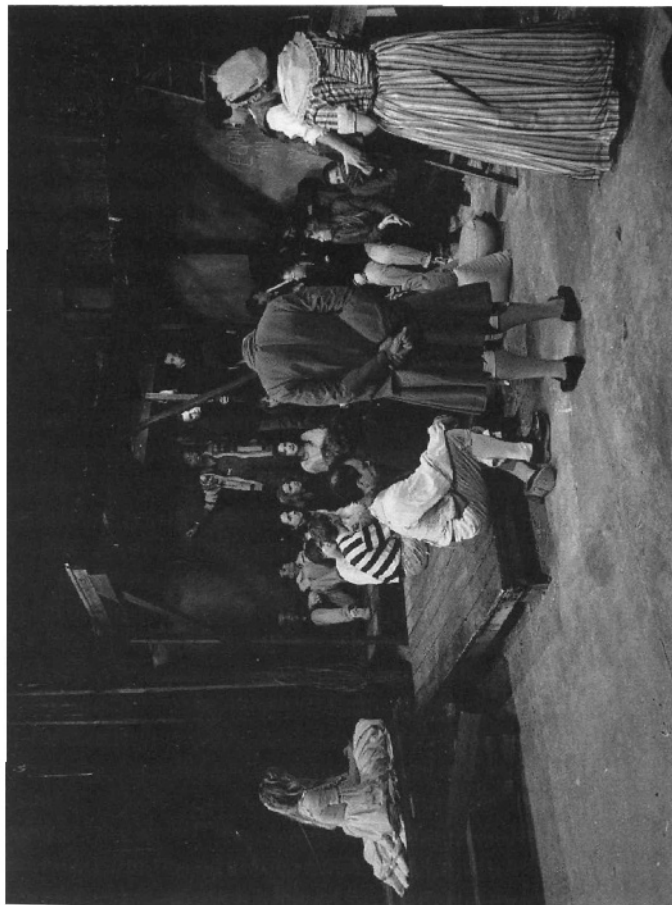


free?’ and ‘Why does freedom mean different things to different people?’ In discussing freedom, the young people decide that the most important freedom is to be able to do what you want. The still picture work has been developed to look at more alternative ways of improving the situation. The first image, of a man with his hands tied guarded by two others, is now contextualised as South Africa. The actor-teachers probe whether violence is the only means of settling the problem, and a role-play situation that includes new characters is acted out. A constant problem for the actor-teacher who facilitates the participation is to avoid asking the pupils closed questions or promoting a predetermined structure. The danger becomes imminent when there are no responses or answers forthcoming from the group. The main time is dedicated to the first image, with some discussion of the second picture about the woman, baby and saucepan. Freedom in this instance is paid help!

The difference at the start of the play is in the monologues by the four characters, which are clearer and more informative for the audience. We are able to identify with them more easily. The Jacobin now brings grain to be milled into flour from Paris, and informs the villagers that someone is storing grain that should be sent to Paris. There are minor changes in the script and slow gaps between scenes. Charlotte suggests that the mill should be communal, that ‘everyone would have an equal share’, with villagers helping to improve it. We are more aware that the Jacobin’s job is in conflict with his personal feelings and relationships. The script seems more detailed in clarifying both characters and situation.

The questioning by the actor-teacher in the afternoon is more specific to the characters. What were their ambitions, desires, or objectives in the play? Charlotte is the character they would trust most, and yet the Jacobin is the person they would want to lead them in the revolution. Before the role-play drama begins, the audience are shown a short scene with the husband of the hanged villager. In the secret meeting at the Bakery, the group agrees rules, which include taking over the mill and providing equal food for everyone, and trying people that steal grain in the People’s Court. Decisions are structured into the meeting through voting, and writing them on a blackboard. Joint leadership of Charlotte and one pupil is



12 Schoolchildren and Carole Lythgoe, Anthony Burbage, Lloyd Notice, Robbie McGovan, and Vivien Harris in 'The Edge of Reason': Greenwich Young People's Theatre, 1989-90. (Photo: John Daniell.)

agreed, as well as a series of demands to present to the Jacobin. When requested to give all the grain back to the soldiers, the pupils discuss the possibilities in four groups. On knowing that Charlotte has been arrested for the counter-revolutionary activity of calling a secret meeting, the immediate response is to hide the grain and capture Charlotte. A kind of 'Forum Theatre' results where pupils try out their suggestions; for example, a villager attempts a reasoned argument with the Jacobin, in order to examine the central, underlying question of whether it is better to obey the leadership (and save France), or whether to think first of the villagers themselves. The Jacobin asks the young people if the English were invading, would they keep the grain as villagers or give it to the soldiers fighting for them? The participation is clearer and more concrete, yet the villagers are still faced with complex decisions related to themselves as a group, the grain, and Charlotte's position or predicament.

## FUNCTION

Devising a participatory theatre-in-education programme for young people raises a general question about the purpose of making or creating a theatrical experience for any specified group or targeted audience. How and why does devising a participatory programme about the French Revolution make a different educational impact on secondary pupils than merely staging a play about it for schools? The simplest answer has to be that the programme has been devised for young people, and asks them to participate in a sharing, learning process of discovery with the actor-teachers. The programme enables the pupils to question what they see, to challenge what they are told, to look at the contradictions of a concept, and to creatively 'role play' a situation.

The audience is empowered to make decisions, to choose a course of action, to listen to various points of view, and to elect a way forward for themselves. Watching the single vision of a playwright's play about the French Revolution in isolation does not provide the learning experience gained from the participatory theatre-in-education programme. The pupils engage with the actor-teachers in a different way to being passive spectators of a play, or to their everyday pupil-teacher relationship in a classroom. The participatory nature of the

programme provides an alternative educational and artistic experience, which encourages active learning, questions beliefs, and offers many possibilities of changing pre-conceived ideas or thinking. Such is the value and power of this particular form of devised theatre, as opposed to the performed play script where the audience watches, is told, and then goes away.

The devised participatory theatre-in-education programme allows young people the opportunity to explore and experience concepts, to socially rehearse their ideas, thoughts, or beliefs within an open-ended structure of learning. Each group of participants contributes and receives a unique knowledge from the programme, which is different for every visiting school. The targeted audience (the fourth-year secondary school pupils), have been part of both process and product, in the sense that the theatre-in-education team has devised for, from, and with them. It is vital to 'workshop' ideas with pupils in order to gain feedback from the intended audience while devising; it is integral to the learning process that young people 'hot seat' characters, 'role play' a difficult situation, or actively join in during the programme.

The team has constantly referred to agreed artistic and educational objectives throughout the devising process, addressing and re-assessing the purpose and function of making such a programme. Devising a participatory theatre-in-education programme is a decision to give young people time and space to express, exchange, and change their views or opinions generally. The power and value of this form of devised theatre cannot be overstated; it is yet another way of understanding the world we live in, and ourselves. Theatre-in-education has always been marginalised in terms of the dominant British literary theatre tradition, yet it offers young people the chance to enrich their social and cultural experience of contemporary life in Britain. In the 1990s it is needed even more now that Drama is not included in the National Curriculum, and there is even less potential for this kind of educational and artistic work. There is much uncertainty, change, and confusion as we move towards the twenty-first century, highlighting the need to continue opportunities to devise participatory theatre-in-education programmes for young people.

# SPACE

## Site-specific theatre

A devised show sets sail without quite knowing where it will land. For this reason it feels quite risky but it can produce surprises and respond to possibilities unrestricted by fixed narrative.

(Collective statement of IOU Theatre)

I have argued that devised theatre may start from any number of possible sources or stimuli, be they oral reminiscences, text, image, music, concept, or an audience. In the case of site-specific devised theatre, it is the location itself that provides the potential structure, form, content, and participants for the piece. A residency is defined by a company being resident in a particular place, and creating a show specifically for that site. For some professional companies this is only one aspect of their overall work, whilst for others it is integral to their continuous development in exploring and experimenting with alternative ways of making theatre.

What is common to all companies involved in devising theatre from a specific site, is the desire to make or create a product from a particular environment, using their particular skills or work practices as appropriate. There are often strong elements of the visual, the physical, and the performance. There may also be the notion of an event, a celebration, or a spectacular occasion, which will vary and be determined by every individual company, the special circumstances of the residency, and available funding. Site-specific devised theatre can include local involvement from a range of participants, and be classed as community theatre in one sense, or, in contrast, may consist of company members only working towards an installation or piece of performance art.

In order to illustrate the spectrum of site-specific work, I want to take IOU Theatre as one example of the detailed, performance art area of devised theatre, and compare it to the large-scale events with communities created by Major Road Theatre Company. Both companies have a visual and musical emphasis, working collaboratively towards indoor or outdoor shows. Somewhere in between are examples from Fork-beard Fantasy and Lumiere & Son, as illustrated in the comic art of visual, sculptural constructions outdoors, or in the performance pieces devised in or out of the locations of Kew Gardens, Nottingham Castle, or the Penzance swimming pool.

### THE NON-THEATRICAL SPACE

The current policy of IOU is:

To invent and develop a rich form of theatre where music, imagery and words can combine with equal status. To present the work in a wide range of venues, indoor and outdoor touring shows being balanced with site specific productions. IOU's work is characterised by vivid images, distinctive sets and original music with an emphasis on atmosphere rather than plot.<sup>1</sup>

Since 1976 this company has prioritised devising work for landscapes and buildings not normally used as theatre venues, with the aim of reaching a wider cross-section of the public rather than a conventional theatre-going audience. Some of IOU's most memorable productions grew out of residencies in specially chosen locations, where the building or landscape influenced and shaped the show. It is the environment that inspires and stimulates the company's creative process, which is of prime importance when devising for a specific site. The company suggests that, 'the physical characteristics of the space condition the narrative, structurally and in content.'<sup>2</sup> It is the setting that generates and determines ideas for a show, which in IOU terms means building in to the place that they will be performing in. This company has devised shows in a variety of places, including disused houses, beaches, cathedrals, woods, castles, rooftops, mills, and others.

Residencies have enabled the company to create per-

formances for a specific location, either indoor or outdoor, over a period of weeks on a site. Sometimes ambitious in scale, pieces have exploited particular environmental characteristics, producing a unique kind of devised theatre. One such example was 'The House', which was originally commissioned by Chapter Arts Centre in Cardiff; a second version was produced and performed in June 1982 for the Almeida Festival in London. An undertaker's derelict three-storey house and garden provided the setting for the London production. The company landscaped the garden, built outhouses and rooftop platforms, and constructed rooms inside the house to produce a show which used both indoor and outdoor space at the same time. The occupants of the house were observed in detail through the windows, with their everyday lives being interrupted by extraordinary visitations, including an angel descending from the rooftop down a sixty-foot ladder, giant bees crashing a stolen car into the bushes, and an aviator, who circled the rooftops and climbed out on to the wing of his aircraft to deliver a parcel of fire.

In an article, 'Back to the Garden', Meira Eilash described this piece as

a structure of collage or assemblage, in which an overall framework is given to a collection of elements, not necessarily connected to each other in a logical, informative manner, but creating in total an effect of perceptible, visual information; always rich and stimulating on the imagery level, sometimes one of conceptual accumulation, as well.<sup>3</sup>

'The House' demanded weeks of preparation and intensive work from a strong, artistic team. The diversity of work (administrative, technical, artistic, and practical construction) required a large amount of organisation at all stages of the devising process. Performance ideas were developed through discussions, from individuals' own work, from music, and from made objects for the site. Examples of objects or props were: the conversion of a lawnmower into a police motorcycle; the adaptation of a scrap car for the 'Bees' sequence; and the building of a twenty-five-foot aircraft and mounting it on to a revolving hydraulic access crane. The final shaping and editing

of the show occurred as late as possible. Once an order of main scenes was decided, linking or bridging scenes were devised and rehearsed. The fine tuning of all the performance elements did not happen until the dress rehearsal stage and run of performances.

When devising a show, the creativity of the performers is given as much scope as is physically and practically possible. A structure is needed in order to proceed, so core members of the company invent an initial framework that allows exploration of images and themes. Members of the company believe that it is important to get an overall shape, albeit perceived through a fog: 'images, themes, action, music and words have to keep being knitted, unpicked, and re-knitted.' It is necessary to be open-ended at every stage so that detail may surprise and contradict rather than be imposed in advance. It is this balance between improvisation and structure that is absolutely crucial for IOU, so that individual performers have the opportunity and freedom for exploring possibilities, as well as the chance to develop the various elements of the created world into a final product. This way of working demands space for spontaneity in the process, and also relies on particular individuals in the core group pursuing their own artistic preoccupations. Originally, IOU's work was motivated by a desire to develop alternatives to the gallery system, wanting to explore different ways of looking at paintings or sculpture, and how these could be combined with music. Theatre was the most appropriate medium for this group of artists, who were from a fine art or classical music background rather than performance.

### **Company structure**

From 1976 to 1987, there was no overall director and it was the contradiction of individuals' ideas, pooled and shaped by each other, that created an energy that made IOU's work so particular. As a collective of six artists or so, and two administrators, they worked in collaboration as a tightly-knit group, seeing the work through all stages with no one person in charge. Core members tended to have roles that took account of their skills in relation to devising or making, such as songs, costumes, machines, poems, technical, music, and lighting



design. Now, in the 1990s, the company has a more hierarchical structure. A director is often appointed for a show, with individual members taking responsibility for specific aspects of the project. For IOU, devising is about the combining of different people's ideas and talents into a complete show. It is during the process that these ideas define themselves against each other and 'a pattern emerges'.

Music is a foundation of any IOU created world, composed and performed live by musicians in the company, forming an equal strand with the action rather than simply having an illustrative function. The way that music, artefacts, props, costumes, and images are pieced together, as well as the way scenes move from one to another, is very particular to this company's work:

IOU shows are pieced together in a very filmic way. Scenes are edited together, cut together abruptly or slid one into another. The music holds this non-narrative sequence together, the juxtaposition of familiar and unfamiliar instruments and styles is an integral part of the shifting atmospheres.

Likewise words are only one thread in the weave or pattern of work, and stories or meanings are never conveyed through speech or dialogue. In site-specific products the relationship of people to the material world observed is vital, with shows dipping in and referring to a wide range of ideas that have informed our culture. Meaning accumulates and surfaces through significant moments, images, insights, or the unusual and surprising connections that are one of the features of IOU's work.

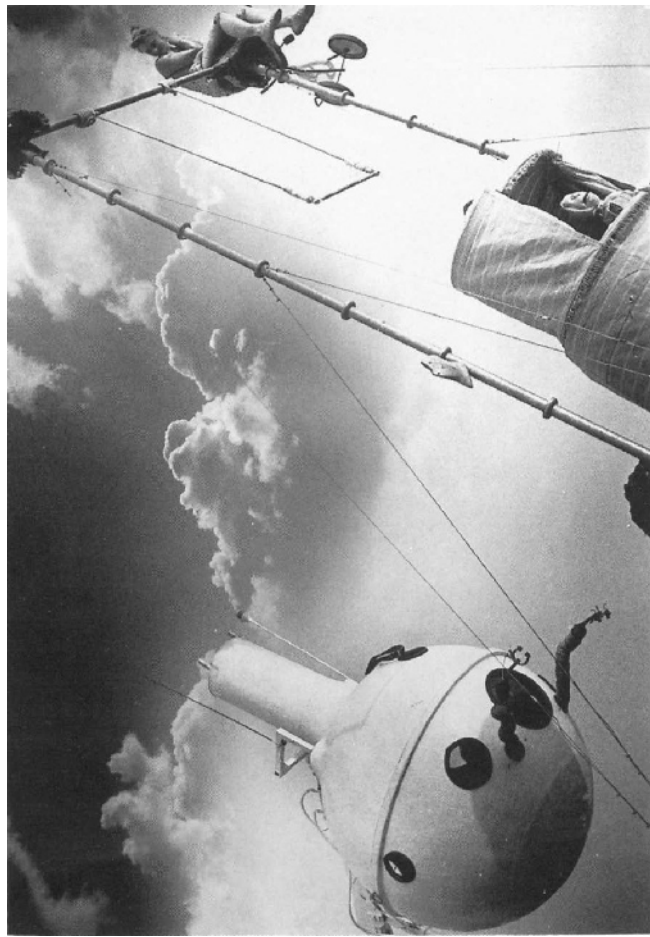
Within the context of devising site-specific shows, IOU is excited by making theatre that explores the possibilities of varying combinations of art forms, including poetry, music, dance, puppetry, painting, and sculpture or mechanical devices, working out of the site and with the interests of the individual artists. Inevitably, this means experimenting with ideas, images, construction and painting, with the knowledge that the making and doing will be constantly replaced by new attempts to find the most appropriate means of expression. More recently, the company has been open to influences outside the

core, working with other performers, which has brought a broader range of possibilities to the form of its pieces.

### Products

Two such examples are 'Just Add Water' (1989) and 'Full Tilt' (1990–91). The former was a large-scale outdoor touring piece that explored the beaches of Britain. The performance suggests a traditional beach-type show at the outset, and includes: a magician, dressed in a long, blue gown and matching hat that looks like a whipped ice-cream, performing conjuring tricks; a female trapeze artist costumed in a pale blue silky leotard with rosettes on the knees, who swings high above; and a Punch and Judy show played from inside a red and white, horizontally striped tower that rises from the circular platform supported by scaffolding and a ladder. Having gathered around the troupe with particular expectations, the audience's attention is then diverted to the arrival of a team of scientists in a curious, white vehicle that is exploring the beach. The front section is similar to a space capsule with round windows on wheels, the middle part is reminiscent of a fork-lift truck, and the last section resembles a cylinder below a balcony with a plastic, transparent tent at one end, white railings, and a ladder to the sand. The show's interest is in the collision of these two worlds (the interaction of the familiar with the unreal) in a mixture of humour, music, images, and contradictory meanings.

This was also the case with 'Full Tilt', which was devised as an outdoor summer touring show for parks, city centres, fêtes, and festivals. It is a visual spectacle, full of colourful costumes, lively music, objects, and extraordinary machines. There is no narrative or single meaning to this show, but the spectators receive an experience of changing images, moods, perceptions, and portrayals. Exciting, rhythmic music plays as an elaborate machine is driven around the space; two acrobats in skin-tight, yellow flecked outfits tumble across a centrally positioned white performance mat; a woman in a red farthingale skirt opens either side of her constructed costume to store various objects; and someone on a tricycle horse (wearing a corrugated iron neck-piece collar and yellow armour) wields a weapon in pursuit of a black bin.



13 Deborah Pope in 'Just Add Water'. IOU Theatre, 1989. (Photo: Sheila Burnett.)



14 Chris Squire in 'Full Tilt'. IOU Theatre, 1990-91. (Photo: *Evening Courier*, Halifax.)

SITE-SPECIFIC THEATRE  
**COMMUNITY EVENTS**

In direct contrast to the detailed performance work of IOU's site-specific products is the approach taken by Major Road Theatre Company when devising large-scale, site-specific spectacles or events with local communities. Major Road Theatre Company was formed in London in 1973 by Graham Devlin, and in 1978 moved to Bradford, West Yorkshire, where it is based now. There are four full-time staff, and the company operates as an employing management, so that individuals are taken on for specific pieces of work. Major Road concentrates on touring new or little-performed work at small or middle-scale venues, and on devising performances with community casts in a variety of informal settings. Over the last ten years, this company has developed a particular approach to devising and creating theatre events with and for local communities. A residency involves a team of Major Road artists devising a performance event with a community of local people. The team acts as facilitators for a group of participants for between two to six weeks in a selected, suitable venue (indoor or outdoor), with the ownership of the final product being determined by everyone involved.

Residency shows are usually site-specific and often ambitious in scale. There is a strong emphasis on collaboration between art forms, such as dance, music, or visual, enabling the team or participants to explore and experiment via the devising process. The starting point for a residency is often theme- or issue-based, and is relevant to the particular community involved, providing them with a focus and a voice. Themes for previous residencies have included the politics of disability, adolescent sexuality, global environmental issues, and adaptations of existing texts – for example, Coleridge's 'The Ancient Mariner'.

Devising is used as a technique in residency work, according to Devlin. If it is a large-scale event (that is, upwards of one hundred people), then a thematic or scenario framework is needed, particularly for the design and technical team. Major Road's devised work has changed in style over the years from being more issue-based and political in the 1970s to more visually and physically based work in the 1990s. Devlin suggests that the shift away from being a permanent ensemble, where a group shares an ideology and is much more involved in

the process or development of the work, is for artistic rather than economic reasons. Devlin admits that in today's climate 'the economics of keeping an ensemble company all year round would scare me rigid'.<sup>4</sup> Now, artists or performers are involved for thirteen weeks from start to finish.

The key characteristics of Major Road's site-specific work must be the breadth of scale, the physical and musical expression, and the involvement with the community. This is significantly different to the smaller, finely observed performance work of IOU, and marks out another approach which differs from the recent visual, celebratory, site-specific work of Welfare State International with the people of Barrow-in-Furness.<sup>5</sup> What is interesting is that both Major Road, a theatre company that has developed the visual side, and Welfare State International, a group of artists who use theatre, often employ the same freelance personnel on a regular basis for these projects.

## Process

The starting point for a Major Road site-specific project or residency is to identify a space to use and a community to work with. On the basis of these initial decisions, the company decides on a team for the project. Sometimes a writer is used, but more frequently a member of the team acts as dramaturge, mixing the scenario and improvisation together, says Devlin, 'in a freewheeling way as a response to the working process'. There are usually representatives from dance, music and design on the team, who will meet and determine a specific way of working together. This is the result of amalgamating and collaborating on a variety of approaches to devising site-specific work. Major Road has identified a pool of approximately thirty-five artists to choose from, and the intention is never to have more than two new people in a potential team of seven or eight members, as it is such an intense process of working.

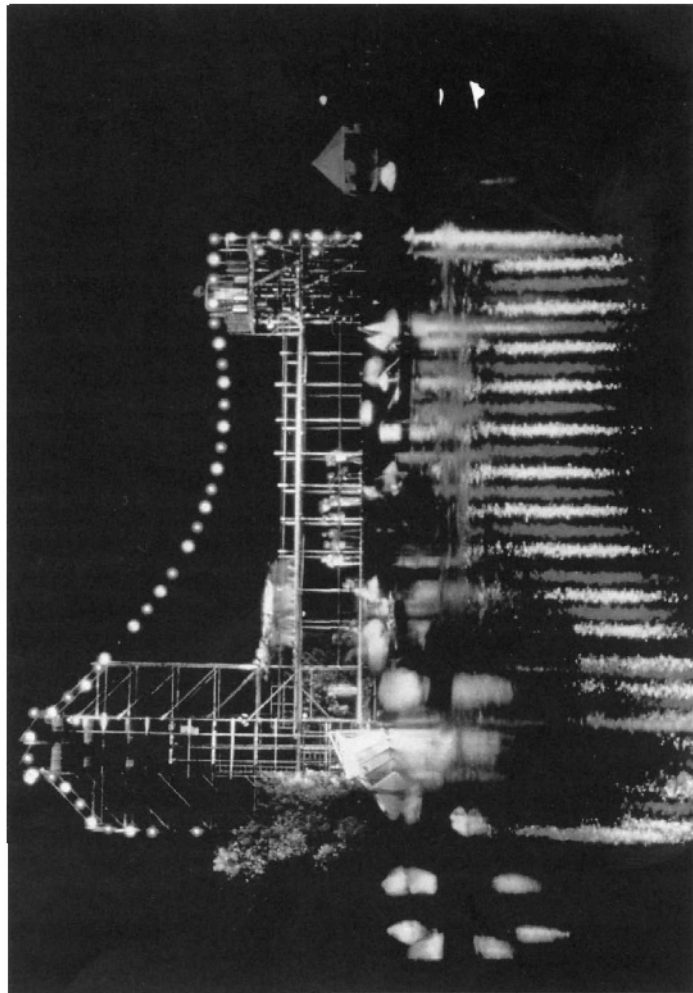
Examples of residencies using specific communities have included: 'A Drop in the Ocean', a highly visual performance piece devised with profoundly disabled students from Thomas Delarue School in Kent; 'Faces of Repression', devised with a local youth theatre and performed in a museum gallery; and

'The Lake Lake Lake Show', which was a large-scale outdoor spectacular that took place in, on, and over a lake in Basildon, Essex. In the case of 'The Lake Lake Lake Show', there was a team of eight from the company working with young people aged from fifteen to twenty-five (students and unemployed) for three weeks in the summer of 1986. The audience were asked to participate in the spectacle at Basildon's Gloucester Park, where, according to Victoria Neumark's review in *The Times Educational Supplement*, they enjoyed 'waterside processions, strongly executed dance routines on an elevated walk-way above the lake, and a stunning finale featuring fibre optics, daring dives into the lake and air, destruction of the set, and spectacular rockets.'<sup>6</sup>

Apart from the obvious necessity of good working relationships within the team, Devlin argues that there is a kind of known language within the group, which serves as a working reference to past pieces of work, offering a form of shorthand for describing a situation. This is not simply a verbal language, where the semi-visual term 'installation' has the Major Road implication or meaning of physical or sculptural objects that have a performance element to them, but an unspoken shared understanding of two people improvising 'on the floor' and then moving in a new direction without discussion. This means of communication offers huge flexibility to the team.

Preparation and planning are vital to any devised residency. In addition to working from a budget, and the practical or technical considerations of the site, it is important to look at how to motivate the participants in a comparatively short period of time. The average residency is three weeks, which necessitates knowing how to structure the time carefully. In the same way, evaluating and assessing the project is an important part of Major Road's policy for site-specific work. Every residency has de-briefing sessions with the participants, either in the form of an open forum or a questionnaire, with the professionals, and with the host or organisation. Out of these discussions, reports are written and submitted to the company.

Devlin believes that this particular area of devised theatre gives a voice to people, empowering them, and enables opportunities for creativity. Within Major Road's vision and structure for a piece, there is the flexibility for participants to



15 'The Lake Lake Show'. Major Road, Basildon, 1986. (Photo: Steve Whitson.)



become part of an arts process and product. Major Road is attempting to blend or use language and performance disciplines to create extraordinary events that are non-naturalistic. The appeal and importance of this strand of work for Devlin is the opportunity it provides for interaction with other artists, so that music or design may lead the devising process, which contrasts with the alternative strand of working from a script in a more structured way.

## Collaborative exploration

Devlin suggests that devising site-specific pieces or residencies provides a freedom to explore ideas or forms of theatre, where collaboration is the focus for that discovery. The residency work informs the touring work through ideas and personnel. The project director for a residency is usually a musician or visual artist, and experimentation with the set or design is strongly encouraged, as a scripted touring show will have far less room for manoeuvre. The residency enables design and performance to work together, so that a major idea can be tried out and then abandoned. There is no doubt that devising site-specific work and residencies has developed Major Road visually. The freedom for a variety of artists and makers to work collaboratively, particularly in the development of set design, has fed into their touring work, as evidenced by the inventive, visually exciting touring sets of 'Ideal Homes' by Alan Dix, or 'Divided Kingdoms' by Garry Lyons.

A visual emphasis is an important aspect of any site-specific piece, and this is particularly relevant in the case of Forkbeard Fantasy, a company from Devon that works from a strong visual base, devising comic theatre and film. Since 1974, Forkbeard's activities have included small-scale touring theatre shows, Forkbeard films, street and outdoor performance, walk-through installations, animated sculptures, gallery events, and festival commissions. Company member Tim Britton points out, 'SETS: sets PERFORM in our shows. They are as important as the performers as performers!'<sup>17</sup> The three members of the company are all visually orientated, love making things, and are excited by the invention or trickery of props, set, and sculptural objects. None of them is drama trained, two having

studied English literature at college, and the third coming from an art background. They are all involved in the devising process, from original ideas or images through design and construction, to lighting, sound, and the day-to-day running of the company. They have a 'filmic' attitude to their shows, always interested in the potential of integrating film and live performance. Britton recounts this process:

We piece it together bit by bit – from already firm ideas or images, to new stuff that emerges through the process. The overall show is seen in musical terms really, although we are not musicians. It's a combination of the way music might be put together and the way a film script is put together.

### **Integrating film and live performance**

Forkbeard Fantasy is the only British company devising theatre that works with film in the particular way described by Britton:

directly interacting with it, climbing in and out of it, passing things back and forward, using it not as a back-drop or effect but as an extension of the *place*, of the set. The interactive approach is a fairly unique trademark.

This company is certainly unique in its whole style and approach to devised theatre, usually working with film or visual, sculptural construction in which the participants are as extensions of, or operators of the construction. The company wants to encourage people to discover ways of interacting with working, moving, sculptures. Within a residency, a group works together with Forkbeard Fantasy on an equal footing, with members of the company acting as catalysts to participants, nudging them in directions or discouraging them when their own experience indicates a particular line of enquiry will not work. The company is not afraid of wanting to entertain people, and frequently works with schools, colleges, and the disabled outside of their own devised shows. It is important for them to involve their audience as part of the show, whether as visitors from an institution, film-types, archaeologists, or in other roles.



16 'Headquarters'. Forkbeard Fantasy, 1983. (Photo: Penny Saunders.)

### Approach to residencies

The form of theatre varies enormously from residency to residency, ranging from a two-day workshop that puts on an exhibition to a longer one that starts with an environment concept and results in a show. Clearly there are restrictions of scale, but there is always a theme, for example, 'industrial nightmares', 'insect struggles', or 'slaves to the machine', and certain types of materials are always provided. The company loves invention, as well as using cheap or junk materials. One example of a site-specific residency piece was 'The Corridor of Doors', where a whole Arts Centre (The Hornpipe in Portsmouth, 1986) was 'animated' by Forkbeard Fantasy, turning it into a corridor of doors. The participants were made up of art college students studying environment or architectural design, fourth-year secondary school pupils, and disabled groups, all working together. From the pupils' designs, the art students built and constructed an environment full of animated insects, objects, gadgets, and devices that all worked, whether by pulley system or by pressing knobs. Each individual or group was in a room with a door, and the audience watched as voyeurs by peeping through keyholes or opening doors on the events or actions within each room.

An alternative residency at The Albany Centre in Bristol used interactive film, involving live, facial, physical animation. The participants, young people aged between fifteen and sixteen years, were pushed into a machine that incorporated the screen, which Britton describes in the same interview: 'their (created) transmogrification, or metamorphosis that might take place (using stop-frame animation), and then they are spat out again.' Ten days' hard work only produced several minutes of film, which was sent off and processed during the week, so that it could be publicly shown as part of the resulting performance.

Forkbeard Fantasy believes that film can extend theatre in remarkable ways. The company loves using and exploring the possibilities of film, as in its residencies based on the theme of 'ghosts'. In the 1980s, the company devised a show called 'Ghosts', which opened with the Ghost Hunter narrating on tape, 'I approached the house from an uphill direction. . .', whilst the audience watched him on film approaching, through

a cobwebbed window on the set. On film, he came to the window, peered through, tapped on the glass, and then burst through the set door in person. In this show the set and props were animated, and it was the start of live interaction between film and theatre. This is the most exciting aspect of Forkbeard Fantasy's devised products in recent years, and is illustrated well in one of Britton's own descriptions:

Once we used the film so that seven brothers went into the film one by one; they were all going over the edge of a cliff in search of someone. There was a rope that came through the centre of the screen which the character on the stage would hold and then pass on to the next, until we ran out of brothers. Someone in the front row of the audience was given the rope holding all these men's lives at the other end! We made it *feel* quite heavy. A character on the film comes back and asks the person holding the rope to let go as they have run out of rope over the cliff. He or she does, and all the men fall screaming over the cliff. It had an extraordinary and mind-numbing effect on people; that you had this umbilical chord into a screen that you could feel pressure on at the other end, and people on the screen talked to YOU as an audience from a wild, windy, country location.

## OUTDOORS

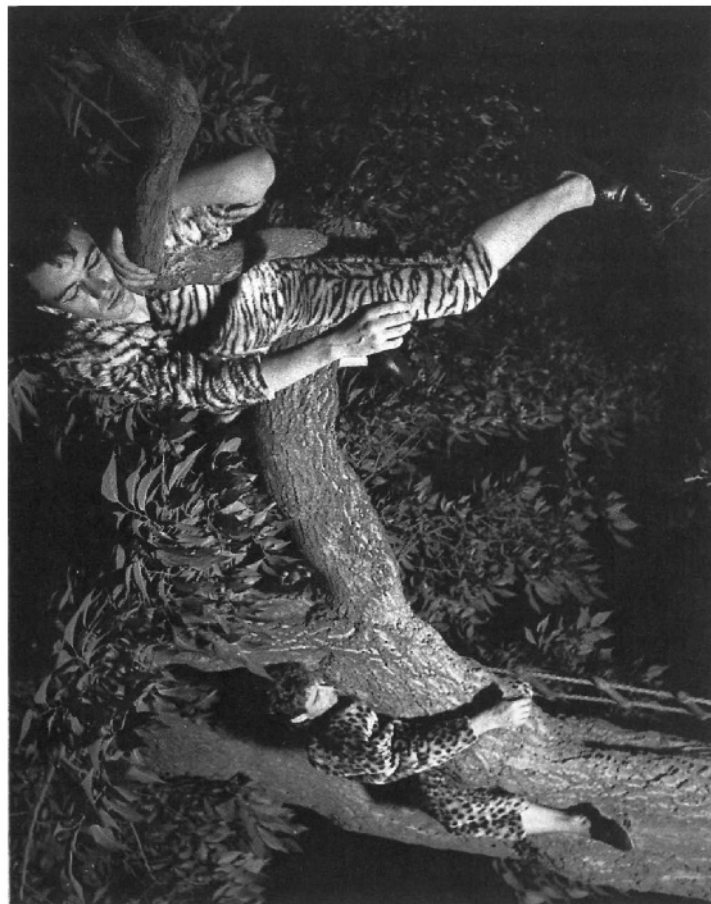
Location has always been crucial for any site-specific work of Lumiere & Son. One of the company's most successful site-specific devised pieces was 'Deadwood' in 1986, which was created out of Kew Gardens in London. This spectacle was a culmination of a range of individual talents working from the environment under the artistic direction of Hilary Westlake, who used the company's skills to devise and create visual images, music, text, choreography, and inventive illuminations. The performance started at dusk with the audience sipping wine and listening to music before being invited to journey through the gardens, which took on the appearance and atmosphere of a tropical rain forest. Through swirling mists, different images were perceived against a background of sounds of forest habitation. Various parts of the woody

environment were illuminated, with clumps of bushes swathed in green or yellow light.

As a group of Victorian dressed performers walked through the grounds with the audience, an actor (Trevor Stuart) told them, 'At the centre of the earth is a piece of everything'. As they listened to the continuing text, creatures emerged out of the vegetation or were spotted amongst the trees. A family group in fur costumes with painted faces huddled close together, chattering to each other, seeming aware of being observed. Two leopards or similar wild cats were asleep, fully stretched out along the branches, as two exotic birds in another tree moved their heads from side to side. A group of grasshoppers, dressed in all-in-one green jodphur-like outfits with yellow sleeves, belts and matching caps, jumped along in unison, bounced off a trampoline and continued on their way with precisely choreographed movements. Large numbers of ants moved rhythmically through the forest, waving their arms up and down, whilst creatures in white turbans danced or leapt through the air, revealing a breadth of wings speckled with holes.

The audience arrived at the Temperate House, which was impressively lit against the evening sky in purple, blue and yellow, as a small conducted choir sang outside to a soundtrack composed by Jeremy Peyton-Jones, and a variety of live musicians played from a gallery structure inside, at the top of the magnificent glass building. The performers, in cream Victorian costumes, moved in repetitive patterns on the terrace amongst the cane chairs, watched by the audience from the grass as they listened to the continuing narrative poem and music. Dancers in tightly bodiced tunic dresses and harem pants, with elaborate plumes of feathers on their heads, moved up the steps towards the building, as the central speaking actor delivered a description of exotic butterflies above a pool into the microphone.

Back in the rain forest, a man in a white outfit hung from a rope, dropped to the ground and remained face to the earth. Black creatures hung upside down from branches, as the text now talked of the different woods being felled despite the destruction of wild life. Gradually all the animals, who were represented rather than played naturalistically, congregated in a clearing (line by line), adopting their own particular movement sequence. A visually exciting insect creature, constructed



17 Graham Newton and Paul Treacy in 'Deadwood'. Lumiere & Son, 1986. (Photo: Simon Corder.)

of numerous tubes speckled and spangled in yellow and black, twirled a baton around as it moved to its position amongst the others. Together, they danced a simple routine of steps to the mounting musical chorus and final spoken words of the poem. The performance ended with each line of creatures disappearing off into the forest as the sounds or babble of forest life echoed on.

### Participants

In Westlake's experience, site-specific devised products have their own particular set of problems. For her, the greatest difficulty has always been local involvement and working with non-professionals.<sup>8</sup> Lumiere & Son is not a community company, nor does it hold a community philosophy, which is clearly indicated in Westlake's attitude to the Penzance site-specific product. Westlake comments, 'If you have an ideological interest in community theatre then I am sure that such a project can be viewed with a degree of success; if, however, you want to produce exciting art it is hopeless.'<sup>9</sup> For Westlake, the overwhelming problem of devising 'Fifty Five years of the Swallow and the Butterfly' was 'the total unpredictability, unreliability and incompetence of local involvement'. For the chorus, Westlake expected forty available, fit eighteen- to thirty-year-olds, eager and keen, as well as equal numbers of men and women. She recalls, 'I got nothing like that. I was assured that there would be no problem finding them. So my chorus dropped from forty to twelve with most of those twelve able to attend only a small number of rehearsals.' Westlake suggests that the time commitment of amateur participants is always a problem in these projects, sometimes combined with them being relentlessly critical and conservative. The devising process for site-specific work involves delicate relationships with people, although some will drop out without communicating reasons and simply not turn up at the next rehearsal. A daily change in numbers means that group or ensemble work cannot be developed with the performers over the prescribed period.

The recruitment question has also been a problem for Major Road, with nobody turning up on the first day of a project as their worst example, which now means that they actively involve themselves in the recruiting process of local people. In



direct contrast, Forkbeard Fantasy's initial problems were with too many participants; for instance, over one hundred seven- to eight-year-olds arrived at one Arts Centre for the day, making them feel used as a crèche whilst parents went shopping. Britton experienced 'terrible times helping Art Centres look strong on community commitment and hardly getting any results from the actual process', with the result that:

Now we are very firm. Maybe up to thirty people is our maximum. We're strict on the place we're given to work in, the hours, and who! We don't let schools just dump their difficult problems on us. We say the kids must be picked for what they'll get out of it.

The extent to which participants are involved in site-specific residential work is dependent on each company's approach to every particular situation and its unique circumstances.

### **Difficulties**

Practical problems arise throughout the devising process and preparation for any site-specific product. The practicalities of preparing the site for an audience are helped by advance planning, incorporating issues of car parking, disability access, power supply, and technical requirements. For IOU, the administrative work may begin a year prior to the planned site-specific event, and includes site visits with the promoters, obtaining necessary permits or licences for the show site, producing and distributing publicity, arranging insurance as necessary, accomodation, contacting extra artists or workers, and fundraising, sponsorship, and grant applications. Perhaps the hardest task is to communicate with all those involved in the process, being aware of instant needs, keeping abreast of all changes, as well as liaising with the host or organisation. Site-specific work also requires diplomacy, good management, and keeping a cool head in the event of a crisis. Artistically, it is vital to hold on to the central idea without getting sidetracked by interesting alternatives that are not relevant to the main objective of the piece. It is often necessary to edit or throw out exciting ideas that do not relate to the structure as a whole.

Working within a limited budget is always an underlying problem for this kind of devised theatre, because of the

unknown elements that may arise in the particular situation. Environmental devised work requires planning in advance, time, and money. According to Devlin of Major Road, projects are always five times more expensive than the money available. The essential question is how to translate ambitious ideas into practical possibilities that are also cheap. Companies like Major Road, Lumiere & Son, or IOU need security for their equipment on site, which is often expensive with costs being covered out of box office takings. Any outdoor situation is dependent on the weather, which can mean rusting or damage to equipment, such as lanterns being ruined by salt and spray. The practical difficulties of lighting an outdoor space are sometimes costly, requiring the use of generators or extra equipment to achieve specific effects. Technical work for IOU usually includes making the site safe and secure, laying in electricity and water supplies, hiring and erecting scaffolding or raked seating, installing safety lighting, steps, ramps and toilets for the site, rigging special effects and sound amplification, as well as liaising with fire and safety officers.

It is quite clear from the professional practice of these four companies based in Halifax, Bradford, Tiverton, and London that devising residencies or site-specific products requires a reasonable budget, time, planning, and preparation. Good organisation, communication skills, flexibility, and inventiveness are essential if a show is to succeed. Where local participants or a community are involved, then it is important to encourage enthusiasm and goodwill from the outset. Much of this is dependent on individual personalities and previous experience of this kind of theatre. A company may simply perform, or members may facilitate others in the devising process, leading them towards a product. Ultimately, the success of every project will be judged in terms of its original objectives and particular focus or emphasis, whether it be a performance piece or a show devised with over a hundred local people for a specific location.

## FURTHER INVESTIGATION

From this observation, it becomes even more apparent that any group that contemplates devising a site-specific piece of theatre

or working in residency must address key additional questions to those outlined at the end of chapter two:

- 1 Who is the piece for? Is it company based only, or does it include other participants? Is there local involvement, or is the piece partly or wholly a community project?
- 2 Where will the devising take place? Is it an outdoor or indoor situation? Will it require permission, licences, extra facilities, or alteration to an existing location?
- 3 How much funding is available for the project?  
How much planning and preparation is needed prior to the performance?  
How much time will be scheduled in the location itself or for the residency?  
How will the piece be organised, administered or co-ordinated in relation to the site or residency?
- 4 What are the artistic, technical and practical considerations when devising a residential site-specific project?