

4.51 FrenchMottershead

The third element of the fieldwork undertaken was with FrenchMottershead who locate their work within the genre of 'live art'; however, they are particularly interested in languages of bodies and bodily communications of specific spaces as informed by choreological study. They recently received a New Work Network commission and Arts Council grants for their piece, Club Class which they presented at Tate Modern and Tate Liverpool. FrenchMottershead's work demonstrates two areas of interest that are relevant to the aims of the research project. First, in considering the audience as performers; and secondly, in considering the embodied actions of individuals simply *performing themselves* as theatre as art and performance, what might be described as the 'performativity', following Butler as described above.¹ The three areas of investigation can be understood by drawing on cultural studies writer, McKenzie (2001) who analyses the concept of performance within the structures of contemporary cultures such as business, technology and the performance of our gender and identity. The analysis below provides a choreological investigation in terms of structure and considers McKenzie and Butler's (1988) theories as a means of interpreting their work. FrenchMottersheads 2002 work: *My Word is My Bond* (2002) is particularly the focus of this analysis.

The performances within FrenchMottershead's works are similar to the performances within Ruckert pieces in that audience members occupy the role of performers. The focus in FrenchMottershead's pieces is upon how the actors² perform themselves, rather than a character, particularly in movement, which is similar to La Ribot in that

¹ FrenchMottershead also offer a useful method of devising movement for performers by considering the conventions of spaces as dictating body languages or bodily codes of behaviour but this was considered beyond the scope of this research project.

² The performers in *My Word is My Bond* are frequently acting or performance artists rather than dancers.

movement is not considered in terms of telling a story but as an exploration in terms of performing oneself.

4.52 Performers and FrenchMottershead

FrenchMottershead work in two ways: initially working with performers who are intentionally non-professional (often they have not had formal training) and who function as fellow audience members in the work; and in later works with no official performers, merely using a set of business cards instructing all present at a social event to interact with others in ways suggested by the site. *My Word is My Bond* (2002) is an example of the former and took place in a Frogmorton's bar in the City district of London and was established so that the audience knew there were performers amongst the clientele of the bar (who appeared to consist largely of FrenchMottershead's audience) but these performers did not present themselves as such but interacted with other clientele in pre-determined ways. The performers arrived and left as audience members and were disguised among the crowd, facilitating for audience members a means of observing all the customers of the bar that made everyone a performer.

Such a consideration of who is a performer and who is audience member brings to mind McKenzie's (2002) consideration of 'performing' roles as a significant, challenging and controlling aspect of culture. He argues that performance has significance in all 'first world' contemporary lives from "congressional attacks of performance artists to the performance specs of household appliances, from the interactive training of high performance managers to the performativity of everyday speech"(McKenzie 2002:3). If all individuals are performing in the manner McKenzie

suggests, performing effectively or otherwise, FrenchMottershead's piece provides an opportunity to witness the *performance* of all participants, as audience members seek out which individuals are the performers.

By disguising performers, FrenchMottershead invite the audience members during *My Word is My Bond* to play a detective game of 'guess the performer' while simultaneously asking the audience to engage with everyone as a possible intimate performer. Thus the 'performance' of 'audience members' becomes a little heightened and self-conscious and maybe shifts audience member's performances into another mode. An example of myself as audience member playing this detective game occurred when I whispered in French's³ ear, saying "I bet that older guy there is a performer" and she whispered back: "No, that's my Dad". His interesting face alongside his confident and easy manner had intrigued me and I was faced with my own pre-conceptions of what and how performers enact themselves.

During *My Word is My Bond*, I witnessed one obvious performance, which consisted of an interaction between myself and my partner and a man calling himself 'a salesman'. This was clearly a performance interaction as his movement was in too close proximity to both my partner and me. The man showed us the contents of his bag, continually touched one of each of our arms, trying to sell us a brief case. This was in many ways the most engaging part of the evening, as the performance was considered in terms of what is inappropriate behaviour in the context of a public bar and the performer was able to hold his performance despite being questioned and cajoled to reveal himself as a 'performer'. This performance seemed to be significant

³ Rebecca French is one half of the artistic duo FrenchMottershead.

as he was clearly carrying out a performance task in two ways. He was performing as a salesman and as someone who transgresses appropriate spatial boundaries in his too frequent' touching. The performance of the young man also, however, questioned what could be considered performance, what was everyday behaviour and what was theatrical, which became significant questions for the practical dance research project, *In Your Shoes*.

4.53 Performing Audience and FrenchMottershead

FrenchMottershead's piece raised questions as to what extent un-trained 'performers' could be interesting to witness if they were considered to be performing just by *being* themselves. At the end of the night many performers and audience members danced to well known music and as I made eye contact with an older black man in his sixties or later enjoyed a dance of hand gestures with a young woman (both of whom I did not know), I engaged a little more sensitively than at other times. I wondered if their respective performance tasks were to stare or to engage in gestural dances on the 'dance floor'. As audience member I then questioned my actions as I danced, considering whether other audience members were perceiving my own body language as a performance.

The event required a different kind of engagement than regular theatrical events for both audience and performer. My experience of the event, *My Word is My Bond*, raised the question of whether this form of immediate engaging and blurring of roles between performer and audience could be used in a dance event in a studio space. A studio is a more conventional dance theatre environment in which codes of performing are very different in terms of movement vocabulary and conventions of

watching, yet an interest in exploring these questions raised by this ‘pedestrian’⁴ and site-specific work by FrenchMottershead.

The concepts of enacting performativity or individuals enacting identity signatures that Butler (1988) discusses (and discussed in detail in Chapter Three) are exposed in some ways in *My Word is My Bond*. Gender studies writer, Butler (1988) argues that the “existence and the facticity of the material or natural dimensions of the body are not denied, but reconceived as distinct from the process by which the body comes to bear cultural meanings.” (Butler, 1988: 520) This is a functional concept that offers a means of understanding how the ‘fleshly’ bodies do not become a vehicle through which a destined essential being emerges. Rather bodies are in dialogue with “an active process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities” (Butler 1988:521). The incident when engaging with *My Word is My Bond*, of observing the older man who turned out to be French’s father, provided an example of how someone’s performativity can function as performance. French’s father effectively drew my attention because he was enacting a different set of cultural and historical meanings from the majority of people present. Although French’s father was not performing, the questions created by the piece and the context of a bar in the City district of London facilitated a way of viewing this man and the way he enacted himself as performance. He was, I thought, a little too old and modestly dressed to be a friend of the artists, or an audience member for such a ‘live art’ event, but he had an ease and confidence in his behaviour that, to me, seemed to be that of an actor. Maybe this ease was the familiarity of family members interacting in a public space. French’s father’s performativity communicated to me that he was one of the hidden performers,

⁴ Pedestrian is a term particularly used by American ‘postmodern’ dancers to describe everyday actions which are not actions of specific dance technique such as Graham technique, a modern dance system of training.

and I was mistaken. This did however, made me consider what an individual's learned way of enacting or an individual's performativity communicated to an audience without acting or dancing but placed within a particular context. French's father became interesting because of his 'otherness' to the city bar that had been taken over by a live art/theatre audience.⁵ Significantly for the *In Your Shoes* research project, the framing of this older man's performativity within this younger group of 'live art' performers made him unintentionally interesting, which identified an area of research for dance performance in the possibility of working with individuals that are other to the usual young and very fit bodies of the majority of dancers.

⁵ Because of his easy familiarity with those around him, he was interesting to watch just because of he was and how he was positioned in the particular contexts.

FrenchMottershead Interview

August 04

JM: How would you describe the kind of artwork that do? Any word that would let someone who doesn't know about you understand. How would you position yourselves?

AM. I would say there are live works. Works that use groups of people and they respond to the environment with actions and gestures that respond to the language of those environments and we posit it under the theme of live art but I think there are more connections with other areas of practice.

RF: We consider ourselves to be artists who are currently working with bodies but it could be sculpture or another media. Live art is quite a convenient bracket to put ourselves in.

AM: In terms of language, maybe it's body language that has been the most primary thing over the last year.

RF: Or just how people interact socially.

JM: Is there another area of your work that is in a slightly different place. Obviously, I am interested in the work that emphasises the body. I know that you have done billboards and I'm hearing about postcards from you and wonder about that. I can see that it does have body interaction but it does seem different.

RF: It is different. At the moment we are doing these. (Brings out a box of small cards the size and in the style of business cards.) We go to a site and we do some research and as people come in they get these cards. They anonymously pick a card, any card.

AM: You've seen one of these cards. You said that the workshop with Rosemary Brandt really did take effect.

JM: Yes, it's like a Laban scale or something.

RF: So if they get this card 'lie to impress' the person must do this to someone in the room, another member of the audience and then they mark it with a sticker. So a map of interaction builds up. There's a key so that they can map what's happened to different people at different times. It is performance and using bodies on a different level.

AM: And it's inviting interaction as well. It's inviting touch, promoting touch as a necessary part of the work. It's there. The physicality of it is all-apparent. It's not spotlighted but it's the purpose of the game really to create connections between groups of

people and in between groups of people with corresponding actions and also giving them a role so facilitating them in that way.

JM: I'm thinking about performers and I'm thinking about audience and I'm thinking about you. Can you talk about the role of the performer.

RF: It has changed a lot. It's changed from us performing ourselves in some way. Like for example ...

AM: Pretending to get married.

RF: We did an event at a social club where weddings and christenings happen and we had a hoax marriage. That was about five years ago and it moved to running workshops with performers to be our micro-performers and encourage the audience to perform back and that sort of thing, whereas with the cards everybody is audience and everyone is performer because everyone gets a card and is invited to perform in the same way and because nobody knows what is on anyone else's card. There has been quite an evolution in terms of how we think of audience and performer, which is not to say that we won't go back to the first or second thing. It's just that at the moment this is what we're doing.

AM: It's about activating all the audience as performers and giving them that role. I think we've just put a bit of detail on some of those points in time. There was mid – way when we did the My Word is My Bond piece we were thinking of dissolving a line between performer and audience and having the performers anonymously within the audience (RF:arrive as audience leave as audience but do some thing naughty in between while they're there) which is a different framework from the one we are promoting now.

JM: It seems to me, and tell me if I'm wrong, that before you had people who were entitled performers and they had their tasks and they were anonymous.

RF:AM: Yes, we thought of them as the performers

JM: But now you have developed a task that everybody becomes on an equal level.

AM: Yes recently we experimented as well by running short workshops proceeding one of the card pieces we did in a gallery. So we had ten people we did workshops with in the afternoon going through the building going through a gamut of what we could possibly do which seemed to work in tandem.

JM: What did you work out with them.

RF: They left the workshop with a strategy of some kind which might be – 'I'm gonna be in the way' and so they will be in the corridor and they don't sense you're there

and there's the awkwardness of saying excuse me, and sorry. Someone will be clumsy or flirty.

AM: For that one we particularly chose the focus on areas of behaviour that would engage the audience in either a way that they would get pissed off or that they would be facilitative.

RF: There were lots of corridors and lots of door ways in the venue and there was lots of potential to be in the way. One woman wanted to do something that was just facilitative and guys would come out of the toilet and she would tell them that the tap was there if they wanted to wash their hands. So that's the kind of thing. It's a game really but the audience know that there are people *there* doing this and they've also got the cards.

JM: So there are performers in this one. What was this one called?

RF: Princelet People. We've done it in eight places now.

JM: Some of them don't have performers.

RF: No. All of them don't apart from that one.

AM: It's been presented in different scenario. Princelet People was exhibited in a scenario with 8 other artists exhibiting in a gallery doing live works and the micro performance and the cards were our bit of that. They've also been presented within festivals scenarios where two or three artists were presenting on that evening.

RF: Sometimes where we've been programmed and sometimes where we haven't.

Do you mind if we set up our cards here – at the NRLA and at the Fierce Festival.

JM: Gorilla performances.

RF: Well not really because we are only asking for a table. It's about marketing ourselves a bit and having the opportunity to go to the NRLA without feeling like an audience member. It's nice to go and feel like an artist that you can actually do something.

AM: The last one we did was Duckie where we were ostensibly the only act on that evening and we camped it up a little with a cabaret style show at the end with a reveal. There was a key being available with us having it round our necks- projected towards the end of the evening so people could map the interactions. We had people get up on stage and saying: "I was number eighteen and my thing was to ..."

JM: Why didn't I get an invite?

RF: We didn't market it to anyone at all because it was a gay club and we didn't want to inundate it with all our heterosexual friends. So we just took with us the only

couple we know who are gay. It would have really changed the balance of it because it's such a gay club. So we didn't tell anyone.

AM: Apparently we take a high risk with our audience. If they don't do it.

JM: Oh my god I know about that. Do you have some strategies to entice people to do the tasks.

RF: Well it's like this: "HI, TAKE A CARD IT'S A GAME, A SOCIAL GAME, TAKE A CARD, ANY CARD." The way we introduce is fun.

AM: It's also introducing it in a sense of it's about interaction and it's about doing something that you haven't done before.

RF: Your change to be a bit naughty. I'm sure if we introduced it like – "this is an art work", it's not going to happen. I think that's our biggest strategy.

AM: So far it hasn't failed yet.

RF: We do always have that – umm. Especially at Duckie because we hadn't really done it in that kind of clubby context, it has always been in an art context at festivals and galleries. This was a more social context but they loved it too.

AM: I'm a bit worried about the site-symposium. Then we're always worried.

RF: We're going to do something that intervenes in the registration process and maybe of the walks through town. There's forty people and they're all quite serious academic types.

AM: Our instructions have to be specific. We re-write them every time. It's a great dilemma to be in. We have to research and we have to look and we have to put ourselves in the position of the audience to figure out whether they would actually do that. On occasion I think we've written 87 instructions on these cards over the last seven months, we have felt that a few of them.....

RF: The stickers do build up, people come up to us with five stickers saying I'm having a wonderful time.

AM: In general I think that audiences would like to be activated rather than ...

RF: We're so used to going in, sitting down somewhere in the dark, we have to be quiet. All these rules about how to be an audience member. We're all aware of it and we all just do it.

JM: Have you done this in a theatre?

RF: No. It has to be a social space. Art openings or festivals are still social but when people – how can they do it in the theatre.

AM: Well theatres are social spaces as well. What we'd have to do is have a look at the interactions that occur between people within the audience and the audience dynamic with stage.

RF: We could do something fantastic for the audience, like whisper or have your phone go off or nudge someone but we wouldn't be able to find anybody who'd be willing to do the stage bit.

AM: It's dependent on the production and what the production is doing and whether that production sets up that relationship with the audience as well. So we'd probably have to become theatre critics or something and see what we could fit in to the gaps.

JM: It's all about how people interact in particular spaces.

RF: Yes, we'll consider the toilets, the entrance and the corridors and the stairs and the entrance and the pavement outside and the walk from the nearest tube and all of those things in the site. We do site visits and map that space and to map the interaction that happens in that space. Then we come here with all that information and we write the instructions from the site and from our imagination of what would be good in that site or what people might do or what's pushing it a bit but not so far that people won't do it.

JM: How has it been different when you've done it in a gallery and when you do it as an intervention. I wonder how they work differently.

AM: I don't it does because the main thing that happens at a private view is the social interaction.

RF: If you want to see the work on the walls you go later. In either way we're quite exposed with our cards, grabbing every person who comes in – no one can get passed us - either way we kind of there. It doesn't matter where we are - I don't think about where I am. I'm just full of energy.

JM: I see you as being very different personalities and I've had an example of how Rebecca interacts and I wonder how you go about it, Andrew.

AM: I use the skills that I use when I work in the cinema selling tickets. I put myself in the position to convey the information to the public. It sounds a bit drier perhaps.

RF: I'm the gushing one. You're the honest one – they trust you while I gush.

JM: Yes, I can imagine the combination making you really do it.

RF: You tend to explain it further, have those longer conversations with people who want to. I'm the grabber.

JM: It's an experience or a game that happens, and are there stages?

RF: There aren't really stages with this one.

AM: As yet. I mean.

RF: To be honest we're so busy grabbing every single person that we don't have time to notice. People come up to us and tell us what's been happening to them and show us their stickers.

AM: There are stage of entering, shyness and coyness. Someone does and acts as a trigger for everyone else and by the end of the evening there's always a group of people who are just covered in stickers and who come and get more and more cards. They've finished that one and they want another.

RF: And some people don't do it at all I'm sure.

AM: It's something that offers up the opportunity of extending a relationship outside of the piece because it's a piece of technology – a business card. It's there to give you information about who you are and how you contact people.

JM: Can I have another look at it.

AM: You can go to the website.

JM: It's quite a beautiful object.

RF: There's only one or two in the venue at the end of the night. They are limited edition art cards. We number them like this.

JM: The fact that the cards are beautiful frames them in a fine art way.

RF: We kind of hope that people might take it out of their wallet and do it on someone at work.

JM: So it's got a life after.

AM: This is how we document it. By putting together a lecture.

RF: This is the key.

AM: We had them round our necks at Duckie. At the NRLA we had them as beer mat.

RF: Each different venue has a different strategy for how the cards are distributed. Like at Duckie we did have a table but we basically went down the queue saying "take a card because they were coming in so fast. It's a very flexible thing. We have a collapsible table. A red box with our cards in and we turn up and set up.

JM: It's quite vaudeville isn't it. You turn with your box of tricks – any takers.

AM: I think the audience like the simplicity of that as well.