody's agenda to enable us to make a show which is actually, I think, very difficult for audiences, very challenging, and... quite negative in its, if you like, its ethic, or its moral outcomes if you like!

4:54

SG

Well it's dark , it's hard, it's fast... it's all of those things and it's RIGHT up close.

5:01

SJ

So I think that was... that was quite interesting... Do you want me to say something about Who by Fire? Or do you want to...?

AP

Yea. I think we've got time for me to... switch the tape. Yea, because I mean that makes sense in terms of talking about it because we're going to talk about it later as well.

Track 10

00:17

SJ

Well I mean Who by Fire came out of Skinworks and this is often the way with our work, is that... and this is why I think ... question-answer, you know, new question, new answer, bla bla bla is ... is not appropriate for us ... is the fact that we wanted to work with live musicians and we wanted to work with musicians who were able, in the rehearsal process, to respond to all the other elements... and simply working with XXXXX... produced this very interesting energy between the movement, the verbal text and... the sound, the music... in that sense, and so we wanted to develop that with Who by Fire. And Who by Fire marks, I think, the second fundamental inflection in our... itinerary because, for the first time since probably ninety-four or five... we did not begin with verbal text, we didn't begin with a, what we call, rather ambiguously, a "block" of text. We did not begin with pages and pages of text that I had written... and we decided quite deliberately to make a work that, in a sense, began with... the exterior... began with the found rather than began with the interior, so it was a very deliberate change of strategy, in that sense... and it came out of this relationship with the music. And I think where it's heading, because we're only in the... we've only just completed the research and development phase, and another thing I think is worth mentioning about the show since Constance, since ninety-eight, is that the funding has enabled us to through... at least two and often three stages of the work... that we've had a research and development phase, then we've had a production phase, and in some instances, like Deliver Us and Skinworks , we've had a touring, and then a FURTHER touring phase. So we've been... we've been able to keep developing the work and keep changing it.

2:55

SG

Which is much better for our rhythm, and how we work. Much, much better.

SJ

Yea. And so at the moment we're at a research and development phase with Who by Fire, and it looks like it's... in my mind, anyway, and we haven't had a chance to talk about it! But in my mind... I'm beginning to get interested in something that I've always been interested in, in a kind of vague, intellectual sense, which is a sentimental... and I... and it's to do with the relationship... it's to do with what music can do as a discursive field in relationship to... to words, in relationship to gesture. And it's interesting the responses to Who by Fire that people... people have... the one word that has cropped up from almost all sectors is "moving" which is weird for us because we've never encountered... we've had very emotional encounters to our work previously, because one of our deliberate strategies has been to choose situations, as we call them, that everybody can hook into. So when someone says "What's your show about?" we will say "It's about..." you know, Deliver Us, "It's about this... lovers in this bed and they wake up and they start thinking about their relationship". You know, it's all very simple things that everybody has encountered. Like Constance, it's a... it's a piece about the relationship between someone... entering XXXX, youth... you know, beginning an adult life, and somebody XXX an adult life, somebody who is aware of... the... of death and it's about that... sort of bookends of... of adulthood, in a way... so we've always had very... relatively simple and, we hope, accessible... situations that people can go in, so it's... we have in the past had very individual, personal responses from people that have been... moved by the work because of... you know... several people said about Constance "So that reminds me of my mother" and things like that and... that's not to... in any way to denigrate those responses by any means but... we've never had a collective ... "This is moving!" and... and I'm still processing that, I'm still trying to work that out... because for me, I don't find it moving. I don't find the show moving at all... I find it... an interesting thing for me of putting together elements that I don't have the same internal attachment to that I had with my own text. And one of the things that I do in rehearsals, which is different, I know, because you're... your working with...

Track 11

00:53

SG

Much harder.

00:54

SJ

You're working much harder! Is... the exciting thing for me about performers performing my text is it becomes theirs. And for me the rehearsal process is about letting go and upon what terms, and what's the condition of me letting go of something so that that person... you know their job... the performer's job is to work the event of the show and the rehearsal, if you like, is their preparation for

that, so I fully respect them when they say “This won’t work” or “I want to do this in this way” and my texts get inordinately changed and altered and everything changes the... the first person changes to second person... the gender changes from she to he and bla bla bla bla the whole or-... everything changes, the order changes the dadida... and that’s what I love about... the rehearsal process is that something that was deeply internal to me becomes exteriorised via this other person... who has the job of... of gi-... of then giving it on to strangers in... the theatre event. And... this is very different for me because although there is... there are bits of text in Who by Fire, they’re very often written to order as in “Here is a lyric”...you know... “we need five verses” ...you know... “four... four lines of verse, the first line must be ten syllables, the second line five sy-“ and you know it’s... it’s been a different practice that I’ve want-... that I’ve wanted to do... but... it’s... it’s... too early to say... but it’s been the music that has allowed us to... to contemplate that shift because the music has a way of sustaining an... an engagement with the work that before was between the speaking body and the moving body.

Track 11

3:06

SG

It’s how... it’s how it creates that space and time, isn’t it, and how that different space and time is.

3:11

AP

Well it’s interesting because, I mean, we jump at the “reality effect” of photography but with music it’s... it’s the cinematic, emotional effect that music creates. I mean everybody talks about you watch a horror film, you turn the sound down, you’re no longer frightened, so how music works in a live performance along those similar lines is quite interesting...

3:31

SJ

And I think there’s a whole area to be looked at in the sentimental, and I’ve, you know, I’ve long thought that... that... I’ve long been interested in quasi-performance events or like, you know, like pop concerts and... XXXX very interested in this idea of how such a huge amount of libidinal energy can be organised in these events with very simple... commands of var-... of how to, you know... of very simple music... structurally simple so I’m told! Structurally simple music, certainly simple lyrics and how it is that... how it is that something very deep... within the human experience is accessed via these things...

4:19

SG

But that makes perfect sense, doesn't it, in terms of the communal experience and... and what we feel is so important at the heart of live performance that communal experience... I feel different about Who by Fire 'cause it's very personal for me and it's come out of lots of... emotional things that I've been going through with... with various people so I actually feel very different about it... which is really interesting.

4:49

AP

Did you want to talk a little bit about HOW you feel about it?

4:53

SG

Well... I, uhm... I think it's the... it IS the first time that I've ever been... that I've ever made a show where so much of a very specific personal situation I've, uhm... a very close friend of mine has just died and... has died of breast cancer and... was diagnosed two years ago so we first started talking about Who by Fire... you know... that situation had already arisen... so... uhm... putting... not wanting necessarily deliberately to put it all into the show but of course processing there and processing the loss of someone very close to me whilst making a piece of work has been very interesting process.... uhm... and actually... I'm actually quite cathartic, I think, in the end...

Track 12

00:52

AP

I wanted... Do we have? OK five minutes, but it's probably enough to switch gear to a certain extent... and ask about... because we've dealt with funding, we've dealt with the notion of what it is that you're exploring and I wanted... there was a question, a very prosaic question about... resources and what kinds of resources have been available to you or not available to you because of your position both within the academy but also through Arts Council XXXX traditional, non-traditional XXXX being funded by the Arts Council... Do you... What kind of spaces and equipment... do you use?

1:30

SG

There was a period when I was at Nottingham and Simon was here at Bristol whereby we were advised in Arts Council applications and regional arts applications NOT to... mention, or certainly not to make a play of the fact that we were both academics in universities because that might affect how we were funded... Its... I mean it's a similar problem to the... "Southwest region, East Midlands region, "Who's gonna fund us"... we're kind of... in-between... we were... we were kind of constantly falling in between these various things and...

and then... I don't know... four or five years ago? Were we allowed to mention that we were... attached to...

SJ
Mm

SG
...universities by that point...? So... that kind of changed... and I think we've always been REALLY well supported by institutions in terms of... rehearsal space... access to equipment, you know... obviously it depends what time of year and... what kind of XXX there is on the equipment from students etcetera, etcetera... but...

3:03
SJ
And I think also freedom. Time.

SG
Yea. That's what I'm miss ...

SJ
And you know... there are obvious benefits in... in terms of... if one is teaching performance and then working professionally in performance, there's all kinds of benefits in terms of... the sort of... synergy or the relationship between those different activities, so I'm not in the position that... you know, effectively one might look at it as... as me being a... a teacher in a university for ten months and then a practicing artist for two months, 'cause that's in a sense how it's kind of panned out the last few years, you could think of it as that separated, but in effect it isn't and I'm lucky that I don't ... I don't work on a building site for ten months and then I'm a practicing artist for two months. I mean you might say there's dangers because... maybe... maybe if I WERE to do something completely different for the other ten months... you know, it would... it would clear my mind. But I think time is... the greatest resource that one is given, over and above the profession where there is a need to move on, and the artists that we've been working with who work in the profession are constantly juggling the next job, the next commission, the next pot of money, and we're in an extra... well, you WERE... you're no... but I still AM... in that very luxurious position of... of the intellectual who is... able to... to contemplate.

4:49
AP
At which note we need to switch. We have run out of time.

Tape 2

Track 1

0:04

AP

OK. Tape 2.

SG

Where are we up to?

AP

Well we've kind of covered a number of different questions and I think we've talked about... resource. Was there anything else you wanted to talk about in terms of resources allocated because what's quite interesting is that some people make a specific... they have a specific position NOT to use their institutional spaces. I mean there are people that we've spoken to who don't use rehearsal space who don't use any of the equipment so it's interesting to see how you play with these various different contexts... and has being able to...

00:40

SG

I mean I think it's... it affects the structure of how we work and how we have worked, you know, and we tend to work in holiday times when... demand for rehearsal space is... significantly less.

00:56

SJ

And when I have the time, but then that... but as we've become more successful we've been more driven by the market, so we've had to go with the seasons of presenting work, so Who by Fire was in May which, of course as we know, is a particularly busy time in the academic year, and that's proved... tricky.

1:17

SG

But that was because of a XXXXX commission and May, you know, XXX opera being there.

1:21

SJ

But then the other season is October as well, you know XXXX season is October. But also there's a... there is a political thing in it as well, because I think that, you know, I don't want to put intention into other people's... actions, in that sense, but you might say that to NOT use one's facilities is actually making some kind of precious claim about the artistic practice not being containable within the academic enterprise, and I think actually using the facilities is making the statement that that is the "proper" place for it, or A proper place for it and it, in a sense, you know, as we... as we experience on a daily basis, for us to be in the

building is a challenge to other users of the building. And for many years what that challenge was... you know... "Simon's Company" rather like some sort of amateur dramatics enterprise that was, kind of, clogging up the spaces! And, you know, recently of course it's achieved this status of research... but that hasn't always been the case. So it does contain within it quite a serious... sort of... quite a serious sort of political statement about that the "proper" place for this work to take its place... and... and for us, I think it was, yes, within these... within these institutions... rather than... without, somewhere, hidden...

3:01

AP

OK. I wanted to talk now about... I suppose about Who... well, no... if we talk about Double Happiness, Skinworks and Who by Fire and I keep thinking about sort of the three as somehow... as working together within, at least a PARIP context if not a Bodies in Flight context. But how have... you mentioned research, Simon... and how have you, or have you, consciously, self-consciously positioned those shows as research, has that been a concern of yours to do so? Certainly with Who by Fire there's a very... there's a conscious move by organising a research seminar around that. I just wondered if you had anything to say about that.

3:49

SJ

Well I... it just goes back to my opening statement about activity of knowing. I mean, I don't... I don't think... the organisation of a research seminar for me is a... is a sort of... convenient... vessel for semi-formalising feedback that, you know, colleagues... colleagues have been more and more forthcoming in their feedback on the work and I appreciate that... mightily... and therefore it's been... this opportunity to get... to get people together in the same room at a point when we're... sort of... having finished the... research and development phase and before we even apply for monies for a production phase, it's just... it is very... helpful to have a kind of f-... semi-formal discussion about what people who are outSIDE of the research process, the making process, think of it. So I see its positioning as research as part of this on-going exploration and explication of... this activity of knowing, really, and... rather like the documentation, you know, we've been looking at different ways of documenting as running alongside the event of making and performing.

Track 2

00:18

AP

And do you see the potential, or do you see any potential, and obviously we haven't XXXXXX yet, but the potential for that kind of format as working its way into future work as part of, sort of, rational of... evaluation, I suppose, of... of what it is that... you're doing.

00:39

SG

Well I think in a way the prof-... you know, the professional... world that we work in... and certainly the funding world that we operate within make those demands upon us, as well... you know... we have done work in progress... was it Skinworks? We did at the Arnolfini? And did... and had evaluation and feedback afterwards... it was, wasn't it.

SJ

Mm.

SG

You know, and constantly we're having to... collect and collate information in terms of feedback and evaluation for Arts Council so it is another... avenue, really.

AP

1:23

But is that driven primarily then by the needs from ... the Arts Council rather than internally driven in terms of what you're... what you would be doing. Would you be doing that anyway? Would you be interested in doing that anyway?

1:36

SG

I think we're interested in knowing how... in exploring people's responses to our work, full stop.

1:44

SJ

I think particularly now that... the status of practice-led research has shifted... I think I was much less interested, and so were my colleagues... not... they were not interested to come to the shows XXX, and... I was not particularly interested to garner their response... I was very interested in what... other artists and funders and promoters were saying about the work but not what my acaDEmic colleagues were saying. But now I think that... that practice-led research has a particular... status within the mix of different kinds of research that people do. It seems appropriate to me... that a... that a discussion can happen and that's why I th-... that's where, in a way, where the challenge comes... because of this notion of... of... how do you evaluate... and... qu-... I'm never sure quite how that happens... in traditional forms of humanities scholarship anyway, and... and... it's difficult to know how, sort of... what are they called? Is it metrics like citations and things like this... would operate... But it seems to me that... if... IF... part of offering a paper, or holding an event like a research seminar is evaluatory... is that correct?... It has evaluation in it... that's then quite an interesting moment because it would then very much run up against my thinking

about the suspension of judgement... and that... that... this kind of activity of knowing is very different from the scholarship that, say, produces a paper on a specific object of research... is that kind of...? I don't know whether that's a very clear statement.

4:09

AP

Although I suppose... I mean, in terms of... running up against that notion of evaluation, but of course one can evaluate to what extent one has... explored the impossibility of reaching the end of the sentence, as it were... If one comes out of that research seminar with an even greater sense of... still trying to find or being part of an activity of knowing rather than reaching a conclusion.

4:40

SJ

I think those kinds of... sort of, quote, Tom Stoppard... nudges to the system, where one is nudging the system to reflect upon its own epistemological limits, is... is really the ... it's the virtue of such things from a kind of... from a kind of collective point of view ... from a personal point of view as a maker, they're very, very instructive and it's very, very... helpful and dynamic and intriguing to hear people's responses at all levels of all kinds of audience spectator, but if you stand back from it and say "If one was investigating practice as research, why would one want to hold such an event?" It would be, I think, because one would be nudging that tendency in academia to judge, and be saying quite "What do you do with these different types of objects?" I mean, it's interesting... because in a way Who by Fire as a show is all about objects, it's... its about images and how can one think about images as quasi-objects, and in a way performance is a quasi-object in terms of... in terms of... the research culture because of its ephemerality. It's very different from the disseminable... products of other kinds of research... whose... the objecthood of which is so much more certain and agreed, and therefore the sort of quasi-objective... the quasi-objecthood of an event like Who by Fire is actually one of the things it is trying... it is looking at, which was part of the reason why we went for external... found objects for iconic images was because we were trying to look at this whole idea of... of the sort of... yea... the status of... these kind... of images as quasi-objects and where do you get them from and why do you recall them, why... do they have such...

SG

Potency.

SJ

Yea... yea... such... potential.

1:59

SG

I think what's interesting about Who by Fire as well is that certainly on the first night of XXXX is the show where I've had the least XXXX or understanding of what an audience might make of... out of any show that I can remember. You... I think you were like that... you were like... you know, in terms of feedback and how people were going to respond to it... almost no idea until that first night. Which is a strange position to be in.

SJ

So in those senses I see there's a kind of... there's a kind of mirroring or a kind of analogy between... thinking about it as a research object and it thinking about its own... generation, it's own expression, and why... you know, we talked a lot about... and I will talk to a certain extent this afternoon about the point... of an image... the point of an image becoming an image... the point that an image becomes recognisable... and how does one... how... how can one know that point... how can one think of that point and... I don't... I think we're... in terms of the show... a very long way away from... from approaching that ... it feels like a long way away... it feels like a long way away from it... but it's... it's an interesting thing that's emerged...

SG

But it was... you know... one of it's major, kind of, questions in a sense was how you can pull focus, how you can make focus and pull focus... uhm... which of course when working with video alongside that, you know, has a kind of nice... a nice parallel... so constantly we were trying to kind of work with that idea of what is this moment, before the event, that the kind of pre-event, and then what is the event and then how do you pull focus out of that. And I think that's what's interesting for a lot of aud-... responses from the audience... where people are talking about drifting off and going out of focus, but that feeling XXXX to do that and then suddenly being pulled back in and then... a lot of people have described this... this journey that they've had with the show of... taking something that's much more personal in these moments where they're kind of drifting off and going away from the focus that's actually where a lot of the personal, the more biographical stuff has been happening for people... so... and I guess XXXXXX you're talking about focus.

Track 4

00:04

SJ

Possibly, yes XXXXX focus. Yea. But then the... but then that's also interesting is the enunciation images within the piece... is deliberately to choose very recognisable... imi-... iconic images and it's how do they... you know there's a technical question about how do they emerge out of the background of... of relatively speaking "real" actions, if you see what I mean... all of these terms are relative... but that isn't...

SG

They're more naturalistic and perhaps less stylised.

SJ

Yea. They are... they are... that IS analogous to how... to how performance might emerge from the background of activity within and around an academy as an object of status... whereas, in a sense, one inherits certain forms of... of research... as having status, rather like the image of the enunciation... emerges, so the single XXXXX work emerges from the background of that person's... plethora of activities, it emerges with this iconic status and it may be the only book they ever write! But, it persists and the other thing... the other thing that Who by Fire in using such iconic images, and they may not survive, you know... they may not survive the production phase but literally trying you know, beginning... starting work with these things is to look at why it is that certain images persist... and obviously that's a complex socio-cultural complex of why they do but... all I can say is I'm intrigued by the persistence of images...

2:12

AP

But it's also interesting in the context of emerging through the research seminar and the whole... the iconic status of the research seminar within the academy and how that conveys different kinds of status upon... the show and the work, which I think is a really interesting XXXX to play with.

2:30

SJ

No, so it'll be... I'm... I'm in-... I'm intrigued as to how it'll go.

AP

I have a question about the makers of the works. How do you conceptualise, conceive of, think about who the makers of the shows are? Who is Bodies in Flight, in a way? I mean you have talked about collaboration, but, as well I suppose in terms of representing the work within the Academy, I know each of you has submitted Bodies in Flight to the RAE... who... who are the makers of work, how do they get... credited, how does the work live on in their lives, I suppose.

3:13

SG

Well, I think everybody gets... everybody's been credited in our RAE submissions, haven't they? Or... yes, certainly major collaborators. Have we always mentioned performers? That's what I'm wondering...

SJ

Yea, I think so.

SG

So...

SJ

I mean in terms of... If you mean in terms of authorship, I don't know if you mean that, but I mean I think it's always been under the umbrella of "this is a devised piece of work" and I think for us it's been relatively easy because of our interest in mastering incompetence to say "I'm the writer" and... "you're the choreographer" and such-and-such a person is the performer, and what have you... the video artist or the sound artist. It's been relatively easy to attach those pre-existing labels... although that has shifted and it re-shifts, doesn't it, I mean it keeps shifting.

4:25

AP

It's just an interesting question to ask because I know that collaboration is at the heart of your concerns and... people answer that question about ownership in a range of different ways and it is about ownership but it is also touching on the... the idea of authorship because of this... because of the political aspect of the Academy.

4:48

SJ

Yea. I mean certainly, you know, I've had negative expressions from senior management to do with authorship, you know... question put to me "how can you... how can you show, how can you prove that you wrote that text" was put to me by a senior manager several years ago and... I think that's...

Track 5

00:08

SG

(Laughing) And you answered "no-one else would be able to write this."

SJ

No, I said "no-one else would want to." No... But... but that strikes me as being rather... poorly thought through because, you know, single-authored works, the wife can write them... in this instance it was man who said it... and that was the first thought that went through my head, that proof... proof is slippery in all of these regions and it's only not asked of the single-authored work because of the "status" attached to that that one dare not ask... but one CAN ask of this fragile, ephemeral, collaborative thing called "a performance". One IS able to, sort of, ask those kinds of questions. And certainly within our arts funders, there's been no problem, I mean it's... it's... ta-... again... well... it's taken as read, in a way, that... performance-making is collaborative.

1:09

AP

OK.

SG

And that we're co-directors, we each have a...other role apart from that and... yea, everyone is speCifically...

SJ

But what I do think about the itinerary of collaborations, or the shift of collaborations, I've described it in the CD-Rom as "monstrous", I do think it IS monstrous, I do think it's... it is very much about... bringing a strange kind of non-reproductive organism together that doesn't last particularly long so... the strange thing is this "odd couple" as I've also described it! ...in the CD-Rom! That we have lasted so long, but... and we DO attempt... and we do have a percolating group of artists that we work with like... Graham, for example, we worked with first, well YOU worked with him BEFORE Bodies in Flight but... there's always been an attempt to work with the same set of people but it's not in the sense of, say... a forced entertainment where there's obviously a high degree of... of collegiality about the PROject of forced entertainment. I think... I think Bodies in Flight is more monstrous in the sense that it's appearances are very different. I mean that's one of the things that's been problematic for us as a professional company is we don't have an easily read signature. People cannot say "Oh! You do that kind of show" because every kind of sh-... every SHOW... in response to the previous one appears quite different.

2:51

SG

And sometimes makes very clear demands on the personnel, the collaborators that we're gonna next work with, and the idea of, kind of, concerns coming out of one show into another. So it's not necessarily that we don't want to work with the same group of exACTly the same personnel that we worked with last. Sometimes it's... the work seems to dictate that we work with an eight-year-old or... a pauper you know, a XXXX, whatever it might be. It's not, I mean it's not always that, but...

3:27

AP

OK. I wanted... you mentioned "proof", the idea of proof, and I think that... nicely slides into the next question which is about documentation and really, just whacks on about the place of documentation within the shows of Bodies in Flight but then also that sense of how you use what, I suppose what XXXXX might term as an extrinsic documentation, how you... the documentation of the show might work, so you might want to talk about Caroline's XXXX DVD, or the Flesh in Text CD-Rom.

4:01

SG

I think the Flesh in Text CD-Rom is really interesting for us 'cause I think it IS the first time that we have shown work that isn't live performance and... and... it kind of had quite a lot of manifestations in the end, didn't it? Probably... not in Bristol, Glasgow... big... and attached to big events... which of course is very interesting because there it... there it was and we could kind of wheel it out at appropriate... points... and certainly increase the profile.

4:45

AP

I suppose that's the question: what's it FOR?

SG

Certainly increase the profile. And for me... in terms of... talking to venue and promoters and funders... I can't say just how useful it was to have this object that I could give to them and they could go away and look at the kinds of work that we make and the kind of professional... well, the kind of standards, the kind of quality of that... so it was actually a very useful tool. And it was ve-... I mean it... I found it really useful for me personally because it was the first time I'd ever had any research time to... look at what we'd done retrospectively over... how ever many years that was then... ten years? And I thought that was invaluable... it was a brilliant, brilliant time for me to be able to kind of go back and look at that and then see how work had developed so... yea... but I thought that was really good.

Track 6

00:50

AP

And how do you deal with issue of course of the "difference between" because obviously when you're talking about using it in promotion, of course you're promoting the document and people aren't really seeing the work, etcetera etcetera, that obvious gap, is that something that you talk about as... a collective...

SJ

I think...

1:13

SG

Yea. I mean, sorry...

SJ

No, go on.

1:17

SG

Just the end of it would be that I think... I still, when giving the CD Rom, say "the focus of our work" or "one of the focuses of our work is this... moment of the live event and obviously this documentation can talk about that but can't replicate it or duplicate it in the same way." So I think I probably use that... that XXXX quite a lot.

1:44

SJ

I mean that's why I would say alongside... that they... they... the documentation offers, depending on what it is, what kind it is, offers different reflective opportunities for... for thinking back on the work and thinking forwards about what one might do... I think its utility... I think the CD-Rom is interesting because it allows people that... fantasy of... of interaction that they can... that they can go through it in a way which, you know... I think other forms of documentation like video and... and photogra-... you know, much less useful in those terms, although useful for us... in terms... I find it... it's rather like... the sort of Bartsian idea of the XXX in that... a lot of this... a lot of this documentation... is... is quite redundant and one looks at it and then one fi-... it's finding that sort of XXX in a particular image or a particular moment in a... sort of hour and a half video documentation that one can then remember the sort of anecdotal context of that and that then assists in helping one to formulate a particular aspect of a particular problem that one is now facing in that sense. I don't think we methodically go through... I mean I have never sat through any, a single documentation tape of any show that we've done. I have fast-forwarded tapes to points where I thought... something... of interest that occurred in my mind I wanted to think "what's... the difference between my memory of it and how it's recorded here". I mean for example we've got money in the current batch of money from the Arts Council to produce a radio version of Skin Works because we... in the earlier production version we did a standard video where we attempted a standard video documentation and it was quite interesting because it didn't work. Not because it wasn't done properly but because the whole show is predicated on... when one invites people into the chatroom what you're inviting them into is a highly relational positional space where literally their central experience of the event is being immersed in... in dynamics coming at them from all different directions, mainly sound-based in terms of, you know, text or music but then also the sense of movement around... and the video couldn't capture that. The video was... was disastrous at capturing that. I mean you could... see somebody speaking but the experience for most people in Skin Works was to HEAR someone speaking, because they wouldn't necessarily want to LOOK at the person, there's an awful lot of looking at the floor in Skin Works. So we decided to... to actually make a radio version because we thought that this was actually... the more interesting way, so that people are focused on... on the listening... and so that's the current... the current piece of documentation.

Track 7

SG

That's exciting, isn't it, when different manifestations of the work come through...

SJ

Yea. And I think when we've done paper documentations, like when we did a lovely little book of photographs of Do the Wild Thing, which... Do the Wild Thing is all about the scopic desire, you know, the scopic desire to see people... fucking! which you don't see, you don't see anything like it in the show but it's... it's the promise of it and it's teasing the audience. And so it seems entirely appropriate that you have these very lush photographs of what people can see... set against the text. And that as a... booklet is a really nice object for creating a kind of sense of the... of the very... profound tension in that show between what you see and what you hear... in terms of the way that it's set up.

1:33

And because the movement in Do the Wild Thing was so... slight and still and all about the minutia, I mean... interestingly in a way that the... enunciations are in Who by Fire SO completely precise that you can capture the moment (snaps fingers)... and so there's two things all working really well in that catalogue, I think.

1:57

SJ

So I think they've always... there's always been a... there's always been an attempt to find a form of documentation that, as you say, produces different... expression of the work but is not about capturing it in that way. Maybe I was suggesting it WAS about capturing it but I think it's about... it's about re-configuring it in some way.

2:21

AP

Saying it another way.

SJ

Yea.

SG

Or saying something different.

SJ

Yea.

AP

And what about... because obviously you have been... video... work has been a concern for you withIN the shows and... and the issue of imaging technologies and that sense of... presence-ing absence within the ephemeral moment, so how... that obviously isn't a documentation of a show, but it's playing with notions of documentation, so... did you want to talk a little bit about that and how that may or may not relate to u-... notions of using the documentation of the event itself.

3:05

SG

I think... the fascination with video... was... is at least two-fold. One is about... for me anyway... was about that the focus of a camera and how... the performers themselves could... frame their own bodies which... is... is different from... the documentation but obviously, you know, in parallel with that so that the fascination with video was PARTLY because of that and the other thing that we got... REALLY into with... again I think with Constance, but definitely through to XXX and working with Caroline... is the stuff about time, that the idea of pre-recording and recording and playing back and really messing about with time and space within the live event and in a sense... we can do that with other forms of documentation as well, like the CD-Rom 'cause of course... times and spaces are colliding in... in a way that we can't even... predict within that CD-Rom because people are... given so many choices, so I think those two things are working... in similar places although for very different reasons.

SJ

Yea, for me I think... if you're talking about the introduction into the work of those... technologies, one aspect of which is that they produce documents I think for me it's... I see them as a kind of continuum of writing. I very much buy the Marshall McLuhan position elaborated in the early sixties, I think it's the best position, that... that technology in a sense begins... you know, that the point that he makes about technology beginning with writing and that this process of alienation and then in that process of estrangement there's the possibility of... of... in a sense one's identity being played back to one but not as one might want it or... as one might have thought one was projecting it. And that's what fascinates me about these technologies and ... and simi-... because you never get back what you think you're giving to the technology and... Sara's interest in... in the active framing within the event so that the performer has the technology and "appears", in inverted comas, to be able to control it. There's a similar thing for me I think going on and I relate it to the way language works as a tool for me in that, for me, language is a technology and as a... as a writer, in terms of my own personal history, I was a very slow learner at reading and I came at reading almost as the s-... you know, as the son of an engineer I came at reading very much as if words were tools and I... I, you know, I could do calculus on a slide rule before I could read a book and so for me language, you know... writing has never been natural... it's never been self-expression... it's always been "it's this tool kit" and how can one use it and... and a lot of my texts are about that

struggle with a... FELT identity and then how that... matches up to the identity that it expressed or that one finds oneself saying with the tools that one has and for me visual imagery, digital imagery... is a kind of extension of writing... and it goes back... for me it goes ba-... it all goes back to XXXX's tape and I think that is just the... the seminal work of... of how technology operates XXXX and... and what I... what I'm interested in both as a writer artistically and as a, sort of, thinker in... within the academy is... is really just that problem: the problem of an external... an external memory of a technology that is an external memory and how does a mach-... how does this external memory encount-... how does one's INternal memory encounter one's EXternal memory.

2:41

AP

So then how do the documents of shows, for example, work in terms of people who haven't been to the show, and that's... so, to take it back to that other aspect of documentation, given that the documentation IS speaking alongside, but how do you deal with the absence of that thing that's along-... it IS alongside? Or is that a concern?

3:13

SG

I think that... we have to say this... this is different from the experience of the show but... IS an experience and... possibly taps at... some of the... ideas and concerns and ascetics that we're interested in.

AP

I mean I suppose...

3:34

SJ

I mean I don't think we've... it's... it's been a... "failure" is too strong a word or rather too weak a word, because we fail all the time at everything, but there's a particul-... I think we haven't paid enough attention... to documentation in terms of... in terms of creating... complementary objects... I think we've used documentation in a very personal and idiosyncratic way for our own... you know, our own encounter with our own ex-... you know, the external memory of... of a process or the prod-... you know, the outcomes of a process... and... I don't think... I don't think we've... I don't think we've paid sufficient attention... to XXXXXX objects. And it may be that we're now moving into that phase... occasionally we have, for instance the video for Do the Wild Thing, we paid a lot of attention to that and produced, I think, a really nice documentation of a performance, in a sense, but that was because I think the... because as I mentioned, the scopic nature of what was happening and the separation of the elements within that work allowed... it was almost made for video, in a way, it's kind of... and we have been trying, very half-heartedly, to turn that into a movie,

just because it lends itself. And I think maybe the Skinworks radio version will have sufficient work put into it so that it almost then has a separate life, if that's not too corny a phrase. But the other stuff I think...

Track 9

00:24

SG

But there might be something really interesting visually to be... to be created with Who by Fire, I think, as a document, and as a stand-alone experience.

00:36

AP

'Cause I suppose that the question is arising from... it's always coming back to this question of the academic context and the person in... Hull who's researching devised performance and feels that... there's continuing temptation to use the documentation as a research tool to say something about that event and I just... we all know about the problems within that, but just thinking... I was just interested in how... what your thinking was around that in terms of what your thinking was around the relationship... that you feel exists between the documentation that you've produced and those events that many people never get to see.

1:24

SJ

I think there's a certain half nod... well, there's more than half a nod with the... with the CD-Rom, I mean the construction of the CD-Rom... certain levels of the construction of that assume no knowledge and... in a sense try and open out the company's work to a sort of general reader, and then there are certain aspects of the CD-Rom that are highly... highly specific in their enunciation... and I'm guilty of all those sections, I'm sorry!

AP

SJ

But... so it kind of... it IS constructed to permit a way in, but in such a fragmented way that it would be difficult to get a sense that... that one was experiencing a... quasi-performance event in that sense... but I think other documents we've been... our main concern with them has been, in a sense, their... their own... our investment in their... in the qualities of them. I don't mean that in a sort of good or bad quality, but I mean in the qual-... like for example the Constance documentation is this... is this sort of fold out... sheet that... for us in terms of its scale and its layout, represents the fact that in Constance... it's an environmental piece where the audience is seated in a circle and... and the sort of layout of it doesn't allow you to, sort of, start at the top and... and read... read

across and down like a conventional page you have to s-... there's a kind of attempt to sort of spatialise the documentation and quite how that... how a reader would read that that hasn't seen the show, I don't think was really our concern. It was almost made from a point of view of taking bits or part objects or concerns from the work and then finding a wa-... another way of formulating some aspects of them, and I don't think we had a target reader... in mind, but we did with the CD-Rom, we had various target readers and tried to find different ways of letting those readers in and through the CD-Rom...

3:53

SG

But the architecture of the CD-Rom is so layered in itself, isn't it, that... it allows you to do that.

4:00

AP

But I think that's what's... what's so interesting is how... documentation does work alongside... shows for people who can see the show, that's really where documentation comes into its own and the purpose of documentation is primarily for people who actually were there, rather than for people who weren't there and I think that's one of the things that isn't really dealt with at all, and I'm not talking about Bodies in Flight, I'm talking about...

4:47

SJ

But I... and also... and I think intriguing also, possibly... possibly, or baffling, you know, it's impossible, I think it's impossible to tell... whether one would be baffled or intrigued by certain bits of our documentation... But because a lot of them are print, some of them are print, some of them are print, aren't they? Because some of them are print, you know, we've been able to put them out in performance research and we've been able to put them out in Live Art magazine and therefore there's been a reach so just on the law of probability if a small percentage of people are intrigued rather than baffled by what they see, then... then the chances of people coming to the work... which is what matters...

Track 10

00:16

SG

And that's the thing, you know, it is about changing... changing an attitude, really, and... for ours, the process of making, for both of us, I think, is... is so much the heart of what we do and the place where we invest the most energy, even more so than touring, much more so than touring ... you know, we... we've only just learnt that we kind of keep shows current for longer because that's the way the world works now in terms of touring, and documentation becomes kind

of... aNOTHER stage of that, if you know what I mean, so it's... it's a kind of... we have to make the decision whether we kind of attend more or less to the documentation than we do.

00:15

AP

Which brings me to the question about dissemination... because we all know that... there's a conflation that goes on with some people between documentation and dissemination, but I was intrigued to know how you conceive of the notion of dissemination with the work of Bodies in Flight... 'Cause I know Simon in research seminars HERE... you were raising the issue of the bodies of knowledge that... taking a very literal approach to bodies of knowledge, and all of this, of course is a dissemination, is tied in with the academic, specific academic context of the contribution to knowledge, and how you conceive of that... or problematise that and problematise dissemination.

2:01

SJ

I think it's... I think it's... if you're thinking about it within the sort of academic zone, it's quite problematic... largely because of the forces operating upon the Academy, and the general forces of commodification... and the general pressures on the Academy and education generally to be a lot more... service oriented, a lot more sort of outcome oriented... and I think that's a very problematic context for performance documentation to operate in, for practice as research to operate in and that's why I think in a way it's much CLEARER for practice as research to have a political stance that it is against commodification and against... forms of dissemination that are inappropriate to it, because otherwise I think one... one will... be collapsed into the hegemonic forces of commodification whereby, you know, students will say "what do you want me to write in this essay?" And... and documentation and those... those... because documentation can be entered into various mass media whether it is print or digital, on line media... will... will inevitably stand in for the event. You know a lot of money has been, you know, a lot of money goes into... research which allows... which allows performance to be replaced by performance documentation and... allow... you know... and students will quite happily write about things and quite happily go through whole, you know, theatre studies degrees with seeing very few performances. And that's not their fault. I think it's part of a general problem of commodification in our... in the current phase of late capitalism and... I think in that sense we have to be quite clear about why we're doing the documentation and why we're doing... why we're doing these ephemeral events within that and what particular forms of disseminable... offshoots... emerge from that... otherwise I think you just get snapped up. You just immediately get snapped up and immediately, you know, "the reader on live art" becomes the... the thing the students experience of live art, because... the whole force of... the whole force of the current scene is... going that way.

Track 11

00:12

AP

So what are the contributions that Bodies in Flight make to, I suppose, the practice as research communities, what are your contributions to knowledge. I know that's an odd question to ask, but I'm wondering if we can problematise that, or if that's a question that one can even begin to ask.

00:41

SJ

I think if you're... I think in a way you... you have to... one has to have a belief that... the very persistence of one's activity is... is altering... is adding to... is nudging... is changing... the broader activities. I think if you want to try and measure against, you know, how many copies of Performance Theory sold versus how many people sit down in the Arnolfini gallery and watch a Bodies in Flight show, then you're doomed, and you may as well give up. But then the same could be said of virtually every activity because of course you could, you would then shift the goal posts because you would then say "well, this scholarly tome only sells twenty thousand but this popular science reader sells a million, so why bother producing the twenty thousand?" which I think is probably quite a lot for a scholarly tome... but... do you see what I mean? I mean the goal-... you know, the... capital will, up the ante... every time. It's... that's what it does, that's how investment and development work and you've got to be wise to that and so, you know, in a sense to... to answer that question is to offer a different notion of how... the academies work, a notion that is perhaps medieval, certainly Greek in the sense that it is about the gathering of bodies in places for periods of time and it is about the sharing of knowledge and the transfer of knowledge within that, is a kind of essential quality of the Academy, alongside which other forms of dissemination of course exist, and of course it's fantastic that you can go into Virgin and buy a movie on DVD. Of course that's fantastic, but it won't replace the cinema and in the same way a book about performance will not replace performance. And so I think it's... I think it's a different, it's part of a mix of... of ways of generating knowledge and transferring knowledge and... it's very difficult to predict, if you like, the global or objective outcome, because it is all about scale, and it is all about... how one influences at a level that, you know, in our case is often unspeakable, because if we're interested in those moments that... you cannot pin down, why should we expect our audiences to be able to pin them down?! In a sense we would have failed to attend to those moments properly if an audience can simply say "well this show is about this..." and walk away content. It's the troubling and perturbing of a way of knowing that we're about and that is not, by its very nature, and I would use the word "essence", by its essence it is not phrasable until maybe a long time after the event. And therefore dissemination is a tricky thing... but I'm always reminded of... you know, I'm always reminded of... sort of... you know when Howard Barker was charged by various other writers with elitism... he commented, I think, either in some

interview that, well, OK, so my play is... my play is on... in the Barbican Pit, but just look whose in that theatre. And certainly the night I saw the particular show that was being criticised for being elitist... what's it called now? Oh, The Bite of the Night, there were MP's, you know, comm-... TV commentators, other academics that I recognized, and so... theatres, rather like academies, are particular groupings and gatherings of people and those people go out to do particular things and therefore I think... sort of notions of... of dissemination have to be looked at very carefully.

Track 12

00:26

SG

But... dissemination can be about things and questions which are about the live event.

AP

I have four minutes left... so I'm gonna... I think, although it's somewhat truncated the conversation about dissemination, I think it brings us in some ways to the final question about what's missing from... from the interview, because obviously you know the reasons why we have the PARIP case studies and why they're structured in the way that they're structured, how has been this experience of engaging in that and what am I not getting at?

1:15

SJ

Well I would say if... unless Sara wants to go first...

SG

I don't know, I've got stuff to say but you can go first.

SJ

OK. Well I would say, one of the things that we haven't really touched on and I don't know if I'll touch on it very much in an hour or so is the erotics of events and I think one of the... one of the challenges that practice as research makes to the Academy is its pretensions at objectiveness and its pretensions at... externalizing or... only the pretention that... that objective or externalized knowledge is better than subjective or personalized knowledge, and I think... there is a pleasure for want of a better word... there is a pleasure in the... in... in this particular activity of knowing which... is invigorating to the Academy and exciting and provoking to the Academy and... that's one thing that we haven't really talked about... and I think that's, again, that's an interesting aspect of our work.

2:38

SG

Yea... pleasure...

AP

Do you want to keep...? I'm gonna keep recording on the mini-disk, if that's OK.

SG

That's fine. That's fine. I feel like I would have liked to have talked more about the works themselves and their relationship to each other but maybe... I mean, that's probably as much my fault as anything else, you know...

AP

But I think that's... that's the difficult issue, though, isn't it, because I mean of course PARIP itself can't... I can't access those works that have happened, and in terms of the discourse of our own practice as research, it's very unclear how the specificities of shows... ties in with those concerns that have been identified as PARIP's concerns, I mean I think there's a whole tier of activity that could be going on with... similar to Nikki Pollard working with Rosemary Lee, the whole sense of actually working with a small number of people working through a whole process of devising and production and all those after effects and those avenues... avenues of dissemination that I think are really interesting and that would be... it would be very interesting project to go down. I'm not... PARIP's remit is so enormous that it kind of shuts that out as a possibility, but I think that that's... that IS the... that is the absence that, in all of these interviews, conversations with people, the very loud silence is... is the work.

SG

And the process of that, because we have had to talk about the products and the outcomes in relationship to... where they sit and how they've been driven by... academies or funders or whatever... the process is the stuff that is.. is the most interesting, or the stuff that I feel most passionate about, I guess.

4:59

AP

Which is interesting because where... where is the place, I suppose, within the academic discourse for the pleasure and the process... Is there a place for, I suppose, representing that?

Track 13

00:10

SJ

Only in the activity and attendant activities, really. But then this is fine, to talk about this in this way, really, because we all know that... that those activities exist in a context and that context has to be... debated and has to be, sort of, discussed, what we would resist is the automatic translation of... of what we do into... into the dominant discourses and therefore in a way I think it's quite good

that we don't talk about the work in that sense 'cause that would almost, you know, would almost lead one to believe... that it could be summed up, because there is a kind of...

SG

But I also think it's because... about... it's because we've got such a large body of work in a sense and much better than people's standards, OK, but, you know, if you were talking about one project and its relationship to documentation, that would feel very different, wouldn't it... and it is that thing that you can't necessarily say "this is what XXXXX " although some people might feel that XXXX Bodies in Flight XXX

AP

But in some way that... that problematic I think is applicable to practice as research generally I mean, well, kind of, we want to avoid, and this is one of the things I'm kind of interested in is... we don't talk about what it was about for anything because that is an impossibility.

SJ

Well I... yea, I think there are... I do believe that there are certain kinds of projects where one could, sort of, express them quite clearly but, not ours.

AP

But I wanted to thank you very much for participating 'cause I think we actually did get through all of the questions, although I didn't ask every question explicitly but, when it comes to translating this into a database, there were many areas that we talked about that were actually answering some of those questions so XXXXXX that way. So thank you very much, and that's the end.