

# The shinkansen Collection: 1989 - 2004

## Flying Along a Curved path

### History

#### shinkansen – new main line

The concept embedded in the name of shinkansen (taken from the Japanese, fast speed bullet train and translating as ‘new main line’) provided a creative foundation for a leap in art development.

The incentive of the founders of shinkansen, [Ghislaine Boddington](#) and [cris cheek](#) (both were part of the Chisenhale Dance Collective in the 1980’s with dance/movement and sound/text backgrounds) was to take artist-led innovation into mainstream access and this was the motivation behind the early shinkansen projects in 1990, [Vinyl Requiem](#) (Union Chapel/Time Festival), [Voice Over](#) (South Bank Centre/Institute of Contemporary Arts) and [shinkansen tracks](#) (Brighton Festival) – producing unusual and experimental artistic content into mainstream and large scale festival contexts and distributing innovative interrelationships between process and product into the European/international arts scene.

The impetus was to be able to work throughout Europe and make use of the new technologies of the day. The beginnings of this can be seen in the projects, [Vinyl Requiem](#) (1990), [European Choreographic Forum](#) and [Butterfly Effect Network](#) (1992) and [Sound Works Exchange](#) (1994) and the development line traced back to work at [Chisenhale Dance Space](#) in its emphasis on collaboration processes, European connections and sound art and video dance in the 1980’s.

The focus of [enabling new and wider access](#) and involving art in every day life manifested itself as a continuing objective in shinkansen’s work and was visible in its use of topical themes, which moved the relevance of its work beyond the world of art and attempted to involve people of all types in art experiment and development.

It was a result of this focus on access that [Debbi Lander](#) joined shinkansen in 1990 (from Bartle Bogle Hegarty Advertising Agency, two years later, [Estelle Neveux](#) from France and the world of stage production and [Andrew Ward](#) from his career in photojournalism completed the core team. (See [People](#) for full team details.) The social interests of shinkansen personnel in club culture and global communities came to be reflected in shinkansen’s practice; its work in clubs, web casting and ultimately the development of telematic performances. These people, alongside Ghislaine Boddington, worked as an integrated unit and created a solid foundation for shinkansen to thrive for more than a decade.

Never one to follow trends but rather to make them, shinkansen was instrumental in opening up emerging markets for others in the arts to exploit; such as the youth culture and creative industries markets. Looking back we can see themes and practices which have continuing resonance today. Examples include:

# The shinkansen Collection: 1989 - 2004

## Flying Along a Curved path

[gender mayhem](#), explored through annual curations at the [Institute of Contemporary Arts](#),

**total immersion in the sense of sound** developed through working with sound artists and through its Club Research projects in clubs

practices of **sound and movement research in clubs** leading to **telematic dance performances**

shinkansen's use of **process-based network structures** and **peer led professional development**.

These methodologies are acknowledged across the arts as having been benchmark shifts now taken on board as good practice by the more forward-looking. All of these themes are explored in the shinkansen [Essay](#).

One of the opportunities seized by shinkansen at this time was the diversity of locations we had the chance to place creative work in, the fascination of working in unique sites in rural, urban and coastal locations; the atmosphere, the meaning and the accessibility afforded to artworks in non art spaces. This was art in the real world deploying extraordinary spaces for innovative experiments. An experience of the group, primarily group research, rooted the artistic vision of shinkansen in social interaction and the development of creative participatory experience for the public.

### Early On

shinkansen's origins lie in [Chisenhale Dance Space](#) in the heart of Bow in East London where its co-founders both worked, as part of a collective of radical artists dedicated to risk, experiment and culturally diverse interdisciplinary arts practice. Chisenhale Dance Space pursued an artistic agenda rooted in exploring the edges of dance, movement and performance and the potential of live physical forms. Its by-line in the mid 1980s was Chisenhale "Not Just Dance" Space. Chisenhale was the home for the original X6 Dance Collective who moved there from Butlers Wharf in the late 1970s alongside a group of visual artists. Chisenhale Dance Space and the Chisenhale Studios became a key 80's melting pot and meeting place for artists and community. These origins associated shinkansen from the very beginning with grassroots communities, cultural diversity and collective action.

A conversation between Ghislaine Boddington and cris cheek in a local pub on a night in January 1989 led to the birth of shinkansen as an independent and non venue based independent producer. This concept of being non building based was born out of its co-founders dissatisfaction with the limits imposed by working within the confines of a single venue.

shinkansen also deliberately chose not to be an agency (providing representation for individual artists) but to focus on being a producing house that created its own themes, curations, projects and events and researched and produced the artistic work of

# The shinkansen Collection: 1989 - 2004

## Flying Along a Curved path

innovative sound and movement artists. It became a research model that took themes as a starting point and created forms from multiple conversations around those themes, as opposed to other set ups at the time which developed organisational structures that focussed on agency models servicing the work of individual artists.

Such an emphasis put shinkansen in a unique position from the very beginning, as in 1989 the practice of independent producing was only known in the worlds of music and film and was highly uncommon in the field of dance and theatre.

Throughout the 15 years, shinkansen's artistic direction evolved from providing training, production and touring support for innovative movement and sound works such as Jonah Touching Jonah ([Fiona Wright](#)), Walking Tall ([Susan Lewis](#)), Frederick's First Kiss ([Sean Tuan John and Bert Van Gorp](#)), (R)eplay (E)rase (C)opy ([Jessica Levy/Joao Galante](#)) and Vinyl Requiem ([Philip Jeck and Lol Sargent](#)) to becoming a research, production and development organisation focusing on producing new content with live and digital creators for multi sector and multi media distribution. We liken this journey to the concept of '[Flying Along A Curved Path](#)'

### How shinkansen described itself

#### In 1991 (PR text)

*shinkansen – new main line is an independent partnership based in the east end of London. We specialise in the new production of dance, live/performance art, music, public art and voice/text work, primarily multi arts based. shinkansen aims to activate 'new main line' contexts for new production whether through the live arts, media arts, research, publishing or consultancy. shinkansen – new main line fully integrates artistic and marketing direction to fulfill the needs and maximise the potential of both artists and their audience.*

#### In 2001 (PR text)

*shinkansen is a research and development unit based in London Bridge. Formed in 1989 it specialises in the creation of digital performance environments, and the integration of professional development within intermedia based projects. shinkansen has an international reputation for advanced networking and artists exchange through its programme of workshops, residencies and topical debate forums.*

# The shinkansen Collection: 1989 - 2004

## Flying Along a Curved path

### Role and Remit

The form of shinkansen, its focus on themes and wide engagement with different artistic forms and audiences put it ahead of the game. When we reflect on our past we see a body of avant garde work which had a role in extending the boundaries of the wider arts and cultural sector.

shinkansen's commitment to both artists and audiences led to **integrated artistic and marketing** processes being woven into the fabric of every project from the concept stage through to presentation. A cornerstone belief in the equal importance of **debate and practice** resulted in curatorial and producing methodologies which incorporated both domains in both public events and professional development projects.

We remember the efforts we made to keep up with new and topical developments in arts, culture and society. In practice this meant constantly viewing a great diversity of work, reading extensively, talking and networking with people from all over the world, as a core part of our everyday work.

It was opportune to be living and working in an internationally diverse megatropolis like London in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and to be part of a community of people worldwide who believed in innovation as opposed to imitation. Rich content was always around in the form of information, dialogue, new tools and systems and through spending time in diverse groups of creative thinking people.

The intensity of debate and concept development which took place both within and outside of the unit through its networking came from embracing diversity of background, culture, experience, skill, age and geographical location. From this place emerged a commitment to interdisciplinary working and a process which came to be called [Interauthorship](#), a focus theme explored in the [Essay](#).

shinkansen was clear from the start that in order to survive it needed to be influential at a strategic level and develop itself as both a professional and public brand within the evolving European context. This meant it needed to find a very public and high profile way of placing its ideas on the map for arts and culture internationally. The means to do this first came through a close collaboration with London based theatre and music producers, [Speakout](#) (which subsequently merged with Serious to become one of the biggest and leading organisations in the world of contemporary music promotion).

Through this collaboration with *David Jones*, the concept of *Voice Over* emerged. This project is explored in the focus theme on [Hands on producing](#) in the [Essay](#). Two other international co-productions were also emerging and developing at this time - [Vinyl Requiem](#) and [European Choreographic Forum](#).

In 1992 shinkansen was awarded a one year Multi and Interdisciplinary Franchise agreement for £22,000 from Arts Council of England as a direct result of developing these initiatives. This agreement was continued for a further two years with a 10% increase per year and when, in 1995 this agreement ended, shinkansen was left with no base funding in place to provide a degree of stability to the organisation. Struggling with

# The shinkansen Collection: 1989 - 2004

## Flying Along a Curved path

a business context where low fees were the norm, shinkansen was forced to return to the process of applying for tiny pockets of project funds.

We vividly remember the daily challenges of financing an artistic agenda that had committed to supporting grass roots networking, hands on producing and an emphasis on content and process rather than style and product. shinkansen's remit also responded to artist-led agendas rather than producing to what was favourable in policy and grant giving at the time. Whilst shinkansen continued to work at the small and middle scale, many other independent producers in the field had turned to large scale and high profile producing in order to survive.

When we look back and reflect on what shinkansen managed to achieve on an average turnover of £120,000 a year, we understand how it came to develop an ethos of co-producing, working internationally and working semi commercially. Such processes are the foundation for economic models common amongst today's micro businesses in the creative industries. We worked it out as we went along.

shinkansen officially set up and began producing in May 1989 from the home bases of its co-founders who lived in Stratford and Canning Town. This point in history was just prior to the commercial development of Canary Wharf and the Docklands. Early shinkansen days (1989 -1993) were spent in East London until Arts Council of England Franchise funding in 1992 facilitated the renting of a shared basement office in Bloomsbury with First Out , the gay and lesbian café in Tottenham Court Road . Economics and the need to scale up and down to survive the ebbs and flows of research and independent production moved the unit to different locations and spaces in London - to the Arts Depot, an old German Turnhalle (Gymnasium) in the heart of Kings Cross in 1995 and back to a home office base in Dalston in Hackney, North London in 1997. Finally shinkansen moved to London Bridge and nos 3 Bedale Street in 1997, the unit's final place of work, located in the heart of Borough Market in SE1.

shinkansen's need for annual revenue funding created precarious business conditions. Most notably, two key points in the history of shinkansen, in 1994 and in 1997 (See [Support](#) for letters of support received at this time) when the organisation had to turn itself into a pressure group and lobby for its livelihood, shinkansen took action by scaling down, lowering its overheads through returning to a home base for a temporary period and reducing its activity in areas of work which were not self generating, namely providing advice and mentoring services to independent and young artists. shinkansen looked to mainland Europe for ways to make a living of producing.

In the UK the Arts Council was unclear about its thinking in relationship to digital technologies, in particular those connected with the body, and engaged in multiple re-structuring processes within itself. Like other UK-based peer group organisations working with performance and new technologies ( Blast Theory, Gob Squad, Desperate Angels, Random Dance Company to name a few ) we all turned to the rest of Europe, in particular Germany, which supported many of us across a 5 year period at the end of the nineties and into the new millenium.

From 1996 to 2001, shinkansen worked almost exclusively in Europe and extensively with Germany on a range of initiatives including a series of body-technology themed

# The shinkansen Collection: 1989 - 2004

## Flying Along a Curved path

workshops, an area of core research explored in the focus theme on [Virtual-Physical Bodies](#) in the [Essay](#). Economic realities pushed a lucrative creative agenda.

The creation of Future Physical as a theme and programme evolved during this period and despite two funding bids to Arts For Everyone programme of the National Lottery to support the development of Future Physical, funding for this initiative was not to come until 5 years later when in 2001, after nearly 6 years of mainly producing projects outside of the UK, shinkansen was awarded a commission of £550,000 from Arts Council England East to advance the development, profile and public awareness of arts and technology practice in the region of East England, nationally and internationally. This commission to research, develop and deliver the major two-year programme [Future Physical](#), brought the unit's programme back into Britain.

shinkansen set up a new non profit Limited company called **Future Physical Ltd** to manage the programme of work and catalyst the public investment to an overall turnover of 1.2 million. This opportunity both consolidated the operational processes and the artistic research evolved over the previous 12 years. It also enabled shinkansen to further its own research into body-technology themed telematic club environments [Cluster](#), dance curations for Dance Umbrella, [Virtual Incarnations](#) and telematic performances [CellBytes](#) in the UK.

Alongside Future Physical and 13 years after its formation in 2002, a commitment to funding shinkansen on an annual basis was finally secured. shinkansen became a revenue funded client of the Visual Arts Department of Arts Council (London Office) and was awarded a £62,000 a year funding agreement for three years. The acknowledgement of the value to the arts of shinkansen's role and remit, came just at the moment when shinkansen was ready to move onto into new initiatives, just at the moment we felt shinkansen had done its work.

At around the same time, Arts Council England responded to shinkansen's need to advance its aims and visions and integrate the shinkansen and Future Physical Ltd operations, awarding Future Physical Ltd a 'Grants for the Arts' for a nine month period of organisational development. Future Physical Ltd produced a three year business plan for 2005 – 2008 proposing the development of three new initiatives: *bodydataspace* (new design unit), *Mutual* (Co-operative network structure) and *Future Physical Publishing* (a research and publications programme).

This business plan in 2004 was our final bid for survival and centred around the development of a new organisational structure, **Mutual** enabling a range of interdisciplinary organisations (including bodydataspace and Future Physical Publishing) to work together in a cluster environment, all sharing the same operational base. This was the ultimate evolution of shinkansen working practice, and utilised skills well recognised and needed in the creative economy and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

For the 4th time 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.

Subsequently [bodydataspace](#), the new company set up by body technologist Ghislaine Boddington with architect and video artist Armand Terruli, is now the recipient of shinkansen's annual funding legacy at the level of £66, 950 in 2005/2006. Formed in

# The shinkansen Collection: 1989 - 2004

## Flying Along a Curved path

April 2005, bodydataspace (b>d>s) design unit evolves the artistic direction of shinkansen/ Future Physical into new forms and territories working with the expanding integration between the human body, technology and architectural space enabling the evolution of action landscapes and media blend worlds through the creation of immersive and responsive spaces.

**Future Physical Ltd** sought further 'Grants for the Arts' funds and a Learning Award from NESTA to develop key projects within the Future Physical Publishing strand, [Creative User - investigating the new market for interactive digital art](#) and [The shinkansen Collection: 1989 – 2004](#), archiving the unique legacy of shinkansen'.

These two publishing projects effectively served to consolidate, archive and end the work of shinkansen and Future Physical.

## Advocacy

An undercurrent going on continuously behind the scenes of producing and research was a commitment to advocacy for the independent artist sector. The diary was always full of events to go to in the form of conferences, think tanks and funding meetings both in the UK and abroad. shinkansen took every strategic opportunity it could to voice the needs, visions and opportunities for independence and innovation in the 90's.

Being actively involved in networks such as the [British Council Dance and Drama Advisory Group](#) and the [Informal European Theatre Meeting \(IETM\)](#) enabled the organization to contribute to policy debates at an international level. The results of engagement enabled us to develop a profile in the corridors of power and cultural policy as well as in the world of cultural production and at a local and community level amongst independent artists. Taking on the role of advocate alongside the role of artist and producer enabled support from major cultural institutions for shinkansen's work, despite its youth, radical agendas and rather unstable infrastructure.

The special and rather fluid culture of shinkansen made no distinction between working with establishment cultural institutions like the [Dartington College](#), [Foreign and Commonwealth Office](#), [Goethe Institute](#) and [British Council](#) and producing projects with grass roots organizations like [London Musicians Collective](#) and [backspace](#) and popular culture venues such as [The End](#)

There is a very human story behind the professional practice of shinkansen which speaks of enduring values of commitment, immersion, passion, exploration and these values are the hallmarks of its achievements in history. **The shinkansen Collection** is therefore a tribute to collective effort.

We believe shinkansen has been important precisely because it has pioneered, because it has refused to be pigeonholed, because it has not adopted the funders priorities as its benchmark and because it has functioned as an agent of change. Its impact has extended from the grassroots to major institutions and a presence throughout Europe and worldwide. Its role in moving the arts forward in process, practice and thought is evident in the *names* the organization gave to its projects.

Key projects initiated during the first five years of shinkansen (1989 - 1993):

# The shinkansen Collection: 1989 - 2004

## Flying Along a Curved path

[Voice Over](#)  
[Vinyl Requiem](#)  
[European Choreographic Forum](#)  
[shinkansen tracks](#)  
[Butterfly Effect Network](#)

Further examples from the middle years (1994- 1998):

[Sound Works Exchange](#)  
[Club Research](#)  
[Connectivity Discussion Forum](#)  
[Future Physical](#)  
[No-place.net](#)

And, from the final phase of work (1999 – 2004):

[CellBytes](#)  
[Virtual Physical Bodies](#)  
[Woven Bodies Woven Cultures](#)  
[Fluid Work-Flexi Lives](#)  
[CorpusOnline](#)  
[Virtual Incarnations](#)  
[Future Physical](#)  
[Creative User](#)  
[bodydataspace](#)

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

### 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:

[PEOPLE](#) - key personnel in shinkansen, Future Physical and The shinkansen C Collection  
[SIGNIFICANT DATES](#) - chronology of key events and achievements  
[ESSAY](#) - reflection on major themes arising from shinkansen research and practice  
[DEBATE](#) - research topics and outputs from shinkansen debates, symposia and working 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