

GORDON INSTITUTE

**GIPCA**

FOR PERFORMING  
AND CREATIVE ARTS

# GIPCA Fellowship Report

Richard Antrobus

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# Introduction

As a GIPCA fellow, Richard's initial project proposal aimed to continue his exploration of the cross-disciplinary nature of contemporary performance, culminating in his final project entitled: "Delayed Live". Through the use of multi-media, live-camera feed, pre-recorded footage and simultaneous live performance from actors and dancers in a live (as well as a delayed-live) performance space, "Delayed Live" sought to take an introspective into the private in-between moments of the lives of performers, which would be simultaneously projected as a public, delayed-live performance by the dancers/actors who would themselves be (a)live and present on stage.

Richard's contribution toward the host department would include teaching and assistance in the facilitation of practicals pertaining to the areas of movement, voice, mime, physical theatre, and theatre-making, especially in the BA in Theatre and Performance and Performers Diploma undergraduate programmes. Over the course of the fellowship, however, this project grew, shifted and developed into a final offering, entitled "Delayed Live(d)".

## Bio: Richard Antrobus

Richard Antrobus completed his BA (Hons) in Drama at Rhodes University in 2004. From 2005 to July 2006 he worked as a resident performer for *First Physical* before embarking on studies abroad, gaining a Diploma (Distinction) at the *London School of Physical Theatre*. While abroad he performed with *SlungLow Theatre Company*. Richard returned to South Africa to read for his MA Drama in Contemporary Performance, Rhodes University 2008-2009, graduating with distinction.



In 2009, Richard created and performed “*Stilted*” to critical acclaim at both the National Arts Festival and Hilton Arts Festival. He also founded the *Phezulu Project* in 2009, which has since expanded to form the *OddBody Theatre Collaborative* – a community circus-skills and performance development initiative. Other works Richard has been involved in include the popular show, “Hats”, as well as “*Beelzebub*”, directed by Brink Scholtz, and “*3 Acts of Love*”, created by Richard Antrobus and Bauke Snyman. Richard was also the recipient of a *Standard Bank Ovation “Encore” Award* at the NAF 2011 for “excellence and innovation” and “for bridging the gap between professional and developmental theatre”.

# Initial Proposal:

The initial practice as research explored the cross-disciplinarily nature of contemporary performance, which was to culminate in a final project entitled: “Delayed Live”. The proposed project being a social commentary and exploration on the notion of the term, “delayed-live” in relation to live performance art. “Delayed-live” is a term which has become increasingly popular lately in its usage to refer to sporting events on television, which are recorded live but then broadcast at a later stage to fit in with appropriate or ‘prime time’ scheduling. It also raises the question of the differences (or similarities) in the voyeuristic intrigue held by theatre audiences and non-theatre audiences alike. In traditional theatre we have the “4<sup>th</sup> wall”. At home we have the private made public through electronic media such as television - “Reality TV” being a prime (-time?) example. In keeping contemporary performance contemporary, there is an implication that there should be a move toward merging new-media entertainment with live performance art? That theatre needs to be an exposed private made public performance while simultaneously live, but also delayed and edited enough to be viewed by an audience at their own leisure, privacy or level of discretion?

Hence, the project led to an investigation into the perception of what constitutes a live event versus something pre-recorded or “PVR’d”, which can be re-played or viewed later at a more convenient time or at the leisure of the spectator or audience. Can performance be considered live if it no longer happens in the immediate present? Or does the term rely on the degree (or lack thereof) of a pre-production editing process?

Does performance art only live when it is live? What happens when the boundaries are blurred between what is happening in real time and what has already happened? What do the actors/dancers do when performing live but caught on camera in between performance, in the spaces of time between performing live and living?

Through the use of multi-media, live-camera feed, pre-recorded footage and simultaneous live performance from performers in a live (as well as a delayed-live) performance space, “Delayed Live” takes an introspective into the private ‘in-between’ moments in the lives of performers, which is simultaneously projected as a public delayed-live performance by the performers who are (a)live and present on stage themselves.

While the show aimed to stylistically blend the genres of multi-media, film and live performance, investigate the temporal liminality of performance art, and cloud the boundaries between live and live(d) performance, “Delayed Live” would also draw on a narrative examining the (pre-recorded) private made public (live showing) of the personal, mundane and extra-ordinary moments of the performer just living – living in the spaces between their publically projected, exciting and extraordinary lives.

# Research Through Practice

## Stage 1.

In exploring the notions of “Liveness” in performance, my theoretical research steered me towards various authors, writers, and playwrights including: Pirandello, Kafka, Stoppard and Minghella and even Shakespeare. These writers interrogate the play within the play and draw attention to the form itself and the meta-theatricality of performance.

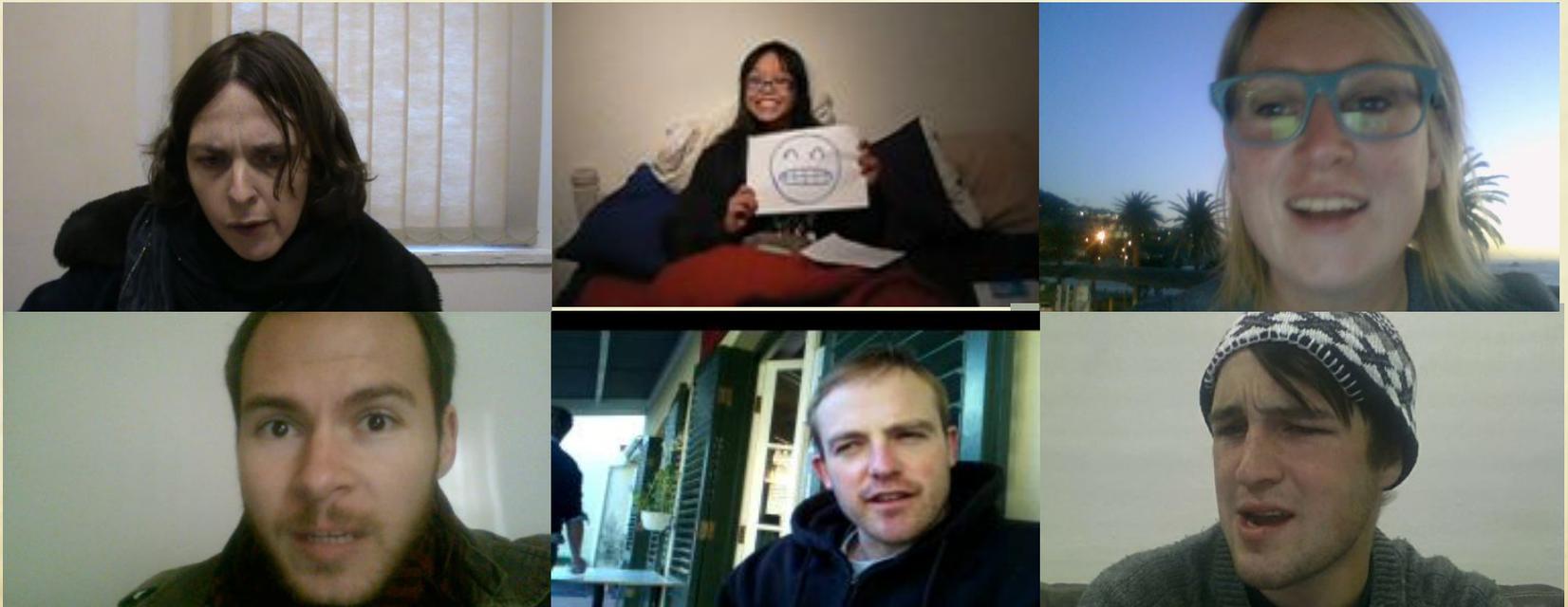
Practically, early investigations initially took the form of personal interviews of dancers and actors in public spaces. These interviews interrogate these performers asking what it is they do in certain “in-between” moments of time – like boiling a kettle, for example. These (seemingly) dull moments are selected on the basis of involving short periods of potential inaction where, for a change, the performers are required to wait for something to happen rather than the performers themselves acting or performing actions.

At this stage, the show was to take the form of a display of pre-recorded interviews and images of the dancers performing, which would be projected on a semi-transparent scrim. This would be interspersed by interviews and dancing by the dancers/actors in real time as a live event, simultaneously projected from a live camera feed onto the same scrim. As the show develops, the interchanging between live and delayed-live performances would go from running in sequence to having live and pre-recorded events occurring simultaneously until the images and projections overlap, occurring on top of each other (through the scrim). This culminating in an interaction between the dancers/actors live on stage who would eventually start responding to and interacting with their own delayed-live selves on the screen which oscillates between pre-recorded and live-feed camera footage.

## Stage 2:

### “Delayed Live” – A Work In Progress

Richard began exploration and experimentation with the ideas of live and delayed camera feeds with multiple cameras and projectors. Furthermore he also started looking into how mobile media can be simultaneously live yet delayed, as exemplified by the android phone application, “Whatsapp”.



*WhatsApp* is a proprietary, cross-platform instant messaging application for smartphones. In addition to text messaging, users can send each other images, video and audio messages...WhatsApp handles ten billion messages per day as of August 2012. According to the Financial Times, WhatsApp “has done to SMS on mobile phones what Skype did to international calling on landlines” (Wikipedia). Apart from WhatsApp’s multimedia function, it also includes features such as Group Chat, offline messages, precise message time stamps, Email chat history, Broadcast messages and MMS to many contacts at once.

WhatsApp” debates or conversations (dialogues) were initiated in three separate randomly selected groups of amateur and professional artists and performers in South Africa - who engage with performance art - by asking the following questions:

- Was does live performance mean to you?
- How much “liveness” does there need to be in a performance for it to be considered live?
- Do performers have to be physically present (or (a)live) on stage for a live performance?
- Do you think “liveness” be delayed or recorded?
- When does live performance stop being live?

By mid year, the the project had shifted towards a performance made up of a series of juxtaposing meta-theatrical investigations of liveness in the form of short scenes and live tableaux in a site specific environment.

The data collection of “Whatsapp” group conversations was then adapted to video through re-acting and re-playing the digital conversation with different performers, both on stage and pre-recorded through a live video projection presentation.

In August, a showing of Delayed Live was presented as a curated and public live (as well as delayed-live ) performance exhibition in a curated public art gallery.



# Contribution To Drama (Host)

## Department:

As a GIPCA fellow, Richard contributed to his host department (Drama) in the form of teaching and assistance in the facilitation of tutorial/practicals and studio master classes pertaining to the areas of movement, mime, physical theatre, and theatre-making.

He especially enjoyed teaching practical classes, which he viewed as important in the continuing development of my own interpersonal and communication skills, building a rapport with both UCT staff and students, and in the development, consolidation, and sharing of my practical and performance knowledge with both undergraduates and postgraduates in the UCT Drama and Contemporary performance programmes.

## Drama Undergraduate:

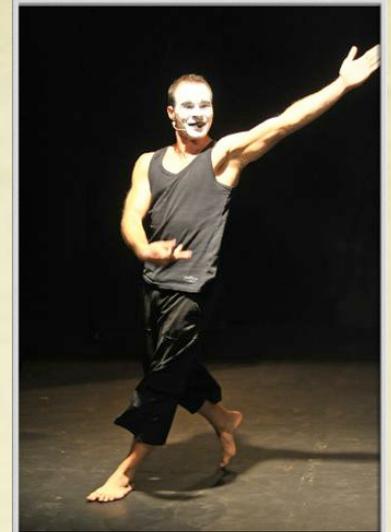
- - BA in Theatre and Performance
- Theatre Making 2 Movement studies programme: Including a Movement & Contact Improvisation workshop series over 6 weeks.

## Drama Postgraduate:

- Honours workshops in mime, viewpoints,
- Postgraduate Masterclasses in characterisation, mime.

## Departmental production:

Richard was also invited on an occasion as a movement consultant for the departmental production, “Absolute Turkey”.



## Dance Undergraduate:

Contemporary Dance (II) workshops in interdisciplinary media workshops, viewpoints, alba emoting, characterisation through breath control and body posture. The concept of “delayed live” through contemporary dance was also explored through structured improvisation.



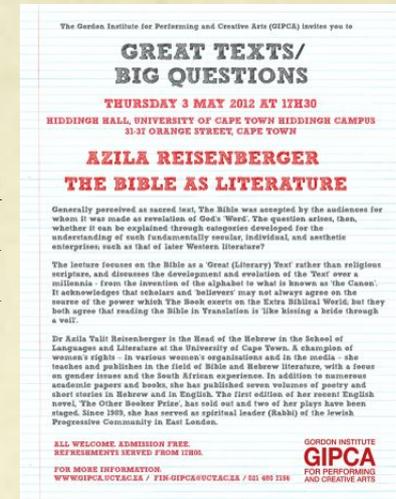
# Other involvement in the GIPCA included:

## Great Texts Big Questions:

Richard was able to attend a number of these seminars by various well renowned and distinguished authors, writers and academics which dealt with a smorgasbord of literary texts both fiction and non-fiction from religion to politics to art and performance.

## Dance-Film Workshops:

Richard was fortunate enough to participate in a short intensive Dance-Film workshop series, led by Jeanette Ginslov and hosted by GIPCA. These workshops culminated in the creation of a short dance-film, which gave me invaluable knowledge and insight into the technical and aesthetic basics of video-dance. This would prove instrumental in growing his confidence in creating a multidisciplinary production, which aimed to incorporate multi-media technology with live performance.



## Exuberance Project:

The Exuberance project saw Richard performing on Stilts as “front of house” welcoming guests to the official opening as an intriguing and exuberant guide.



## Directors and Directing Conference:

Richard performed “Stilted” with Tristan Jacobs. “Stilted is a show created and performed by Antrobus and looks into the nature of contemporary performance or, rather, the contemporary performer as s/he attempts to negotiate a new style in a new performance space/context and questions the performativity of the written word versus the present performer.



# Final Performance - Arts Alive Festival (Dec 2012)

## “Delayed Live(d)”

- A Live Performance Interrogation

Cast: Shaun Acker

Description of Set:

Bare stage with music stand in centre spot. Behind spot is a backdrop projector screen. Behind audience in a separate room which has been set up as a makeshift backstage “dressing room” with a small coffee table with desk lamp and a chair behind the table. A music stand sits in the corner next to a saxophone case. Behind the chair is another screen upon which all the video personas/characters are projected. Camera focused on area backstage is projected through live feed onto the stage backdrop.



## Synopsis/ WhatsApping:

The protagonist, Shaun, a musician, reflects backstage on his imminent performance as he fights against the clock to string together a musical arrangement composed by the audience to which he is just about to perform.

This work is not so much a play, but an interrogation of the nature of both live communication and live performance. It should thus be partially viewed as an academic exercise and the culmination of performance practice as research. Much of the dialogue has been adapted from text messages taken directly from an actual “live” *WhatsApp*\* group chat initiated by the director on the current notion of live performance.



The transcribed spontaneous interaction from 9 contacts/contributors (i.e. Chat history) was then scripted, condensed and adapted into a dialogue between 5 personas and played by a single performer, Shaun, who is also present in the live performance. The deliberate use of the solo performer is multi-fold: Despite the apparent reading that the protagonist is battling with his own personas, it interrogates the notion of live versus non-live thoughts presented live on stage. Moreover, it raises the question of whether or not dialogue can exist with: a) the self; and b) non-live characters in a live performance space. It also explores the concept of live and delayed liveness, the audience interaction and expectation of that liveness; as well as the role the audiences themselves play for live performance to exist.



# Post-Production Project Review:

The show went successfully and the audience was intrigued by the concept which came across clearly. Perhaps to its detriment though, the work was perhaps over-explained, trying too hard to be accessible to an audience rather than serving the piece and the raw interrogation of the nature of delayed live was at times forced. I was generally satisfied with the final product though the concept lends and opens itself up to further exploration and interrogation in a multitude of directions. Special Thanks go to Jay Pather and Adrienne Van Eeden-Wharton for their guidance and administrative support and for making my fellowship a successful pedagogic and practical growth and developmental experience.

