**Jonathan Pitches in conversation with and Gary Winters (Lone Twin), on Zoom, 31.3.23**

Jonathan Pitches: I’m really grateful to you for coming back to this this piece, *On Everest* again. You've done me two massive favours: one was in 2018, with the *Performing Mountains* symposium, and that really being a keynote performance, and then indeed, re-gathering around this. I was expecting you to say, ‘we're done with this, we don't want to talk about it anymore’. But here we are. So a huge thank you for that. I want to take you back to ‘97 as has been done many times in interviews with you two and ask you for a little bit of context on your piece. I’m aware it was a final graduating performance piece, and you came together with very little preparation time, and it was a kind of serendipitous collaboration that then led to an incredible history. Gregg, perhaps just to start, why Everest and what was the kind of research work that you felt you needed to do to do it justice?

**Gregg Whelan: Yeah, I was thinking about this – and thanks for sending those questions through Jonathan, it was really useful. When I read the questions I was thinking about it, and actually, I think - I haven't thought about it this way for a while, but this is the most pragmatic way. You had to make a piece, you know you had to make this final assessment piece, and it felt like a second part. The third year [at Dartington] seemed to have 2 big projects in it, along with the dissertation. But the *first* thing was this ‘public project’***.* **Its legacy was when the degree was 4 years, and you’d go off for most of the year and do something in some public or professional/semi-professional setting. And then it shrank to a module by the time Gary and I were there. I’d done this project back in the village in Leicestershire where I’d grown up, which was also a completely pragmatic choice, because it was *free* to go there. Gary did something much more interesting and travelled. But that's actually part of it as well, because Gary did this big journey for *his*, and moved right around the coast of the country - I’ll let Gary talk about that. But I went home and I started reading – there’d been this small press history published on the village that I'd grown up in and I’d gone back there and I’d approached the author of that history and asked if I could add a chapter which would be you know [*laughs*] - it wasn't to be printed. I’d give it to him at the end of the project, and it would be our family history within the village or *my* childhood – but part of that work was a critical bit around place-based, spatial theory, arts practice, philosophy, critical thinking, literature, etc., looking at contemporary ethnography, anthropology, cultural geography, and all of the frameworks that a good third year Dartington student might engage with critically to enable or, one could argue, *inhibit* the making of something. Because I was quite aware that it was rather interesting just to go back and write about you know, who cares about *my* experience of that particular place, and all of those things of who gets to say all this stuff in the third or first person about a place, or about a people, or about a history etc - those earlier moves into contemporary ethnography. So I was trying to construct a way of doing that.**

**And actually, I *didn't* write a history of my childhood, or of the village, etc., in the seventies and eighties, the thing I submitted for assessment was really about the *problems* of doing that, or the space in which you *might* do that critically, *those* days, as it were. But it made me really interested in place-based practices, and I *had* been throughout the training at Dartington. And there’d been a strong approach on place throughout that training, throughout the degree. But I became really interested in it. And then when I started thinking about what I wanted to do, having written this *theoretical* thing, I wanted to *make* something for the final submission that was a show. And I would say, I guess we’ve probably said this before, but I really wanted that show somehow to be successful, and to get me work - I’d stopped the, not hugely successful, beginnings of a career to go to college late. As did Gary actually. Gary was in the financial services [*laughs*]. And I wanted it to work out. But I also knew, and I think this gives rise to the tonality of the piece - I also knew that this critical voice was also part of what I was doing. So, going back to the village, a big bit of that was about memory and melancholy. That places that hold your past and that you were drawn back to might be drawn back physically to somewhere because of the previous time that you've had there, and I started thinking about that. And then I read something which was about altitude sickness and the first stages of attitude sickness - or climbers identifying** **that they may be entering into a difficult phase - that they should be self-monitoring or thinking about what's happening to them physically. It’s the idea that they oddly produce, bodily produce nostalgia, that melancholy *comes in*, and you start not thinking about the job at hand, which is *ascending*, and do the reverse, well not the reverse, you move away from where you are. You think back to all of these places that you you've been to, or past moments in your life, or past people, etc. And then I alighted on Everest as the poster mountain for all mountains. That you could go to this place, that it would attract people in quite significant numbers, and the challenge of it, and all of that stuff that we later work within the piece. That you would go, you’d choose to do that, and actually what it would do is throw you back to everywhere else; it was about being there, but potentially it was about other places. And I like that very much, that a geographical location could do that - whether it's true or not, I liked it as a proposition for the piece.**

**So it's those those 3 bits really. The critical thing in that essaying voice which I'd been engaged with in a straight up way in the previous project, I guess, is what we end up appending in Everest.**

JP: That makes a whole lot of sense. So, Gary if you can then illuminate on *your* way into that project. Obviously, you were doing this endurance coast walk and then came into the project.

*Gary Winters: It was a journey, so it did take in the coast. It took in the cardinal points of the UK – north, east, south, west. And this period was four journeys to lighthouses at those furthermost points, three quarters of which are quite remote. And the journey there was, not complicated, but there was a lot of different kinds of transports and the walking and whatever. I say that because on the east coast it’s in Lowestoft, which is just on the promenade, it’s sort of Martin Parr territory, you know, like big ice creams and stuff like that. But the other 3 were up in Scotland, on the west coast of Ireland, and down here in Cornwall, on the Lizard. So I made these four journeys to these lighthouses and spent a week at each place. Just sort of being there, documenting, writing, using it as a space to think and respond to in a site-reactive kind of way. And then that material that I generated at those places, and the journeys, itineraries and journeys, that I take and organize, then became these visual art pieces that I made when I came back to college. But the going, doing this, this period as Gregg said, of being away from the college - were these journey pieces. So I spoke to Gregg about that. So maybe there was a little kind of* *grain of me being involved in some you know, some aspect of a durational thing, and a physical walking thing, an outdoors thing. It's kit that I had. So I camped at a couple of them, a couple of them said I could stay on site but a couple of places I camped and was almost on my own little kind of expedition, and that was all in the mix of the documentation, the stuff I need to camp, the kit bag, the itinerary, the equipment and stuff just living out and surviving in those places.*

JP: And then you met in a party and serendipitously came together.

*GW: Yeah, and I think Gregg, we’d spoken about the piece and various points of its development in the months leading up to the degree show, and there was work I was showing at the degree show that I was putting out. There was one live piece, but it was mainly object-based and film-based stuff. And I think Gregg handed me the final text at midnight on the night before the day before and we went through the logistics of instructions, and what goes on, so there was a sort of plan being hatched of what needed to happen, although there were some things that were contingent in the actual doing of it, the performing of it, the next day, which we felt comfortable I guess that we could work out maybe in the moment, or that there's some flexibility, or there might be a looseness or an establishing of our relationship within it that would allow for those kinds of things*.

JP: And the residue of that approach has leaked through every one of your presentations since, is that right? I’m not sure I understood how much that was an important constraint for you. That's been a trope of your approach ever since, has it?

**GWh: Yeah, I think it’s to do with the fact that at that time at least, both of us had a background in visual art, and Gary was more keenly involved in that at Dartington, and I was on the performance writing course. But we didn't have a theatre background, like rehearsing and doing all of that, we just didn't know that - we've since gotten quite familiar with that in other ways and other projects, particularly when other folk are performing or you're making with other people, and across the last years we've engaged in really intensive making and rehearsal and fixing, blocking processes, where you make a thing, and it stays like that and it gets shown repeatedly. But a lot of the work from *Everest* on that we made together, just Gary and I as a duo, always worked around the making of plans, lists on the clipboard, stuff, notes that would be like, ‘now you go off and do that’. And curiously we would very rarely work out how things would go, you know, like if you have to go over there and open that door and come back, or how long would that take? Or if we move everybody outside a bit, in the middle. It's curious now when I think about it *[laughs*]. We must have been extraordinarily confident. I don't think it was confidence, actually, I know what it was. I think we really liked the *aesthetic* of, and not *just* the aesthetic, I think the operational quality of a thing just appearing to happen, that we are just putting it together, and this thing could go off - or *not.* And if it doesn't go off it didn't really matter. If we're not successful at you know, getting 300 times up and down the line, or if we don't dance for 12 hours, or if we don't make clouds at the end of those water things that we did, it wouldn't matter, but the *attempt* was the thing. So I think we were always very keen to do that. I like very much with *Everest* that the line always has to come in and out of the doors of the place that we're showing in, which is often the theatre, or has been the theatre at times or studio. So, you’ve got the doors open and it's a different space, and it's a different sort of approach. And I remember as I was making it for what was then called, at Dartington, Studio 11, the dance school, the long space, and that was part of it to be honest - it's a really lovely, long rectangular sprung floor space. It has a good view and it's just a really nice space, and I wanted to make something for in there, and you could elongate it by having it all open. What was the start of that question? Sorry.**

JP: It was to do with the extent to which you plan…

**GWh: Oh, yeah, but it was also pragmatic, because we would just make, I was making it, I’d done an about turn. I remember putting in those short bits quite late on.**

Jonathan Pitches: The chapter titles?

**GWh: Yeah, maybe like the night before, or something. That’s sort of pragmatic because there’s only X amount of time to work on stuff. Gary was super busy because he was showing like 105 different pieces as part of his degree show. And that continued then, you know there's never oodles of time around stuff so often we would, in the early days we’d travel to go somewhere if we're doing a show and we'd be doing bits of stuff on the way independently, and we'd come together, it’d be a few hours and we’d make some plans, and then we’d do it. In a way *Everest* was more prepared than later stuff.**

JP: I mean, there's so much to riff off that, there's the importance of the space, I loved the way that you narrated Kurt Joos’s relationship to that back in the thirties, and it had its echo in some of the choices that were made. And of course, I was very struck reading back on the 2018 version of it in Leeds that you cite that history of stage@leeds being built on the original climbing wall that Don Robinson designed**. T**hat sense of the spatial specificity, the geographic specificity of that location. I’m presuming you did that in each iteration of the piece, and so you've got a number of versions, am I right, in that list? Have I missed out anything - there was the first iteration in the ICA and then Glasgow, Arnolfini and then Leeds?

*GWi: There was one in Nottingham as well. The Expo in ’97, for the Expo festival, which was on the back of Dartington, getting a few bookings with it, or interest in it, and then interest in new work and new ideas that we had. But the one at the ICA is a different piece in a way; it's the same text, the same sort of same idea. But it was actually stretched across a day. So there was a weekend festival there and new exhibitionists if I’m remembering right?*

**GWh: This is summer exhibitionists?**

*GWi: Yeah, it could be that.*

**GWh: Sounds about right.**

*GWi: So we had the line running through the building. It's changed - I was back there a little while ago, it's all changed around a bit, but essentially it ran from the door which is on The Mall, through the building, up the stairs to a top room and that was the 30 metre line, or thereabouts and then across say a day, you know, it was probably 8 or 9 hours or something from us arriving, we continued to walk the line, I attempted to walk the line a number of times. But then we installed the text along a long corridor that used to be a hard-walled long corridor in the ICA. And across the day we installed the text of the work through there. So we had a few bits of kit with us that we didn’t use again or before, we had a little camping table and we had the frames which were all in pieces. So: stops, you know, intervals to put up the camping table, have a rest; we would, using the Swiss army knife, make the little frames with screws and things, put the glass in, and then bang a nail on the wall and hang them.*

Jonathan Pitches: You literally had to ascend in that piece by the sounds of things?

*GWi: Yeah, up and down the stairs. And we did this Hillary walk moment where for the John Denver song we handed out some sheets in the café - cos you know, it passed through the bar, the cafe bar - and everyone sang that song as we did this Hillary walk. I remembered that last night actually. Yeah, so it was a slightly different set up in a way.*

JP: That's a really helpful clarification. And indeed, the fact that there was a Nottingham version of that.

*GWi: I think it was just a way of thinking: now this piece has happened, and you know the materials are there, what's the potential of it happening in different ways and still making sense?*

**GWh: Yeah. I remember that we ran from Paddington before it started. So everything, all the kit now was in our backpacks, and we ran from Paddington to the ICA - as a sort of warm up.**

*GWi: …Because of the usual thing about walking to get to Base Camp*

**GWh: Yeah, because we'd go from Base camp, we’d get to Base Camp in the warm up, on a ‘normal’ performance of Everest. So we’d do an hour before anybody arrives which we wanted people, in the first version, and the version we've done more times than the ICA version, we wanted to be depleted as it begins - you know, to be not totally on top of one's game as a performer. You know that it would knock you off a bit because you were tired, and it's quite interesting how that actually does work, even though you might know a thing really well in terms of what the next hour is. But yeah, at the ICA we ran from Paddington station to the Mall to the ICA - we didn't tell anybody we were doing that we just turned up to start.**

*GWi: It was July, and we had the mitts and the hats, I remember Did we get stopped by a policeman in Hyde Park?*

**GWh: Maybe we did.**

*GWi: We did, because we were this incongruous image.*

**GWh: But then the mittens became a real central thing, right? So we were trying to make the frames in the ICA still with mittens on. So these little screws and things, trying to put these things together. And then in the piece, in the end-on version of the piece, you're trying to do stuff, or even just turn the page is really, really difficult. It was this idea that the ‘Everestness’ of it was inhibiting physical ability. You know, that it limits your ability to do the things you want to do, because it's extreme altitude, etc. I think it was also about the thing that nostalgia does, or you know the *effect*, the sort of *production* somehow.**

JP: We're at question 2 [*laughs*] although we're covering loads of fantastic material, and we won't get through all of it, I’m sure. I wanted to ask you how you came about the conceit to bring Everest on to stage? Obviously, there's a range of things here that come from the Dartington training, those briefs, that idea of lexicons and tasks and particular protocols that you set yourself. But was there a moment where you thought, ‘okay, we're going with Everest, what on earth do we do in order to be able to make an hour piece out of this?’ And what was the first logical step that you took to start answering that question?

**GWh: I think I’d had this thought months before: you think about good things to do and performances that are not connected to a bigger idea that could sustain the piece. I was thinking of a movement piece [*laughs*]. I mean, yeah, I was a long way from making movement pieces then, but the ideas was that as you went deeper into the space you were going uphill and when you were right at the back of the room you had to crouch. So you'd sort of have to shrink back. And I remember thinking you could choreograph a thing, that you can make some movement that wasn't governed by that, and then you could teach it to everybody. And then you could say, okay, now, you've got to do it like this. And it would be about the fact that this flat space sort of goes up. I don't know, it was something that entertained my mind for a while. It was to do with the dance school [at Dartington] and moving through that space because it's like a corridor because it's rectangular, it's much longer than it is wide. And I’d also made some pieces for that space that had some performance material *outside* the studio, just by the door, then walking in the audience *through* the studio. I think this piece was a bit like Everest but about the Natural History Museum. It's a very small little piece. I remember drawing it from a side view? And put in a line like this. And then when I started, when this idea of mountains and nostalgia and the stuff I'd done earlier about place and memory, and all of those things, I started thinking, you know you could put it on a mountain, and you could put it on Everest. And I remembered this idea of a studio that conceptually went uphill. But there was no physical manifestation of that other than how you would behave in the space. And then I think out of that I started thinking how would that actually work, and *would* that work, and *could* it work for this thing that I’d started making or writing at that point. I think the thing that actually focused the idea of it was seeing some work - I saw a particular other student’s work, a graduating piece the year before, so I must have been thinking about it for some time. Remember Liam's piece?**

*GWi: Yep, yeah.*

**GWh: You know all the training in it - this piece by the way, was a very physical thing, where he trained a bit like a personal trainer, army drilling this group of guys. It's about masculinity and physical, but he just got his mates and some performance together, and he was just running them through the spaces, and he went into the studio, and it was like they'd been doing it 24 hours or something. And you saw the last hour of this huge sort of workout that it was to you. You know people were struggling with it, and dance as well and** **movement. It's emotional for lots of reasons that Gary and I went on to talk about it I think, as we started our friendship about sport. My mum and dad were athletics fans for a while, and somebody would run really fast and win, and they would be moved. I'd watch them sort of tear up. And I’d think that’s quite amazing. That's quite an abstract thing – that man’s just run from there to there for no other need - nothing's chasing, his life's not in danger, and nothing’s chasing him. But it's caused all of this fuss in a living room [*laughs*].**

**I was thinking about *attempts* - like actually doing stuff, you know *actually;* so it wasn't about representation, and it wasn't about putting the *visual* of a mountain in a room and it wasn't about plainly telling a narrative about going up a mountain. Instead, it would actually have some *real activity* in it, that, however playfully, it replicated the attempt to physically achieve something. And that's when I think I started thinking if you put that line vertically, it's 5 miles high, but I can't do that, and I don't want to do a 5-mile-long show. But if you shrink that and, I just must have just worked it out that you could put down this line and then everything was built around that. So it came from this conceptualization of this long space, working in there and making various pieces in there and then this real drive to do *real things*. And we did that again and again - and we're still very interested in that, and that’s where we found performance - in the *doing of real stuff* We *have* made and written you narrative theatre 10 or 15 years later, but for many years the *doing* was always a sort of *reality* and I think, however playful, that's what we set out to do in *Everest*. As Gary was saying at the top of this, we didn't actually know if we could do it, if it would be successful or not. So that's where the approach to the mountain came from. It was about a physical activity and then, in an attempt to achieve something which, in its active, pure folly, abstractly, going up and down the line 300 times, going up to the top of this mountain, seems to be the same sort of pursuit.**

JP: Gary, could you say something about that *doing* then, and what it's like - the visceral experience of performing the piece?

*GWi: Well, again, it's that beginning - when you don't know if you're gonna do it, or what's gonna happen over the next hour. The little devices in it - counting people in - there are those little jokes aren’t there? Little cheeky things so you've caught the audience in the attempt before they know what they've been implicated in. They've actually helped us by turning up and by walking in. So you hope that's gonna help you along the way. I feel my role is to be the image to the words that cite the mountains. Your question about putting a mountain on stage, and having a big knobbly wall [on stage]. I’ve seen a show about climbing where they did that. It feels so sort of flat after that, because they've done that for you. Whereas for the utterances of the name and the various flashes of equipment and kit and the sound of the wind, the fan and the wind. I guess we are asking the audience to work at making that image, connecting those dots and the name. Everyone sort of knows, everyone's got their image of Everest, whether they've seen it in a photograph, in real life, as a little kind of icon on a kind of double-glazing company’s van [laughs]. There's an image of Everest that we've got in our head.*

*And so, rather than us giving them that, it will be giving them the image through the citing of the name, and through these various references. In the first Dartington version - I’m sort of going away from your question - the summit, the peak that we stand on at the end was a little … in subsequent versions we had this blow-up paddling pool that we carry with us all the way, I carry on my back, and we actually construct it in front of you. As the peak was in the studio off to one side, you know, somewhere that, not being so out of way I may not have been noticed, or it was just one of these little islands in the room – the one where Gregg sits, the one for the fan and there was another one, that we then pushed on to the line at the at the end. So the only kind of representation of the mountain you get is the little chippy most top. It's a little fragment* *which seems to come up through the floor. These little fragments - you* *get as an audience or receiver of it, to stitch all those things together. So I feel I am the doing of the distance, the sort of counter to the words, to the staticness of Gregg who for most of it is sitting and reading. I'm this this demonstration aspect, the example of what's been spoken about. I see myself almost like a little meme or something that's just ticking over and colliding with those images. And there'll be different things happening at different moments, really locking us into the space we're in through that thing that contextualizes the space and place each time. And then the dreamier images of the mountain and the stories that come from there - it's a bit like those David Lynch cartoons of the angriest dog in the world where it's just the same image across 3 or 4 cells - just this dog going mad. But then there's different texts. So that the words landing on this kind of common image, this little loop image, although I guess I change slightly through it, through what I’m wearing, through the quality of my voice or my physical state. I see my job as being this little illustration of the idea, attaching myself to those words that are coming up in the paper, and the antithesis of that. Isn’t one of the questions, the idea of the presentation, the lecture, the paper, which is often the sort of thing that comes after an expedition, or an attempt or something? So I’m almost like the little visual accompaniment, the slideshow, the video, the go-pro view that might accompany, the drier information, the account.*

*The other thing to say, I notice the other peak in On Everest is at the very beginning on Gregg's chair where there's the pile of snow which gets sort of wiped away and removed. So it's been this little fleeting of the fake, the poly balls, the fake snow - it's there, but then it's swept aside at the beginning.*

JP: I’ve still got those little beads stuck in my copy of the script, and every time I read it I lose more! I try not to. Can I ask about the leading up an audience to the top of a mountain, not leading us down, allowing us to descend, as it were, individually? There's a lovely irony to this, because, of course you know, it's an absolute outrage as a guide that you would do that, in terms of mountaineering protocols. Where did that idea come from and was there a sort of playful sense of not, as it were, abusing your audience, but empowering them in different ways? Having been guides collectively, you then effectively abandon us.

**GWh: I think there's 2 things. I think it occurred to me as a joke, and I think it gets a laugh. It's always interesting to judge and remember things in terms of where the laughs are, but it gets a laugh, intentionally, when we sit back down, when *I* sit back down and pick up the clipboard, because everybody wants it to be over. No matter how much you've enjoyed it, it’s the end and you'd like to leave. But I start again, and I say, now there’s the matter of our descent, which is like, you could do another *hour*. But then I say, ‘I think it's best that we all do that in our own times and in our own way’ or whatever. And that's funny, because it's like a relief, like we're not going to do the bookend descent. But then I think it also came about because of the maths thing, of knowing that if you do it it's 5 miles. And I remember Gary and I talking about this because I don't think I’d made this bit when we started talking about doing it, the working out how long would it take, you know, because they walk out - we've set up this principle that if you walk in to be a member of the audience you've covered some of the distance of the piece and of the mountain, so as you walk out, you also do that. So they do the first 300th as they leave the space, and then we thought well, we should just say when they would – so when are they going to get back to the beginning, as it were, to sea level Or Base Camp? So, we just worked out that the average person walks X amount, so it's in 3 days’ time or in 2 days’ time, or whenever it is. And then there’s a thing that we do all the way through, which is this sort of collective ‘but here we all are and we are here together’. I think it was like a *show* idea really about the audience-as-group, and this temporary community beyond being just the people that happen to have come out to see a show that night. And in a subsequent work we tried to extend that framework, and think about what it means to be together in a certain way for that amount of time, and what it might mean tomorrow or in a week's time, or a year's time. And we just like that idea as artists from a visual background, that performance brings people together as a principle in a way. I mean, there are other types of performance, of course, and one can perform on one’s own and tell people about it later, and all of that business. But we like these ideas of gathering and people coming together. So we wanted to keep thinking about that through the piece. And we say at the beginning that we've all made difficult journeys to be here and that we're all missing people. We use ‘we’ a lot in Lone Twin stuff and sometimes there's 2 of us, so it's a ‘we’ rather than ‘I’. But it would often open out to ‘we’ *all of us*, which is sort of playful. I remember having conversations with people around Dartington - it's lots of things isn't it to try to include somebody in your statement. Somebody might not feel a part of your ‘we’, somebody might not *want* to be a part of your ‘we’ and there are subjectivities and political economies to it that these days are much more complex than they were then. Although we still do it now, because for us it's a sort of playfulness, it’s a sort of *joke* that *we* all think the same. Of course we don't. Or that we all feel the same about what's just happened. Of course we don't. But we liked that frame, so we just started those things about the physical, the time-space equation of the piece extending because there *is* a descent. We are at the top so the end, maybe as we were thinking about it *then,* the conceptual end of the piece is when we all get to the bottom. But let's not do that in the show, let's do that across the next few days. And then people then *do*, people *do* it, and sometimes they get in touch and say, oh, we, you know we *did*. It's like if you go on a journey together, or you go on an expedition together, you do something together, and then you think about it and it becomes part of your past. And I guess that's what *one* of the things in the piece is about that you know, is that you will remember this, and well, if *we're* lucky, you'll remember it. You might forget all about it and on Wednesday you’re just watching blockbusters and having your Wagon Wheel.**

*GWi: …just to say that moment, the descent and the kind of bubble that we put people in at the end, it's a playing out, or it's a flip of one of the first ideas in the piece about the effects of altitude sickness, where you're on the mountain, but your other places and your everyday life was this way round. You're in everyday life, but we are putting you on the mountain somehow, that you are walking down it in a conceptual way, but you’re actually going through these places of your life.*

JP: Does it add to that gentle mockery of heroism as well?

**GWh: Yeah, because if you're an audience person you've not *done* anything! You’ve just come to see a show, and then you walk, and then it's Wednesday and you've got back to sea level. I guess one of the things running through Everest and lots and lots of work that we make, we went on to make together, is this layered relationship to physical endurance. And that we are drawn to it. I mean, we've thought and spoken quite a lot about this, that we are *drawn* to it as a way of shifting the emotional dial in a piece or in the room. You know that something happens when we watch, when humans watch each other *do* some sort of endeavour, something happens to us, something empathetic - I don't know what kicks off, but it was there at our disposal. Our *take* on that is always that the heroicism of it is there to be totally upended because it's also ridiculous, and just folly, and nonsense. And that's quite rich, that became quite rich, there was something about that. I mean it is quite a bit of work doing *Everest*, but we've done other things which are much more physically demanding. And as they get - this sounds very reductive - but as they get more and more physically demanding and difficult to do, they get funnier and more ridiculous, like the joke becomes stronger. So something like *Ghost Dance*, which is this 12-hour blindfolded line dance. Always it presents itself in one way very seriously, so ‘performance art’, these two white men do something for a long time in the gallery. You know it conforms to everybody's worst nightmares these days around performance, masculinity, etc. However, it presents to *us* as a sort of joke as well. We use jokes very liberally as something that has humour and humility and humanity in it. You know, that has joy and silliness and lightness in it, alongside all of the shadow, difficulty and trauma. And the fact that those things could *come together* to us is always really interesting. Sometimes you want - and I’ve heard other *makers*, and I’ve heard comedians, and I’ve heard entertainers and writers talk about this – to make them laugh, make them cry. If you make them really laugh you've raised the emotional temperature of a room. You can say something, you can undercut that with pathos and sincerity immediately, and people are much more given to an emotional reaction to the next bit, which could actually be the opposite of something that's happy. So that's what I mean about this sort of joke, you know we don't mean it as a joke *on* somebody. It's a joke. If there's a joke on somebody it’s on *us* all the time because we're the people *doing* it.**

**But there is that play around the absolute folly of the *attemp*t and the *task* and the masculine and all of those male-centric expedition explorers, mountaineers, endurance folk, athletes – in many ways that’s only increased, across the last 25 years. If you look at a of set shelves in the bookshop there’s a lot more than there was. That sort of ‘endeavour for us’, it's just we’re naturally drawn to certain things. I remember after *Everest* I read things about solo sailing, I got really into these people on their own going off and doing these mad journeys and bits and pieces. But I’m critically minded as well, and Gary and I have our own sensibility that as performers, and as friends, and as men that we naturally undo a lot of it just because we are who we are. I guess that has allowed us to be interested in it. I think if we were really about, watch me lift this heavy car above my head [*laughs*] you know, that's a very different sort of showing and sharing and what that elicits and allows for is - it's *less* perhaps.**

JP: Gary do you have any thoughts on that? I’m thinking of you in your yeti costume through parts of that as well. Part of what I’m trying to do is think through the various critical discourses that have found their way into mountain studies: a new enlightenment about how the narratives around mountaineering have been performed in literature through the lens of performance. What I’m interested in is whether there is any of that ‘new’ decolonial thinking manifest in the performance of mountains?

**GWh: I’m sorry, I know you’ve addressed this to Gary, but I’ll just speak over the top of him [*smiles*]. I read through that, you know, there's a bit about the Colonial naming game, but I think it starts on kaleidoscopes and George Everest. So I think, is the line ‘on the kaleidoscopes and George Everest and the colonial naming game – colon- oh, look a mountain’? Right. And it's a *kaleidoscope* and not a telescope. It's because there's all this stuff about making Astroturf because that’s what we’ve done and we’re like kids. We put a line on the floor and other versions of it, using a Blue Peter, ‘making a rocket out of the washing up thing’ and Astroturf instead of grass. And in a way that's just what's going on there. We take this rather naive look at it, in very straight-ahead terms in the whole piece; the humour of the piece works in that way, there's something in our identity as British men doing it: handshakes and we say we like stiff upper lipness, and we're driving that, and trying to skewer that, and shaking each other's hands all the time formally [*laughs*]. There's something oddly Victorian about some of the ways that happens, or what that is. So I think a lot of the drive in it was just saying, listen, we know there's a whole set of problematics here that we're very aware of. But we are also a bit like children playing.**

JP: Gary?

*GWi: Yeah. All of those things, yeah, especially the kit we're wearing - we just got it from Millets! So it's these little signs of outdoor pursuits, mountainy stuff, and as Gregg was saying the text acknowledging all of those problematic points around both climbing the mountain and naming it, and who's claiming it. And citing other heroic narratives - Neil Armstrong's mentioned in there as well. These other ‘heroic’ human endeavours and feats. But also, as Gregg said, through the childness, the paddling pools, you know that's part of the unravelling and lampooning - you know ‘our sponsor’ - in the Dartington version it was a photocopy shop that photocopied the books. In subsequent ones it's always been a…*

JP: …[*laughing*] nursery!

*GWi: …a local nursery that’s given up their afternoon in the water to give us the paddling pools and things. So yeah, that's touching on the nostalgia of places - you know, holidays and family, childhood friends and things like that. So all that weave of naivete as well around that. And also, I think, when Gregg first mentioned it I remember that Monty Python sketch - you know when they’re mountaineering up Chiswick High Street.*

**GWh: That's amazing. I watched it with my kids the other day. That's an amazing little clip that.**

*GWi: So, there our sensibility and friendship met across humour and those little shared interests and reference points. I think there’s a lot of that in all the figures or archetypes that we've dropped into. We started with the mountaineer in Everest, and went on to the cowboy or the endurance sportsmen in the cycling pieces, and Al Pacino, we can have an actor, a male actor pretending to be men, other men and these kind of qualities. So that's been one of the aspects I think we've been mining away at - the Shaman in this piece, the sledgehammer songs, kind of folky water stuff, medicine show piece that we made - which, in fact, I also remember we tell a story in that about Joe Simpson. Touching the Void. So in the middle of this piece called Sledgehammer Songs, which is all wood and bullrushes and folk songs, in combination with other little mobile PA units. It's the pieces of dance - it's got a similar mode to Everest in that Gregg is sitting and reading a very long and winding and kind of psychedelic text. And then I’m doing this circling you know, Everest is a line and in Sledgehammer Songs I’m moving in a circle, the audience is in the round, and I’m just in the circle, and again I’m illustrating and enacting bits from the text, or it kind of gathers and accumulates on to me. But then at onepoint I stop to put on more layers of clothing, because it's the piece where we make clouds at the end. But I tell the story about Joe Simpson and the cutting of the rope, you know, cutting of the rope of his mate, and then but we sort of push it into, we add things to it which make it kind of become ridiculous. I saw that documentary when he spoke about getting back down the mountain and the sort of state he was in, hallucinogenic, having the Boney M song just in his head the whole time. But we inserted a little kind of episode in that tale where he shits in the snow to make an ice pick to get out of the cave, the crevasse that he fell into. Which as far as I know he didn't do [laughs]. We did it to add an extra layer of bother that he was all covered in his own – he's shits. Makes this kind of frozen turd to use as a hand tool, but in using it, and digging out it, it goes back into being a semi- liquid form, and he gets covered in all his own shit. And then in the end image when he's rolling down the mountain, crawling down the mountain but we've added this extra layer of him being covered in shit.*

JP: Which of course he was, wasn’t he?

**GWh: He was because he goes through the latrine of the camp.**

JP: He does.

**GWh: Yes, we put more shit on him basically [*all laughing*]**

*GWi: It's something I’m telling as I’m getting dressed, it’s something I’ve needed to do so I’m just telling this story, and it's almost maybe like a parallel to what people are seeing I’m going through, I’m just circling, circling. I’m getting sweatier and more out of breath, and I’m forgetting stuff and I’m trapped in a sort of hell. We maybe try to just shift focus for a moment about this other sort of heroic moment, but make it completely ridiculous as well, to do this, and this person just ends up covered in shit having gone through this traumatic event with his friend. So I think with starting with Everest it’s been a kind of regular touchstone that we've gone at these heroic figures, or a moment of considered heroicism in our pursuits.*

**GWh: But we’re critical of it. It's almost like the social contract means that we have to talk to it, because we're blokes and we're doing this stuff, right? But it also means that we are *doing* it so we are *attracted* to it as well, right? If you wanted to centre work around upending masculinity you could skewer it in all sorts of ways that didn't involve some of the stuff that we actually end up doing together. So there is a part of us that is interested in what is a sort of catalyst, an *emotional* catalyst. And there's a way of creating stories and a way of, in lots of pieces, of meeting people. These really really long journeys became ways of meeting people. So the physical stuff for us is really just something we shoulder in order for other stuff, for the *good* stuff to happen. That does mean that we end up falling into the space and the trope of all of this other iconography. But we're quite happy to welcome that because it gives us something to *work* at, gives you something to *dress* as and then *do* it as an image. I think it's probably important to say in a very straight ahead way there are certain cultural and social narratives these days that you might feel guilt or shame [*laughs*] in being drawn to or being interested in and rightly so in lots of cases because of what they go on to *cause* in the world, especially from a national, colonial position. It becomes difficult to talk about, but ‘physical endeavour’ *full stop* interests us, me and lots of us. We still have *sport* as a mainstay at the heart of society, physical practice as a cultural practice, and we're variously across the world obsessed with it.**

JP: Absolutely, and as you said earlier there is a palpable kind of mirror neurone in your own kind of response to some of that as well, isn't there…

**GWh: Yeah…**

*GWi: Maybe part of what we're trying to get a response from is to have that physical, to have me as a kind of constant reminder of my role in the piece and that things get loaded onto that role as well - the reading of the quotes, putting on the furry suit as a sort of ‘Oh, my God, he's got to run in that thing now’. And hopefully that might draw people into that, you know, like, steeplechase runners that ‘oh, God he's got to jump, he's running enough, he’s got to jump over the things’ or whatever pursuit it is. I quite like at the end that I’m partly transformed. As you know we start off both together, dressed the same, and by the end of it I’ve become more animal or beast – again, it’s the image of the sherpa figure, with those images of Tenzing and Hillary and the furs and stuff they were wearing then. And in that suit I get to tell a dream - my figure shifts away from a straight kind of involvement in the academic paper, albeit that paper’s full of all sorts of things and doing all sorts of stuff. Then I get called aside to almost like a campfire, I tell a story and tell a dream.*

JP: Is it always the same dream, Gary?

*GWi: It is. Yes, yeah. And the same story about the 2 dogs, which in itself is like a dreamlike thing.*

JP: What about this juxtaposition of success and failure? Would you mind touching on that? You've obviously got, right towards the back end of the piece, episode 58 and 60, both a summiting success and a summiting failure. Am I right that we get both and we get exactly the same rendition of them?

**GWh: Yeah, I think if we failed, I think we just made the decision we’d just say the same thing. We're saying it’s an emotional moment for us all, so it’s now the matter of our descent. We just say the same thing. I remember just running out of time to write. And then I think I either sort of retro-fitted the logic, ‘oh, we could just - works perfectly, say the same thing’ [*laughs*] or we made that decision at the time. But yeah, you're right, it's the same text, and I think if we made it in all of a bluster in 1997 with only a few hours to go. We've had ample opportunity to address that and *haven't,* so I think it is purposeful that we just say the same. Also we thought that the show element, the end, still needed to be an *end* to the show, to end on upbeat that, well, we haven't made it, or we're short, ‘we've come up short, ladies and gentlemen’. But, it would still amount to the same thing, whether you do it or whether you don't do it. And there are lots of things that we've done over the years which is like, well, maybe *can* we do it, I don't know? And what if we *can't*? Well, that will be it, the *not* doing it will be *it*, you know, not being *able* to do it or finish it, or complete it, or nothing happens would be *it*. So I think that's what that is, it’s just the end of the show. Whatever happens it's still just the last 5 minutes of the show, and it needs to deliver a certain thing for the ‘showness’ to end. Maybe we did think about, you know you can be regretful and look back on what went wrong or, this starts to sound like a better idea – or we always spent too long talking, trying to do the maths, or why did you tell that long dream story that nobody is particularly interested in - people *hate* dream stories [*Gary laughs*]. But we don't do that, we just have the same thing. You're right to pick up on it, it is exactly the same text.**

JP: Which is very much part of that sense of pulling the rug from the classic mountaineering narrative isn't it?

**GWh: Yeah, exactly. It is what it is. We're always quite clear - we're setting out to do an *attempt* so you can either succeed or fail. And that's where it leaves you. One of those two things, but what it achieves is broadly perhaps the same.**

JP: So a final question just before we finish. I hope this doesn't sound too sort of too ‘Hollywoody’, my question 10. Will there ever be another On Everest?

**GWh: Do you mean that we perform it again? Or we make a new one?**

JP: Either or, actually. I mean, I don't know how central it is to my chapter, but certainly it’s just my curiosity about its life since ’97; I’m feeling very privileged that, in a very small way, we're part of that history now as a School.

**GWh: We decided to stop doing it in ‘98, ‘99, or whatever it was, because it was popular, small ‘p’ [*laughs*] popular. It was like, ‘oh there’s these guys with this mountain piece’. It's funny, we were quite aware at the time that we knew of other artists because of certain work. Especially emerging artists, performance makers, live artists, whatever at that time. And we were the ‘Everest guys’, and brilliantly - and these were different times in this country at least, but across Europe – it created a lot of interest, a lot of support. People wanted to show it, or people wanted to know who we were, or why, you know, like where it came from, and all of that business. And we decided we wanted to convert that interest into the ability to make something *new* or *more*, which was a new thought, because all we’d done is make this piece together and it'd got a bit of a life and then it was like, oh, but could this be the beginning of *more*?**

**So we decided that we would just not do it anymore, and anybody that was interested in *Everest*, or us, we'd say, oh, we're doing this new thing, or, why don't you support a new thing? And so I remember making that quite clear decision at the time, which means that we've never toured. There's only been a few showings of Everest as you rightly pointed out, and we’ve not toured. We then went through a period where we'd show things for many years. If we’d got something up and going and it worked, we would just sort of have it for years, and we'd show some of those things for years and years [*laughs*]. So *Everest* just didn't get into our time of working and touring together. So there is this thought of, ‘oh you *could* show it again’. And I think each time we show it it's - I mean the one that we did 5 years ago with you guys, with you Jonathan, there’d been a really big gap and you know, the world's a different place. The world was a different place *then*, it's different again *now*, we’re different people, or you know, these versions of ourselves in our fifties you know, and getting that out of the box and just doing it may no longer be appropriate. Not - maybe just for us, in terms of how - but getting it out of the box and working on it, shifting it, changing it. It *is* one of those pieces, we don't have that many pieces where there's a defined script, like you call it a ‘play’ in your questions, and it operates like a play. So it's got that structure and we don't have many of them actually where you go, ‘oh look, there it is, it's all written out’, and you go and do it. So perhaps. And perhaps there might be ways of thinking it through in terms of where it goes, you know, this thing about the space, if it was to go into a particular space or we reworked it for a particular environment or occasion or moment. But I don't know if we've got driving ambition to do that. We're very fond of it, we're always really happy to talk about *Everest*, we're fond of it because of the role it played in our careers in a way. But I do think when I wrote the article about how Everest was a product of Dartington in the late nineties, it did make me really interested in it perhaps for those reasons actually, a bit more than other stuff, that it sort of embodies a whole set of thought - maybe this is why people *do* go back to old work because it, you know it embodies a whole set of ideas that were sort of central to *my*, to *our* lives at that time.**

JP: Would you concur with all that, Gary?

*GWi: Yeah yeah, I would. Yes. I remember another decision for not really touring it and responding in the first wave of interest is that we, I think we thought that if we did it too often, we’d become too good at it [laughs] and we maybe knew we could achieve each time. So we sort of said, well you know, the jeopardy and chance and the questions wouldn't be there if we could do it. So that's another reason why we said let’s [stop] - and the new stuff we wanted to work on. So I think it's not out of the question we'll do it again, I think we’ve just got to wait until we're not very good at it again [laughs].*

[1:28:31]

**GWh: I don't know if we've ever been that good at it [*Gary laughs*]. But there is something Jonathan, where we're in the very early stages of making a new thing at the minute in a very sort of light way, which is predicated on an idea of a voiceover, that there’s voice and this image, or voice and this action. I was looking at nature documentaries, early televisual nature documentaries, especially North American ones where you get this rather poetic narration. It isn't like David Attenborough, it's more expressive, and it's not integrative of what's going on on the screen. It's like a set of aesthetic and emotional suggestions but they're showing a picture of a tree or a little chipmunk, or it's a horse. It's still sort of playful and we're just working to that, and when I started thinking about it, I was like, okay, that's what we've *always* done, and Everest actually is like a voiceover piece where there's the *voice*, and there's the *thing*. When we started thinking about voiceover it was like, something simple, like an orange on a plinth and you do a voiceover for it, because you can do it for footage, or you can do it for anything, like a dance, or you have the same voice over and you ask an audience to regard the orange. And then we've got the orange with this voiceover, and really think quite formally about voiceover as there is *something*, and then you put a voice over it. It could be a drawing. It could be anything. But you stick a voiceover the top of it, and I don't know – we’re sort of working into that. And then I was thinking, in the lead up to talking about *Everest* again with you that well, that's what that *is*, really. And Gary talked about being a meme, this little image that goes through it, so I think it's perhaps more present than it's been for a long time. And also we haven't made a lot recently. We go through periods of making loads and loads of work and then we have times and we don't make much. And when you're making loads and loads of stuff and you feel a million miles away from certain projects because your head’s into… But then when you've got a gap and you look back and you can see things more holistically, certain bits do pop out, and then *Everest* does pop out. I’m sure given who we are we'd probably be happy to talk about any piece, but we are interested still in talking about Everest. Yeah, maybe there could be another. I was thinking about one thing in your questions about the sort of academic paper, and as I said at the beginning of our conversation that definitely came out of being in that writerly mode and then upending it for a performance. But there are some very clear and sincere influences in there around its academic tone. Folk that I’d read, people that were teaching me at the time, like John Hall, who chaired the panel discussion that we had at your event, who saw the 1997 Everest, and then saw the one we did for you - *his* lectures were *as* constructed as that text and were amazing, and I’ve thought a lot recently about how John’s lecturing and teaching practice taught me something about making performance that wasn't about - you know his lectures were always about writing and brilliant series on grammar - so they were very *in* on writing, writerly tactics and things. And John by nature, background and publication is a celebrated poet but there was something in how he taught and how he prepared a lecture or a seminar – at Dartington they were never really called those things because everything was sort of informal. But anyway, his stuff didn’t necessarily have academic formality, like the great academic’s in the room and is now speaking, but were much more playful and were much more performative than other pedagogic frameworks that I’d inhabited. And I think that when I look at the Everest text and think about that mode of delivery and the thing that we're doing I think we are making the piece sort of make humour of things all the way through. But there is a sort of line, for *me* at least, it's quite a sincere one, and I am interested in that voice - I don't know what it is, the sort of critical voice that gives way to something that is totally unusual and sort of spins it.**

Jonathan Pitches: I absolutely understand what you mean, not least having had a relatively short relationship with John as an Associate Editor on the journal, and he did exactly that for us, in terms of understanding what Training Grounds was, particularly how we might use image in that journal. He wrote very short but highly stimulating rules that we might think through in terms of the curation of that journal. Quite extraordinary individual and lovely to have that cycle from ‘97 to 2018, 21 years. I must draw things to a close. Gary did you have any final things you wanted to observe in the light of that set of statements from Gregg?

*GWi: No [laughs].*

Jonathan Pitches: You've been super generous with your time, absolutely brilliant to talk to you.

**GWh: It's great, Jonathan, and thank you for your interest. It sounds rather sad, but I don't mean to be, there was a time when we were *always* talking to people about our work, which in itself is not a problem, but you alight on things again and again and again. And then you have periods now where we don't, where Gary and I might think about stuff, but it's more unusual for us to spend time really talking to somebody else about a piece of ours or something that we have previously done together, or our concerns, and I value it more and more. I value it in a kind of different way to the way that I that I used to, and see it as really useful for starting to make some new work I find it really useful to have these conversations. So thank you. It's been really interesting.**

JP: It's been a pleasure. Thanks so much