

Flying Along a Curved Path

Flying Along a Curved Path is **shinkansen**'s reflection on key focus themes arising from its 15 years of research and practice in the field of performing and media arts.

This essay forms part of **The shinkansen Collection: 1989 – 2004** which archives the unique artistic legacy of **shinkansen**, renowned for its innovative and pioneering work in the field of sound and movement research.

The six focus themes selected for inclusion in this essay are: -

Artist / Audience Integration
Hands On Producing and Concept Curations
Interauthorship
Networks and Exchanges
Equality and Diversity
Virtual Physical Bodies

The overarching agenda of placing the new into the mainstream is expressed through the concept hidden in the name of **shinkansen** (taken from the Japanese, fast speed bullet train meaning 'new main line'). This theme is also explored in the **History** document featured as part of **The shinkansen Collection: 1989-2004**.

Artist / Audience Integration

From its inception **shinkansen** set a clear aim of giving equal emphasis to artists and audiences. This prerogative has been linked into every project produced, curated, commission or developed in-house.

The unit felt no true reason to exist without this clarity, had no embarrassment about being clear in the targeting of a highly specific audience and did not feel in any way that to make art with the audience in mind ever held back the art or made it less significant. In fact the feeling was the opposite. Art is made to communicate a message to others and we were as interested in the receiver as the creator.

It is for this reason that we never chose to become an agency. We needed to remain as much on the side of the public receiving the art as the artists making itto ensure that it was relevant, topical and exploring all potentials.

Yet the root of this debate was that **shinkansen truly** felt that, just because something was experimental, innovative and risky in the arts sector did not mean it had a small audience in the cultural sector as a whole. Much thought was put into the siting of performances, in relationship to the audience pull required. Again, clarity emerges here. Although often pushed by funders to find ourselves a permanent studio base (this apparently could have secured our very wobbly funding) the aim to site work correctly, in the right place for the right audience, was more important.

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So marketing was woven into the base of every concept and brought into the studio for re-discussion at several stages in the making process. We always had Open Process points in all productions and Network Days at the end of every workshop to check again and again that the work was fulfilling its communication aims. The feedback from visitors and invited viewers was taken into account. For many projects with the budget to do so, vox pops and audience questionnaires went into place to catch the immediate post view from the public and compare it to the marketing line that had been taken. We learnt on every one.

In 1997 for **The Source** with its low budget/no budget base of independence we aimed to fill a theatre of 300 seats for 3 nights by mailing 900 people, and we did it.

Future Physical (2001-04), with much larger ability to do a true marketing push, used live web casting to engage with its international community and network it into East England. 1200 people worldwide watched all major keynote speeches and panels throughout **Future Physical**, gaining the artist speakers a much wider reach, a virtual as well as a physical reception.

Curatorally every programme had debate running at the heart of it and **shinkansen** chose not to present definitive views. We would set out themes, research them, create a set of questions and set off multiple threads of discussion through curations, using multiple forms of communication/expression.

Concept branding was a strong enjoyment of the group and the names of the projects across time became very strong in their own right. We were selling sound artists exchanging with Sound Works Exchange (not shinkansen), and research in clubs with Club Research. Personalisation was the key for every project, enabling the art to meet its own special audience in the right place.

Voice Over took the form of a London wide festival of the human voice and it took place between October and November 1990. The festival presented well-known international voices alongside emerging and young talent. The programme placed the voice at the centre of a range of art forms. **Voice Over** presented impressive large scale concerts at the South Bank Centre by Meredith Monk, Le Mystere De Voix Bulgares and Diamanda Galas, edgy and experimental works by performers and musicians such as Shelly Hirsh and Cassiber and small scale theatre pieces such as Memories of the Middle Kingdom involving physical theatre group dadadumb and vocalist Lui Sola from China at the Institute of Contemporary Arts. **Voice Over** also ran public and professional workshops led by British and International voice practitioners at Riverside Studios.

Voice Over fulfilled its aim of successfully presenting the emergent alongside the known names and making a gathering of voice professionals all able to advance their careers through extended audiences. **Voice Over** also articulated a vision for audience development, crossing over dance, music and theatre audiences and thereby creating new markets, which were wider and broader than many arts events of its type in London at the time.

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Vinyl Requiem was a phenomenal success and lifetime experience for those who saw it at Union Chapel in 1992 – a church in Islington, which went on to be used as the venue for the first London Big Chill festival.

The concept for **Vinyl Requiem** was a vinyl orchestra and, as a tribute to the demise of vinyl in the face of the minidisk and other developments, was very ambitious: 180 dansette record players replicating a full orchestra and constructed into a wall of sound with 2000 plus live slide and video projections on the theme.

In 1992, it was not uncommon at experimental music gigs to see audiences which were small, specialist, white and male at the Purcell Room and Conway Hall. **shinkansen** had a different agenda with **Vinyl Requiem** and its development illustrated an alternative way of working with the art form of experimental music.

Presented as a pre club experience and 10 o'clock show in an unusual public space, its presentation went against the grain of concert presentations in concert halls as 8 o'clock shows. It was fantastic to see London's music and club audiences in the old chapel squashed in alongside the usual suspects for contemporary and experimental performances.

Vinyl Requiem proved the potential to reach new and wider audiences if the processes of cultural production were right. The resulting experience left the 1000 + a night audiences who saw the work at Union Chapel in a standing ovation. The cult memory that has emerged from the project makes us all smile.

Creative User

Creative User Research was an integral part of the **Future Physical** documentation process and involved user research focused on six case studies in the Future Physical programme. The aim was to explore and identify the key issues pertinent to an emerging new form of participation in art which required the user/public/audience to influence, activate or create the artistic experience. The research approach was rooted in our interest in exploring how advanced artists are at meeting public needs and whether the user interface could become the expressive arena of the work. This two year research programme further extended the conceptual framework for users that had evolved out of shinkansen's work in clubs where the role of the user is multifunctional and based in active participation through processes of observation, performance and creation.

The resulting research outputs provided specific insights and observations pertaining to the nature and scope of creative participation within interactive digital art and identified some of the key user requirements. Out of this research directed by Debbi Lander of shinkansen/Future Physical emerged a concept for the analysis of the data, that of *response-Ability*. Does interactive digital art respond to the creative interests and behaviour of the user? Does the user respond to the creative potentials of interactive art? This theme is further explored in the forthcoming publication from Bath Spa University on 'The Mobile Audience.

The value of this research and its analysis to interactive art developers was recognised by NESTA who funded the publication of a Report, DVD and web site

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www.creativeuser.org. It was clear from the research that the emergence of interactive digital art requires convergence between the worlds of art and marketing at a deeper level that was common practice in 2001, backing up our long held view that integrated artist/audience working was the route to high quality user experience.

Hands On Producing and Concept Curations

From the start **shinkansen** evolved a number of new processes in cultural production and it developed and improved these organically over the subsequent 15 years.

Strengths became co-producing and theme producing. We took an approach to curation and programme development which involved local, national and international artists and inserted opportunities for both the public and professionals.

Voice Over set the benchmark for the **shinkansen** standard of production. Many thanks go to Speakout/Serious for very good training in our early days. High level of production, which was and still is uncommon at the experimental and risk taking end of the arts, proved the point that just because something was experimental, did not mean that production standards had to be low.

The early international co-productions emerged out of necessity, as part of the making process. They - without us realising this at the time as we genuinely thought everyone was working this way - were some of the first real European co-productions for art creation in the performing arts and came to be highly respected as models for new ways of working. This fuelled **shinkansen's** reputation as an agent of change and cultural prophet.

The smaller co-productions of the early 90s included award winning commissions in sound and movement research – Jonah and Jonah Touching Jonah by Fiona Wright, Fredericks First Kiss by Sean Tuan John / Bert Van Gorp, Cyborg by Wayne McGregor and Walking Tall by Susan Lewis plus process developments with Vera Mantero, Silvia Real, Iztok Kovac, Alain Platel, Barnaby O'Rourke, Francisco Camacho and Mark Jeffery to name a few.

The work was intensive and mostly on low budgets, making it difficult to fulfill the true potentials of the creations. Yet the network of producers we had made across Europe helped and supported shinkansen and provided an early example of a 5 country touring circuit spanning Austria, Belgium, Portugal, Slovenia and Britain.

Our hands on producing came to a halt in the mid nineties when the Arts Council declared that solid administrators, not creative producers, were needed for dance artists. Other more administration based agencies did not, like shinkansen, set themes for curations and it was considered inappropriate to lead and direct artist's in particular topical directions. We give thanks here to Artangel for sharing our hands-on stance and giving shinkansen the confidence to hold its line of thinking in place.

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However shinkansen did stop producing small scale projects due to impossible economics and it was not until **Hearing Things** by Aaron Williamson, a production for the Dutch Electronic Arts Festival at V2 in Rotterdam in 1998, that we were able to reinstate our bespoke producing methods.

Vinyl Requiem by sound composer Philip Jeck and audio-visual artist Lol Sargent started life in 1990 through an early model for research and development grants. Support came from the Gulbenkian Foundation, focused on new forms of collaboration. **Vinyl Requiem** was co-created with the support of Voice Over, Tramway Glasgow, Now 92 Nottingham and Die Theater Wien, Austria, Time Festival / Vooruit, Belgium and the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. This was the artistic partnership which was to signify **shinkansen's** first efforts at international co-production.

The impossibility of constructing, composing and financing such a large scale work in one go led to the idea of producing the full scale work in sections - as the voice section (1990), woodwind section, massed pianos and percussion section and brass section (1992), each commissioned by a different partner. The sections were then put together in a residency at the Time Festival and the final large-scale piece premiered in London at Union Chapel and toured internationally.

The development of this successful international co—production model was born out of economic necessity. The UK did not seem to have the money to fully support this size of experimental and innovative project – even though it was an orchestra. This had a spin off effect – it gave the artist's time and opportunity to deeply craft the work and **shinkansen** as its producers, a phased opportunity to develop structures and audiences for it. **Vinyl Requiem** was ground breaking, both for its art and its production. It was innovative in its processes of production and also the starting point of **shinkansen's** work in the club scene.

Attached Artist Scheme

The hands on producing line also manifested itself in the development of a scheme which enabled artists to be 'attached' to the organisation for 1 - 3 years, dependent on need. Taking on 3 to 8 artists a year and offering them a bespoke package, tailored to individual needs, this scheme enabled shinkansen to support emergent artists in very particular ways.

Advice and help on the integration of digital technologies become the main line of support, often run alongside personalised 3 year business plans which set out clear professional development and skills enhancement aims to fully immerse the attached artists in digital concepts and processes. This scheme which started in 1992 continues into the new **bodydataspace** organisation co-founded in 2005 by Ghislaine Boddington and Armand Terruli. www.bodydataspace.net

Future Physical Commissions

The **Future Physical** programme (2001 – 2004), 12 years after our starting point, finally gave shinkansen the chance to commission and produces a series of works by artists with the finances to support professional results. The response to the call for applications was overwhelming, 280 being received from 20 different countries. **Future Physical** had the staffing structure set up to project manage in a highly individualised way and 300K was allocated to artists from East England, the UK and internationally for 21 pieces of new work.

The call for applications was very clear in its theme. The commissioned work needed to prioritize placing the body at the centre of digital interaction. Future Physical set 4 research themes - Wearable Computing and Smart Textiles, Bio-Technology, Eco-Technology and Responsive Environments - and artists were asked to respond to one or more of these. Praise came in from artists worldwide thanking us for the clarities around the contexting of their work.

Commissioned works included Whisper by Thecla Schiphorst and Susan Kozel, txoom by Fo.Am, Remember Me by Joseph Hyde, Cell by Jane Prophet, Remote Controller by Vicky Bennett (People Like Us), Memory Release by Isabel Rocomora and Hypnos by Tom Sapsford.

Prize winning projects since include Genomixer by Stanza, Digital Dawn by Rachel Wingfield, Textterritory by Sheron Wray / Fleeta Siegal and Mersea Circles by Masaki Fujihata, a 3D work made by the residents of Mersea Island in Essex which is now permanently housed both in the Martello Tower digital media centre in Jaywick, Clacton and the Ars Electronica Museum in Linz.

Interauthorship

A belief in pooling of ideas and common ownership was at the base of the organisation from the start. When the founders, Ghislaine Boddington and cri cheek met they were both members of the Chisenhale Dance Collective and collaborative practice was their roots. In fact one could say that shinkansen did not believe in the concept that any one idea belongs to an individual alone. Our experience has shown us that innovation and vision leads to unique ideas and this emerges from groups in debate and exchange.

Across the first few years, linked to projects emerging with co-produced aims and concepts, a group process was created which has now been tried and tested across many types and sizes of projects. It emerged, through the collaboration of digital connectivity tools, into a named methodology – Interauthorship.

Ghislaine Boddington has written in depth about this process as part of her research associate at ResCen. ResCen, the Centre for Research into Creation in the Performing Arts at Middlesex University has a series of online pages dedicated to her work as Process Director of shinkansen group projects based in interauthorship. The Weave web site draws together a selection of the **shinkansen** research concerns and maps their development. It shows how the practice of group process evolved into interauthorship, both in response to changes in the field of performing arts and the influence of both the

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tools and the processes inherent in digital technologies.

Interauthorship is defined by shinkansen as a collaboration methodology where each individual involved in the process makes a creative contribution as an equal member of a group and shares ownership (in terms of Intellectual property rights and copyright) of the final product with all other creators.

The written Group Process Brief (extracts below) evolved through the input of hundreds of partners and participants in the 40 plus interauthored residencies, workshops and group projects initiated by **shinkansen** since 1990. It is always used for pre briefing participants and is often part of the final confirmation letter received by invited participants and therefore, alongside documentation agreements, is signed as a negotiated contract of involvement before attendance.

GROUP PROCESS BRIEF... an extract

The aims and themes of this exchange will be explored through a deep group collaboration process.

The invited participants come from diverse cultural and skills backgrounds and bring with them a range of social, political and aesthetics experiences. We look for good debate through this diversity and to enable the use of this opportunity as a chance to learn about other ways of thinking and being in the world today.

The project will be flexibly evolved – with a secure structure in place a FLUID MIX of practice and debate will be evolved by the process directors.

Discussion and debate is a very important aspect of this exchange. We need to learn about each other's cultures and ideas and evolve threaded discussions on the themes emerging from the topic of / participants in the project to carry through into the creative and practical work.

On many occasions, in conversation with funders, or others in the arts, there would be cursory acknowledgement of this rich vein of group creation work, then after a moment's pause, discussions would quickly move on to individual artists. This continuing resistance and a growing confidence founded on increased experience, led us to reflect and make the case that the evolution of digital technologies had initiated a series of changes which had fundamentally altered, and would continue to alter, the ways in which art is made and received, as well as radically altering the relationships between the makers.

The constant focus on the individual author seemed more and more to be simply a blatant misrepresentation of the truth of the day. While recognizing the importance of individual achievement, almost all activity in the performing arts relies on contributions from teams to create and present the work - a collective contribution which is often unacknowledged. One only has to compare the credits that accompany a film, with the credits in virtually any theatre programme in the performing arts, to realise that there is a gap in the theatre programme where the names of the many people who contribute to performance work should be recorded. Somehow it is deemed acceptable to leave this

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space, to render these contributions nearly invisible.

To us the performing and live arts sectors have had and are still in a two decade discourse of false collaboration and teamwork, with little or no real commitment to or understanding of the true depths of the processes involved in specialist collective working practice. Across the late nineties the language has changed and the use of interdisciplinary, collaborative, co-authored, co-created has exponentially increased, but our impression is that these concepts have simply become buzzwords, very rarely are artists being honest that their ideas are created by the skills of many coming together, very rarely does the author genuinely credit or reference the multiple sources of his or her ideas. The funding system re-inforces this still, as only last year the Arts Council still were pushing the priority of the individual artist.

Butterfly Effect Network

It was Butterfly Effect Network (BEN) that set the impetus to an honest recognition of group ownership and European Choreographic Forum (1992 – 96 at Dartington International Summer School) that created the Group Process Brief which, after small changes in 1996, remains as it is today.

Group Process Brief – a few key excerpts

- all participants will be creatives
- skills specialisation will be practiced within collective working methodologies
- respect of experience and respect of topicality/freshness will be given equal weighting
- all will learn and teach equally
- pooling of ideas
- continuous weaving / plaiting of content development, performance and technology
- chains of interaction between participants - deep collaboration

Since 1996 all group projects have used this brief to great effect.

Club Research

An interauthored night of innovative clubbing emerged from shinkansen in 1994 after much discussion around us about the potentials of more innovative work reaching a receptive younger public through the buzzing nightclub scene in London. Made up of multiple rooms, club environments were perfect for jigsawing together multiple fragments of music, dance and video. Each night 60 plus people would gather and make it happen, all interacting and linking as they went along. Club Research had a big effect on other arts organizations in realization of the wider audience access it reached. shinkansen took Club Research and its evolved Cluster club series into venues all over the UK as well as into Germany, Portugal and Finland.

The Pod Structure

Pods – a group collaboration structure based on specialisation within collectivisation. Groups of specialists gather around a theme/activity and share and pool skills throughout the research and production process. For anyone project or programme of work, a number of pods can co-exist and interact with each other to generate the final outcome.

This is an operational model that allows the process of interauthorship to be run through a large group of people. Each project creates a series of interlocking pods containing groups of specialist participants who are attached to various areas of decision-making, co-ordination, production, marketing, process, content development, documentation, technical etc - depending on the projects needs. This ensured that the participants had clear determination in and ownership of the end result.

Well tested in numerous projects, this model allows a deep debate to occur on all important aspects and allocates crossover people to work between the pods ensuring all stay in tune with each other. The pods can vary from larger more generic group structures to smaller teams of specialists dealing with one precise area. The pod debates are documented in detail and summarised into action points for the whole group to use for the final creation.

The Pod Structure was used on projects as small as a day to those of 4 weeks long. With the Future Physical programme in 2001 shinkansen had to expand from 3 to 22 staff for a 2 year period and we decided to try out the pod structure for this. It worked brilliantly, better even than for shorter time periods. The Future Physical Pod Diagram can be seen at www.mdx.ac.uk/rescen/theweave

Our final bid for survival in 2004 was through a shinkansen/Future Physical business plan which put forward a new organisational structure, **Mutual** enabling a range of interdisciplinary organisations to work together in a cluster environment, all sharing the same operational base. This was the ultimate evolution of the Pod structure, a flattened hierarchy based in economic efficiency which is reflected in the networking culture of the 21st century. The Arts Council did not take up the vision and we decided shinkansen had tried its best over 15 years. It was time to stop.

Networks and Exchanges

shinkansen worked at all times with a strategy of planned informality – a collaboration strategy which creates an overall solid framework and yet enables individuals to work within the group in an open-ended and personalised way. This structure facilitates a working process akin to structured improvisation and maximises individual and group creativity.

As shinkansen workshop projects became more complex in their organisation and international involvement, there was a clear need for more pre-project communication. The preparation for these workshops began to use the almost ubiquitous email, to

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connect the group and this enabled a forum for democratised debate. We worked to develop flattened hierarchies, creating porous networks with active clusters of interaction. These networks continue long after the project has ended a practical and powerful testament to the power of communication and the collective.

This all fed into the Interauthorship processes detailed above and was also the foundation of the creation of Networks and Exchanges.

The story of Butterfly Effect Network is the starting point for a process that went on to affect all shinkansen work onwards, finalising in the 4 Network Exchanges of **Future Physical**.

The pursuit of these concerns led to an international series of projects and workshops, among them European Choreographic Forum, Sound Works Exchange, körper-technik/body-technology, Woven Bodies/Woven Cultures, and Club Research, all focused on collective working practices. This culminated in projects focused on the creation of CellBytes, short interauthored dance works credited to the group which produced them. This line of enquiry has focused on the use of telematics; using web based audio-visual interactivity for an art making process centered on bridging physical space with human interaction

Today, such people are often connected by networks, allowing an open exchange of information and an immediacy of communication. The networking becomes a part of the process of making work – it is a dynamic networking which facilitates the development of natural, intuitive, emergent patterns of behaviours. Because of the nature of their source/s, such networks are simultaneously deeply dependent on ‘the other’ and yet require a highly independent engagement which results from personal choice.

Butterfly Effect Network –The partner organisations in this network came together through meeting at IETM (Informal European Theatre Meeting). All were concerned with advocating and supporting process. This viewpoint went against the grain of the times and the focus on product in most artistic exchange projects involving European artists. Butterfly Effect Network saw the need for artists to have a safe space to play, experiment and exchange without the pressure to produce or present product to an audience.

The network co-produced European Choreographic Forum at Dartington International Summer School on an annual basis from 1992 – 1995. European Choreographic Forum took the form of a two week workshop involving artists from six European countries in an intensive opportunity to debate and explore process with a peer group. Choreographers from the young to the well known were recruited through the network.

European Choreographic Forum came to be renowned as a pioneering model in the field of professional development in dance. Funding for the 25 or so participants who attended each annual project came from the national funding bodies linked to the network partners in Slovenia, Austria, Belgium and Portugal to cover the costs for participants. The Arts Council Dance Department provided base funding and support for

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UK artists for its five year duration.

Butterfly Effect was one of the first artist led networks in Europe. The European dimension and network component of the project enabled EC Kaleidoscope (now Culture 2000) funding to be gained for the annual workshop (1993) and EC DGV Task Force Funding for the network (1994).

The effects of Butterfly Effect Network are still being felt in the ongoing collaborations between artists that it spawned. The reputation of artistic by-products that it helped produce created an ongoing after effect of the Forum - such as Fredericks First Kiss - a theatre collaboration between Sean Tuan John and Bert Van Gorp which was co-produced between shinkansen London and Stuc, Leuven with money from both the UK and Flanders and which toured all over Europe and presented 70 plus times.

Sound Works Exchange was modeled on European Choreographic Forum and focused on exchange and the improvement of relationships between young German and British artists, in this case sound artists. Supposedly the first co-production between the Goethe Institut and the British Council, it was also about raising profile and awareness of the sound art scene through events and recordings. Public performances, artist discussions, club events and open debate all took place. The project focused on self help learning, exchange, networking and critical debate. Many ongoing connections are in place from this network, a group of 30 plus who have helped each other often in the years since.

Sound Work Recordings emerged as a recording project for the Sound Works Exchange with a focus on the production of sound research and ambient recordings to small scale and independent global record distributors. Sound Work Recordings released two CD's, The Sound Works Exchange CD1 and The Sound Works Exchange CD2 of recordings by the artists involved. This showcased the networks output.

Connectivity and the Connectivity Online Forum (1996) was a physical and virtual networking concept linking diverse ideas, processes, people and products in a particular community. In this case the community was dance and digital artists who, in collaboration with the infamous backspace new media lounge in Clink Street, shinkansen brought together once a month to talk. The online element kept people in touch between the discussion forums. The flow between giving and receiving from each source or node on the network generated multiple links for the benefit of each individual in professional development, employment and audience development.

Future Physical also utilised what shinkansen were by now well known for and what had become acknowledged as advanced networking practice. Four Network Exchanges were set up, one for each of the programme's themes. Each was held in a different city / town in East England. The Network Exchanges started with a keynote speech on the topic and moved into 2 – 4 days of forums and debates surrounded by commissions, performances and installations. Future Physical put aside a professional development fund enabling every artist involved in the programme to attend the four Exchanges for ongoing connectivity. This network of people is still in the flowclusters and nodes emerging monthly as artists re-find each other, invite each other to perform and present and start collaborations together, all based in the trust formed from collaborative practice

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and skills exchange.

Equality and Diversity

Diversity was always at the organic base of shinkansen. Our belief is that diversity in debate and practice is the only true way to have a healthy engagement in today's world and this belief is still strong. Through pooling and sharing practice between artists and audiences from numerous differing cultures we can all extend our consciousness of reality, exchange knowledge and gain understanding, expand our ideas and artistically innovate for a 21st century global environment.

Apparent at every level of **shinkansen's** artistic and business work was interdisciplinary process, witnessed at the levels of concept, branding, product and market. Looking and going beyond boundaries was a deeply engrained reflex action of **shinkansen** and whether these boundaries were mental, physical, emotional or spiritual, artistic or geographical, the work which emerged from this approach was interdisciplinary in the widest sense.

Nearly every project integrated local and international participation from the outset. **shinkansen** utilised its co-production strategies not simply as financing arrangements, but as deep artistic and production partnerships, which organically materialised through networking and exchange and emerged in recognition of like minds, common agendas and shared objectives.

Equality as an integrated part of the organisation is reflected in the interauthorship methodologies detailed above. Equality was at the root of the organisation's belief system. In fact we can truly state that every shinkansen project and event was programmed with thought and care around gender, race and other equality issues, the aim always to have a wide representation and ensure a wider thought process for all involved.

Today within the innovative live and performing arts community, nationality is in many ways an anti-issue – in fact the more multinational an enterprise the better. In general people are excited by the variety of different cultural influences. Many practitioners come from multi-national backgrounds themselves. Dance in particular is a cultural form recognised by all, although hugely varied in its approach from differing cultures.

However the technological and financial means of production for this sector still lies overwhelmingly in indigenous white European hands. A means for disseminating cultural hybridity still needs to be harnessed to create networks between cultures and to prevent these frightening global declines into 'ethnic' narcissism and nationalism. shinkansen always asked itself *“What relevance does a proscenium-oriented theatre show have to those who can find their special ‘sub cultural’ interest is catered for in other more inclusive environments?”*

Why should all members of the public be asked to sit still in a numbered seat and watch,

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at a distance, other bodies moving in a removed space? This way of behaving is very normal for some and very alien for others.

In 1993 shinkansen developed a simple and fun “getting to know each other” exercise for the start of group projects. Its aim was to get beyond the official CV style biographical information sent around prior to projects and to ease up and familiarize everyone with each other at a more personal level. This exercise was very effective and has now been used many times with at least 600 plus artists over the 15 years.

Excerpt from Identity exercise

To build trust and get to know each other we will start with an identity game so I need you to bring with you 5 items, which you feel truly represent your life. You will be given five minutes to show/tell the group more about you and your identity - so think carefully - meeting a group of strangers, how would you, using 5 key items as illustration, tell us the most important things about your essential identity and who you really are!

The interesting point to come out of this was that rarely if ever did the nationality of the individual come up as one of the 5 main representations of their life.

Bare Essentials – Gender Mayhem, a two year curation at the ICA in London focused on a range of trans gender work and addressed the 'gender agenda' that faced us all in the early 90's. Through performances, debates and workshops, emerging and known artists explored areas ranging from identity to eroticism and cross dressing.

Taking a serious and humorous look at the body politic through the theme of gender, Bare Essentials showcased work by Liz Aggiss, Emilyn Claid, Meg Stuart, Clare Russ, Subodh Rathod, Fiona Wright, Susan Lewis, Francisco Camacho, Madelina Victorino and Gary Carter.

The use of clear interauthorship collaboration methods and realtime telematics across the last 10 years resulted in invitations to direct 15 major projects which had the specific agenda to engage artists from differing cultures in deeper understanding of each other worlds. This included specialist connections between Europe, Africa and India, East and West Germany, East–East European connections, China and Japan, Israel and Palestine, as well as multi-cultural group projects in the UK, Portugal, Austria, USA, Romania and Canada.

shinkansen's work took us into intercultural practices on a daily basis within the local context of Britain, in the new Europe debate and on a global level. In 2000 Ghislaine Boddington co-directed and moderated (with Andre Lepecki) a discussion atelier for choreographers from South East Asia, Africa, South America and Europe as part of the festival **Munich Dance 2000** and at the **Copenhagen International Dancing World Festival**.

The **Digi –ID** project for Akademi at the Nehru Centre initiated many younger British Indian choreographers into working with digital technologies as part of a debate about identity and **Litmus Effect** was a China/UK exchange series for artists working with new

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technologies (Artist Links, Arts Council of England and British Council).

shinkansen has also presented, wrote articles and led workshops throughout the British Council series of conferences **Re-Inventing Britain**. This led in 2002 to working again with Akademi on the **Two Cities 4x4** project for Indian choreographers regularly on the move between London, New York and India. This was part of the **Connecting Flights Symposium** at the British Library.

These projects are all detailed on Ghislaine Boddingtons ResCen pages [LINK](#) as are several written articles on these issues.

Germaine Acogny, Senegal, reinforces this: "*Know who you are and where you come from, but also be of 'now'*".

What is 'authentic' today in a world of sampling and pluralistic identities?

Traditional mutation should not replace true innovation.

Traditionalism must not determine the way but must regenerate within the modern context, or natural evolution is held back.

"I am so much more than what I am asked to confine myself to be" says Bozie Cekwana,

Virtual Physical Bodies

shinkansen emerged and existed in the last decade of the 21st century at the peak point of the shift into digitalisation, a revolution which has changed the whole world in the last 20 years.

Very early on we took the view that digital technologies needed to be used as a development by and for people, and did not, in contrast to many live performance specialists, see it as a dehumanising, oppressive anti-presence to be avoided at all costs, and only the preserve of a select group of techno-wizards.

Technical expertise was essential, but it needed to be demystified and shared as openly as possible. We had a very strong sense that these new digital technologies should enable human endeavour and be used to empower us.. Enhanced connectivity would facilitate knowledge exchange and therefore deepen understanding between us and those at a distance.

Human connectivity must balance technology; so shinkansen set off on a route into the digital world that insisted on the consistent input of human presence into the evolutions of new technologies, based in a concern for the living emotional breathing human body.

It was **Butterfly Effect Network** that became the key push for the technologically

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influenced creation processes when the five producing groups scattered across Europe discussed in 1992 how resourceful it would be to continue our shared process and finalise creations in our own countries beyond the joint workshops. Unfortunately the “Beam me up Scottie !!” dream of our youths had not emerged from science and to truly exchange with one another we still had only one choice.....to get on a flight and meet physically.

Yet the Dartington International Summer School, highly supportive of shinkansen’s cross - European aims, enabled us to access additional performance technologies for all 5 years of the annual European Choreographic Forum. Butterfly Effect Network and its participants advanced rapidly into what can now be seen as the first steps into the set up of body reactive environments for performance.

A Responsive Environment is the creation of space which responds and reacts to the human body through data inputs and outputs. Sound, movement and visual data transference became a key exploration area for the organisation, resulting in the high level debate held at the RESPOND Network Exchange in Future Physical in 2003 and the evolution of the new bodydataspace.

The Sound Works Exchange artists of the mid nineties were advanced in their use of technologies. These artists had no fear of technology as a ‘tyrant’, they were in control. These were tools they used to reach their creative goals.

At this point in time it was the situation that wearable computer systems, worn on the body to enable connectivity of the human body to computer networks, were very restrictive and clunky. This defeating, for shinkansen, the point of the free flow moving human body and the joy of movement.

So we explored telematics.

Telematics – the transmission of audio-visual data between different spaces in remote locations through use of the internet. Performance telematics remotely connects two or more 'stages' and performance pieces are performed live in each space and simultaneously mixed and transmitted to the web.

For us this solved several key issues:

- no wires attached to and restricting dancers performers, participants or creative users
- connectivity between us and our co-creators in other countries
- extension of audiences through the web steam, taking the work beyond its live audience internationally to real time virtual viewers
- exploration of contemporary global movements, interculturalism and identity was extended by this clear defiance regarding geographical distance

Telematics finally allowed us to fully grasp our early ideas about the interaction and integration of the **virtual** and the **physical body** – a blurring of boundaries allowing the creation, communication and real time interaction of live bodies and digital

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representations of the body.

In 2000 **CellBytes** emerged and investigated the impact of remote and live presences brought together into a single virtual space. The residencies and workshops advanced knowledge for many artists. Working with the live body in relation to the virtual projected body opened up a new virtual space for creative exploration. It was ResCen Middlesex University that came in to support this research and from 1999 to 2005 shinkansen/Future Physical created 15 projects involving telematics, workshops and dual stage performances.

Initial research questions for CellBytes included:

- How do projected forms of the body, that are recreated and transmitted through digital tools, change our relationship with others and ourselves?
- What is "live"? What is "natural"?
- What does it mean to be embodied?
- Can embodiment be extended into virtual realms whilst still maintaining a physically centered orientation?
- What connections can be made between the extended bodily sensations virtuality promises, and the body knowledge of the movement researcher?
- Can one inhabit multiple worlds through multiple identities?
- Is there an essence of "presence"?
- What evolutions of touch and intimacy, empathy and trust, are possible with communication through telepresence?

Created in this way numerous experimental **CellBytes** emerged, as multi-sourced, multi-sited 1-7 minute pieces of live dual stage performance transmitted real time through the internet. The **CellBytes** exist on the web beyond the life of the research project, as archival evidence of the live performance, with resonance of human presence in the moving images. Cellbytes00 in Arizona State University and CellBytes01 at Middlesex University have their own websites with an extensive amount of detailed information on this series of creations, and on her ResCen online pages, The Weave, Ghislaine Boddington has uploaded all the tiny CellBytes experiments as a video archive of research outputs, and in May 2006 completed a series of written reflections on this work.

shinkansen has worked with many artists to share, exchange, train and mentor on the evolution of telematics into dance and performance including Company in Space, Random Dance Company, Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company and the majority of the younger British Asian dance sector through co-operations with Akademi.

We have worked with dancers, performance artists, video jockeys, sound artists and best of all with children and young people to evolve this form. We have streamed two ways between London, Colchester, Norwich, Cambridge, Helsinki, Lisbon, Arizona, Tokyo, Kyoto and Shanghai in various combinations from clubs, theatres, arts centres, conference centres, cafes and boats. We even did a three way stream between London, Colchester and Norwich at the opening party to launch **Future Physical**. We have

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always used the internet as proof of the DIY culture that two-way audio-visual transmission enables, utilising the lag when present into the process, and avoided more inaccessible transmission methods such as video conferencing.

The **Virtual Physical Bodies** workshop and symposium at Middlesex University in 1999, the Future Physical theme - putting the body at the centre of digital interaction - and its Cluster club nights, and the three year co-curation with Dance Umbrella and the ICA, **Virtual Incarnations**, brought this work and other body technology performances into the public eye. Many more artists and organisations are now using this tool as a stage connector and audience enhancer.

Today wireless applications enable the body to move freely and avoid the restrictions of cables and wires. Equipment can gather data and signals generated by the wearer or other wearers connected to the same system, and communicate this as a network of data and information, e.g. sensing and movement data.

We have constant requests from artists all over the world to help them engage in this connectivity – in particular artists in remote countries lacking access to the touring and festival circuits who have a clear need for real time relations with colleagues and audiences.

bodydataspace takes this debate on the body in data in space forward. Set up to explore visionary explorations of this merge between the physical, the virtual and our environments Ghislaine Boddington, Armand Terruli, Leanne Bird and the rest of the team moved forward on projects such as *skintouchfeel*, an interactive performance-based installation immersing the audience in the virtual and digital body and enhancing the senses of touch and feel.

Merging live audio-visual interaction with telematics and the new generation of intelligent materials and wearable computers **bodydataspace** take installations and live performances into large-scale public environments and architectural builds, shifting the relationship between the artist, the media/content and the user/audience.

shinkansen foresaw the exchange and involvement in the creation, participation and consumption of art enabled by digital technologies.

We still look ahead and bodydataspace focuses on a future vision.

Large screen display technologies integrated with compact multi-camera set ups, multi-projections and surround sound systems that will create new immersive dialogue spaces. The data will be processed and transmitted real time, allowing the meeting space to be accessible from anywhere in the world 24/7.

Visuals and sounds generated by haptic and other smart sensors plus integrated mobile device controllers will create live reflections of the dynamic (temperature and motion) and the reach (networked accessibility) of the performances.

These social network structures will interconnect micro-content, empowering end users

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to move data across networks. These are people aggravators allowing the users to reach, receive and respond to the sounds and visions, views and opinions, creations and ideas of others worldwide.

The active and effective results of these outputs...debates, happenings and performative interactions ...will create multi-distribution gateways, breaking through traditional dogma and codifications. The users will generated the paths and journeys, leaving in places traces and patterns that will awaken shared insights and perspectives, enabling other ways of thinking about our world, philosophies, politics, cultures and far away places.

Inclusive for all, diversity is the key element of insightful dialogue. Access for disabilities will be integrated into all aspects of design from the early stages, empowering individual identities and voices to emerge and effect.

These physical and virtual interfaces for the meetings and sharings automatically widen access. Defying place and time, multi-distributional networks will cross boundaries in ways previously unimaginable. Fresh truths and new wisdoms can emerge, freed from the restrictions of 20th century institutionalism.

Andrew Ward, Technical Director of Future Physical and long-term collaborator in shinkansen, passed away in January 2005. He was an imperative influence in the evolution of telematics in the work of shinkansen, responsible for the streaming of all the CellBytes and working closely with the process directors on researching the methodologies and keeping the debate topical.

Flying Along A Curved Path is dedicated to him.

Links

Connected documents in the 'Flying Along a Curved Path' selection of writings and documentation co-authored and compiled by Ghislaine Boddington and Debbi Lander:

[HISTORY](#) - background to shinkansen early days, role and remit

[PEOPLE](#) - key personnel in shinkansen, Future Physical and The shinkansen C Collection

[SIGNIFICANT DATES](#) - chronology of key events and achievements

[DEBATE](#) - research topics and outputs from shinkansen debates, symposia and working

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groups

[SUPPORT](#) - what others said about shinkansen when it needed support in 1994 (shinkansen) and in 1997 (Future Physical)

[GLOSSARY](#) - a listing of shinkansen process and research terms