What's the Welsh for "performance"? [30 years of action art in Wales]

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The history of performance art in Wales has yet to be written. Over a period of more than thirty years artists have been creating performance, action or time-based art, but their works have not yet been sufficiently documented. Performance, as a discipline has been confined to oral traditions, folk lore, literature and half-remembered anecdotes, rumours and hearsay. Yoko ONO allegedly once presented an action at the National Museum in Cardiff, the small seaside town of Aberystwyth is said to have hosted a Fluxus Festival... one searches in vain for traces of these events anywhere. Despite this, for a discipline so committed to documentation and theoretical reflection, there are no archives dedicated to performance art in Wales, no books, no journals. Rather than constructing a history from such fragmentary evidence therefore (a project which I am planning to undertake in the future), for the purpose of this article I will attempt to provide a partial overview of the history of performance art in Wales, with a focus on the most important contemporary events.

In 1977 the National Eisteddfod in Wrexham was regarded as a seminal event for the promotion of ‘performance art’ in Wales. ‘Spiral Gag’, in which the artist struggled free from his symbolic imprisonment in a British flag, “the inception of a self-conscious contemporary Welsh political art” (in BALA 1999, 79). The act could also be considered the inauguration of a self-conscious contemporary Welsh identity, which had never been so starkly manifest in Wales before. Artists Rob CONAN and Iain HINCHCLIFF, for example, had created a series of joint street actions around the country in the mid-1970s, among them a performance in the Brecon Beacons National Park during a snow storm. Wellknown English performance practitionersRoland MILLER and Shirley CAMERON had created work inspired by the Eisteddfod in 1967, and up to the late 1960s courses offered in fine art and improvised jazz based in a small port on the outskirts of Cardiff. And Welsh artist Ivor DAVIES, painter, activist and protagonist of the destruction art movement, had staged performances in Swansea as early as 1967. Paul DAVIES was probably the first artist, however, to utilise the idea of performance in order to articulate within a simple symbolic action a complex nexus of issues concerning cultural domination and political resistance that commented very directly on the Welsh situation. As fellow artist Llanfair BALE, in his BALE 1999, a brief account of DAVIES a member of the Welsh artist collective, Beca, claimed, for the work of the group: “Beca” was the instigating force in the politicisation of Welsh art, and one that focused International trends and methodologies into a language that highlighted specific concerns in Wales’ (BALA 2003, 23) – in DAVIDS case this was the focus was in the language of performance art. The location which these events occurred was the National Eisteddfod (Eisteddfod Genedlaethol) is one of the oldest, most poetic and most political European festivals. The word ‘eisteddfod’ literally means ‘sitting’ and originally described a medieval contest of poets with rules and prizes. These days, the National Eisteddfod has grown into a weeklong festival and most political European festivals. The word ‘eisteddfod’ literally means ‘sitting’ and originally described a medieval contest of poets with rules and prizes. The word ‘eisteddfod’ literally means ‘sitting’ and originally described a medieval contest of poets with rules and prizes. This festival is the oldest of its kind in Europe, and the only one among the most poetic and most political European festivals.

The distinctiveness of much Welsh performance work derives from a fusion of global artistic developments with local cultural and political desires. The earliest art actions that appeared in this country in the late 1960s and early 1970s were inspired in equal measure by the movement of the international avant-garde toward a dematerialization of art practice and by the local reification of a distinct cultural identity that manifests itself primarily as performance (above all as the celebration of the Welsh language). This was accompanied by a political activism that too gathered pace in the sixties through harnessing performance’s radical potential for direct political action in the struggle for the survival of the language. Wales has often been called ‘England’s first colony’, a marginalized cultural hinterland turned to a marginal art practice as a means for its cultural and political expression. As a consequence the division between different artistic disciplines has been of lesser importance than the question of where these disciplines situate themselves in the cultural and political landscape of Wales. In its quest to develop a distinctive form that could provide an alternative to the dominant English mainstream, for example, Welsh experimental theatre from early on embraced artistic strategies that we have come to know from performance art, such as site-specificity, duration and active audience involvement. As a result, the term ‘performance’ in Wales today describes a fluid field of innovative practices originating in a variety of disciplines, including performance art, sonic art, experimental theatre, movement work, and performance poetry. It is this interdisciplinary quality and the ‘sited’ nature of Welsh performance in an international field of highly nomadic practices that distinguish the performance scene in Wales.

Y Maes – The Field

The Maes has been the major element of the Eisteddfod since its inception. The first Maes had been a large village green on which the Eisteddfod was held in the 13th century. Since then it has been called the ‘Field’ (‘y pethe’ in Welsh) and appears to have been associated with the tradition of Eisteddfod (the contest of poets). It is possible that an Eisteddfod may have been held at Aberystwyth in the late 13th century. The term ‘Eisteddfod’ is of Celtic origin and was first used in a Middle Welsh charter of about 1280. The Eisteddfod was a way of celebrating Welsh culture and literature, and the festival provided an opportunity for poets to meet and compete. The Eisteddfod also served as a way of promoting Welsh language and culture, and it was held in different locations around Wales.

The Maes is a field of about 40 acres, located in the heart of Aberystwyth. It is a large open space surrounded by trees, and it is used for a variety of events throughout the year. It is a popular venue for concerts, festivals, and other cultural events, and it is a symbol of Welsh identity and culture. The Maes is also an important part of Aberystwyth’s history, and it has been the site of many significant events over the years. In 1979, for example, the Aberystwyth Arts Festival was held on the Maes.

In the 1970s, the idea of the Maes as a site for performance art began to take hold. The first performance art event at the Eisteddfod was held in 1977, and it was called the National Eisteddfod of Wales Open Performance Art Competition. The competition was open to all artists, and it was judged by a panel of professionals. The winning artist was selected based on the originality and quality of their work.

Since then, the Eisteddfod has become a regular site for performance art events. In 1999, the National Eisteddfod of Wales Open Performance Art Competition was held in conjunction with the Aberystwyth Arts Festival. The competition was judged by a panel of professionals, and the winning artist was selected based on the originality and quality of their work.

In recent years, the Eisteddfod has continued to be a site for performance art events. In 2007, the National Eisteddfod of Wales Open Performance Art Competition was held in conjunction with the Aberystwyth Arts Festival. The competition was judged by a panel of professionals, and the winning artist was selected based on the originality and quality of their work.

In the future, the Eisteddfod is likely to continue to be a site for performance art events. The festival provides a unique opportunity for artists to showcase their work, and it is an important part of Welsh culture and identity.

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The rural landscape of Wales, however, presents only one part of the country's environment. South Wales in particular is highly industrialised, and the industrial landscape of the so-called 'South Wales valleys', the site of the former coal and steel industries, possesses an iconic status comparable to that of the Welsh mountains of the Romantics. In the works of many artists of the late 19th and early 20th century 'the valley' appeared among the most familiar of Welsh landscapes.

(Martin BARLOW in BALA 1999, 152-3). DAVIES, who comes from a Welsh speaking-background but does not speak the language himself, attempted to engage 'with that elusive spirit hidden within the letters of the language that he himself has lost.' (BALA 1999, 156).

Y Tir – The Land

The mountain range appears, white and gleaming, against the fading light as the bus takes the road at Coed y Brenin, the last remains of a forest are approaching. The glowing red ball of the sun vanishes slowly behind the peaks, bathing them for a moment in its orange beam. We are witness to a glorious sunset in the uplands of the Llyn peninsula in North Wales. Only we are sitting, neatly packed in rows, inside the black-box auditorium of a theatre space. The mountains are formed from crumpled strips of white paper. Moments ago movement artist Simon WHITEHEAD had used them to scribble down memories of a walk across the landscape of the peninsula. Now he is standing next to the paper panarama, moving a red light bulb slowly from one side to the other to illuminate the scenery, whilst his collaborator, sound artist Oliver NOLLY, mixes the sounds of nature with those of technology.

WHITEHEAD's Hollow land from 1997, subtitled The long lines project - A landscape re-envisioned, was one of the first of a growing body of work by a new generation of artists working in Wales today who create performances from their physical, sensory and political backgrounds. This work is based on the assumption that one landscape, within a long tradition: in Wales identity has been linked historically, culturally, politically, linguistically, socially, emotionally and aesthetically to its landscape. As a result, in the area of the visual arts, landscape painting has been synonymous with Welshness. The landscape was painted for touring by artists like TURNER, SISLEY, SUTHERLAND, JOHN PIPER and Paul NASHE, a form of 'colourisation' of Welsh landscape through art! (BALA 2003, 29); more lately in works by contemporary painters from Wales such as Peter PRENDERGAST, and Cats DRAY, who aim to reclaim the pictorial representation of the landscape of their home.

In Welsh performance work, this landscape has been explored with an aesthetic that has its roots in the time-based strategies of land and environmental art and in an ecological concern for rethinking our connection with the natural world. The landscape performance has emerged as a series of short projects based on long solitary walks through the Welsh landscape, informed by a sense of estrangement and the desire for a sensual and perceptual reconnection. WHITEHEAD is also a member of the 'bitment' collective (with StringTUIIDER, Pete BODENHAM and Maura HAZELDEN), a group of artists based in West Wales, who have staged 'place-sensitive work' in rural sites, inspired by an ecological agenda, local folk traditions and the decline of the traditional farming economy. Bitment is currently involved in an exchange with the Boréal Art/Nature centre in France. A further other collaborative project, as maintained close links with Berenal, is the performance artist Phil BABOT, who undertook a residency at the centre in 2002. BABOT creates psychogeographical performance work that too is often based on the practices of walking and mapping, most recently The Long Road to the North, a journey from the southernmost tip of Wales to its northernmost point, documented in a long walking documentary accompanied by the creation of solo art works alongside collaborations with other artists who live in varying geographic locations northwards along the designated path.

The first instalment of BABOT's year-long project took place in 2002 at Cwmder Hills Rural Art Space (CHRAS). A 180-acre farm in the Vale of Glamorgan in South Wales, which is run by artists who attempt to reconcile the making of contemporary art with ideals of sustainable living. They have transformed the farm into an art space with purpose-built studios, low-impact dwellings for visiting artists, a sculpture trail of site-specific works and a programme of exhibitions, performances and community workshops. The project is supported by a host of on-site small businesses, including an organic café, wholefood distribution, lime putty production and greenwood handcraft farming background, returns time and again in her work to the location of her own upbringing. LADD's performances are as much shaped by contemporary media influences as they are by traditional rural cultures (recent works related to the Western Shore, Brian de Palma's Scarface and FULLER'S Shock Corridor and storytelling of her childhood). LADD's project for BORÉAL shows how ideas of self-containment and stability are inevitably lost and are instead replaced by erosion, fragmentation and cultural self-loathing.

In 1995 Queen Elizabeth II declared Cardiff to be the capital of Wales. Cardiff is the country's largest city (around 320,000 inhabitants) and thus seemed an obvious choice. But the plan soon hit problems and many of those who had made claim to the capital, and most of them had better historical justification for their claims. In their eyes, Cardiff was a town without a past, a nouveau riche fishing village which made a career for itself in the 19th century as a port, and did not possess any remote romantic associations to sustain it as a capital. Cardiff is also Wales's most anglicised city, geographically and culturally located in close proximity to England. And as a port it has always maintained stronger links with the rest of the world than with its Welsh hinterland, which for many called into question its suitability as a capital. The dispute was revived again in the wake of the so-called 'Devolution': 1999 saw the creation of the National Assembly for Wales, a somewhat historic achievement in that it gave Wales, which up to that point had been governed from England, its own executive forum for the first time in six centuries, albeit one with restricted powers. When searching for a new creative base for the Assembly, every other city in Wales again laid claim to becoming the seat of government, but in the end the city of Cardiff won out.

In 2005 Cardiff celebrates its centenary as a city and fifty years as the Welsh capital. It was the town's ambition to follow this by becoming European City of Culture in 2008, but it narrowly missed out to its competitor Liverpool. Cardiff's campaign for the competition, however, briefly energised the local arts scene and inspired a debate on the nature of urbanity and the artist's place within it. It also highlighted the major changes the city had undergone in recent years. Cardiff, once a thoroughly anglicised and overwhelmingly working-class town (and as such with no real tradition of a public patronage of the arts) has been gentrified by a new middle class, many of whom are Welsh-speakers employed in the media and government. Symbol for the change is the bay area, Cardiff Bay, which twenty years ago was a smelly, dank slum adjacent to the old docks area. Cardiff Bay is now a new bilingual cultural center, a new hub of multiculturales communities in Britain, one of Europe's biggest waterfront developments now attracts new upwardly mobile costumers to its chic bars and restaurants. But the attraction of a cultural artefact between a Welsh-speaking elite, an English-speaking second-class proletariat and various disadvantaged multi-ethnic groups ignores the far more complex interplay of different communities, languages and economies that make up the cultural life of the city, and that presents the context in which many socially-engaged artists in Cardiff create their work.

For some, of course, the very idea of 'Cardiff as City of Culture' is already an oxymoron – for this is the city in which Zaha HADID's daring design for the Cardiff Bay Opera House won an international competition in 1994, but was turned down by the financiers. The ensuing scandal won Cardiff an international reputation as a city of philistines, a reputation it recently confirmed when architect Richard ROGERS was first hired, then fired, then hired again to design a new home for the Welsh Assembly, currently housed in an annex with all the charm of a corporate meeting room. Cardiff has one of the best schools for architecture yet contemporary architecture of any rate, and one of the best art schools in the country yet (at present) no publicly run contemporary art space. (There are a number of Welsh galleries devoted to contemporary art outside the capital in towns such as Swansea, Machynlleth, Aberystwyth, Wrexham, Llandudno and Newtown. Plans to open a major new visual arts facility in Cardiff, the Depot, have not materialized, but the success of the Cardiff-based Artes Mundi, the largest prize for visual art offered anywhere in the world, has awakened a new public interest in contemporary visual arts after its launch in the spring 2004). In the absence of large public institutions, the critics of the mass of artists involved in contemporary art in Cardiff thus takes the form of independent artist-run centres, collectives and artists' networks.
The Cardiff School of Art and Design (or Howard Gardens as it is commonly known) has for many years offered students the opportunity to specialize in time-based art practice (i.e. performance, video, sonic and installation art) as part of their fine art degree. Teachers and students affiliated with the school have consequently occupied a central position in the performance art scene of the city. In the time-based department, performance artist Anthony HOWELL, founder of the influential Theatre of Mistakes, with whom in the 1970s he performed Fluxus-inspired minimalist 'conceptual performances' based on rules and instructions. During his time at Howard Gardens, the school housed Cardiff Art in Time (CAT), a performance art and video festival which took place in 1986, 1989 and 1992, and featured artists and professionals from around the world. Stuart SHERMAN, Gary STEVENS, Seiji SHIMODA, Aaron WILLIAMSON, Hayley NEWMAN, Stanton House Opera, Mark JEFFERY (Goat Island) and Jeremy DELLER all presented live work at the festival, which was championed by artist JESSICA CHRISTO. Gary HILL and Aleksandra SOKURUKA were represented by video works. CAT fulfilled an important role in the development of performance art in Wales, not so much because of its spectacular event character, but by providing a forum for the documentation and dissemination of contemporary performance art practice, a form of performative publication in the shape of a festival. This function was further enhanced by HOWELL, who filmed much of the first festival as a contribution to his Grey Suit: Video for Art & Literature, a performance art magazine distributed on videotape, which was intended as an innovative approach to the recording of live art practice and remains to this day the only publication originating in Wales and solely devoted to performance art.

CAT also brought André STITT to Cardiff, who presented three of his intensely visceral and cathartic 'skishuns' at the festival. The themes of the Belfast born-artist's work revolve around freedom, subjugation and politics, and he grew up in a family of artistic traditions, resonating strongly with the concerns of many political artists in Wales. STITT took over from HOWELL as subject leader of the time-based department in 1999, which he now runs in collaboration with Paul GRANJON, a French artist working in robotics, whose playful performances and installations take as their starting point his fascination with robot-human and machine-human interactions. Recent performance graduates from Howard Gardens include Kira O'REILLY, Richard DEDOMENICI and Matt COOK. COOK in particular creates works that directly reflect on their urban environment. His sound work, ‘Pendulum Electronic’, an extension of Steve REICH's famous Pendulum Music, featured swinging tongs and light sensors that triggered a series of sound samples collected from around Cardiff, which produced an increasingly dense aural portrait of the city. On the other side of town from Howard Gardens is Chapter Arts Centre, Wales's most important centre for contemporary art. A former school, the building was opened as an arts venue in 1971 by local artists Christian KONSEY and Stephen JONES with journalist Jill FLOOD. Their vision was to establish a place that would serve the local community as well as provide an environment in which all creative disciplines could be housed under one roof. More than thirty years on, Chapter has developed into an extensive complex of artists' studios, performance spaces, galleries, cinemas, and premises for various cultural enterprises. It now presents over a thousand events a year and works with partners from all over the world. It also still functions as a meeting place for community initiatives, mother and baby groups, the local Buddhist congregation or weekly Yoga classes, although the futures of these societies rarey meet.

For a long time Howard Gardens in the east and Chapter in the west of the city presented the main two sites where performance practice in Cardiff was created, but in between which there was surprisingly little exchange. Howard Gardens was devoted primarily to performance work that had its roots in the 'party and performance' culture that had its roots in the film industry and the traditions of visual art, while Chapter championed work coming from and emerging from the practice of performance art. Cardiff Projects was an innovative project supported by Chapter and Business Wales which was led by poet, playwright and performance artist Anthony HOWELL, with journalist Mike FLOOD. Their vision was to establish a place that would serve the local community as well as provide an environment in which all creative and innovative arts were encouraged. The corner of their vision was to build a network of artist-run venues devoted to innovative art, among them TACTILEBOSCH, the school housed Cardiff Art in Time (CAT), an experimental performance art space created by Howard Gardens. The school offered a performance-based degree programme for BA (Hons) students and a master’s programme for MFA students. The programme was led by art historian and critic Howard STICKLER, who also served as the university's director of the School of Art and Design. The programme was intended for students interested in a career in performance art, with a focus on experimental forms of art and performance. The programme was considered to be one of the most innovative in the UK and was seen as a model for other universities to follow.

CAT in Cardiff in 1996 once again presented work from Howard Gardens. The situation did not suffer pretension, as the domestic setting of the events was central to its success. It was in this environment that audiences could experience the performative potential of the work presented. The programme was based on the concept of artists presenting their work in a variety of settings, from intimate and isolated spaces to larger and more public venues. The programme was seen as a way to challenge traditional notions of performance art and to make it accessible to a wider audience. The performances were presented in a variety of settings, including streets, parks, and public spaces, and were designed to engage the audience in a variety of ways. The programme was considered to be a way to challenge traditional notions of performance art and to make it accessible to a wider audience. The performances were presented in a variety of settings, including streets, parks, and public spaces, and were designed to engage the audience in a variety of ways. The programme was considered to be a way to challenge traditional notions of performance art and to make it accessible to a wider audience. The performances were presented in a variety of settings, including streets, parks, and public spaces, and were designed to engage the audience in a variety of ways.

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which many current art projects aspire to; this is more of a matter of delivering
opening scenes in the intimate realm of another's senses one's gestures and
and accordingly responsibility. It is this presence that underlies Trace. [...]" (BA-
ccon 2001).

And to those of us who pay a monthly visit to trace, the remains of past
performances is always present. There is the perfect circle that Morgan OMARA
rode on the back wall by swinging her arm around her bodys there is the
time capsule that Brian CONNOLLY filled with the remnants of his audience's actions
and buried in the floor - the one since painted over, the other now concreted
over, but both still there, physically and in our memory. Each performance
reawakens with those that have been and those that are yet to come the line
that Julie ANDRÉ-T. strung between the side walls pre-echoed a similar line in
Zbierniew WARPECHOWSKI's performance. Two artists of different nationalities,
genres, generations, aesthetics and politics become part of the same history,
a new history of performance that is being created as a series of performative
explorations of the same limited space.

Postscript: Y Rhwydwaith – The Network

'It is this isolation of everything not on the map that so potently naturalizes
what's on it.' (WOOD 1992, 87)

No map is complete without a consideration of that which remains unmapped,
in this case the increasing number of artists' collectives and networks in Wales.
The Artists' Project (one of the longest-established of the groups), the Umbrella
Group and Trailerpark are all artist-run collectives that organise collaborative
exhibitions and performance events. Dempseys, an old Cardiff pub, has become
the venue for a regular meeting of experimental music and sonic art, The Quarter.
Other networks are devoted to discourse rather than display: Bloc is a virtual
forum for art and technology, which organises seminars and conferences to raise
the profile of digital media in Wales. The 2nd Wednesday Group, which meets on
the second Wednesday of every month at Chapter for presentations and debate,
is a loose network of around eighty artists, writers, teachers and students with
an interest in performance, cross-disciplinary, live and time-based art in Wales.
It was founded in December 2003 as a forum for discussion, to share informa-
tion and to develop advocacy in an area of artistic practice that in this country
has notoriously lacked sustained critical attention and incisive theoretical
reflection, a lack that has often hindered its development.

Some of this reflection is provided by Performance Research, a peer-reviewed
academic journal that aims to promote innovative connections between
scholarship and practice in the field of contemporary performance. Although
published in England by Taylor and Francis and internationally in scope, the journal
maintains close links with Wales through one of its editors, Richard GOUGH.
GOUGH is Artistic Director of the Aberystwyth-based CPR Centre for Performance
Research, at its roots a theatre organisation devoted to training and the
reflection of practice, which organises workshops, festivals and symposia,
publishes theatre books, and runs a multi-cultural performance resource centre.
The CPR's decidedly intercultural approach to theatrical performance has from
very early on brought it into contact with the emerging academic discipline of
Performance Studies, which it has helped to promote in Britain through a range
of international conferences. The CPR assisted in establishing the Performance
Studies network PSI Performance Studies International, a worldwide membership
organisation, and this year is curating the first of these conferences, which will
hosted the 5th Performance Studies Conference in Aberystwyth in 1996, which brought
several hundred artists and scholars to West Wales, among them Peggy
PHelan, Richard SCHECHNER, Rebecca SCHNEIDER and Guillermo GOMEZ-PENA,
for an exploration of the rapidly shifting definitions at play within the field.
These networks may take temporary possession of a site, but otherwise remain
largely virtual, nomadic and decentralized. Yet even the most 'sited' of theWelsh
collectives is concerned with networks - the Wales Contemporary Art Project, for
example, has an interest in contemporary performance and the cultural and political
similarities between Wales and Québec (Cymru and Québec), and those of their capital cities,
Cardiff and Québec. Cardiff and Québec have often been highlighted:
a bilingual country with a strong sense of cultural identity (against an Anglo-
phone dominance) and a long-running campaign for political independence
(although the presence of first Nations peoples in Québec disturbs this neat
picture and reminds us that French, unlike Welsh, is itself a colonial language);
a historical city in the process of remodelling itself for the global economic
market; and an arts scene in the shadow of a dominant neighbouring metropolis
that sets the cultural agenda.

The CPR has inspired a long-standing cultural exchange programme between
the two countries, both on the official level of government-subsidized art
projects (including the recent RHWNT/Wales-Québec exchange programme,
festivals, residencies and translation support) and on the more informal level
of individual projects such as the Decem Western Cajun Poets Exchange, which,
has been involved in an exchange with Boreal Art/Nature for a number of years;
and most recently Welsh movement artist Marc REES invited Québécois artist
Michael TOPPING to restage his House Project in Cardiff. The latter form of
exchange is driven by a similarly vibrant scene of artist-run centres and initia-
tives in both Québec City and Cardiff.

But the differences are as significant as the similarities. Seen from the
outside, it appears that the Québecois performance scene has experienced a
sustained development over the past thirty years, assisted by the patronage
of such organisations as Inter magazine and Le Lieu and similar artist-run initia-
tives throughout the different regions of Québec. Performance art in Québec
is supported, promoted, documented and critically reflected upon in festivals,
archives and journals. As a result, on the evidence of the work presented at
RHWNT, the performance practice that comes from Québec is accompanied by
a highly developed sense of its history and a sophisticated critical vocabulary
(which was introduced in Cardiff in a lecture-performance by critic Guy SOUILL
DURAND): concepts such as 'relational aesthetics' (N. BOURRIAUD, Paris, 2000)
and 'manoeuvre' (INTER #41, Québec, 1989) are (as yet) little known in Wales.
In this country, the history of performance art is far more fragmented, and the
teoretical debates surrounding it are more unsystematic. There are no archi-
ves, no publications, and barely any festivals devoted to this still marginalized
art practice.

This situation is improving, however. With the establishment of Trace;
installation artspace in 2000, Cardiff now has a gallery space exclusively
devoted to the presentation of performance, which maintains strong links with
the international artist community. And Chapter Arts Centre, the city's main
venue for contemporary art, increasingly hosts time-based art practice. Chapter's
annual Experimentica festival is solely dedicated to a presentation of emerging
work in this area, primarily from Wales itself. RHWNT was evidence for this
change: Initiated by Trace in collaboration with Le Lieu and staged at both Trace
and Chapter, the event took place in the context of Experimentica. This allowed
for a very direct comparison between the performance work currently originating
from Wales and Québec.

There is a danger in exchanges of this kind to interpret the work on show as
somewhat 'representative' for the entire artistic practice of a particular place.
This, of course, it is not. For RHWNT, Richard MARTEL had chosen emerging artists
as well as more established artists who are in the course of making their mark
internationally. Their formal approaches were highly diverse: multimedia
installation, manneve, body art, action art, relational Intervention... What
linked them all, however, was the highly politicized nature of the work. It was
in this case not so much 'local' questions of cultural diversity, linguistic
identity, colonial legacies or political independence that interested these
Québécois artists, but concerns with a wider global resonance: the nature of
collective aggression, individual responsibility, human competitive behaviour,
and all pervading sense of paranoia in our post-9/11 world.

"[P]aranoia ... is nothing less than the onset, the leading edge, of the
discovery that everything is connected, everything in the Creation, a secondary
illumination - not yet blindingly One, but at least connected, and perhaps a
route in ...".

Thomas PYNCHON, Gravity's Rainbow, 1973

*rdnl, voir www.tracegallery.org/