

# Gob Squad

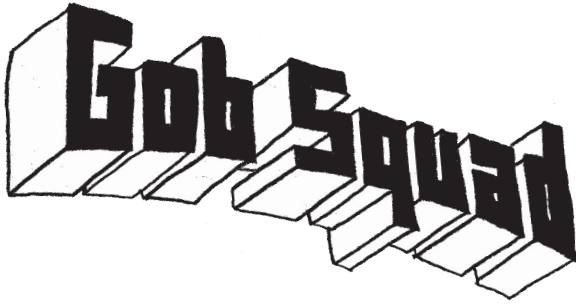
*An ideal introduction to Gob Squad:  
a double bill of an interactive performance/lecture and a film screening...*

**We are Gob Squad and so are you** is a performance/lecture developed by the company to introduce audiences to their work. Exploring the group's methods and motivations, they lift the lid on their participatory performances, where the boundaries between audience and performers often disappear completely.

**Live Long and Prosper** is an emotional yet playful two-screen film which sees the company explore the themes of death and dying through a series of re-enactments of classic death scenes.



PHOTO: GARRETT DAVIS/CAPTURE IMAGING



## About the group

*"This feels like one of the most impossible, beautiful, courageous and epic theatrical experiences you can imagine" - The Guardian*

Gob Squad is a seven-headed monster, a multinational **arts collective** with seven bosses, a patchwork family, a Berliner institution and a social utopia. Gob Squad have been devising, directing and performing together since 1994, working where **theatre meets art, media and real life**.

**For 30 years**, Gob Squad have been searching for **new ways to combine media and performance**, producing stage shows, video installations, radio plays, interactive live films and urban interventions. The use of audio and video technology plays a prominent role in their work, with the result that alienated forms of intimacy have become a central theme. They try to scratch beneath the shiny, pixelated surface of the 21st century, seeking out the dark corners and hidden desires of contemporary culture.

Always on the hunt for beauty amidst the mundane, they place their work at the **heart of urban life**: in houses, shops, underground stations, car parks, hotels or directly on the street, as well as in theatres and galleries. **Everyday life and magic, banality and idealism, reality and entertainment** are all set on a collision course and the unpredictable results are captured on video.

Motivated by a desire to elevate the everyday and **empower audience members** to step beyond their traditional role as passive spectators, Gob Squad set up often absurdly **utopian scenarios** where **meaningful collective experience** and genuine encounters involving local guests, passers-by and audience members are suddenly possible. They are always looking for ways to **transcend barriers of language, class, age and culture**. Anything might happen during an evening with Gob Squad. You might be asked to dance, sing or even kiss one of the performers. You might play in a band or the part of a lover or liberator in an improvised film or a home video. You might be part of a temporary community or simply be asked to bear witness to the organised chaos unfolding on stage before your very eyes.

Gob Squad was founded in **1994**, whilst its members were still at Nottingham Trent and Giessen universities. **Berlin** has been the group's creative home since 1999. HAU Hebbel am Ufer is their home theatre and long term production partner. **Core members** are Johanna Freiburg, Sean Patten, Sharon Smith, Berit Stumpf, Sarah Thom, Bastian Trost and Simon Will. The group is managed by Marta Hewelt (Company Management), Caroline Gentz (Funding und Financial Management), Grischa Schwiegk (Financial Administration & Production), Talea Schuré (Touring und PR) and Christina Runge (Production Management and Dramaturgy). A pool of collaborative artists are regularly invited to join the creative process.

Gob Squad's **international reputation** has grown steadily since coming to prominence at documenta X in 1997. Their productions have been shown on all the continents (apart from Antarctica) where projects such as SUPER NIGHT SHOT (2003), GOB SQUAD'S KITCHEN (2007, winner of New York's Drama Desk Award 2012), SAVING THE WORLD (2008, winner of the Goethe-Institut Prize), BEFORE YOUR VERY EYES (2011, selected for Germany's Theatertreffen), WESTERN SOCIETY (2013), CREATION (PICTURES FOR DORIAN) (2018) and SHOW ME A GOOD TIME (2020, selected for Theatertreffen and awarded with the Friedrich Luft Prize 2021) have received wide acclaim. In 2020, the group was awarded the Tabori Prize, Germany's highest honour for the independent theatre sector. Their latest works are IS ANYBODY HOME? (2022) and HANDLE WITH CARE (2023). The group will be awarded the Silver Lion at the 2024 Venice Biennale.





# We Are Gob Squad and So Are You [ADVENTURES IN REMOTE LECTURING]

*Hello. My name is Gob Squad  
and this is my story...*

*I am English. I am German. I am male. I am female,  
gay and married with 2 children. I am trained in all  
and none of the following: singing, dancing, acting,  
critical theory, sword fighting for the stage, analysis  
of post-dramatic theatre, and how to cry at will.*

*Before Gob Squad I played Mary, Joseph and a  
sheep in the nativity, Mother Courage in Mother  
Courage and a piece of straw in Rumpelstiltskin.  
Auditioning for a drama school they said to me,  
“have you ever actually been in a theatre? Because  
what you are doing here has nothing to do with act-  
ing - you’re just playing yourself!”*

Using text, video archive and soundtrack, this  
performance-lecture takes the audience through  
a telling of the collective processes, big ideas and  
vivid memories shared by Gob Squad throughout  
almost 20 years of working together.

Soon after the lecture begins, Gob Squad leave  
the authority of the lectern behind and audience  
members take their place. They are asked to put  
on headphones through which they receive instruc-  
tions and the performance begins. The headphones  
are passed around and the physical identity of Gob  
Squad shifts amongst audience members who col-  
lude in the re-telling and re-construction of stories,  
interviews and scenes. Identities shift as their bod-  
ies stand in for other bodies.

A lecture about authenticity, truth, fiction and the  
collective identity unfolds via a playful, experiential  
perspective as everybody gets involved. Using a  
technique they call ‘remote acting’, what begins as a  
straightforward lecture exploring the company’s  
methods and motivations, ends up as a moving  
meditation on the nature of the self.

Who is this “self” that you think you are? How did you  
come to be what you think you are? What makes you  
you? And what happens when we venture outside the  
concept of the “unique self”?

In this typically unconventional interactive lecture/  
performance, the group lifts the lid on their participa-  
tory performances – where the boundaries between  
audience and performers often disappear completely.

*“Tender, exciting and dangerous... an outstandingly  
brilliant piece” Total Theatre*

DURATION: 1 hour

TECHNICAL:

1 video projector, 1 PA system, 5 mics, basic lighting

NUMBER ON THE ROAD:

2 performers, 1 technician



# Live Long And Prosper

## *A new kind of dying*

*In the course of the twentieth century an absolutely new type of dying has made an appearance in some of the most industrialised, urbanised and technologically advanced areas of the Western world. Society has banished death. Society no longer observes a pause; the disappearance of an individual no longer affects its continuity. Everything in town goes on as if nobody died anywhere.*

Phillipe Aries, *The Hour of Our Death*

Seven film sequences are restaged by seven performers across the city of Berlin. Shown on two screens, the devices of narrative film are doubled up and reflected back on themselves in a cinematic game of 'spot the difference'. The mountains of the Wild West become escalators in the central station, a battlefield from a historic war becomes a city fairground and the interior of the Starship Enterprise is played by a cheap "Everything's a Euro" shop.

The intertwined sequences and their doppelgänger weaves simultaneously towards their inevitably tragic ends. Performers prepare and play out their scenes with tender seriousness, leaving a trail of pretend corpses, extracted from their borrowed sources and abandoned in cinematic pull backs that reveal everyday urban life continuing around them.

*"Suddenly it is possible to understand that the central figure in this installation piece is the audience, and their relationship to fictional deaths on film. In this way, Gob Squad use the live event beautifully, setting up an extraordinary exploration of film death and its witnesses."*

Alexander Roberts, *Total Theatre*

DURATION: 20 minutes. In English and German (with a tiny bit of Spanish)

TECHNICAL: 1 video projector, 1 PA system





## TOTAL THEATRE MAGAZINE

Tonight, we are in the main theatre auditorium of the Arnolfini for a lesson that turns out to be about Gob Squad and, importantly, ourselves. What unfolds is **a work that envelops its audience in the world of this nearly 20 year-old collective** – a piece as much about the process of creation as it is an active demonstration through performance.

The juxtaposition between presence and absence in this adventure is exciting. **Strangers meet on stage:** conduits for the unseen Squad. It's **a concept full of excitement** as the richness of the work comes from this unknown factor, and failure in this guise would still fulfil the brimming sense of tension and anticipation that a work like this creates in its spectators.

The work as a whole is lovingly layered with the company members' own moments of inspiration – be that clips of their working practice and lives, the recounting of moments of pivotal change, encounters they have experienced, or even influences from literature, music, TV and cinema where concepts of multiplicity take hold.

A particularly perfect moment sees the recounting of a chance meeting between a couple that is **so tenderly expressed by the two audience members that one wonders how this bitter sweetness could be retold and captured again**. Yet much like its source it is a fleeting moment never to be repeated in the same way. There is a resonance that cannot be expressed, but it leaves you wanting to burst out, in much the same way that an old photo of happier times leaves one trembling to capture it again. This palpable potential for resonance is created in fleeting moments of living action, and later further enhanced with the screening of performances from the Gob Squad back-catalogue alongside the action on stage.

**Tender, exciting and dangerous**, Gob Squad challenge the roles of audience and performer, the nature of a company's heritage, and who we all are at the heart of a projected persona. There is no such thing as a singular self, and Gob Squad expose this authentic fiction superbly in **an outstandingly brilliant piece**.

**THOMAS BACON**

## HERALD SCOTLAND

Gob Squad lead the audience on a shared pursuit of fact, fiction and the nature of identity. They know we hate audience participation yet onlookers somehow find themselves wearing headphones and following instructions, speaking text, engaging with strangers. As they 'become Gob Squad' intriguing truths about our everyday performances and role-playing emerge, albeit with humour. It's **a superbly crafted, complex piece of provocative strategy that sticks in the mind**.

**MARY BRENNAN**

## ON GOB SQUAD:

*Gob Squad is the one company of whom I'm a fan first, and a critic second. They're more like a band than almost any other theatre company.*

WHATSONSTAGE.COM

*This feels like one of the most impossible, beautiful, courageous and epic theatrical experiences you can imagine.*

THE GUARDIAN

*Gob Squad virgins, please stop reading now, and go get your tickets!*

TIME OUT NEW YORK (on WESTERN SOCIETY)



PHOTOS: JEAN-PHILLIPE OFFORD / CARTEL PHOTOS