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U O I S T A K E S



An A-Z of The Ting: Theatre of Mistakes – T & U

Marie-Anne Mancio

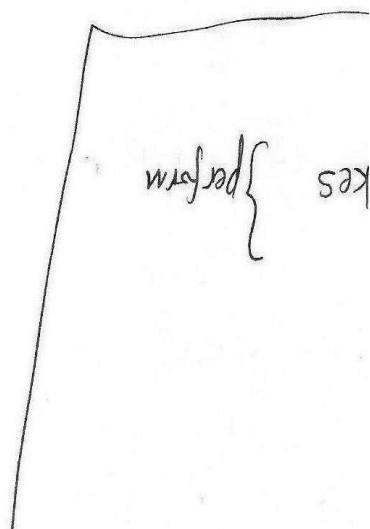
Tong, Howard (1954-) See also: *Car, Five Concert Pieces*, Lindsay Moran, *The Street*
 Howard Tong was studying Interiors at Maidstone (see *Art Schools*) and was sent to mime artist Lindsay Kemp (Tong insists his work with Kemp was "dreadful"). He liked the work of Nice Style and sculptor/performance artist Bruce McLean and joined Ting after taking part in Anthony Howell's *workshop*. He recalls that he and Howell were the group's mainstay till the arrival of Fiona Templeton and the establishment of a *Core Group*. The Theatre of Mistakes.

The Ting at Artists Meeting Place, November 1974
 Photo: Bob Janz? The Theatre of Mistakes Archive



Howard Tong in *Preparations for Displacement* (April 1975)
 Photo: ©The Theatre of Mistakes, The Theatre of Mistakes Archive

Tong shared an apartment with Mickey Greenall (see *Mud Man*) and remembers them holding many dinner parties and eventually married Anita Urquhart. He went on to become Chief Visual Merchandiser at Harvey Nichols, creating many of their famous window displays. He has since co-founded a collective of designers (see www.ksht.co.uk) with former partner Kathryn Scanlan, which specialises in window- dressing, shop-fitting, displays, and creating environments for exhibitions.



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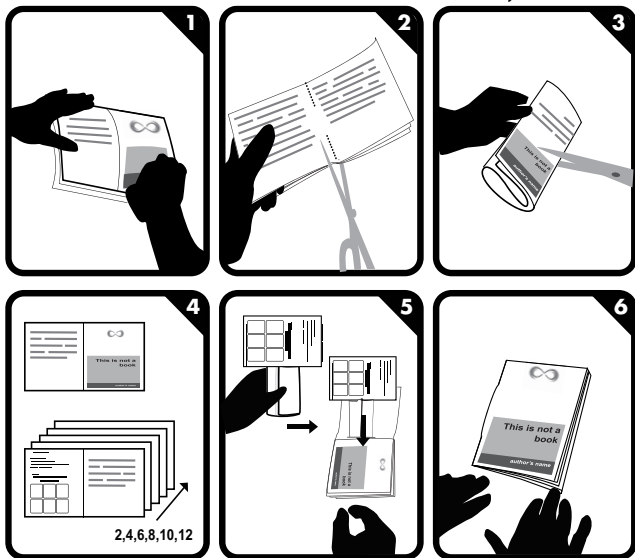


Table Moves (1981) See **Anthony Howell**

Tea

a) Fiona **Templeton** recalls Anthony **Howell** initially wanted to use cups of tea rather than water in *Waterfall*. She persuaded him otherwise. b) Andrew **Eden** and Susan **Bonvin** praise Templeton's ability to manage people: "She made sure people had breaks and cups of tea and things." (Interview: Peterborough, 24th Nov, 2008)

Templeton, Fiona (1951-) has been described as:
a poet; conceptually sophisticated; influenced by the French *nouveau roman*, the work of Oulipo, Georges Perec, Robbe-Grillet, Fluxus, Gertrude Stein; the really beautiful one; adept at **games**; co-founder of The Theatre of Mistakes who began work with the **Ting** in March 1975.

"Fiona is a strategist; her father made crosswords. If you read *Elements of Performance Art* you get a fantastic sense of Fiona's voice." (Conversation: Peter Stickland, London, Jan 2009)

Andrew **Eden**: "Fiona was a key person in the development of The Theatre of Mistakes." (Interview: Andrew Eden & Susan Bonvin, Peterborough, 24th Nov 2008)

"A skilled performer, her mathematical abilities and her talent for logical analysis helped pioneer the development of the company." The Theatre of Mistakes Program for Jeanetta Cochrane Theatre, March 1981

The Theatre of Mistakes Archive

The Ting: Theatre of Mistakes

an **A-Z**

T-U

Marie-Anne Mancio



Fiona Templeton with Robert Janz's *Six Sticks* c.1975
 Photo: ©Bob Janz?/ The Theatre of Mistakes, The Theatre of Mistakes Archive

"Fiona had a big input in writing as well; she was very strong in her ideas."
 (interview: Lindsay Moran, London, 6th Nov 2008)

Interview: Victoria Chick and Marie-Anne Mancio, London, 4th Nov 2008:
 VC: She was marvellous. She'd been a dancer, had she?
 MM: No, I don't think she had.
 VC: She was very physically competent.

A member of the **Core Group**, former partner of Anthony Howell, Templeton remained in **New York** after The Theatre of Mistakes toured **Going** there. Though she returned to tour with the company in Europe, she had already begun developing her solo practice and went on to create and perform seminal works such as *YOU-The City*, *L'ile*, *The Medead* as well as continuing to write poetry (she was senior writer-in-residence at Cambridge University), academic papers, and contribute to *Grey Suit*. Currently MA Convenor in Performance at Brunel University and director of **The Relationship** in New York with whom she developed **Coming with Going** (2008):

"Two acts of **Going** are replaced with **Coming**, a work that takes the task and structure of The Theatre of Mistakes' earlier **Homage to Pietro Longhi**. Like the latter, **Coming** relies heavily on improvisation. There is Katy Brown's terrifying boot camp leader who screams her way through a gruelling set of physical exercises, drenching herself with bottled water; Stephanie Silver's leap from a table top in high heels. The audience is co-opted – asked to hold a spool or choose a playing card, to put on lipstick. Structure is less legible. Spatially, **Coming** leaks beyond the taped borders of **Going** as a performer exits the intimate theatre to the street. Like boisterous revelers, others clamber over swags of ribbon, toss

shreds of paper, skid on a slippery wet floor."
 (Review by Marie-Anne Mancio *RealTime Arts* 88, Dec/Jan 09)

Unwritten

My fantasy book of essays on The Ting: Theatre of Mistakes would include:

The Theatre of Mistakes Relationship with Conceptual Art

Michael Newman

A Conversation Between Two Anthropologists Re-Visiting Ting

Professor Signe Howell and Professor Christina Toren

Urqhart, Anita (1957-)

Anita Urquhart was a member of the 1975 **Core Group**, participating in works such as *The Street* and *Five Concert Pieces*. The girlfriend of Howard Tong and the only one who hadn't gone to art school, no-one is quite sure what to say about Anita. Miranda Payne recalls she and Howard lived in a flat with hessian covered walls and a cat who climbed them; Anthony Howell remembers she was beautiful. Others implied she was a bit out of her league, not interested in debates about **structure**. Married to Tong for a while, Urquhart went on to St. Martin's School of Art and now designs lingerie.



Photo of Anita Urquhart, nd, courtesy of Howard Tong

Unattributed

See also: *Gossip, Memories, Secrets* Piece

Some indiscretions are best whispered. They ought to be repeated for the information they contain but to repeat them also risks enacting betrayals. Some disclosures were made in confidence. Their veracity cannot be guaranteed:

"It was like a dictatorship."

"We used to get our dope from Mike [Nyman]. He always had the best stuff"

"We all had egos"

"She always forgot her lines"

"She wasn't much fun"

"He sat on the fence"

Notes in The Theatre of Mistakes Archive

Courtesy Fiona Templeton

Consistency is a mistake in inconsistency.

Inconsistency is a mistake in consistency.

Consistently inconsistent.

Inconsistently inconsistent.

Consistently inconsistent.

Inconsistently inconsistent.

In "Two Freedoms" performers are free to execute any consistent series of actions until a mistake is made, and then to perform any inconsistent actions, until again mistaken. Inconsistency constitutes the mistake in Part 1, repetition constitutes the mistake in Part 2. The conclusion is provided by the particular mistakes made during the performance.

Specifications: 4 to 6 performers. A performance space 17' by 17' (6 mtrs x 6 mtrs). Audience on all four sides. Good lighting facilities. Duration approximately 1 hour.

TWO FREEDOMS

1979)

Two Freedoms (Belgrade/Vienna Biennale, April 1978-June

Unexplained

No-one can explain why wigs were worn for this performance of *Going*.



Unknown

The increasing number of participants in Ting workshops throughout 1974 means some names have been forgotten.

See: *Nameless*

Union

"Anthony [Howell] as never keen on the Artists Union, not at all. One side of him was quite conservative though several of his friends at the time were involved."

(Interview: Andrew Eden & Susan Bonvin, Peterborough, 24th Nov 2008)

However, as Anthony Howell is keen to point out, The Theatre of Mistakes was never "vapidly apolitical"; they just believed that the politics resided in the *structures*, in the notions of *Mutuality*.

Cf Signe Lie Howell's belief in the personal as the political.

"We definitely wanted to make a distinction between what we were doing and theatre as we perceived it. There was a valid

Cf Julian Maynard Smith on *Station House Opera*:

(Pat Murphy, Response to *Questionnaire*, Dec 2008)

"I was interested – and still am in how the *Ting* utilized ideas of duration and repetition. I liked the critique of "theatricality", of inauthentic forms of performance and I remember how, after a while, even the most pared down Beckett performance would seem too theatrical and contrived to me."

(Afterword 'Preparations for Displacement', 1975)

"We are not acting. We are not miming. Nothing is characterized."

Theatre

Maynard Smith, Miranda Payne

See also: Anthony Howell, *Art Schools, London* Exhibition, Julian

It was described in press releases as "a demonstration of fate in action."

documentation marks a shift in professionalism for the company.

with its *metronome* prefigures *Going* and its thorough

ACT ONE: Spend up to 50% of your time reversing your actions or repeating your actions from memory; this does not necessarily mean that you divide the act in half or end the act in the position from which you began it.

ACT TWO: When you see the metronome walking backwards or hear the reciter reciting backwards, perform the whole of the act one, starting from its conclusion and ending at its beginning.

ACT THREE: When you see the metronome walking forwards again or hear the reciter reciting forwards again, perform the whole of act two, starting from its conclusion and ending at its beginning.

See: *Bibliography, Five Concert Pieces, Going, Manifesto, Mutuality, Preparations for Displacement, The Street, Three Act Piece, Waterfall*

Further reading:

Champagne, Leonora (ed.) *Out from Under: Texts by Women Performance Artists*, Theater Communications Group, US, 1991

Three Act Piece (1976)

Featuring: a table, a chair, a blindfold, and a *goldfish* (whose life, Lindsay Moran recalls, was often endangered by the performers' uncompromising adherence to rules...)



Fiona Templeton and Lindsay Moran

Photo: ©The Theatre of Mistakes, The Theatre of Mistakes Archive

The complex *structure* of this work -

Trio (Aug 1976, Artists Market, London and Galerie Farideh Cadot, Paris). See Photographers.

Extract from *Three Act Piece* (1976) The Theatre of Mistakes Archive

out the three acts.

Alternate the above triggers for moving after a freeze through-
reciter has paused then begun again or vice versa.

move again only after a second performer has moved fast or the
fast or the reciter has paused or begun again, then start to
without altering position as soon as another performer has moved

The second time this happens to you perform DYNAMIC TENSION

paused or begun again after a pause.

after another performer has moved fast, or after the reciter has

The first time this happens to you only start to move again

If you touch, or are touched by, another performer both freeze.

Extract from *Active Circles*, nd, The Theatre of Mistakes Archive

The first personal subject pronoun shouted twice by a performer
moving fastest in any rotation directs the performer at the other
end of the line to choose for performance any of circles, but
this time walking backwards or revolving in a reverse of the pre-
vious direction (that is, performers start walking the new rot-
ation backwards).

(Only a double shout denotes a circle to be walked backwards.
After a circle walked backwards a single shout will always denote
a circle to be walked forwards, only another double shout will
keep the circles rotating in reverse.)

Directly after a single or a double shout, and before any fresh
circle may be embarked upon, the performers at either end of the
line stand still and wait until the others have completed their
last orbit and are standing in line again—a performer may judge
whether he or she is standing in line by the amount that the
bodies of adjacent performers obscure a view of the others.



Two Journeys (The Slade, UCL, 27th May 1976)

"The structure was this. One person made their journey covering the space of the Slade/UL portico. Then two performers worked in the same space and so on. In the second journey all the performers repeated what they had done in isolation the first time around, but all in the space at the same time. The entire piece was being "timed" by a further group of people performing the **WATERFALL**. The second journey was predicated on the fact that mistakes would inevitably occur as performers blocked and crossed each other and had to interact and figure out what to do as they attempted to repeat their first journey. Although the work manifested as formal/abstract/structural, I feel that there was in fact a narrative element in the way audiences, understanding the structure, anticipated conflict or projected a narrative onto the unfolding performance. The piece worked with tensions around the perception of the mistake before it actually happened."

(Pat Murphy, in response to *Questionnaire*, December 2008)



Waterfall was originally conceived as a timing device, utilising natural time.

(Julian Maynard Smith in www.vizlang.co.uk/readings/smith)

theatre doesn't really apply."

procedures which give a plasticity to time and space which in
was repeated, inverted done backwards - all the kinds of musical
figure. The material was improvised within that structure, but it

distinction to be made - the aesthetics which guide the decisions
we make are often not 'theatrical' at all."
(www.vizlang.co.uk/readings/smith)

Whilst texts (programs, press releases, and so forth) produced in
the early days of The Ting: Theatre of Mistakes reference notions
of mutuality and collaboration, later ones appear to contradict
this, presenting the company as a more traditionally structured
organism with a 'writer' and 'director':

THE THEATRE OF MISTAKES at the JEANNETTA COCHRANE THEATRE

Monday 16 March — Saturday 21 March

Written and Directed by Anthony Howell

with: Michael Greenall, Julian Maynard Smith, Miranda Payne,
Peter Stickland, Fiona Templeton.

Homage to Morandi: 1.15 p.m. tickets £1 (Monday to Friday)
GOING: 8.00 p.m. tickets £1.50 (Monday to Saturday)
The Table Move: 2.30 p.m. tickets £1 (Saturday only)

The Theatre of Mistakes, whose verse-plays incorporate stage directions which have been developed into a precise choreography, is in effect a body of thought, a synthesis of the many improvisational exercises and formal structures contributed by its performers. Out of this collage of disparate notions, Anthony Howell has created a company with a distinct method and a repertoire of plays which are fusions of visual aesthetics, action, poetry and philosophy. These plays demand meticulous rehearsal and considerable skill from the actors.

Program notes 1981, The Theatre of Mistakes Archive

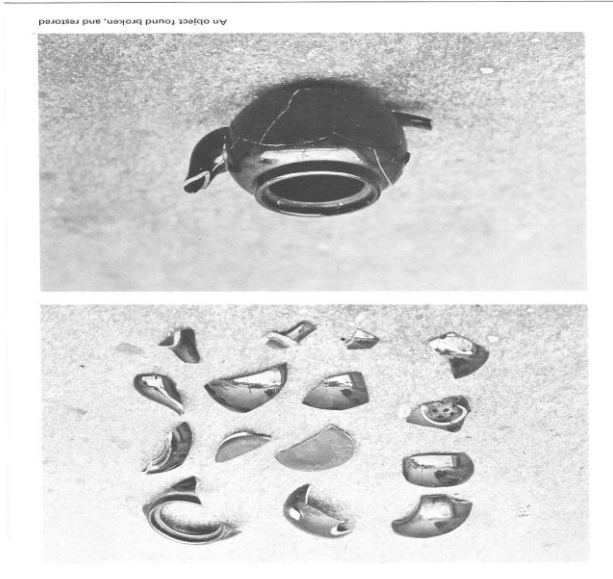
Time

Susan Bonvin recalls the weekend at **Purdies** farm, August, 1974:
"It was an experience in time. It wasn't one thing finished and another began. The installation of the things was part of it."
(Interview: Andrew Eden and Susan Bonvin, Peterborough, 24th Nov, 2008)
"The time-structures were all fairly conceptual in the way that music is. There was a piece that was constructed exactly like a

Triggers
 "The triggers are there to create fundamental agreements between performers"
 (Program notes *Preparations for Displacement*, April 1975, The Theatre of Mistakes Archive)

Toren, Christina
 Anthropologist, then wife of Amikam Toren, friend to Signe Lie Howell. Participant *Birth Ballet Chorale*. See also: *Anthropology*, Unwritten

Serpentine Summer Show Invite Card



Triggers

- if bust touches bust
 Rotate once as a line
- if bust touches torso
 Jump immediately on contact
- if bust touches leg
 all but the leader turn 180 degrees on the spot, bend from the waist and straighten, while the leader bends simultaneously in the original direction then turns 180 degrees — the lead now being reversed.

if torso touches torso

Anthony Howell's Notebook, nd
 ©The Theatre of Mistakes, The Theatre of Mistakes Archive

Standing stone between Lochs of Asta and Tingwall
 Photo: Mike Pennington



Ting

See also: *Conceptualism, Diagrams*

5. To time a fifth period of identical duration:
 five performers
 ten identical cups
 two identical pails
 one table
 five chairs.
 As before—leaving three cupfuls. (By now the table on top of the chairs may have to have the additional chair placed on top of it.)
 Further periods of identical duration will require proportional increase in cups and furniture.

Adjust equipment so that the same conditions as before apply, leaving the pail now full again on the ground but raising the height of the empty pail.

Action: while seated on a chair and/or standing, the first performer transfers the water from full pail to first cup, and then the water passes from cup to cup until poured into the empty pail by the second performer.

Otherwise as before, leaving one cupful of water in the pail on the ground: the end of the period again signified by pouring all the water from the now full pail back into the pail on the ground.

3. To time a third period of identical duration:

three performers
 six identical cups
 two identical pails
 one table
 three chairs.

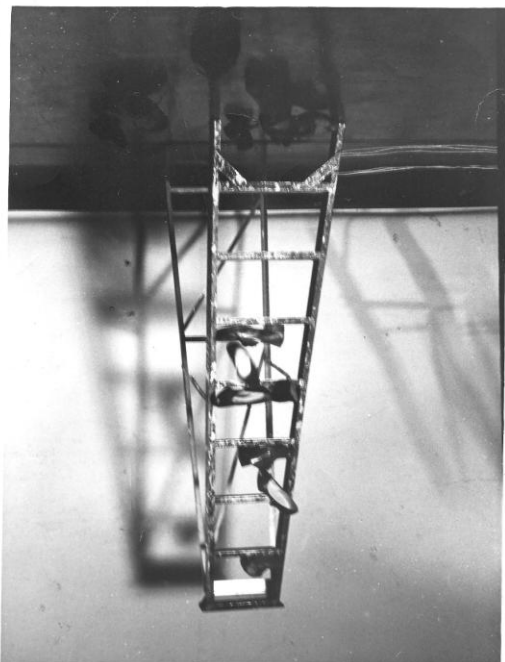
As before, again raising the height of the emptied pail and signifying the end of the period in the same manner. Leave two cupfuls in the lower pail.

4. To time a fourth period of identical duration:

four performers
 eight identical cups
 two identical pails
 one table
 four chairs.

As before—leaving three cupfuls. (By now the table may have to be placed on the chairs.)

Tong created performance/installations including one with Richard Rayner-Cannon (photographer) at *Filtro di Luce* (Acme gallery, 10th August 1978) where Howell also performed on the 11th.
Photo courtesy of Howard Tong.



Toren, Amikam (1945-)

See also *Ballet for Cars*, *Birth Ballet Chorale*, *Five Concert Pieces* and *a Free Session*, *Purdies*, *Two Journeys*
Artist involved with *Ting* and co-founder/editor of *Wallpaper*.

See: www.anthonyreynolds.com/biogs/toren.htm for biography
Sargent Fellow of the British School at Rome in 2009.

March-July 1975:



PATH OF BOXES

One sculptor (Amikam Toren) to lay his boxes alongside of each other or on top of each other, in a regular path over the performance space.

PATH OF DUSTBINS

Adaptation of *LINE OF BOXES* used in *The Cambridge Performance* ("Preparations for Displacement")—the action disguised by employing three plastic dustbins instead of boxes. These dustbins to be moved slowly across the factory pavement, taking three hours to cross the width of the performance space once.

Extract from *The Street* (1975), comb-bound book
©The Theatre of Mistakes, The Theatre of Mistakes Archive

The Theatre of Mistakes Archive
Extract from notes for *Summer Pieces*, 1975

The *Ting* Theatre of Mistakes is a group of approximately 25 performers, drawn together from diverse occupations, arts and disciplines, who meet twice weekly to create large scale performance exercises—both physical and verbal—are generated and redefined.

"an Icelandic or Norse word meaning magic container, I think. The *Ting* was initially a group of artists whose work ranged from poetry to film, painting, performance and sculpture, coming together to explore the potential of extending their work beyond the studio into a group performance-focused situation. Some people didn't see it as more than that and they felt that their work was enriched by their experience in those sessions. There were no rehearsals as such. Each week was seen as a performance. I was conscious that this was something special. Coming from a fine art background, I was dissatisfied with a lot of 1970s performance art and experimental theatre. As a dancer and poet, Anthony brought an incredible rigour and discipline to each session. He also had a vision of how the *Ting* could develop. At the same time, those early sessions were quite anarchic – with lots of improvised movement and weeks in which each person would direct a session. However, Anthony was definitely the leader and as that summer went on, we were influenced by the vocabulary of movement and language which he developed."

Ting -
Pat Murphy in response to Questionnaire, December 2008:

In the early *Seventies*, Anthony Howell's then wife, Norwegian Signe Lie Howell introduced him to the Norse *Ting*: a governing assembly of free people in a province, presided over by the King or a *law-speaker* who would memorise and recite the law. It represented the democratic ideal; it was usually a site deployed for rituals; a place of meetings where weapons were left outside a ring of stones and anything could be said therein.

A flyer for *Ting* (c.1974):

"The *Ting* is a community of artists of all descriptions working within an arena of ritual coincidence in an attempt to build a ceremonial performance on a traditionally operatic scale of grandeur while adhering to the concepts that have spurred the development of theatre since the days of Artaud"



The *Ting*: An early workshop
Photo: ©The Theatre of Mistakes, The Theatre of Mistakes Archive