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presents...

PRECARIOUS THEATRE





Who are Precarious?

Precarious Physical Theatre and Multimedia is an award-winning company, established in 2005 and based in Bristol. **Co-Artistic Directors of Precarious, Dan Shorten and Karla Shacklock**, combine their specialisms to create new work which fuses **break-neck choreography, stunning imagery, poetic text, original music, and cutting-edge technology.**

Since its conception, **Precarious** has been creating and touring new work across the country and **the company has worked with a diverse range of performers.** Previous shows include the two-hander 'Junction 8', the award-winning 'Druthers' and the five star sell out show 'The Factory'.

In 2008, the company was shortlisted as a finalist in for the Oxford Beckett Theatre Trust Award and Dan and Karla began their **research and development process for 'anomie'.** This process lasted over **eight months**, a period in which many of the ideas for choreography, sound, text and video were **developed and experimented** with.

In June 2009, with a **newly recruited cast of performers**, the company entered into the final stages of development. The result is a production which is undoubtedly **Precarious'** most ambitious work to date and which will tour nationally and internationally in 2009 and 2010.

Alongside the performance work, **Precarious** deliver a range of **professional masterclasses and educational workshops** in schools and universities. They are also engaged in a **twelve month audience development initiative** that aims to broaden participation in multimedia performance.

"One of the most original examples of theatre around."
The Stage





Synopsis

Definition of ANOMIE:

A condition of instability, in societies or individuals, resulting from a breakdown of standards and values or from a lack of purpose or ideals.

'**anomie**' is an hypnotic and surreal journey that traces the fractured pathways and phantom connections between **six unnamed anomie-plagued characters**, all inhabiting the same apartment building, yet unaware of each other's trials, tribulations and deviant behaviour. They live in close proximity but **never seem to really see each other** and this leaves them feeling alone and desperate. Exploring how an apparent **erosion of traditional moral values can result in social instability**, *Precarious* present a portrait of modernity that will disturb and delight audiences.





Inspiration...

The term anomie was brought into its current meaning by French sociologist **Emile Durkheim** who borrowed the word from fellow French philosopher Jean-Marie Guyau. Durkheim's early work on anomie focused on the culture of industrialisation and its inability or resistance to respond to change; this caused 'disruptive cycles of collective behaviour'. In his influential book 'Suicide' (1897), he claimed that **a state of 'normlessness' where individuals become isolated or detached from traditional social system**, such as families, neighbours and friends, **creates social instability and personal unrest, characterised by an absence or diminution of standards or values and a lack of purpose or ideals.**

In the context of the **current global recession** Durkheim would argue that **the stage is set for feelings of anomie to run riot.** He believed that **individuals are more likely to experience a feeling of anomie when the surrounding society has undergone significant changes in its economic circumstance.** The sense of anomie may not directly relate to the economic shift but he claimed that the feeling is made stronger when the values, targets, hopes and dreams that a particular society hold in high regard are especially difficult for individuals to attain.

In their production, ***Precarious*** draw on Durkheim's theories and other stimuli such as **the work of photographer Gregory Crewdson.** Of particular interest was Crewdson's series 'Twilight' which depicts the **bizarre and beautiful worlds behind familiar suburban facades.**

Novelist J G Ballard was also influential; in particular his '**Concrete Island**', a somewhat twisted reinvention of Robinson Crusoe where **a car crash leaves a wealthy architect stranded on a section of fenced off wasteland.** As his condition deteriorates, it soon becomes difficult to determine whether he is discovering sanity or falling apart.

These and many other influences have helped ***Precarious*** to patch together **a portrait of modernity, based around six characters and their alienation from the world they inhabit.** Their stories are different and individual whilst sharing key similarities. **The characters share common thoughts and feelings and this is represented by all elements of the production.** Various **recurring musical themes breach the performance linking the characters through the music, choreography, text and video** as they cross and weave, some finding their anomie more destructive than others...





Themes

Consider how and where the following themes featured in the performance and make notes in the boxes provided...

Isolation

Nature

Technology

Struggle

Sex



Characters

'Rain Woman'

The constant knocks and struggles of everyday life have taken their toll on the terminally unlucky Rain Woman. She has adopted lots of little habits that she tells herself will help her to cope, but in the end these things only weigh her down even more. Despite all her efforts the constant bombardment is eventually too much for her.

'Surveillance'

'Surveillance' spends his days watching and recording other people's lives. At times he enjoys the secret scenes that he witnesses and can appreciate the beauty of the metropolis he inhabits. However, he has no real human relationships and is left feeling cut off from the rest of the world.

'Hicki'

The character of 'Hicki' is based on a cult amongst young Japanese men who never leave their rooms and spend all their time surfing the internet. He seems to long for human connection, but when this becomes a possibility he shies away from it. He is afraid of the outside world and of his own weaknesses, so chooses to stay in isolation.

'Digger'

The character 'Digger' is always looking for something. He is playful and curious, traits that are sometimes misinterpreted negatively by a society that seems to deny him freedom of expression. Digger has difficulty expressing his desire for something that remains intangible. His character reaches some fulfilment through his relationship with 'Preggers'.

'Preggers'

Despite being alone, 'Preggers' yearns for the quiet domestic life and routine that she thinks having a child will bring. Her miscarriage leaves her alone again until she has a chance encounter with 'Digger'.

'Earth Woman'

In the frantic rush of life, 'Earth Woman' finds some comfort in the reliable presence of nature. After initially despairing at the dominance of concrete in the city, she realises that small patches of green also provide her with something valuable and that she can rely on old fashioned wisdom.





Style

'**anomie**' is a blend of several key elements:

✓ Movement

The choreographed movement often allows the characters to express themselves without words. Repeated sequences of movements form motifs, and moments of unison show the audience that the characters have shared experiences even though they are oblivious to this. The physicality of the movement illustrates the struggles and despair of the characters.

✓ Text

The text works in conjunction with the movement and allows the characters to expand upon their individual narratives. The delivery is direct address – the text is spoken out to the audience, almost as if in response to a question they had asked.

✓ Multimedia work

*The multimedia work characterises **Precarious**' work and takes place on the TV screens, hand-held tablets, and through projections. The animation on the TVs often forms part of a characters' body, especially in the early walking sequence. The dual existence of the characters emphasises the fact that for these characters the virtual world can be just as significant as real world. The projections often add an organic element to an otherwise sparse set – they bring rain to the storm sequence and allow the weed to grow out of the shoe. They also depict aspects of fantasy – for example the hand that entices Hicki into his laptop.*



Design

The show takes place on a **bespoke metal truss**.

The **six mattresses move around the space to**

create different scenes and also represent the characters' individual homes. They mean different things to the different characters – Earth Woman creates a sanctuary, Hicki creates a space of isolation whereas for Digger the mattresses are obstacles between him and potential discoveries. The **six televisions form an integral part of the set, allowing us to look through windows into the characters' lives and see them from different angles.**

The **use of the truss as another space above the stage** enables characters to watch each other unobserved. It also provides a different space that the characters can retreat to in moments of reflection.

The **costume is designed to blend with the aesthetic of the animation.** Exaggerated lines create a **graphic novel feel**, while the **colour scheme is contrastingly natural.**



Interview

Co-Artistic Directors, Dan Shorten and Karla Shacklock, discuss the company's approach to devising...

How do Precarious begin the devising process?

Karla: "Dan and I brainstorm a topic that is relevant to us and to contemporary society and then research that concept. Dan and I play independently with the constituent art forms – sometimes Dan will write some music which will inspire some choreography which will then inspire some text. It can start anywhere and branch out in any direction.

Then we'll come up with loads of cool visual ideas and symbols.

The next step is to decide on characters and a structure for the show. Dan will write some text for each character, which may or may not be used. I will choreograph a series of motifs for each character which again may or may not be used. We will then create a movement bank, text bank and music bank from which we will take material to experiment with. Finding our performers and passing all the information and ideas on to them is the next step. Once the company is formed we begin the devising process, realize the ideas and collaborate to get them on their feet, with Dan and I always leading the direction."

Who or what influences you?

Karla: "In terms of style, we are influenced by a range of artists from a range of media: ie from dance theatre Jasmin Vardimon [<http://www.jasminvardimon.com>] and Motionhouse [<http://www.motionhouse.co.uk>]; from physical theatre Frantic Assembly [<http://www.franticassembly.co.uk/>] and of course Complicite [<http://www.complicite.org>]; from immersive theatre shows like De La Guarda [<http://www.delaguarda.com>] and Feurzebruta [<http://www.fuerzabruta.net>]; from film Chris Cunningham [<http://www.director-file.com/Cunningham>]; from straight theatre Steven Berkoff [<http://www.stevenberkoff.com>]; and from music Aphex Twin [www.aphextwin.com]."

How did you come up with the concept for 'anomie'?

Karla: "We were interested in social networking and its effect on contemporary society. We did a lot of research and development on this for the Oxford Samuel Beckett Theatre Trust award short listing, and came across the term 'anomie'. We realised that what we are interested in is not just people on the internet, but what it is in the modern world that makes people want to go on the internet and in fact what causes all sorts of deviant behaviour. This led to finding six characters all experiencing different sorts of anomie."

Dan: "Back in November we thought, 'is the show about technology and the way we use technology, interact with each other through it, or is that just one of the symptoms of something greater?' We kind of decided that that was it: in the world today there are many, many wonderful things that are a part of contemporary life, but also there are sort of fractures in the way that people interact and behave. It's some of the stuff that Durkheim talks about in his discussions on anomie: about how the breakdown of traditional social values and normal behaviour can create these little pockets of deviance, and one of those is technology."

What challenges do you face when devising?

Dan: "As a company I think because we work with video so closely technology is always going to be something that fascinates us - something that we want to artistically explore. But sometimes we can get a little too het up in that, the work can become about that and really it's not so interesting, when the technology is leading the art rather than the other way round."



Things to think about...

- How successful were the company in combining the use of spoken, word, technology and music?
- With a partner, discuss the way in which any two of the performers played their roles and interacted together in at least one specific scene or section. Consider voice, movement, characterisation, and relationships between characters on-stage.
- Did you find the performance visually effective?
Consider set/ costume/ lighting/ video.
- How was the performance space used in the production? How effective do you consider this use of performance space to be?
- How did specific production and / or performance elements contribute to your enjoyment of **anomie**?
- What did you enjoy most about the performance?
- If you could change one thing about the piece, what would it be?