

REHEARSAL↔REVERSAL experiment 3: Structured Spontaneity.

By: Goossun Art-illery, DK – Modern Times Stage Company, CAN – Laboratoriet, DK

Daily reports by Debbie Kent

Prep day 10 January

A day of meetings, shopping, cooking for everyone. Trying to remember names. A lot of new people to discover. A lot of excitement hearing about what lies ahead. It is exactly the sort of thing I want to be doing right now - so much so that I might be dreaming. (Also, fear of being discovered as a fraud and pretender, as ever.) So much information, anxiety about not being able to contain it. What a waste of energy such anxiety is. I need to try to find my own path through it and I will, whatever happens. Such an opportunity, it makes me feel tearful...

Day one Monday 11 January

A day of attention - watching, receiving, absorbing. A long, long day!

It starts gently: everyone observes the 'peaceful morning' rules and personal warm-ups ease into a group exercise playing handball. I find myself between Lene and Sue, both fiercely competitive players, while I start off by missing or misfiring the ball more often than not. Strange that in bed last night a memory of schooldays jumped into my mind I remembered how I practised and practised in order to be able to catch a ball so that the other children would not mock me for dropping it... But soon we all get better at passing the ball. Already we are starting to feel like a real group.

Then we watch a training session. Vahid feeds instructions to Dafne and Steve, adding in elements bit by bit so that walking round the room in their separate worlds develops into (eventually) a tango-battle. The stages include walking to discover the space; sensing each other's presence; sensing the other's direction of gaze; stopping at given intervals and turning to look in that direction; following the other without being caught; taking on board the spirit of a cartoon/detective; making sounds for different walks; using the Pink Panther music; and finally, trying all these things while locked in a tango. The tango music is fast and folk-ish (something Balkan?) and it turns into a crazed whirling dance of conflict, then in slow motion this becomes a desperate pull-and-push of mutual pain. At some point along the way, an instruction has been added to use text - Dafne's is in Greek and sounds passionate and emotional, while Steve's is from an article about a jazz musician. What started as an abstract pattern has gone through various metamorphoses - into an alien mating ritual of pursuit and evasion (and implied consumption); into a ceremonial dancing of a long-forgotten myth; into the dance of lovers, each secretly double agents who have forgotten which side they are on; into two people bound by invisible threads of separate pain. Towards the end Vahid puts on a monologue by Steve, recorded from an earlier residency, to see what the effect will be; then a piece of booming, portentous music (Pink Floyd?), during which Dafne and Steve sink slowly to the floor...

Before lunch we contribute the objects we've brought to represent 'home'. They sit in a row on a shelf at one side of the studio - intriguing and suggestive. I remember a rosary (or a kombouloi?), a piece of stained glass with the serenity prayer on it, some herbs, a small bag, a tiny object I didn't recognise, a crocheted blanket. I have brought a crow's feather. Also on the shelf are the 'set texts' - our short reading list of David Mamet and Thomas Richards, for anyone to borrow. Vahid tells later that these are two of his key texts - touchstones for him as a director; by sharing them with us he is sharing himself. In the afternoon (or maybe also in the morning - the day has blurred into one long session), we get our first sight of the sequences that Dafne and Steve have separately

devised with Vahid. Steve's first sequence segues straight into the second, so a few of us don't realise there are two; they are called Shout and Flying Butler, and both involve five chairs distributed around the space. In each, he moves between the chairs, a collage of sound and movement. Dafne's sequences are clearer as they are performed separately. The first, Blue, involves one chair; the second, Truth is Fragmented, is performed with the audience in the round. I won't say too much about these at the moment as they are our main task for the week - to contribute another layer for Soheil to add to his mix. They are still percolating in my brain, and tomorrow will be spent revisiting them many times. I have taken hundreds of photos, which may or may not help.)

Vahid works to refine Blue with Dafne towards the end of the afternoon, so me and Sue get a better chance to absorb it. I scribble some thoughts as I watch, to do with a goddess transforming into her priestess, paintings (until the end the action seems confined to a 2D plane and highly stylised), a shifting world of illusion and metamorphosis. It feels very contained and inward-looking, almost claustrophobically so – I wonder what on earth I can take from it ...

*The world pours like sand
through your fingers.
Time shatters and melts
beneath your feet,
hurling you into
ice-cold ocean darkness
(lose yourself in waiting and
the invisible guest will never appear).*

From notes inspired by the Blue sequence, Arhus Laboratoriet work, 12/1/10, dk

The day ends with a screening of Rashomon and a chat about its relevance afterwards. Vahid talks about how the camera movement through the forest and editing in each section reflects each character – this is what he finds so fascinating. He leaves us with the thought that he dreams of recutting Rashomon to turn it into Waiting for Godot and our ideas for this week can be as insane and wild as that. No pressure, then!

Day two Tuesday 12 January

A day of ideas.

A short entry as the evening is packed with work.

In the morning a short warm-up (we're getting better at the ball game) is followed by the three performers (Julia has joined Dafne and Steve) doing the Study exercise followed by Tarkovsky's Lake - I remember seeing the latter developed at the Goldsmiths residency, now it's part of the repertoire. Then Vahid works with Steve to refine his two sequences and me, Sue and Soheil have a chance to see them in more detail.

At lunchtime I tell Vahid and Barbara about my approach - so far a general idea about service and servants, collecting text from everything from machine instructions to news stories about Princess Diana's former butler Paul Burrell. (Later tonight I will find all sorts of things to draw upon - too much material! There's enough to sift through for days but I try to select bites of it for a montage that Soheil can choose lines from if he wishes.)

In the afternoon we see Dafne revisit Blue and do Truth is Fragmented with many different soundtracks - including a very rough group choir singing Das Beckwerk's anthem... Yesterday Dafne had to speak and laugh at the same time, today she was challenged to

sing and bark simultaneously, while Steve had to sing and make siren sounds. Vahid believes in challenging the people he works with...

At the end of the day we watch a film about Grotowski and training showing a session led by Ryszard Cieslak, followed by a fascinating discussion about the differences and similarities of this and Vahid's work, and about many other things including truth, memory and the search for meaning. Cieslak's muscles are mentioned, as is clothing in rehearsal and performance, and its absence. Soheil has seen Cieslak in action and talks about what an extraordinary presence he is – someone who is completely present.

We leave with tasks - in my case, writing up material for Soheil as well as writing a story from one of the objects everyone brought. And this report, which is why it's so brief!

Object story

I found it in the turn-up of my trousers one day. No idea how it got there. I didn't even know what it was. Jakob said it was a piece of microfilm. He said a spy must have planted it there and I should put it back because another spy would come to collect it one day. As if I was a human hiding-place. I asked them how they would know where to find me. What if it was a school day and I was wearing a skirt? Jakob said spies know everything, that's their job. I said what if the Secret Police find me first and Jakob said the Secret Police would never find me because they were idiots and I was clever. Then he tried to give me a hug and I pushed him away – or maybe I hit him, because I didn't want him to think I was a stupid scared little girl. Anyway, he said I started it and to be fair usually I did start all the fights we had because I thought it was best to get my retribution in first, and this was one of those times when I knew a fight was bound to happen. I didn't fight with any of my other brothers, just Jakob, because we were both stubborn and besides, we enjoyed it. Sooner or later, Mum came in to tell us off because she didn't want the woman upstairs to complain again, and it was the second or third time that week she had caught us fighting, and I thought she was sure to give me a beating, so when Jakob said I had started it, I told Mum that he had said he would report me to the Secret Police for being a spy. After that he was in big trouble. I thought Mum would shout but she didn't, she went very quiet instead and dragged Jakob out of the room. I don't know what she said to him, he never told me, not even weeks later after we had made it up and he was speaking to me again. Not even years later, when we were both living in a different country. This was a long time ago, I don't know why I'm thinking of it now. I remember finding the small black circle on the floor the next day and thinking, oh, this must be a sequin from one of Auntie's dress ladies, and I wrapped it up in a piece of paper and put it away in my treasure box and forgot all about it. It wouldn't happen nowadays, spies don't use microfilm any more. Everyone has computers.

Exercise, Arhus Laboratoriet work, 12/1/10, dk

The material on servants, servility and service I prepare for Soheil is taken from various sources, including a couple suggested by Vahid (a TS Eliot poem and the novel Remains of the Day). I raid the web to steal stories of immigrant domestic servants from a UK charity; readers' comments on a BBC news item about the plight of exploited servants; the British Butlers' Association website; a 1911 guide to employing servants; the instructions for using a Dyson vacuum cleaner... Oh, yes, and Hamlet. I include some material on servants and spying, as Soheil has told me at lunchtime that he is interested in the significance of spying in Hamlet and has been inspired by Vahid's following/tango exercise on Monday.

The English servant has been brought up to know her place.

Here, sweet lord, at your service.

The safety alert ratchet noise warns that the brushbar is obstructed.

The more nearly perfect a machine, the more noticeable any flaw in its operation.

Take you me for a sponge, my lord?

...

As a spy, the software would provide a means to watch carefully the coming and going of residents, note suspicious patterns and report them.

Everything that you do, and very much that you say at home, is related in your servants' families and by them retailed to other gossips, until you almost feel that you might as well live in a glass house or a whispering gallery

Diana called me in, and there was Burrell kissing her feet. She had caught him looking through her private papers and he was attempting to ask forgiveness.

I was honoured and privileged to keep those secrets, which I intend to still keep.

The princess called me her emotional washing machine. She could go out, and could come back with all her troubles, all her problems, she could tell me about them, and then go back and get more....

when he needs what you have
gleaned, it is but squeezing you, and, sponge, you
shall be dry again.

Extract from montage/material on servants, Arhus Laboratoriet work, 12/1/10, dk

Day three Wednesday 13 January

A day of learning. And midweek energy sag.

Morning routine as before - except that our ball skills seem to have gone into reverse - then the performers work on the Study and develop the Tarkovsky's Lake exercise into an improv with some of the objects, with Dafne and Julia giving Steve a manicure/pedicure using the glass serenity prayer as a hand mirror. Vahid asks me to write some words to feed to the performers - something an overseer might say in a forced labour camp. I feel rough as anything after 5 hours' sleep and misunderstand at first but come up with some instructions eventually.

Today you are digging the field. Take a spade. Quick! Run and take it to the field. Dig! Work harder. What are you, a little girl? Harder. Dig. Dig. Dig.

Today you working in the mine. Take a pick. Hurry. Get in the lift. Stop coughing.

Anyone who coughs will be beaten. Anyone who falls will be beaten. Anyone who stops will be beaten.

Today you are breaking stones. You must work faster. Faster. You idle lump of flesh. You must break the whole pile before noon. Do not dare to faint or stumble. Do not look up. Look at your job you moron.

Exercise, Arhus Laboratoriet work, 13/1/10, dk

Dafne takes my words and eats them (literally)...

Soheil takes over at 10.30. He says we are at a disadvantage as he saw our work and we haven't seen his - he considers himself a collaborator and plans to work through collaborating with all the people in the room. This morning is to be about establishing a vocabulary and way of working. He emphasises that he is interested in the process of experimentation and discovery and that there is no such thing as failure - something you fail to achieve in one production can emerge much later on. He also talks about how his job is to try to find the essence of the scene we're looking at. All this sounds great and I'm really looking forward to working with him.

Soheil is looking to find a way into HamletZar and starts with a simple exercise around spying and detectives, inspired by Vahid's training session on Monday and playing with what he describes as a hunch. He sees spying as one of the important themes in Hamlet - so many characters do it including Hamlet himself. We find out that this is why he has cleared the side of the studio - to enable the performers to use the two pillars in that part of the space as hiding spaces in the imagined hall of a grand palace.

The performers start walking, and pick someone to spy on - with the idea of hiding what they are doing from that person but also revealing it to the audience. They mutter reports into secret transmitters and the air becomes filled with whispers and cross-currents of conspiracy and collaboration. Sue later describes this rather beautifully as a "triangle of paranoia" - the watchers are all watching and reporting on each other.

The exercises in hiding and spying, freezing and moving, begin with the performers using real pillars. This shifts as each of them takes a stick, learns to treat it as a portable, invisible pillar by using their body memory of moving round a real one, and plays with a series of switching between moves - casually to disguise their intention, slowly to see their target, urgently to hide, frozen to remain unseen. Soheil is keen to ensure the performers move with intention and make specific choices. The stick is used as a tool and a diversion - it becomes a guard's pike, a fishing rod, a toy...

Passers by are introduced into the relationship between spy and target to see what happens - if they "don't see" the hidden spy, does it help reinforce the illusion that the spy is really hidden? When Soheil comes up behind Steve and starts asking what he's doing, Steve quickly concocts a ludicrous explanation (all without leaving his Keith Jarrett text).

As the morning ends the exercise has evolved into a tense thriller, with Dafne's spy-turned-assassin, egged on by Steve, threatening Julia's unknowing Claudius. I am inspired to explore assassins further - maybe later in the week or after the Lab. I find a great, evocative list of 21st-century assassinations (at www.assassinology.org/id21.html), though none of them seem to involve the conspiracy of a wife and a brother who are secretly lovers...

Soheil has said he is keen to generate ideas in the Lab space and Sue told me she was planning to play it by ear, working with him in the moment, whereas I have conscientiously done my homework and produced some written material. I'm beginning to think she has the right idea, though Vahid assures me he will do something with my servant material later in the week. In the afternoon, I read it out. Having glimpsed how Soheil works now, I worry that it is too much "HamletZar" ie a montage, a bit off-the-wall, and that it will be of not much use to him.

Soheil begins by exploring the fool - not an aspect I've looked at yet, although we both agreed that Steve's sequences evoke that archetype of fool or clown. Soheil asks Steve to do his Shout sequence and adds in part of Dafne's Blue sequence. Soheil inserts intention - Steve must get Dafne's attention, tell her the story of what's happening in Denmark. The alarm sound becomes a noise to gain her interest and also to ridicule and mock the status quo.

Julia is introduced into the work as Steve's shadow then, from a fairly tight repetition of parts of the sequences, the work develops into a much more free improvisation, with the three performers becoming the players from Hamlet. At the end they turn and mock Claudius (aka Soheil) with alarm call and laughter. It's very effective and also fascinating and absorbing to watch Soheil putting it together, thinking on his feet. I feel I haven't been able to contribute to the process, though.

Feedback at the end of the afternoon involves more discussion on thrashing out how this will work for writers, directors and performers. Barbara reminds us of the rules - that Vahid is not allowed to contribute until the weekend - and Maya suggests the performers replace lines from their texts with lines from the material I provided. Sue's strategy - of waiting to see what develops and contributing on the spot - seems far more promising. It will be good to watch her working with Soheil tomorrow and see what I can learn. In the meantime I am inspired to mention the Number Stations - mysterious radio stations used by governments to transmit secret info to their agents abroad with strings of numbers, letters or random words - and suggest the performers could use streams of numbers as text (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Numbers_station).

Steve says something interesting about how this week was all about rhythm for him - using the materials of the sequence was like finding a rhythm for the context. He talks about his difficulty with the free-er improv work without his body tension fixed by the moves of the sequence.

The day at Entre Scenen ends with a group photo - I try my best to hide. But afterwards there is more horror as Gab and Gitte must interview me on film, asking really tough questions that Vahid has set. My brain has turned to jelly and I struggle to come up with answers that make sense. When work is over we go to ARoS, just round the corner from the flat, to see the exhibition of Jeppe Hein's work, which is really good fun - just right for unwinding - and the 9 Rooms in the basement, some of which I loved - especially the bottomless mirror pit by Olaf Eliasson, Pipilotti Rist's installation and the sculpture that changes colours when a star dies. I'm not so impressed with the rest of the permanent collection but there is an interesting exhibition about architecture firm BIG, which is a bit pleased with itself but has some nice ideas on presentation (so much more accessible than the big Le Corbusier show I saw last year at the Barbican), also on how useful failures can be. Don't know how or whether this relates to the project but sooner or later everything is food for work...

Day four Thursday 14 January

A day of sorting out some confusions, creating others.

We reach 35 hits in the ball game!

In the Study, the performers introduce their texts. Then they come to standing and the other two have to follow Julia's Swedish text - tone of voice as well as sound - as she speaks it louder and louder then shouts it, her voice changing to a harsh rasp as she moves under Vahid's direction from stretching upwards to curling into a ball. The three of them are asked to go into their original movement/text scores from the Goldsmiths residency last summer and Vahid asks me to read Maria's object story (about holding onto a memory) in English while Maria herself translates it into Danish and Maya translates it into Italian... The performers take on board the story in their movements and music is layered into this, then the background noise is stopped and the performers get on with it; Dafne is given an object (the blanket). They become three lost people stranded in a the middle of nowhere. My throat hurts after doing loud whispering - sadly out of practice with vocal technique.

Maria's story:

The dark was slowly falling over the fields and the sun was disappearing in the horizon. She couldn't think of anything else, she just had to get it. So she kept on running into the darkness. Her feet were cold and her legs were screaming, but she couldn't stop, not without it. It was a part of her, a part of where she came from - without it she would not only be lost, she would also slowly forget. She would forget like all the other times - "out of sight, out of mind". Even though it was in her memory, it would slowly fade away. She had to have it, so she could feel and smell it - that would be the only thing that would make her capable to remember entirely. Then it landed, just right there on the dark leaves of grass. She ran for it, but then suddenly a light breeze took hold of it and swept it gently away.

Exercise, Arhus Laboratoriet, 14/1/10, Maria Jeppesen

At 10.30 Soheil takes over.

Swordplay! Julia, Dafne and Steve fence with imaginary swords.

Then the performers practise violent dying - on cue. They must show two snapshots taken just before and at the moment of death. There are rules - the face must be shown, eyes kept open, no falling on the floor... Then Soheil gives them each a flower, telling them it is the life force and is to be thrown away at the moment of death. Flower goes from hand to mouth as the performers must imagine their hands tied and backs against wall. Then all study each other's positions to see what an 'interesting' death could look like. Steve stabs Dafne and Julia then pulls out the weapon and they react to both with stylised action. Sue throws a flower at each death.

Steve speaks his text as a ruthless executioner. Dafne takes over the executioner's job. This time she takes the flowers from them. Then she kills by ripping out an imaginary penis... which turns into a red rose in her hand. Julia's turn as executioner. Soheil emphasises what a brutal, barbaric world they are in. Julia is given free rein to kill using different parts of the body. The other two can fall against her, with the proviso that their bodies never relax. They become like frozen explosions. A lamentation is played (very beautiful but I forget to find out what it is!) and Sue reads Dylan Thomas's poem *And Death Shall Have No Dominion* as well as a lovely fragment of poetry I don't recognise (I later find out it is by the Iranian poet Forough Farrokhzad) as Soheil turns the movements from the Tarkovsky's *Lake* exercise into the performers stepping over dead bodies.

Then Soheil asks Dafne to repeat her *Truth is Fragmented* sequence, making use of the flowers and Steve in the focal chair.

Soheil picks a short part of it and places Steve into the scene as the ghost, using his 'mask face' from the *Shout* sequence. Julia is his shadow while Dafne is Hamlet (doing her lamentation movement from *TiF*) hearing his voice (Sue reads part of the ghost's speech from the play). Soheil asks Steve and Julia to walk away, and carry on walking through a wall... and they do! Well, as close as. This is turning out to be the week of impossible tasks. It looks beautiful. At the end Dafne calls 'father' in Greek over and over through the wall as the ghosts say *Adieu* and disappear.

Soheil tries another proposition. The three performers die by falling down against the wall in slow motion as Sue reads some text, then as I read some text (the list of 21st-century assassinations I found on the net). It's hugely effective and powerful, as are the flowers scattered around as dead souls. He's playing with ideas of killing, assassination and death – the final scene in *Hamlet*, where everyone dies. (Except Horatio – who hasn't really made an appearance this week.)

Soheil asks Sue and me to find three moments from the sequences that could fit with

yesterday's work, and to find some text that could be used.

After lunch we look at Steve's Flying Butler again, with Julia and Dafne hiding around the chairs as if they are the pillars of the great hall. Then we revisit Blue.

Soheil asks Sue and me how we'd retitl Blue in one word: we both talk about goddesses and Sue picks 'Arrival' while I opt for Shift, which Soheil suggest changing to Transformation. He asks what we'd like to explore and I suggest the arrival of the Queen into the play, focusing on her hand movements (we've been discussing how regal Dafne's movements are in Blue) and introduce Steve's hand gestures from Shout – an obsequious twirl and bow - and Flying Butler, where he constantly has one hand held out as if balancing a tray. Dafne goes through Blue again, this time with Steve approaching her with his obsequious hands. As they begin to interact it soon emerges that he has become Polonius, whispering gossip to her and echoing her shape as she stands on the chair. There's something sexual and creepy about the power play that is revealed in their relationship. Another variation is tried, with Steve trying to get Dafne to look in the mirror. Sue reads text; Julia sings a beautiful, sad song. It's another powerful variation, illustrating how adaptable the sequences and their moves can be.

There's a meeting with Sue, me, Barbara and Vahid to thrash out how the last day will work from the writers' point of view. Somehow the plan for the week has gone slightly askew – Soheil has been building his own scenes from the material provided by (a) William Shakespeare (text) and (b) Vahid (movement), with large amounts of essential glue from the performers by way of their improvisations. Both Sue and myself are feeling unsure about our role in the experiment. Wednesday was supposed to be my day for working with Soheil and in fact I spent it watching him at work; today was meant to be Sue's day and actually he spent it trying to draw on ideas and text from both of us. We decide that the two of us will go away and separately come up with a scene (a proposition) for Soheil, choosing elements from the sequences and exercises we have seen and text fragments to use. Also, as suggested by Barbara and Vahid, we will all try to explore how Soheil's brain works tomorrow. Sue suggests he's unlikely to tell us straight out, but it can be something to investigate over the course of the day.

Day five Friday 15 January

A day of investigation.

We reach 60 hits in the ball game!!! We rock!

After the Study, Barbara tries to pin down Soheil on the subject of how he works. This discussion turns out to be very interesting and revealing – as well as quite long – and I've tried to write down all of it that I caught.

Soheil says it's hard to talk generally, it depends on what sort of project he's approaching. Barbara says she's noticed that every day he starts with a piece of action - eg the spying, the killing - and then he lets the performers improvise around it. He agrees. He sees his tools as:

INTENTION. He used to be an actor and knows what it's like to feel frustrated when left alone by the director - actors need to be given something by the director. An abstract situation means nothing.

ACTION. The verb. This is very much from Stanislavsky – using one active verb to ignite something. Sometimes Stanislavsky helps you, sometimes Grotowsky, Artaud, Meyerhold etc. (He talks about the influence of Eisenstein on Meyerhold – 'the montage of the attractions' – for Soheil, the attractions are all actions). He needs to improvise with the

actors - if sees something he will throw it in. Every moment must be filled with a spark of life, even in rehearsal – he must come up with another idea if he's bored, he has to keep moving. (He says this is not necessarily a good thing - sometimes you need to wait and see, and spend for instance, 15 minutes just walking - but it's the way he is.) He always tries to put himself in the audience's shoes.

Soheil says he learned from Meyerhold about importance of hooking the audience. He talks about directing *Waiting for Godot* - how exciting it was, and how pleased he was when people commented that they hadn't been bored for a second. He says that his model for audience connection is traditional Iranian storytellers in teahouses and talks about how they use pace, rhythm, suspense and audience awareness to keep people listening. He points to a parallel with Noh theatre, where the main actor's job is to observe and adjust performance to audience.

Barbara says she's noticed in improvs that Soheil keeps the ball up in the air - he supports the actors' energy rather than throwing in obstacles and it's very much a flow.

Vahid says he wants to leave his questions for Soheil until tomorrow, but he notes that he needs to distinguish between three things: tool, technique and aesthetic/style (although they sometimes overlap and often influence each other).

What he is looking for is the tools Soheil uses. For instance, keeping the audience awake is the job, not the tool to do it or the technique to use.

Soheil says he has learnt his tools and techniques by doing it and making lots of mistakes. He finds it hard to verbalise because he learned through experience – he never had mentor though he searched for one. He studied in Iran – then went to theatre school in Toronto and they said he wasn't eligible for their support as he wasn't an emerging artist - too old and experienced by then. He applied to be an assistant director but encountered the same obstacles. So he started to teach himself through reading Peter Brook, Meyerhold etc and doing the work.

Vahid says that with the natural way of doing things it's hard to distinguish tool and techniques, but in this Lab the work is very unnatural – he compares it to Van Gogh working intuitively at the time but now there are volumes written about Van Gogh's technique.

Soheil says it's important to discover and copy techniques at the beginning but the most important thing is to move beyond it – he quotes Grotowski: a good artist is a good thief. Take what you need - what is the essence for you. For him, stuff like biomechanics is very abstract but Meyerhold has useful lessons in the performer/audience relationship.

Barbara asks the performers what they think. Julia wants to clarify the difference between signs and symbols, a subject that has been touched upon in reference to communicating meaning to the audience. Steve says he understood a sign as being a kind of code created to relate to something inside the work; a symbol to be a cruder, more universal measure. Maya adds that you create your own sign whereas symbols are already established. Soheil talks about the need for a sign to be rooted in reality, not the abstract – the audience shouldn't have to work to decode it. For him, the stick yesterday was a sign – it wasn't a symbol of something else like the Christian cross, but it represents what it's used for in performance - a sword, a hiding place. However, over the course of the play, something established as a sign may become a symbol. He gives the instance of a production of *Macbeth* he directed, where each character wore a different coloured scarf, which was used as a sign for that character. When the assassin came to tell Macbeth he had killed Banquo, he brought Banquo's green scarf. This enabled the performers to create the impression of a massacre by scattering a lot of scarves, and Macbeth was then dressed in the armour of all those deaths for his final battle.

After the break we move on to the writers' propositions for Soheil. Sue has generously (or foolishly) agreed to go first.

Talking on the way to Entre Scenen today, Sue and me confessed to each other that we had found last night's work impossible! My brain just doesn't work that way - my own work may take an image or a word or a place or a feeling as its starting point, but it always progresses through character and relationships - and words. Approaching a story through these movement/visual building blocks doesn't come naturally to me at all, and I struggled to make sense of it, eventually giving up and deciding to go with something much sketchier - characters' intentions and an idea about some sequence fragments to draw upon, although these relate very much to how I see the scene unfolding. I'm very interested to see what Sue will do. She seems more laid back and less anxious about facing the challenge than I am - I don't know if that's anything to do with being Canadian. Maybe she just hides it better.

Sue starts by saying she will try to resist the urge to explain too much. (I too feel the urge to justify what I'm planning to do - will have to remember not to.)

Her idea is to work on the opening moments of what might be HamletZar. Her goal is to establish a contrast between the order of the court and Elsinor, and the chaos on the ship. She wants to show the arrival of a Hamlet figure from court to the place of chaos. She has brought music and found text to throw in and see what it suggests and whether it works.

She wants to keep a song Julia sang in Swedish from yesterday - to start and end her scenes. The structure will be:

1. Julia's song
2. A violent army scene - based on the killings from yesterday including the flowers
3. Scattered bodies on board ship - the Tarkovsky's lake exercise, but on a ship at sea - we are not on solid ground any more
4. Hamlet's (Dafne's) arrival with the first part of the Blue sequence
5. Julia's song - a siren song representing the call of the sea and despair

Soheil proposes a rough run-through in silence to see the proposed sections visually. In practice this doesn't quite happen as it's hard to resist adding and trying out things straight away.

Afterwards, Soheil asks Sue what she liked and didn't. She has suggestions, such as wanting more contrast between the first part and the second: straight lines and faster, more frantic killing in the massacre. Her ideas are great - very visual and ambitious. But time is short and they need a lot longer than a couple of hours to be played with and built on. Somehow, Sue's idea of the chaos of the ship gets lost and everything is in beautiful but decreasingly interesting slo-mo. A possible ending is proposed - Sue takes a broom and sweeps away the flowers on the floor like human dirt. This works well - an abrupt puncturing of the portentous atmosphere. Funny and sharp. We talk about what worked and what didn't. For me, everything was at the same slow pace; Soheil talks about failing to communicate a story to anyone who didn't know what we were doing.

The afternoon session is my attempt at a scene. Having learned a lot from Sue's work this morning I simplify before presenting my idea, then Soheil strips it back further. I also suggest intention for the performers in the sections. I want to look at the immigrants faced with the presence of a stranger - Hamlet - on board their ship, and how he explains himself. Dafne and Julia (the immigrants) are to approach, test out and perhaps intimidate or threaten Steve (as Hamlet) using their moves from the afternoon's Yawn (the HamletZar routine of starting the afternoon with everyone stretching and yawning to a particular piece of music). I want Dafne to use the more masculine of her movements and gestures from Blue (spitting, jumping up). Then Steve/Hamlet is to somehow use three of the chairs from Shout and the moves between them to tell them his story. I also want them to incorporate the spy tango-battle from Monday's exercises. I also want to use some found text, and

some words I've written on small pieces of paper for the performers to pick up and read (or eat).

The improv that Soheil directs works as a dramatic scene that tells a story clearly and coherently. We both agree that my idea of ending with the tango-battle is not needed. But Soheil lets me try out something, a couple of different pieces of found text to bridge the gap between the two halves, with the performers freezing as Dafne threatens to cut Steve's throat and Gab walking around them with his camera to make a documentary. One of the found texts is about illegal immigrants sailing to Italy, from the transcript of a TV documentary:

The trawler men did radio for assistance to the nearest countries but no one wanted more migrants, so they clung to the net 80 miles out at sea. After nine days at sea they were finally brought into Lampedusa. There's no ceremony. They are, despite what they've been through, just more migrants. Like the rest, they're moved through the island's holding centre to the airport, and from there to a detention centre on mainland Italy.

The numbers reported dead or missing in Lampedusa this year are the highest ever, estimated at nearly 500. Last month on one day alone 14 dead bodies were found floating in the sea off the island, they're buried anonymously, their families only guessing their fate from the months of silence. (BBC Panorama transcript)

The other is from a review of an exhibition in the Grand Palais in Paris:

The white noise separates into deep, regular thuds, and above it the croak of frogs or the alarm calls of unseen jungle birds. There are disco squelches and native drums.

These sounds are all human heartbeats.

Artist Christian Boltanski is compiling an archive of heartbeats that he intends to be housed, eventually, on a remote and inaccessible Japanese island. He has already collected over 15,000 individual recordings. One day, these beating hearts will all belong to the dead.

(The Guardian)

I'm not sure if either of these works, and there doesn't seem to be space to test the scattered words idea. The story is clear enough, but the storytelling feels as if it has become too naturalistic - something that could have come out of any improvisation about the intrusion of a stranger into a group.

Looking back, I note that Soheil's work has used the sequences or other exercises as a starting point to build scenes from Hamlet, while both me and Sue have been drawn to telling Vahid's frame story – Hamlet on board ship with the immigrants. This seems logical – the directors seizes on a play he's familiar with, while the writers are drawn to telling a story that has not yet been written.

The performers talk about the difference between ordinary movements and the extra-daily movement they have developed with Vahid. Dafne talks about how she was conscious of losing layers of meaning in the work she did off-score – she describes it as feeling "slushier". This builds on a comment by Steve earlier in the week, about how he loses rhythm and pace away from his score, which helps him maintain tension in his body. This time, though, Steve says he was able to draw on a complete section of his sequence and make it smaller while still keeping the layers – I hadn't asked Dafne for a section of either Blue or Truth is Fragmented, so she lost that advantage.

We discuss the lack of time to process and digest - Soheil has been working on the run – on previous days has had to be both director and writer, which meant being able to work organically with no need to bridge the gap between them.

After the break Vahid talks about tools and techniques again: what he got from Soheil's work in those terms. The main tool he picked up was to do with using 'voiceover' alongside action as an extra layer – something that came from Soheil talking about traditional Iranian teahouse storytellers. Vahid also liked a suggestion I made about using the chair-game in an improv, and wants to try using it as a tool to develop work. Jens asks an interesting question about being a tool-maker (engineer) and/or tool user, and Vahid talks about Jimi Hendrix, but I get a bit lost here.... my mind is too crammed with information and images to take in anything more. It feels as if we are packing into every day as much work as most people do in a week.

Everyone is given homework - mine is to reread Hedda Gabler and pick two scenes, as well as doing leftover work selecting instruction lines from my material about domestic service. Sue has Waiting for Godot to reread/select a section from.

After our attempts to raid the sequences/scores for physical material in the last few days, I reflect on how much my view of them has shifted. Blue, which seemed rather flat and selfenclosed, has emerged as richly loaded with meaning and hugely adaptable; ditto Shout. The Flying Butler, which charmed me at first and seemed far less disjointed than some of the other scores, has now slithered away into something forgettable and hard to transfer to other contexts. Truth is Fragmented seemed to offer the most possibilities at the beginning, but the more time I see it, the more 'of a piece' it seems – complex, flowing and interlocking to be broken up and quoted - although the hobbled, hanged-man walk has reappeared many times in other improvs, as has the machine gunning and the broken body at the end.

I'm also finding it a bit frustrating to have these long, looping discussions which contain many nuggets of wisdom, provocations and ideas, but test my attention span and notetaking speed to breaking point.

Day six Saturday 16 January

A day of revelations.

Vahid takes back the reins and applies what he's gleaned from Soheil's sessions. One of the tools he was talking about was the chair-game, and in the warm-up we play this for quite a long time, seeing how far we can go in terms of bluffing, risk-taking, pushing the rules (to their limits, it turns out, when Lene actually picks up a chair as Steve is about to sit on it, and moves it to another part of the room).

Then the performers do the study with the Shout chairs placed around them. The room is in semi-darkness (Vahid wants them not to see each other); the music starts with something middle-eastern that sounds like a lament, then something that sounds like a work song, then an organ-based heavy prog rock-ish thing and finally some sort of monologue to music about Native American experience. Their movements are slow, measured, weighty.

This segues into the performers sitting on the chairs while they imagine the Study continuing. The soundtrack moves into a storm-at-sea soundscape (I find out later that Jens has created it). Then there's a recording of Julia's song from yesterday. When it ends, still in semi-darkness, Dafne speaks her text, moving gradually from a whisper to a shout.

The three of them play a short version of the chair-game. It's interesting with five chairs and three people - the rhythm changes completely and they spend a lot more time moving,

bluffing, double-bluffing, obstructing and dancing round each other, and a lot less time actually sitting down. Vahid feeds in more rules to the game: no noise with feet or chairs, change direction crisply, avoid traffic jams...

We sit down to look at the texts people wrote inspired by the objects. Vahid says he will use them in the next two days to put together a montage. He plans to use other tools: sequences; texts from me and Sue; music made by Julia and from elsewhere; Jens' windscape.

Vahid then explains something about where the performers' sequences come from and how they have been developed. This is revolutionary - he never explains this sort of thing.

One step (a tool or a technique?) is that when he first starts working with a performer, he asks them for their top fives (music, novels, films, plays etc). This then becomes a potential resource. In Steve's case, for instance, Vahid drew on his top fives when developing the Flying Butler sequence. The point of departure was five chairs, and Steve walking between them, relating each chair to one of his five. One chair in particular provoked something (which is no longer in the sequence) and a rubbish-bin lid that happened to be in the room provided a prop that became a tray, transforming Steve into a waiter. A fly found its way into the sequence and became something for Steve to escape or catch...

With Dafne's sequences, Truth is Fragmented came from a commission by the Pinter Centre at Goldsmiths College on the theme of Fractured Narratives. Vahid chose to use a short poem by Harold Pinter, called Death.

Death (Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953) by Harold Pinter

Where was the body found?

Who found the dead body?

Was the dead body dead when found?

How was the dead body found?

Who was the dead body?

Who was the father or daughter or brother

Or uncle or sister or mother or son

Of the dead and abandoned body?

Was the body dead when abandoned?

Was the body abandoned?

By whom had it been abandoned?

Was the dead body naked or dressed for a journey?

What made you declare the dead body dead?

Did you declare the dead body dead?

How well did you know the dead body?

How did you know the body was dead?

Did you wash the dead body

Did you close both its eyes

Did you bury the body

Did you leave it abandoned

Did you kiss the dead body

Vahid asked the HamletZar members to send him images of dead bodies, and Dafne copied the positions of each body in turn, then found a way to move between them. The performance was contextualised by screening the images at the start of the piece. Text and a musician (performing a call to prayer) became part of the performance too.

I missed the chance to see the performance when it was done at Goldsmiths - which turned out to be a good thing as I was able to come to it without preconceptions. For the Laboratoriet, the text, images and music were stripped out - but sounds such as Dafne's Greek song, barking like a dog and machine-gunning were left in as they seemed to be part of the spine of the piece as much as the movements.

Dafne's Blue sequence was created for this workshop and came from an image she had chosen in her top fives – a painting from Picasso's Blue period, *The Frugal Repast*. As a result, she and Vahid looked through the Blue period series and Dafne tried to recreate the gestures and positions of people in several of the paintings, then build a bridge that would take her naturally from one pose to the next. This helps to explain why I thought it looked like a series of paintings (although it made me think more of Italian Renaissance images) and why they had a flat, 2D feel (the Blue series are known for the figures being painted on one plane). What I find interesting is that Dafne's physical presence is quite the opposite of the miserable, droopy woman in *The Frugal Repast* and as a result a distorting filter is introduced simply by the fact that *she* is embodying the shapes - a completely different atmosphere is set up yet it still has echoes of the solemn, static nature of the inspiration.

Vahid talks about the sequences as a box of material - that needs to be kept fresh and can be used in training (like an etude in guitar practice) It doesn't have to be used in performance work. He's only interested in using the sequences if they don't look like exercises.

Lene suggests that usually Vahid works on basis of spying and concealing, and asks what his purpose is in revealing this method now. He says he wants to show how the edges of the two cogs come together.

Shout came from idea of vocal action. Steve was asked to move between his five chairs and shout at each. Idea was to then to take away the movement and keep the vocal, but it changed. Vahid says there was a foggy logic to it - he still doesn't know what's going on, it is based on a "journey of impulses".

Lene asks why Vahid why he has kept all this secret so long and why he is revealing it now. He talks about the fear that he and performer will lose interest. He is revealing this for the purposes of the Laboratoriet, he may not use any of it again.

He talks about the objects people have brought - how they acquire a kind of magic from their private meaning - even he doesn't know what they mean to people. He talks about the text montages that were created at Goldsmiths - how they were chosen by the individual performers then edited and stuck together to create a different meaning, but still carried the power of the original personal meanings.

He says that everything is so fixed in this work - the movements, meanings, sounds, sequences - because he is working against "the danger of haphazard movements". (This seems to refer to something both Steve and Dafne had mentioned in the last few days, about feeling vague or adrift when they had to improvise for Soheil.)

Soheil comments that "always things stay a mystery" for him. When he watches the exercises and sequences, he admires the work but he has a hard time connecting with it a lot of the time. Moments touch him but not the whole thing. He really likes watching the

exercises for a while, but after that he stops caring. He's concerned with keeping the audience's attention - he mentions a nine-hour Hamlet he saw in Toronto, which never lost his interest.

Vahid mentions Grotowski's quote about reaching the spectator who needs to see your performance. He says the minimum requirement for him is to be entertaining - he doesn't think anything justifies misunderstanding. He points to the fact that there's no one more profound than Hitchcock, but no one finds it hard to understand Hitchcock films - they have layers and layers of meaning. He also instances Charlie Chaplin - that's the kind of performance he wants to make. He agrees that you can't control who the audience are - but the Grotowski quote relates to connecting with individuals among that audience. Lene has a couple of comments on this. She thinks Vahid must consider how and why he reveals details of his method because this is against what they have done so far. Also, it's not true to say you can't control who sees your work - you can target a niche audience to a great extent. She admits she is still mystified even though she's familiar with the work. V talks about

Barbara comments that the sequences, which don't look as if they have context, are actually loaded with context.

Soheil asks how personal meaning becomes meaningful to the audience. There's a lot of discussion about meaningful objects and how the performers and creators feel. Dafne suggests it's worth making a distinction between meaning and feeling. Meaning exists only in the mind of the spectator, according to Grotowski. There is no such objective thing as meaning - it is created by the mind.

Soheil asks what is purpose of this training - he understands that it is a journey of digging in and discovering but not how it will transfer to performance. Where does the transition happen? The training confuses him because he worries that it will turn out to be a selfindulgent thing - will a meaning emerge that makes sense to the audience?

Vahid says he worries because this process is extremely prone to danger of selfindulgence - it is his big fear. Everything is a huge mystery to him - he does what he does in order to figure out what's going on. He says that the common context in which he works is that the people he works with belong to the world of performing arts. He hates words like spiritual or mystical - he prefers Gordon Craig's word "Imagination" - and it's a life-long process. He says he needs to make a performance so he needs to understand craft needed for that.

V says his disease is the encounter of two worlds - the modern and traditional - what happens when they collide is central to what he does.

Barbara asks a simple question: what happened when Vahid saw what Soheil did with the sequences and what the writers contributed - what did he think?

Vahid said it wouldn't have an effect on the production of HamletZar - the Lab wasn't about that for him, it was a separate exercise and all the material he brought was separate. Some of the work has given him ideas - for instance, Dafne doing TiF in rose garden - but he wants to stay focused on the tools he's extracted. He is being systematic.

I ask a basic question about the production of HamletZar - how many performers will it involve? Vahid says, ideally, eight, with two musicians - but only if the budget stretches that far. He says that all will be performing solo ie monologues or the equivalent - there will be no interaction between the characters.

AFTERNOON

Dafne and Steve persist with the chair exercise without Julia. What is emerging from it for me is the shifts in pace/rhythm. Not about a competition any more, but about

following/pursuing, turning away/turning towards, coming together/moving away - with one slow, one fast player who are constantly swapping roles. Things start to happen: both performers share on the same chair, Steve almost sits on Dafne's lap, Steve walks backwards, Dafne puts on Steve's huge army boots... All sorts of elements are added in, starting with the sequences. Then, when losing look at each other. Pieces of text are read out by me and Sue - we have somehow become the week's 'voiceover artists' - and music is played at intervals. The performers add in text from Hamlet. Dafne reads the Pinter poem.

Text adapted from Maria's story:

*The dark was slowly falling.
She kept on running into the darkness.
She could hear her legs screaming.
She kept on running.*

*It was a part of her.
It was a part of where she came from.
It was in her memory.
It would slowly fade away
A light breeze would
sweep it away.*

*She could hear screaming.
She kept on running.
She could feel her legs.
Her feet were cold.
She kept on running into the darkness.
The sun was slowly falling*

on the dark leaves of grass.

Exercise, Arhus Laboratoriet, 14/1/10, DK / Maria Jeppesen

At five, when it is dark enough outside to watch a film, we sit down by the projector and watch fragments of Noh performance, Balinese dance training and Pakistan Qawwali music, followed by scenes from Eisenstein's October.

Discussion follows about the use of a voiceover in Noh and the intensive training and discipline required to reach the standard of skill. Also the relevance of montage in film to what Vahid is doing with HamletZar.

Jens talks about difficulties of decoding/understanding what is going on with the Noh performance. Others say that's because we don't have a context. Maria asks what is it that Vahid is trying to figure out in this Lab. That's the big question! Steve says he would like to know what we were doing this afternoon. Vahid replies that he was trying to run material through the filter of the chair game. S asks how it is useful to Vahid - what does he do with things that work? I don't really understand Vahid's answer but I think it boils down to finding tools that work. Lene gives the example of other artists who video their workshops and save the moments that work.

During discussion, Barbara takes me and Sue out to interview us for the Laboratoriet. We only have 10 minutes and she asks us both one question: what did we get out of the week for our writing practice? Sue answers that she's learned a lot about different approaches to working with text for theatre-making; I say I've had new insights into how Vahid works. We agree that the week has been so intensive and packed with information and work that we

need space and time for things to percolate and be absorbed. I think I will be still processing the information for a long time to come.

Day seven Sunday 17 January

Final day. A playful day; a day of funerals and hysteria.

We score 69 on this morning's ball game. Not bad.

As yesterday, the performers do the Study in the dark, to dark music, something Middle Eastern, something African (?), then something lyrical and acoustic, then hard rock. The dim light makes the Study very beautiful and creates an entirely different atmosphere - of melancholy, mourning, endings.

Steve puts out the five chairs for his sequences. Vahid says the performers are going to do the sequences as they have been working them just before coming to Arhus. First we listen to the music Julia has been recording. A kind of wonky slow dance comes out of one speaker, and a series of odd noise out of the other; it's odd, unsettling, dislocating. V shows a Monet painting Julia sent him. He was going to use it as a starting point for her sequence but now it has become the base for a music/sound sequence. He asked her to count the number of poppies - she found 274 - but that was too many so they chose another number, 86, from her personal stories, which was used to specify the number of notes she could use in the music.

Dafne does Blue costumed in a white shift and with a flower in her hair. She has a container into which she throws a flower, then shows to us, then later she tips it up to shower herself with petals and turns it over to wear as a hat. She looks like a dervish whirling in slow motion. Vahid reveals a further source for part of the sequence - a Japanese comedian's dance from the film Lost in Translation.

Then Steve, in a charity shop jacket, old lady's pleated skirt (!) and army boots, does Shout and Flying Butler. While Dafne's sequence has become very accessible and readable with the addition of her props and costume, Steve's becomes more mysterious. It's time to use the plays me and Sue have been instructed to read - Hedda Gabler in my case, Waiting for Godot in hers. The performers have also learned a chunk of Godot from near the beginning of act 2 and can integrate it into their elaborated version of the chairgame. Maya is also given some text to read - an extract from James Joyce's Finnegans Wake (or Winnegans Fake as Vahid calls it at one point). Julia is on the keyboard, making noise/music.

Vahid draws three time lines on the whiteboard: one for the scene he's picked from Hedda Gabler, where Lovborg tells Hedda he will kill himself and she gives him her gun; the fragment of Waiting for Godot; and the chair-game. All the time lines begin simultaneously. Dafne and Steve are to do the chair-game. While they are walking, they speak the Godot lines; when they sit they must pause while Sue and me speak some lines from the Hedda scene. That's the theory - but for a long time all that happens is the chair-game plus sequences. Then the performers add lines from Godot.

After this has gone on for what seems like forever, some lively music is added in along with Julia - the three of them must turn the exercise into a dance. Then music changes to pounding techno. Things liven up considerably, even after the music ends.

At some point, Vahid grabs a few props - borrowed specs and hat, the blanket from the object collection, and plays with dressing up Steve and Dafne as Joyce and Beckett. He asks us to imagine that in a post-script to Hedda Gabler, the two men somehow turn up at the funeral of the two suicides, Lovborg and Hedda. This is what we will create through montage this afternoon.

AFTERNOON

We start with an extended Yawn - extended into dancing - and a wild ball game. There's an end of term feeling.

Barbara kicks off the afternoon's work by introducing a discussion. She wants to know if everyone saw the same as she did in this morning's work.

She points out that there were two montages this morning (I got so caught up in doing my side of the work that I forgot to note that). The first worked very simply by adding one thing at a time so it was easy to see the effect of this *contextualisation* (this is the word Barbara has been using, though I still feel a little hazy about what it is). She details the process with great clarity - which is incredibly useful and makes the process seem much easier to grasp - listing the different elements on the whiteboard and noting what she felt they brought to the table:

1. **The chair-game** - action
2. **The scores** (ie the performers' movement/sound sequences) - character
3. **Music** - mood (colour, a filter)
4. **External words** (ie the voiceover) - theme
5. **Tempo change** - clarity and tension - heightened focus on the action
6. **Music and dance** - refocused attention on the game/action - because it brought rhythm and rules?

After some discussion, she adds two items she forgot:

- 4 (a). **Internal words** (ie by the performers) - situation
7. **Sound** - space/place

In other words, the Godot dialogue added a sense of a situation between people, while the storm noises situated them in a place or space, suggesting where it was and what it was like. (I think.)

Barbara says she found the second montage less clear - this was where we were trying to layer in the Hedda Gabler dialogue and the performers, by then more comfortable with the chair-game, were using the Godot dialogue more...

The second time around, adding the three texts created different layers that were like different universes side by side. The audience wants to make connections - it's a natural human impulse. In the second montage, the voiceover sometimes seemed like subtext informing what was happening between the performers; at other times it seemed as if there were two different worlds next to each other - quite separate times and places.

Barbara makes this all seem quite clear, whereas I would have floundered to explain... It's so hard to see something from the outside when you've been doing it from the inside!

Soheil comments that he noticed parallels with the way he works - the starting point is always something concrete and specific. He is starting to see a pattern in using the game - it's about immigrants who haven't got their own space (on a boat, in a society) and have to

compete to find somewhere to squeeze in, even when (especially when) that means taking someone else's space. The context and content we have brought with us is impossible to escape - it is there, implicit in the way we approach everything.

Soheil talks about the difficulty of recapturing the beautiful moments that arise in improvisations - the longer the improvisation, the harder it becomes to pin down those moments. Lene says something about how it can be done if the tools (and/or the task) are very clear.

There is some discussion, with contributions from Julia and Jeanette, about improvisation and structure - which, after all, are the key words in the title of the experiment. Points are made about the need for structure to avoid banality, the need for mastery of improvisation skills to perform structured improvisation and the ubiquitousness of improvisation in creative work. It feels as if we are groping for the essence of the experiment at the last minute and really just scraping the surface. Perhaps this is inevitable, perhaps this is what always happens...

After a break, we get down to business. Vahid has drawn a map / timeline on the whiteboard:

Science | P1 | W4G | HG | W4G | HG | P2 | W4G | HG | Joyce | Flowers | Death List | Song

W4G is the Waiting for Godot lines by the performers;

HG is the Hedda Gabler voiceover from Sue and me;

Joyce is Maya's Finnegans Wake voiceover;

Flowers means that flowers will be scattered at that point;

the Death List is me reading as voiceover my list of assassinations;

the song is the Das Beckwerk anthem, to be sung by anyone who knows it.

'Science' is to be a short reading by Maya about experimentation.

P1 and P2 are poems that Sue and me have produced by taking phrases from the object stories; she has chosen one to suit Waiting for Godot while mine is inspired by the atmosphere of Hedda Gabler...

Like the barren wife of a blind man

she goes on.

In spring she hangs;

in winter she buries her tears -

a hole in her heart

devoured by weeds.

DK, altered lines taken from Object Story by Unknown

The 'stage' is set with chairs as if we are going to play the chair-game. The lights are dimmed; candles are lit in the central area. Vahid places me and Sue next to each other on one side (where we can't see the whiteboard timeline!) and the 'audience' take seats around the edge of the rough circle. Flowers are distributed to everyone. Maya reads her

piece of factual text (I am too busy worrying about what I have to do to take it in) and the performers begin...

I enjoy playing my role and I'm pleased to be able to contribute, but I'm frustrated (again) that taking part in this makes it impossible to step back and get a sense of it. I know that darkness and candlelight have created an effective atmosphere; add scattered flowers, a funeral setting, the tough poetry of Beckett and the tense relationships of Ibsen, and it's easy to see how something must be happening.

Afterwards, there is more talk - although an attempt to play the chair-game during the discussion fizzles out. People try to sum up what we've learnt and what we've discovered. It's a big task and we have to leave the studio by 6pm. Maria talks about being moved by the performance, but she is unsure why. All sorts of important questions are raised - what were we trying to achieve, what was the point, why were the writers there? It feels like the beginning of something, not the end. I still have more questions than answers...