

## Constructing performance: *Missing screws*

### **Zoo Indigo**

*Zoo Indigo are a two woman Anglo-German performance company based in Nottingham, founded by Ildiko Rippel and Rosie Garton. They create multi-media theatre that uses humour as a mechanism to explore the realities of unimaginable experiences. The duo often use a bi-lingual approach to examine cultural identity, themes of displacement and home, alongside their own experiences of motherhood. Their most recent work, 'No Woman's Land', follows the footsteps of Ildiko's grandmother who in 1945, expelled from her place of birth, walked 220 miles across Europe with her two small children and all her belongings in a cart.*

### **Doing.It.Yourself.**

A while ago I passed a billboard poster proclaiming: "*We will come and do your D.I.Y. for you!*" And in moments of stillness, this advertisement reappears, uninvited, in my brain, and I consider the confusing proposal of hiring someone else to do *Do It Yourself*. My house is in a constant flux of D.I.Y. projects at various stages, a growing condition over the eight years I have lived there. These projects generally fall into three categories:

1. Completed (but not quite to specifications)
2. Not-quite-completed (but getting used to)
3. To-be-started at some-point-soon

Predominantly my D.I.Y. determination is driven by the desire to both prove my womanhood and save money. But as someone who learns on the job, I have also identified an attraction to the exhilarating and demoralising experience of un-planned construction. This weekend I charged up my drill and began to work on a project in Category 3: *To-be-started-at-some-point-soon*. There are many items on this To Do list – *shelves for kids room, tiles for bathroom floor...* – marked around the house by pencil scratchings and droppings of screws, like evidence of a little D.I.Y. rodent resident.

Meanwhile: Ildiko and I are in the midst of creating *No Woman's Land*. There is a clear sense of labour in this particular devising process; we are struggling. We think we are half way through the build, and then we de-construct it and start again, and re-build at a different angle. Right now: in my front garden, I am building a shed and I am pondering all the performances we have made over the last fifteen years, and placing them into my three D.I.Y. categories. And it is pleasing to find I can order them in this way, just as I have the assorted screws into groupings of size in front of me.

## Paving pacing panting

Scraps of paper with heavy black scrawled headings on, such as *Mann o Mann* and *Sausage Song*, are laid like stepping-stones across the front of our rehearsal space. Last week there were ten pieces of paper; now there are about twelve. (This growth does *not* signify progression). During our making process, when an idea makes its way from chat to play, we name it and place it down – just somewhere – among the others. At this moment, we are staring down at this cobbled paper pathway, using our toes to drag some of these headings down into a sub-line of *not-sure-if that-fits*. In a sudden heightened burst of enlightenment, one of us will drop to our knees, and move a paper stone to another position in the queue. There are a series of guttural reactionary noises of agreement/uncertainty as we reach a consensus of whether or not we played the right move. After a time of thinking noises and weighted pauses, we remind ourselves that we have not used cement, that these stones are just in fact bits of paper dropped on a dance floor. They are movable, they can sit on top of each other, underneath each other; they can be cut in half, re-ordered, put aside.

We have the ground plans for this piece; it is about walking, about the walk of Ildiko's grandmother, about our re-tracing of that walk and about the images of walking refugees flooding the news. From early conception we wanted to use treadmills, machines that would insist on a fluidity of pace and endurance. And here they stand now, two treadmills in the space, the humming conveyor belts delivering an insolent rehearsal soundtrack. These masculine objects beckon us like sirens, and without discussion we find ourselves riding their backs, and it is in the heart of this monotonous kinesthesia that we find our feet.

And here we are now, having gravitated towards the treadmills. Pacing, pacing, pacing, going nowhere. And thinking. We are wearing beards, trousers, braces, waistcoats, tailcoats. We are thinking about the women entertaining their audiences in the darkened *Kabarett* rooms of Berlin and Munich, steeped in an orgy of political arousal, as they shed their socially gendered positions. We are thinking about Marlene Dietrich in her trouser suit, singing to the American troops during the war to boost morale.

I don't know who initiates it, but we are now running. Out of breath and hot. And as is the nature of running on a treadmill, we have no destination. After some time, through panted breath, I ask: '*Ildiko – is this entertainment?*' It's a genuine concern. She seems to have picked up her pace. '*Rosie, this is entertainment*' she assures me. She is definitely going faster than me; I competitively bleep my way up the speed buttons. '*What about this?*' I holler as I wave my arms around frantically: '*is this entertainment?*' I am grasping at straws, and nearly falling off. She makes an encouraging noise, and bleeps up two more speed notches. '*What about this?*' she cries as she does some impressive time-step footwork on the speeding conveyor belt; '*is this entrainment?*' Yeah, it is. And she knows it. What's my next move? I rapidly open my waistcoat, fling it to the floor, pull down my braces so they hang

down to my knees, undo the top two buttons of my shirt and whisk it off. I am running harder now, breathless in my bra and trousers, raising my voice in desperation to our imagined audience, 'what about this? Is **this** entertainment, am I entertaining you?' Ildiko is hot on my heels, and is shouting, 'IS - THIS - ENTERTAINMENT?' I look across to catch her ripping at her shirt so fiercely one of the buttons has Frisbee-d across the space, she is bra-less and laughing at her breasts bobbing up and down as she runs. Now *that* is entertainment. We run together, laughing, on the edge of hysteria, then in silence. Our verbal hush is underlined with our heavy breathing and the persistent whirring of the treadmill. Suddenly feeling exposed, like we'd gone too far, like this isn't funny anymore. Now we are thinking about the women who obligatorily handed over their bodies for the evening's entertainment for the Russian soldiers, accepting their place on the abortion cart, being bled until their shelled bodies were ready for the entertainment market again. We slow the treadmills down, sweating and abruptly cold and look around for something to cover up our bodies.

Stepping off the treadmills, shaking with the sudden exhilaration, I write *Entertainment* on a page torn from my notebook and place it among the pathway of headings.

We may abandon it tomorrow.

### **Completing (?) the build**

At home, I finish building the shed. I confess, it's a flat-pack; I followed the instructions carefully. I ~~drilled too many holes~~ made certain amendments, but essentially the completed image was as sold in the photograph. Although happy to have somewhere neat to keep bicycles, I am hovering on the edge of disappointment that all I have now is a shed identical to everyone else who Googled 'bike storage for small gardens'.

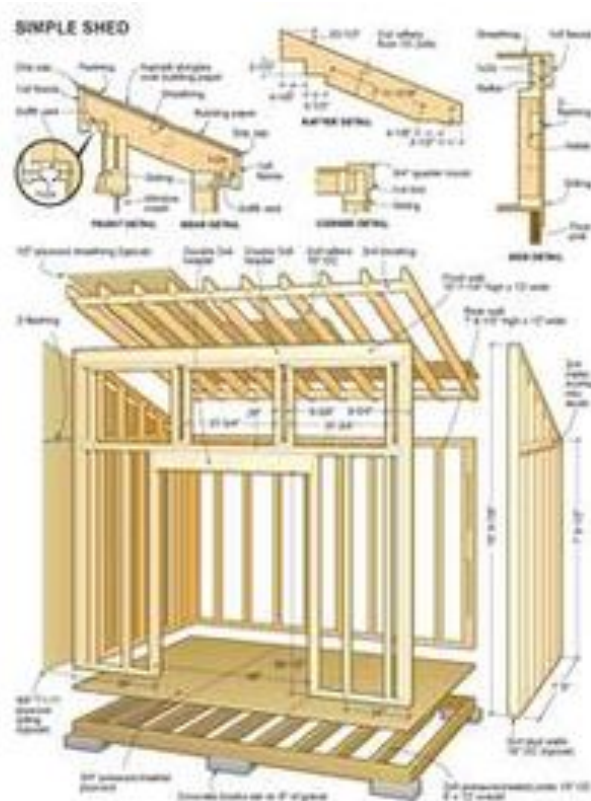
Theatre that follows an instruction manual offers something familiar and comfortable; teetering on the edge of formulaic and predictable. Many of us dabble with the desire to have our work liked; of thinking that the more gigs we get and the more tickets we sell, the better our work is. In this grading system, particular theatre trends lead the way and provide us with a blueprint. But if we are only making flat-pack performances in this way, then why not just call in the folk on the billboard who were offering to come and do our D.I.Y. for us? Why do it yourself when you can get someone else to do it *perfectly*, or least like it looks on the box?

In making this flat-pack shed, I missed the thrill of not knowing whether it would work; worrying that I might have got the angles wrong, or that the screws would be the wrong length, or that in my enthusiasm I would saw that really expensive piece of wood too short. In adapting to these ~~mistakes~~ discrepancies, something new can be found that gives character to the projects I carry out, and so give character to my home. ('Quirky' is the word the estate agent used.)

During the process of devising performance, notions of *starting* and *finishing* are variable. Construction does not mean an unalterable completion; cement is not required. A touring work may never be considered 'finished', as it adapts and responds to its shifting audiences. It's in the re-building that we discover that the intricacies of wrong angles, excessively-drilled holes, and even disappointing wood-worm are what separates each performance work.

Next week, Ildiko and I will be back on our treadmills *starting* the same idea, again, in a different way. We have picked up speed and we are briskly pacing our way towards category 1: *Completed (but not quite to specifications)*.

And if the whole thing falls down – well, *that's* entertainment.



### How to build a shed:

- Step 1: Figure Out Your Needs.
- Step 2: Get Shed Plans.
- Step 3: Build the Foundation and Floor Frame.
- Step 4: Frame the Walls.
- Step 5: Frame the Roof.
- Step 6: Build the Gable Overhangs.
- Step 7: Install the Fascia, Sheathing and Roofing.

**Rosie Garton and Ildiko Rippel**  
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