

## Who Became Those

### Reflections in lockdown, May 2020, by Jacky Lansley and Fergus Early

Looking at this film, ten years after we made it, we are struck by how instinctive decisions made at the time generate new or altered meanings now. The film, one of 90 commissioned by Matt's Gallery with Anne Bean in celebration of the life of Paul Burwell, has a retrospective quality which looks back to the mid 1970s Butler's Wharf, then an assemblage of derelict warehouses South of Tower Bridge, where we were part of the X6 Collective and where Paul performed with us on several occasions.

The film is historically layered as it reflects back from 2009 to the 1970s and beyond. A series of black and white stills shows Jacky looking out across the river wearing a 1940s floral print dress and head scarf, reminding us of a time when the docklands would have housed a bustling wartime industry. This sense of shifting time is stark and poignant as we watch the images of lapping waves against ancient wharf architecture. The changes from black and white to colour and from archival stills to moving image, juxtapose then and now in an emotional and revealing way as we look at the derelict landscape of Butler's wharf, transformed into the new shiny developments of the 90s and noughties. The opening black and white shot pans down from the huge refurbished Butler's Wharf sign, changing to colour as it arrives at a smart café where we are seen drinking cappuccinos, as though tourists in what once was our home and laboratory.

The action moves to Lafone Street, in front of the same brick wall on which we once painted the sign 'X6 Dance Space' in 1976. Here a circle of shoes creates a performing space, with Paul's brilliant drumming driving forward our dance, accompanied by tap shoes, a hat and a pair of spoons. Shoes are central – all kinds of shoes – which are worn, used as objects, discarded in a heap. This heap of old shoes suggests layers of history and experience; each pair of shoes tells a story. It is also an image of abandonment of the old, like the derelict warehouses that we were inhabiting, but which had provided such a haven and creative sense of regeneration for a growing artistic community.

We perform a duet in which we lean against the wall balancing shoes on our heads, legs, hands and shoulders. There is a sense of 'a balancing act', 'wearing different hats', juggling to survive as we lean on each other and the old X6 wall for support. A man walking past the camera, carrying red plush opera chairs (a site specific chance event) provides a playful image of colliding worlds. Fergus says "Surely this is a dance of austerity, of a world with few resources left – even a shoe, balanced on a shoulder falls off. But it has a manic glee and seems to say 'Look, this is plenty'.

We are now looking at this film about our time at Butler's Wharf, from the perspective of 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic and this reviewing of the piece is taking place at home in lockdown. What does that mean and does the film have anything to say about our present condition? The film's reflective narrative, Jacky says "seems to provide something quite nourishing and hopeful. It is a film about using the old, making do, re-use, a kind of artistic thriftiness that evolves at times into a beautiful and revealing minimalism." Is it suggesting that we need less to survive? – certainly we need little to be creative. It is

interesting and important to remember that this film was made in 2009, the same year that the over confident, market-led, economic bubble burst, leading to global recession and ten years of crippling austerity, extreme inequality and deprivation of the most vulnerable communities within the UK – as we have seen in the statistics of the Covid-19 crisis. This context has produced Donald Trump, Brexit, Boris Johnson and the extreme right; it is a backdrop of irrational politics in which we are all having to improvise and draw on our own human resources to survive in the absence of very little positive leadership and guidance.

The title *Who Became Those* came from a poem - 'Adventures in the House of Memory' that Paul Burwell wrote shortly before he died in 2007; the journey of change these words suggest is optimistic; they also suggest the intergenerational knowledge and experience of past and present. Artists have always defied and questioned what we are told is reality - we work around the edges and foreshores to find the hidden, and sometimes obvious, or neglected possibilities for positive human development and change. The words *Who Became Those* are enigmatic but their combined forces seem to provide strategies, ideas and hope.