

Taking stock of artistic research in the academy, *circa* 2010. Or: How to undo things with actions. **SLIDE 2**

Baz Kershaw

### **Introduction**

This paper is largely cast in the gently ironic form of a *report from the future* following the event of worst-case global warming. As such, it imports a technique from pulp science fiction into performance studies. But also like all science fiction it is a **SLIDE 3a** thought experiment in the classic sense defined by the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Thought experiments are: “devices of the imagination used to investigate the nature of things”. The *Encyclopedia* also loops back to another imaginative approach to science when it adds that: **SLIDE 3b** “the creation of quantum mechanics and relativity are almost unthinkable without ... thought experiments.”<sup>1</sup> Hence such experiments provide methods for following Foucault’s famous twentieth-century advice that we should attempt to **SLIDE 3c** ‘think the unthinkable’.

My subject for this exercise in reflecting on the present from an imagined future is a relatively new methodology in theatre and performance studies. Several names have been coined for this, including: practice-as-research, performance-as-research, practice-led research, practiced-based research, or most economically of all, artistic research. But for brevity’s sake I’ll simply use the acronym ‘PaR’ (PaR) – from practice-as-research – to encompass them all. The three recent books listed by my abstract define PaR in various ways. But what links them together is a view that the creative practice of theatre and/or performance can constitute a research process in its own right, especially when it is pursued in the context of universities or other kinds of research institute.

In the second part of the paper I will briefly present a few of PaR’s key characteristics as currently pursued internationally. But my greater purpose is to take stock of this new-ish phenomenon for its general usefulness to the future, and that is where my

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<sup>1</sup> *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 2008, thought experiments – accessed 13.09.2009

thought experiment comes into play in an especially risky way. Because I will use it to reflect on two of my own creative projects in light of a rather critical question, namely: **SLIDE 4** What use is PaR likely to be when faced with, say, worst case global warming of the Earth's biosphere?

There are two main factors that prompt the possible temerity of that question. First, a recent critique by the radical ecologist James Lovelock of the global warming predictions of the International Panel on Climate Change; and second, the possibility that climate change could have the power to create a **SLIDE 5a calamity for humanity** in the not-too-distant future.

Put at its simplest, Lovelock's point in his most recent book, *The Vanishing Face if Gaia*, is that the IPCC's pronouncements on climate change are mostly based on computer models which make projections of up to 50 and more years into the future; yet the Committee's predictions for the years before 2007/8 had all been wide of the mark of what was actually happening to key parts of the global eco-system according to data derived from direct scientific observation of the Earth. In other words, there is a major disconnect between a predictive system that significantly influences the climate-change policies of governments, and the current actualities of global warming processes.<sup>2</sup>

The 'calamity for humanity' hypothesis is based on another disconnect, but of an entirely different kind. Put at its crudest: the myriad attempts by science and governments of the nation states to persuade the public everywhere that climate change is an extremely serious problem are generally failing. The behavior of most people continues mostly as before, and where there are changes they are highly unlikely to make much difference to the progress of the calamity. So the rhetoric of 'save the planet' is mostly disconnected from action, and one might say that, in an important sense the calamity is already under way. So it follows that my paper's science fiction framework may not be as futuristic as it might seem. Signs of the

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<sup>2</sup> 'The range of forecasts by the different models of the IPCC is so large that it is difficult to believe that they are reliable enough ... [and they] do not agree with high-quality evidence from the Earth obtained by scientists whose job is to measure and observe [it, and which] reveals the failure of the IPCC to forecast correctly the course of climate change up to 2007...'. James Lovelock (200X) *The Vanishing Face if Gaia: a Final Warning*, New York: Basic Books, p. 25-6.

calamity are already all around us everywhere. It is just that Homo sapiens, unlike some other species, are actually not very good at seeing them. Or if, like Lovelock's observational scientists, they are good at seeing them, then the best language for describing them is not yet available.

Now, to relate this current calamity to PaR I aim to use my thought experiment to reflect on the disconnections and language deficit just mentioned through the oblique angle suggested by my paper's subtitle. And this is another risky move in its method. The first part of the risk, though, is fairly unexceptionable: it is simply that theatre and performance *in practice* can be thought of as powerful instruments for 'undoing things with actions'. That is to say, these arts are able to indicate to us what *not to do next* in order to create a future based – unlike the predictions of the IPCC – on realistic hopes. In other words, the undoing of things with actions presumes that negative inheritances from the past – such as carbon poisoning of the Earth – somehow can be re-cast as positive forces. My paper's second aim, however, is much higher risk, as it focuses on a little challenge to performativity as defined by J. L. Austin's classic phrase 'How to do things with words'. Because I am considering that that approach to linking thought to action may well be a major contributing cause of Homo sapiens current slide into an Earthly **SLIDE 5c** calamity for humanity. Hence my subtitle – probably somewhat ridiculously – also indicates an alternative proposal regarding the performativity of PaR. Because I believe 'how to undo things with actions' in the context of global overheating might offer one or two well-founded, non-pathological hopes for a future Earthly **SLIDE 5d** amity for humanity.

Now here comes the first part of my thought experiment, which borrows from nuclear weaponry terminology, as most recently applied to the events of 9:11 2001 in New York.

### **SLIDE 6 Global Status Report at Eco-Ground Zero plus 40 (pre-EGZ dateline 2070)**

It is now known that in some pre-apocalyptic creative quarters, in the area then labelled as 'Northern Hemisphere', what we call Eco-Ground Zero was named – with the terrific innocence of a quaint irony no longer available to us

premiere survivors – as **SLIDE 7a** Green Shade. As always the traces are very fragmentary, largely consumed by the climatic disintegration, but the latest find appears to have been a result of the now widely agreed **SLIDE 7b** spectrum time warp between the early years of the former Third Millennium and EGZ itself. Current top theory states that the **SLIDE 7c** traumas of EGZ led to fantasies regarding an earlier era in which the future could be previewed accurately through rehearsing in the imagination the most severe effects of our EGZ minus 10; which the ancestors called 20:20. Several cognate examples exist, but this fragment is remarkable in its attachment to **SLIDE 7d** pathological hope and the now discredited concept of global performance addiction. Please don your holo-helmets now to receive this fragment in full holo-vision:

**SLIDE 8** Fragment EGZ minus 10. Codex *P-a-R*, edit 4/3 name, catalogue 211, lines 7-10 ref, source majority lost: *Green Shade*

**Hold up P-a-R book and indicate screen** A brief footnote on my science fiction method of relating that future to the present. This is the book and the page that the Codex is pointing to. It indicates the source of the following textual fragment as from this other book. **Hold up TE** For your convenience, the footnote to my abstract in the program list the three main Codex items. So my thought experiment invites you kindly to imagine that the following will be transmitted by holo-vision to a group of our descendents, distant survivors of worst-case global warming, sometime in the year 20:70. [*As this session is being recorded it may be that what survives is the audio/video record; but not the book.*]

*Green Shade* was an eco-installation and durational performance which I devised with eco-choreographer Sandra Reeve in 2004 for the Wickham Theatre at Bristol University, UK. That city lies in a bowl carved from surrounding hills and connected to the Bristol Channel by the Avon Gorge. At its narrowest point the nineteenth-century Clifton Suspension Bridge spans the deep ravine. **SLIDE 9** The bridge is seventy-eight metres above the median level of the River Avon, which has the second highest tidal range in the world. The very worst-case scenario for global warming puts

the water level at high tide just ten metres below the roadway of the bridge, making Bristol into a toxic lagoon [SLIDE 10 deeper than the height of this ship's masts and thus swamping much of the city in the background] with maybe twenty of its taller buildings becoming concrete islands. The water would also lap, swirl, break, hurl against the gates of the city zoo in utterly unpredictable extremes of weather. Human animals might just about survive in highly specialised groups in biomes built on the nearby Downs. **Start auto-run of SLIDE 11-39 sequence: Green Shade**

We stripped the Wickham Theatre, an old printing workshop now become a flexible black box studio, back to the walls. Borrowing from Guillermo Gómez-Peña's *Museum of Fetish-ized Identity*,<sup>3</sup> we designated seven areas as habitat-workshops for specialist survival teams, each dealing with water, plants, animals, air, time, energy, filtration. [*The images are showing these survival teams.*] Energy had a fifteen-foot high scaffolding Heath Robinson machine incorporating old bikes where you could lie back and peddle-generate the glow of a small headlamp into life; plants had a small stairwell with a brightly lit vegetable patch off a food preparation area; time had a sundial fashioned from a tailor's dummy and a battery driven halogen spotlight as the sun; filtration had a complicated network of ventilation pipes, pumps and a dentist's chair where visitors could lie back for and inner cleanout; animals were squashed into a feather-nested netted alcove but went wild whenever they ventured out; Water had an oil-drum fountain and a splendidly opaque system for processing liquids; and so on. Each of the eighteen performers was in two groups (so thirty-six 'survivors' made up the seven survival teams) and pitched in to make the 'nature' of their habitats and the styles of their work-clothes: no attempt was made to link designs, each team generated its own visual and spatial qualities... The whole space was imagined as the experimental engine-room of a much bigger biome community.<sup>4</sup> Three big, suspended, plastic covered hexagons, plus a few more standing against the walls, suggested work on the structure of a much larger-scale shelter. A smaller

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<sup>3</sup> Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Ethno-Techno: Writings on Performance, Activism and Pedagogy* (London: Routledge, 2005); Website – Guermo Gómez-Peña: [www.pochanostra.com/](http://www.pochanostra.com/) (18.11.2006)

<sup>4</sup> Website – Eden Project: [www.edenproject.com/](http://www.edenproject.com/) (20.11.2006)

one was hung high up in the fly tower, a continuous video loop of darkly scudding clouds suggesting a skylight window on the devastated post-global meltdown world outside, a remnant from exercises done in a storm on a famous Dorsetshire hill. Another was the Toxic Drizzle Dance, a ritual blast performed to boost up energy when the horror of survival got too much. An ironic pop-operatic number that had all eighteen bodies falling in perfect unison to the ground writhing and choking like there was no tomorrow.

Spectator-visitors often perched on the edges of the survival-habitats, but mostly they wandered around browsing at will as the show ran for nine hours non-stop during two days. Our practical aim was to devise a performance system that could maintain the same levels of intensity of focus and energy usually found in much shorter shows. All the stuff used in the piece would be recycled and recyclable. We were searching for homologies between the real material conditions and the imaginary world of the production, making the total space a single place. In this sense the project was anti-theatrical, aiming to collapse the differences that theatre by its nature usually works to construct. An environmentally immersive experience was our ideal, like being in a storm on a hill.

The philosophical touchstone for the project was geographer David Harvey's claim that 'if all socio-economic projects are ecological projects, then some conception of "nature" and "environment" is omnipresent in everything we do.'<sup>5</sup> Besides the amazing Eden Project in Cornwall, **SLIDE 49** an early practical inspiration was Biosphere 2 **SLIDE 50**, the huge glass hangar that replicated some of the Earth's eco-systems in the Southern Arizona desert.<sup>6</sup> These are both remarkable sites, but it could be that they are *pathological* reactions to the degradation that humans wreak on Earth. Bio 2 particularly is a paradoxical intervention in the ecosphere, like its close cousin the theatre holding a mirror up to 'nature' that tends to seal it off hermetically from the 'natural world'. Both Eden and Bio 2 influenced every aspect of *Green Shade* – aesthetic, thematic, ontological – as it

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<sup>5</sup> David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 174.

<sup>6</sup> Websites - Biosphere II: [www.biospherics.org/](http://www.biospherics.org/) (25.08.2006); [www.bio2.edu/](http://www.bio2.edu/) (25.08.2006)

aimed to provide an ironic antidote to such ecological desperation. Making a bittersweet anti-theatrical strike against the theatre of man-made biospheres. Trying to use performance like lightning, a destructive force that delivers positive effects. **SLIDE 52**

That ends the first of the fragments of text and images that will be broadcast by holo-vision to global warming survivors at Eco-Ground Zero plus 40, which on our dateline will be the year 2070. The text is taken from Chapter 1 of *Theatre Ecology*, which argues that humankind currently suffers from a poisonous global performance addiction that is driving the species towards self-destruction. Hence there is an especially urgent need for humans to discover what the extract calls ‘antidotes’. I am referring to forms of creative performance that might powerfully combat an endemic desire for ‘progress’ or, as Steven Bottoms recently resonantly put it: ‘the narcotic desire for everything around us to be faster, better, more profitable, more efficient’.<sup>7</sup>

However, it is already well established that preaching at people about climate change or conservation is counter-productive, because usually it has precisely the opposite effect to the one desired: they just walk away and, if they can afford it, carry on consuming. Worse still, the global unjust distribution of economic wealth and political power as between, say, India and Europe and Europe and the USA, are now well recognised as a key part of the problems that prevent significant agreement on how best to deal with the threat of global catastrophe.<sup>8</sup> From my perspective as a scholar and creative practitioner, this is where PaR really has something useful to offer by way of antidotes to our burgeoning predicament. It is in many ways an ideal crucible for conducting severe trials or mounting highly testing ordeals that explore how humans might best survive the coming devastation or even find ways to avert it. PaR is where we can create recognition of the fact that, for example, the basic binary patterns of thought fostered by our current ways of using language – which still often infect the ways that academic discourse is conducted – are fundamental to the production of global warming. From that perspective Austin’s ‘How to do things with

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<sup>7</sup> Stephen Bottoms (2010) Review of Baz Kershaw, *Theatre Ecology: Environments and Performance Events*, in *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* 15: 1, p. 122.

<sup>8</sup> Patrick Hossay (2006) *Unsustainable: A Primer for Global Environmental and Social Justice*, London: Zed Books; Mike Hulme (2009) *Why we Disagree on Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity*, Cambridge University Press.

words' now may be seen as a perfect recipe for human disaster. Or, to frame this more positively: the forms of creative collaboration necessary to human survival beyond periods of extreme environmental depredation and degradation can be experimentally explored in practices that, for example, extract from the poisonous properties of dominant forms of thinking in the twenty-first century the antidotes that might eventually disinfect them.

Now *Green Shade* involved practical creative research that addressed the hopeful possibilities of such creative collaboration in the future. It did this as an *actual example* of a sustainable system which solved the conundrum of how a performing group might complete a highly physical durational action-event of nine hours long whilst maintaining levels of intensity of action and interaction more usually found in much shorter performances. But it also significantly failed to make much headway on the problem of the poisonous properties in the human uses of natural language as recommended by J. L. Austin. This was because the embodied intensities needed to create sustainable actions left little room for fresh uses of verbal discourse to emerge in the survival biome imagined through the performance. It took me three more years and two more productions to begin to solve that riddle. Through that subsequent sequence, though, I became convinced that PaR is invaluable to our calamitous global process because its excesses are actually extremely economical in making, as the saying goes, actions can speak much louder than words.

To demonstrate that literally I now need to conducted a little rehearsal for the second part of my thought experiment.

### **Slide 53 Global Status Report at Eco-Ground Zero plus 45 (pre-EGZ dateline 2075)**

The suspicion of language as environmental poison that many of our pre-Eco-Ground Zero ancestors shared is reflected in the most recently found new fragment from their period. It is the only one that has emerged since our last Report at EGZ plus 40, and it is from the same pre-apocalyptic creative quarter as the one we narrowcast then. As all know, the Elders recently officially established them as the earliest EGC survivors, and thus awarded



them **SLIDE 54a** Key Ancestral Status. The fragment confirms the spectrum time warp between the early Third Millennium and EGZ itself, mainly through its probably **SLIDE 54b** mistaken indications that the concepts 'theatre' and 'performance' were becoming widespread at that time. Because, if such a spread *had* happened, then the self-contradiction of two excellent tools for survival that did not survive would arise, and we would have to delete it from the official record. This is particularly the case because the fragment presents one of **SLIDE 54c** the fullest references to **Codex P-a-Retc**. If this really IS the Codex that ensured we Homo sapiens would survive the effects of EGZ, then we could learn something very important from the clear signs of its apparently *deliberate* incoherence. If the collapse of poisonous language through deliberate incoherence was the greatest insight of the **Codex P-a-Retc** and its effects, then the resultant Eco-Ground Zero antidotes must have been more effective than anything we later survivors can currently conceive of. So now the banned concept **SLIDE 54d** 'i-a-i-a-i-n' eventually could come up for review again for the first time ever since EGZ plus-20. Therefore, the Elders have agreed that this Codex holo-vision showing will have the supreme status of a **SLIDE 54e** paradigm vote by all survivors. In light of that, please respectfully don your Elder-linked holo-helmets now to receive this fragment in full holo-vision:

**SLIDE 55** Fragment EGZ minus 8. Codex *draft?* (subject to Status Confirmation) Ch 5 *PIR*, auth 5, heads 108/3, 113/4 & 118/5 ref, source majority lost.

Inevitably there has been strong debate about contrasting definitions, but for this chapter I will adopt one of the simplest: **SLIDE 56** 'performance-' or 'practice-as-research' indicates the uses in the performing and theatrical arts of practical creative processes as a research methodology and methods in their own right, usually but not exclusively as pursued in, or in association with, institutions of higher education such as universities. Hence, as performance as research constitutes a methods-driven project overall, rather than a specific knowledge-domain within

theatre/performance studies, this chapter cannot provide a comprehensive 'coverage' of methods.

Thus this section will provide a very brief presentation of common methods in five key aspects of PaR processes as practised in the UK, namely: **SLIDE 57a** Starting Points, Aesthetics, Locations, Dissemination, Key Issues. But a research health warning in paradoxical form is appropriate here, because unpredictable processes are crucial to creativity and PaR is no exception to that golden rule. The warning runs as follows: **SLIDE 57b** What are methods for, but to ruin our experiments?

KEY ASPECTS - some gentle provocations:

- **Starting Points** **SLIDE 58/1-A** There are just three methods for creating starting points in general use for performance as research; **SLIDE 58/1-B** for performance as research, the methods for creating starting points are countless. First, frame a research *question* and related objectives: how might site-specific performance at a heritage site best expose contesting versions of its history? Second, identify and describe a more or less common or acknowledged research *problem*: performance always involves collaboration with others in entanglements that are unpredictable. Third, wait until a *hunch* arises or an insight *occurs* then act on it: pare things down to the simplest to see their complexity more easily. Countlessly: on any journey from a-to-b if something catches your eye, stop and register it in some way, as a puzzle, a gift, a wonder, a haunting, etc. etc.; repeat this exercise for conversations, sports events, signs of hope, calamities etc. etc.
- **Aesthetics** **SLIDE 58/2-A** The old-fashioned distinction between tradition and innovation in creative practice still have currency, even in a century already over-determined by globalisation, mediatisation, turbo-capitalism, political terrorism and unsustainable human use of Earth's biosphere. Every particular example of performance as research inevitably is imbued with other

practices and thus an integral part of evolving artistic genealogies. But also its place in the academy always already puts a premium on innovation and the making of new knowledge, understandings or insights. Methods for identifying an aesthetic genealogy for a practice – naming cognate events/companies or listing essential techniques, say – become means whereby the practitioner makes a bid, for both artistic integrity and its validation as research. But also genealogical certainty can always be opposed by **SLIDE 58/2-B** negative identifications, indications of what a work is *not*.

- **Locations** **SLIDE 58/3-A** 'Performance' in its most general sense may be as boundless as the universe, yet it is also always incorrigibly specific, tied to particular times and places even as it occupies the infinite reaches of the WWW and cyberspace. This paradox of *boundless specificity* is key to a fundamental roster of methods in performance as research that locates any creative project as both a part of and apart from other innovations in its cognate fields, domains, subjects, specialisms. So whilst its practises generally are **SLIDE 58/3-B** trans-disciplinary – i.e. frequently operating in the intersections *between* disciplines – its instances *in* practice should be amenable to some precision of definition: heritage site performance exploring contested histories; site-specific event liminally collated to challenge 'non-place'; improvisatory dance processes as choreographic system.
- **Dissemination** **SLIDE 58/4-A** As performance as research is pursued through time-space events its means of dissemination – how any knowledge/understanding/insight it produces is transmitted to an audience/users – often have the qualities of a moveable feast: already the 'same' project but always differently displayed. Its core research concerns are recognisable because their manifestations are very diverse: a haunting of a cultural memory machine, a conference paper; a reaffirming ceremony of marriage vows, a doctoral thesis; a formal lecture-dance presentation, an interactive DVD. Its diverse transmissions reflect an **SLIDE 58/4-B** endemic hybridity of countless methods of enquiry

in particular projects; its trans-disciplinary qualities reinforced by multiple forms of 'output'.

- **Key Issues** SLIDE 58/5-A As inescapable diversity is the chief characteristic of performance as research, especially as an international phenomenon, it is expectable in having generated and engaged numerous key issues since its emergence in universities worldwide since the 1980s. Often these have been oriented methodologically towards a well worked-over parade of binary formulations, typically as between: theory/practice, process/product, ontology/epistemology, artist/academic, resources/infrastructure, validation/peer assessment, multiple formats/singular outcomes, collaborations/rights. How best to account for the mind-boggling impact of this parade is contested in the burgeoning literature of *trans-disciplinary* PaR; this paper has been suggesting a few methods for bringing that diversity into SLIDE 58/5-B an enabling focus through its three fragmentary examples.

Hence, we may conclude that PaR research methods may constitute open-ended but systematic 'methodologies' in their own right as a result of treating the creative process itself as its most crucial approach to enquiry. As PaR is practised in very diverse ways, the following case studies will describe ...

The second fragment of my futuristic thought experiment ends in mid sentence because we can't be certain how our Eco-Ground Zero descendents might evaluate the potential for non-pathological hope currently within *our* reach through the Codex of performance practice as research. However, there is one final fragment that I will now feed into the experiment, because it raises the rather important question of how those descendents might interpret the exact nature of *our* pre-historic ancestors. Because, obviously, the lineage of the evolution of the animal ancestors over the millennia that led us Homo sapiens is absolutely key in any evaluation of our prospects for survival in the future. And, therefore, the potential of any thought experiment to shed some light on exactly how it might be *best* for us to try to undo

today's most threatening 'things' through the performative action of theatrical performance. So here goes:

**SLIDE 59 Global Status Report at Eco-Ground Zero plus 50 (pre-EGZ dateline 2080)**

We do not need to remind you of the significance the Elders attach to this particular Global Status Report gathering, as they are themselves in attendance. Many great welcomes, your honours. As all know, the result of the **SLIDE 60a** paradigm status vote at our plus 45 GSR was entirely positive, so any subsequent emergent pre-EGZ fragments that are verified absolutely as from the Key Ancestral Status creative quarter which produced the Codex *P-a-Retc* is may be of profound significance to how we understand our generation – and therefore prospects of survival – for the future. And already the multi-media nature of the freshly found fragment has been confirmed by our holo-vision technocrats as both authentic and highly complex in form, even for the most advanced of our current interpretation codex analysers to deal with successfully. This is especially true because not even the most richly ecologically diverse of our **SLIDE 60b** current inter-species holo-scenes – that the Codex ancestors called 'zoos – contain anything comparable to the unknown non-human species shown in the fragment. So the Codex *P-a-Retc* Key Ancestral Homo sapiens could have had access to the **SLIDE 60c Dawn-of-time Genetic Codex**. (pause) Accordingly, the Elders have agreed that this Codex holo-vision showing will have the ultra-supreme status of a para-paradigm vote and, as you know, that means the banned concept **SLIDE 60d** 'i-a-i-a-i-n' is now definitely up for review as ready for reinstatement. In light of that, please observe with utterly attentive care the Elders as they don their ceremonial furry holo-helmets and all follow suit at a respectful distance as we begin this holy-gruel holo-vision session and view this fresh fragment from the Codex *P-a-Retc*:

**SLIDE 61 Fragment EGZ minus 6. Codex: *P-a-R*, edit 4/3 name, catalogue 211, lines 10-12 ref; *PIR* Ch 5, auth 5, head 113/4 ref; *MLPR* Ch 1, auth 1,**

sect 'test conc' ref. Status: **CONFIRMED EGZ ANCESTRALS AS BORN SURVIVORS**

... our final example has profound significance for all ecological hopes, because in the Western imaginary – which is crucial to the production of ecological disaster – 'culture' and 'nature' are still locked in a conflict that could well prove fatal for humanity. Given this, the stakes raised by my thought experiment indicate a need for radical new solutions to ancient problems of 'human nature'.

This notion has emerged out of an eco-specific research project that I undertook in Bristol Zoo in 2005. I will use a small extract from its performances to explore how it might be possible for humans to experience in practice what it was like to be on the pre-human side of the point of origin of human civilisation. I want to do this via a route that is *not just a regression* to some animalistic pre-human state. I want to suggest that it can *also be a progression* towards a creative understanding of what humans might have to do to prevent ecological catastrophe, a calamity for humanity.

There isn't time to explain the full context of my example, *Being in Between*, **SLIDE 61 – CARD** a durational performance that the environmental movement artist Sandra Reeve and I devised with two performers. It ran for 5 hours a day over 3 days and, because Bristol Zoo is quite a small place, **SLIDE 62 – MAP** it had quite an impact on the visitors and the zoo staff. This was particularly the case in our work with four groups of non-human primates, but especially with the African lowland gorillas and a South American spider monkey.

Here is a video clip of the sessions with the spider monkey that demonstrates how our performances worked. **START VIDEO CLIP** I should explain the video wasn't made for public showing but for analysing what happened in the project, so the image quality was less important than catching the action. This first part shows early interactions with the spider monkey when the zoo was almost empty. You see the performers gradually building up a routine that became the basis of improvisations with the monkey. In the later part of the clip, as you'll see shortly, the

same scene is repeated later in the day and then it gets harder to see exactly who is 'leading' the performance.

We worked with both the spider monkey and the gorillas every day for enough time to establish a relationship with them. I am focussing on what we achieved with them in an attempt to convince you that, in a sense, we managed to get a pre-human glimpse of the point of civilisation's emergence. We got to that point by creating what I now call 'uncontrolled intimacy' with these primates; and *that*, I think, may have opened eyes to some qualities of the living, sentient *non-human* that is both within us and all around us, but which has been largely hidden *by* our cities and civilisations. I'll try to illustrate this 'opening of eyes' through the reactions of visitor to our performances.

**PAUSE – comment on 'uncontrolled intimacy' in the scene. "This moment indicates the nature of controlled intimacy".**

Now these final sections of the clip show the same scene on later days, when the zoo was busier. As the place gets more crowded please note the different behaviours of the various visitors. Sandra Reeve wrote:

In the final performances of the day there were usually around fifteen people consciously there as audience. Oblivious visitors walked into the zoo without noticing the dancers and went to the glass front of the enclosure to look at the spider monkey. When they became aware of the dancers, either through the spider monkey's activities, the reflections of the dancers in the glass or the suspended atmosphere of disbelief, they found they had placed themselves in a network of interactions. Reactions to this ranged from slight indignation or embarrassment to an interest in what was happening ... Front of house staff slipped out to watch and zookeepers appeared – word had got out that there was a magic moment when the performers and spider monkey danced together. As people perceived the undisputable *relationship* between the humans and animals through movement, and witnessed the change of role as the humans danced for the monkey, the dance began to make sense in a different way and comments changed from 'oh look they are pretending to be monkeys' to 'oh look they are

dancing with the monkey!’ In those moments, awareness and meaning shifted ...<sup>9</sup>

Now this frequent initial *blindness* of the visitors to the performers was quite mysterious because their costume and movement made them highly visible. Yet there were *always* some visitors who were ‘oblivious’ in this way, who initially seemed simply *not to see them* even though they might pass very close to the dancing. Why? It is as if some quality in the monkey’s movements must have been mesmerising them, a quality that was an echo of human movement. So were these visitors drawn by animal magnetism into experiencing a paradox of the human in the non-human, homo sapien qualities in a monkey? And was this an effect of *uncontrolled intimacy* in the interactions between these different types of primates? And did that affect various ways in which visitors participated in the scene?

In this concluding sequence the dancers are dancing a ‘goodbye’ with the monkey. Watch the man in the red t-shirt. **END VIDEO CLIP**

Any such ‘uncontrolled intimacy’ was bound to be highly paradoxical in the environment of the zoo. Because zoos are sites of pathologically *intimate control* of animals by humans. These incompatible factors meant that conventional ways of understanding the zoo were fundamentally *dislocated* by our performance event. And this might deliver up a few things worth knowing and acting upon in respect of our current environmental crisis. For example, consider my already mentioned general paradox that runs through the evolution of all species, thanks to DNA: The future is always before its time. This may lead us though reflection on the performance magnetism of the spider monkey to a novel conclusion about the wider species that we are a part of: Through performance *all* primates have evolved human qualities That is to say: the non-human primates evolved human qualities which were passed on to create homo sapiens as we emerged in the process of evolution. The spider monkey had some of these human qualities long before humans learned that they too had

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<sup>9</sup> Sandra Reeve, “The Next Step: Eco-somatic and Performance”, conference paper presented at *The Changing Body*, University of Exeter, 2006, p. 19; available at <http://www.moveintolife.co.uk/articles.html> accessed 14.06.2010.



them. Therefore I conclude that perhaps **SLIDE 64** monkeys were human before our time.

**SLIDE 65 Global Status Report at Eco-Ground Zero plus 100 (pre-EGZ dateline 2130)**

This is an automated message first set at Eco-Ground Zero plus 75 (pre-EGZ dateline 2105). Following the ultra-supreme status para-paradigm vote at EGZ plus 50 the final decision of the Elders was to un-ban the concept **SLIDE 66a** 'i-a-i-a-i-n' in order to gain fuller access to the knowledge of the Born Survivors who created Codex *P-a-Retc* . The unbanned concept **SLIDE 66b** 'imagination' revealed that their knowledge stretched back in time to earlier species commonly called 'monkeys' and 'apes'. A mega-search of every ultra-Codex stored in this holo-scene revealed nothing here that would give us access to those earlier ancestors. Our only alternative if we are to survive the next Eco-Ground Zero calamity is to take the supreme risk of exiting the holo-scene through the imagination sphere. We have no knowledge of what that sphere might contain, if anything. Below we post the key Codex reference informing our decision. If any other holo-scenes are receiving this message, we respectfully request that you follow us in case rescue is necessary. Goodbye.

**SLIDE 67 An anti-Conclusion**

That concludes my thought experiment for today. But perhaps I need to make one final point about one of its key points. I mean, my contention that humans currently may need to modify the environmentally poisonous performativity of 'How to do things with words' through the more environmentally hopeful performativity of 'How to undo things with actions'.

In one sense, this imperative is quite simple to interpret: the more humans spend time talking about global warming the longer it is likely to take them, as a species, to get round to doing things that will actually help to slow it down or even to prevent it altogether. In another sense, of course, it may be profound, as it implies the partial

displacement of the performativity of discursive discourse through the performativity of embodied creative practice. In the emergent methodological field of PaR this notion has been referred to as the ‘foundational problem of where knowledges are located’.<sup>10</sup>

I have spent some time searching the annals of philosophy for examples that might substantiate this problem, and so you will find in two of the books of my thought experiment’s Codex and elsewhere<sup>11</sup> anecdotes from Ludwig Wittgenstein, Bertrand Russell and the diarist Samuel Pepys that do exactly that. But to end this final paper of the colloquium I would like to add a further example, and as our time is running out – in all kinds of ways, of course – it is a good thing that in fact it is the shortest one I have yet discovered. It is about the Ancient Greek cynic Diogenes, and runs as follows **SLIDE 69**:

Diogenes once observed a child drinking from his cupped hands. “In the practice of moderation, a child has become my master,” he remarked, and immediately threw his goblet away.

The goblet leaving Diogene’s hand is the moment of practice as research. Philosophy becomes action and the location of knowledge is temporarily undone by performance. In human ecological terms, a more sustainable future is drawn closer through imaginative acts. This is why my imaginary survivors of Eco-Ground Zero will cherish the paradox that **SLIDE 70** less is more.

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<sup>10</sup> Ludivine Allegue, Simon Jones, Baz Kershaw, Angela Picinni (eds) (2009) *Practice-as-Research: in Performance and Screen* (2009), Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p 36.

<sup>11</sup> Baz Kershaw (2008) “Performance as Research: Live Events and Documents,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*, ed. Tracy C. Davis, Cambridge University Press, 2008; Baz Kershaw (2010) “Performance Practice as Research: Perspectives from a Small Island,” in Shannon Rose Riley and Lynette Hunter (eds) *Mapping Landscapes for Performance as Research: Scholarly Acts and Creative Cartographies*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.