



## ARTISTIC EVALUATION

It should be noted the views expressed in this evaluation are intended to represent, as far as possible, an objective aesthetic judgement. Specialist advisors and officers should avoid making judgements based on their own personal tastes and preferences.

**Artist/Company: Suspect Culture**

**Venue: The Corn Exchange ~Edinburgh**

**Title of Event: Futurology**

**Type of Event: Performance**

**Date of Visit: April 18<sup>th</sup> 2007**

**Overall Rating: Poor**

I feel the ideas and the engine to create this piece should be commended and supported. I also feel the desire to use theatre in a way that challenges the public to engage in such issues was well worth the risk of failure since we only create masterpieces by risking failure. Unfortunately I was very disappointed by this production since the concept behind the production was very interesting. I do think issue based theatre is hard to create and when taking on issues of this scale, it becomes an even more difficult thing to accomplish. I would like to re-enforce my belief that it was well worth the risk- although I have no idea of the financial investment in this production but trust that the process of development for this production will create other works. I note from the Delegate's Pack that Dan Rebellato – a dramaturg on the show, has an upcoming play called, '*Theatre & Globalisation.*' So need I say more.

I took a sneaky look at the audience feedback questionnaires, of the performance on the night I attended, and there were some very positive comments by other audience members who had enjoyed it. I would have really liked to have been one of them.

Name:  Alexandria Patience  Date:  02  /  05  /  07

Specialist Advisor  Scottish Arts Council Officer  *Please tick the relevant title*

This report has been commissioned by the Scottish Arts Council to evaluate the artistic quality of the production named above. It has been prepared by either a specialist Advisor, or an officer of the Scottish Arts Council, as indicated at the end of the form. The report will be circulated to the organisation which produced the work and to the management of the venue, if the venue is core funded by the Scottish Arts Council.

The report will form evidence for the Artistic Leadership and Public Engagement sections of the Quality Framework and be taken into account in assessing the work of the producing company in relation to applications for funding to the Scottish Arts Council. It may also be used by the Joint Board to report on the overall performance of its funded organisations.

**Evaluators should enter their rating under each section, explaining briefly their reason for the rating with reference to their comments under each section. Ratings should be given in accordance with the following:**

- 1 - **Very Poor** – standard falls well below what is acceptable.
- 2 - **Poor** – not attaining acceptable standards of conception or presentation.
- 3 - **Competent** – routine rather than especially interesting.
- 4 - **Good** – well conceived and executed
- 5 - **Excellent** – conceived and executed to a high standard.

## 1. Artistic Assessment

Please evaluate the artistic quality of the event, with particular reference to the strengths and weaknesses of the following:

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
All	Vision and imagination of work - Quality of ideas, skills in execution; if you've seen the work of this artist(s)/ company before, please comment on the comparison.	Vision: Excellent	This is a very interesting and timely choice of issues to explore and I was very excited by the largeness, political content and the importance of the issues/themes involved. I feel the ideas and the engine to create this piece should be commended and supported. I also feel the desire to use theatre in a way that challenges the public to engage in such issues was well worth the risk of failure since we only create masterpieces by risking failure.
All	Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection Please indicate how the event originated eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, artist-led or commissioned. If the event is part of a Festival, please say how it contributes to the overall programme.	N/A	Artist-led by the Artistic Team of Suspect Culture.
All	Success of event against stated aims - in the programme or other printed material, including how well it communicated the artistic themes.  Education events – see <sup>1</sup> below for guidance	Poor	. I was less than convinced by the production or that it managed to address the questions it posed. The format made it very hard to not slip into a facile glossing over of the real content and what we saw was a series of turns – some of which were a little difficult to see as dealing with developing the ideas behind the production. The real problem was ideas were brought forward but then just weren't followed through. I'll take one example – Raphaëlle Boitel was an excellent performer and a fabulous choice for the role – the idea was very interesting to show the manoeuvring of politicians through the contortionist performance but in her 'physical speech' showing Angela how to address the delegation Angela was impressed and then there were some small movements to indicate her attempt to take the lesson on-board. Dramatically, this choice to have Angela intellectually follow her so easily, made bad theatre and is patronising, giving the character of Patrice a 'simple' island mentality and avoided any conflict – if she had made the choice to attempt to physically follow her it would have made good comedy and theatre – since no matter how well she attempted it those skills are not easily learnt – just like learning to compromise the community she was there to protect shouldn't have been. The fact that she does finally compromise was less meaningful since she seemed to go there so willingly and that she perhaps didn't understand that inciting the delegation to a consensus bill of "We aspire to face the future together." is along the lines of 'we will take no action'.

<sup>1</sup> Education is a bridge between artform excellence and increased access and participation, and it is people centred. Providing opportunities for learning and progressing in an artform or using an artform to address

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
All	<p>Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage.</p> <p>Where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.</p>	Excellent	Highly trained performers who were excellent. Production gave them little through line to work with, in this 'Revue' episodic format. Strong when called on to perform but had little opportunity to create a cohesive performance
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	Excellent	Dance featured strongly in this production and the performers were very capable and engaging.
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.	Poor	<p>The script is new but to my mind weak – the only characters who were allowed to continue were Patrice as the delegate from the Sandwich Islands, the Conference facilitator and the Mayor of Bauxite – the location of the International conference. All three performers were solid and very capable but the production did not support the development of them as characters with the ability to move us and charge us. The production needed a stronger vision of where it feels we are going internationally if we don't take charge of our politicians/ governments and state controlled organisations which channel us. I needed more of everything – more political content, more revue, more sex – if the analogy is sex is power- is what we seek when the end is coming. And I needed less jokes of the – Jamaica (no she wanted to go), Jakarta, Alaska, Genoa, Hungary Boom boom vaudeville style. Although I have read the description of how Suspect Culture functions with an Artistic Team who collaborate – director, writer, designer and composer –( I am sure there may be some changes within this team depending on the production) in this production there is no writer attributed but three dramaturgists. I am a big fan and work within collaborate models but perhaps the failures in this script can be left at the door of too many ideas being allowed too little life. I do see this as a script which could be re-worked to have much more edge and power and that it would be very worthwhile for this to happen. The timeline of creation would seem to be very heavy on the initial stage of exploration and very quick on the turn around of producing the final script and then subsequently the performances. I would be very interested to know how many of the whole production team were a part of this lengthy process.</p>

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other, non-artistic, outcomes are equally valid; in either case a high quality strategic approach is required in order to benefit the participants and the organisation. Delivery can be through workshops, post/pre-show discussions, outreach work, etc aimed at any age group.

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	Poor	With collaborations the development of the script and production is a shared process but to my mind the director still has the ultimate responsibility of guiding the process. They are charged with the responsibility of ensuring the final product includes the relevant input of everyone, that all the input comes together to create something richer than a single vision could create, is the strongest piece of theatre they as a group can create, that the ideas are focussed and imbue the piece with everything of that subject and that it engages the audience in a meaningful way. This production had a sense of this but fell short of achieving it.
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/ recorded) to the production.	Good	Musicians were great and the music supported the choices being made. A four piece live band on stage was a real plus and certainly supported the performers and engaged the audience.
Dance, Theatre	Design – costume, set, lighting. Take into account how appropriate the design is in relation to the venue and, where appropriate, the touring schedule.	Poor	The show is touring to four venues and it would seem to be flexible enough to fit the convention style model. There did seem to me to be a lack of cohesive thought though – high tech elements in most elements of communication such as the live audio feed to the conference facilitator and the large flat screen monitor but then it projected a grainy B&W video link of the indigenous group fortunetelling the future. The choice to not paint the chipboard stage and yet no one notices or comments on this – so was the lack of ‘glossy veneer’ an intentional illumination of the cracking-up of the power franchise or just no one painted or carpeted the stage. These choices didn’t really help it create the ‘Revue’ vision either.
All	<p>Quality of Presentation/Engagement</p> <p>Performing Arts - technical presentation of the production (eg lighting and sound cues, etc).</p> <p>Crafts/Visual Arts - Use of equipment, space and overall layout/hang</p> <p>Education events - relevance/ appropriateness of presentation and teaching methodology (one to one, group, child centred); details of participant group and activity, including genre.</p>	Poor	Technically there were some problems with lighting. The most obvious were the scenes where French dancer/contortionist, Raphaëlle Boitel, was performing on some scaffolding and she was not lit. There appeared to be some holes and dips in the lighting. And in a scene using light boxes with Patrice a barn door could be seen on the projected art images she was using to create her image of the Sandwich Islands for us. Sound was generally fine though there were a couple of burst of feedback.
All	<p>Audience</p> <p>Performing Arts - appropriateness of the production for the audience/participants; estimate the size and reaction</p> <p>Crafts/Visual Arts – time spent, interest, activity, and visitors’ books comments, number of visitors/ participants at the time of visit</p> <p>Education/learning – pre-event</p>	N/A	The content and issues of this production are relevant to everyone – or should be. The venue would appear to hold approximately 150. On the evening I saw it there were approximately 40 there

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
	involvement, participants/ schoolteachers reaction, understanding, commitment, enthusiasm, number involved, etc		
All	<b>Additional Interpretative activity</b> – what activities were available to enhance the experience of the event eg workshops, artist's talks, discussion groups? Please indicate age-groups targeted.	N/A	It appears Suspect Culture worked with three groups to engage in as a part of this production and it's development process. There were elements of this process available in the lobby for the audience to access. The main question being asked appeared to be "What do you want for the future?"
All	<b>Outcomes of education activity</b> – what learning/skills development took place? What did participants take away with them? Are education resources being provided for follow up work? Is it strategically linked to the curriculum (formal or informal)?	N/A	N/A. I did not attend any educational activities.

## 2. Management of Event

*Please evaluate the way the event was presented/organised by the organisation and the venue, with reference to the checklist below, including additional comments/observations. Please try to view the venue and the services, and interpretative material as though you had never visited it before eg if you did not know the venue's location, how easy would it be to find your way there, and to find your way around once you had arrived?*

Criteria	Comment
Suitability of the venue for the event	A very understandable choice of location and perhaps the SECC in Glasgow and the AECC in Aberdeen will give the audience that sense of business/corporate culture that I think they were looking for us to experience as a part of the production. The Corn Exchange seemed more as if I was at a music or nightclub venue. I could have been convinced if the idea had been allowed to expand – if the Box Office had been a convention delegate's table in the lobby where we signed in for tickets and our delgate pack – even asking us to/ or assigning us to the countries represent and the excellent hostess of the convention could have made the announcements calling us into the convention.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	They have a great informative programme referred to as the 'Delegate Pack' and there was a display/exhibition of an outreach aspect of the production in the lobby of the venue
Publicity/ pre-publicity – leaflets, posters, websites, etc. What is produced, is it easy to understand and where can you get the information? Please be alert to the publicity available prior to your visit to the event and comment on the company/organisation's website.	Highly visible through street presence with tons of posters and flyers in all kinds of prominent and paid for locations. Visible on web sites – Suspect Culture and The National Theatre of Scotland, I had two mail-outs with material on the show – one from National Theatre of Scotland and I'm not sure where the other originated. Lots and lots of material and focus drawn to this production. I do find it a little strange that a production which would appear to be drawing our attention to the responsibility we have to ensure a safe environment and to base our actions in small scale understanding of humanity with a view to transferring those ideas globally – the oldie but goodie - 'act locally, think globally' – made the choices they did with print material - heavy weight card stock for the flyers which are printed in heavy saturation ink - white knock-out text on back ink. Print design was done by Frozen River and the Designer for the production Patrick Macklin is part of the creative team so must have been able to inform all the decisions. The irony of what the production is addressing and these publicity choices occurred to me prior to attending the show but were made more confusing by the realisation that the designer of them is a key creative team member. It seems to me it would have been a very interesting challenge to have taken on creating publicity material which were less environmentally demanding and more creative and people supportive The first idea I have would be something along the lines of, paying Big Issue sellers in the cities it was being performed a fee to wear an advert on a T-shirt/ fluorescent vest for 2

Criteria	Comment
	weeks prior to and during the run of the show – something which has a life and use.
Ease of booking and payment	I had some difficulty in booking my ticket – although this may be more a problem with The List and the venue than it has any reflection on the Company. When I phoned the number given in The List it was The Corn Exchange, they seemed confused and there was a lot of too-ing and fro-ing and then they said that the show was only running on the Friday & Saturday. I felt they were wrong, so went to the National Theatre of Scotland web site and got another Box Office number. I called it and made my booking. Just so they could deal with the confusion at The Corn Exchange Box Office and not lose audience members, I told them about my first call – at which point they seemed concerned that maybe the show was cancelled and a whole long dialogue began. Some shows were cancelled she said but not this one, and so it went until I finally said - Please just call me back and confirm that there is a show. They did call me back to confirm. I do wonder how many other folk just got turned away? It was a small house that night..
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	This did take me a wee bit of tracking down and I just went the easy route and took a taxi to get there. The taxi driver said it was a main route but when the show ended and I left the venue it seemed pretty isolated and with very little traffic around. I walked to what appeared to be the busiest street and flagged down a taxi there. I'm sure it's a fine location but for someone from out of town I did have a moments concern and hesitation when I left the venue.
External signage and signposting	The Corn Exchange is a number of buildings but there was no trouble in locating the area for the performance.
Internal directional signage	Very simple lay-out so no difficulty in finding anything
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Everything seemed accessible.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Fine
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Please see 'Ease of booking' section. Once at venue – staff were friendly and helpful.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding <sup>2</sup>	Acknowledgement appropriate

<sup>2</sup> In press releases, at launches, on all published materials (including leaflets, brochures, programmes, posters, company's website, notices display, exhibition materials, websites and advertising, recordings,

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publications, video, broadcasts, computer programmes etc.) Where the event is publicised in the programme brochure of another organisation (eg venue, gallery, etc) then SAC acknowledgement should appear against the particular programme entry for this event.