

A Frantic Assembly, Drum Theatre Plymouth and Lyric Hammersmith production

**frantic assembly**



**000 (no water)**

by **mark ravenhill**

# A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE

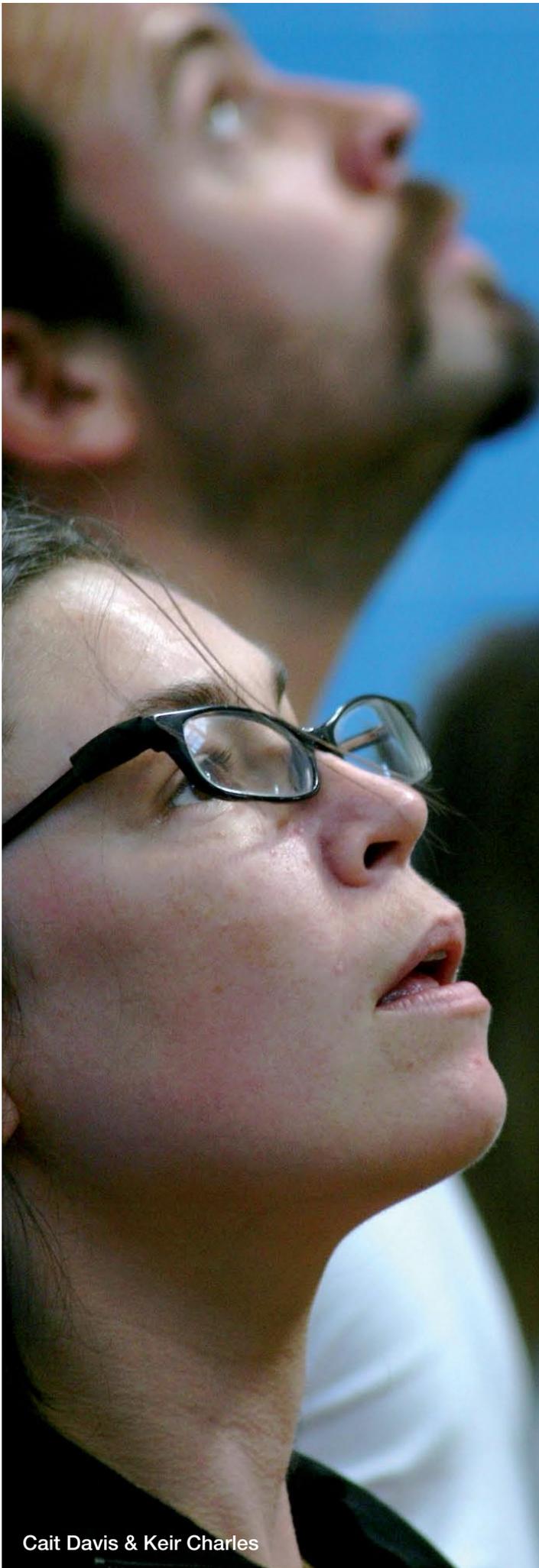
For students (aged 16+), teachers & arts educationalists.

By Scott Graham

**Lyric**

DRUM THEATRE  
PLYMOUTH THEATRES

ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND



Cait Davis & Keir Charles

# pool (no water)

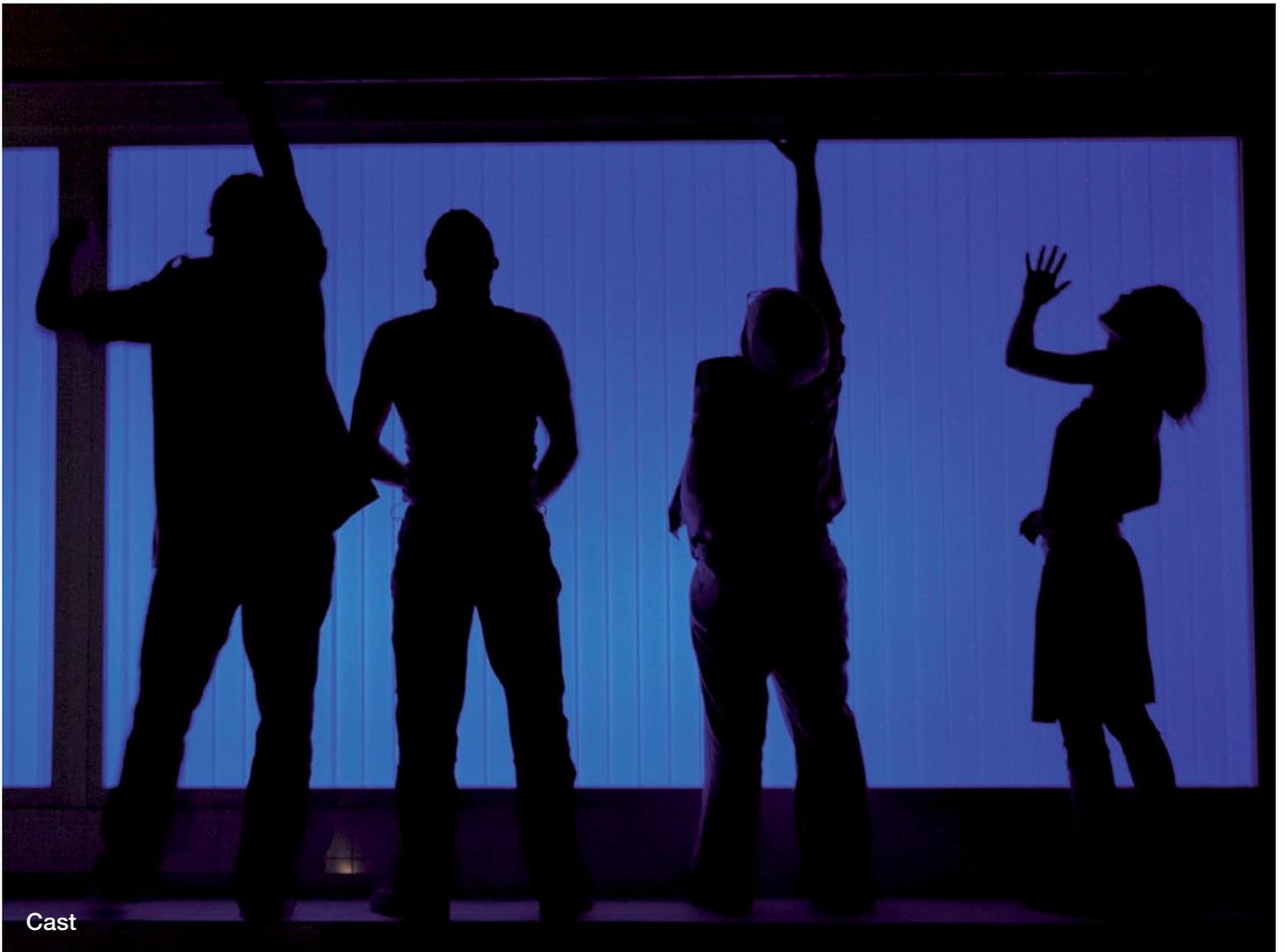
## A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE

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Cast

Photo: Manuel Harlan

## Why write this?

This is the 4th education resource pack we have produced. The initial intention was to create something that could bring students, teachers and educationalists into the rehearsal room and get a taste of how our work gets made. As devising plays a large part in AS and A Level assessment we felt we could help offer techniques and ways into a process that has successfully been creating collaborative theatre for 12 years.

I quickly realised that I did not just want to create a standard teacher's work pack. My research had found many of these boring and reductive. I wanted to create something that would bring teachers and students together, to raise issues and questions that could be taken back into the classroom but not create some plodding prescriptive tome full of familiar exercises and patronising suggestions. I will still offer suggested essay titles along the way but it is hoped that this pack can be interactive and inspiring. A springboard for your own work within devising or physical theatre, or accompaniment to your study of **pool (no water)**.

**pool (no water)** is an important collaboration for Frantic Assembly. Each production is different and requires a slightly different attack behind the resource pack. As the age limit is 16+ I am aiming to engage the minds of those from AS/A level up.

I hope this pack offers some insight into this project. As ever your feedback and suggestions would be very welcome ([admin@franticassembly.co.uk](mailto:admin@franticassembly.co.uk)) so that I can take your advice into the next resource pack.

**(All quotes from the play refer to the Methuen play text ISBN 0-7136-8398-8)**

# 'Oh, look, it's the Ant and Dec of theatre'

## How pool came to be

'Oh, look, it's the Ant and Dec of theatre.' These were Mark Ravenhill's first words to us when we shared the same dinner table at the National Student Drama Festival in Scarborough. It was a good line. And I was quite flattered. But here we were sitting with the enfant terrible of British Theatre. He has a big name. It is the kind of name I am semi confident about using when I talk to non theatre friends about our work. 'Have you heard of Mark Ravenhill?' usually gets followed by at least an 'I think so'

From this introduction and lots of cheap wine we met again in the offices of (new writing theatre company) Paines Plough. Mark had just taken an office along the corridor and it was there that we hatched a plan.

'We should work together' said Mark. It was as simple as that (although Mark remembers it differently). From there we approached BAC about the possibility of working on a scratch performance of a weeks development work. We had toyed with scratch performances before on an idea 'All About The Dark' based on the film 'Your Friends and Neighbours' by Neil LaBute but this was much more open. This was actually just going into the room, the three of us and four performers with nothing more than a book of Nan Goldin photographs for inspiration. We did not even really plan this. They were just an interesting collection of photographs that we had been talking about in connection to our planned site specific show (this would become 'Dirty Wonderland'). This was as daring as we had ever been.

We had always possessed a suspicion of the scratch

performance culture, feeling it had the potential for artists to make work for other artists to see and for the rehearsal or creative process to become (and I am sure that this is the opposite of the intention of scratch performances) the point of existing. I remember a performer, years ago, talking about how her collective never really made work to be seen and considered themselves a theatre laboratory. This made my blood boil. I guess I have never really given it enough thought but it seemed to be the opposite of theatre. Surely theatre is only what happens in front of an audience. It needs the audience to become theatre?

Here is possibly the route of my suspicion about Research and Development. That and the fact that the company has never been able to afford it. Maybe it was the notion of the wasted money that offended me?

The point is, we found ourselves in the rehearsal room embarking on research and development for the first time. And it felt good.

As it happened that week was the first step in a very clear and fruitful development process towards **pool (no water)**. The success of that week (and also its failures) led us to approach the National Theatre Studio to see if they would be interested in giving us some development time. (They also, crucially, cover performer's wages). From there we arranged a showing of the work in progress at BAC in recognition of their original input. We were starting to get bold about the idea. The next stage was a commitment to Mark to commission him to write a performance text for us.



Mark Ravenhill - Writer

# Starting Points

## i) Physical Training

As with all Frantic Assembly rehearsal periods we feel the need for a rich and structured warm up to each day. It is important to build on technique, strength and stamina but also to give the performers a feeling of achievement each day. Even though they may be aching and tired they at least know they are aiming to do one more press up than yesterday. And that is all it takes to improve. Just one step more.

It is the same when devising or creating choreography. We are very happy to take small steps forward, biting off tiny chunks at a time, as long as we never go backwards. That is our golden rule: we never go backwards.

With that in mind we sought to build up the strength and hardness of the cast. There was a time when we were performing within our shows that the reckless physicality was a given but being on the outside means that it is harder to get someone else to risk their well being. And I guess we were good at protecting ourselves. I fear asking someone to do something risky out of the blue because I do not know their instincts for self preservation if they say yes. So this overt physical training is a way of getting the cast to a point where such a request is not a million miles away from what they have been achieving every day in rehearsals. It does not come as a shock and seems within their abilities.

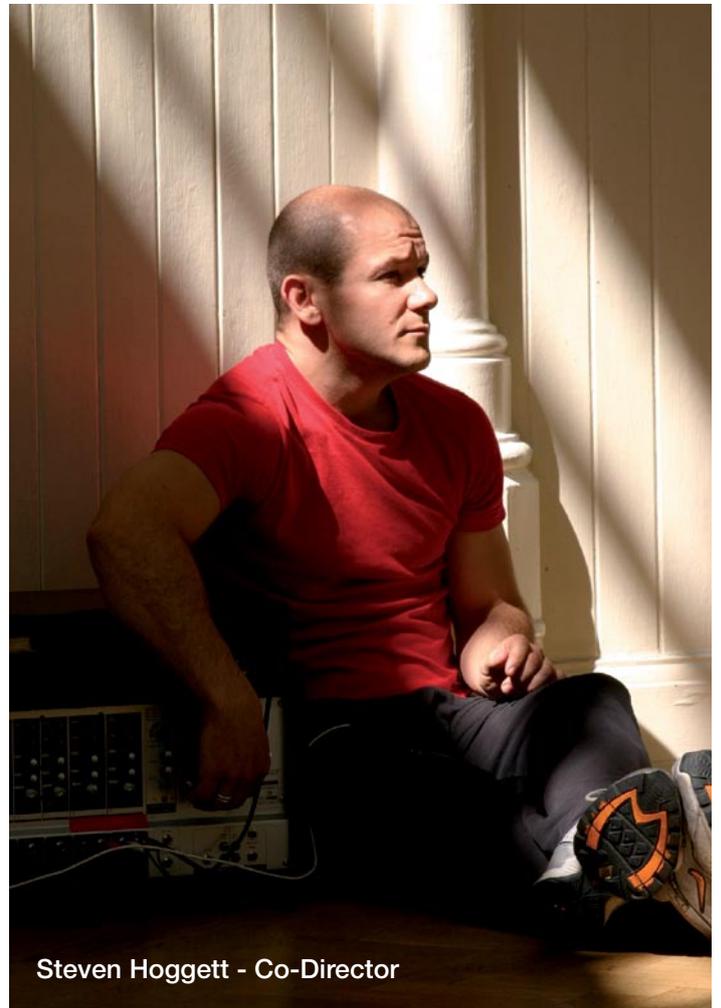


Mark Rice-Oxley & Leah Muller

Try structuring a warm up that feels like a release from the pressures of the rehearsal. Keep it fun and think about what your cast can achieve and build on each day. But be clever too. You don't have to give your intentions away but maybe there is something you place in the warm up that could feed directly into your production. It could be choreography or it could just be building to an event. For example getting better at holding a hand stand against the wall is the perfect training for having the strength and poise to lift someone above your head. It is just about disarming your cast a little, not frightening them by having them consider their limitations but giving them strength and conviction through new achievements (that translate easily into the production).

## ii) Physical Devising

Below are extracts from the rehearsal diary (This will be available on line soon). It highlights some of the early approaches we took to building physical confidence and the first steps into physical devising. Not all of them made it into the show but they are all very simple tasks that then became more complex and could serve as useful starting points for your devising process.



Steven Hoggett - Co-Director

### (Day 5)

Compelled by a desire to get closer to making some work I set some energetic choreography with the performers, involving crashing to the floor, picking yourself up, doing it again, hitting counts in music, etc. All brave challenging stuff. It struck me it was time to introduce the performers to the floor, to an element of risk and the techniques to keep yourself safe.

It is basically 2 bars of 8 with a move on each count. This tests the ability to hear the count and the discipline to stick to it. It is also quite exhausting once you repeat it a few times. And this presents a fascinating moment... How will they deal with the sweat? The heat? The burning thighs? The bruised knees? To move forward we need them to embrace this as part of the process, to indulge in it, to perversely enjoy it! Luckily, I think they do. Mostly. We shall see.

The choreography started out as a task but it turned out to be pretty effective. It might be worth returning to this and developing it. It certainly has all the pain and self loathing of the text. It is punishment but it is also a search for empathy (something consistently and outwardly missing from the characters) as they crash their own bodies around the floor / swimming pool.

Later in the morning we get out the seats / bench (a moving row of seats on castors, forming part of the set) and ask the performers to just play with them. Sometimes all four, sometimes in twos, threes, but all the time not thinking about character and story. We need the performers to feel comfortable with the set. To own it. While we do not have the whole set in the rehearsal room, we do have these seats and the hospital bed. It is a great opportunity to play with them and see what the performers come up with outside the limiting environments of the set and the

confines of proper context.

This exercise presents some interesting images and we then revisit them and try others. There is a lot of potential in this. It strikes us that this is the characters bored in the hospital, the room constantly changing showing the passing of time while the characters move around oblivious to each other. They sit down, they are then lowered to the floor where they are instantly comfortable suggesting they have been there for ages. They pace around, frustrated. They 'collide' with another and are tumbled to the bench where they sit, at peace, as if there for hours.



Mark Rice-Oxley

## (Day 7)

In addition to the stomach exercises today, Steven led them through some fairly tough aerobic work. They all coped fantastically. They seem to enjoy the sweatiness of hard work. I managed to miss out on all this because our director's notes for the programme had to be finished and sent back to the office. It is a shame in lots of ways that these notes have to be written now, as early as day 7, as we are well aware that we are going to learn a lot about our selves and our work through this rehearsal process. As it is we find ourselves trying to find a tone that is hopefully funny and gracious without being presumptuous and arrogant.

We started them off on an exercise to find 10 fairly naturalistic sitting postures or moves while sat. They were to then set, remember these and turn them into a string of material. This is to be clearly defined and disciplined and possible to keep to the count of the music used. This is only to create a vocabulary though, and a sense of disciplined movement. There is not necessarily an intention to use the movement in this way in the production. This is so that we can use a precise physical language underneath the opening sections of text. Physicality that can unite the characters while we are making every effort to separate them textually and vocally. It can suggest complicity and insincerity or awkwardness. It immediately can present a conflict between what the characters say and what they mean and this instantly makes them more interesting.

This exercise proves tough for some but the results are uniformly good.

We try out a different exercise for the first time. We set up a camera in a small room and instruct the performers to enter one at a time and be interviewed. We also tell them that they are allowed to play and choose different levels of excitement about this interview. But what we subject them to is the pre interview: constant adjustments of chairs, clothes for light levels, sound checks and strange questions. All the time the camera is recording them, closing in and panning out.

We watch the recordings and it becomes fascinating how edgy they are and how difficult it is to achieve stillness when they have been knocked off guard by this strange situation. They display tiny twitches and insecurities, all written large on the tv screen. There is an unpredictable energy about the room and about these people. When later we attempt a semi staged (seated) run through of the first page the pace reaches a new low and that is when we refer the performers back to the video. That is what it was for - to combat this laid back, lazy, theatre raconteur delivery impulse that is afflicting us at the moment. We remind the performers that it is highly possible that the characters are not entirely at ease with the situation and it is this nervous energy that propels them on past tact and towards recklessness. Maybe they are disarmed by this situation.

## (Day 8)

I take it easy with a stretching massaging warm up. We then work on some rolling work, interacting with chairs in our path. All this is building up to something we wanted to try out. Namely, an effect where the performers appear to roll up hill and into their chairs. As if the film had been reversed. It should look impossible.

Progress is slow and the results are only ok. It was worth trying and we may return to it. At least the performers have experienced the process and are aware of the effect desired now, even if this session did not provide completely inspiring results.

This afternoon started with an exercise focussing on the hospital bed. The performers were asked to approach with good intentions, with care and concern, and then recoil with fear, hatred, revulsion, etc. These were the inspirations. The performers were instructed to contain these bursts of contempt within 8 counts of music and to set a few versions each. During the exercise one of the performers completely froze and could not think of anything. Feeling lost and unsure of the improvisation he just stood there and watched the

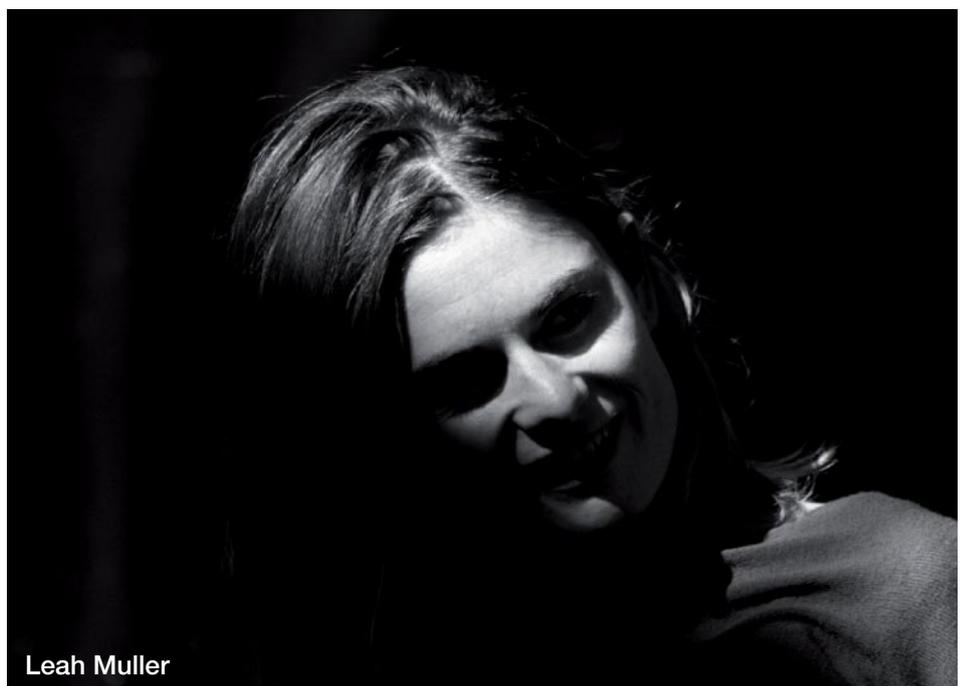
other three wrestling with their feelings towards the imaginary being in the bed. This accident looked fantastic and offered an unconsidered depth to the situation. Here we had one of the four characters who did not respond to the situation in the same way, who observed the alternating emotions of their friends with a similar fascination and revulsion. This allows the possibility for the audience to wonder whether there was a judgement made in his mind. It makes the audience question the unity of the Group in that moment even though their text suggests they all felt the same. It also seemed right that it was this person's character who witnessed this.

These kinds of accidents are a crucial part of the creative process. We have found that you must remain open to them. I think we may even partly rely on them and actively create situations and improvisations that will allow them to happen.

The rest of the afternoon is taken up with the performers all learning each others 10 moves in the chair from yesterday. They are very fast at this, despite being tired and sore. Their speed and clarity allows us to workshop the moves a little. It becomes clear to us that this is the vocabulary that will see us through the

first few pages but that not all of it belongs there. There are some moves that are screaming out to be placed elsewhere. And this is what happens when you instruct your cast on a simple brief and do not ask them to make up moves for a certain part of the show. Often when you do this you stifle their creativity and they only try to second guess what you might want from them. This way round they can surprise you and offer more.

The exercise also points out to us that the choreography works better in separate chairs rather than the bench seat of the set. This means that we may be going into the production meeting tomorrow asking for some more chairs. This will obviously be a pain but I guess this is what these meetings are for.



Leah Muller



Mark Rice-Oxley

## (Day 12)

The afternoon involves a run through of where we are up to so far. It is occasionally languid, especially at the start but is exciting nonetheless. We give a note to find the excited affectation of the beginning and to fight this casual approach. It is a note we have said after every run. These are very intelligent and talented performers. The lure to play this text this way must be very strong but I still believe in our instincts.

We also instruct them to make some material that pulls their clothes around, grips at their own flesh, etc. They are to find 8 moves. They do not have to fit them to music but they do have to teach them to a partner when they have found their string of moves. They are split into two pairs and teach each other their moves so that we have two groups doing a string of unison. We then ask them to think about the excitement of something naughty, the butterflies in the stomach, the desire to pee, the childish need to hold onto yourself. Let these inform the moves rather than some erotic notion. Then they had to focus their eyes on a fixed point and adjust their work if they had to. Once we had this we told them which section we were thinking about for these moves.

This was a section about taking your clothes off. Not the most inspired or abstract association but we wanted to avoid the moves being completely literal. If we had started with the words then there was a risk the moves may have been simple mimes of getting stripped. What we ended up with was 2 strings of material much more beautiful and intriguing.



Cait Davis

### iii) The Questionnaire

Sometimes you need your performers to engage with your ideas to help you take them further. When you challenge your performers head on then the responses can be academic and slightly cold. We find that it is useful to disarm our collaborators and create an environment where their anecdotes are valid and welcome. It is often from hearing someone else's story that our own story, opinion, feelings come back into memory. The Questionnaire seeks to indulge the cast in a bit of fun but also to unearth the darker side of our characters. It has some loaded questions directly related to the themes we want to explore and it has some seemingly innocuous questions that also subtly lead us to that darker place.

The questions are different for each project of course as is the decision to have it a completely confidential moment or a group event

This technique is not just useful within devising theatre. It could be a very useful tool to open up the themes within a text and engage your performers with the text's universal and specific themes.



Keir Charles

## Below is the questionnaire for the cast of pool (no water)

What is the worst thing you have ever done?

Have you ever struggled with anyone else's good news?

Who do you dislike the most? David Beckham or Frank Lampard? Geri Halliwell or Victoria Beckham?

Which Spice girl would your mum be?

Have you ever spent the night in a hospital bed?

Tell us your sickest, guiltiest joke

What feature on your face would you change if you had to?

'You've Been Framed' - Old lady falling off a swing or Japanese child falling in their birthday cake? Which does it for you?

What would you do if, tomorrow, you woke up invisible?

Worst swimming pool experience please.

Have you ever bought coffee from a machine in a hospital at 4 am?

What is the most dramatic event you have ever been involved in?

Have you ever stolen out of your Mum's purse? Details please

How good looking are you? Rate out of 10

Have you always been this score?

Weapon of choice? Chinese burn or chicken scratch?

Love, Marry, Chuck off a cliff.... Keith Chegwin, Ann Widdicombe, Noel Edmonds?

What is your worst Love, Marry, Chuck off a cliff combination

Flicking the bird.... preferences? US vs. UK style?

Who is the most undeserving 'successful' person you know?



Cait Davis

# Making the Show

## i) The Editor / The Documentary / The Concept of the Interview

One of the difficulties in performing this script with several performers is in finding the different voices of the characters. It adds so much colour to this story if there appears to be several slightly different takes on it rather than one consistent voice.

One of the techniques we employed on this project was to get the performers to imagine they are being interviewed for a documentary on the artist and that they have all been interviewed separately. They have started off towing the party line, all stating how wonderful she is but then start to descend into sniping and eventually telling a completely different story to the one they may have set out to.

The first task was to get the performers to consider the relationship between them and a film camera, that this cold eye never diverts its gaze from them, that its impassive presence may provoke a nervous subject to say more than they had anticipated. We asked the performers to imagine that their words are inspired by questions from off camera, by a director who is beginning to sniff out a much bigger story and who, sensing this, eventually gives them enough space to betray

themselves and tell the whole story. We also asked them to imagine their words spliced together by the hands of a thrilled editor who is piecing together a much more beefy documentary.

All of this liberated the performers from the notion that they were actually in the same room, listening to each other and finishing each others sentences. If we could create the impression that they were not in the room together then that would allow us to create tension and conflict between the opinions and memories of the protagonists.

It also stopped the performers from thinking that this was a purely theatrical situation, that they were theatre raconteurs beguiling an audience in a laid back, confident manner. It had to be much more edgy than that.



Mark Rice-Oxley



Cait Davis



Cast

## ii) What's going on? - A pre recorded voice

At this stage in rehearsals we are toying with the idea of recording the artist's words as she discovers the others burning the photos. It is quite a strange situation because this is the kind of thing that we would probably have thought to be a terrible idea and would have run a mile from the notion at the start of rehearsals. There is something so theatrical and stagey about the idea of this 'voice' but I think the point is not to consider it just a voice from off stage. It must boom and cut through all that is happening on stage. Technically it should feel that it has come from every angle of the room, or that it comes from the back of the auditorium. It needs to jolt the audience. It is from another world.

Hopefully the audience get sucked into the abandon and debauchery of the destruction of the photos and they too share a sense of shock as this new voice is heard. Up until now everything has been told through the Group. This moment has the potential to define and unite the Group in inescapable guilt, to implicate them totally, to catch them red handed. It also has the potential to do this to the audience. As we have always said that it was crucial to take the audience with the characters as far into their dark deeds as we can, then it is only right that they should share and get a sense of the genuine terror of being busted in this moment.

We will have to see if it works but it is interesting at this stage to really want to do something you thought you would never do three weeks ago.

What are the alternatives? What would be the effect of one of the actors taking on this voice, as they have done consistently so far? As this is 'a text for performers' what would the effect of having the artist appear at this moment? Would this work? (We obviously don't think so). If not, why not? If yes, what would it offer?



Keir Charles

### iii) A Text for Performers

The front of my script says **“pool (no water) - a text for performers”**. The decision about how many performers was made from a mixture of the desire to work with that number, the dynamics that that number can achieve, and the practicality of being able to afford 4 of them.

From this point we then start to look for characters in the text. the first step was to simply divide the text up between the performers assigning lines A,B,C,D. Where this did not seem consistent or where other possibilities presented themselves we simply changed the order to suit. For example, it may have run A,B,C,B,D,A.

Similarly if the pattern appeared predictable we simply changed it as long as it did not interfere with any character consistency.

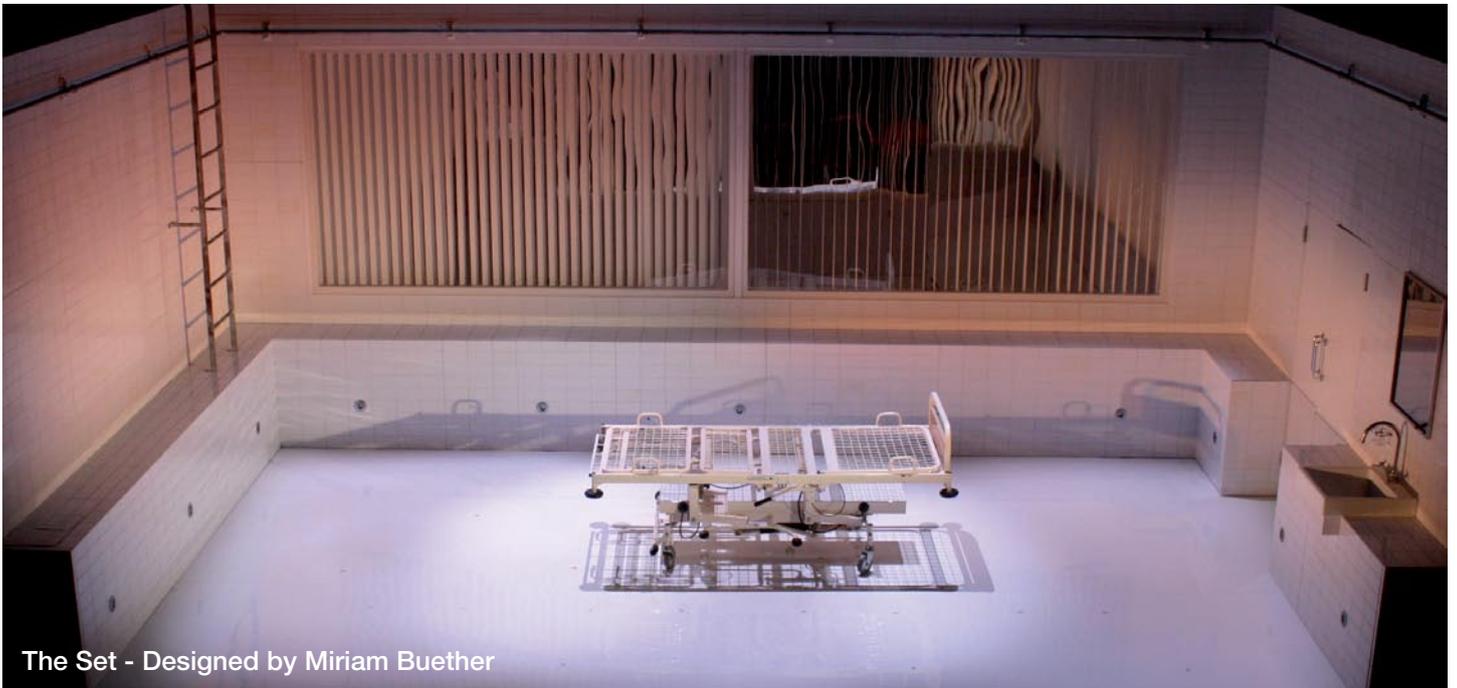
The interesting thing about this text for performers is that it does not claim to have any character consistency other than in its original form, ie it is presented on the page as a monologue\*. By splitting the text we find new characters who share aspects of the same story but also appear to have individual opinions about what they relay, coloured by what we perceive to be their unique outlook on events.

So how would this text operate with a different number of performers? The proof is in the pudding as they say. It has to be tried to comment on it. There is no wrong number at this stage and every number would surely offer new and unique dynamics.

\*Although this is presented as a monologue it was written with the knowledge that there would be more than one performer. It is the use of and contrast of ‘we’ and ‘I’ and ‘us’ etc. that makes this text so fascinating and full of potential. Also because they never address each other you are never quite aware of whether they speak for the whole group when they say ‘we’. Are they a self appointed voice or are they speaking from a point of safety within the group? (see essay, ‘I, you, me, she, they, us’)



Leah Muller



The Set - Designed by Miriam Buether

## iv) Design Concept

This is the first time we have worked with Miriam Buether and in initial meetings we were struck by her use of strong clean lines and general openness to our ideas. Our joint response to the script highlighted a need for a set that could help the 4 characters take us into the story they need to tell us. We wanted it to be a literal aid, overtly suggesting swimming pool and hospital room. We wanted the audience to get the sense of bones smashing on tiles, of the hours spent in a waiting room. This flexibility would have to come from a very robust and clinical set. For this to happen it was clear that the set design and the lighting design had to work in close harmony. In the roof of the set are numerous lights to illuminate the back room yet maintain the designers aesthetic. Miriam also designed a hidden trough in the room with running water so that Natasha Chivers could bounce light on it and out onto the window (this has since been cut).

The characters' story is at times tender, gentle, brutal and cruel and the set and lighting had to reflect this. Ultimately it is probably the unforgiving nature of the cold swimming pool tiles that tells the most important story. Just like the artist's accident this story they confess is a leap of faith. It too is left broken on the floor at the end of the production.

## v) The Return to Direct Address

Early Frantic Assembly shows were typified by a non theatrical directness. An attempt to remind the audience they were very much part of an event and were potentially being addressed by personalities rather than characters. This was a deliberately blurred line as we were presenting characters but through our own names and mannerisms, all using direct address. The intention was to disarm the audience somewhat and make them feel that they are engaging with an immediate honesty from the stage, to implicate them and never allow them to dismiss what they see as safe because it is 'only' a play. In fact the early shows were very much non plays.

The result felt fresh and exhilarating at times.

It struck us that with this text and its ideas of the extremes of artistic jealousy that it would be foolish to merely present a story about a group of people you have never met and their

issues with another person you will never meet. It cannot just be the story that you meet here. The audience must be made to confront the idea of artistic jealousy. We felt the audience had to be implored to at least put themselves in the shoes of the characters. And this imploring is direct from the characters themselves. Why else do they speak? This is not the theatre of events unfolding. This is confessional and specifically the confession of despicable events that will ultimately demand sympathy, horror and revulsion (see *Bad Bed*). But there is no tension or engagement if these acts are purely despicable. The audience has to be led to believe or appreciate the need for these acts, or at least what inspired them. The characters have to go somewhere towards the point where what they are presenting to you is a possible version of you in the same situation.

This is the characters' objective. This is what they need. They need you to understand. Not necessarily absolve but just to understand.

So, with that in mind, of course the play is not about the events. It is primarily about the characters and the audience. This is why they do not talk to each other and only talk to the audience. This is why we felt the need to return to direct address and any theatrical moments are merely conjured to illustrate the points they need to make. They start the evening sitting in chairs chatting to the audience. Everything that follows is still part of that initial audience character relationship and exists in the present. It is just that the illustration of certain events get more and less vivid, allowing the characters to return to a more obvious direct address.



Mark Rice-Oxley

Is it possible for this text to be performed in anything other than direct address?

On the page this text reads like a monologue. (see *A Text for Performers*) Does this dictate the performance style?

Do you think we feel any different about the characters presented in this production because they are using direct address? What are the effects of this performing style?

## vi) I You Me She They Us

It occurred to me that this is a text that addresses the central, absent character only as 'she.' It is also about the 'Group'. Within that the characters recount and express opinions while making a clear choice to use either 'we' or 'I'. There are times they are talking from within the group. Why is this? Is it subconscious? Is it a place of safety? Of defiance? Of unity? And then there are times when they choose to speak as individuals, using 'I' or referring to 'my work'. Again, why? What makes them kick themselves free of the group at this moment?

We set up a read through of the first page only and the performers had to take their time and clearly make decisions about the use of I, you, me, she, they, us by their characters. The cast were asked to look at the first page and consider exactly what motivated the choice of these words. It was hoped that this would present characters who alternately revel in and recoil from their outrageous actions, one moment standing proud as an individual and the next hiding within the banner of the Group.

So how can the performer use this? It was clear that there is a fluidity to how the characters see themselves as alternately individuals and members of the group. The task here was not just to acknowledge that this was an interesting quirk but to consider the almost subconscious decision behind each choice. This process is lengthy and detailed but ultimately rewarding for the performer. Wherever the character uses one of the above word you simply have to ask why? What are they gaining from using I when they could have used we. Of course real people make these decisions all the time and it tells us vast amounts of information about how they perceive themselves and want to be perceived by the rest of the world. It is no different here.

This research can unearth an extremely complex layer of the unwritten psychology beneath the words. It makes the audience question everything and it makes the characters fallible and more human and because they are more human they can be sympathetic characters. As an audience we may not sympathise with people who can abuse their friend as they do in this play but if we can see that it comes from a million different needs, fears and doubts then there is every chance they can engage with our humanity or fascinate the amateur psychologists within us.

Try it out. Take a small section of the text. Remember that if you have broken the text up like we have then the voices are individual and can disagree if needed. They may also be unreliable. Encourage your actors to consider this.

**...we take it in turns until we all rush there one night and some of us make it and some of us don't and that's Sally done for.' (p.5)**

Is this just a statement? Or does it carry a touch of animosity towards the friend who was late? Or does it throw away the fact that it was this character who was late? Once you start exploring this you unearth such detail. If it was the third option where the character offers no detail and still uses the



Leah Muller and Mark Rice-Oxley

word us are they actually making light of a situation where they were the only late one and the rest of the group severely chastised them? And if they are making light of it then why are they? Was it too painful? Does the use of the word us in the second sentence actually cover up a moment when they felt outside the group completely? Or is this use of 'us' a way of forgiving the offending character?

This approach allows the different characters to have slightly different recollections about the same traumatic event. And why would this be? Because real people protect themselves with selective memories and differing slants on events. Where you can achieve this you create tension where on the face of things there was none, you create depth to what may have appeared to be several people telling the same story, and you create interest. This is so important because the interest for the audience is in more than the primary story. There are more stories emerging between real human characters, each of whom may have a different reason to have you understand their point of view.

# Scenes and their Creation

## i) Good Bed/Bad Bed

### Good Bed

Here we wanted a sparse and tender choreographed scene where the characters appear to be struggling with the plight of the artist in the hospital bed. The choreography is very naturalistic but is inspired by the line

**Come on you cunt feel oh feel oh - we look like we are supposed to look, we do the - the little tilt of the head, the little sigh, the tear comes down the cheek - just like we know it should (p. 12)**

We wanted to give the audience the experience of being the people in the hospital who are duped by the 'performance' of the Group. At the end of this gentle scene, performed to Imogen Heap's most beautiful and heart breaking track (Hide and Seek), one of the characters is seen crying. Then she is seen stopping suddenly and then trying to cry again. It is all an attempt to feel and present the correct reaction to the situation. From the outside this appears to be a genuine show of remorse and connection but the script is quite explicit that it is not. This was our attempt to open up the world of the text, suck the audience in and then really hit them with the power of the above line.

### Bad Bed

In this scene we wanted to show how the passing of time may have corrupted the quality of the care the characters were giving to the artist. We played with a growing familiarity and lack of connection with the tasks of looking after her as well as a creeping resentment towards her prone body.

The moments become more and more sadistic as they each out do the previous visitor's abuse.

There is an ambiguity about this scene as their actions are so extreme and sadistic we are left wondering, 'Did they really do this?' The point is that what they do with their camera is an abuse. An abuse of her trust and of her body. If you are going to do this you might as well have gone the whole way.

Before we started work on this scene one of the performers remarked that she had lost sight of the level of abuse, that taking the pictures did not seem much of a violation. As she then went on to play the artist's body she was then in no doubt about the abuse.

But this is a scene of great risk for us. It is certainly going to alienate some people. We need to take as many people as we can past this initial alienation as we need them to feel some of the freedom and liberation of the four characters and deal with the accusation 'If you were in that room, then maybe you would have done the same.'

It is very difficult though to continue to see this prone body as the passive aggressor here so it is also part of the plan for the audience to really get a sense of the abuse.

But did it really happen? I don't know. I think it probably did not. The start and end positions of the 4 characters is identical to further this ambiguity. I think the main purpose of the scene is to use the violation of her body as a metaphor for the use of the camera while the artist is unconscious and unaware.

One of the performers summed it up neatly by saying the abuse is like 'reading a bit of someone's diary. If you read a bit it is just the same as reading it all. The crime is still the same.' So in this context the abuse of taking the photos while the artist is unconscious is equated with all the other abuses in Bad Bed.



Mark Rice-Oxley

## ii) Your Friend is Conscious (by Steven Hoggett)

On first reading a script, there are moments that seem to 'explode'. These are normally the points of true drama within a play, when events suddenly acquire a new found dynamism. In 'pool' there are several of these moments and each of them, for any director, are points at which distinct decisions have to be made about the best way to deliver such moments (often extraordinary) to the audience. There are no hard and fast rules as to how to best communicate these moments. One choice may be to purify and distil the techniques already present within the production up until this point. Another choice might be to break entirely with the conventions established by the production before now.

There is a point in 'pool' where, after eight weeks of visiting their comatose host, the four friends arrive at the hospital to hear the news – "Your friend is conscious". This moment is pivotal in the play, huge in its implications, setting off an inevitably ruinous chain of events. For us, this moment is one such 'explosion', when the resonance of the spoken words offers the opportunity to portray the covert feelings of the characters.

In deciding how best to approach this moment, we looked at its position within the piece and in particular, the choreographic structure of the show so far. Until this point, the physicality of the piece had been based on naturalistic and everyday movement - mannerisms adopted in front of a camera you believe is filming you or about to film you, behaviour when visiting a private room in a hospital, the tearing off of clothing. Admittedly, these movements had been stylised to varying degrees and set within a specific choreographic framework but as material it was still identifiable as 'naturalistic' movement.

This moment textually is one of sudden impact, where the four characters are smashed into new, uncharted territory where they swing violently between behaviour they know to be correct and behaviour they cannot help but express, despite their best attempts to keep it secret. We decided that this moment should also be one where the choreographic style of the piece lurches forward into an area less controllable, less considered.

We asked the performers to create material based around two ideas. One was of 'goodness', like the kind portrayed in religious illustrations where sunbeams emanate from behind people's heads, iconic imagery usually involving the spreading out of arms and slightly upturned faces bathed in soft, beautiful light. We played with the idea of kisses and cherubs – examples of which are littered throughout the history of art. The second idea was based around the words "shit" and "fuck" which is not so well represented in art history or iconography and so posed itself as a bit more of a challenge when trying to create physical material that represented this. However, the results were fascinating. Most material seemed to centre itself either on the hands (particularly the fingers) or the gut (clutching, vomiting, retching). We began to construct a sequence that flipped between the two states, asking the performers to lift the physicality out of a sense of naturalism and gesture and more towards the extreme.

Once these 'strings' of material had been made, we then created their spatial dynamic. In this instance it was quite a simple one – in approaching the hospital bed they were to play out the 'goodness' material and on turning away from the bed, the 'shit/fuck' material. (As with any rule that gets set up, it is always good to mess with it too so there is one moment where Mark's character approaches the bed with a shit/fuck string although it is an approach from behind the bed where he is 'unseen'). We discovered a further dynamic when considering the extent of how far 'goodness' went and how explosive 'shit/fuck' was. 'Goodness' definitely seemed to have a limit in this moment, so we asked the performers to ensure that their good gestures never involved full extension of the limbs. To do so would be to give too much away. This moment of goodness was not so sure of itself. 'Shit/fuck', on the other hand, was shocking, violent and played to the very extremes of the body, limbs lashing out uncontrollably or knotting around the gut.

We set the choreography to Imogen Heap's track 'Just For Now'. In hindsight, we probably had a subconscious response to the lyric towards the end of the song - "Get me out of here, get me out of here, get me out of here". Working with the instrumental version in rehearsals, we latched onto the interplay between the delicate melody played on the harp countered with the skitterish almost panic-stricken rhythm track. Following the structure of the music, we built choreography that climaxed in a shit/fuck frenzy where the individual performers get wrapped up in each others choreography before using the gentle last line of the song to float themselves gently over to the bedside.

In exploding this particular moment like this we created implications for the rest of the piece. The choreographic bar gets raised at this point and the sense of control the characters have is seen to slip. In being witness to their excessive physical responses, we are made aware of the inner feelings of the characters through non-verbal means of communication.

It was important for us to set up this convention here as, looking ahead, there were moments later that would also rely on the physical rather than the verbal to express important shifts in the narrative.

### iii) Cuddle Kills

This is a tiny moment, lasting no more than 30 seconds, that seeks to express a complex, murderous undercurrent existing when the artist returns home and the others look after her. They are doing their best but we wanted the seeds of their final sadistic act to be in the air before they even recognise it.

The performers were put into couples and were instructed to explore a simple relationship where a caress becomes a bit too hard, a hold becomes a squeeze, an embrace becomes a crush. In practise a gentle touch across the face starts to drag the skin and disfigure the face. A stroke of the hair slowly starts to grip and pull and twist the head way. The intention is to make the transition smooth and almost imperceptible.

We set this into a string of material where the performers changed roles back and forth, ie the caresser becomes the caressed and back again. It was then run with the text to see what accidents cropped up.

It was not made to fit the text as this often makes the moves literal and dull, merely reiterating what the text is saying. Remember that the reason for making this scene was to bring out what was not being said, to hint at a brooding, growing darkness and to undermine the characters when they say such things as

**We do genuinely - it's very important that you should believe this bit - we do genuinely care'...**

**And it's true. We do. We really do. (p.24)**

We are not saying they do not believe this. Just that they believe this despite the imperceptible growing malevolence in the room. They believed it then and that is why it is so important to stress it to us. But there is an inevitability about the descent into darkness.

What happened was the moves appeared too deliberate at first. The initial intention to touch your partner must be a good one and then it changes from there to something darker. Also if the performers look at each other when the moves turn bad

then they just appear to be moments of overt aggression. This was not what was intended.

We reminded the performers that the idea was to show care and love and for the mind to wonder to notions of inflicting pain during the caress. It became clear that the focus of the performer had to leave their partner to achieve this. It must be an absent minded thing.

Once we had achieved this we created a moment when they become aware of the way they are touching each other. This is a very open moment. Are they horrified? Apologetic? Or is there a synaptic moment of complicity that takes the evening forward to its brutal conclusion?



Mark Rice-Oxley and Cait Davis

Photo: Manuel Harlan

## iv) Here we g-g-g-g-g-g-g-g-go!

This is the scene near the end where the characters have nothing left to lose. They are stripped of the power they momentarily had and are left as the artist's lackeys, doing the leg work for her exhibition.

The script has this moment of recognition quickly followed by the burning of the first photograph. We felt that this was missing a beat. We wanted the evening to spiral up to the burning of the photographs but to get there through various episodes of adrenaline fuelled indulgence. Although fuelled by more than adrenaline actually.

**Pedro! Come back over here and bring as much fucking gear as you've got and we will buy the lot. (p.28)**

We wanted to suggest that they had attempted every taboo in her house but could not escape the obvious conclusion. The ultimate high. The only way to redress the balance. The complete destruction of the photos.

This indulgence before the burning was to suggest complete debauchery and disrespect for their host. It is also a desperate last 'hurrah' before time ran out and the artist regained complete control and they returned to being nothing. We wanted them to jump around and fornicate all over her house before they find the supreme gesture. There is also a section in the scene where the characters imitate her fall into the pool. They mimic broken limbs and juddering nerves with a complete abandon but all of this, even this can only be topped by the burning of the photos. It effectively elevates the gesture to the worst they could possibly think of.

To achieve this we allowed the performers to 'play' in every section of the set. They were helped to find lifts and moves that could send each other all over the set. We had created some choreography with them early in rehearsal and allowed them to rehearse it at a steady pace so that they were utterly comfortable with it. When it came to using it in this scene all the moves had to be roughened up, all of the crashes to the floor had to be more brutal and honest to really conjure up the physicality of the leap into the empty swimming pool. This section was simply a string of 16 moves combining falls and crashes. It was very simple to create but it was useful here to mark a departure where the characters stop indulging in each other and the trashing of the room to sadistically wallow in the pain of their friend. It is a moment informed by all the pain their friend will inevitably cause them. (There is a Hockney painting called The Cruel Elephant where an unknowing elephant is standing on the words 'ants ants ants ants'. This is like their relationship. The characters are the ants crushed under this crass behemoth).

The flavour of this scene was motivated by a response to a partial run witnessed by our Executive Producer Lisa Maguire. She commented, 'where is the pain?' It is not just that she is a sadist. She was actually making a very good point. We have always said that this has to be a bruising show to capture that crucial moment and the concept of **pool (no water)**. By that I mean the understanding of all that is the opposite of a full inviting pool. It would have been wrong not to aim for this and as rehearsals were coming to an end we were in danger of doing this. Lisa's comment was a wake up call for us to raise the bar and to push our actors further.

The result offered a new and welcome dynamic to the piece. It is, dare I say it, a physical theatre crowd pleaser, but I felt it was necessary and something we had researched in the earlier development sessions but had taken our eyes off.



Leah Muller



Cait Davis

Photos: Manuel Harlan

# Themes, Essays and Insights

## i) The Frailty of the Flesh

Frantic shows have often been full of youthful, limb threatening energy. Almost a defiance of danger and destruction. We would bounce around the stage, bounce off walls and collide and crash into each other. All of this was about a particular energy that we wanted to capture. It was never about the negative possibilities and implications of these actions. The reality of such performances can often be injuries, aches and strains but we have been thankfully free of major incidents over the years.

**pool (no water)** asks different questions about the body. It has a completely different agenda. It is not an act of youthful exuberance as it concerns a different stage in life. It is partly about the repercussions of a reckless act upon an ageing body. It is partly about feeling the pain that we have so long denied. Simply, it is not about the energy of bouncing or flying but is more fascinated by the crunch and crash of hitting the ground when you least expect it.

The very act of jumping into the swimming pool and finding it empty and unforgiving could be a pessimistic metaphor for the lives of the artist and that of the four characters. Initially filled with energy and optimism, their ambitions have been mangled at the bottom of the pool. Why? Because they were unrealistic? The attitude is fatalistic and is encapsulated in their response to the artist's accident.

**You see you flew - yes - you reached out your wings and you flew above us. And that's okay. You tried and congratulations. For trying. But you thought that could last? Flying above the ground, looking down on our lives in the city below? You really thought that could last. Of course that couldn't last. And now you've crashed right down. And that hurts doesn't it? I understand. That hurts. (p.10)**

It is interesting that the artist is vilified for not leaping (which is momentary and suggests a following landing, and is what she, in fact, did) but for 'flying'. As if it is wrong or an insult to even try. Here the characters place themselves in a catastrophic heap at the bottom of the pool, watching the artist fly over and eventually join them. This is how they see life, not just in the depiction of the artist's attempts at superiority but in their role as broken failures, twisted on the tiles of the emptied pool. This is not the outlook connected with the youthful exuberance of early Frantic Assembly shows. This attitude is bitter and worn. It has leapt and found the pool empty.

So is the tone of their voices cynical? At times, but it is also passionate, honest and tender. It is something much simpler that dictates the tone of the voices here. They are undeniably older. And from this vantage point they are clearly obsessed and inspired by the frailty of the flesh.

So where can we see this? There are numerous places this obsession surfaces.

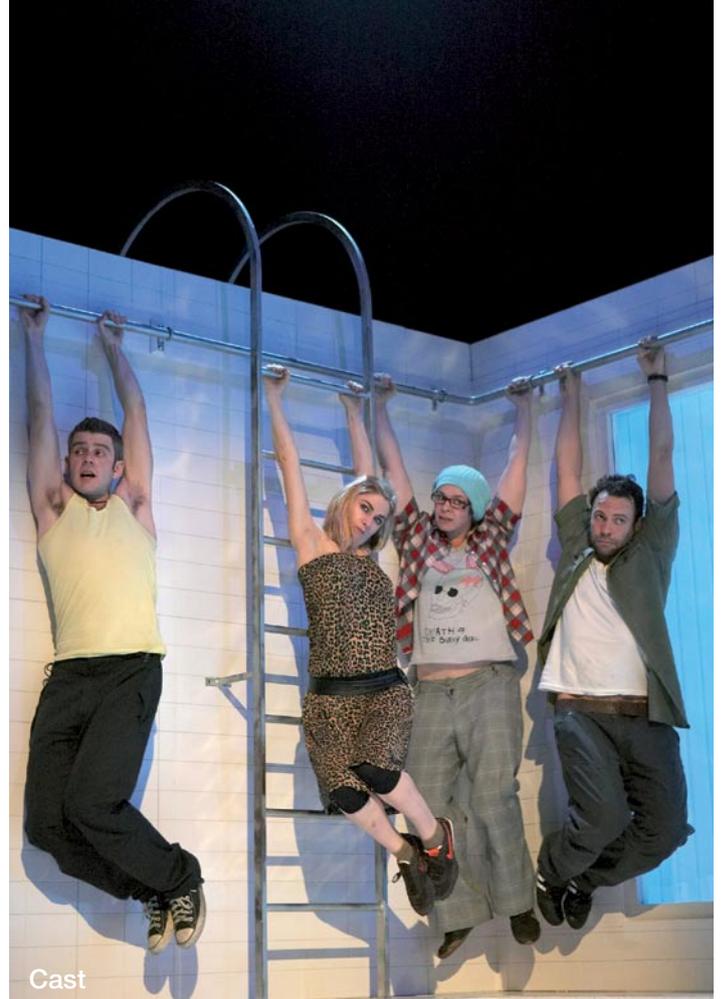


Photo: Manuel Harlan

## i Time (1)

This play is presented as a recollection, a retrospective. The actions happened in the past. Those actions themselves refer back to earlier times of what we have called youthful exuberance.

**Years ago when she was in - when she was the group. Life and soul. And she'd always be ripping her clothes off, just ripping them off, and we'd all rip them off too - we'd follow her - and then we'd all make performance pieces or art house shorts or we'd just go skinny dipping for the sheer naked fun of it. (p.3)**

But things are different now. Not only have the friendships and loyalties been tested but physically things are different.

**And each of us knows that our bodies is not what it was those ten years before - that there's sag and fat and lines even and even even the littlest hints of grey. Oh yes the sad sad rot to the grave has already begun. (p.8)**

Here is the frailty of the flesh played through the effects of time upon the living, but in the moment it is defeated for those aesthetic values have no place here. This is genuinely 'sheer naked fun.' Ironically the above line is one of the few where there the voice is unconvincing. The sentiment may be real but the final line feels too prepared. It seems to belong to the present rather than the moment being described. This helps remind us that this is a recollection presented in real time and must be considered potentially unreliable.

And what of the 10 years mentioned above? Have the characters stood still while the artist has flown? Worse than that. As the lines above point out, they have rotted. They have been surrounded by struggle and cancer and death; Sally in the hospice, Ray's demise, heroin babies, orphans; their bodies have sagged and their hearts have become poisoned towards the artist. Just when it seems like they have been transported back to a time when,

**...when it all seemed to mean so much when everything was so full of meaning yes it was all drenched in meaning and we all cared we all cared so so passionately? (p.8)**

all of that bitterness comes flooding back. Too much has happened. They are not those people any more. Despite their best intentions in that moment of disaster by the pool they cannot help falling foul of their baser instincts. As one of them later remarks (about the taking of the photographs and the arrangement of her body)

**The temptation was great and we were weak. (p.14)**

I will come back to 'time' and the frailty of the flesh later. Where else do they betray this obsession and place themselves at its mercy?

## ii The Pool Boy - The Personal Trainer

**And there's the pool boy - who could have been a porn star. Or maybe is a porn star. Or will be a porn star. And there's her personal trainer taking her through her lengths. And he's a porn star too. (p.4)**

The pool boy and the personal trainer are sexualised as soon as they are mentioned. Both are symbols, not only of the trappings of success and wealth, but also of youth and the desire of the ageing to retain youth. The pool boy is pursued by a predatory elder character who finds that time has devalued his sexual prowess and attractiveness. While all the life and innocence is evaporating from their lives he seeks out a meaningless sexual encounter with the younger man and finds that ageing flesh is a devaluing currency.

**And the - I'll give you a hundred to sleep with me. Leave the pool for a moment. Leave the pool alone just for one Goddamn minute and give me one good fuck won't you? What is wrong with my money? (p.18)**

This is an attempt to commune with youth yet it only serves to embarrass and confirm the effects of time on his flesh. If this was not depressing enough when he is finally successful in his quest the reality or the repercussions are not so sexy or romantic.

**Doctor doctor I think the pool boy may have passed on something fungal. I'm yeasty and I want to cry about it. (p.22)**

Life only seems to offer disappointments for these people. Is life really just a 'sad sad rot to the grave'?

## iii Bruises, Flesh and Frailty

So what of the specifics? What of flesh and frailty? In what ways do the characters betray their obsession?

**The way the bruises and the swellings grow and ripen over her. The myriad colours that a bruise can take. One day an eye revealed and then another concealed beneath the swollen. (p.15)**

The bruising and discolouration of the artist's recovering body becomes an artistic fascination for the four characters.

**We've become fascinated by the - look you can see - fascinated by the way the markings and the bruising and the cuts progress from day to day. (p.15)**

Is this interest in the workings of her body born from a realisation that she is only flesh and blood, like them? Are the bruises a sign of her life in its most simple, innocent form? Is this the humanisation of someone they had demonised previously?

It is possible of course but they could just as easily be describing a rotting bowl of fruit. It is a detached fascination and one that could never use the phrase 'The Miracle of Healing' as its title. Only the artist could have come up

with this perfectly marketable title. All the four have seen or experienced is decomposition. They had not considered that what they were watching, photographing and documenting was someone's return to health. They had in fact taken their eyes off their subject by inspecting her too closely. By taking her frailty for granted they had not noticed her growing strength.

But still she is frail. What does this mean to the four?

While she is weak they are strong. It is as simple as that. Just as they appear to get their strength from the fact that she cannot cope without them so do they seem to believe that her strength previous to the accident was responsible for their weakness. The sickness of Ray and Sally, the tiring 'good work' for good causes, all seem conversely related to the success of the artist. In their minds she effectively sucks the life out of them (and 'life' can mean 'success' in this instance).

**Because none of us was meant to wealthy, none of us was meant to be recognised, none of us was meant to fly. We're the Group. And there's balance. And you took away the balance. One of us goes up, then one of us goes down. It's a natural law. Don't you understand the most basic natural law? Well of course you do - understood it and ignored it - on purpose - and killed Sally. (p.6)**

And here as she convalesces, she is doing it again

**And walking through the ward she looks so strong so well. Amongst the injured dying lines she looks so strong as if to insult each of them one by one. And it's us following behind who look the weaker. The weak ones stepping in her step. (p.23)**

How does she do it? It must be infuriating for the four characters. She appears to be a force of nature and the four feel helpless in her wake.

So what can they do? Where are the small victories? It can seem that as she appears to be growing stronger one of the characters reminds us of her frailty and reliance on the others.

**But we still have to take her to the toilet. Remember. At the end of the day ... we still have to take her to the toilet. (p.22)**

but a closer reading probably suggests that even in her relative weakness they are only her menial servants. There is not a real sense of humiliation or degradation here. To me there is a stronger implication of status, namely, even here we are only fit to wipe her backside.

Either way the line is brilliantly ambiguous.

## iv Time (2)

So what can someone do to defeat time? What efforts have the four made as we reach the end of the play and are placed back into the present? There are two significant gestures against the 'sad sad rot to the grave.'

**And these four here – new teeth. Beauties. (p.30)**

This small, personal affront to the rot joins another more significant act.

**And I actually met someone who I rather like and I have two children – one is two, the other is four – and they like me so that makes it feel rather better. (p.30)**

This nod to procreation at the end of the text is certainly presented as a small victory against time and the frailty of the flesh. Is this a note of optimism? Partly, for what follows may well be more realistic. Or is it just a return to the fatalistic? It is not a conscious effort from the character voicing it. It comes out like a genuine, if slightly self indulgent, understanding statement of where they are in life.

**And I like to think there's a rehab or an AIDS ward or a somewhere where we'll be together once again. Somewhere where we'll meet and be the gang. But - hey I'm a romantic. I'm a foolish old romantic as the years go on. (p.30)**

This is a lovely comic touch at the end of a harrowing text. It is a knowing voice that is distinct from the new found stability and respectability of the previous voice. It reminds us that there are questions to be asked at the end. The characters have obviously moved in different directions and each has responded to the march of time in their own way. (This reminds us that the definition of the Group is fluid, as is the characters' desires to be associated with it and its actions. See **I, you, me, they, she, us**).



## ii) Imogen Heap and the 'Mic Check' effect (by Steven Hoggett)

The creation of a Frantic soundtrack is an essential part of our creative process, not just in terms of what the audience will eventually hear on stage but also as the means by which we ourselves structure, choreograph and devise the piece. Knowing this to be a crucial choice that we have to get right, conversations about sound tracking are amongst the very first when considering how we might create a new show. Initial thoughts regarding **'pool'** seemed to centre themselves around the idea of the hospital environment. From here we considered the use of ambient artists or tracks. Artists such as Aphex Twin have a rich catalogue of work that evokes a very dark ambient space full of menace, struggle and an often blatant disregard for musical structure or timings. At one point Mark suggested focusing the soundtrack around a specific vocalist and we talked for a while about artists such as David Sylvian. As a solo songwriter, Sylvian has a varied body of work, his haunting, delicate vocal style being set alongside his own musical forays into ambient, jazz, electronica and the recently coined term 'alternative' (the good arm of pop). These felt like interesting and exciting starting points until we had completed a second research/development period at the National Theatre Studio in January 2005. It seemed that the scope and range of the piece in terms of its storytelling, its mood and its locations had taken a significant step forward and the task of the soundtrack became something different. We now needed to make a decision about whether we chose a single artist to work with on the show or, as we had done in the past, give ourselves total freedom to use any number of recording artists and select tracks from a variety of sources – bands, vocalists, film soundtracks.

We had first contacted Imogen Heap in the summer of 2004. At the time we were involved in a tv commercial being filmed for Baileys and they were still looking for the music track to go with the ad. We had been fans of Imogen through hearing her work with Frou Frou a few years earlier and although the band no longer existed, we had heard that Imogen had been recording some material herself. We contacted Imogen who had recently completed some demos and within days we were sat in Battersea Arts Centre listening to previews of five tracks from the forthcoming album. On days such as this we absolutely love our jobs. In the end, Baileys opted for a rather bizarre music choice for the ad, we began negotiating with Goldfrapp for the use of their music on our forthcoming 'Dirty Wonderland' project and Imogen completed her album and became popular in the States after contributing tracks to Six Feet Under and The O.C. The track featured in the latter was something of a breakthrough for Imogen and a U.S. audience. It was also a breakthrough for us in how we might successfully put together a **'pool'** soundtrack.

'Hide and Seek' was unlike anything we had heard before. A sparse, emotional a capella track with vocoder layers which created a sound that was almost hymnal. The intimacy of the recording (Imogen's breathing pattern is a definite feature of the track) makes it one of the most arresting songs imaginable. Realising that the range of Imogen's work

had just rocketed off the scale we asked if we could meet and listen to the almost completed album. On listening to the tracks that make up 'Speak For Yourself', we had all our prayers answered. For spare, delicate sections there was the aforementioned 'Hide And Seek' but there was also 'The Moment I Said It' with its distinctly cinematic feel (the piano melody reminding us of the work of Thomas Newman, a film composer much loved by us at Frantic). 'Daylight Robbery' with its huge slabs of guitar was the opposite end of the spectrum, a relentless wall of noise. Tracks such as 'The Walk' were unquestionably dramatic- strident and bold melodies with just a touch of heartache that made you wonder just where it was coming from. All of these pieces were threaded along by Imogen's incredible voice which track by track constantly reinvented itself. Here, at last, was a collection of tracks that were contemporary, playful, wilfully destructive, euphoric, delicate, emotional and always thrilling.

Mark delivered the rehearsal draft of **'pool'** in Leicester Square on Christmas Eve 2005, back dropped by a young gospel choir from Lewisham. Immediately we started to place tracks in the text. We knew we wanted to open the show with 'The Walk' – this would be our first brand new piece of work in nearly a year and a half (our first in three years for those who didn't get to see 'Dirty Wonderland') and we wanted to come out fighting. In terms of sound, 'The Walk' does this for us. A classic 'Frantic-sounding' track, it has a hook that is as bold as it is beautiful, an urgent, muscular sound that promises much in the verse then truly delivers by the chorus – a principle we try to live by. 'Hide and Seek' we knew would be used as purely as possible in order to reap all the benefits it provides on hearing. During a research period on **'pool'** we workshopped the idea of visiting a comatose body for the first time. The sense of reverence throughout 'Hide And Seek' complements this scenario perfectly as well as having an uncannily apt lyric. The O.C. feel of 'Speeding Cars' was an obvious choice for the scene in which the characters arrive at a sun-drenched house with a pool in order to enjoy a night of "swordfi-ish and cool, cool wine".

Working in this instinctive way is incredibly rewarding and to know that some of these initial gut responses were absolutely right is some comfort for the numerous days in rehearsals when we wonder why we ever thought we could create good theatre without having done the formal training. What is equally as exciting is the learning curve and working with Imogen has provided us with an extraordinary one. Sometime into rehearsals, Imogen provided a brand new track recently completed called 'Mic Check'. Around this time we were working on a section of the show we called 'Select Delete' where the characters wipe out a computer memory. We were working with the track 'Cumulus', an instrumental track of orchestral proportions that had a prominent cello line that descended throughout the track. It was this cello that we hooked onto, the notes cascading down being reflective of the depleting files on the computer. The tempo of the piece is also heavy which we linked to the severity of the act and its weighty implications. All was

going well until we heard 'Mic Check'. A second a capella track by Imogen, it couldn't be further from the delicate, haunting nature of 'Hide And Seek'. In it, her voice trills, stutters, gasps, wavers before creating whole waves of sound, all underpinned by a flurry of beats and rhythms. On hearing this, the whole meaning and feel of 'Select Delete' was upturned. We began to play the scene as something utterly thrilling. Quick, naughty, rude, incessant, exhilarating. We were able to use the complex vocal arrangement to set quirky, detailed gestural patterns, using count structures we would not normally have found. The structure of the track itself guided us to create a movement sequence that actually gathers momentum even though the event itself is one of emptying out. In this way, their energy as characters surges throughout the act, the music constantly underpinning this to a brilliant point of nothingness. It is possible of course that we might have made this discovery some other way, but it seems hard to imagine how it would have happened in such a speedy, thrilling and informative way. In becoming completely different, it became completely right, not just in itself but also in setting up the rhythmic structure of the entire end section of the show. Instances like the 'Mic Check' experience are indicative of the genuine moments of creative euphoria that can occur in a collaborative devising environment when the elements are working – when the 'known' takes a back seat while the 'what if' is allowed to have a go.

Such discoveries rarely leave the rest of the work untouched. The freeing up of the 'Cumulus' track allowed us to tackle the difficult section of '**pool**' where the four characters become abusive towards their comatose friend. We had been using the thrusting menace of 'Daylight Robbery' as an idea but were unsure and somehow unsatisfied. In trying the same sequence with 'Cumulus' we were able to re-evaluate the entire scene – asking the performers to play with a sense of familiarity, almost boredom, so that their cruelty becomes clearer as something that developed over a longer period of time. This time, the deep, descending cello pattern became reflective of the degradation of the body prone in the bed, taking the musical focus away from the acts of cruelty and instead asking us to reflect on the unwitting victim. This change in focus was another significant step forward in our understanding of the piece and how best to present the story. 'Daylight Robbery', as a consequence, moved further into the narrative and now sits alongside a drug-fuelled frenzy towards the show's climax, a perfect accompaniment now that we have allowed the track to truly drive acts of physical aggression and excess.

From watching sections of the show during rehearsal, Imogen was also able to offer suggestions regarding the 'arc' of the soundtrack. Like a text might follow a narrative, a good soundtrack will, in addition to supporting events onstage also follow a 'narrative' of its own. Imogen was able to point out the places where initial choices worked against this approach. For instance, two tracks that appeared consecutively within the show were of a similar sound and feel despite events and actions between the two tracks having moved on significantly. Another early choice of ours marked the start of the drug indulgences. Our choice was incredibly hard in terms of its drive, leaving the actors little room to play as they were, in effect, chasing the track. Imogen suggested an alternative track ('I Am In Love With

You') which contained more space, allowing the performers to sit within it and be coaxed rather than dragged along. This informed the way in which we asked the performers to deliver the scene textually as well as physically – our 'directing' the scene taking direct inspiration from the nature of the music track.

Undoubtedly, there is a long tradition of the creative link between music and theatricality, from the classicism of 'Swan Lake' to the adrenaline rush of 'Stomp'. The spectrum is vast and goes far beyond the simple notion of the 'musical'. We believe we are still some way from establishing just what it is that music does for us, but collaborating with Imogen on '**pool**' has allowed us to take a huge leap forward in understanding the possibilities that arise when sound becomes the leading principle in the rehearsal room.



Steven Hoggett - Co-Director

### **iii) We hate it when our friends become successful - the directors notes from the published script**

For the most part Frantic exists in a generous, supportive and affirming creative community. How thrilling, then to allow yourselves to spend an entire creative period considering 'the most dreadfully involuntary of all sins.' Openly discussing artistic jealousy is a compulsive and exhilarating pursuit. Even the most innocuous seeming question ('So - what do you really think of... insert name of director/performer/company?') can result in breathtaking displays of vitriol and bile.

What becomes clear, almost immediately is just how very human in feels. Not unusual, not painful and, if we are being honest, in the right environment, not that wrong!

To this end Mark brings out the very best and the very worst in us. We only hope we prove to have the same effect on him. His opening line on our first meeting ('Oh, look, it's the Ant and Dec of theatre') was an audacious one but in some ways the perfect indication of how things would be - bold, wicked, and very, very funny. But also daring.

Come on, admit it. You hate it when your friends are successful. Or are we on our own? Either way we hope you enjoy us unashamedly addressing our darker side.



Cast

Photo: Manuel Harlan

## iv) Pool and Psycho

How can we take the audience with the characters as they turn on their friend, manipulate her and take photos of her when she is in a coma and then burn her art? How can we present something other than contemptible self pitying mediocrities, bitter at the deal life has dealt them?

I knew that we wanted to take this production to some pretty dark places and that there was a real risk of alienating the audience. This would have been a disaster because the production relies on the suggestion that 'If you'd been in that room with us then maybe, maybe you'd have felt the same.'

I started thinking about a reference to illustrate this need for empathy from the audience. It had to be extreme just to show us that we had a chance of pulling it off. Then it struck me. I remembered a film director talking on TV about Hitchcock's great subversive masterstroke in psycho. He was talking about a scene where Norman Bates tries to dispose of a body in the boot of his car by dumping the car in a lake. He rolls the car into the water but to his horror and the horror of the audience, the car does not sink. And in this is the masterstroke. He made the audience care about Bates. Their concern was that the car would not sink. They were on his side.

If Hitchcock can make us will on a psychotic serial killer then we could surely convince the audience that we hate it when our friends become successful. And may hate it enough to go to extreme if there was a chance of getting away with it.

## v) Pool and Beckett

When we first began work on the National Theatre Studio development period I thought that the script reminded me of Play by Samuel Beckett where a story of infidelity emerges from cut up fragments of lines spoken by actors through direct address. Then it struck me that there is a fundamental difference.

In Play the protagonists are manipulated by the light on them, picking them out and demanding that they speak. They follow this tyrant to the point of exhaustion. (It is interesting, to me anyway, to note that if Play is somehow a critique of the tyranny of the director then just what has happened to the subsequent productions of Samuel Beckett's work. The notorious tyranny of his estate has virtually killed any directorial flair within his work. It is fundamentally his work. Beckett makes the demands of the actors/protagonists. He is the tyrant. It has become the tyranny of the writer).

In **pool (no water)** there is a genuine need to speak, to get something off one's chest. There is no cruel tyrant demanding details. If anything it is the cool impassive documentary maker who allows his protagonists the space and freedom to betray themselves. (See Concept of the Interview).

Consider the end of the play. Here we decided that the characters have said what they need to say. So what do they do? The imaginary documentary maker has left the camera running and they feel the impulse to talk, to fill the silence or try once more to convince us that they are ok. And this comes out of them because of the passivity of the director. These characters need the audience. They need to be understood and absolved. The only cruelty from the director/documentary maker is to not give them that absolution. That is left to the audience in the awkwardness of the final scene.



Cast

Photo: Manuel Harlan

## vi) Pool and Amadeus

I first thought there was a great similarity between the characters in **'pool (no water)'** and Salieri in Peter Shaffer's Amadeus. It seemed all had been living under the shadow of greatness and all had had their revenge only to find that their ultimate curse was to be forever mediocritises.

This dynamic works well in Amadeus where the talented Salieri makes a deal with God to ensure his success only to find that God has obviously chosen another, the sublimely talented but crass and undeserving Mozart. Salieri finds an acceptance of his mediocre status only after revenge and subsequent madness. It is not a peaceful acceptance. It is merely an acceptance of the position of mediocritises everywhere among the damned.

With **'pool (no water)'** it seemed to me that here were even more bitter and less talented contemporaries of an incredibly successful artist. But then Steven suggested that he thought it was important that they were not dismissed as rubbish artists. This was a revelation. They could be described as failed artists but only in relation to the success of 'the artist'. And this success has nothing to do with art. Throughout the text there are references to her business acumen and her opportunism

**He owns the gallery that I work with out here. We've been talking about the work I want to show when I get out of here. (p.22)**

If the protagonists were credible artists and 'the artist' not some heavenly inspired wunderkind then we are actually dealing with a much more modern phenomenon with this production. The phenomenon of celebrity.

The artist's success brings power and her power brings success. Once the worlds eyes are on her she knows how to market and sell herself perfectly. This is the expertise that the Group will never have. Even when they are close to

succeeding they contrive to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory

**Oh you can see what you look like (p.19)**

The tension here is that there is nothing between the quality of the work of the Group and 'the artist.' For example, both make art out of suffering. The artist is very happy to take their work as her own. It is just that 'the artist' knows how to sell it and, in turn, sell herself. In the fickle world of celebrity this gives her work an instant credibility whereas the Group uses their suffering artistic sensibilities to give their own work credibility. But they can still see that her work succeeds

**Exactly. She's... absent. It's that quality in her work that sells. (p.3)**

Faced with this frustrating inequality the Group lashes out. If the world cannot understand art unless it has to be packaged as 'The Miracle of Healing' by a celebrity artist then they must destroy it. It becomes an artistic gesture in itself (see Bibliography: KLF Foundation).

This modern obsession with celebrity led us to the performance style for the production. During rehearsals we spoke specifically about the kind of documentaries where you can tell that some C list celebrity is just so excited at having been asked to spout their contrived views on anything from pop videos to school dinners. We imagined that the protagonists have been invited to talk on on of these shows, aware that they could talk the talk and celebrate the life of the artist or they could release the knot of frustration in their stomachs. This second choice is obviously irresistible and it raises the question, 'if we they were set up to celebrate her life then how does the interviewer/film maker feel about this explosion of bile? Did they ever expect it to be a confession. And just like Salieri's confessor is the truth so much bigger than he had ever thought?' (see **Concept of the interview**)



Photo: Manuel Harlan

## vii) The Empty Pool

There is a beauty to the fact that she lands in an empty swimming pool. As one of them states, 'This is right. This feels - there is right in that'

So why? What is the significance of this?

A lot of the significance is explained by the characters. It is partly in the 'flying' and the crashing, in her gravity defying ascent to stratospheric success and her sudden plummet to a position of helplessness beneath them. (It is interesting that even though the characters are above her in this moment they still associate themselves with the broken and crashed. She has metaphorically joined them at the bottom of the pool)

But there is more from this accident. The pool is the symbol of her success,

First seen in attachments. The pool quote

Her pool is full. She has staff to keep it clean and ready for random acts of abandon. Why else have a pool? But when she jumps it is empty. There is no power to guide her as she takes off and no water to welcome her back from the sky. This empty pool is the perfect welcome to the world of her friends.

This accident. Is it metaphorical, ironic, symbolic? This kind of event is used frequently in films, novels, etc. where a protagonist is brought down to Earth from some lofty position of delusion or are simply brought to justice by the symbol of their excess. It can be incredibly trite (Dead Again - Kenneth Branagh?) but hopefully here it is less contrived. It is just a genuine accident that becomes symbolic/ironic/metaphorical

There is also a great potential for mutual understanding from the audience of what it means to jump and land in an unexpectedly empty swimming pool. The contrast between the joy of the leap into the air and the pain of the crash onto the tiles is so extreme yet so vivid. Who cannot imagine that feeling of abandon followed by the confusion of the slightly extended length of the flight, the unexpected angles and views, before the unspeakable cruelty of the landing?

We aim to take the audience through this through the simplicity of the words. There is no point, we feel, acting it out or dancing it because it is the perfect communion of story telling and the audience's imagination. And we can't beat that.

## viii) Jacob Love

We did not want the 4 protagonists to be dismissed as non artists. We wanted to suggest that they do make work and that it has a credibility of its own. Their lack of perceived success is more to do with the values of modern society and the quirks of celebrity.

A friend of Steven's introduced him to the work of film maker Jacob Love and specifically this film used at the start of the show. It is a mesmerising and beautiful piece. It is also, at times, a naive collage of seemingly unconnected images. Then just as you think that there is a stunning transition or connection of images that takes your breath away.

My point is that this is a film that you could easily underestimate. It is the same with the 4 protagonists. We did not want them to be written off as pretentious failures. We wanted to suggest that success could have been a whisker away and that is where the bitterness comes from. (I admit that the characters do dismiss their own work at the end but that could be because they are at their lowest point and need to convince each other they have nothing left to lose so that they can see out their final act of destruction / redemption.

Using this film gave us the opportunity to hint at the work of the 4 artists to suggest a life outside the telling of the story of the accident and the empty pool. It was also useful in helping the performers visualise what their characters work might look like and how their eyes take in the world.

## ix) Last Minute Advice

Just before the first preview I go to speak to the cast as they finish their warm up. I want to talk to them and check that they are ok, that they feel clear about what they are about to do.

I remind them about their simple super-objective which is to simply tell us their story, to have their actions understood, for us to understand why they did what they did.

To get there I ask each of them to consider several things:

Tell us how the artist crushed you, how she always crushes you, and how we would have done the same thing.

To do this you must emphasise that all the signs were telling you you must do this.

You are also to convince us that you are quite correct in destroying the monster that you created.

I asked them to allow this first preview to teach them about the overall arc of the piece, about its rhythms and energies.

Also to tell the story through its mood swings its power struggles and, ultimately, to find your way to the point where there is nothing left to say.

# Suggested Essays

We never see any of the photographs. Why would the directors choose to do this? What would be gained by seeing the art of 'the artist'?

What is the point of the film at the start of the show? What does it suggest? Whose work is it? The artist or the Group?

What techniques do the directors employ early in the show to give a sense that the protagonists are uncomfortable?

Why do the 4 characters never really look at each other?

The directors have talked about the characters all being in the same space but at different times. What does this offer? How would it be different if the performers were in the same space at the same time and could hear each other?

The set is not naturalistic. How does it and the lighting suggest different locations?

The directors have talked about the protagonists being unreliable narrators. What does this mean? What is the theatrical potential of having an unreliable narrator? How does this effect the viewer?

How might the production be different if 'the artist' was present as a character?

How would you describe the performance style of the production? What performance elements come together within the piece? Why have the directors chosen to use non naturalistic elements / movement? What does this offer? Would it have been clearer if it was just naturalistic?

We see two very different scenes where they visit 'the artist' in hospital. One appears gentle and caring. The other is extreme and shocking. What do they say? Also, are they truthful? Did they both happen this way? What textual suggestions are there that the kind scene was probably not as sincere as it looked?

How does the use of music effect the show? Give an example of a music led moment

Think about character development. How long have these characters waited to get this off their chest? Are they happy now?

Consider the idea that the show is like a documentary and the words of the characters are sometimes inspired by an unseen interviewer. Is this the interview that he/she expected?



Cast

Photo: Manuel Harlan

# Bibliography and Inspirations

Below is not a normal bibliography. Some of the list below are links to genuine research. Sometimes just through reference but at others a more detailed homage. But I have also included anywhere else we found inspiration. It is just as valid and serves to show what goes into forming the thoughts and ideas found in this show and littered through the rehearsal process.

So some of it may inspire you to do some more background research. But some of it is unashamedly personal and is included to show you that you need these moments of epiphany and that inspiration does not always come from where you expect it but it is always welcome and valid. Sometimes it is a classic film. Sometimes it is a throw away comment. Both have equal weight when it comes to the creative process.

<b>Nan Goldin</b>	photography
<b>Peter Shaffer</b>	<b>Amadeus</b> - play
<b>Alfred Hitchcock</b>	<b>Psycho</b> - film
<b>Lisa Maguire</b>	stating ' <b>But where is the PAIN?</b> ' after seeing an early run through
<b>Samuel Beckett</b>	<b>Play</b> - play
<b>Imogen Heap</b>	Working with <b>Imogen Heap</b> - musician
<b>Rubbish celebrity vox pop documentaries</b> on C4	
<b>Frankenstein / Prometheus myth</b> (destroying your creation once it is clear it has become a monster)	
<b>Jacob Love</b>	film maker
<b>Robert Altman</b>	<b>Short Cuts</b> - film (for its brilliant use of nudity to create an unnerving scenario)
<b>David Hockney</b>	art
<b>Mark Ravenhill</b>	Wanting to play with <b>Mark Ravenhill</b>
<b>Chris Cunningham</b>	<b>All Is Full Of Love (Bjork)</b> - music video
<b>Eddie Kay</b>	Some shapes thrown by <b>Eddie Kay</b> in a residency in Leeds
<b>David Hockney</b>	<b>The Cruel Elephant</b> - I think it is called this and it is by <b>David Hockney</b> . I could be wrong - artist
<b>Lars Von Trier</b>	<b>The Kingdom</b> - tv mini series
<b>Quentin Tarantino</b>	<b>Kill Bill</b> - film
<b>Lady T</b>	<b>Crazy P</b> - song
<b>Ellie Parker</b>	film
<b>Mark Romanek</b>	<b>Got til its Gone (Janet Jackson)</b> - music video
<b>Andy Purves</b>	<b>Andy Purves'</b> strobe work
<b>KLF Foundation</b>	conceptual artists
<b>Ron Mueck</b>	<b>The work of Ron Mueck</b> - artist and a subsequent article in The Guardian ( <a href="http://arts.guardian.co.uk/critic/feature/0,,1840151,00.html">http://arts.guardian.co.uk/critic/feature/0,,1840151,00.html</a> )