



Interview with Rebecca French and Andrew Mottershead

Manchester, 11th December 2003

Charlotte Smith: How would you both define performance and would you call your practice performance "art"?

Rebecca French: This is a funny one isn't it, it depends on who you are talking to. When I think of performance art I think of 1960's America. At the moment in Britain the term we all tend to use is "Live Art" because it's something that's more understandable by people. Also something about calling something performance art; People who don't know anything about art think that you are one of those living statues, the kind that just stands in Covent Garden Market, and then other people think, people who do perhaps know about art, maybe painters or something, think you run around and you take your clothes off all the time. It's really problematic and every time I say performance art it makes me cringe. I did Fine Art as my degree I just say I'm an artist working with mixed media - mainly live art. That's what I practice. If I talk to the general public I'll say something like "it's a bit like the theatre - but there's no stage".

Andrew Mottershead: I'd also add that it seems that because of the way that we work and we tend to work with people who don't have a knowledge of what you would call traditional "performance art", if we are working with people who are not involved in art in any way it would be a problem to talk about this work as "performance art". When we first started out we were conscious about... some of the things that we were worried about were that "are we trying to run here with these projects a little crash course in performance art and go through the history of performance with these people to give them some background and education about what we are actually doing". In truth I think that's something, that positioning within the tradition of performance art is something that maybe we keep within our practice but it's not something that we should really project onto the people that we are working with. We speak about it now with the people we are concerned with in developing the micro-performances just about everyday stuff. This is our material.

Rebecca French: It's about a look; it's about a touch ...that kind of thing.

Charlotte Smith: That's what I'm interested in - where, if there is one, is the boundary between a performed experience and a lived experience kicks in. Your work to me seems to encompass all of those issues and bring two together.

Andrew Mottershead: Sometimes if you do speak to someone, for example in Tampa when we were working with these art students they had a presumption about what performance was and we had to explain to them that these "talents or skills" that

you are assuming you are required to have to become a performer are not necessary for this work, because the material we are using is everyday "stuff" and everybody has these skills and these talents and we employ them automatically.

Charlotte Smith: To what extent would you agree that your collaborative projects explore the boundaries between the realistic lived experienced and the traditional theatrically performed experience?

Rebecca French: The traditional theatrically performed experience has an audience, somebody that sits in the proscenium stage and it has them sitting forward in the dark watching people in the light run around in a loud voice - that kind of black and white thing. In fact, what we have done with most of the micro-performance events we have done is where we have had performers there that we have done workshops with and they are the performers but nobody knows who they are, so everybody is a potential performer. That sense of who's audience and who's performer is dissolved. Actually tonight we don't have any performers at all - we are just giving everybody the chance to perform if they want to. We have not done anything like this before so we will see what happens as there are no performers and just the audience watching each other and wondering what is going to happen. One thing about this kind of lived experience is that it's about the levels of the performances...with each venue or each performer we have a baseline and we research to find out what this baseline is. For example, me in this event tonight I'd probably be a bit nervous and not really sure what I'm doing and that would be my kind of baseline in this space, whereas somebody who lives in Manchester and knows some of the people would have a very different baseline. So it's understanding the reality of who they are on that night and then adding and then adding to it. Perhaps for me it would be to be a little bit more nervous, or to maybe not make eye contact with people, something like a micro adjustment. Someone else's baseline would be approached in a different way so it's specific both to the site and to the time and to the performer and to who they are.

Andrew Mottershead: We do refer in some senses to traditional theatrical experience. We have in a sense responded to that one example would be ... are you aware of the work of Hogarth?

Charlotte Smith: Yes.

Andrew Mottershead: He would do depictions of life in London and there are two engravings in particular. There is one, I think it is called "Southwark Fair", where there is a stage performance with jesters and what have you going on, but that's sort of a side issue in the composition because the main focus of the composition is the theatricality what's going on in everyday life in London, the boisterousness and that action, that real experiences and in his view that is more theatrical than the stage presentation. There is also an engraving called "Gin Lane" as well which we looked at and found quite interesting when we were developing our ideas and ways to speak about our ideas to potential participants. In "Gin Lane" he focuses on a number of issues that would be present within this gin quarter of London which show the nasty bits of life so there would be a whore, a baby falling to its death, a suicide, a burial in-situ, an emaciated young man, but all of these details are these real experiences composed into the one frame, all positioned in space and time in the same place. Of course, it would be ridiculous that all these events, all these real experiences would

occur at the very same time but what he does with that picture is he presents all these social realities all at once, he compresses them in time and space to give an impact. There is a certain sense that that is what we would like to do with our micro-performance events: compress a number of social realities into one space.

Rebecca French: It's what all theatre and all soap operas do. You wonder in Eastenders how many deaths and marriages there can possibly be in one year because they are compressing all the things that could potentially happen into this half-hour slot and this is kind of what we do, you know... what could possibly happen in a gallery at 5.30pm in Ancoats on a Thursday evening and let's try and have all those things happen. That sort of sense of that compression. The other thing I think is really interesting is the sense of carnival - what theatre used to be. Theatre used to be everybody in the whole town would participate, more of a carnival thing and people would have roles and then it slowly became that some people would sit and watch whilst other people performed, and now it's a strange national theatre thing, it's incredibly structured about who's performing and who isn't.

Andrew Mottershead: It's a funny word - theatricality - because you can speak about theatricality in painting, sculpture and it can be applied to all kinds of things.

Rebecca French: People learn their handshake don't they? They practise a good firm handshake and it's incredibly performative that kind of thing but it's everyday about how you project yourself and that is a kind of theatre.

Andrew Mottershead: We have to overcome people's presumptions about what it is to be traditionally theatrical if we are putting on a performance; they expect to see a show.

Rebecca French: We do have this a lot. "I have arrived at the event and nothing happened" and literally that it is true. It isn't until you key into actually looking for these little details that then everything becomes performative and that can be overwhelming. But when you walk in nothing does happen. The other thing is we don't ever work with actors because they are completely unable to move in a normal way. You know how ballet dancers learn to walk in a certain way and then can't walk normally. It's very important for us to work with people who move normally and don't have that training.

Charlotte Smith: Can you explain how you think your work explores the performer / audience relationship and why or how this interests you?

Andrew Mottershead: I think that the main thing is that traditional line between performer and audience in a traditional relationship. What we try and do is make that disappear so that, therefore, anyone is potentially going to be a performer when you come and view an event.

Rebecca French: What we would have maybe 70 - 80 audience numbers who know what they are coming to and know that there is going to be these anonymous performers in the audience and then we will have worked with 20 - 30 performers on these small interventions which might be something like move people out of the way as they walk past or flirting with someone across the room, using eye contact or body

language or conversation, etc. Then what happens is the performers have tickets, same as the audience has tickets and everybody arrives together at, say, 8.00pm onwards, people arrive at say between 8.00 and 10.00. Some performers don't get there till 10.00 and they will stay there for 5 minutes and then go. Its not like the performers are there as the audience arrive, it really is just a sort of filtering in and filtering out and mingling... So for the audience who is coming in, knowing these performers are there but not knowing who they are they walk in and nothing happens, yet they are scanning and watching, wondering what is going to happen. Everything becomes a performance.

Andrew Mottershead: What I would say is that what we are trying to do now is that we have developed an awareness that we are trying to transfer what normally happens within social relationships and use that as a basis for our audience / performer relationship. So there are four main forms of social relationships where you have the intimate, you have the personal; you have the public and the social.

Rebecca French: These are just sociology terms...

Andrew Mottershead: They are four different levels of interaction that occur.

Rebecca French: We like mixing these around. There is something very appropriate to the context of who you are with and where you are. For example, your partner you might snog him in bed but probably wouldn't do it in front of your parents. It's a whole thing about the appropriateness of different actions. You know, in public, if you are sitting on a train and somebody you don't know looks at you and looks at your for a bit too long then it crosses something, whereas you can look into your lover's eyes all day. These levels of what is appropriate...we are all hyper aware of this all the time. These are the kinds of things we use for our micro-performance events but mix them in a different context.

Andrew Mottershead: In that sense we really are exploring the depths of the audience / performer relationship.

Rebecca French: At the beginning it is more public and then towards the end of the evening it is more social, but how does one make it maybe personal, intimate, or public...or how does one mix these things around?

Andrew Mottershead: I'm not saying this was the successful micro-performance, I don't know what a successful micro-performance is. However, in the past it has become so intimate that someone has come away with semen all over their dress which doesn't usually happen when you go to a theatrical event.

Rebecca French: The boundaries break down because people don't know how to read things and haven't got that safety of knowing that there are certain limits, because everything appears fake. People somehow feel they can behave in ways they wouldn't normally behave. We have had strange things where people have gone home together and then we've had a phone call on Monday from someone wanting to know whether the person they spent the weekend with was a performer and that was the performance. These sorts of extremities of not being sure somehow bleed over into the everyday life of people. We do document what we do because the whole

audience's experience is very important and the feedback we get is our documentation. When we are in the room it looks to us as though nothing is happening because it is about a little look between two people and we don't see that, so we have that same sense of not knowing what's going on as people involved in the performance.

Andrew Mottershead: I would say the interest is also to activate the Frisian between the audience and the performers and it can be quite a complicated relationship as complicated as it can be within any social scenario. That's what we like to play with.

Rebecca French: Possible performances is like when people walk in and they feel very comfortable and someone goes up and says "Oh hi, it's nice to see you again" but not sure if they do know them or it's a performance but even so maybe that's quite nice and then maybe they feel a bit more comfortable and then perhaps they will go off and talk to someone else. That is real, even though it is performed because it's had a real effect.

Charlotte Smith: My reading of your work is that you tend to work everyday or real life events into the fabric of performed or structured events to create this kind of ambiguity within your audience and their evaluation of the performance. Can you try to explain to me about how you use the everyday to inform your choice of act?

Andrew Mottershead: We touched on it a little earlier, the baseline, about analysing the everyday experiences through four filters; intimate actions or personal spheres and so on. You can do that primarily through observational exercises that take place at the site and we try and experience the environment we are making the work in to create for ourselves a kind of baseline experience that we know that that is how it is in reality. From that baseline then we can start to introduce a deep understanding of that environment.

Rebecca French: As far as how we chose the things, it really is if we like it - for example something a bit naughty or something with some kind of edge to it. For example, there was a really beautiful performance in Florida there was this woman who was Romanian. In Romania if a woman lights a man's cigarette it is basically saying "I want you to kiss me", a kind of "light my fire" saying. It is a completely literal exchange with no ambiguity there at all. We don't have that kind of meaning in the UK so much. Very ambiguous - if someone lit your cigarette that is definitely an invitation to conversation or something. So she kind of went round and just had a lighter and when somebody took out a cigarette and she would say "let me light that for you" and the effect that had on them was incredibly powerful of like "Oh, let me buy you a drink" you know, some kind of sense of something, some kind of invitation. For the audience, they were sat there shell shocked because it wasn't appropriate, it belonged in the intimate sphere and it was taken into the social sphere.

Andrew Mottershead: It's not us that really makes the choice, although we do have some say because the way that we work to kind of agenda a group of people to putting on this event and getting them to do stuff. We do a lot of research and do some workshops and observational exercises. We try and lead the group of performers through this structure which we think is going to be appropriate.

Rebecca French: By the time they have gone through the workshop they know what we want.

Andrew Mottershead: They have a whole raft of possibilities and sometimes a performer would have 2, 3, 4 things that they are going to do in the evening and we speak with them individually.

Rebecca French: It's a process of collaboration, it's not a case of us deciding what the performers will do but we have very strong directorial roles.

Andrew Mottershead: Often they have much more information about the culture of that location

Rebecca French: If they are from the venue. They know who they are and they know what they can cope with and what they feel comfortable doing so it has to work on that level of exchange between us and them.

Andrew Mottershead: It's a combination of issues to do with the site and whether that action would be appropriate at that time.

Rebecca French: And how appropriate. I mean we know how we want to orchestrate a night or how the things will work together.

Andrew Mottershead: For example, if we know that a venue plays loud music on a night it's not going to be very easy to do a Microperformance which requires intimate conversation.

Charlotte Smith: You touched upon this earlier. How do you believe performance or the performative informs the everyday life or the social relationships that we are commonly part of, instead of the everyday influencing performance?

Rebecca French: In terms of things like the handshake?

Charlotte Smith: Yes, that sort of thing.

Rebecca French: Hugely! Everything about how we present ourselves is incredibly performative. If you actually start watching it - how everybody interacts with each other, it seems like a play put on for your own benefit. I don't know how much people are aware of that or how influenced people are consciously, because I think it is very innate, you know, chimpanzees do it. To analyse it in terms of whether people are influenced by it...I'm not sure it has actually worked from that kind of level or whether it really is learnt behaviour.

Andrew Mottershead: I used to work in a cinema and much of the everyday conversation would revolve around impersonations of the actors and the actions in the films we were showing so in that sense there is a copying and fantasisation. There's all that sort of performative element of copying.

Rebecca French: It takes you a step away from yourself doesn't it? Its performing in a different way, we all do it on some level.

Andrew Mottershead: It's very sophisticated and there is a tremendous amount of history surrounding it...the self help programmes and the training to become...

Rebecca French: To be so self aware that you actually cannot have a conversation with someone without analysing the "performance" you give. I don't know how far things work on that level. Does it actually affect the social relationships today or does it just affect what people are trained to perceive of them. Does it actually affect the way people interact or the way people think they are? It's all so unconscious I think.

Charlotte Smith: This is the question about the John Cage interview. Richard Schechner once asked him if he saw a difference between a group of people going to a beach and seeing what happens there and a group attending an event of an activity: a performance. What difference do you see between those two things, especially in relation to your practice?

Rebecca French: I think there is a huge difference for me personally because the whole thing that we do setting aside what the Microperformances are and the venue and these kinds of things, there is this conceptual framing of what we are giving the audience, there are these performers in the space but you don't know who they are. It's that sense of the way they look at the space and I think it's the same thing if you go to a beach and say that these are actors and they will be seen as that even though they are not and it's the same thing about being more aware of how people interact, you start to look at it as if it's a play it becomes a play for you. It's very ambiguous but it's all about how it is framed I think, it's to your perception. It's what you are told and how it's framed for you which can change your perception completely I think.

Andrew Mottershead: I think each group would have different expectations of the experience.

Rebecca French: If you go to the theatre, it's a whole structure: you pay for your ticket, walk in, take your allocated seat, sit down, the lights go down, you watch the performance on a stage - it's all very structured which prepares you for knowing that they are performers and you are the audience

Andrew Mottershead: In the same sense going to the beach is because you've got the sand, the sea, horizon, you've got the sun.

Rebecca French: That prepares you to think it's not a performance but real life.

Charlotte Smith: So, you've identified it before actually watching or taking part.

Andrew Mottershead: I'd also differentiate it as well because in one sense you are going to see a theatrical event, generally you'll be going to see something that has been programmed and conceptualised and scripted, but the beach is maybe a little more "open" to your own interpretation of what's going on as opposed to the theatrical event. It depends on the artist presenting their work but the interpretation is directed in general, whereas at a beach it's completely up to the individual.

Rebecca French: Something really interesting about watching a film and watching

something like love scenes in a film for instance. If a film is wonderful and you have been taken away and forgotten you are sitting watching it and are actually in the film and two hours have gone by and This is a completely different experience than if you are aware of the seat and you are aware of your popcorn and the films not doing that much for you and then you watch something like love scenes because you know how incredibly choreographed these things are. It all becomes very mechanical. Its one time because you are very aware of the framing and another because you have been taken into it and it feels real for that moment when you are watching it because it's good enough to take you somewhere else. I always found that interesting in terms of reality.

Charlotte Smith: Who would you liken your work to and who and what have been your main influences?

Andrew Mottershead: Hopefully we are not like anyone. We can't go out and purchase a book on micro-performance. It's a practice that we are having to evolve through trial and error, although I'm sure we are not setting a precedent in terms of culture. I don't know...

Rebecca French: Things like Joseph Boyce sweeping the street is an obvious one, or Yoko Ono's instruction books. I mean sociology definitely and those kinds of...not because we are particularly in-depth on it but we use it as a tool, for these kind of signals of non-verbal communication like proximity and how you can move someone around the room by standing a bit too close to them. We kind of steal things from different areas just to use as kind of starting points to use as how we might make performances.

Andrew Mottershead: My background, my education was...I did a masters in site specific sculpture and was really interested in artists that make work which would be sensitive to a particular environment and almost make their work invisible to that environment and make it melt together. At that time I realised there were a lot of different avenues that this work could potentially take in this exploration of making site specific work which is what I think we do now. We don't do it sculpturally but we do it with people. At that time I guess I was looking at artists such as Dan Graham, Robert Smithson...I think peers mostly, those are our main influences.

Charlotte Smith: Your work at the Nebraska Bar, Fiasco's was described by Susan Edwards as an "art happening". I just wondered how you responded to this and to what extent you accredit your practice to the likes of Allan Kaprow and how you see it in terms of "happenings"?

Rebecca French: We were a bit surprised by that because we feel again like performance art it was very 1960's kind of term.

Andrew Mottershead: I'm fine with it being called a Happening!

Rebecca French: Yes. It's kind of sweet because it is something very small and something that hopefully inserts into something that is already there.

Andrew Mottershead: So again it's kind of indicative perhaps more about Susan

Edwards...

Rebecca French: Yes, she's a 45 year old American art critic, yeah. But it's fine.

Andrew Mottershead: It happens! It is an event, it is a Happening. I think that now we have different forms as well and different social possibilities now than were possible in the 70's. There is a different approach that has to be taken.

Charlotte Smith: I would suggest that everyday life stands apart from art in performance because it has no need to select materials from life and then organise them into an artistic whole. Those materials are already implicit in the lived experience, as I see it, and so they need not be recontextualised by art to embrace a meaning. According to this, the lived experience is a simpler, more genuine form of representation than performance which tries to imitate the everyday by taking its materials and distorting them. When a practice is concerned with the social and everyday events inherent in all of our lives then it would be more productive to use a system of exposing rather than reflection or re-presentation. How do you feel your practice compares to this suggestion of exposing the everyday rather than imitating it?

Andrew Mottershead: I think the main thing about the work we do is that we are working with the normal things but what we are attempting to do with the performance essentially look at their everyday environment in another way, which gives them a deeper understanding about their own social responsibility. That one issue that I'm quite interested in that we should address and you can only do that, I think, by deepening our understanding of our everyday environment. To focus on the everyday and make it interesting.

Rebecca French: I think what we do with our performance basically is to take the everyday and re-package it, like you were saying. I think for the audience it actually becomes their everyday and changes the way they see their everyday experiences and their own reality. We have had feedback about our performances having altered the way people have behaved in certain social situations and the way they interact with people because it's gone further than the original looking, repackaging and presenting and into something, for the audience, that is more than that. That is where it is more interesting in terms of that...because, yes, in a way making art out of the everyday is never going to be a genuine or as good as the everyday so why bother. Except it can be because you can take it somewhere and I think that with this framing of it, it becomes something else. A painting of a street scene: all its done is look at the everyday and repackaged it in one way, but in another its created something beautiful, or people have looked at it in a way that they might not have looked at it before. They see something they haven't spotted before and I think people see social interaction in a different way.

Andrew Mottershead: I'd say that it does relate to the performers as well. One part of the process that we go through is the analysis of site. An anecdote from Tampa was this one guy who said I don't need to go over there because I played darts there last night so I know everything about it and I said you have to go over there because...

Rebecca French: You are now looking at it in a completely different way as a site for performance.

Andrew Mottershead: So therefore you are able to enrich your knowledge, it's not just an area to play darts in; it has other potential possibilities for a performative action there. There were windows to look out of etc...so in that sense it's about having to look again or in a way stripping away the usual activity for that area and trying to look at other possibilities, to see which is the strongest.

Charlotte Smith: When the action of performance is staged in the audience's space and the actors move amongst the spectators it tends to violate the traditional spatial boundaries embodied by many conventional theatrical performances. In relation to this do you believe that actors carry the borders of their performance space around with them?

Rebecca French: It is quite intimidating for an audience to come to one of our events, because there isn't a clear thing about who is the performer and audience. It's a lot easier to sit in the dark in a seat than to actually have the spotlight on yourself. We do say to the performers "your performance space is the space between you and the person next to you." They do carry it round with them but only metaphorically because to the audience, they can't tell the difference. At most theatres, even when the performers mingle with the audience they are dressed differently or they are moving differently or they are kind of talking and it is still a performance, it's just the close proximity physically, but there isn't an ambiguity necessarily between the audience and the performer. Whereas, at our performance events because there are really no performers, I mean they are there but you don't know who they are, there is no stage really.

Charlotte Smith: Performance is generally described as a conscious event or occasion where there is this awareness of the audience and the actors and planning, etc. Does your work conform to this or challenge it?

Andrew Mottershead: I think the way we set up, we do structure things and score things but it is so informal and so loose out of necessity because that's the nature of the work, it is quite chaotic.

Rebecca French: What we do, I think, is we use this idea of deliberateness. There is no difference between me going like that now and going like that (run hand through hair) later on tonight, except if it is deliberate then it is a performance and if it isn't deliberate then it isn't a performance. That's not to say that the audience or someone in the room might not look at me and think it was performative but unless I deliberately did it then it isn't. We do use that idea of "deliberate" a lot, because we work with everyday actions. That's quite important to us isn't it? Performance I think does have some crossovers with theatre and live art so we do get asked questions about theatre. I think we use the everyday hugely in our work; it's our basic, raw material. It's not like we maybe making work about science and art or about something that really isn't...I mean it's a social sphere that we work in, we work with everyday movements.

Charlotte Smith: Do you deliberately explore specific areas of social engagement?

Rebecca French: Yes.

Andrew Mottershead: For example, tonight we know that when people will arrive here they will be on their own, they will be coming in couple, intimate couples, or just there with their friends, they may be coming in groups of 3 or more and they will be meeting perhaps people and building up large groups, smaller groups waiting for their friends.

Rebecca French: They will be talking to someone, looking over their heads to see if someone is more interesting to talk to...all these things.

Andrew Mottershead: We know that they will all be standing, not sitting...

Rebecca French: We know that they will be drinking out of cans...

Charlotte Smith: You stated earlier you do a lot of research from sociology, things like domination or socialisation. Do you explore specific areas like that?

Rebecca French: No, I don't think so. Well, kind of. We are aware of it and we think about it, for example how it might affect people. For example the action of moving people out of the way - that's very dominant action and it's very different if done by a man or a woman, or done on a man or on a woman. Those kinds of things we take into account with all our performances, trying to think who is doing it and where are they doing it and what's the context, who would it be appropriate to do it on, who would it cross the line to do it on. If we are crossing the line we have to do that and what responsibility we have to the audience, these kinds of things we discuss with all the performers. We don't necessarily set out to explore domination for example; it may be just used as a filtering exercise.

Andrew Mottershead: Again, it's dependent on the individual that we are working with, they may want to deal with that issue or they may not.

Rebecca French: Some people for example who are taking something like being very shy, which is quite submissive, they would either maybe want to be more shy which is in a way quite empowering because they are sort of performing shy rather than just being shy but also to use the experience of what it feels not to be shy, and to feel dominant, for them to perform confidence. But it's not done in a sociological way; we are not examining it in a scientific context.

Andrew Mottershead: We often don't have enough time to do that because we have a very short period of time with the performers!

Charlotte Smith: Do you perceive micro-performances as being comprised of compartmented theatrical units or do you follow a more conventional western structural flow where the whole production flows through as one big thing?

Andrew Mottershead: One approach we have used is, ... though we don't use this approach all the time. Tonight is very, very informal it's just going to be an opportunity for people to perform when they want to. Someone cited the work as being a bit like "Al Qaeda meets RADA" because they heard about the process of the way that we organise the Microperformers where we would organise a group of 30

performers into "cells" and each "cell" would manage themselves. The cell would contain 3-4 people and they would be there as a support structure, a small group.

Rebecca French: Cells are more practical things. People arrive at events with their friends and leave with their friends, we don't have 30 people arriving on their own, people don't come to events like that on their own so that would automatically mark them out as performers so it was partly for disguise and for support because its 6 hours of performing and that's hard work so they can go back to their cells and have a drink and a chat about their performances with their other performers. But it is not that structured in the sense that when that person leaves the stage the next person comes on, there's not the sense that the whole thing is choreographed. Performers have a strategy...one person's is making inappropriate eye contact with people and they will do that for the whole evening on and off.

Andrew Mottershead: They would have a Micronarrative!

Rebecca French: Yes, and that would be pretty much "their thing" its not say that we might not at a certain point in the evening decide that when Cindy drops her bag, Theo will drop her glass, we might structure those for our enjoyment as much as anything else but then again we might not so its very unstructured.

Charlotte Smith: Do you feel that the audience members are as much an integral part of your production as the actors and how do you feel that the ambiguity of these roles reflects the overall principles of each production?

Rebecca French: Oh hugely, yes. Well, we can't rehearse what we do because it is about a look and if there is no-one to look at then it doesn't exist. Whereas, at least for the play on the stage, and I understand that the performers get a lot more energy from there being an audience there, but actually they could run the play from beginning to end and it would be pretty much the same whereas we can't do that at all because it all depends on that moment between two people across a crowded room and so there is no performance without the audience. They are it!

Andrew Mottershead: I'd like to add that we are not talking about Microperformances being required to have a room full of people, it doesn't necessarily have to be like that you could develop a Microperformance with just one person.

Charlotte Smith: In your opinion, how does your work abandon the traditional signifiers of performance and is this a deliberately devised procedure on your behalf. If so, what is your reasoning for this?

Rebecca French: We started doing this thing originally because we got very bored by these kind of endless platform events you go to, you know, where you sit down, someone stands up, etc. It is actually quite boring and it got to the stage where it was much more interesting seeing what was going on next to you.

Andrew Mottershead: It was extremely limiting for what you actually wanted to do.

Rebecca French: We deliberately didn't do that, but that was 5 years ago.

Andrew Mottershead: For example, we can't go and do events like the National Review of Live Art because our work just isn't suited to the platform format that they instil. It's kind of nice to work like that.

Charlotte Smith: Don't you feel that's much more challenging than just working on a platform?

Andrew Mottershead: Much more challenging, yes. We are having to evolve our practice.

Rebecca French: Everything now is a lot more complicated because you are going outside a set structure. For example, trying to find a venue and having to approach them and how you talk to people about what you are doing who don't have any understanding of traditional theatre never mind something that's a bit more different and how you approach and work with these people to have them as your performers. This all takes a long, long time because you are outside those easy structures of ringing up a theatre and saying, I want to put on a performance and I need 3 spotlights and a PA system. It's a lot more interesting, that kind of thing.

Andrew Mottershead: We have no props, no lighting...

Rebecca French: They are only allowed the objects that they would normally have with them on a Friday night.

Charlotte Smith: What reactions to your micro-performances have you received from the varied locations where you have travelled?

Andrew Mottershead: We are still waiting for some feedback to come back from Tampa, although there is a review by Susan Edwards of her experience. We facilitate this receiving of feedback by handing out feedback forms which people can either hand back to us or send in an SAE. Sometimes you get a positive explanation of their experience, that they go on to see performance everywhere.

Rebecca French: In Tampa although it was really fantastic to go somewhere to work for 3/4 weeks just solidly on artwork it was great, it wasn't quite what we expected. We didn't have a venue when we arrived, we only actually had ... we had a lot less time to actually make the work than had been agreed so it was kind of tough.

Charlotte Smith: Do you choose the space of your productions and do they purposefully reflect the type of performance you produce?

Rebecca French: Yes!

Andrew Mottershead: For Tampa the project was to make a piece with people at the university and we were very much reliant on their experience and knowledge of the city because obviously we don't know anything about Tampa so in that sense we said well "what kind of arena interests you", what embodies a particular issue for you, and there were huge conversations over the summer about the venue that we were going to be working in and they wanted to do it in a strip club...

Rebecca French: Because Tampa has more strip clubs than any other town or something...

Andrew Mottershead: And there was a conversation about using an old people's home and all sorts of environments that had some relevance to a social issue within the city.

Rebecca French: Let's talk about how we choose our venues in London. In terms of how we choose, it's something that will be a bit of a clash, we don't like art venues, we want something that the art world audience and the people from the venue will cause some kind of Frisian from both sides. So, we have used private members' clubs primarily like a working men's club and these kinds of places, which have a very strong identity so that when the audience come in we are taking them somewhere they've never been before, its not like just going to the ICA to see another event but its going somewhere you would never normally be allowed to go and opening up some part of London that's hidden...

Andrew Mottershead: So in a sense the performance begins as soon as you get the flyer through the door advertising the experience of going to a West-Indian services association in Clapham...

Rebecca French: Which we feel kind of further displaces the audience before they have even got there, because they are having to go somewhere different or somewhere new, somewhere they wouldn't normally go to, and we like that, that clash, having a conversation with someone they would never normally meet and...

Andrew Mottershead: It's also very important the venue demonstrates a form of commitment to what we are suggesting...

Rebecca French: And an interest, the people from the venue will want to be involved.

Andrew Mottershead: With "My Word Is My Bond" it was quite interesting that the venue was actually an area, a room, a restaurant that could be hired out for parties, wedding receptions or whatever...so simply we just took the same strategy that everyone else had, we just hired the room!

Rebecca French: And took our site as being the city rather than the venue so much. The venue has got to be somewhere that has got something. Would you rather go to a gallery or a West Indian ex-services association, which is a private member's club that you could never normally go to. Something a bit special.

Charlotte Smith: This question is much the same as the one before but if you feel you can add to it feel free! How would you describe your stage space and how has this been influenced by exploring conventional notions?

Andrew Mottershead: Well, it could be anything that surrounds you within the environment.

Rebecca French: The walk to the venue as well, you know. We like to think that it

starts as people leave their houses and its taking them somewhere they've never been so it's a whole journey, especially in a city because you are winding your way round these little passages, under arches, by churches, etc.

Andrew Mottershead: Most of its been done before anyway. You create a flea circus out of a suitcase...There are performance artists or live artists that would use a table as their performance space but they would flag it up as a performance space and I think what we are suggesting is that with this piece tonight, anything can be a performance space.

Charlotte Smith: What role do you perceive yourselves to take within the micro-performances and how do you identify with the roles of actor, spectator and artist?

Andrew Mottershead: I think we are coming to terms with the idea that we are directors in some way, but we definitely want to posit ourselves being artists under whom the performers that we work with can have an independence; we create an umbrella under which they can create something that, under our guidance, has some relevance to themselves. I think to the visiting audience we are the hosts.

Rebecca French: We don't really have a role. I mean, literally on the evening we feel incredibly displaced because we have done all this work with the performers and the venue and then people arrive and we just kind of stand there not really knowing what to do with ourselves. Sometimes, we kind of oil the wheels of social interaction but we don't really have a role.

Andrew Mottershead: It actually depends on piece to piece as well.

Rebecca French: We also offer a support network to the actors if they want to come and chat to us they can just subtly come and chat to us like any audience member would.

Andrew Mottershead: We are the keeper of all the secrets as well!

Rebecca French: Yes, we are!

Andrew Mottershead: We know everything that should be going on.

Rebecca French: It's really hard for the performers as well. It's really easy to be up on stage because although you are being looked at you have a real safety whereas they have to improvise around everything. They could start doing something then the audience member does something else and they have to completely adjust, its hard work!

Charlotte Smith: What degree would you agree that micro-performances experiment with the cultural frames and expectations that we use to identify events, people and objects in order to challenge the category of performance in theatre? In this sense, don't your productions signal theatrical status, invoke expectations from the audience and then disrupt those expectations to challenge conventional laws of the performed experience?

Andrew Mottershead: Yes, yes. Mmmm, in fact notable feedback that we have had is "I don't like your kind of theatre, we are going to call London Arts and tell them to withdraw your funding." But we don't think of it as theatre either, do we?

Rebecca French: Never. No.

Andrew Mottershead: If we get feedback saying we don't like your kind of theatre, well obviously we are not meeting up with their expectations of what a theatrical production is. In one sense, because we are not making a theatrical production - that is not our goal to do a good piece of theatre.

Rebecca French: No.

Andrew Mottershead: I'd agree with the question though, definitely. I think we really do disrupt it.

Rebecca French: In as much as we understand that the audience get a flyer through the post and they think they are going to see something...we mention Microperformance and in the sense that they are coming expecting to see something...

Andrew Mottershead: I think they expect a platform event...

Rebecca French: In this sense we do disrupt something on that kind of level.

Charlotte Smith: How does your practice relate to the conventional speculation that spatial and architectural arrangements such as platforms, etc, serve to indicate that the time or space of a performance should be regarded as separate from the ordinary social space of the audience?

Rebecca French: Well that is what they indicate - that is what they are for, to separate the two.

Andrew Mottershead: It is a frame.

Rebecca French: They are all of these structures about turning down the lights and you automatically know you have to stop talking...

A: They call the space at the front of the stage the fourth wall don't they, which is apparently one thing that we step through and we don't have that fourth wall.

Charlotte Smith: Does your practice then challenge this?

Rebecca French: Yes, in as much as we have any interest in them, which we don't because we don't come from that background. So is suppose it does from the outside but for us in terms of how we organise what we do it just never occurs to us in that kind of way about whether or not we are challenging some kind of theatrical tradition, because we don't know what they are!

Charlotte Smith: How would you answer the sceptic who may suggest that a practice which engages in the integration of life into art, which I believe yours does, voids the

distinction of the artwork as it becomes almost indistinguishable from real life?

Rebecca French: I think that perhaps that is the biggest criticism we got because we tried to refine how we do this but it is possible for somebody to walk into the event, go to the bar, order themselves a drink, talk to their friends for 3 hours, leave and that is it and they have not seen anything! We do put a lot of responsibility onto the audience that they are active, they have to look and if they don't look it's not going to be given to them. It's not like sitting down and the lights go up and even if you hate what you see at least you know you've seen something. We have had a few people who have been like, "I can't believe I paid £5 for nothing, there was nothing there".

Andrew Mottershead: That's a big issue.

Rebecca French: It is a big issue because I do think we have a responsibility to engage the audience with what we are doing because it is something that they are not used to doing, you don't know necessarily how to engage with something like that. On the other hand, because we do ask everybody for feedback we get the good and the bad, whereas if you go to a play they rarely get any feedback, so probably half the people there hate that too it's just they never say it. But I do think that the fact that you walk in and nothing happens and you are responsible for your thing is important. The people who put a lot in get a lot out and the people who don't...you know. We are always working on strategies like do we give out cards as people come in which gives them a key into what is happening or maybe we give them a performance instruction and that maybe has them thinking already as they are walking in about the level at which we are operating and therefore that will help them see. In a way what we are doing tonight is that kind of idea actually, and that's where that idea has come from, how we can engage everybody. But yes, I think it is really close to life and I think that is what makes it interesting in some ways is because it has that reverberation and that "you don't know" and that's what we like about it and that's what a lot of people like about it but I always think it does have that thing where if you want to be sceptical you can quite easily about this because it is hard to see where the money has gone. So yes, I think it's a fair comment and it is something we do grapple with.