

## **Wolf**

### **Documentation of a making process**

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#### **Introduction**

This is a documentation of the creative process leading to a solo performance inspired by the fairytale Little Red Riding Hood. My process centred on devising a fluid landscape within which to move. This landscape is composed of movement scores and images, live improvised music and the scenographic elements of set, costume and lighting.

Through my moving body's interaction with the landscape the characters of Little Red Riding Hood can emerge and interactions between them play out, creating a new telling of the centuries old story. My approach is based on the premise that the characters of the story represent elements of ourselves. It also depends heavily on a phenomenological approach, allowing movement to come from sensory information and trusting the knowledge of the body.

A central premise is that the piece is created in the moment of performance as I interact with this structure. It therefore changes with each performance and with each audience. This reflects the way that folktales evolve over time as they are made manifest by their telling.

#### **Underpinning**

Central research interests of mine over the past few years have been improvisation and performing improvisation. In particular prioritising the sensorial, lived experience and allowing movement to arise from this. According to Nancy Stark Smith 'sensation is the language of the body' (as cited in Olsen, 1991, p.119). I have been interested in learning this language and finding out how it can communicate in performance. This research has taken place with many different improvisers and teachers, particularly Contact Improvisers Andrew Harwood and Jess Curtis, and with improvisation collective Mathilde of which I am a member.

The interplay between intention and the physical reality and the dance which arises from this is of interest to me. The potential to play this interaction comes from the lived experience of a "phenomenal dancer" who as Preston-Dunlop describes "is never an object moving to commands but lives every moment" (1998, p.60).

In performance this plays out as allowing an intention to communicate something to an audience through my actions to "sneak in", rather than being the overriding factor determining action. If I want to perform a particular action to communicate something but the physical reality of the momentum of my body in that moment is something different, a negotiation needs to take place. In some modes of performance this negotiation is minimised and hidden. I am interested in allowing it to visibly take place in my body and in

space so that the results of it become the dance that the audience witnesses.

### Introducing Little Red Riding Hood

To leave space for the waylaying of intention in performance described above, it helps to use a narrative that is already well known to the audience then I don't need to do much for the audience to be put in mind of the whole story. This is a strategy that I have used in my last two pieces *Nativity* and *Love in Idleness*, which was loosely based on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and it is one that I wanted to continue to investigate. Little Red Riding Hood, "to many symbolic of childhood itself." (Orenstein, 2002, p.4) fitted the bill perfectly.



**Fig. 1. Illustration from C. Perrault's *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*, 1697.**

*Note: From Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked: Sex, Morality and the Evolution of a Fairy Tale. (p. 39) by C. Orenstein, 2002, NY: Basic Books.*

First published in late seventeenth century France by Charles Perrault (1695), Little Red Riding Hood actually has its origins in much older oral folk tales. Its popularity grew following the publication of *Little Red Cap* by the Grimm brothers in 1812. It has continued to be extremely well known and loved both for its simplicity and complexity. As is the case with folktales many different versions exist in which Red Riding Hood's fate varies widely. Perrault (1697) has her being eaten up. In Grimm's telling she is rescued by a woodcutter and thinks to herself "you will never again leave the path.. as long as Mother forbids it." In a second less frequently recounted part of Grimms' story Red and Grandmother outwit a second wolf and she "went home happily." In a French oral folktale which predates either of these (collected around 1885 by P. Delarue and M. L. Teneze) she inadvertently eats her Grandmother then uses a cunning ploy to escape. She pretends she needs to defecate in order to leave the bed where she is trapped with the wolf. In *The Company of Wolves* (1979/1995) Angela Carter's heroine has her own animal instincts which she uses to tame the wolf. The story ends with the words "See! sweet and sound she sleeps in granny's bed, between the paws of the tender wolf."

### Fluidity of identities

Red Riding Hood is often examined in terms of binary opposites, with fixed and defined

characters each representing male and female, adult and child, purity and lust. In contrast to this the identities of Carter's characters are interrelated and fluid. Each encompasses human and beast, tenderness and aggression, innocence and evil.

In an attempt to circumvent binary interpretations and to invite complexity into my own telling I have engaged with the three characters who appear in all versions of the tale. Red Riding Hood, Grandmother and Wolf. (I am leaving out the woodcutter, who didn't arrive to rescue Red until 1812). In my telling the three characters may become apparent individually or concurrently. Shifts between them can happen in a moment.

Fluidity of identity in Red Riding Hood has also been a concern for contemporary visual artists. Kiki Smith's sculpture *Daughter* (1999) [Fig. 2] is of a figure in a red cape who is half girl, half beast. Gérard Rancinan (*Little Red Riding Hood*, 2003) [Fig. 3] depicts Red Riding Hood as a male ballerina whilst the wild creature the wolf is shown trapped in a cage. This subversion of their usual identities invites an ambiguous reading of meaning. In order for my telling to do likewise I have taken the perspective that the archetypes depicted in the story are integrated parts of me, whilst simultaneously teasing them apart just enough to highlight them in performance.



Fig. 2. Kiki Smith. *Daughter*, 1999. Note: From "Visualising Little Red Riding Hood" by S. Bonner, Retrieved from <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/english/graduate/issue/2/sarah.htm>



Fig. 3. Gérard Rancinan. *Little Red Riding Hood*, 2003.

Note: From "Visualising Little Red Riding Hood" by S. Bonner, Retrieved from <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/english/graduate/issue/2/sarah.htm>

In folk tales the audience play an active part in the construction of the story. It is in its telling to an audience that a story comes alive. Therefore I am consciously aware that as I

perform the piece to an audience, I also take on a fourth role, that of storyteller.

Catherine Orenstein's book *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked: Sex, Morality and the Evolution of a Fairy Tale* (2002) gives background, context and analysis and has been extremely useful to me. It inspired me to consider my own telling of the story as part of an ongoing, ever-changing canon of folklore.

### **The dance within the story**

Folklore is ephemeral in nature, changing over time with fashions, concerns, each teller and each audience. Each oral storyteller brings their own interpretation with what they emphasise and what they leave out. Not until stories are written down do they become frozen, locked in context. I am interested in how through the ephemeral art form of dance I can tell the story in a way that allows the dance within it to continue. With my moving body I can uncover what in the story resonates for me and for my audience. I aimed to find out how movement can release Grandmother, Wolf and Red Riding Hood from their historically recently fixed fates, breathing new life into them and enabling the possibility of new meanings.

Much enquiry into fairytales seeks to uncover universal truths. I am more interested in what resonates for me in the Winter of 2012 in the studio theatre at Laban Creekside. An improvised component to the performance is essential to let this fluidity continue and through it to discover what my telling of Little Red Riding Hood is at this time.

### **Creating a landscape**

Danielle Goldman (2010, p.5) describes improvised dance as “literally giving shape to oneself by deciding how to move in relation to an unsteady landscape.” By creating an unsteady landscape and moving within it I give myself decisions to make and reasons to move. The landscape manifests elements of the story of Little Red Riding Hood; a cold Winter woodland, a warm cottage, and three characters, grandmother, wolf and girl. When I move within and in relation to the created landscape, I move in relation to the setting and characters of the story.

When I am viewed moving within this context my movements are read in relation to it. Putting an audience in mind of a story they almost certainly already know allows me to be less explicit in my actions whilst still bringing the audience with me through a narrative of sorts. Constructing a familiar landscape also creates a setting in which deviations from the expected story and its characters are highlighted.

The landscape is created through a combination of movement scores, sound, and the scenographic elements of set, costume and lighting. I will examine each of these elements in turn.

### **Movement language**

According to Orenstein (2002) Little Red Riding Hood “embodies complex and

fundamental human concerns.” My challenge was how to literally embody the story and its characters.

My approach to movement creation was premised on the idea that the characters of fairytales are archetypes that we all identify with. Orenstein encapsulates this “The fairytale runs through us like a current. Each of us carries within an intuitive understanding of what it means to be wolf, Grandma, woodsman and Red Riding Hood.” (2002, p.245). My process consisted of uncovering the real life resonances that the distillation of these understandings set off in my body.

I took a phenomenological perspective, finding elements of wolf, grandmother and Red Riding Hood within the sensation and experience of my own body. Rather than try to move how I think the wolf or Grandmother would move, or even study and copy the movements of wolves or elderly women, I looked within the sensation of my moving body for elements which resonated with the characters. Orenstein says that whilst we think we outgrow fairytales, in fact we internalise them (2002, p11). With this premise, I didn't need to create movement to depict the characters, just allow it to emerge.

This embodied approach to movement creation fits well with the themes of the piece. It resonates with the animal movement of the wolf using its senses to negotiate the wood, of Red Riding Hood's distraction by the environment of the wood and of her responses to meeting the wolf.

The movement content in the opening section was strongly influenced by dance artist Jess Curtis's symmetry score where the body must remain strictly symmetrical. As we naturally move bi-laterally it produces a strange, awkward quality which I hope conveys something of the awkwardness of a changing, unfamiliar body. Symmetrical movement of the pelvis without the diffusion of bi-lateral movement produces a movement quality that is somehow sexual, though the lack of this intention prevents it from being overly descriptively so.

The movement in the piece is semi-improvised. My intention in each section is determined along with spacing on the stage and some of the movement content. The exact movement content is a result of the interaction between my intention and my environment in each moment. The pacing and rhythm of my movement in particular is influenced by the presence of the audience and by live musical accompaniment.

## **Sound**

For the music to be improvised and live is an important component of the piece. It provides a key 'unsteady' element to the landscape, helping me to respond in the moment as I perform. The sound is created by David Leahy using double bass with a loop pedal. The

frequencies of the double bass can be felt resonating through the body, linking me and the audience with a shared visceral experience.

David and I are both experienced performers of improvisation but this was a new working relationship and we rehearsed together only twice before the performance. This newness ensured that my response to the soundscape in performance was fresh and genuine.

Following our first rehearsal I devised a score to give us a shared structure. [Fig. 4]. It determines textures and levels (including moments of silence) in different parts of the piece, and gives some specific cues. At moments in the piece I visibly cue the music with my movement. This is to give a sense that I play an active part in creating my environment. I collected samples of wolves, fire crackling and wind through trees and shared these with David. He showed me how he is able to use his bass to create sounds evocative of these and these became part of the score.

There are several parts where the build of the music and movement are distinct from each other. For example at one point the music builds and I imagine it as the forest materialising for me to enter and move within. At its peak the music continues whilst I step back and watch as the scene continues, perhaps remembering, perhaps imagining. These differences are to indicate my distinctness from my environment, that whilst we influence each other greatly we also exist independently of each other.

A significant artistic decision was to have a solo female performer representing each of the characters in the story. The musician will therefore be positioned off stage. In practice in the studio theatre with no orchestra pit or wings, this means far enough downstage and to the side to not be lit and to be read by the audience as intended to be off-stage.

## **Song**

During the piece I perform a song. The tune is that of a Southern spiritual song, the words I pieced together from words and phrases in Angela Carter's *Company of Wolves*. The religious connotations of the spiritual melody fit with the instructional tone of the lyrics. The original song was taught to me by my father, in the way that fairytales and the instructions contained within them are handed down from parent to child.

Folk songs are folk tales set to a melody therefore I perform the song in a folksy style. This is reminiscent of the grandmother telling stories to her granddaughter Red Riding Hood. I sing the song directly to the audience also making the connection to my role as storyteller. Angela Carter makes the same connection between narrator/storyteller and Grandmother in *The Company of Wolves*.

The fifth intervals in the melody are reminiscent of wolf howls and towards the end of the song my words tail off into howls. The double bass provides an aural context for this and we set each other off reflecting the rhythm of wolves calling to each other. The timing of

this is improvised. Integrating wolf-like howls into a song is an idea used by Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs in their *Li'l Red Riding Hood* (1966) and by contemporary Canadian singer songwriter Rae Spoon in *We Become Our Own Wolves* (2008).

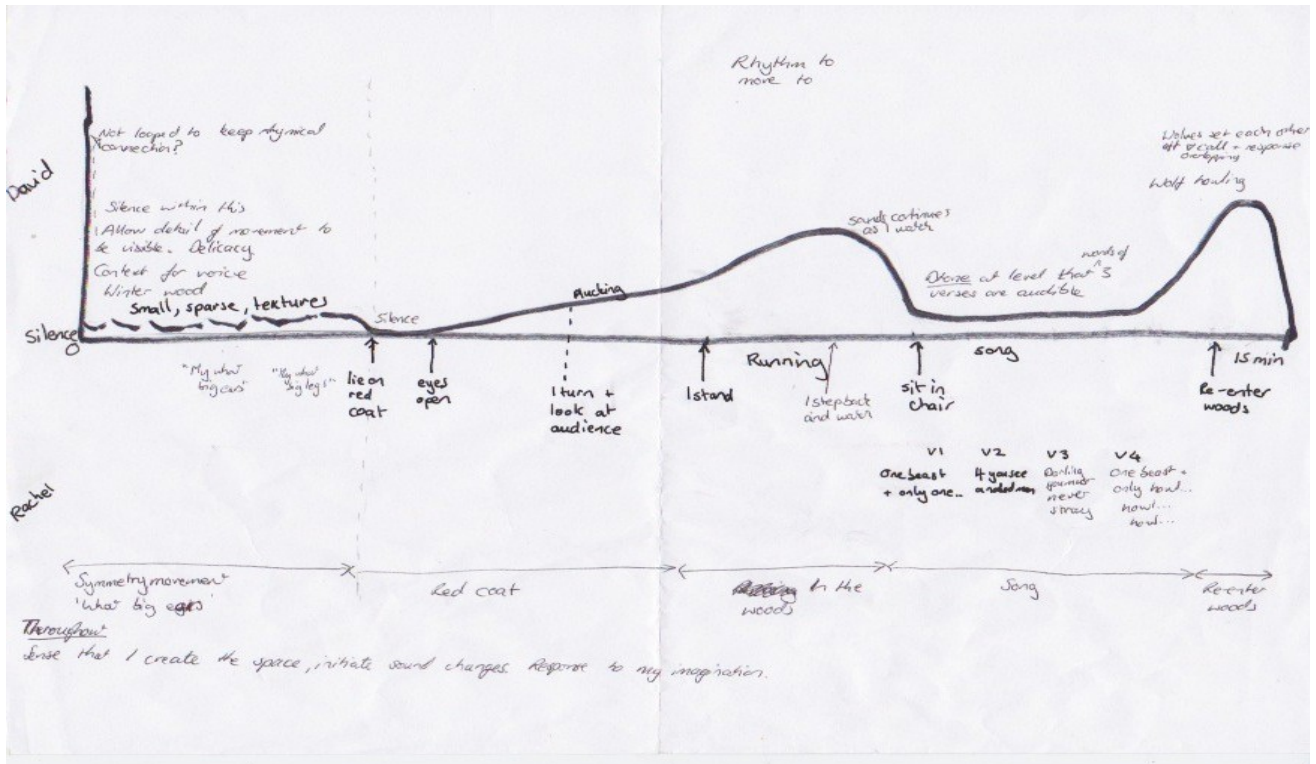


Fig. 4. Musical score

## Set

Three items on stage correspond to the three characters of the story. For the Grandmother in the cottage there is a multicoloured blanket of crocheted squares (which was made by my Granny). Red Riding Hood is represented by a well-worn red winter coat and the wolf by a sheepskin rug. A well-known illustration of Little Red Riding Hood by Walter Crane [Fig. 5] shows the wolf wrapped in a sheep skin, drawing on the biblical reference of devil and establishing the use of sheepskin to depict the Red Riding Hood wolf.



Fig. 5. Walter Crane, 1875.

Note: From *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked: Sex, Morality and the Evolution of a Fairy Tale*. (p. 39) by C. Orenstein, 2002, NY: Basic Books.

The three objects are islands of warmth in an otherwise cold and bleak set, the same way that the cottage provides some warmth and protection in the dark, dangerous forest. [Fig 6 & 7] The objects are all made of wool. They reflect their origin in the way they are used, wrapped around human bodies to keep warm. They invoke a time of people and animals living amongst each other, the killing and use of animals by people, and the threat to people from animals. The characters in the story wrap themselves in the skins and wool of animals to keep out the Winter cold as they try to keep the wolves at bay. In some versions of the story Red Riding Hood ends up wearing the pelt of the slain wolf signifying a change of power or making her more animalistic.

Meg Stuart creates powerful results from the full integration of scenography into the creative process. In *Appetite*, her 1999 collaboration with visual artist Ann Hamilton, this idea of warm and coziness provided by textiles was taken further, with blankets provided for the audience to wrap themselves in.





**Fig. 6. Still from performance, December 2012**

### Costume

My costume needs to allow me to be read as all of the three characters, Grandma, wolf and Red Riding Hood. [Fig 6 & 7]. Being fully covered up with cloth would pin me down as human (or wolf in disguise!) Also I wanted the musculature of my arms and back to be visible. Being naked or semi-naked would have had overly strong implications of vulnerability and also pin me down as human. These factors pointed towards having some of my skin exposed and some covered. I chose a backless, close fitting top with cropped trousers, covering my chest, pelvis and upper legs and leaving my back, arms, lower legs and feet bare. Having my four forearms and calves visible emphasises the similarity of my limbs to those of a creature who moves on four legs.

The top is a very pale pink suggestive of both skin and femininity. Decoration on the lower back in red connects visually to the red of the coat and red squares within the crocheted blanket. The trousers are made of thick cotton, appropriate for a journey on a Winter's day. Gathers across the thighs give texture and volume, evoking the texture of an animal's fur.

The taking off and putting on of clothes by wolf, grandmother and girl are important elements to many tellings of the story, particularly ones in which the wolf is a werewolf, a creature who is sometimes wolf, sometimes human. However I made the decision not to enact this action of putting on and removing clothes literally.

## Lighting

The lighting is used to suggest the Grandmother's cottage set within a winter woodland [Fig. 8]. Gobos in side lights suggest light falling through trees onto the moving body and to break up the surface of the stage, giving the texture of a forest floor. The gobos are softly focused to give a subtle, less descriptive effect appropriate for the ambiguous nature of this piece.

Warmth and cold are present simultaneously in different areas of the stage. Cool blue light across most of the stage suggests Winter, perhaps moonlight. In contrast a small area of stage is lit with a warmer amber light like that cast by an open fire. The colour differential between these areas is subtle enough that it only becomes clearly visible when the light falls on the performer. This interaction between environment and performer is important. Not only does the environment bring me into movement, but as performer I bring life to the environment as I inhabit it. My first experience of moving within the lighting state was during the moment of the performance, providing another 'unsteady' element.



**Fig. 7. Still from performance, December 2012**

One lighting state is used throughout. This is to achieve the highest quality possible result with the technical resources available, and to leave space for all the elements within a relatively short piece. As the areas of the stage remain mapped out in the same way throughout the piece, my passage through the space and between these areas becomes very significant. Watching a film of the piece in which the camera zooms in on my body, I realise how important it is that I am seen in each moment in the context of the whole stage setting.

A possible future exploration within a longer piece would be a change in the balance between the two lighting qualities, with the woods spreading and retreating at different points in the piece.



**Fig. 8. Still from performance, December 2012**

## Conclusion

Through this creative and reflective process I have further developed my methodologies for making performance and my skills as a performer. I have also learnt more about the role a “phenomenal performer” (Preston-Dunlop, 1998) plays in the making of a performance.

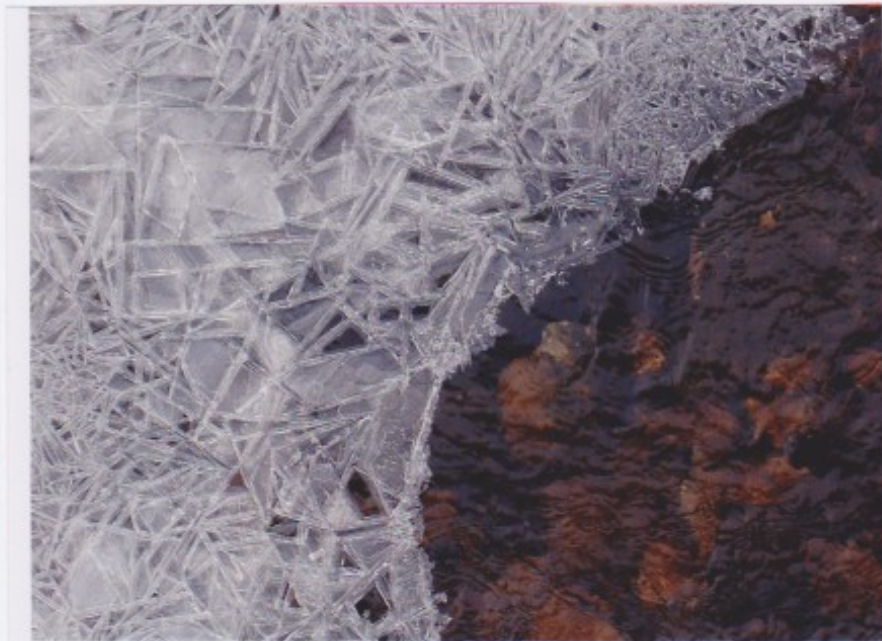
My process in creating this performance has differed significantly from that of my previous work. I have been more consciously aware of the contribution that all the movement research I have undertaken over the past few years has made to the content of the piece. My task in making this performance has therefore been to construct a framework within which to use this movement potential to communicate particular ideas about Little Red Riding Hood. My creative process has to a much greater extent than usual been driven by reading, thinking, considering options for creating a framework and questioning my decisions. My moving body has played an extremely important part as this consideration and questioning has often taken place physically. However physical exploration has not been the driving force that it usually is when I make performance. It has also represented a significant step in an ongoing concern for me, that of investigating how improvised and choreographed work can come together.

At times it has seemed like a risky choice, to decline a path with a known destination, instead straying from it to an uncertain fate. But all of Little Red Riding Hood's various adventures, her negotiation through the wood, distraction by the flowers she spots, her attraction and attractiveness to the wolf and her ultimate seduction, devouring or escape happen through the physical, lived existence of her body.

Therefore I have placed trust in my body uncertainties and unpredictabilities. Retaining a fluidity in the way I make and perform the piece has allowed the fluidity of the characters to emerge and be communicated. I believe that by working in this way I have created a performance which better communicates the ideas driving it than if my physical, lived experience had not taken this central role.

Mood Board of images

*Mood board of  
images taken + collected*





Bettleheim's blushing covergirl *Gustave Doré*

## Words of the song

One beast and only one, only one, only one,  
One beast and only one, only one,  
One beast and only one howling from the woods does come,  
Carnivore incarnate, incarnate, incarnate,  
Carnivore incarnate, incarnate.

If you see a naked man, in the pines, in the pines,  
If you see a naked man, in the pines,  
If you see a naked man, my sweet child you must run,  
As if the devil comes, devil comes, devil comes  
As if the devil comes, devil comes.

Darling you must never stray, from the path, from the path,  
Darling you must never stray, from the path,  
Darling if you ever stray, nought will keep you from harm's way  
Then, you'll be torn apart, torn apart, torn apart  
Then, you'll be torn apart, torn apart.

One beast and only one..  
One..  
One..  
Howls...

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