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Hoxton Hall
10th & 11th July only

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Review by [Jackie Fletcher](#) (2004)

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This weekend Hoxton Hall gives space to a trio of young dance companies pushing at the boundaries of contemporary performance. Partly installation-theatre, the audience is moved from spaces to space in different seating configurations, so there is never the opportunity to sit back passively in the dark and adopt the standard disengagement of the seasoned theatrical voyeur.

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The pieces are connected thematically, each in some way or another redolent of those metaphysical questions that pester us all from time to time. What are we doing here? Do we have free will? Can we make things happen? Or, are we just going through the motions, performing actions pre-determined for us and without our consent? Is mankind really the apex of creation, or just a tragic-comic race of *über-marionetten*?

First up was a short dance piece performed by choreographer Nikki Tomlinson. In ***Saw/Sore/Soar*** there is an overriding sense of the spirit striving to transcend the confines of human corporeality. Tomlinson is confident but modest; the work seeks to break with conventions without recourse overarching pretensions. It features an ordinary individual, often in confusion, expressing conflicting hopes and emotions, but even hemmed

in with doubt.

In the next room, Rotozaza-Ooff provides us with food for thought of another ilk. Their **TOCAR** (Theatre of Command and Response) focuses on the unrehearsed, the arbitrary reaction, and this keeps our attention and challenges. One actress (the very funny Silvia Mercuriali), carrying out rehearsed behaviour, interacts with two performers who are blindly following pre-recorded instructions on a voice-over. They move from square to square on a numbered grid, reacting to their invisible masters and ever unaware of what lies ahead of them. This was intriguing, riveting, thought provoking and often very funny. As the action progresses and one laughs at these pawns sweating to live up to their part of the bargain and give their all in playing the game, discomfort should prompt us to consider that great existential question mark concerning the risibility of human endeavour. Are we laughing at a mirror of ourselves?

The final piece, back in the musical hall space, ***The Awkward Position***, by Rajni Shah Theatre, is an apt finale to an evening that gently confronts us and begs for participation in the philosophical inquiry. ***The Awkward Position*** is aesthetically engaging and finely executed in terms of movement and spoken text. Its triumph is its simple honesty; movement alternates with silence and stillness; tense moments give way to the ridiculous; the performers are sublime and clumsy in a measured balance. The short speeches indicate that this piece is concerned with the failure of passion and engagement in the face of those forces that exist to flummox human enterprise. Disempowerment inevitably gives way to lethargy and apathy. Pathos seems both tragic and comic in a world of such potential beauty.

Hoxton Hall's 2004 season of experimental performances continues on selected weekends throughout the summer.

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