

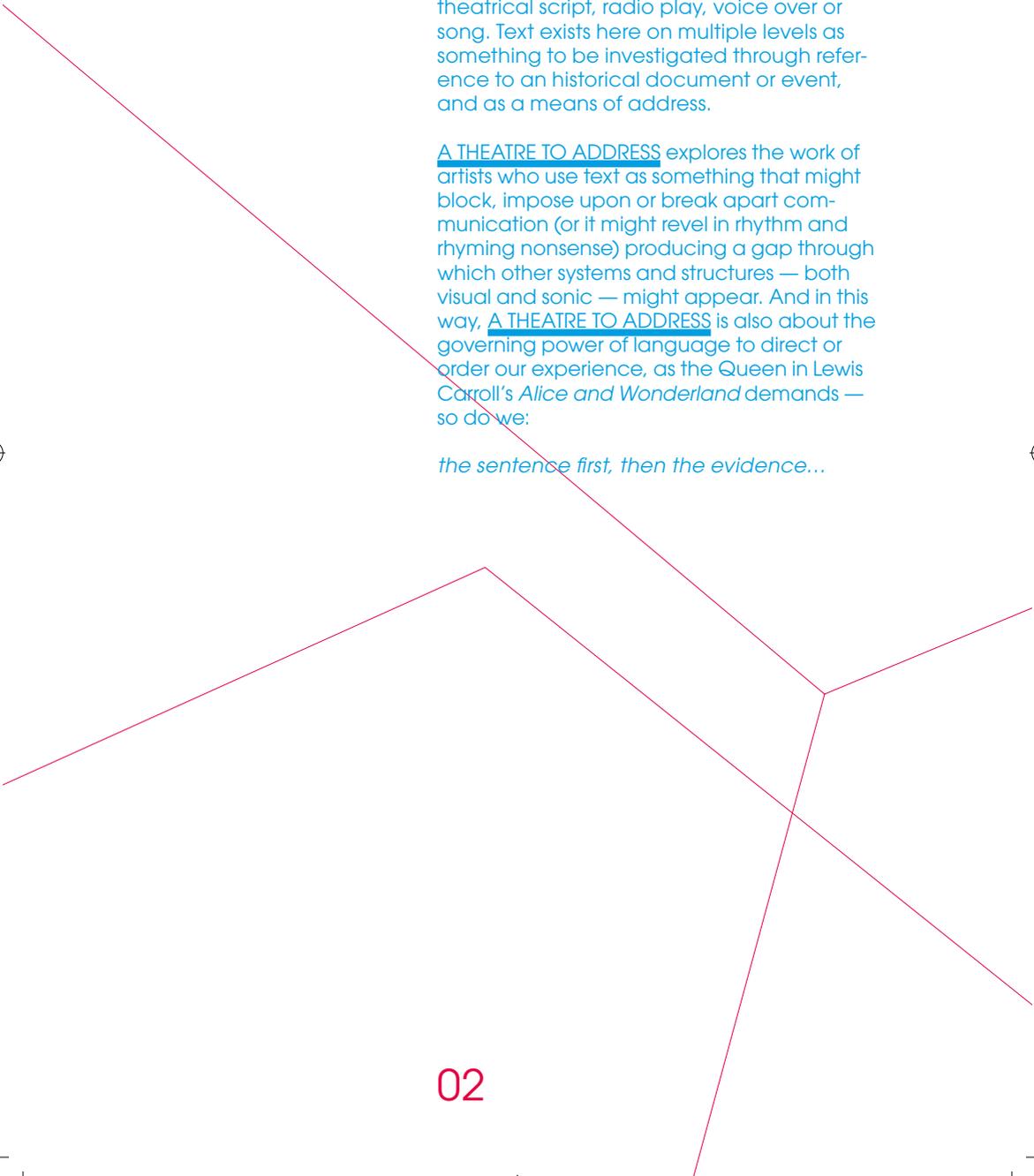
A THEATRE TO ADDRESS

a festival of
textual form

concrete
material
scripted
performed



Media Art^{Bath}



A THEATRE TO ADDRESS is a programme of performances, readings, screenings and talks that explore the many forms of text from concrete poetry or sound sculpture to theatrical script, radio play, voice over or song. Text exists here on multiple levels as something to be investigated through reference to an historical document or event, and as a means of address.

A THEATRE TO ADDRESS explores the work of artists who use text as something that might block, impose upon or break apart communication (or it might revel in rhythm and rhyming nonsense) producing a gap through which other systems and structures — both visual and sonic — might appear. And in this way, A THEATRE TO ADDRESS is also about the governing power of language to direct or order our experience, as the Queen in Lewis Carroll's *Alice and Wonderland* demands — so do we:

the sentence first, then the evidence...

A THEATRE TO ADDRESS

performances

／ **Friday 4 June / 20.00**

／ **Arnolfini / Bristol**

／ **clare gasson** ^{p04}

／ **maryam jafri** ^{p06}

／ **pil and galia kollektiv** ^{p08}

A THEATRE TO ADDRESS

readings / screenings / talks

／ **Saturday 5 June / 18.30**

／ **Arnolfini / Bristol**

／ **sovay berriman** ^{p10}

／ **phil coy** ^{p11}

／ **annabel frearson** ^{p11}

／ **beatrice gibson** ^{p12}

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Friday 4 June 2010

clare gasson

Clare Gasson is an artist who uses writing in her practice. Often she writes then narrates the dialogue or story or instructs someone else to do so. Gasson's texts create a space that is densely cinematic where sound and image layer, building in intensity — both through its evocative, descriptive characteristics and through its formal stylistic aspects — to create a scene into which we find ourselves immersed. Sometimes, such as in the film *The Ballad of Albatross Way* (2008), imagery is present in the work but mostly (and even then) there is a sense of text leading the unfolding of the image. *The Ballad of Albatross Way* shows Gasson's workspace, its rich colour tones connect us to a painterly tradition of depicting artists' studios yet in this case the text provides a counter narrative a tale of yearning, of love that is spoken quietly and hesitantly by the artist, written in the lyrical old English of Romantic Poetry, so that the sense is of the text leading us through the filmic space.

Clare Gasson is based in London. She graduated with an MA from Goldsmiths, University of London in 2004, and since then has held solo exhibitions at Gimpel Fils, London (2008) and Parkers Box, New York (2006). Gasson has shown internationally in group exhibitions including: *The Known Unknowns — Volatile Dispersal Festival of Art Writing*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, UK (2009); *À corps et à textes*, La Galerie, Centre d'art Contemporain, Noisy-le-Sec, France; *The Object of the Attack*, David Roberts Foundation, London UK (2009); *M25: Around London*, CCA Andratx, Mallorca, Spain (2008).

THE TRAVELLER — WALKING WALKING WALKING THROUGH...

(2010)

The Traveller—Walking Walking Walking Through... is a kind of sound-poem that takes a balladic or song-like form, and was written in response to a visit to Bath—walking and experiencing the city, and thinking about the rhythm of walking and of waulking songs. Waulking songs are the work songs of women waulking the cloth, and like miners' or seafaring songs, the rhythm of the songs—designed to assist the process of labour—provides a basis for undertaking physical activity. In this case, the activity is Gasson's walks, and these lie between the text, the rhythm and the action with the action being walking and experiencing the city and the influences that touch upon the traveller through the journey... Through this process there is an uncovering or a peeling back of the layers of the city through the converse action of layering sound. Walking to the weekly market in Twerton, Gasson recounts text in the landscape: graffiti, signs for car manufacturers... the unfolding of the city from a smooth surface to a striated, uneven space of a city fringe—the city unravels. Like working songs themselves, Gasson's texts don't just belong on the page although the notation of their rhythm and their sounds (often percussive, involving clicking, bodily noises, calls and echoes) is of interest to her, instead they lift off creating an immersive sonic, evocative and imaginistic space.

The Traveller—Walking Walking Walking Through... will be performed live at the Arnolfini on Friday 4 June 2010, and will be available as an MP3 download from the Media Art Bath website with an accompanying map of the walks for those visiting Bath who wish to undertake the artist's passages through and around about the city.

A new work commissioned by Media Art Bath.

Friday 4 June 2010

maryam jafri

Maryam Jafri's work centres around documents — texts and images often presented through the use of staged tableaux, moving image as well as collages of text and image. Collage is an apt description for Jafri's work and the manner in which she intersperses her focus between the document and the script, often calling into account the way in which both master and minor narratives dominate the present as a form of fiction. Of her work, Jafri has said: 'My approach to documents is transformative rather than representational. I tend to work through source material — be it a newspaper article, an old photo or a literary text — often by fusing it with elements of theatre and cinema in a process I'd call fictionalising.'¹ The film *Staged Archive* resulted from Jafri's exploration of the national archives of Ghana, and it stages the archival images alongside other recognisable visual material; it's a 'collage of filmic codes and conventions from film, theatre and photo history,' as Jafri herself states.²

Maryam Jafri is an artist based in New York City and Copenhagen. Born in Karachi, Pakistan, she is a graduate of Brown University and the Whitney Museum Independent Study Programme. She has held solo exhibitions at neuer berliner kunstverein (2006), and Malmö Art Museum (2005), and she has shown in many groups shows internationally such as the Bucharest and Quebec City Biennials (2010), and *Time out of Joint, The Kitchen*, New York City and *Contour*, 4th Biennial for the Moving Image, Mechelen, Belgium.

- 1 Patricia Reed (2009), *Through, Around and Against the Document: Maryam Jafri in conversation with Patricia Reed*, *Art Papers Magazine*, January-February 2009, p.114
- 2 Kathrin Peters (2009), *How do art and cinema respond to history?*, *Text Zur Kunst*, December 2009, p.32

DEATH WITH FRIENDS

(WORK IN PROGRESS, 2010)

Maryam Jafri has said that she works with ‘adaptation rather than re-enactment.’³ For example, when approaching literary texts or historical documents, she views them as a kind of script in order to call attention to the way in which certain narratives dominate and inform our present moment. If we understand history as being always in formation rather than a fixed, objective ‘truth’ claim, then Jafri’s new work in progress, *Death With Friends* explores this fictionalising of history — fictionalising not in terms of making a story out of history but as a process of pulling apart and reassembling narratives so that this re-ordering of parts (and often adding visual material or influences) creates a dynamic through which other stories or possibilities for stories can emerge. Adapted from the early 16th century diary of Babur — founder of the Mughal empire in India — the *Baburnama* is not only the first known instance of autobiography in Islamic literature, it is also unusual because it is written in a vernacular Turkish dialect rather than the usual courtly Persian.

The *Baburnama* forms a kind of textual impetus for the work but at the same time it is present alongside numerous other visual codes and styles from the golden ‘bling’ of Bollywood to Derek Jarman to Fellini, as well as textual reference to Machiavelli and Rabelais. The resulting work occurs as an accumulation of these forms pieced together in a collage-like process so the work is an accumulation of visual forms rather than a direct quotation or re-enactment of the material itself. As Jafri comments, on the one hand, the *Baburnama* ‘eerily parallels present day political realities’ in Afghanistan/Pakistan with bloody accounts of warring tribes and imperial plunder. Yet on the other hand, Babur describes a highly cultured, somewhat hedonistic civilization replete with ‘carnivalesque type descriptions of wine and opium induced parties populated by glittering poets and dancers.’⁴ In this way, we could understand the script of *Death With Friends* not only as the text — Babur’s diary — that forms the basis of the work but as also the visual form, which by being present, inform and structure our evocative response to the work.

Death With Friends is a work in progress to be first shown at Jafri’s forthcoming solo exhibition at Umea Bildmuseet, 2010/2011. For *A Theatre To Address*, Maryam Jafri will present a lecture on the work in the context of its rich source material, textual and conceptual development.

3 Patricia Reed (2009), *op.cit.*, p.118

4 Email correspondence with the artist, January 2010

Friday 4 June 2010

pil and galia kollektiv

Pil and Galia Kollektivs' work deals with the legacy of modernism, labour and ritual, and it is mostly film and performance based. Through the processes that they utilise of staging or re-enacting modernist forms — such as *No Haus Like Bau*, which was performed with props and set made from different Ikea furniture ranges (from Expedit to Lack, Jeff, Fado and Mikael) — their work acts to break apart and question dominant narratives and assumptions surrounding both modernism and contemporary capitalism, a situation that they would recognise as being marked by the impossibility of change but at the same time imbued with a kind of romanticised desire for this change. This could be understood as a process of instituting a revised vocabulary where symbols are mixed up with new possible meanings so that Ikea furniture becomes mixed with traditional Cornish crafts or the visual language of sci-fi mixed with archaeologists digging at Stonehenge. Most recently, however, the Kollektivs' work has focussed on a futurist desire or strategy, and in their essay, 'In Praise of Yachts' they cited the historian, Michael Kammen, saying that 'societies in fact reconstruct their pasts rather than faithfully record them, and that they do so with the needs of contemporary culture clearly in mind — manipulating the past in order to mold the present,' and they suggest that the future can 'similarly be manipulated through acts of redescription'.⁵

Pil and Galia Kollektiv are London-based artists working in collaboration. They have presented stage productions such as *Asparagus: A Horticultural Ballet*, commissioned by The Showroom, London and toured to the Montreal Biennial (2007), and *No Haus Like Bau*, commissioned by the Berlin Biennial (2008), and most recently *Performative Construction of a Future monument for the Dialectic Negation of a Post-Catastrophic Society* at The Herzliya Biennial, Herzliya.

⁵ Pil and Galia Kollektiv, *In Praise of Yachts*. *The Irresistible Force*, Tate, London, 2007

CRITICAL MASS (2009)

Pil and Galia Kollektiv present an evening of radical worship for the apocalypse, featuring a sermon for the Church of the Atom — ‘a modern temple. Very modern. Our temple’ — and accompanied by ecclesiastical live music by Gelbart.⁶ Following in the footsteps of positivism, the Church of the Atom worships at the altar of science and progress, and it’s a form of worship that draws upon texts from Auguste Comte (the founder and self-declared pope of positivism). The sermon plays an important part within the Church of the Atom as the composition of the sermon shows us the role that language plays in forming and governing belief whether that is in terms of theology or a belief in progress.

Worshipping at the Church of the Atom is a highly theatrical endeavour and the theatrical gives the event a specific cohesion and authority. In this way, theatre isn’t inhabited as a naturalised concept (or an unquestioned form) but is something that’s used or staged deliberately as an inherent aspect of the worship itself — a formal device used to form and inform meaning in a particular way. It would be too simplistic to term this within the language of re-enactment — indeed there isn’t anything being re-enacted here — but rather the use of recognisable form or framework to create a kind of anti-spectacle that re-does or supplements previous spectacles by addressing the inherent logic that structures its parts, in a way it’s like sewing a dress so that the construction of the seams, cut of fabric and lay of the cloth are made apparent and part of the garment itself.

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<http://www.kollektiv.co.uk/Critical%20Mass/Sermon.html>
Last accessed 14 May 2010

Saturday 5 June 2010

sovay berriman

NIGHT FLIGHT
(2010)

Sovay Berriman's recent exhibition at the Exeter Phoenix — *Entertaining at the Dust Lounge* — presented as she stated: 'a framework for an undefined performance or escapist activity to take place.'⁷ This sense of providing a site or a platform for something to take place within is a defining aspect of Berriman's work. This platform can take various forms, for example in the case of *Entertaining...* it is a large gothic, black sculpture that simultaneously offers and denies — through the impenetrability of its reflective black surfaces — a podium like structure, a position from which to speak, to intone, to stage... For Berriman, collaboration often takes place through text or through the identification of patternistic forms (such as the dance forms of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers seen across the whole of their oeuvre) that act like a text or script.

The collaboration of Joe Delvin, Magnus Quaife, Paul Cordwell, Luis Alvarez and Sovay Berriman will work through, with and on the script of the un-produced play for radio, *Night Flight*, originally written by Magnus Tristan in the late 1970s. The script provides a vehicle for their collaboration, as they explore its constituent parts — pace, structure, narrative, characterization and direction. FOR A THEATRE TO ADDRESS they will present their work with the play's synopsis.

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<http://www.sovayberriman.co.uk/Entertaining.html>
Last accessed 14 May 2010

Saturday 5 June 2010

phil coy

FRANKENSTEIN 2
(WORK IN PROGRESS)

Phil Coy's practice examines film, text and the performance of text as an objective material where rhythm, tone and intonation circumscribe meaning. His work attempts to create distortion and feedback by manipulating textual performance both as a process for the generation of text (for instance, in his taking notes (1999 onwards) projects) and the sounding, or speaking, of a pre-composed or 'found' text. This process of paying attention to aspects of words other than their meanings can be found across Coy's work — for example, in his application of the Oulipo technique of 'univacular' translation to Sol LeWitt's *Sentences on Conceptual Art* (in Coy's work *where petty theft sleeps* (2006)) and through the successive breakdown of language and its mediation in his most recent film, *Façade* (2010).

annabel frearson

WHERE PETTY
THEFT SLEEPS
(2006)

Text is the focus of Annabel Frearson's work, which she uses as a kind of building block or cut up. Here meaning is collapsed, instead these building blocks are pieced together not in a random process but in a process akin to a kind of data-ordering where the possibilities of the text to be re-ordered and restructured are prioritised ahead of meaning. Often reworking texts, such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Frearson uses the original as a kind of expandable database from which words are taken — building blocks used towards the creation of another text from the original.

Saturday 5 June 2010

beatrice gibson

A SCRIPTED-TALK
ON THE SCRIPT
AND THE SCORE
(2010)

Beatrice Gibson describes her practice as 'exploring ideas around sound, sociality, collective production and the problems of representation.'⁸ The processes or methodologies around the development of *A Necessary Music* (2008), for example—a film about modernist housing that explores the 'social imaginary' through texts written by the residents of Roosevelt Island—hinge on an open process of communication and enquiry. In this way, the script or score forms a structure and a methodology for the work but rather than this being a closed form it is radically open so that textual structures and sound become a way of exploring site and the processes inherent in and around that site.

julika gittner

PHYSICAL
CAPABILITY
ASSESSMENT
(2009)

Julika Gittner works across the fields of architecture and contemporary art. In her art practice, there is a sense of a structure — most often a social structure that has the potential to govern or order our lives — being activated. In work such as *Physical Capability Assessment* (2009), the text from the list of questions used to assess someone's suitability for receiving the incapacity benefit becomes the basis for a sculptural, sound and performance work in which the questions are translated spatially. The result is a sculpture but also an invitation to perform the activities demanded by the questions. Other work such as *Homo Economicus* takes a similar instruction from the literal interpretation of the title, and translates this into a process of collecting the results of the daily / weekly labour of a hairdresser, bartender and others as materials for a sculpture.

8 Email correspondence with the artist, May 2010

the otolith group

OTOLITH III
(2009)

The Otolith Group — Anjalika Sagar and Kodwo Eshun — works with media archives, histories of futurity, the legacies of non-alignment and tricontinentalism. The Group's artistic work explores the moving image, sound and text, and their film, *Otolith III* takes the legendary Bengali director Satyajit Ray's unrealised screenplay *The Alien* as its point of departure. *The Alien*, written in 1967, would have been the first science fiction film to be set in contemporary India, and *Otolith III* returns to 1967 to propose an alternative trajectory in which the fictional protagonists attempt to seize the means of production in order to create the conditions for their existence as images. Courtesy of LUX, London.

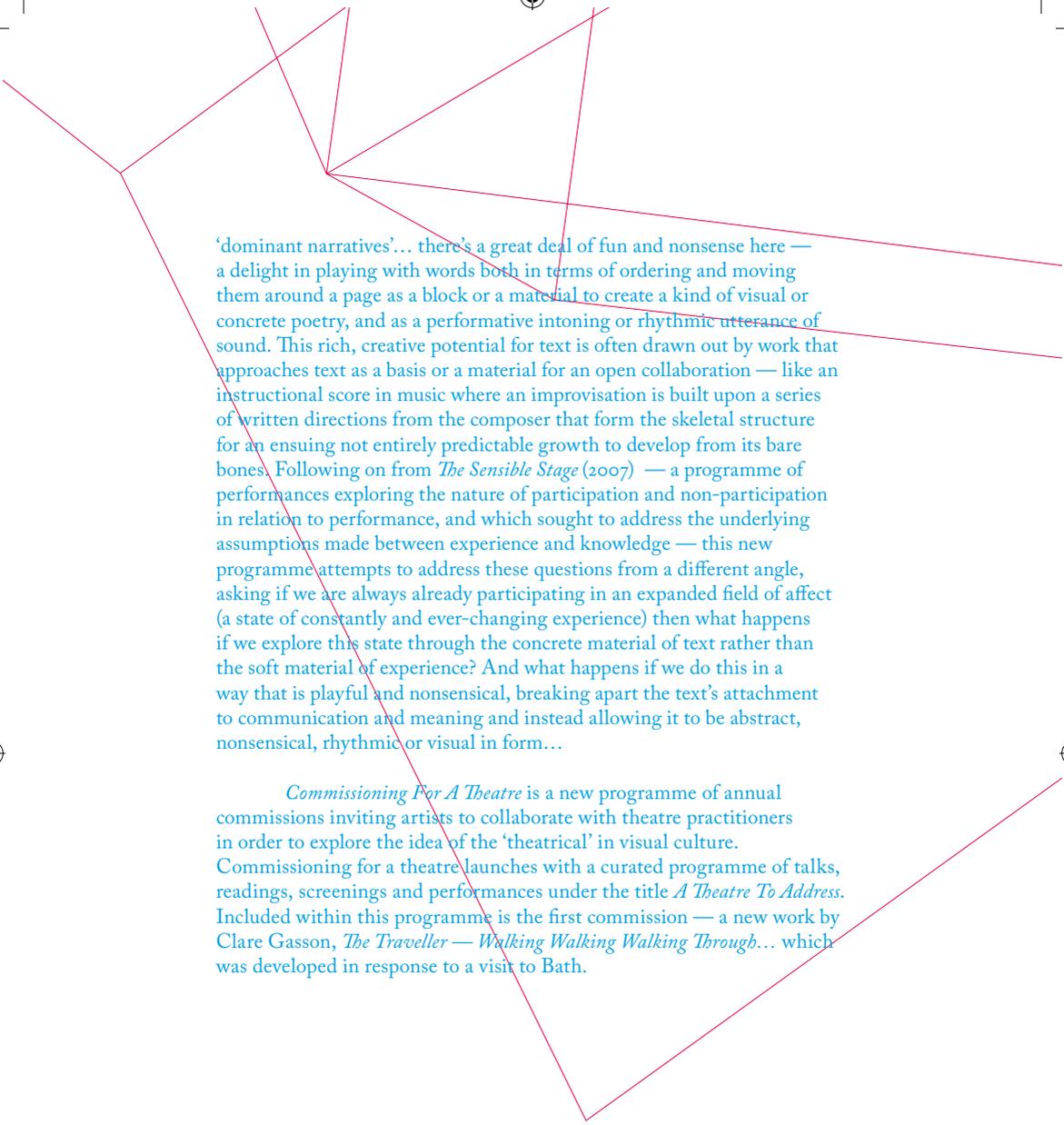
reading room

From June 2010, there will be a changing display in the Arnolfini Reading Room of work that reflects on the current programme, and material from the Arnolfini archive, which is in the process of being catalogued. The first in this series looks at the relationship between text as a visual form and performance, with works by artists including Chris Evans, Sue Tompkins and Beatrice Gibson. These works, often in the form of a script or artists' book, are not simply a material remainder of a temporary event, but exist as visual material, communicating first and foremost their structure or form. The use of the script in this form is used to describe multiple voices and viewpoints or the rhythm and pace of a performance, the juxtaposition of language on the page a disruption or re-contextualisation of verbal communication.

EPILOGUE

In *The Medium is the Massage*, Marshall McLuhan writes about the way in which ‘text’ – specifically the alphabet – instigated the dominance of vision (ocular-centrism) that led to the development of architecture, cities and mechanised processes. McLuhan writes of alphabet as having ‘no semantic meaning’ but simply being a form that must be ‘strung together in a line, bead-like and in a presumed order.’⁹ And this sense of words or text having a form that can be separated or divorced from meaning and instead used (at times nonsensically) as a kind of objective material with a shape, rhythm, form can be seen in much of the work in *A Theatre To Address*. McLuhan goes on to assert that a move away from a predominantly aural culture — ‘the magic world of the ear’ — towards a visual culture led to ‘the habit of perceiving all environments in visual and spatial terms,’ leading to the development of architecture and therefore the building of towns and cities.¹⁰ It’s curious to consider now how this division between visual and sonic cultures persists and, particularly so, in terms of a romanticisation of sonic cultures such as the spoken word, storytelling and folksong traditions. Yet at the same time we live in a world that is increasingly governed by affects — the use or ‘modulation’ of our bodily, sensory reactions on a pre-cognitive level, and which operate through all of our senses but particularly through sound. The development and use of sonic weaponry is an example of this as is the US Government’s Terror Alert System in which particular colours were connected to levels of threat resulting in feelings of anxiety, fear or terror. In a world of affects, we are immersed in an ever-changing environment of images and sounds so that there is very little difference between the autonomy of our own bodily reactions and those induced by the affective-field, that is, the situation in which we find ourselves. It’s a situation in which it’s hard to stop, make a break or make a change, and hard to distinguish between ourselves, our own reactions and those around us...

Through this programme, I am interested to think about how the structure or the structuring of ‘text’ makes apparent the various architectures of power inherent in our world and calls into questions the problems of representation through a process of questioning the dominant narratives or language or of history. This is also, for me a question about finding strategies for resistance within the constantly flowing and changing field of affect so that modifying, disrupting or forcing a break within the given flows could allow something different to emerge. It’s important though to point out that despite the sombre tone invoked through the mention of ‘architectures of power’, ‘structure and structuring of text’,



‘dominant narratives’... there’s a great deal of fun and nonsense here — a delight in playing with words both in terms of ordering and moving them around a page as a block or a material to create a kind of visual or concrete poetry, and as a performative intoning or rhythmic utterance of sound. This rich, creative potential for text is often drawn out by work that approaches text as a basis or a material for an open collaboration — like an instructional score in music where an improvisation is built upon a series of written directions from the composer that form the skeletal structure for an ensuing not entirely predictable growth to develop from its bare bones. Following on from *The Sensible Stage* (2007) — a programme of performances exploring the nature of participation and non-participation in relation to performance, and which sought to address the underlying assumptions made between experience and knowledge — this new programme attempts to address these questions from a different angle, asking if we are always already participating in an expanded field of affect (a state of constantly and ever-changing experience) then what happens if we explore this state through the concrete material of text rather than the soft material of experience? And what happens if we do this in a way that is playful and nonsensical, breaking apart the text’s attachment to communication and meaning and instead allowing it to be abstract, nonsensical, rhythmic or visual in form...

Commissioning For A Theatre is a new programme of annual commissions inviting artists to collaborate with theatre practitioners in order to explore the idea of the ‘theatrical’ in visual culture. Commissioning for a theatre launches with a curated programme of talks, readings, screenings and performances under the title *A Theatre To Address*. Included within this programme is the first commission — a new work by Clare Gasson, *The Traveller — Walking Walking Walking Through...* which was developed in response to a visit to Bath.

9 McLuhan, Marshall, *The Medium is the Massage: an inventory of effects* Corte Madeira: 2001, Gingko Press (first published 1967), p.44

10 Ibid.

A THEATRE TO ADDRESS is a Media Art Bath project in collaboration with Arnolfini

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LUX

ARNOLFINI



BATH & NORTH EAST SOMERSET

