

*frantic***assembly**



Frantic Assembly and the National Theatre of Scotland present

Beautiful Burnout

By Bryony Lavery

A Comprehensive Guide for students (aged 14+), teachers & arts educationalists

By Scott Graham



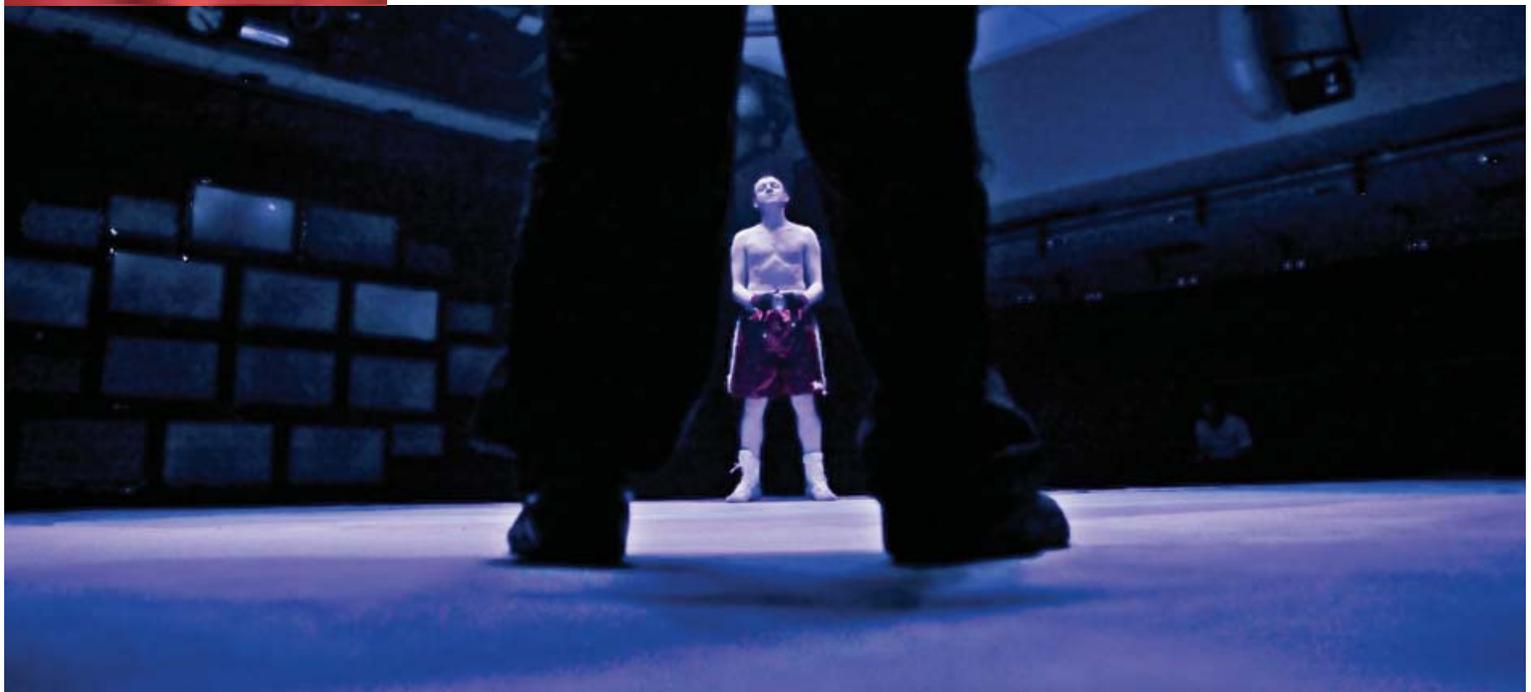
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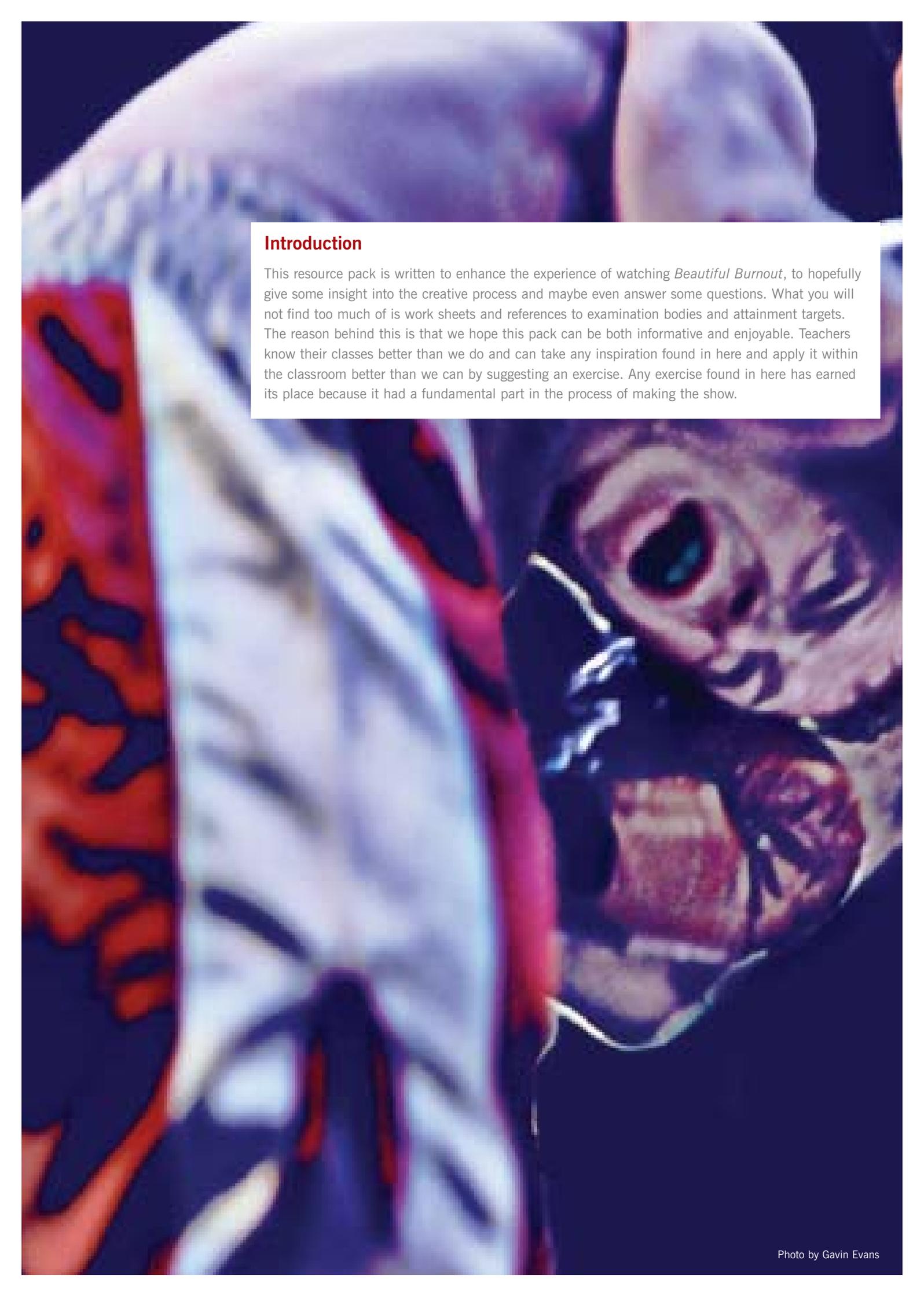


Contents

- 3 **Introduction**
- 4 Why Boxing?
- 4 Why Beautiful Burnout?
- 5 Why Underworld?
- 5 Why Bryony Lavery?
- 5 **Essays**
- 5 Research and Development
- 6 The danger of cliché and the need for authenticity
- 7 Damage: The Elephant in the room
- 8 Bloodsport or Noble Art?
- 9 Creating the image
- 10 The Training
- 12 The Research - the gyms, lists, DVDs, books, interviews
- 13 The Warm Ups - Flipping what we know - Explosive before stretches
- 13 Fathers and Sons - the boxing family
- 14 The Use of Film
- 15 The Referee
- 17 God and Man
- 17 The Danger of Unison
- 17 **Scenes**
- 17 The Fight - 'Beautiful Burnout'
- 19 Kittens
- 19 Wraps
- 20 Scribble (inc. This Is Your Scribble!)
- 21 One Punch
- 22 Catch Up
- 23 Referees
- 24 **Exercises**
- 24 Head Smacks
- 24 Trainer and Boxer
- 25 **Bibliography**

Photos by Gavin Evans
Front cover photo by Ela Włodarczyk





Introduction

This resource pack is written to enhance the experience of watching *Beautiful Burnout*, to hopefully give some insight into the creative process and maybe even answer some questions. What you will not find too much of is work sheets and references to examination bodies and attainment targets. The reason behind this is that we hope this pack can be both informative and enjoyable. Teachers know their classes better than we do and can take any inspiration found in here and apply it within the classroom better than we can by suggesting an exercise. Any exercise found in here has earned its place because it had a fundamental part in the process of making the show.

Why Boxing?

The idea for *Beautiful Burnout* initially came from a 10 minute visit to Gleason's Gym, a world famous boxing gym in Brooklyn. It's quite hidden, just a doorway on a street. It was about 10 o'clock at night and the sweat, the focus, the smell, the energy, the noise, the intense application was mesmerising. It was one of those moments where you find yourself entering into a world that somehow you knew was there but never had any direct experience of.

We started talking about how to capture this experience within a show, how boxing shows we had seen had never quite presented a credible physicality. We felt inspired by the challenge of giving an audience that same visceral, thrilling and conflicting experience of the visit to Gleason's.



Ryan Fletcher
Photo by Gavin Evans

Watching boxing can come with its own moral dilemma. Boxing is often referred to as the "noble art", the "sweet science" by its supporters. It is idolised and revered by academics and artists but even the people who love it and appreciate it can often struggle to defend it morally. The wilful infliction of damage upon your opponent is utterly abhorrent to others and has been considered a blood sport. There is a massive range of responses and reactions here. There's an incredible tension between those two points of view. That tension became really interesting for us to start grappling with.

Boxing is a provocative subject. We had no intention of shying away from the moral debate surrounding boxing. It is this debate that convinced us we had something to say about this world. The issue of how damage is both present and buried within a sport that appears to offer its participant's support, focus, and discipline is fascinating to both of us.

Why Beautiful Burnout?

Beautiful Burnout is the title of a song by Underworld from the album, *Oblivion with Bells*. We seized upon it as a potential title for our boxing show.

We initially struggled to convince people about the merits of *Beautiful Burnout* as a title for this project. Desperate to avoid boxing cliché we did not want a title that sounded too sensational or provocative.

Those who do not know boxing might be repelled by the sport. Those who love boxing may be dismissive of the uglier connotations. We wanted a title that could allude to both extreme views and remain intriguing. While many of the people around us considered *Beautiful Burnout* we honoured their serious misgivings and kept looking for alternatives while thinking about what we wanted our title to say.

We talked about how the impetus behind a boxer's career must surely be about glorious aspirations and the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. They have to believe in themselves and believe in the value of the rewards.

Very few boxers make a living out of boxing. Even those that do can suffer terrible consequences. Boxing is not a sport that often allows its protagonists to glide gracefully into retirement. And what about the families and friends around the boxer? How do they respond to the end of a boxer's career? Is the last fight the death of the dream or is it a release from the ever-present threat of damage?

This world of tension is entered into with free will. People know the odds on damage and take that risk, on the whole, knowingly. People who box defend their right to do so passionately and our research showed us people who had found much more than fitness and discipline inside the boxing gym (see **Fathers and Sons - the boxing family**). The more we thought about it, the more people we met, the more we believed *Beautiful Burnout* captured the mix of contradictions, the love, the belief, the glory and the potential for disaster inherent in this boxing world.

Why Underworld? By Steven Hoggett

Underworld has been in the rehearsal room with us since *Frantic* began. Over the years, their output has been in the background of most *Frantic* rehearsal processes so maybe it was always going to be the case that one day they would move to the forefront of our creative process. Right from the start, when we first began to talk about the evocative moods and feelings associated with the subject of boxing and the intentions of the show, Underworld were a first and only recurrent name. Listening back over their released albums only consolidated our belief that only they had the key to how we might create the world of boxing lurking in our creative imaginations. Their studio albums each cover such a varied and progressive range of styles, whilst retaining that irrepressible 'Underworld' feel, they provided the golden palette - one that is both expansive and yet totally coherent.

Underworld has a beautiful grasp of language and the most intimidating moment of working with the band was an early request that they might 'lend' us their title '*Beautiful Burnout*'. A stand out track from their *Oblivion With Bells* album, it was a title close to their heart too, forming the title of an exhibition of theirs that had been held in Japan. However, with typical trust and generosity, we were told that they would be delighted for us to use the title for our own, as yet unmade, piece of work. This trust and openness has been the defining experience for us working on this show. Underworld has provided us with an embarrassment of riches. We were given access to a huge number of released and unreleased tracks. Deep throbbing techno? Check. Euphoric skittering beats? Check. Sublime minimalist tones? Check. Sweeping cinematic tracks? That too. Pounding anthemic beats? Take your pick. The list was and is endless and we have enough unused tracks to safely soundtrack the sequel without any problem.

This collaboration has been endlessly inspiring. The soundtrack for *Beautiful Burnout* is a huge part of its entire shape. Structurally, the work they create has been a guiding principle for us as theatre makers - an epic eight-minute boxing match only becoming a possibility for us when we realised the *Beautiful Burnout* track held all the answers. It's at times like this that we are reminded how crucial music is to our creative process and happiness and in this instance, Underworld have given us pure, unadulterated joy.



Bryony Lavery
Photo by Scott Graham

Why Bryony Lavery?

It might have crossed other directors' minds to approach someone who knew boxing! We approached Bryony precisely because she knew very little about it and would bring fresh, hungry eyes to a world where every story it can tell has probably been told.

We have always had fantastic experiences with Bryony. Together we went deep into the troubling world of mutually destructive and passionate love with *Stockholm*. To lighten the tone we collaborated on *It Snows* for the National Theatre New Connections. *Beautiful Burnout* seemed like the right challenge for us both and the perfect excuse to work together again.

Essays

Research and Development

We have had two research and development sessions in Scotland. One included interviewing people and visiting gyms and tackled the potential physicality of the show while the other session aimed to explore possible narratives. This latter approach proved more difficult than we expected.

The main problem is that whatever scenario you suggest, as soon as you start talking about boxers, fights, winning, losing, getting hurt, managers, trainers, etc. it all instantly sounds like some clichéd film you have seen before.

Where we felt we had more success was in the physicality. We always try things out to see whether they can carry emotion or story (see **Wraps**). The first week of physical work involved constantly ticking off all these exciting discoveries we felt sure would help us make *Beautiful Burnout*. We left Glasgow feeling triumphant and buzzing about the inroads we had already made into this project.

The problem was returning to the footage we had taken of the sessions. Yes much of it was useful but there was something slow and deliberate and utterly fake that had once convinced us it was boxing. Despite the satisfying smack of leather on flesh our boxing was totally unconvincing.

This was a worry but it was one we decided to meet head on by committing to sending whoever we

cast to boxing training. (see **The Training**) It was clear that the more we looked at boxing the more our eye was going to accept nothing less than the real thing. This would be the same for the boxing world that we were so keen to play to. The prospect of putting something so slow, so deliberate and so obviously 'acted' in front of them terrified and inspired us on.

Back in London we were itching to get going. We had not got our head around any narrative yet and decided to get our hands dirty by bringing in some highly physical dancers to spend three hours with us in a rehearsal room finding out just how far we could stretch this boxing physicality. Again we were confronted with a problem. No disrespect to the brilliant dancers but none of them were boxers. They may have looked like boxers (some actually could have pulled that off!) but as soon as they got into their stance most of them betrayed their lack of boxing instinct. Even the ones that got past this initial stage fell when it came to throwing punches and moving like a boxer.



Taqi Nazeer and Henry Pettigrew
Photo by Johan Persson

Even these highly trained lads did not possess the snap, the speed, the power and the exquisite balance of a boxer. They worked their socks off for us but they mostly reminded us how we had our work cut out in the casting process and in developing people who could move like a boxer yet be capable of embracing the rest of our physicality like these guy obviously could.

All of these unexpected setbacks actually raised our expectations and aspirations for *Beautiful Burnout*. Each session was a necessary stage

towards making this show and we are so grateful for what we learned from each one, even if the lesson was not what we thought it was!

The danger of cliché and the need for authenticity

In our research and in talking to people within boxing we were struck by how open and proud they were but if there was one issue they became slightly guarded and concerned about it was that we might savage or present a clichéd Hollywood version of their sport.

We shared this passion for a grounded depiction of boxing. We did not want to put Rocky on stage. We wanted our boxing to be gritty and real. We searched for a story that would also feel real.

Our research took us to gyms, professional bouts, amateur administrators, doctors and promoters. There were many stories opening themselves up to us, from the Doctor dissatisfied with the measures the amateur world was taking to protect the boxers, from the female promoter fighting for the respectability of her profession, to the referee still scarred by a serious injury inflicted in a match he officiated.

The problem was that whatever story we looked into, as soon as it was fleshed out with boxing it started to feel like a cliché. Boxer gets better = cliché. Boxer gets hurt = cliché. Boxer wins something = cliché. Boxer has tensions with trainer = cliché.

The challenge or, even, the impossibility of avoiding cliché was presenting itself. Accepting this we realised that the authenticity in this work must lie in the boxing itself. We had done our research, getting to know the world inside out but it would count for nothing if the narrative arc only smelled of cliché and the boxing looked like actors flailing around. We stepped up the physical training and set ourselves the task of getting our fights and fighters up to scratch.

One of the most difficult aspects of putting this on stage was in the realisation that we had got the boxing up to an exciting standard but the play does not require this for its first 40 minutes. It actually requires very bad boxing up until that point. This realisation came excruciatingly late!

During our press night I ignored the faces of the journalists scribbling away and was fixated upon the face of professional trainer Terry McCormack, with whom I had several dialogues and tapped his brain for all aspects of the boxing world we were exploring. I had always stressed how seriously we were taking the boxing and how it had to be of a high standard and feel real. I had never mentioned to him that the boxers would have to look rubbish for the first half of the play! I could not take my eyes off him in that first half, scanning his face for a look that said 'is that it?'

The upside of such a structure is that when the boxing gets good, it looks really good, as it has come a long way! It is a risky strategy though, when you have invited all the people from the boxing world and you have promised them you will be true to the skill and dynamism of their sport!

Damage: The Elephant in the room

Within the company we all have different feelings about boxing. Many of those have changed over the course of making *Beautiful Burnout*. Some have shifted from a vehement abhorrence to measured respect and appreciation of the form and its protagonists. Others have had their faith in boxing challenged by certain aspects of the research.

Personally, I have always been a boxing fan. Maybe I found it a little frightening as I watched as a young boy with my Dad but I later found an enthusiasm and knowledge about this world and its main players.

Until researching *Beautiful Burnout* I had never been to a boxing match. I had only ever experienced it on television. It was not an experience I felt I was missing and even embarking on this project I was reluctant to attend a live event.

None of my current friends are knowledgeable boxing fans. Many of them will not know I am a boxing fan as the conversation does not often pop up. (Researching this project has been a massive indulgence for me!). Many of them will have moral objections to boxing as a sport.

This is where I have to raise my hand and admit to some concerns I have always had about boxing.

I am a boxing fan. I would defend anybody's right to box but when discussing the moral implications of a sport where a primary aim is to inflict temporary brain trauma upon your opponent, I do struggle.* I even find this moral battle in my own mind reassuring because at least I know I am watching boxing with a complex and conflicting set of emotions. I am not just baying for blood and damage.



Ryan Fletcher and Taqi Nazeer
Photo by Gavin Evans

It was a bit of a personal revelation when I came to understand this latter point in the context of my reluctance to attend a live boxing event. I realised I could not account for the attitude of the crowd I would be part of. If the crowd wants blood and blood spills is the crowd not implicated in the damage?

The issue of damage was always with us in the research.

A doctor we interviewed stated that he felt there was no damage in amateur boxing despite his medical association being opposed to the sport as a whole. He admitted professional boxing was a different issue and that damage had a much bigger presence. Even then he could reel off the statistics stating you are more likely to get injured participating in many other sports.

Interviewing a professional trainer I asked his feelings about damage. He shrugged them off. I then asked how he would feel if his son was a boxer and even though his son used to box, (he was apparently very good but is now a professional footballer) he went quiet and pale and stated that he would struggle with the idea of patching him up and sending him back out to fight. He was much happier that his son could earn a living playing football, but then who wouldn't be?

Arguably, maybe controversially, boxing appears statistically safer than horse riding, mountaineering and rugby but the central aim of these pastimes is not damage. (see **Blood Sport or Noble Art?**). We are interested in what happens to conviction and certainty when damage does occur. Does it bring a fundamental shift away from the sport? Or is it a fleeting distaste? Or is it merely part of the noble art, the sweet science?

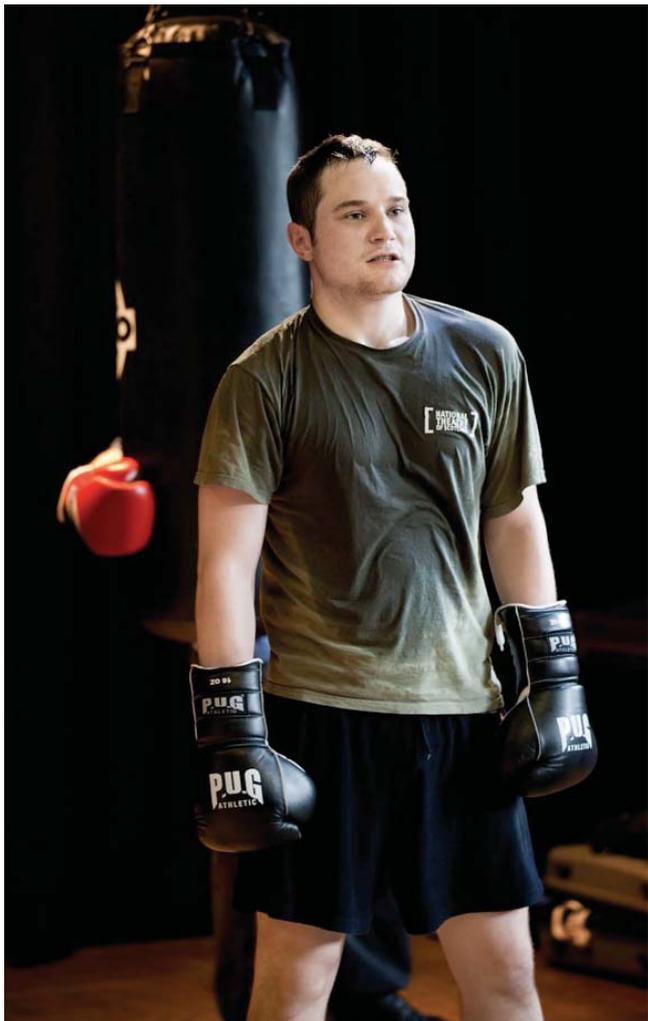
One thing is certain, none of the people interviewed for this project lacked heart or compassion. They did what they did out of love for their sport, their charges, their family. What happens to these hearts when the unthinkable happens?

Many families take their children to boxing as a way of protecting them from what they feel is a hostile world. How does a parent feel when their protective instincts place their offspring in a potentially greater danger? Do people's opinions of boxing change when it involves their own family?

One of the more traumatic moments of research came through watching a CNN Sports Illustrated film on brain damaged boxer Gerald McClellan.

I remember watching the fight between him and Nigel Benn and seeing it all unfold. It was an extraordinary battle that might have been celebrated as one of the greatest nights in boxing history if it were not for the turn of events that followed it. Even watching it as a teenager I was exhausted and exhilarated but the usual coming together of the boxers after the fight, that little act of mutual

admiration and respect that absolves any of my guilt for watching, did not happen because McClellan collapsed in his corner. He went into a coma from which he would emerge weeks later blind, deaf and brain damaged. This, and the incredibly similar Chris Eubank v Michael Watson fight, might have been a large part of my contradictory struggle with boxing.



Henry Pettigrew
Photo by Johan Persson

The CNN film revisited McClellan six years after the fight. He was living with and being looked after by his sister. Despite the outpouring of emotion around the events of the Benn fight not one single boxer had visited him since the injury. Only Roy Jones Jr. had asked after him. When the film maker implored him to visit McClellan, Roy Jones Jr. said he would but could not while he himself was still boxing. This was extraordinary but then made complete sense of how the spectre of damage is dealt with within the boxing mentality. Statistics can be reassuring but they also make the risk, however small, very real. The prospect or even the reality of damage has to be kept at a distance for a boxer or a trainer to operate. They have to fancy their chances and believe in their ability to avoid damage. That, it seems, is why Roy Jones Jr. cannot look Gerald McClellan in the eye. McClellan represents what happens when the luck runs out.

So is there a massive denial of the damage within boxing? Or is it a natural reaction to the odds of being hurt?

Either way it became clear that we could not make a show about boxing that did not in some way touch on damage. To avoid it would make it the elephant in the room. No matter what statistics do to reassure, damage will always be there.

*It can be argued that the point of *amateur* boxing is to win points much in the same way as Fencing. That argument is less applicable to the professional side of boxing.

Blood Sport or Noble Art?

Boxing is an emotive sport. The extremes of the views concerned are reflected in how it has been described over the years. It was coined the 'sweet science of bruising' by Pierce Egan in 'Boxiana' (published in 4 volumes between 1812 and 1824) and the phrase was further popularised and trimmed by AJ

Liebling in his collection of boxing essays 'The Sweet Science' (1956).

Boxing has been called the noble art but for those opposed to the sport there is nothing noble about it.

The British Medical Association (BMA) called for the banning of boxing in 1982 concerned with the recent fatalities and the increasing awareness of Dementia Pugilistica.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dementia_pugilistica

There is quite disturbing evidence of the long term effect of receiving blows to the head but this is also disputed in other reports.

See the fascinating Sports Law by Simon Gardiner, specifically chapter 3, through the link below:

<http://www.tinyurls.co.uk/x11966>

For the development of boxing and its styles see below. It also gives an outline of how its early protagonists shaped the popularity of boxing.

<http://coxscorner.tripod.com/briefhistory.html>

For a somewhat partisan take on the subject of the dangers of boxing see:

<http://ozboxing.org/health/antibox.htm>

This link is Australian and uses some American statistics to back up its claims. Below are some of those statistics.

US figures on sports fatalities:

Fatality rate per 100,000 participants

Horse-racing	128
Sky-diving	123
Hang gliding	55
Mountaineering	51
Scuba diving	11
Motorcycle racing	7
College football	3
Boxing	1.3

Cited in Cantu, Robert (Editor) *Boxing and Medicine. Human Kinetics, Illinois, 1995 (pp xi-xiii)*

It appears to present a solid argument for boxing but the problem is that the opposing sides are basing their arguments from vastly different starting points.

Simon Gardiner lays out the position clearly when he writes 'Nobody significant on the pro-boxing side denies the risk of brain damage. They would only dispute matters of quantity and degree. What really counts for both sides is their own gut feelings about common sense, decency and civilized behavior.' (p110)

However BMA spokeswoman Fleur Fisher insists the opposition is less about gut feelings and is based in scientific reason. Again, from Simon Gardiner's book, she is quoted saying, 'it is difficult for doctors to see trauma inflicted upon that most exquisite computer, the brain, and not take action. It would be unethical for us not to speak up.' (p111)



Taqi Nazeer
Photo by Ela Wlodarczyk

As Simon Gardiner states in his book linked above, no matter what reports claim 'the entrenched battle lines never move. They cannot. As presented, it is a for or against issue. To box or not to box.' (p110)

What we have is a world that presents an aesthetic that can be worshipped across the globe yet professional boxing is banned in Norway, Sweden and Iceland. Boxing's leading writers constantly talk about the beauty of the sport (and often about the ugliness of the world that can surround it). Boxing's champions are often romanced and painted as heroic gladiators and some, like the idolised Mohammed Ali become gods yet you do not have to dig deep to find the disturbing statistics of death, injury and corruption in boxing. The Sweet Science, The Noble Art as terms remain utterly incongruous to those who oppose the sport of boxing.

Creating the image

We had strong ambitions for the poster image for *Beautiful Burnout*. We had ideas of ordinary people sitting in a café but one of them is responding to an invisible punch. Unfortunately (or fortunately) there was another boxing show that got in first with a similar effect. We had reservations about this image anyway as one of the briefs we set ourselves was for the poster to capture the beauty in *Beautiful Burnout*.

We talked about the light quality we were after and referenced the cover of Imogen Heap's album 'Ellipse' but we also needed something more to be happening to the model rather than a beautiful effect around them. We then wanted to create a feeling of weightlessness to the normally grounded boxer. Ideally we wanted to photograph a boxer underwater but our initial investigations into costings suggested this would not be possible.

When we talked through our idea with the National Theatre of Scotland they were so convinced it was the right way to go that they decided to find a more practical way of getting the shot rather than going to a specialist underwater photography studio.

A few weeks later we were standing around the outdoor swimming pool of a French diplomat who lives in Streatham, London, and instructing Taqi Nazeer on how we wanted him to pose underwater.

The National Theatre of Scotland had found a specialist underwater photographer who knew of a man (the diplomat) who would let us use his swimming pool. He has done this on several occasions and he provides a much cheaper alternative to the specialist studio.

The pool had two poles across it. One was for Taqi to hold onto and the other was for the photographer. In between descents, which could only last for around five seconds, they would return to the surface and hold onto these poles so they did not get exhausted. There was a single light pointed into the water as well as a flash triggered by the camera. At the side of the pool an assistant continually made ripples across the water by pressing down on an inflatable crocodile! This was not a high tech shoot but the early results were very exciting. The ripples created a beautiful effect on the water and across Taqi. The light pierced through the water brilliantly.

We wanted Taqi to be wearing boxing wraps and for them to be floating away from his wrists. It was quite a job just wrangling them and stopping them floating across his face. The producers at the National Theatre of Scotland suggested we take some shots with Taqi wearing boxing gloves but we came up against a problem when the gloves refused to sink. The only way to get Taqi to the bottom of the pool would be to weigh him down. We thought we had put Taqi through enough that day. The photographer was amazing. She was very patient and was fantastic at communicating different poses and stances to Taqi.

If you have not done this type of thing before then what is involved can be a little surprising. You might think that the model (Taqi) would have to take a deep breath and then hold it as he sinks to the bottom of the pool but if you take a deep breath you do not sink, you float! Taqi had to exhale all the air from his lungs and then descend into the water, hold it for as long as he could and then ascend quickly for a gulp of air!

We knew we only had one go at getting this right. We believed in the concept of the image. We just had to make sure we had got the best photograph. We pored through over 500 shots on the photographer's laptop while standing in the diplomat's sauna. Fortunately the sauna was not on as it was doubling as the photographer's office for the day. After seven or eight hours we felt we had enough quality shots to take back to the National Theatre of Scotland.

Go to our website and within Beautiful Burnout you will find footage of the poster shoot on a cold February day in South London.



Henry Pettigrew
Photo by Johan Persson

The Training

We realised that a large part of the success of this production would hang on whether an audience would believe that our actors were boxers. This was all about how the boxer is balanced, his stance, how he holds himself. We also realised that this quality was not something we could achieve or teach in the six weeks of rehearsals.

Once we had found performers whom we felt had the right physical potential (as well as all the other skills we look for in casting) we insisted they find training in boxing gyms and we supported this financially. They had between four and six months to develop the technique and fitness we would need to hit the ground running in rehearsals. This is the most we have ever asked of our cast but there was never any hint of dissent. It was plain and simple how authenticity was everything. It was equally plain and simple how the actors needed to achieve it.

We had to maintain this in the rehearsal room. We asked the cast to apply their new skills to lead a warm up each morning. Five actors playing five boxers. One leading a different warm up each for the whole of the rehearsal period.

The beauty of this was not just the fact it let us off the hook from having to create different warm ups each day but it also meant that it brought an element of competition into the warm ups. No one wanted to be seen to be providing a lesser warm up. It also meant that we could join in and be stretched and pushed without having to keep an eye on everyone else.

Below are Taqi's notes from his warm up from the first week. It might not all be completely comprehensible but it might give you an insight into the kind of routines we were keeping up in order to get everyone fitter, into shape, looking and thinking like boxers.

Taqi Session - Week 1

Start - Kevin Warm up

- moving joints on the spot to get blood flowing
- Feet hip width apart, flicking 'coins' whilst throwing, jabs, crosses, hooks. Isolate one side - Left jab, left hook, left uppercut only then right jab, hook, uppercut.

Skipping

3 minutes on clock. 1-2-1-2 rhythm only

3 minutes on clock. 30 seconds 1-2-1-2 rhythm, 30 seconds right leg in the air as close to your chest as possible. 30 seconds back to 1-2-1-2 rhythm, 30 seconds left leg in the air as close to chest. Repeat every 30 seconds for full 3 minute duration.

NO BREAK - Straight into burpees - 5 right leg only burpees, 5 left leg only burpees then 5 normal burpees

1 minute rest

Abs/Press up session (Minimum break between routines about 15 secs)

- Lying down, lower back pressed into ground raise feet 6 inches and hold for 20 seconds

- With the left leg still extended bring right leg towards chest 10 times then swap and keep the right leg extended and bring the left leg towards chest 10 times, then both legs in/out 10 times towards the chest.

15 sec rest

Press ups - 5 wide with right leg in the air, 5 left leg in the air, 5 normal

15 sec rest

Lying flat on back, back engaged with the floor, arms extended long behind your head, come up and bring your right knee up to meet your chest, repeat using alternate legs 15 reps each leg.

15 sec rest

- Lying down, lower back pressed into ground raise feet 6 inches and hold, from where you are bring your neck up and down 10 times like your nodding keeping your legs extended and off the ground.

- No break straight into plank with right leg raised for 10 secs, then swap and raise left leg for 10 secs then normal plank for 10 secs. Take further by bringing your elbows forward 12 inches past your eyes and holding for another 10 secs

15 sec rest

Press ups - right arm in close to body, left arm out in wide press up position - 5 reps. Swap over, left arm close to body, right arm out in wide press up position - 5 reps. Normal press ups - 5 reps.

15 sec rest

- Lying down, lower back pressed into ground raise feet 6 inches and hold for 20 seconds

Boxing (3 minutes at each station)

3 at each bag

2 on each pad

Bag Work - 30 secs jab, 30 secs cross. One holds bag, one punches one does 30 Secs hill sprints. Hill sprints - go into press up position legs extended and bring alternate legs to chest like your running.

Pad Work - 30 sec jab, 30 secs cross, 30 secs left hook.

NO BREAK - straight into 10/15 press ups

1 Minute Break

One from each station moves round, pad holder moves to next station to become puncher, if working on the bag move to next bag or move to become pad holder.

Bag Work - 30 secs left hook, 30 secs jab. One holds bag, one punches one does 30 Secs burpees

Pad work - 30 secs jab, 30 secs jab/cross, 30 secs cross uppercut

NO BREAK - straight into 10 super burpees. Press up when down when you come to jump up bring knees to chest.

1 Minute break

One from each station moves round, pad holder moves to next station to become puncher, if working on the bag move to next bag or move to become pad holder.

Bag Work - 30 secs body head head. One holds, one punches other 30 secs squats on the spot with arms extended out.

Pad Work - 30 Secs jab cross hook.

NO BREAK - 10 Jump Squats

WARM DOWN - Yoga Breathing

Sitting in cross leg position right index finger closes left nostril. Breath in deep into chest, close right nostril with right thumb and exhale through nose. Eyes can be closed during this to really focus in the internal. Do this for approx 20 breathes then open eyes and move from the internal to external.

The Research - the gyms, lists, DVDs, books, interviews

The starting point for *Beautiful Burnout* was remarkably vague. For a long time we only knew we wanted to make a show inspired by boxing and when pressed for what it might be about we could only say, 'It is about boxing!'

We researched boxing thoroughly. We compiled lists of boxers who were interesting and had various stories attached to them. Some of them were iconic and some lesser known. Below is a list of some of the boxers' lives we looked at

<p>Kirkland Laing - enigma? Steve Robinson Dave Boy Green retiring Errol Christie } tension Mark Kaylor }</p> <p>Herd Graham Lennox Lewis } O's breakdown Oliver McCull } Tommy Morrison - Israel Adesanya + HIV tests Sarge Frazier v Ali Colin Jones - split vote Nicky Pifer - degree Barry McGuigan - 'Danny Boy' + his Dad singing Colin McCullan - degree? Alameda? Terry Marsh + Frank Warren * Norman Wisden / Lee Evans - boxes!</p>	<p>Trainer - Angelo Dundee, Cos Jitabato Eddie Foltz, Freddie Roach* Enzo Calzaghe - not no training - not used</p> <p>70's 80's Duran, Pacaris, Hooper Leonard</p> <p>Benn ← Eubank → Watson ← McClellan</p> <p>Ken Branham Alex Arthur Jim Watt → Ricky Berns (Terry McNamee*)</p> <p>* Manny Pacquiao / Amir Khan (Narciso + Larned) Ricky Hatton → Floyd Mayweather [Boxing Doctors Johnny Owen / Duk Kim...?</p>
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We wanted to talk to people from within boxing. The boxing gym is an intimidating place and when you are not there to train and box and have a pen and paper in your hand you feel awkward and fake. Luckily, throughout our visits to gyms in Scotland, we were met by the kindest, most open people who took the time to answer our questions. We watched young boys and girls get taken through training schedules next to Commonwealth champions, British champions, and ex World champions. The atmosphere was of intense focus, learning and utter respect. The gyms we visited will be massively inspirational to us long after *Beautiful Burnout* has come and gone.

There are thousands of books and articles written on boxing. Probably the most influential on this project was *War, Baby: The Glamour of Violence* by Kevin Mitchell. It is not the best book in the world. He is a journalist for the Observer and has written better articles and there are books by academics and novelists that knock spots off it for its prose but the reason this book stood out was because of its subject matter, the 1995 fight between Nigel Benn and Gerald McClellan.

That contest, along with Eubank v Watson (1991) and Eubank v Benn (1990), is the fight most etched on my memory. It was a war. It was more explosive than anything Rocky would be brazen enough to dream up yet it was ultimately tragic. McClellan nearly died and suffered brain damage.

Many people were touched by what happened that night. As on the night Michael Watson collapsed after the fight with Chris Eubank, boxing suddenly felt more real and for some left a bad taste in the mouth. There have been tragedies since (James Murray in Glasgow in 1995) and there were even more significant tragedies before (Johnny Owen, Duk Koo Kim, whose death resulted in the limit of boxing rounds being reduced from 15 to 12. See **The Referee**) but these are the ones I somehow felt part of.

Kevin Mitchell's book brought all the conflicted emotions and memories back. The book has its clichéd moments but that era as well as being a modern golden age where perfectly matched boxers fought it out for multiple titles was also my formative years. Maybe that is why it has stayed with me so strongly. It was boxing at its best and its worst. It had me out of my seat shouting at the television and then it had me shaken and tearful, feeling dirty and complicit in someone else's very real pain.

I became convinced there was something in this story for us. Not just in the narrative but also in that jolting experience of being taken from one viewpoint to another so quickly. We had talked about how our aim with this show might be to give non-boxing fans a glimpse of the attraction and to give boxing fans a little something to shake their faith. Both the Benn v McClellan and Eubank v Watson fights seemed to be capable of that.

Eubank v Watson

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvh9-xr0gOQ>

Benn v McClellan

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Euq2OieV7Bc&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pDK1GwtxiYQ&feature=related>

The Warm Ups - Flipping what we know - Explosive before stretches

The perceived wisdom of a physical theatre warm up might be to stretch before we do anything aerobic. Visiting gyms we found that boxers would turn up and be thrown straight into extremely



Ryan Fletcher
Photo by Johan Persson

aerobic activity and finish off with stretching. Trainer Kevin Smith explained that this was because the muscles can tighten up after stretching and boxers need their muscles to have all the explosive potential to hand.

We were faced with a dilemma as the physicality we might employ over the course of a rehearsal might span the boxing world and the more overtly dance world. We bit the bullet however and plumped for a total commitment to the boxing approach.

Every morning one of the five 'boxers' would lead a warm up based on their experience within the gym they had been training at. Instantly we could see this approach pay off.

Each session would start with the loosening up of joints as we put our wraps around our hands. (I defy anyone to put wraps on and not feel cool or hard!). Not only does this

make you feel like you are a boxer but it also gives the opportunity for banter and chat. This would not normally be encouraged in a physical theatre warm up but Kevin identified it as a crucial part of how a gym creates its atmosphere of camaraderie and support.

We would move onto some cardiovascular work, often running, before we worked on specific boxing training including padwork, combinations, bagwork, bobbing and weaving, etc. We would then move on to circuit training that would include press ups, burpees, weights, pilates, etc. From there we followed a strict regime of sit-ups as it was crucial our abdomens could take a punch (and look good). Sometimes we would finish with a stretch or Yoga.

All of this was timed using the electronic bell you would find in any gym. Everything was structured around these 3 minute bursts just as it is in the boxing ring. We were slaves to the timer!

The room was filled with boisterous humour and encouragement as each of us pushed the other on to work harder and faster. This was not an affectation. It seemed to be a product of the structure as well as testament to the fantastic nature of the performers.

Fathers and Sons - the boxing family

There is a very well worn boxing cliché of the young, needy, hungry and impressionable fighter being steered along life's path by the grizzled, careworn trainer. One needs a father like the other needs a son. Picture Sylvester Stallone and Burgess Meredith in the Rocky films.

Our visits to boxing gyms did not dispel this myth. We found something a little more complex and beautiful though.

During the training session the door remains open and it is constantly opening to reveal older men just popping in to see how the boys are doing. These men stand around the room and bark out instructions, usually an echo of what the trainer has just demanded. They were all sizes and shapes and ages but they all asked for more from each boxer. More effort, more focus, more sweat. It did not matter that they might not have seen their own toes for a while because we got the impression that they had gone through this themselves and that they knew such dedication and discipline was good for a young boy/girl.

Not one boy snapped back at the elders demanding better press-ups. Each responded with just a little bit more effort. This was a room where the knowledge was being passed down. This transference of knowledge was giving kudos to the elders. They were being respected. And the young were coming here to learn from them.



Steven Hoggett and Ewan Stewart
Photo by Johan Persson

You could sense the mutual respect in the room. The focus and dedication you might have taken for granted but the manners and politeness took me by surprise. It should not have, I admit, because moments earlier as we approached the broken down hall with its chained up doors and the shaven headed boys hanging around outside it, I had another revelation. That initial image of the boys outside the hall had been intimidating. I could hear them laughing and as we got closer I felt it would only be a matter of seconds before we became the object of their derision. It was only once we stood among them trying to look inconspicuous that it became apparent just how good natured their banter was. We were welcomed inside, given the only seats, asked if we wanted tea, asked how they could help us, etc. This was a room that knew how to respect each other. Every round of sparring ended with a touch of gloves that said 'well done,' 'good work,' etc. Someone here was insisting on good manners.

This seemed at odds to the largely broken world outside. Inside there was a level of respect that might not exist outside. Was this why there was a constant stream of older men coming in to be part of this world in any way they could? To get the respect they might not get if they were to confront/talk to/connect with a similar group of boys outside this room?

Rather than confound the cliché of the surrogate father figure, our research seemed to confirm it. And it was a wonderful thing!

We should also state that this relationship is not exclusively Father and Son. Support and insight can come from different people. Boxing journalist Brian Donald sent us a book called '*The Woman in the Corner: Her Influence on Boxing*' by Gilbert Odd, about a Mother and Son in boxing. Leftjab promoter Miranda Carter might have something to say on this matter too.

<http://www.leftjab.co.uk/>

The Use of Film

Beautiful Burnout is the first show of ours to incorporate video. We had often seen shows that had not really incorporated their use of film particularly well. Working with Ian William Galloway we were desperate to avoid this accusation on *Beautiful Burnout*.

Our initial thoughts were about what a video wall might bring to the production. We had talked about how important it might be for the audience to see each other through the action as you would at a boxing match. We were thinking about a video wall incorporated within a deep thrust format. One of the first ideas for the wall was for it to somehow portray a baying crowd at a fight, replicating the effect experienced by the two side banks of our thrust configuration. This moment occurs at the end of *Menace* when the screen is filled with raging Neil Neills now forever damned to be a spectator only. (24: *Boxing Is Safer Than Crossing The Road* p77).

We kept talking to Ian about a visual quality that was haunting us. We struggled to put across what we meant and ended up talking about fireworks, the lights of Las Vegas, The Two Ronnies Christmas Specials*, Midweek Sports Special*, lens flare, to help illustrate what we were looking for. Basically we felt that the image of stars and lights shimmering was central to the video aesthetic. Not as much linked to 'seeing stars' as the glitter of big time fights in Las Vegas, Madison Square Garden, etc. We also talked about a phosphorous light quality, the glow of ingots and the shower of sparks from a forge.

Most creative discussions start off this vague. Things got practical when we could sit together and go through an early draft and say 'That's a video moment.'

We were never really aware of what was truly possible with our video wall. Our fear was that our ambitions would be devastated by the limitations of what was practical but thankfully, miraculously, Ian ran with every suggestion and delivered something more beautiful than we had even hoped for.



Ryan Fletcher
Photo by Gavin Evans

The delivery of beauty was a massive part of the video wall's remit. The set could deliver gritty, the choreography could deliver brutal and together they had the 'burnout' covered. The wall had to take a lot of responsibility for the 'beautiful' in *Beautiful Burnout* and go some way in showing us what makes these boxers take this punishment and like moths, gravitate to this light.

The film supported the notion of these boxers becoming slaves to the 3 minute rounds. It showed the relentless pounding of trainers behind the physical scene where they all get better. It let us into the eagle-eyed world of referee Steve George.

The film went on to capture some of the lives that existed outside of the gym. We saw the streets of the world in which

Cameron lives in a synaptic flashback during the fight. This involved Ian walking the streets at night with his camera capturing blurred lights, staggering drinkers, etc. He also filmed the actors in their character's environments and laced it through the flashbacks. This gave the sequence a surprising emotional depth.

* Ask someone old

The Referee

Writing the list of boxers whose stories had caught our imaginations or who had had a fundamental impact on the way we watch boxing had been quite an emotional experience. A lot of the boxers had given everything and failed. Many of them had to deal with trauma and personal demons outside the ring. Some of them had even died because of their careers in boxing.

One of the names I remembered from my childhood was Johnny Owen, a Welsh boxer nick-named the Merthyr Match because of his slight frame. I remembered the horror of seeing the footage as he falls in the 12th round and thinking I had just seen someone die. He was to go into a coma and never regain consciousness but there was something about the way he fell that told you this was the only way this could end.

Remembering Johnny Owen I started looking at other boxing deaths to get some perspective. I was reminded of the boxer Duk Koo Kim. Although I remembered his opponent Ray 'Boom Boom' Mancini more it was Duk Koo Kim who was to have the more lasting effect on boxing. In another tragedy Kim was to fall into a coma after enduring a savage beating in the 13th and 14th rounds. The referee, Richard Green, blamed himself for not intervening and allowing the fight to continue after Kim appeared to be unable to offer any resistance to the onslaught. (Others were critical of the referee too.)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duk_Koo_Kim

Three months after Kim died his mother committed suicide. Richard Green killed himself less than a year later.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Green_%28referee%29

The boxing world responded to this tragedy by improving the testing of boxers before a fight, improving the strength and numbers of the ropes to keep the boxers in the ring and, more significantly, reduce the number of rounds from 15 to a maximum of 12. (Despite this lesson learned one of the contributing factors to the brain damage received by Michael Watson in London 1991 was that there was no ambulance present at the venue to take any injured boxers to a hospital).

What stood out in this story was the impact on those around the event, namely referee Richard Green and Kim's mother who despite being on the other side of the world found each of the unanswered 39 blows endured by her son in his penultimate round equally devastating. In some ways this might not be a surprise. What was a little more interesting was the impact on the referee. He had not thrown a single punch yet felt he was responsible for Kim's death. Ray Mancini, it should be noted, also fell into

deep depression after the fight.

We became fascinated by the role of the referee and how his feelings about his work might be shattered by such a tragedy.

I interviewed boxing writer Brian Donald as someone who probably has unparalleled knowledge of the fight game in Scotland. We talked about famous fighters, the history of the sport in Scotland and some of its more colourful characters. We also talked about how our ideas for the show were taking shape and he took particular interest in the role of the referee. What I did not know before was that he had been an Amateur referee and had had the misfortune of having a boxer appear to be seriously injured in one of his bouts. He talked movingly about the weight of guilt that he carried as the young boxer struggled to recover. He attributes the reason he managed to deal with it not just to the fact the boxer made a full recovery but mostly to the letter that the trainer of the injured boxer wrote him absolving him of any blame. He said he carried that letter around with him for many years.

This weight of responsibility and the possibility for serious and fundamental damage that exists in the boxing ring became part of our thinking for *Beautiful Burnout*.

The character Steve George is not punched, his family is not hurt, he is not left looking after the injured but he does not come through it undamaged. As we pored over footage on Youtube it became clear that this must be a living hell for a referee haunted by his decisions and indecisions within the ring. There is every action and inaction played out around the world for people to comment on. Bryony Lavery took this hellish scenario but also presented it as a focus of his pride in his work before the tragic events unfold.

'Let's see that *again*, Boxing Aficionados' p10

This joy at watching his role in the boxing on the screen becomes the instrument of his torture as he reprises the words, this time bitterness replacing pride.

'Let's see that *again* and *again*, Boxing Aficionados' p84 (although the addition of the extra 'and again' will not be seen in print as it came after the print deadline).



Ryan Fetcher and Ewan Stewart
Photo by Scott Graham

God and Man

We asked a professional trainer about the tensions that might exist between a trainer and his boxer. He talked about how you might see, in a fight, a trainer slapping the face of his boxer just to get him to focus on the game plan rather than rush out swinging punches trying to knock his opponent's head off. There is so much adrenalin flying around and the boxer is fighting for his life. He is the one getting punched, broken, bloodied up. The trainer is the wiser, older and more objective head that can see how to get the best out of his boxer and what it takes for him to win.

The professional trainer also said the boxer has to do things his way otherwise there is no point in them working together. The logic follows that the moment the boxer stops listening to the trainer is the end of that special relationship they must have believed in and celebrated at some time. See *Father and Son - the boxing family*

It became clear to us that the trainer was creating a man in his image. Such a biblical parallel is reflected in the tension between Bobby and his boxers as he tells them they are nothing until he says they are, until he has finished creating them.

Bobby 'You're a champion when I say you're a champion. Who's God?

Ajay 'You are, Bobby' (p37)

This relationship works until God's favourite Angel rebels and is cast out.

Bobby 'Get your kit. And go. (He reaches into his pocket for some money.) Here... your subs back. Go spend it at another gym. I need boxers who know who knows best.' (p57)

Bobby needs absolute faith from his followers. Doubt is rewarded with expulsion.

There is another potentially explosive seam to be mined here. The phrase 'Who's God?' could be very provocative being thrown at a young (arrogant) and proud Punjabi man. This was never suggested as an explicit playing note for Bobby Burgess. Merely an idea that was probably considered and shelved

for Ewan Stewart seemed to go down a route where Bobby was not aiming to provoke at any point. He was just looking for the right answers from his followers. When Ajay can no longer give them then he must be expelled.

Ajay Because I don't always think you know better than me (p.56)

Note the deliberate double-spacing between 'Because' and 'I'. This is a familiar Bryony Lavery technique that invites a thought from the actor or suggests there is a shift in the atmosphere or the thinking here. It makes this sentence a massive moment for Ajay, as it should be considering he is about to defy God and suffer the consequences.

The Danger of Unison

Scribble, Referees and Kittens were made and rehearsed using unison. We spent hours making sure everyone was doing the same thing with the same physical quality.

We have written before about our thoughts on unison. It is brilliant to aim for it in rehearsals but it is a nightmare to put on stage. Your audience looks at the work and only sees when someone steps out of line. All of the attention and focus gets thrown onto little mistakes.

It is often one of those mistakes which reminds us to think about the choreography in a much more interesting way.

Excluding Scribble, where we committed ourselves to the dangers of unison, we set about cutting into Referees and Kittens, layering, structuring and effectively breaking up the unison within them. The choreography remained but the structure altered making for a much more complex routine.

What is surprising is that despite previously writing about the wisdom of breaking up the choreography we still had to see the mistake in rehearsals to be inspired.

Scenes

We have always named our scenes rather than number them. Sometimes the name is self-explanatory, sometimes it is the name of the track playing under it, and sometimes it might seem inexplicable. It merely serves as a short hand for us and only becomes slightly ridiculous when we have to explain ourselves at the beginning of a resource pack!

Any reference to a scene will include Bryony's scene number, her title and the page number in the published script.

The Fight - 'Beautiful Burnout'

We always knew that a fight would be central to our show. We knew it had to be realistic and it had to give audiences a glimpse of the power, effort and skill involved. We also knew that choreographing an extended fight would take up a large part of our rehearsal time. More importantly we knew that,



Ryan Fletcher and Vicki Manderson
Photo by Gavin Evans

exciting as it may begin, a boxing match, even a single round, played out in real time between two performers might just stretch credibility and interest.

We wanted our fight to be a way of tapping into the mindsets of those characters on the periphery too. The fight needed to be a massive moment for Bobby (has he rushed Cameron into this too soon? Has he let his own ego and thoughts of success cloud his judgment?), for Dina (is this where she wants to be, strutting across the ring? How does she feel about the violence now that it is happening to someone she potentially had feelings for?), for Carlotta (proud and terrified in equal measures), and ultimately for Steve George (he is left haunted by his decisions and indecisions).

With that in mind we decided it was crucial to find a template that would allow us to escape naturalism, to change the focus from the spectacle of the fight to the thoughts inside someone's head. We also decided that it was more useful to show sections from the whole fight charting the onset of exhaustion and the accumulation of blows, rather than concentrate on the final round as had been suggested.

The breakthrough moment came quite late and through listening to the music of Underworld. We realised that the template was in front of our faces. It was the track *Beautiful Burnout!* We looked

at its structure and shifts and realised it could accommodate our wish list of brutal boxing, frantic cornermen, Dina as a ring girl, moments inside the boxers' heads, etc.

We sat down and listened to the track, noting and timing its shifts. We then assigned rounds to various sections (rounds 1,4,7,10 and 12 as we felt they charted the journey through cagey opening exchanges through all out war, to utter exhaustion). The planning process took less than half an hour. Until that breakthrough *The Fight* was daunting and terrifying. Not so much the choreography, as that was always going to be part of the brief for this show, but the task of placing the fight in this world and making it interesting and important. Attaching *The Fight* to *Beautiful Burnout* made our job so much easier.

In the process of researching and making *Beautiful Burnout* we watched a lot of boxing. The more you watch boxing the more you might appreciate (believe it or not) its subtlety and how every fight is a clash of styles and tactics as much as strength and will.

You can get yourself lost in the sheer volume of footage out there on DVD and the internet. We wanted our boxers to look at real boxing matches rather than choreograph from scratch as, just like our observation of the referees and the knock outs, what actually happens is often so much more



Lorraine M McIntosh
Photo by Scott Graham

interesting and strange than what you think should be happening. We wanted our actors to see that boxing is not all toe to toe slugging matches as you might believe from watching *Rocky*. Much of it is like chess. A lot of it is messy and chaotic. Some of it is almost balletic.

To help them from getting lost in the footage we specified a certain era and a certain weight division to explore, namely the Welterweight/Middleweight division and specifically the 'Golden' era of Sugar Ray Leonard, Thomas Hearns, Roberto Duran and Marvin Hagler. We 'stole' moments from these fights, adapted them and laced them through the choreography.

It was important to find boxing styles that worked for the characters and for the physique and style of our performers. We looked at Chris Eubank's fights and Prince Naseem Hamed to inspire the cocky showboating style of Ajay Chopra.

For Cameron Burns we looked at Barry McGuigan, specifically how he brought his aggression to the more fluid and flamboyant Eusebio Pedroza.

When choreographing fights there is always a danger that the rush of adrenalin makes us run before we can walk. It is so easy to get carried away. We had to be very careful to always think of the fighting as placed choreography that must be danced as a duet. The problem was the importance this fight has within the show, not just in the storytelling, but in the whole credibility of portraying the actors as boxers. The actors were acutely aware of this and were desperate to get to the stage where they looked like boxers slugging it out. This meant we often had to reign them in to keep them safe. We had to convince them that we would get to where we wanted to. We just had to make sure we got their in one piece.

Once we had choreographed the fighting we could concentrate on the story telling. We had identified moments where we take the focus into the heads of both boxers as they reel from blows to the head. We also began choreographing the cornermen and their frenetic attempts to patch up and repair their man. With the main boxing choreography solid and secure we could place Dina as the card girl through the action. We did not want to have her coming onto the stage only at the beginnings or ends of rounds. We wanted her to move between blows, passing between the boxers with only inches to spare.

We also wanted to bring Carlotta closer to the action. One of the last moments we choreographed was bringing Carlotta into the ring with a drink in her hand and swap places with Dina. Carlotta, having looked with concern towards Cameron being worked on by his cornermen, finds herself with the round card, strutting her way across the ring as Dina is left looking concerned with drink in hand.

Just as we had considered the impact of exhaustion upon the boxers we were also keen to see the effect on Dina. As the fight progresses she is more and more disturbed and broken eventually hobbling with one shoe, crying, make up smeared, barely able to lift the card above her head. The more we watched the fight the more we could spot opportunities for simple interactions between people that we had not initially thought of.

In addition to the choreography the use of film gave us unlimited access to the mind of Cameron Burns as it recoils and regroups from the impact it has received. This is the first time we have worked with film and Ian William Galloway promised much and delivered even more. See **The Use of Film**.

Kittens

Of course you won't find a scene called Kittens. Again, this comes from the short-hand between directors and refers to the physical scene between 13 and 14. We wanted an explosive montage (for want of a better word) that charted the improvements made by the boxers as they, 'just get better' (p47).

The montage is the most hackneyed and clichéd section of any boxing movie. *Team America: World Police* has already killed any credibility it once had with a merciless parody but we decided to bite the bullet and believe in our instincts with this one. We really felt we could make an interesting section highlighting how all the training was beginning to turn these young people into credible boxers.

We split the scene into possible sections. We identified skipping, shadow boxing, footwork, receiving blows, and confident physicality. (The receiving blows section can be looked at in more detail in **Head Smacks**). We got the performers to create short strings in small groups allowing us to make work separately. This meant we could be working on the details of existing choreography while another group can be finding new choreography.

Once we had the choreography in all these sections the job was to construct the scene in an interesting and dynamic way. We split these sections further and created structural choreography that would allow the performers to pass through each other intricately and join back up into moments of unison.

It was fairly simple in construction but the pumping track underneath compliments the action.

By the way, the track is called 'Kittens' from the album *Beaucoup Fish*, hence the title of the scene.

During the technical rehearsals, video artist Ian William Galloway used images of impossibly cute kittens as screen savers for the bank of televisions at one end of the set. Of course they had nothing to do with the show but when a journalist was given access to the technical rehearsals he wrote how we project images of cute kittens to contrast with the brutality of the boxing!

Wraps

This comes straight from the research and development sessions from the year before. Having observed the practice of wrapping up the boxers hands we noted how almost spiritual it looked. There was a Christ like echo here.



Ewan Stewart
Photo by Johan Persson

We decided to get some boxing wraps and play with them. (We also tried towels which became **Trainer and Boxer**).

We tried to find ways of using the wraps to manipulate the boxer. This turned him into a passive marionette controlled by outside forces. Noting this we then tried to see if we could subvert this. We asked the boxer to make tiny movements while winding these long wraps around his hands. He was to only use one hands and someone else would be on the other end of the wrap being pulled around on the whim of the boxer. This put all the control into the hands of the boxer. He became centre of the universe. In an exercise like this it is always useful to note that you can get such extremes from the results. This makes it full of so much more theatrical potential.

We started to play with the intimacy of the moment of putting on wraps. Traditionally, before a fight, a trainer would put the wraps on the boxer (overseen or checked by someone from the opposing team). There was something important about this tradition, right or honour. It struck us as the perfect way for Cameron to be accepted into the fold of the gym.

'This is your *planet* now, Cameron Burns' (p23)

Within this scene (6, **Welcome to my Strange Planet**, p23) we set out to show that growing connection between Bobby and Cameron as Bobby takes ownership of him, reeling him into his world. The wraps are laid out between them and Bobby manipulates Cameron's arms in a way he has never moved before. The tension in the wraps sometimes suggests hesitance, sometimes it makes Bobby the puppet master. Sometimes it even looks like blood or veins linking Bobby to Cameron.

'We don't get given a big bag full of luck
People like us' (p24)

Slowly we wanted it to become clear that Bobby is not just moving Cameron or inspiring him to move in a certain way. He is skillfully wrapping his hands. He is turning him from a tearaway into something legitimate. He is already working on his promise. He is turning him into a boxer.

Scribble

Scribble is named after the Underworld track we use under it. We were looking for a scene to capture the intense focus of a training session but also the exhilaration in hard work. We had to give the audience a sense of what exists the other side of the pain, namely the rush of adrenalin and endorphins.

We knew the physicality would be based on training techniques. To create the vocabulary for Scribble we set the cast the task of creating two bars of movement based on naturalistic but fractured moments from our many warm ups and training sessions. There was a massive variety of moves to draw on and by splitting the group up so they work individually we would end up with many different variations.

It is fairly standard choreographic practice of ours to split up the creative task like this. It gives everyone an input without crippling them with any responsibility for what the finished scene might look for. This time it was not about keeping people busy or feel like they are contributing. We took this route because we wanted Scribble to feel like every possible training session for each of the characters crammed into a 3 minute burst. The aim of the scene was remarkably similar to creative task behind it.

Scribble took up a lot of time as once the choreography was captured and placed in order it needed to be finessed. There were several important stages to this.

ONE

The scene is rehearsed to a slower tempo track to make sure all the moves are being completed and everyone has got the choreography down.

TWO

Then it is rehearsed with the Scribble track underneath. This is a much faster tempo and almost feels impossible but it is where we need to be heading!

THREE

People are getting it wrong! We make them perform it on their own in front of the rest of the group. This is not an act of cruelty. We are making a point here (although it is quite a brutal one). We have noticed that some people are watching others while performing it. It means they are depending on the other person and are performing their moves a split second after! It is the depending on the other that is the problem here. While they have the safety net of watching the other person they will never take responsibility for knowing their own moves. When we get them to perform it on their own the results are invariably, after a few panics and meltdowns, a massive improvement. In fact they are an improvement that would not have taken place had we not confronted performers hiding behind others!

FOUR

The finished routine is properly finessed. This means taking it apart and putting it back together like a mechanic would do to an engine. You clean bits that have been sticking, you change bits that are not firing cleanly. This focus on the minute takes time.

FIVE

The choreography now needs to be performed rather than merely danced. We have to find a way of capturing the thrill, camaraderie and support of the rehearsals we have gone through for the past 5 weeks and put some of that energy on the stage. The performers are given the freedom to shout instructions and encouragement to each other through Scribble. This now lifts the whole performance and interestingly we don't see the minor errors that blight unison. Instead of seeing dancers trying to move incredibly quickly in time with one another what we see is a room full of young people ready to push their bodies, desperate to give every last gram of energy over the next few minutes. The clarification of a context for the moves makes our audience understand the imperative for them and ultimately makes them more likely to forgive any discrepancy in the unison.



Taqi Nazeer
Photo by Johan Persson

This is your Scribble!

Scribble was a very hard section to learn and took up a lot of time, sweat and sleepless nights. It became all the boxing performers' nightmare. 'Scribble' had become a short-hand for a brain scrambling exhaustion that was inescapable and had to be conquered.

Subsequently whenever anyone came up against the seemingly impossible they were told in no uncertain terms by members of the cast and crew,

'Come on, you! This is your Scribble!' meaning that the pressure was on and you were going to have to get it right.

This banter was applied to many people in many aspects of the show. For Ewan Stewart 'Catch Up' and its insane padwork became his Scribble! Stage Manager, Joni Carter, was informed that the ridiculously difficult task of preempting the stopping and starting of the revolve with the cueing of the lights and sounds, all in time with the choreographed blows in 23, **Arrested Punches** (p72), was, indeed, her Scribble! Lorraine M McIntosh was struggling with the task of keeping her opening scene fresh while making sure it lasted exactly three minutes until she was informed this was her Scribble.

The phrase could change its meaning in the mind of the beholder depending on their optimism. It could mean 'this is your moment!' Equally it could mean 'this is your Waterloo!'

Things came full circle when Ryan Fletcher was struggling to get an aspect of Scribble right and he was helpfully reminded that Scribble was his Scribble!

One Punch

There is a quote from Muhammed Ali from his sparring sessions with Greg Page. He said 'That boy hit me so hard, it jarred my kinfolks in Africa.'

While this was a joke it touched upon a concept we were already thinking about, namely the idea that

a punch that is thrown from a distance of three feet can be felt by many people all around the world. This concept was central to one of our favourite novels, coincidentally titled *Underworld*, by Don DeLillo.

'Underworld' starts at a baseball match and spins out from there, loosely following the journey of a ball that was hit out of the ground by what was termed 'the shot heard 'round the world.'

This inspiration was referenced in the title of scene 28, **One Punch Can Go Round The World. Fact.** p84 (see also **The Referee**)

This scene sees members of the gym talking awkwardly to the audience offering a mixture of stilted defiance and from the heart honesty. This all takes place in the aftermath of Cameron's injury. We asked the performers to think of this scene as an interview and them as reluctant interviewees.

We asked them to picture this happening outside the gym on a cold evening. Even though they are all on stage together we asked them to think of these as separate interviews.

Here were the people touched by Cameron's situation all trying to get on with their lives. Bobby finds another boxer to believe in. Dina states 'He got what he wanted. He is famous in a way' that tries to suggest she is not as affected by the situation as we know she is.

The idea was that we see these people feel the blows taken by Cameron on the night of the fight. Throughout the text of scene 28 we highlighted precise moments where these blows would be felt and actioned. For example, the underscore marks the moment a punch is landed on all of the people on stage at the same time.

'He is famous in a way ___' (p.86)

The ___ indicates a punch. There are two in this short sentence.

Each punch is felt but ignored the second after. These are all repressed impacts, hidden deep inside the psyche of each character.

The result is a very simple scene of restrained physical jolts and recoils.

(Greg Page would suffer a terrible brain injury in a match in Kentucky in 2001. There was no oxygen ringside. Even the doctor had left the building when Page was knocked out. Boxing can be very slow in learning its lessons. He was to die 8 years later partly due to complications from his injuries)



Eddie Kay
Photo by Gavin Evans

Catch Up

Catch Up was the name Steven and I used for scene 14, **'Four Light Years Later'** p47. It is not a better title. It just became a short hand that identified quickly the scene and the intention behind it. Bryony's title has all the depth, poetry and conceptual imagery. Ours was far more a matter of function!

We called this scene Catch Up as the preceding scene Kittens catapults us through 4 years of intense training and significant improvement and here Bobby reintroduces us to his now talented warriors. It was our first chance to catch up with his charges now that all the sweat, discipline and hard work was beginning to fall into place.



Taqi Nazeer and Scott Graham
Photo by Johan Persson

It was this reintroduction that afforded us the opportunity to showcase some skills. We talk elsewhere in this pack how we took a massive risk asking our performers to perform bad boxing for the first half of the play and Kittens and Catch Up became the first opportunity to show some proper boxing skills.

Of course the scene was about more than the opportunity for the actors and us to show off. It was actually about the character Bobby Burgess's chance to show off. It is with immense pride that he introduces each of the boxers in turn and takes them through some padwork.

Padwork is a difficult and exhausting exercise for both sides involved. It is so easy to unravel that great boxing technique you have been working on by over reaching with a punch or losing all

coordination. The reason we were so excited about pursuing it was that each interaction between Bobby and a boxer could offer such a dynamic and economical insight into the style of the boxer and their relationship with their trainer.

Again, we turned to Youtube for footage of boxers going through intense work on the pads. What we were looking for on a basic level was the choreography of padwork but also more importantly different styles of padwork that would suit the styles and personalities of our characters.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JRPmiXRvq8Y>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQltjmMO-5M>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QevWKNM9JWY>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CRNTTQ-mpjM&feature=related>

Once we had found footage that would be of use we got to work with our performers.

The particular difficulty with this scene is that it is actually a very intense high risk duet. Those are very real punches flying around and they have to connect with the pads perfectly if it is to sound right. It is the sound of the leather gloves hitting the pad that would enforce or kill our credibility. A lot of that responsibility lay with the actor playing Billy Burgess, Ewan Stewart. All of the action had to take place with him so while each boxer had a new dangerous duet to learn, Ewan had to learn five. And say his lines! (See **This Is Your Scribble!**)

To save him from even more stress we opted to make the choreography with the boxers first, getting them up to speed and then giving Ewan some time to learn it with them. This took the creative responsibility away from Ewan, not because he was not up to it (he has a very good boxing brain) but because we knew this scene would be massive for him and probably more stressful than anything anyone else would have to do in the play.

The risk of injury was very real and not just from the punches. The pads Ewan wears are heavy and hard and one move out of position and someone will get a broken nose or black eye (just ask Eddie Kay). All of this added to the tension behind a scene that had to be played as if this was the slickest and easiest thing in the world for these talented people (which added to the tension!).

We had to rehearse this in tiny bites as there was so much information to take in it would be so easy for Ewan to get swamped. As Ewan was not in Kittens we used the opportunity for him and I to work together. I learned all the boxers padwork so that I could help Ewan practice in any spare moment and get his speed and confidence up. Eventually we started to string it together bringing two boxers to Ewan in a row and then building up to the full scene.

Ewan was also given some invaluable tips by Terry McCormack when visiting his gym in Edinburgh.

Ewan did not know that Terry was in the audience on press night but was very relieved to get his seal of approval in a text after the show!

Referees

The groundwork

From the beginning we were fascinated by the role of the third person in the ring. The referee. We were interested in his moral role, in his task of 'Protecting the boxer without fear or favour' (See **The Referee**) but the more footage we watched we became more and more mesmerized by his movement around the ring. He is poised ready to jump in and protect a boxer, to leap into the centre of the action, but equally doing all he can to be invisible and unobtrusive.

Most people will watch a boxing match and only see two people but if you look at the footage again, there he is circling, intercepting, watching. We split our performers into 3 teams of 2 (Ewan was set a separate task that would form the basis of the Catch Up padwork scene). We asked each team to watch the footage again but this time to try to ignore the boxers and focus on the physicality of the referee, noticing how light he is on his feet, how coiled and ready to pounce he is. They were asked to write down what he did including anything that surprised them about his physicality. This resulted in a list of incredibly strange and quirky tics and jolts, leaps and skips, hand gestures and signals.

Each group then had to replicate his movements in detail and in a unison duet. They were instructed to create a short string of movement based on the referee movement they had observed. By working separately and on different footage featuring boxing from the 1980's, through the 1990's and up to the present day the intention was for our groups to provide contrasting duets.

This turned out to be the case. Each group then performed their research, their string of unison, for the others. We filmed these and then left them there.

The Scene

We knew we wanted to create a movement scene based on this particular physicality. At some point we had talked about how we might open the show with a disarming and comic Referee movement section. We liked the idea of a ring full of referees all going through their moves. This would be a strong contrast to the image of the loneliness of the single referee.

The position of this scene moved as the structure of *Beautiful Burnout* began to take shape. As our referee had a text scene near the beginning, ultimately the beginning itself, we decided to place his physical scene around and through the main fight.

We knew it would be performed by Eddie Kay as Steve George but who would the other referees be? We quickly realized that the only people who would be available at this point in the show would be Henry Pettigrew and Vicki Manderson. This meant that Vicky would have to transform from a referee into Dina as a ring girl on stage. We were very excited about the possibility of this and the potential of her reprised section beginning 'You can wipe that 'what the fuck is she doing here?' look off your faces.' This power of this transformation led to the insertion of the line 'You'll watch me go 12 rounds now, won't you?'

We set Eddie Kay, Vicki Manderson and Henry Pettigrew the task of looking through the choreographed sections from each group and turning five or six minutes of material into a 90 second string of choice cuts. Once they had this they worked on being able to perform this in tight unison. (We used an instrumental version of *Faxed Invitation*, specially provided for us by Underworld).

Rehearsing revelation

While running the scene on the second last day in rehearsal Vicki Manderson, who was positioned at the front of the three and could not see the other two, accidentally cut a section and boldly stuck out on her own performing a while the other two stood perfectly still looking at her! While it was slightly embarrassing for her it was revelatory for us. It just looked so much better and reminded us of one of our rules of choreography - rehearse in unison but seldom perform in unison.

Excited by new possibilities we asked the team to find more moments where one of the three might get left behind in the choreography while the other two continued, only to be picked up again and join the unison only for it to be broken again by another performer dropping out.

The result was something much more textured and pleasing that happily avoided **The Danger of Unison**.



Vicki Manderson
Photo by Johan Persson

Exercises

These are exercises that we employed in the rehearsal room believing they would become or that they would contribute to physical scenes.

Head Smacks

This was a bit of a grizzly task. Again we turned to DVDs and Youtube for footage, this time of knockout punches. It was not the punch we were looking at but the reaction to the impact. We were looking to see where the force affected the recipient noting that the knees were often the first part of the body to react to the punch. We spent time looking at how the head might recoil or be forced back. We looked at how the receiving boxer might be half way through a punch and how everything changes from the moment of that decisive impact.



Ryan Fletcher and Taqi Nazeer
Photo by Gavin Evans

In a creative task similar to Referees we split the actors into two teams and got them to create a short string of 'Head Smacks' using what we had learned about how the body reacts to punches to the head. We instructed them to avoid telling us the story of one fight. This was not about someone's punishment in their final round. The string of material could be impossible and implausible. It was just to be dynamic physical reactions to numerous punches. It needed to be performed without emotional content.

Again, after developing them, we filmed the results. We did not know where we were going to use this material. We just knew that it would come in handy at some point! See **Kittens**.

Trainer and Boxer

We were interested in the intimate and tactile relationship between a trainer and his boxer. Our research in gyms had presented these fascinating, challenging and touching **Father and Sons** relationships and we felt there was a potential physical scene to be created from this interaction.

This exercise was originally used in the initial research and development weeks. We returned to the process in rehearsals.

We set our performers in groups of 2 and assigned each the role of trainer or boxer. The trainer had to find ways of manipulating the boxer, getting him out of the chair, walking forward, turning around, back into the chair, etc. All he could use was a towel.

With the towel he could wipe the boxer down, tie him up, embrace him like a child coming out of the bath, cover his face, pull him about.

We asked each group to explore these dynamics and eventually set some material. As ever, this was performed and filmed. The results were very tender and beautiful. The unspoken dynamic was rich and



Ewan Stewart
Photo by Johan Persson

complex, at times suggesting a reluctance in the boxer to move forward to the fight, at times a reluctance in the trainer to send his boy out there. There were also massive shifts in the strength of each character. A caring trainer would gently wipe the sweat from his boxer and suddenly find himself lifted off his feet by the power of his charge. You can see more of this in the footage from the research and development sessions at <http://vimeo.com/8816991>

We constantly believed there was a place in the show for this material but it never really found a place of its own. The physical relationship between the boxer and the trainer became more and more distilled and eventually found a home in the scenes **Wraps** and **Wraps 2** (A highly distilled reprise of Wraps that happens between a nervous Cameron

and Bobby just before the fight). Some of the material created by this process can also be found in sections of The Fight.

Useful sites

<http://www.dooyoo.co.uk/discussion/is-boxing-worth-the-risk/302735/>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boxing>

http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/boxing/get_involved/4253766.stm

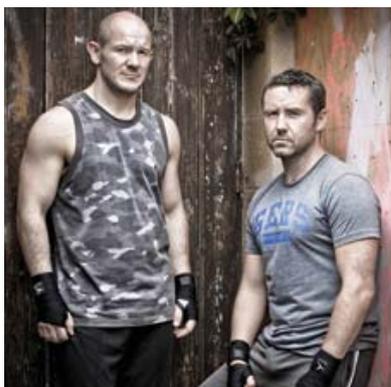
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/boxing/4733928.stm>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierce_Egan

Bibliography

This resource pack is full of references and links you might see appear at the end of such a document. We like to keep our bibliography a bit different. Here are links, films, photos, songs, moments, people who in some way, no matter how small or strangely, have contributed to the creative process of making *Beautiful Burnout*.

We have always wanted the creative process to be accessible and demystified and we believe that inspiration comes from all places and not just from the places that make us sound clever. It is unashamedly nonacademic. So here goes...



Steven Hoggett and Scott Graham.

Not actual size

Photo by Johan Persson

Kevin Smith boxing coach

Terry McCormack boxing trainer

Freddie Roach boxing trainer

John Thain boxer

Alex Arthur boxer

Paul Appleby boxer

Ken Buchanan boxing legend

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ken_Buchanan

Trainer Danny Lee turning up slightly late to lead training, still in his work clothes

The mother that brought her terrified, angelic looking boy to Danny's gym for the first time

Dr Brian Tansy

Andy Goldberg taking Steven to Gleason's Gym, Brooklyn, NY

Mike Gillespie - Underworld

Brian Donald boxing writer

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/sportscotland/asportingnation/player/rhn/waryears.shtml?none>

Underworld band

Team America: World Police film

Layer Cake film

The Two Ronnies TV series

Rubber Johnny by Chris Cunningham short film

The Fabulous Four - Duran, Hearn, Leonard, Hagler DVD

Showboating - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roberto_Duran

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki>Showboating>

Her Morning Elegance - Oren Lavie - video

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2_HXUhShhmY&feature=player_embedded

Underworld by Don DeLillo novel

On Boxing by Joyce Carol Oates book

War, Baby: The Glamour of Violence by Kevin Mitchell book

The Sweet Science by A.J. Liebling book

Boxing: A Cultural History by Kasia Boddy book

Fists by Pietro Grossi and Howard Curtis novel