

The Society of Wonders:

**Exploring useful relationships between research
and practice in contemporary theatre.**

By Laura H. Trevail.

i. David Mamet: Common sense and heresy.

"One can read all one wants, and spend eternities in front of a blackboard with a tutor, but one is not going to learn to swim until one gets in the water - at which point the only 'theory' which is going to be useful is that which keeps one's head up." ¹

In *True and False: Common Sense and Heresy for the Actor*, David Mamet questions the usefulness of theory, study and research in theatre practice, stating as "heresy" that anything other than physically making work is counterproductive. While I agree with much of Mamet's "common-sense" approach to theatre, I believe that research can allow you to not only "keep your head up", but win the Olympics as well. However, a methodology designed to support practical work is required. In this

¹ David Mamet, *True and False: Heresy and Common Sense for the Actor* (UK: Faber and Faber, 1998) 80.

research essay, I will present my exploration of an 'holistic' ("The term 'holistic' refers to my conviction that what we are concerned with here is the fundamental interconnectedness of it all²") research methodology.

Mamet says: "Speak up, stand up, stay out of school".³

This project has led me to question the form of an academic essay. Yet the audience for this work is an academic one, and as Mamet says our job is to "communicate the [work] to the audience".⁴ I am questioning, not confronting. I mean no harm.

I have made a conscious decision to cite my own beliefs and experiences alongside those of other practitioners, and to present an exploration rather than an argument, retaining the personal and metaphorical elements of the work. My decisions are grounded in the styles of writing adopted by the practitioners I have studied, and the nature of the research itself which is led by instinct and wonder.

ii. The Society of Wonders part one: Reading.

² Douglas Adams, Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency (N.Y. Pocket Books, 1988) 151.

³ Mamet 24.

⁴ Mamet 9.

This document is a product of an ongoing research project: *The Society of Wonders*. Through my research I wanted to understand better the processes of other artists. I wanted to put myself and my work in context. I wanted above all for this research to be useful - to feed directly into my practice.

I talked with people who knew my work (all practitioners themselves) and read books they recommended. I re-read books that had been recommended to me over the years in connection with my practice. This coincidental methodology added to my understanding of their work and my own, and made it clear that this was a quest for opinions, not facts.

Two clear patterns emerged:

- I. Most of the books and articles were written by practitioners themselves. *Joan's Book*, by Joan Littlewood (recommended by Ellan Parry) and *True and False: Common Sense and Heresy For The Actor* by David Mamet (recommended by Mike Shepherd) made a particular impression with their uncompromising opinions.
- II. Many were not theatre books. Tom Weller taught me the patterns of binary and bought me *On War* by

Carl Von Clausewitz. The works of naturalist W.H. Hudson (recommended by Sue Hill) opened my eyes to patterns of nature and the details of observation, and led me to the work of another naturalist, William Beebe, especially his undersea adventures in the Bathysphere. Cheaply bound 'Books of Wonder' (recommended by Bill Mitchell) intrigued me with their badly printed scientific diagrams and blurry but atmospheric photographs of airships, stuffed animals and exotic locations.

iii. Towards 'holistic' research.

The Oxford Paperback Dictionary defines research as:

Research (ri-serch or ree-search) *noun* careful study and investigation, especially in order to discover new facts or information. *Verb* do research into; *the subject has been fully researched.*⁵

The academic context of the project might imply that research means reading. In theatre, research implies much more. Forced Entertainment⁶, Jacky Lansley⁷ and Tanushka Marah⁸ talk about the importance of a 'research and development' period in their process.

Products of that research - for example Jacky Lansley's documentation of her *Through The Fire* R&D project - demonstrate that their research includes physical and creative exploration, visiting places, collecting stimuli, thinking and talking, as well as wide reading.

Research and Development (R&D) projects are a recognised, funded part of theatre practice. But these projects are limited by time and money. With very few exceptions - Forced Entertainment are salaried - R&D projects are run like standard productions, with money to pay people, hire

⁵ Oxford Paperback Dictionary: Fourth Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 680.

⁶ Forced Entertainment: Performance group (founded in 1984).

⁷ Jacky Lansley: choreographer and boundary-crosser.

⁸ Tanushka Marah: director and founder of physical theatre company, Company Collisions.

equipment and space for a set period of time during which specific ideas are 'researched' and 'developed'. This is better than no research time at all, but cannot facilitate holistic research.

It is no surprise that long-term research is an integral part of the work of many of our most successful, inventive and groundbreaking companies and practitioners. *Complicité's Mnemonic* was sculpted from ten years of research.⁹ Jacky Lansley runs weekly studio workshops and frequent R&D sessions. Forced Entertainment are able to research continually without the financial pressure to make work in the standard six week time-frame. The variety and uniqueness of these practitioners' work reflects the unusual amount of time 'allowed' for research.

It is interesting too that these practitioners work across art-forms, taking any route necessary to explore their truths. But to take another route, you have to know it is there - you have to find it. To find it, you have to look for it. As Von Clausewitz writes:

⁹ *Complicité*: visual and ensemble theatre company founded in 1983 by Simon McBurney, Anabel Arden and Marcello Magni.

"*The Diversity of Intellectual Quality Results in a Diversity of Roads to the Goal.*"¹⁰

My methodology is based on a wide variety of sources, mostly primary: conversations, experiences, live shows, cheap movies, music, letters, websites, people writing directly about their own opinions, hands-on experiments, dreams.

Each input has equal potential. A child is just as likely to see the truth as a recognised artist and vice versa. A slogan on a sweet wrapper is as likely as an article in *Total Theatre* to point you in the right direction.¹¹ A visit to the aquarium is as likely to solve a movement problem as a master-class. And vice versa. I must be alive to coincidences and signs.

iv. The Society of Wonders part 2: The 'Live Art Naturalist'.

¹⁰ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War* [c.1827] Ed. Michael Howard & Peter Paret (Princeton: Everyman Library, 1993) 160.

¹¹ *Total Theatre*: quarterly magazine of the Total Theatre Network.

It was never enough for me to read critical interpretations of people's ideas; it was far more rewarding to read them directly. But soon it was not enough to read. I began trying out optical experiments from the 'Books of Wonder', and identifying birds in the city with Hudson's help. The naturalists' methodology infiltrated my work.

I found myself referring increasingly to artists' lectures I had attended: the way they moved and spoke communicating as much as their words. But it wasn't enough to observe in the aquarium of the lecture hall. Beebe inspired me, describing his amazement on his first sighting of deep sea fish, which had until his Bathysphere descent only been seen dead:

*"I realised that I, myself, was down where the hundreds of nets had been hauled... After these dives were past, when I came again to examine the deep sea treasures in my nets, I would feel as an astronomer might who looks through his telescope after having rocketed to Mars and back, or like a palaeontologist who could suddenly annihilate time and see his fossils alive."*¹²

¹² William Beebe, Adventuring with Beebe. (The Viking Press, 1951) 84. Quoted at <<http://members.aol.com/chines6930/mw1/sphere.htm>>.

So I set off as a 'live art naturalist', to encounter in their natural surroundings those fish I found strangest or most beautiful. Carrying a minidisk recorder and microphone I made several 'dives', while in my dreams Hudson, Beebe, Indiana Jones¹³, Alan Grant¹⁴, Prof. Gunther von Hagens¹⁵, Michael Palin¹⁶ and Joseph Beuys¹⁷ all waved their fedoras encouragingly.

Some of the artists I approached after lectures: Jacky Lansley and Ken Turner, for example. Others I met through work: Barbara Steveni, Sue Hill, Claire Grove, Amanda Harris, Paul Spooner and the stage management team of the National Theatre. Some are collaborators: Tom Weller, Ellan Parry, Tim Spooner, Trudi Couldridge and Danny Robertson. Some, like John Latham, I met directly through this project. All are practitioners and all have made work or given opinions that are shaping my way of working.

The focus of each 'dive' was a recorded conversation with each subject, but what happened around the interview was

¹³ Indiana Jones (fictional): eponymous archaeologist-hero of Spielberg's movie trilogy. Played by Harrison Ford.

¹⁴ Alan Grant (fictional): palaeontologist-hero of Spielberg's *Jurassic Park*. Played by Sam Neill.

¹⁵ Gunther von Hagens: Artist/Scientist/Showman creator of 'Event Anatomy' - see his Bodyworlds Exhibition in Brick Lane.

¹⁶ Michael Palin: he travels the world on television being nice to people.

¹⁷ Joseph Beuys: artist. I have tried on his coat, but not his hat, alas.

as important as time spent with the microphone switched on. Documenting work for Barbara Steveni, riding in a golf buggy around the Eden Project with Sue Hill and meeting Jacky Lansley's cats were moments when the fedora fitted best.

And then, of course, as with Beebe, came a time for fishing again, for examining specimens brought up from the deep. Transcribing the recordings, searching for more subjects, talking and writing about the research, and making new work myself, I followed up connections and contacts made. Each dive added something to my understanding, to my work, and also to my curiosity and hunger for more. This research is 'useful'.

v. Research, theory, practice and knowledge.

While reading Von Clausewitz's *On War*, I was delighted to find this paragraph:

"Action in war is like movement in a resistant element. Just as the simplest and most natural of movements, walking, cannot easily be performed in water, so in war it is difficult for normal efforts to achieve even moderate results. A genuine theorist is like a swimming teacher, who makes his pupils practice motions on land that are meant to be performed in water. To those who are not thinking of swimming the motions will appear grotesque and exaggerated. By the same token, theorists who have never swum, or who have not learned to generalize from experience, are impractical and even ridiculous: they teach only what is already common knowledge: how to walk." ¹⁸

For Clausewitz, research is "the most essential part of any theory."¹⁹ Mamet too includes research under his blanket label of "theory": "It will not help you in a boxing ring to know the history of boxing, and it will not help you on the stage to know the history of Denmark".²⁰ Theory and research become blurred into one thing, which is learning specific to an environment, but not taking place within that environment.

¹⁸ Von Clausewitz 139.

¹⁹ Von Clausewitz 163.

²⁰ Mamet 62.

By choosing to call this learning "theory", they are automatically distancing it from practice - that is the cultural assumption we make. When taking music exams, for example, we take the 'practical' and 'theory' examinations separately.

Encountering this divide made me aware of how often it is bridged, blurred and generally ignored by the subjects I had chosen to question on my 'dives'. Even Clausewitz, who begins by pointing out the divide, concludes his study of the theory of war with "a factor more vital to military knowledge than to any other. Knowledge must be so absorbed into the mind that it almost ceases to exist in a separate, objective way."²¹

vi. The New Empire Theatre, Southend: Research from practice.

²¹ Von Clausewitz 170.

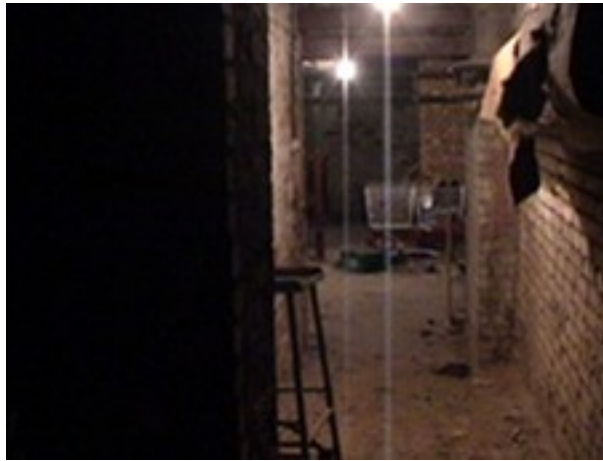
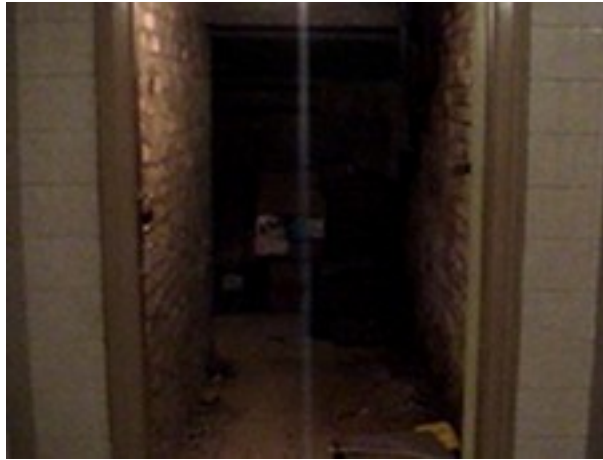
The New Empire Theatre, Southend is a successful example of an unusual approach: historical research emerging from practical work instead of the other way round.

The New Empire is a community theatre run by the Robertson Family and a dedicated team of volunteers. The building is an amazing historical document as well as an extraordinary venue, as it had been treated with utter practicality since it was built in 1896. No attempt had ever been made at preservation, nor had its value ever been recognised. Changes had been made to the décor, and to the structure of the building. In converting the building back into a venue for live work, the team stumbled across clues and scars of the New Empire's history.

From a ladder behind the stage, the decorative theatre ceiling can be seen above the modern cinema panelling. Boxes of papers were found stuffed into a hole in a wall. Theatre tickets, gloves and programmes were found where they had slipped through the balcony floor.

But perhaps the most interesting part of this massive stone 'document' is the basement. In the ladies toilet in the bar is what appears to be a cleaners cupboard. When

the door is opened, instead of mops and brooms you are faced with ...



(Personal photographs of basement corridors.)

These are not the corridors of the ABC cinema, or of its previous incarnation, the Rivoli, but of the original New Empire Theatre.



Original
signs to the
seen, and -
photograph -
written in
wall 'all



wallpaper and
stalls can be
too faint to
someone has
chalk on the
clear' when

these corridors were used as an air raid shelter during the war. Some corridors are blocked by rubble while others have been bricked up. Broken remains of staircases climb bare stone walls.

When I first visited the theatre in 1998, Trudi Couldridge and Danny Robertson - the Technical Manager - led me down to this part of the building with glee. I was truly amazed. In an age when so much is 'restored' and 'recreated', it was breathtaking to come face to face with something so honest, so uncertain, so full of questions and so *filthy* too.

The team are proud of these corridors but, characteristically, they still let a nearby school store its sports equipment down there. The mission of the project is to provide the community with a first class theatre.

Apart from fire protection (which required certified contractors) the team have done all the work themselves: All the painting, decorating, building, wiring, rigging, all the acquiring and fitting of equipment. They have transformed a gutted cinema into what is now proudly boasted as "the best equipped theatre outside London".²² Finding out about the building has been part of that process.

The transition from 'finding things out' to 'research' was never clear. Trudi would always tell me when some new name or fact had come to light in the excited manner of someone having found a missing part to a favourite game in a jumble sale. As the theatre became better known, local people would come in and tell what they knew.

They told stories of ghosts, secret tunnels leading to the municipal toilets and a whole other auditorium buried

²² Danny Robertson, Personal interview. 23 May 2002.

under the first, as well as more pragmatic descriptions of people and events. The team's genuine interest in the building, the area and the stories of people who come in has played a big part in the success of the project. Visitors are welcomed and shown around, and audiences continue to grow.

The history of the building has never been written about. All research is being done on the ground, from primary evidence and local knowledge. Trudi and Danny found the original plans in the local studies library and searched microfilm of old newspapers and minutes of council meetings for any mention of the New Empire. Trudi wrote to the Magicians' Circle for information on 'The Great Rameses' - an illusionist whose name and picture they found on an old ticket. Trudi's mother, Ann Couldridge, archived all the papers found in the walls.

Trudi began to use the word 'research' gradually as more and more things were found out *on purpose*. Trudi's research has been mainly focussed on one man - Mr. Frederick Marlow. She takes great delight in discovering personal details and curiosities.

Marlow was born in 1852 into a population hungry for new and spectacular things in every field, be it science,

art, engineering or entertainment. Isambard Kingdom Brunel was designing massive bridges and boats, Charles Dickens was giving public readings from his works and in 1851 the Crystal Palace had been erected to house the Great Exhibition which showcased arts and industries from all over the flourishing British Empire. It was an age where anything was possible - innovation and ambition were encouraged and financed, as were those who crossed boundaries.

Marlow was truly a man of his time. An ambitious, successful entrepreneur, he built houses, ran pubs and "for over twenty years travelled all over England in connection with the performance of stage plays and for eight years had been the proprietor of [variety] theatre[s]".²³ He was "one of the first to employ and encourage the late Miss Marie Lloyd"²⁴.

While researching that period of theatre history, the New Empire's in-house company produced a very successful Variety show themselves - a direct link between research and practice.

²³ Southend Standard, (May 15th 1896) 6. From the personal research notes of Trudi Couldridge, 2002.

²⁴ Southend Standard, (Dec 24th 1925) 7. From the personal research notes of Trudi Couldridge, 2002. Marie Lloyd is a famous Variety star.

The team found echoes of their own methods and philosophy in Marlow - he has become something of a hero to them. He was keen to dirty his hands to see things done properly, just like the present team. Of Marlow it was written that it was the "energy of the enterprising proprietor ... who has personally supervised the whole of the work"²⁵ that enabled the building to be completed a week early.

From spending time in the theatre it is obvious that research is an integral part of the work. In a day they will do some building, cleaning, rigging, make things, design things, rehearse, read, visit the library and look at microfilms, put on a show. It is a life, a complete, holistic approach, based on total commitment. Danny says: "I shall probably be taking my last lighting cue as I take my last breath here as well."²⁶

Their attitude and work is a constant inspiration to me. Researching their building and work has affected my own practice in a variety of ways. They have been instrumental in shaping my instinct-led attitude to research and they have taught me how to use large amounts of technology in work without over-reliance or compromise. I have collaborated with Danny on a gallery

²⁵ Southend Standard, (Thurs May 28th 1896) [no page number supplied]. From the personal research notes of Trudi Couldridge, 2002.

²⁶ DannyRobertson, Personal interview. 23 May 2002.

project, and will continue to build on these relationships.

This particular dive also demonstrated the importance of coincidence in research.

During the early stages of the research Trudi's father met a new client at work. His name: Roger Marlow. Ron casually asked if he was any relation to Frederick Marlow. Roger was his grandson. Ron invited him to come and look at the theatre. He did and was very impressed.

Then, in January 2002, the New Empire team were told they would have to move out as the building was to be sold to a nightclub company - a terrible blow after all the work and success.

Within a day of going public the theatre received tremendous support: visits, letters, petitions and donations. Audience figures went up overnight. The public wanted the New Empire to stay.

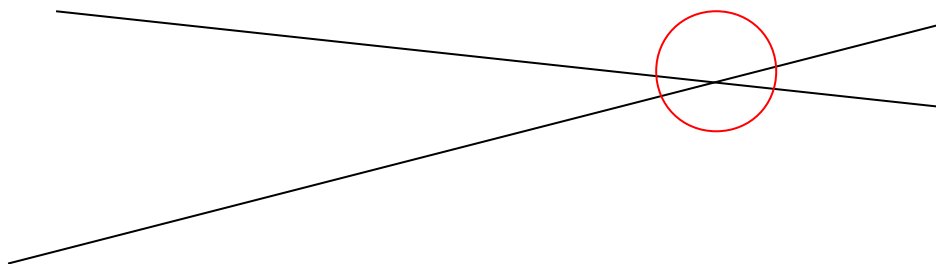
Ron contacted Roger Marlow in the hope that with his legal and business knowledge he might be able to offer advice. Straight away Roger began making telephone calls.

A trust fund - the Empire Theatre Fund - was formed and is in the process of raising one million pounds to buy the building. Once they own it, the fund will lease the building to the Robertsons. "By a curious chain of events, Roger Marlow will end up owning his grandfather's theatre and we'll have a Marlow back on the books".²⁷

Coincidences like this are typical of the New Empire. Research has also shown that the first recorded owner of the land on which the New Empire is built was named Alexander ... Robertson.

vii. Coincidence.

Coincidence is the key to holistic research. When you look beyond the 'spooky' implications (which are also relevant, adding to the sense of wonder) of the word you find the scientific definition. In science, a coincidence is simply a meeting of two lines, like this.



²⁷Trudi Couldridge, Personal interview. 24 May 2002.

The point of co-incidence is here

The more I find out about the world, the more I become aware of the links and relationships between seemingly separate things. For example, parallel to this research project I have been writing a play about Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, war and the arts (which describes my reading list for this project pretty well). During my dive in Southend, Trudi drove me along the seafront. We passed a pub called the 'Minerva'. I asked if we could stop for a drink there. Trudi looked at me strangely and asked why. It turned out that the pub had been run by Frederick Marlow.

viii. Home Education and "The Glorious Generalist".

After talking to my mother about this aspect of the project, she suggested I read *The Teenage Liberation Handbook: How to quit school and get a real life and education* by Grace Llewellyn.

I am school educated but my younger brother has been home educated since he was ten. He is now seventeen. He no longer considers learning as something separate from his work. He sets out to do something and learns what he needs to make it happen, and other things on the way.

Work is also no longer separate from life. Llewellyn recommends: "Pay attention to the details of your own life, such as what you eat, how you speak to your friends, how you walk down the street. The better you understand yourself, the better you understand everything else."²⁸ Von Clausewitz also recommends such an attitude: "an intellectual instinct which extracts the essence from the phenomena of life, as a bee sucks honey from a flower. In addition to study and reflection, life itself serves as a source."²⁹

Llewellyn's book advocates crossing boundaries: "Be prepared, while you are reading Blake's poetry, to come up with a physics question you want answered ... Ultimately, education is about connecting with the universe, making our place in it. The more we connect, the bigger our lives and dreams."³⁰ She holds up the ideal of "The Glorious Generalist [who] sees the world whole".³¹

²⁸ Grace Llewellyn, The Teenage Liberation Handbook: How to Quit School and Get a Real Life and Education (Dorset: Element Books Limited, 1997) 174.

²⁹ Von Clausewitz 160.

³⁰ Llewellyn 174.

³¹ Llewellyn 170.

ix. Live Art: Asking questions.

Theatre would do well to look at how Live Art deals with research. Art schools encourage questioning attitudes, and the Arts Council's Collaborative Arts Unit is pouring money into projects that link arts and science - Blast Theory's Desert Rain project is a brilliant example of this.³²

Artists are questioning ideas of research as art. Barbara Steveni, for example, presents herself as a 'living archive'.³³ Artefacts of her pioneering work setting up the Artists Placement Group, exploring relationships between art and business - even placing artists within government - and working with artists such as Joseph Beuys, John Latham and Fluxus³⁴, as well as her own artworks, are toured to art institutions worldwide in her memory and a large wooden crate. She attends conferences and seminars, and her experience and opinions contribute to the work of a new generation of artists such as Anna Best, Nina Pope, Ella Gibbs and Karen Guthrie, all of whom were delegates of Anna Best's *Team Build* seminar at

³² See <<http://www.artscouncil.org>>.

³³ Barbara Steveni, Personal interview. 25 May 2002.

³⁴ Fluxus: general name coined in 1961 for an art 'movement' including work by George Macunias, Yoko Ono and La Monte Young.

the Baltic Gallery in Newcastle, which is where I first met Barbara.³⁵

At this event there were many discussions about the part of research in live art. Was the event itself art? Research? Business?

Team Build was a part of a 'Year Of The Artist National Media Residency' hosted by [a-n] magazine. In the same issue of the magazine that covered Anna Best's residency (Sept. 2001), there was an article on Moscow-based artist Anatoly Osmolovsky and his work "constantly balancing action and theory, working between the two to create meaningful interventions".³⁶

Osmolovsky makes and seeks out what he calls "actual art". He says: "In order to become actual, art must ... find ways into the real world - the world of politics, show business, music, analytical practices, medicine and so on. By this I don't mean that art should submit to all those forms of activities. I'm talking about their mutual transgression."³⁷

³⁵ Anna Best, Nina Pope, Ella Gibbs and Karen Guthrie. Live artists.

³⁶ Kate Fowle, "Action and Theory." [a-n] magazine for artists September 2001: 36-37.

³⁷ Anatoly Osmolovsky, quoted in: Kate Fowle, "Action and Theory." [a-n] magazine for artists September 2001: 36-37.

x. The Eden Project: New languages, curiosity and wonder.

One project gloriously guilty of such 'mutual transgression' is the Eden Project in Cornwall.



The Eden Project
viewed from the Visitors' Centre

Eden's publicity material proudly proclaims it as "a Living Theatre of plants and people".³⁸ The site is a disused china clay pit now boasting "two decent greenhouses" (the humid tropic biome is "11 double-decker buses in height and 24 buses in length") and over 135,000

³⁸ Eden Project: The Guide (UK: Eden Project Books, 2001) 5.

plants, as well as cafes, shops, a lake, an amphitheatre and a growing environment of artwork.³⁹

The brainchild of ex music-producer and current large-scale gardener Tim Smit, the Eden Project's mission statement is:

*"To Promote the understanding and responsible management of the vital relationship between plants, people and resources, leading to a sustainable future for all."*⁴⁰

To achieve this, the Project has "brought together scientists, artists and technologists to create a distinctive culture, one that makes the possibilities of the future come to life in a way that we can all comprehend".⁴¹

At Eden, it is artists not designers who "tell the stories".⁴² Sue Hill, the Project's Artistic Director, was at the beginning the only member of the team from the "left bank art/theatre culture - the subsidised sector".⁴³

³⁹ Scryfa Group, "Facts from the pit." Eden Project: The Guide (UK: Eden Project Books, 2001) 7.

⁴⁰ Eden Project: The Guide (UK: Eden Project Books, 2001) flyleaf.

⁴¹ Tim Smit, "Dear friends." Eden Project: The Guide. UK: Eden Project Books, 2001. (Page 1).

⁴² Sue Hill, Personal interview. 10 April 2002.

⁴³ Hill.

Her peers included Peter Hampell (commercial design and advertising) and David Minnear (Marketing director).⁴⁴

For Sue, working within the framework of marketing was "simultaneously the most exciting and frustrating thing". Why exciting? "having to learn new languages."⁴⁵

Learning new languages seems to be the key to Eden's "distinctive culture". Eden has a collegiate structure, a series of individual teams: Green, Science, Marketing, Operations, Education, Interpretation and The Arts. "Each constituency has its own internal, tribal practices and languages you have to learn because you can't do anything here without involving at least one of these other faculties".⁴⁶ Research is part of everyday life, indistinguishable from the other essential elements. Sometimes it is intentional to solve a problem, at other times it simply results from proximity.

Sue condemns the "narrow band" of the theatre practice she left behind in London, where everyone works and socialises within their particular kind of theatre.⁴⁷ At

⁴⁴ Peter Hampell and David Minnear also make television adverts, including those for Direct Line Insurance.

⁴⁵ Hill.

⁴⁶ Hill.

⁴⁷ Hill.

Eden you can "work with and meet the people who drive the land train, the paramedics - the whole world."⁴⁸

Artists here are a fully functioning and useful part of society - one of the desires of Anna Best, Anatoly Osmolovsky and Barbara Steveni. Practically, the Eden project has commissioned more artists in the last two years than the Tate Gallery, and put more money into the Cornish arts economy than South West Arts.⁴⁹ Plus, the Arts commissions are paid for by core funds - that is "money coming through the gate".⁵⁰

Ideologically, the artists, and Sue in particular, are responsible for developing the "tone of voice" of the Project, which is curious and non-assertive: "To say 'the world is interesting and you can have an effect on it' is the most powerful thing you can do".⁵¹

They are encouraging people to look at the world, to do their own research. It is a methodology based on experience: "We are trying to make an environment which excites people's curiosity and inspires awe and wonder".⁵²

⁴⁸ Hill.

⁴⁹ Hill.

⁵⁰ Hill.

⁵¹ Hill.

⁵² Hill.

xi. New technologies: Experience, empowerment and responsibility.

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This experiential learning is popular at the moment. As Andy Lavender⁵³ commented at the *RE:Visions seminar on the creative application of new media in live performance* (at which Sue Hill was also a delegate), the traditional pyramidal structures are being dissolved.

Technology offers us instant, first hand experiences of a variety and speed never offered before. Screens and speakers bring visual and audio experiences into our homes, and 'hands on' interactive exhibits are de rigueur in museums.

The internet is allowing opinions to be shared worldwide. AS Llewellyn writes: "The magic of the Net has to do with its lack of hierarchy and with empowerment. Anyone can use it both to learn directly from experts and to share their own expertise".⁵⁴

Being indiscriminate of the 'respectability' of sources, the internet is ideally suited to holistic research. A search engine will display the opinions of respected

⁵³ Andy Lavender: Head of Postgraduate Studies at the Central School of Speech and Drama. Also artistic director of the performance company, Lightwork.

⁵⁴ Llewellyn 166.

historians, children, fanatics and advertisers without making value judgements. It is our responsibility to find our own connections and form our own opinions. We are encouraged to question, to be curious, to search further and deeper, to explore diverse roads to our goals.

xii. Wonder, entertainment, intrigue, adventure, foolhardiness: The human factor.

The internet is reminiscent of the freak shows, variety acts and travelling 'museums' of Fred Marlow's time. Quacks and frauds share the stage with genuine medical and scientific curiosities. Intentions are blurred - education, entertainment, profit, wonder.

Beebe understood the importance of wonder and entertainment. During his first explorations underwater in his home-made diving helmet, he invited others to join him in the "society of wonders", exploring this "glorious realm of life and colour".⁵⁵

Later, he and Barton published the findings of his Bathysphere dives in a series of popular adventure books which were ridiculed by his contemporaries - John T. Nicols, a curator at the American Museum of Natural History saw them as belonging on the fiction shelf because they were written in "dramatic fashion rather than meticulous".⁵⁶ But these books inspired generations

⁵⁵ William Beebe, "A Wonderer Under Sea." National Geographic Magazine, Dec. 1932. Quoted at <<http://members.aol.com/chines6930/mw1/sphere.htm>>.

⁵⁶ John T. Nicols, Natural Man, page 139. Quoted at <<http://members.aol.com/chines6930/mw1/sphere.htm>>.

of scientists such as oceanographers Rachel Carson and Sylvia Earle.

Atmospheric scientist Vincent J. Schaeffer is quoted in the *Teenage Liberation Handbook*:

"You have to have a sense of wonder and be aware of everything that goes on. You have to develop what I call 'intelligent eyes' - be intrigued with the world and everything in it".⁵⁷

It is this sense of wonder and intrigue that has guided me through this project, and continues to guide me now. I have been led by my instinct. Von Clausewitz advocated study that "[took] the human factor into account, [finding] room for courage, boldness, even foolhardiness".⁵⁸

xiv. Conclusions: Project thinking, audiences and shipwrecks.

⁵⁷ Vincent J. Schaeffer, quoted in: Grace Llewellyn, *The Teenage Liberation Handbook: How to Quit School and Get a Real Life and Education*. (Dorset: Element Books Limited, 1997.) 181.

⁵⁸ Von Clausewitz 97.

Research is essential to theatre practice today.

Project-based research is immediately useful in creating work with greater integrity and depth.

Holistic research is more time-consuming, but as it affects methods of working as well as the work, it is truly useful. Researching non-theatre patterns from live-art documentation practice to how deep-sea fish adapt to their environment has given me new ways of solving problems within my own practice. Barbara Steveni's placement of artists in government and the sharing of languages within the Eden Project - notably self-funding - show that the effects can even reach beyond what is thought of as theatre or art practice. As the song goes: "You'll never know what your house is like until you take a walk outside".⁵⁹

We should not be afraid of emotion or personal detail in research as it is these things that inspire. If research does not inspire, it is in my opinion not useful.

Holistic research should be led by a sense of wonder. It should not be the means to an end, but a continuous and self-perpetuating process.

⁵⁹ Jools Holland, Architectural Number. (The Best of Jools Holland, Coalition Recordings International, 1998).

It is interesting that Carl Von Clausewitz died before he ever considered his work 'finished'. It was his wife, Marie, who assembled from his manuscripts what we now read printed and bound.

My research has set up a web of paths and it is up to me to follow them further and reach the co-incidences between them, co-incidences that cannot be truly expressed in one work. Osmolovsky writes:

*"An actual artist is ... characterised by 'project thinking'. The author does not consider the art to be a sequence of independent art works but one single project incorporating various works (his or her own and other artists'), documentation and so on. Project thinking is an attempt to think of art as a process."*⁶⁰

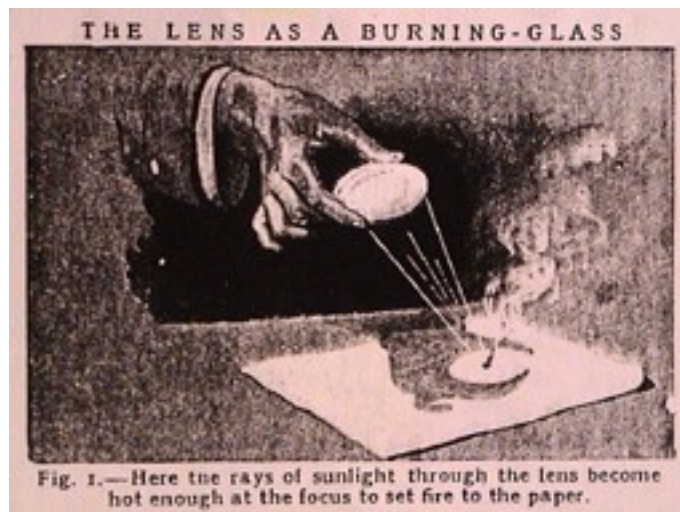
Osmolovsky makes the distinction between 'works' and 'and so on' even within the idea of the 'single project'. It is a subtle distinction also voiced by Forced Entertainment: "Everything is research and development, but we have a specific time for making the piece".⁶¹ Here

⁶⁰ Anatoly Osmolovsky, quoted in: Kate Fowle, "Action and Theory." [a-n] magazine for artists September 2001: 36-37.

⁶¹ Cathy Naden: Forced Entertainment. Personal conversation after "The Travels", Gardener Arts Centre, 14th Nov. 2002.

we see practice becoming part of research and development.

Within this distinction lies the clue to the one thing distinguishing research from practice: the audience. In theatre, the audience for the work and the audience for the research are fundamentally different. We make the research to make the work for the audience, who are not necessarily makers themselves; who have no obligation to engage any further than the work. However, well-researched work often resonates with a power, depth and integrity - like sunlight focused through a lens - that audiences instinctively respond to.



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One work is like the fragment of a shipwreck caught in the beam of a divers torch - a fireplace, a cannon, a rusted porthole. It is a beautiful and complete picture on its own, but the knowledge that just outside that beam

⁶² This picture has been tacked to my pin-board for years. I would love to know where it came from.

of light lies the rest of the wreck adds resonance to what you are seeing. That wreck may be the *Titanic* or it may be a fishing boat. It may even be part of a fleet.

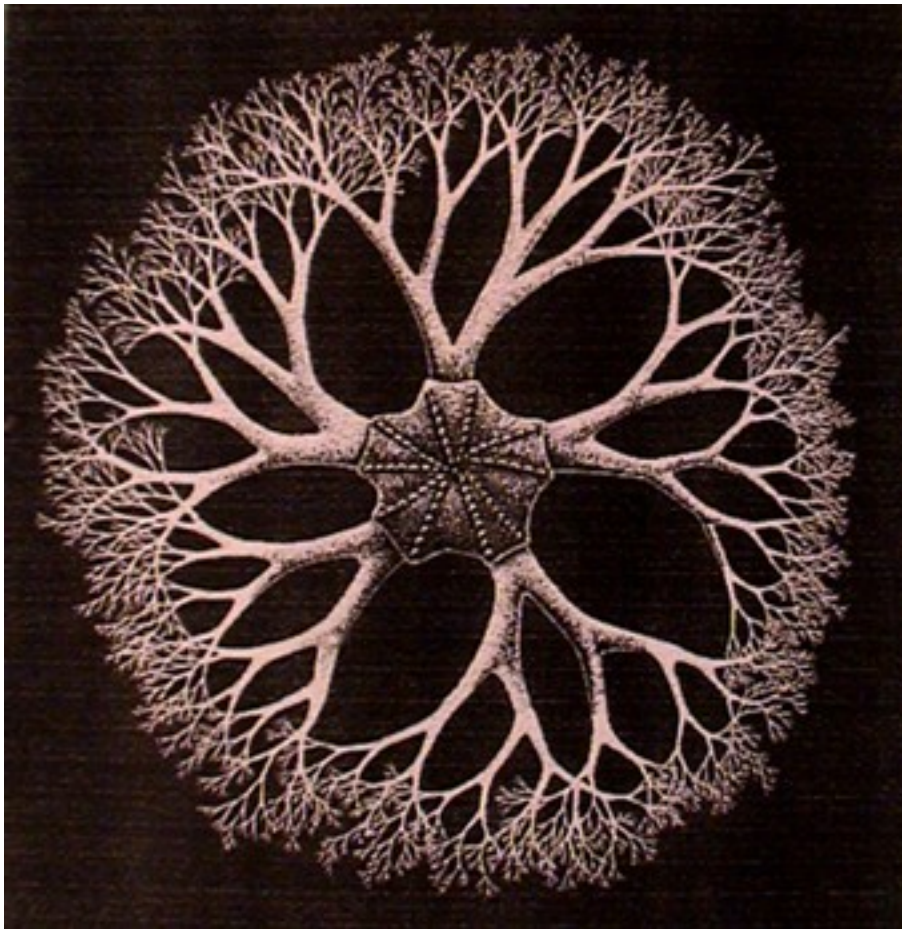
And beyond the wreck is the ocean.

It is our job as artists to point the flashlight at the wreck. To do so accurately - and while doing so - we must explore and question ourselves and the world around us.

Wonder *noun* **1** a feeling of surprise mixed with admiration, curiosity, or bewilderment. **2** something that arouses this; a remarkable thing. *Verb* **1** feel wonder or surprise: *I wonder that he wasn't killed.* **2** feel curiosity about; try to form an opinion or decision about; *we're still wondering what to do next.* **Do or work wonders** produce remarkably successful results.⁶³

⁶³ Oxford Paperback Dictionary: Fourth Edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 925.

Appendix I:
Holistic Researchers' Role-Model
The Basket Starfish



Looking like an artist's conception of the tree of life, the **basket starfish** *Gorgonocephalus arcticus* is found from the Arctic to Cape Cod at depths reaching 4,000 feet. It belongs to the family *Gorgonocephalidae* ("Gorgon-headed"), which is named after the snake-haired sisters of Greek mythology. Reaching some 20 inches across, the basket star snags plankton in its canopy of branching arms and ushers them to its mouth on the underside of the center disk.

<<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/abyss/life/bestiary.html>>

Appendix II: Dream of Minerva.

Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, appeared to me in a dream in a cave by the ocean. In the cave she had a museum.

Minerva was wearing a pleated skirt. Without speaking she showed me the pleats in detail - how each pleat is made up of so many surfaces joining and overlapping, coinciding in the same space. How the whole skirt was made up of one piece of fabric, but it was difficult to tell because of the pleats what was inside and what was outside. How that piece of fabric was woven out of thread which had in turn come from sheep or plants or chemicals or a combination of all three. How those sheep and plants and chemicals had been born or grown or made from other things and all this expressed not just in the skirt, but in the act of showing me the skirt.

Appendix III.

"That piece is full of interest.

It have wondered the spectators.

The curtains let down.

Go out us."

Pedro Carolino, New Guide of Conversation in Portuguese and English, 1883.

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