What's The Story: Adapting Mike Leigh's Improvisational Approach to Character, Narrative and Text for the Development of Comedy Film Scripts Online.

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aimed to ascertain if British film director Mike Leigh's improvisatory approach to the development of character, narrative and text could be adopted and adapted to create comedic film scripts in an online environment.

The research hoped to address gaps in knowledge around Leigh's working methods and the fact that no approach was available to utilise improvisation on existing online video conferencing platforms such as Zoom. Therefore, the research aimed to develop such a method to facilitate improvisation online. Thereafter, the newly established process was evaluated in terms of its efficacy in other scriptwriting forms, namely monologue writing.

Leigh's process was applied in practice as part of an Online Ensemble Project. In pursuing this research-through-practice, I also examined and reflected upon my own emerging praxis as I adapted Leigh's method for the same online project. Further insights into my praxis were then unearthed through a second application of the new method in an exercise involving the writing of comic monologues.

The thesis makes its original contribution to knowledge in the field of scriptwriting by developing an approach to improvising comedy film scripts entirely online.

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Video Clip Links

VC1 https://youtu.be/g8DSvPgoBNY

VC4 https://youtu.be/iUpzeS565ZQ

VC5 (a) https://youtu.be/X63KWS1Pwv8

VC5 (b) https://youtu.be/4kkTjvqI_WA

VC5 (c) https://youtu.be/o5yHIH4PBgQ

VC7 https://youtu.be/Kzdk15AmJCE

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Being Normal Read-Through

Episode One

https://youtube.com/watch?v=Ip7LWf2uhaE&si=EnSIkaIECMiOmarE

Episode Two

https://youtube.com/watch?v=1p3iTI2GINw&si=EnSIkaIECMiOmarE

Episode Three
https://youtube.com/watch?v=Gh5zAcnaD4E&si=EnSIkaIECMiOmarE

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https://youtube.com/watch?v=q9SZXzylcqA&si=EnSIkaIECMiOmarE

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Lester Sees Stars: Read-Through
https://youtube.com/watch?v=NpaXMDjcLBU&si=EnSIkaIECMiOmarE

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1:0 INTRODUCTION

1:1 Overview

This chapter will first present the background for the research and the gaps in knowledge that the research attempted to fill, detailing the circumstances in which the research question was identified and how the question was to be addressed. The research question is: Can a new approach to scriptwriting, through the use of improvisation, be developed, for use entirely in an online environment?

Conducted in and around, and initially in direct response to, the global pandemic, this research identified a need for a method to facilitate improvisation online given the governmental restrictions imposed to combat the spread of COVID. Although Branch *et al* (2021) had conducted some research with a new platform, 'Virtual Director', where an original media server was developed for co-locating remote performers into shared virtual 3D environments, to enable improvisation remotely, the focus of this platform was to facilitate theatre/improv 'games' and short improvisational performances, rather than the protracted projects that I intended to undertake. As 'Virtual Director' was still in development during the period I was researching, and therefore not available to the public, it seemed apparent that it would be useful to develop an approach that could be conducted on existing video conferencing platforms such as Zoom.

British film director Mike Leigh's improvisatory method appeared to offer an approach that could be appropriated and adapted to facilitate working in such an online environment. The early character work, which involves one-to-one discussions and

some improvisation in isolation from the other actors, had the potential to be as easily undertaken remotely, as it could in person. What was of interest was whether ensemble improvisations would be both possible and fruitful when conducted online.

By adopting Mike Leigh's improvisatory approach to film making and adapting that method to meet the requirements and challenges of online working, it was thought that this research might also unearth details of Leigh's approach that had not been sufficiently explored in the existing critical discourse around Leigh's work.

The relevance of Heidegger's philosophy, specifically his essay "The Question Concerning Technology", to my thesis is concerned with the relationship between humans and technology and, specifically how humans use technology and how technology uses humans. As we shall see, Heidegger warns us that technology works to transform humanity into an efficient commodity, potentially robbing of us of our humanity. This notion of efficiency is of relevance to my research because the creative component of my thesis dramatizes just how singularly useless some humans are with technology, and also how technology can be hopelessly inefficient.

It was while I was considering Heidegger's theory that I found the direction I could take my creative practice in terms of subject matter, ideas, comedic moments/material and settings for my scripts. The majority of the monologues take place in the online world, the OEP is set in an online forum and many of the monologue narrators are more comfortable online than in the real world. This idea of experiencing life online rather than in reality echoes Heidegger's warnings in the essay and I soon identified that

there was comedy to be mined from the interaction between humans and technology due to the ever-growing role of technology in modern life.

The other relevant strand that links my research with Heidegger's thinking is the relationship Heidegger thinks could be forged between humans and technology. Heidegger suggests that we might be able to develop a free, healthier relationship with technology, by reconnecting technology with art; that we might harness technology as a means to approach and make art. The obvious relevance, then, is that, in my research, I did indeed use technology to make art: the scripts, presented as the creative component of this thesis.

1:2 Research Questions and Aims

The following research questions were conceived in order to allow the research to address gaps in knowledge and the core research problem of creating an improvisatory approach to scriptwriting in the online environment:

Research Questions

1, Can the elements of Leigh's collaborative approach to developing character, narrative and text (through improvisation) be utilised and adapted (in response to the needs of online working) to generate a new set of techniques which can facilitate online working in the field of comedy script writing?

2, Can the practical experimentation with, and application of, Leigh's approach to the creation of comedy film scripts reveal hitherto unknown aspects of his improviser's methodology in the development of character, narrative and text?

3, Can the new scriptwriting approach be adapted to facilitate the writing of successful monologues?

1:3 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into two parts. In the interests of flow the scripts produced during the practical experimentation are presented separately from the critical discourse. The critical component comprises the first half and offers context, analysis and documentation of the practical research. The second part is the creative component. The devising and writing of scripts counts as an output of the research, and as research in and of itself, so the scripts are presented within the main body of the thesis, reflecting their importance, rather than being placed in the appendix. It is recommended that the scripts be read first (they can be found in Chapter 9, pages 197 - 259) or at least before reading the chapters that offer an account of the practical projects (Chapters 5 & 7), since these chapters contain information concerning the resolution of the creative works.

As a companion to the thesis there are several video clips (listed in the contents and in-text linked) that document key moments in the practical experimentation. These videos are presented at certain points in the thesis to illustrate what is being discussed

in the text and offer the reader visual and audio examples of how the sessions were conducted during the Online Ensemble Project (OEP). In addition to the illustrative videos, films of a rehearsed read-through of *Being Normal* (the script which was created and developed during the OEP) and *Lester Sees Stars* (created during the Monologue Project) are presented to support the discourse as a realisation of the creative component of this thesis. It should be noted that in both read-throughs some episode titles and material differ from those of the final drafts submitted in the creative component, due to the editing process continuing after, and in response to, the read-through.

The critical component (Part 1) is structured as follows.

The *Literature Review* defines the key terms and concepts that are used throughout the thesis. In order to contextualise my research within the wider field of improvisational practice and, to a lesser extent, improvisational practice online, relevant existing research and literature relating to this field is analysed, allowing me to identify gaps in knowledge and highlight the original contribution my research provides.

The *Research Methodology* follows, where I detail both how the practice-as-research projects were conducted and how the underpinning methodologies were applied within the research. The chapter demonstrates that it is through *research-into-practice* that insights into Mike Leigh's improvisational approach to character, narrative and text

were to be revealed. It is then the application of *research-through-practice* that generated insights into my own emerging praxis.

Chapter Four explores Mike Leigh's approach to comedy film-making through the use of improvisation. Despite Leigh's reticence concerning the details of his methods, there does exist one book *The Improvised Play* (Clements 1986), which contains invaluable insights into Leigh's approach. Clements' account, along with what Leigh and his actors have revealed in other texts, allows me to detail Leigh's approach before applying this knowledge in my *research-into-practice* experimentation.

Chapter Five gives a detailed account of the Online Ensemble Project, whereby the research-into- and research-through-practice explored Leigh's approach applied in an online setting. As noted, the resultant script, *Being Norma*l, is presented in the creative component (Part 2) of the thesis.

Chapter Six examines the monologue form, with its conventions and styles. This chapter serves to ground the practical experimentation that follows.

Chapter Seven, then, details how the experimentation (Monologue Project) was conducted and examines its efficacy. It also further scrutinises Leigh's approach to film making, in terms of the elements of Leigh's approach that were adopted. The resultant scripts generated during the project also appear in Part 2 of the thesis.

Chapter Eight offers a discussion as to the results disclosed by the research and the recommendations which emerge from those results.

Part 2: The Creative Component (Chapter 9) presents the scripts that were generated by the practical experimentation. Nearly all the scripts that were produced are presented in this section. Each piece has its merits, but some scripts are more successful than others. The less successful script, *Dark Web*, is presented in the Appendix (Appendix D: XCVII) as it demonstrates the process(es) is/are not infallible. *Dark Web* is an example of what happens when you don't have a thorough character construction phase or enough habitus (knowledge of the milieu) and ownership of the voice. As the scripts are results of the research (even in their failings), these scripts still constitute 'true' products of the research.

Following *Part 2*, an extensive bibliography is presented along with an appendix. The appendix contains relevant resources that are useful to consult alongside the components of the main body of the thesis.

2:0 LITERATURE REVIEW AND TERMS

2:1 GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND CONCEPTS

2:1:1 Overview

This section will begin by offering an overview of the chapter as a whole, which will then examine research into the praxis of British film director Mike Leigh. It is important to highlight how terms central to this investigation are defined and applied through the lens of developing *character*, *narrative* and *text* – this will provide the focus throughout the thesis for analysis of both Leigh's praxis and my own.

In sections 2:1:8-9, we will depart from Leigh temporarily and examine Martin Heidegger's 'The Question Regarding Technology' (1949). It is Heidegger who provides the philosophical and theoretical frameworks that underpin aspects of my research. In these sections, I will first explore definitions of 'technology', so that a clearer understanding of this central term will allow easier navigation of Heidegger's philosophy in relation to my creative practice.

2:1:2 Defining Improvisation

Improvisation can take many forms, so it is essential that we define what type of improvisation is pertinent to this thesis. For the purposes of this thesis, we are dealing with performance-based improvisation and how performance-based techniques are applied by Leigh in the development of character, narrative and text. I refer throughout to a professional level of improvisation as an investigative, exploratory method in practice, rather than a drama school approach to improvisation using a selection of

theatre *games*, where situations, characters and locations are prescribed as a backdrop for improvisations or for use as some form of introductory measure for self-development, confidence building and/or dramatic training. As Scott states,

> improvisation is a temporally situated, environmentally sensitive, imaginative and creative process of restoring, rearranging, and reconstructing behaviour by a performer or group of performers which utilizes available resources to enact an idea, character, and/or situation (2014: 10-11).

What Scott offers us here is of relevance, as not only does it highlight improvisation as a continuous building process, but also that it is environmentally sensitive. This sensitivity to environment is just as pertinent to the online environment in which I conducted improvisations as it is to any 'real world' interactions.

If we return to the notion of improvisation as an iterative and reflective process of creation, we can look to Frost and Yarrow, who develop Scott's theory in the following way:

> improvisation is the immediate and organic articulation, including the verbal; not just a response, but a paradigm for the way humans reflect (or create) what happens. Where improvisation is most effective, most spontaneous, least 'blocked' by taboo, habit or shyness, it comes close to a condition of integration with the environment or context (2007: 4).

The term 'improvisation' is therefore defined as a process where actors/writers attempt to create and develop plot, narrative, character and dialogue through a spontaneous performance act which, at different stages of the process has, or may have, increasing elements of stimuli. Each stage of an improvisation may or may not be built upon

previous improvisations. These acts are bolstered and guided by the creation and development of a script, where the raw material from the improvisations is selected and developed in another improvisatory process by the writer which, we might refer to as improvisation through writing. This notion of improvisation by the writer also comes into play in the monologue writing project which, aside from the use of improvisation for the development of character (using physical, performance-based improvisation), is also conducted when writing.

Improvisation: Contextualising Leigh's Approach

Each practitioner takes what has gone before and builds upon the work of previous practitioners, honing, developing and departing from them to create a new praxis. Leigh cites theatre director Peter Brook as a key influence on his work and Brook was the practitioner who introduced Leigh to the methods of Artaud and Grotowski (Raphael. 2008: 15). It is therefore important that we discuss how these influences have shaped Brook's work and Leigh's thereafter.

Peter Brook's use of improvisation as a key component of his approach to creating theatre is in many ways a gateway to other seminal practitioners. This is because Brook's approach is, if Shomit Mitter is to be believed, a hybridised method that draws from several other theatre makers who use improvisation as a key component of their method. According to Mitter, 'Brook seemed more mimic than inventor. Brook appeared an admirably astute assimilator, a singularly canny user of other people's ideas and techniques; but he was not 'original' (1993: 3)'.

We will now examine Brook's approach to character, narrative and text. As we do this, we will examine others' approaches to the same three components, and this in turn will allow us to explore how these elements differ or demonstrate a parity with Leigh's approach.

Peter Brook

Let us now examine Brook's use of improvisation, whilst using the three foci of character, narrative and text that is applied as a framework of examination throughout this thesis.

It is necessary first to identify that Brook works predominantly with received text, that is to say a script that has been written by a playwright, rather than one written or devised by the director, as is the case with Leigh. However, despite this incongruity, I would argue that the use of improvisation in both Brook's and Leigh's approaches is in the pursuit of similar results, specifically a greater understanding of the characters and the development of the narrative. For Leigh, it is the evolution of these factors which will culminate in the finished film. In the case of Brook it might be a greater understanding of the characters (as written in the received text) and a greater understanding of the 'existing' narrative, or it may be the creation of new scenes that sit within the 'existing' text.

The importance of audience, and their position in relation to the work, allows us to examine Brook's thinking and, to an extent, his own influences from another perspective.

The happenings in the USA (in the 1960s) and the approaches of more alternative practitioners, such as Artaud and Grotowski, were what led Brook towards the importance he places in the relationship between the audience and the work - although Brook does state that Artaud, was 'more of a stimulus than a recipe (1999: xxviii)'.

Peter Brook's assessment of the importance of 'Happenings' is 'that the spectator can be jolted eventually into new sight, so that he wakes to the life around him (Brook. 1968: 61)'. It is the importance of the audience and the role they play that is at the heart of Brook's approach - in that the audience is not a passive spectator, but an active element. For Brook, evoking a response in his audience defines a clear line between what he calls Deadly Theatre and art. Brook defines two other forms of theatre that stand in opposition to Deadly Theatre: *Immediate* and *Rough Theatre*. Both of these forms put the audience at the heart of the performance.

Rough Theatre's 'aim is authenticity […] When I say authentic, I am talking about performances which are delivered in a language, at a place, and at a time that serves the audience, and not the speaker (Brook. Quoted by Ginn, 2019)'. It can be seen here that Rough Theatre places the audience at its heart – it is for the audience not the performer, the performer serves the piece and the piece serves the audience and the

audience alone. The same can be said of Immediate Theatre. Immediate Theatre, perhaps, best expresses what Brook's approach does. Immediate Theatre is the very definition of Brook's practice.

> Immediate Theatre requires a near-perfect understanding of the source material, of the other actors, of the meaning embedded in the play, to be capable of responsiveness and adaptation to setting and time, much less to the audience. When this works together, it is magical, if ephemeral. A moment that cannot be recaptured (Brook. Quoted by Ginn, 2019).

For Brook it is exploration of the text, through improvisation, research and rehearsal that gives him and his actors that 'near-perfect understanding of the source material (*Ibid*)'.

Arguably, the main difference between Rough theatre and Immediate theatre lies in preparation versus spontaneity. Where Rough theatre is a performance anywhere (rather than in a theatre), it is still, however, rehearsed and honed. Immediate theatre is related to the use of improvisation.

Where we might see similarities between Brook and Leigh is the use of both these types of theatre. As we shall see, Leigh has his actors improvise in different locations. In Road Testing, the actor, in character, goes out into the real world and interacts with the public. Actors spend time in the research phase, undertaking the job their character

does. It could be argued that this is Rough Theatre, performances (in character) in places that are not the rehearsal room or a theatre space. Leigh's reliance on improvisation throughout his process, appears to be inspired by Brook's Immediate Theatre.

In fact, Leigh himself has himself spoken of being deeply influenced by Brook's use of research and improvisation when developing a staging of *Marat/Sade*. Leigh saw that using research and improvisation to prepare for a performance of a received text, could be taken further and actually become a method for creating a text. In a collection of transcribed interviews, edited by Howie Movshovitz, Leigh says:

> I saw a documentary on the box on how the play [Marat/Sade] was all sort of improvisation, coming from research from cases in a mental hospital. It triggered the thought in me that if you could do all that, you could go one stage further and actually make one up (2000: 116).

Brook's use of both Rough and Immediate theatre in the preparations for the performance of *Marat/Sade*, can be clearly seen as inspirational to Leigh and can be identified in Leigh's process.

<u>Brook and Character</u>

The understanding and development of character is central to Brook's approach. If the received script is the starting point, then character is the first step in understanding,

developing and interpreting the script. However, where one might think the fictional character would be the starting point, in this character development stage, it is, in fact, not the case with Brook. Brook sees character development as a phase following the initial development of the actor and the removal of his/her preconceptions, inhibitions and potential tendencies to play a version of themselves. In his enlightening text, *The Shifting Point: 40 Years of Theatrical Exploration 1946-1987*, Brook identifies the common misconception that character is formed, developed and then complete; his idea is that authentic 'preparation is not construction (1987: 7)'. He notes that

> Even the title of Stanislavski's great work, *Building a Character*, this misunderstanding persists, implying that character can be built up like a wall, until one last brick is laid and the character is complete. To my mind , it is just the opposite […] preparing a character is the opposite of building – it is demolishing, removing brick by brick everything in the actor's muscles, ideas and inhibitions that stands between him and the part, until one day with a great rush of air the character invades his every pore (*Ibid*).

Brook's notion here is that an actor must first be developed to help him/her then find and develop the character, that the actor's personal and intellectual impediments must be broken down, and only then can a character be developed in a pure and true environment, one in which an actor's training and 'go to' approaches to character are not relied upon, where they are, in fact, removed. The 'common-sense' notion here is that an actor might ordinarily start to draw from his/her inner feelings and instincts, but Brook wants to avoid this. Brook wants the actor to let the text and the director guide the actor's exploration of the characterisation. At the very core of Brook's praxis is the

symbiotic relationship between the key elements of the piece at different parts of the process.

This element of Brook's approach is of interest, as, if Brook is an influence on Leigh's approach, then the 'cardinal rule' in Leigh's approach reflects Brook here. As we shall see, Leigh's cardinal rule insists that his (Leigh's) actors never draw from personal experience or personality traits. It could be argued that Leigh has appropriated this from Brook, for the same reason, namely that neither Leigh, nor Brook, want their actors to play a version of themselves, but to play a character more 'truthfully', by way of separating actor and character in a definite way. For Brook the source text, in terms of characterisation, should not be bent to fit the actor (and their existing experiences and personality), just as Leigh insists that supplementing personality traits and experience is not engaging with his process in the correct way. Essentially the character is more realistic, more robust, when each decision (regarding the construction and development of the character) is considered and not simply forced to fit the actor's personality – playing yourself is too 'easy'. As Brook states.

> Any part must be partly you and partly not you. The part that is you is easy, but the part that is not you, you have to discover. And you have to take that as a challenge […] and that creates a tension and a friction that in the end can produce discovery (Brook, 1999: 67-68).

Brook defines his role of director (in rehearsals) as something more than just a facilitator, he suggests that a director is there to 'continually provoke the actor,

stimulate him, asking questions and creating an atmosphere in which the actor can dig, probe and investigate', but also that the director is better placed to say what belongs in the play and what can be dispensed with (Brook, 1987: 4). Yet Brook does identify that a director is on a voyage of discovery himself, 'In a sense the director is an imposter, a guide at night who does not know the territory, and yet has no choice – he must guide. Learning the route as he goes (1968: 43)'.

Once again, this offers parity with how Leigh works. Certainly, in the early stages, Leigh might be considered more of a facilitator, although, as with Brook, it is his vision that drives the process along and brings it to fruition. As Brook states, 'the work involves thinking, comparing, brooding, making mistakes, going back, starting again. The writer does this, but in secret. The theatre director has to expose his uncertainties to his cast – rehearsal is a visible thinking-aloud (1968: 120-121)'.

Brook and Narrative

Narrative is not just simply the plot: the sequence of events in a play. Narrative encompasses the controlling idea, the relationships between the characters, everything that is implied in and everything that can be inferred from a piece – the information that is revealed in the work, and the information that is not but which has still informed the characterisation and narrative development during the process.

These hidden meanings, themes and messages might not be apparent to Brook and his actors from the first few readings of the text. In terms of something like

Shakespeare, perhaps there is a different reading of the meaning of a play which hasn't yet been identified, and Brook's method enables him to approach an original narrative conception. The pursuit of this narrative takes the play in a new direction, suggests new scenes, or different ways of performing existing scenes – or, indeed, the deletion of existing scenes as they are no longer relevant or necessary. It sees new characterisations and new relationships between the characters, which in turn might suggest alterations to the existing text.

Brook and Text

As we shall see in Chapter Four, Leigh explains that it is essential to his way of working that he pursue a collaborative approach. The following statement from Brook offers a clear similarity between the two practitioners. Brook says,

> On the whole, I find that most authors are trapped, particularly if they have a certain success, into living up to their success and producing plays with their own thumbprint on them. As much as I find that interesting, it doesn't interest me at all to work on that in the theatre because I feel that the playwright isn't truly the servant of hidden realities being brought into existence. He is the servant of his particular point of view, and that doesn't interest me nearly as much as what can happen when one works as a group, bringing and sharing different viewpoints. What can emerge can be more generous in human terms (Brook, 1999: 19-20).

Brook is identifying that working with a group produces more than the sum of its parts and therefore is an approach that is going to produce greater insights and more

exciting possibilities than work undertaken as a solo writer or solo practitioner. Brook worked closely with Peter Weiss on his play *The Persecution of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade* (Marat/Sade, 1967) and with Ted Hughes during his experimental theatre work with the International Centre of Theatre Research, and, in both cases, there was a clear collaboration between writer, director, text and actor involving an agreement to allow the writing to be a starting point for exploration, rather than a carved in stone text to simply perform.

The parity between Brook and Leigh, in relation to the use of a collaborative approach, is clear. However, the use of a text as a jumping off point is where Leigh departs from Brook. As noted in the definition of terms chapter of this thesis, in relation to Leigh's method, the text comes at the end, by way of the finished film, rather than any written artifact at an earlier stage of Leigh's process.

To conclude this section then, we can see that Brook's approach to any text (received or otherwise) is one of exploration. He, with his actors, explore character, character relationships and seek out new meanings, new interpretations. These insights allow Brook and his ensemble to find new narratives within the work. Through improvisation Brook guides his actors on a journey of constant development and revision, which continues into performance. Brook's entire process culminates then in the spontaneity of the theatrical event, which is legitimised by the presence of an audience – the performance's effect on the audience, the evocation of certain responses in the

audience, being the primary, if not sole, purpose of the process. This process has similarities with the approach of Mike Leigh.

Both Leigh and Brook use improvisation as an exploratory and investigative tool. They do not use improvisation in terms of 'theatre games'. Improvisation is a professional process to create and develop insights, rather than to train an actor, or relax him/her in preparation for rehearsal. Improvisation is used to create and develop all elements of a piece, rather than to polish existing elements, although Brook does use improvisation to develop new elements inside received scripts, whereas Leigh uses improvisation to create and develop all elements from scratch.

Brook, then, has influenced Leigh in the following ways. There is the insistence on an actor not playing a version of themselves or attempting to bend the character to fit their own personality and experience. This is shown in Leigh's 'Cardinal Rule', and it might be considered a more stringent version of this rule than that imposed by Brook. Brook's deep exploration of character and character work as a starting point can be seen in Leigh's approach too. In Leigh's process character comes first and is the foundation on which everything else is constructed. Brook's approach to narrative, by way of improvising, experimenting, discussing and questioning, can be clearly seen in Leigh's approach too. It is where the 'text' is positioned that demonstrates Leigh's departure from Brook. Text is the starting point for Brook; for Leigh, it is the end point.

Television Improvised Comedy

In this section defining improvisation, having explored practitioners such as Brook, It might be of use to spend a little time to outline some improvised television comedy, to further contextualise this thesis.

Whose Line is it Anyway?

Whose Line is one of the most successful and well known improvisation comedy shows, certainly within the UK and USA. The use of 'short-form' theatre games, a small cast, some basic props and what amounts to a 'black box space' is what most people would think of when you mention improvisation. I am keen to point out that this type of improvisation is not the sort of improvisation Leigh employs and, ergo, not the type of improvisation I have employed. The clear parameters of setting, character and behaviour, for a short improvisation, predominantly for laughs, although it has its place, simply would not work for a protracted project such as mine.

Curb Your Enthusiasm

Larry David's *Curb* is a now incredibly successful TV show that is famed for its improvisatory approach to comedy television writing. Edge describes *Curb* as a programme that, 'uses 'long form' [improvisation] in a scenic format and realistic settings to create an on-going story based around specific characters. Each episode has a basic format, but the dialogue in each scene is improvised in front of the cameras (2010)'.

David's initial concept for the show was to be a documentary-style programme that followed David as he prepared to return to stand-up comedy. It can't be denied that this is not dissimilar to the premise of *Seinfeld* (NBC. 1989-1998), which was to illustrate how stand-up comedian Larry Seinfeld found inspiration for his stand-up routines. That said, David, as he sat down to write the pilot, soon realised that aside from footage of him onstage, he was unsure what else he might include. Returning to his documentary-style aesthetic, he soon realised that writing a script wouldn't work. 'As I was writing it, I realised it had to be improvised, to work. It had to feel like a documentary (David. *The History of Curb Your Enthusiasm*. 2023)'. Clearly, David had identified that the spontaneous and less polished footage that improvisation could provide was how he must approach his new project.

In order to populate his 'fictional' world, David turned to actors who were adept at improvisation. However, unlike Leigh, David did not spend time with the actors working on character. Rather, they were 'encouraged to exaggerate who they are, their core remains the same, but they are heightened, extreme versions of themselves (*How Curb Your Enthusiasm Works Without a Script*. 2022)' – something that Leigh's Cardinal Rule' expressly forbids.

2:1:3 The Real

References to Leigh's work being in pursuit of presenting *the real* are frequent throughout this thesis. The term 'real' relates to an authenticity in representation, what Marchand refers to as forms 'of mimetic realism (2015: 39)'. In essence 'the real', for the purpose of this thesis, relates to 'realism'.

It could be argued that Leigh, through the way his films represent ‘real life’, is offering the chance for the kind of analysis that Henri Lefebvre talks about when he describes his aim, in *The Critique of Everyday Life*

> to attempt a philosophical inventory and analysis of everyday life that will expose its ambiguities – its baseness and exuberance, its poverty and fruitfulness – and by these unorthodox means release the creative energies that are an integral part of it (1968: 13).

The use of improvisation is designed to generate material and performances which have a ‘reality-effect’ in terms of the representation of everyday life because it is intended to allow for a connection between an actor and their character more profound and more accurate than those we are used to in mainstream cinema.

As Leigh himself states, ‘a great deal can be conveyed to an audience about the way the world should be, by showing the way the world is (in Gary Watson, *The Cinema of Mike Leigh,* 2004: 23)‘. Leigh continues,

> it’s a very particular type of storytelling. [it] takes the form of an invitation to the audience to go through the process of identifying with, reacting to, reacting against, sympathising with, caring for, getting cheesed off with, complex interactions between people (In Watson, 2004: 80).

What Leigh is saying here is, that through the portrayal of characters that an audience can recognise as like themselves or like people they know, he can encourage the audience to consider their own lives.

O' Sullivan argues that Leigh's work addresses a central question namely, 'what is a human being?', and goes on to suggest that this question is articulated through Leigh's process, whereby characters are created and developed through the accumulation of detail, in order to present and explore 'the real' (2011: 105).

Leigh is able to present this realism through his use of detail. This detail is wide ranging and goes from the wider sphere of a determinate social and historical setting to the very minutiae of everyday life.

There is the notion that stories are realistic because they locate their characters and action in a determinate social and historical setting. All Leigh's films are located in predominantly unglamorous and stark settings, reflecting the worlds that the characters inhabit. These settings are reflective of Leigh's characters' destinies and the themes Leigh wishes to explore. In locating his characters within these real life settings, Leigh furnishes those places with the necessary objects which underpin the realism he requires. This 'totality of objects' is identified as essential in positioning a fictional work in the representation of 'the real'. As Georg Lukács states:

> The epic presentation of the totality of life – unlike the dramatic – must inevitably include the presentation of the externals of life, the epic-poetic transformation of the most important objects making up some sphere of human life and most typical events necessarily occurring in such a sphere. Hegel calls this first postulate of epic presentation 'the totality of objects.' This postulate is not a theoretical invention. Every novelist instinctively feels that his work cannot claim to be complete if it lacks this 'totality of objects,' that is, if it does not include every important object, event and sphere of life belonging to the theme. The crucial difference between the genuine epics of the old realists and the disintegration of form in the declining newer literature

> is manifested in the way in which this 'totality of objects' is linked with the individual destinies of the characters (1964: 151-152).

Leigh and his actors don't just transcribe what we see onstage or on film from an anterior reality that they were part of or witnessed. The improvisation is set up to make elements of an anterior reality metamorphose into something new but just as 'real'. There is a Leigh style, made up of elements that can be itemised as constituent parts of his own version of 'the real', including the significance of insignificant objects, clothes, décor, etc. as signs of social status, order or chaos, but also the continuity of the real as its superficial appearance including a contingency of objects, objects with *no* apparent meaning, which are allowed to be present in order to free the author from bourgeois descriptive norms. Realism always exists as a selection from and simplification of 'the real'. As Roland Barthes argues, 'realism is the art that grasps the deep structure of a society. To grasp the structure means to discern what is important (typical) and to reject the insignificant – *the real is what is significant* (2015: 31)'. We might turn to Sagner-Buurma and Heffernan to help us unpick what Barthes is getting at when they suggest that

> He [Barthes] reveals that all such ''insignificant'' details in realist fiction are in fact significant. ''Apparently'' functionless, these stray details seem to the naive reader encountering them in the flow of the novel like meaningless narrative ''fillers''. But in fact, Barthes reveals in a now familiar twist, they enact the important ideological function of signifying ''the real.'' In this sense, all such apparently meaningless realist detail ascends to the privileged status of signification (2014: 80)

This notion of the significance of seemingly insignificant detail is of use, as it points to how Leigh presents realism in his films. It is the carefully crafted use of detail that lies at the heart of Leigh's representation of 'the real'. As Carney & Quant identify, 'Leigh's

characters and situations live in their details. They are nothing in general and everything in particular […] not to attend to these details is to miss the experience Leigh offers (2000:32)'. Keeping with realism, let us examine Leigh's work in terms of realism.

The Real: Realism and Authenticity

References to Leigh's work being in pursuit of *the real* are frequent throughout this thesis. The term 'real' relates to an authenticity in representation, what Marchand refers to as forms 'of mimetic realism (2015: 39)'. In essence 'the real', for the purpose of this thesis, relates to 'realism'.

That is to say, Leigh's films are populated by representations of 'real' people, people we recognise as similar to ourselves and the people we know. His films also portray scenarios, locations and events that we recognise as 'real'; as the 'same' world we ourselves inhabit and experience.

For a definition of realism, in cinematic terms, we might say that the people, events and locations portrayed on film possess a 'convincing likeness to reality (Langkjer. 2002:17)'. That is to say realism in film is a persuasive representation of reality. We could go further. Torben Grodal offers us the idea that, 'historically, 'realist representations' have often dealt with the *daily* routine of uneventful lives, especially that of the *middle* and *lower* classes (2002:74)'. If we accept this idea, then, Leigh's work clearly fits into this paradigm. Many of Leigh's films are populated by working class characters, and many films present routine and uneventful lives, where there is little in the way of major events.

Langkjer also argues that ‘Realism is defined by certain narrative techniques [for example], the habit of spending time on actions and events of no central importance to the narrative (2002:16)’. Again, applying this to Leigh, there are several films where, it could be argued, time is spent on scenes that serve character but not narrative. Langkjer suggests the realism can be identified by its style, ‘the visual style, acting style and mise-en-scène (2002:18)’. Leigh can be said to have a recognisable style, both in terms of his cinematography and in his visual aesthetics including the locations and pace of his films. This might also include ‘loose’ narrative structures, unexplained accidental happenings and open endings which fit the realism paradigm as described by Langkjer; ‘by leaving things undone and unexplained, they somehow imitate life (2002:19-20)’. Leigh is concerned with posing questions and not giving answers. As Leigh himself states, ‘I’m really concerned with stimulating discussion […] I want people to go away without the answers (Movshovitz. 2000:11)’.

Langkjer offers us some further ideas of the use of the open ending and its place in realism that supports my ideas concerning Leigh’s brand of realism:

> The real goal of realism and its protagonists is, through conflict, to gain [the] specific kind of social intelligence the film puts forth as needed. The open ending is almost obligatory, as there is no final action that can make this social ability salient to the audience. [In this way] Realism is different from the classical narrative as its goal cannot be achieved by a single action (2002. 36-37)

It should be noted that Langkjer also mentions realism's protagonists. He explains that, in realism, 'the protagonists are rarely 'men of action' following a clear cut goal' rather, the focus is on their attempts to 'manage certain social and existential situations […] Social emotions such as shame, embarrassment, admiration, humiliation, pride and the like are the structuring elements of those situations (2002:36)'. If we examine Leigh against this final trope of realism, we can clearly see that none of Leigh's characters are men (or women) of 'action' with a single, clearly implied goal.

Authenticity

Intertwined with realism is the idea of authenticity. The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers several valuable definitions of this term. The most useful, in terms of a definition of the term for this thesis is, 'the quality of truthful correspondence between inner feelings and their outward expression (OED)'. It is often stated that improvisation provides an actor with access to more authentic emotions and responses. Certainly, if we look at the often cited scene where, in *Secrets and Lies* (1996), Brenda Blethyn meets her daughter for the first time, her reaction is more authentic, because, as per Leigh's method, she (as an actor and in character) was not party to the information that the daughter was played by a person of colour, therefore her surprised reaction was (according to Leigh) more realistic. In this sense, we might see authenticity to mean believable, real and true emotion. Leigh does talk about his actors being in a condition where they know the character so well that they are able to play the character in improvisations and the emotions they experience are from a kind of embedded 'hard-wiring' in the actor's 'character memory' (Raphael. 2008:30. The best definition of 'authenticity' for Leigh's work and for my thesis too, is the appearance of, or actual

quality of being real', where Leigh's work can be considered a major effort to dissolve the distinction between the two.

2:1:4 Character

For the purposes of this thesis, the term *character* refers to the fictional persona that the actors create and develop during the pre-production and rehearsal process with the director/researcher. Leigh's definition of character is something that emerges from what is described as the pre-production development process (see Chapter 4), and it is from character that narrative (plot) emerges. This challenges the Aristotelian model, where character is subservient to plot. Aristotle states, 'the plot, then, is the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of a tragedy [and comedy]; character holds the second place (1952: 34)'. In the Western Aristotelian model, the characters are those who populate the script, the scenario, the story. It is true that this is the case with Leigh to an extent, but for Leigh the role of character is not so passive. For Leigh, character is the most important element, as it is the basis on which everything else is built. The characters are not just the people that populate a script, rather they are the component that drives the narrative, the central element around which everything else revolves. This is evident in that Leigh spends the most time, in any given project, on the character construction phase, and it is the character construction phase that comes first in Leigh's process.

For the purposes of this thesis, then, the term 'character' refers to the fictional persona, both physical and psychological, that the actors create and develop during the process with the director/researcher. The character is the embodiment and portrayal, by the

actor, of a personality separate from their own who, though based initially on a person they have known, then develops into a fictional construct, while maintaining a persuasive level of realism.

Therefore, by establishing the characters' motivations and desires, it is expected that, through Leigh's approach to character development, this will lead to narrative possibilities. A character's desire and the placing of barriers to prevent them attaining these desires is what forms the basis for plots and character arcs, where the character undergoes some form of psychological change (for better or worse) as a result of their external experiences. In essence, in Leigh's approach to practice, character comes first and is the foundation on which narrative and text are built.

Let us now look at a definition of *text*, or *script*, before dealing with the more complex concept of *narrative*.

2:1:5 Text or Script

In this section I will offer the working definition of 'text' as it is applied throughout this thesis. As we shall see, to simply use the term 'script', when dealing with Leigh, is problematic, as Leigh does not work with a script. What follows is an attempt to use 'text' as an overarching term to encompass the final product of the creative process - the final artifact, be it a script, or the finished film, or a performance.

Due to the nature of Leigh's approach, that is to say his use of a collaborative improvisatory process, the presence of a *script* would place certain limitations on the freedom required for the improvisation so I am appropriating the phrase 'performance text' from D'anna – whose use of improvisation is explored later in this chapter in the literature review.

As D'Anna states in her thesis, 'A Journey Back Home', 'The 'performance text' exists only at the end of the creative process when performers share their work with an audience. In this context, the word 'text' means 'a weaving together' (2018: 119)'. The text, therefore, in performance-based improvisation, is the finished, final product, which can only be complete at the end of the creative process.

2:1:6 Definition of Narrative

In this final section of the glossary of terms I will define the term 'narrative'. This term is the most complex of the three foci used to examine Leigh's (and my own) approach to comedy through improvisation. Leigh is not prone to great plot twists (though some films are an exception to this rule), nor is he a practitioner who utilises extraordinary or spectacular events in his work. For Leigh, the events of his films are related to and driven by character, so 'narrative' cannot just be defined as plot.

We will need to define the term 'narrative' in a way that does not see narrative as a *single* element, but a term that encompasses *several* elements. These elements are those of story or Controlling Idea, thematic strands and character arcs.

For Aristotle, plot has a ‘beginning, middle and end (1952: 31)’. The plot should involve ‘cause and effect’ and a ‘natural continuity (1952: 39)’. If we were to look at Leigh’s films in this way, I would agree that Leigh’s films do adhere to Aristotle’s linear model of narrative, but they are predominantly character-based, in terms of character arcs, or character developments/journeys.

Seminal script writer and author of key instructional scriptwriting manuals, Robert McKee states that *The Controlling Idea*, is an expression of ‘a story’s irreducible meaning’ and a function of writing that ‘guides the writer’s aesthetic choices as to what is right for the story (Story. 1999: 115)’. Narrative defined from this perspective is not a reference to just the events depicted, but all of the work’s composite parts, that is to say, not just the dramatic turning points but all of the dramatically insignificant detail in between too.

In most cases Leigh’s films are *about* (i.e. they are constituted by the controlling idea of) what it means to be human, with a focus on ideas of class, and personal relationships, so we should see these themes as part of the controlling idea in Leigh’s work.

Narrative, for the purposes of this thesis, encompasses both structure and theme. Narrative as an umbrella term embraces story, or controlling idea, and the chronological elements that make up how the events unfold (the structural building

blocks), clearly demonstrated in five act structures such as Freytag's Pyramid (1863), *Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action and Dénouement*, or three act structures like Todorov's (1971) *Equilibrium, Disequilibrium, Re-Equilibrium*.

The reason, as we have seen, that the term narrative cannot *just* refer to structure, is that an important element of Leigh's work lies in the thematic strands and central messages that run through his work, which are intimately related to the production of characters.

2:1:7 Martin Heidegger's 'The Question Regarding Technology'

In this section, I will first introduce Heideggerian definitions of technology, before demonstrating their relevance for both my research-into and -through practice.

Secondly, as part of the literature review, I will examine interpretations of Heidegger's work on technology concerning how Heidegger recommends we relate to technology, the dangers he perceives that technology poses to humanity, and how this theory is relevant to my project.

2:1:8 Relevant Definitions of Technology Derived from Heidegger

It is important that we define what Heidegger means by the term (Modern) Technology. It is human beings' use of and engagement with technology that is at the heart of Heidegger's philosophical ideas on technology. Heidegger, a phenomenologist, is

concerned with the human experience, and it is this positioning as central of human beings within technology that makes his work relevant to my research aims and methodological approach.

The *Cambridge English Dictionary* defines phenomenology as, 'the study of phenomena (things that exist and can be seen, felt, tasted, etc.) and how we experience them'. This definition is useful in presenting us with a broad overview, but we might go a little deeper to understand some of the complexities of phenomenology. If we turn to Moran and Mooney, they take us a step closer: 'Phenomenology may be characterised initially in a broad sense as the unprejudiced descriptive study of whatever appears to consciousness, precisely in the manner in which it so appears (2002: 1)'. They go on to say, that

> the phenomenological approach is primarily descriptive, seeking to illuminate issues in a radical, unprejudiced manner, paying close attention to the evidence that presents itself to our grasp or intuition. It is a way to focus on the manner in which objects are constituted in and for subjects. It focuses on the structure and qualities of objects and situations as they are experienced by the subject (*Ibid*).

From its conception phenomenology was considered revolutionary and a departure from previous philosophical approaches.

> Phenomenology was seen as reviving our living contact with reality, as being remote from the arid and academic discussion of philosophical problems found in nineteenth-

> century philosophy. […] the programme of phenomenology sought to reinvigorate philosophy by returning it to the life of the living human subject (Moran. 2005: 5).

Heidegger, a student of Husserl's, adopted phenomenology as an approach for his own thinking, for the study of phenomena through lived experience, where the experience also takes into account the experiencer. This aspect of the phenomenological approach might be considered analogous to my own relation to my practice-based research, since I, as the researcher, writer and performer, am positioned centrally 'in' the research and research questions.

As we shall see, Heidegger prescribes a particular relationship with technology, for fear that technology may reduce humans to mere resources within industrial and scientific processes that strive for efficacy above all else. What Heidegger does not stop to consider in this context, and what therefore connects my work to his, is how inept some people are with technology. It is the comedy that is born out of people's inability to be efficient when dealing with technology, and technology's own failings (in terms of efficiency) that makes Heidegger's philosophical theory relevant to my practice-led research.

In his 1949 treatise 'The Question Concerning Technology', Heidegger offers an appraisal of what he believes is a new epoch defined by modern technology. For Heidegger, technology has been with us for centuries in the form of tools and

processes that artisans, labourers, farmers etc. use to create – to bring something into being for the betterment of humanity. Heidegger returns to the ancient Greek origin of the word, t*echne*, in order to demonstrate the original meanings of this virtuous historic technology, explaining that at one time it meant the “bringing-forth of the true into the beautiful” and “the *poiesis* of the fine arts (Blitz. 2014)’. In fact Heidegger likens this historical technology to art and nature, *techne* occupying a place within the natural world.

For Heidegger, historical technology has a symbiosis with nature and persists as a real experience. As David Roberts states, ’Heidegger stresses the importance of the connection between techne and episteme. Both words designate knowing in the widest sense. They mean to be entirely at home in something, to understand and be expert in it (2012:27)’.

For Heidegger the virtue of historical technology lies in the value of each of its component parts, its resources and the value of the end product. To illustrate this Heidegger uses the analogy of a silversmith in the creation of a chalice. Each stage of the process, including the silversmith, the resultant chalice and then the significance (in religious rites) imbued to the chalice, are of value. For Heidegger there is beauty in the poetic bringing-into-being of an object, which works with nature and the resources it provides. It is, however, highlighted by Roberts that Heidegger ‘fails to take into account the technical process of deworlding by which silver is obtained (2012:31)’. The term *deworlding* offers a link to what Heidegger defines as Modern Technology.

If we take what Roberts describes as *deworlding* to denote a mechanised taking from the land (intense mining), in a perpetual process that does not value the component parts (including humans), towards no definite end product (essentially intensive industry that is a constant conveyor belt of production without end), we have begun to get close to what Heidegger calls Modern Technology. Roberts claims that,

> [t]he crux of Heidegger's critique of modern technology is the charge that it strips objects of their inherent potentialities by reducing them to raw materials. This is a process of deworlding in stark contrast to the poetic revealing inherent in techne's bringing-forth. (Roberts. 2012:31)

Roberts' précis of Heidegger's differentiation between what he defines as historical technology and modern technology is echoed by Blitz who states that '[Heidegger's modern technology sees] the reduction of things and of ourselves to mere supplies and reserves (2014)'. For Heidegger, modern technology is a departure from the lived experience of being in the world in a harmonious way, to a mechanised procedure devoid of real meaning and for no discernible end. Like Roberts, Blitz explains that

> Heidegger draws attention to technology's place in bringing about our decline by constricting our experience of things as they are. He argues that we now view nature, and increasingly human beings too, only technologically — that is, we see nature and people only as raw material for technical operations (2014)

Modern technology is, for Heidegger, obsessed with efficiency. 'The essence of modern technology, Heidegger tells us, is to seek to order everything so as to achieve more and more flexibility and efficiency (Roberts. 2012:31)'. Heidegger feels that activities which are inefficient from the perspective of modern technology, such as a family meal, or a drink with friends, are of value, despite them serving no economic

purpose as such. This pursuit of non-efficient activities is in direct conflict with what Heidegger describes as the *efficiency* of modern technology. As a phenomenologist, Heidegger is interested in experiencing and connecting with the world, whereas modern technology is born out of science, what he sees as a removed and pre-determined way of examining the world. Heidegger compares the departure from the Greek notion of t*echne* (bringing forth, truth and beauty) to a dispassionate scientific approach:

> In opposition to this definition of the essential domain of technology, one can object that it indeed holds for Greek thought and that at best it might apply to the techniques of the handcraftsman, but that it simply does not fit modern machine-powered technology. And it is precisely the latter and it alone that is the disturbing thing that moves us to ask the question concerning technology per se. It is said that modern technology is something incomparably different from all earlier technologies because it is based on modern physics as an exact science (1954: 6)

Heidegger is referring to nuclear power stations, factories and aircraft, when he refers to modern technology, 'he [Heidegger] is less concerned with the ancient and old tools and techniques that antedate modernity; the essence of technology is revealed in factories and industrial processes, not in hammers and plows [sic] (Blitz. 2014)'.

The reality in which technology has changed everything leads us to an important digression. Before we proceed to Heidegger's conclusions, we must take a moment to consider modern technology as it developed after Heidegger's death, the modern technology of today – particularly the internet and online technology. Today's internet and online world is of philosophical and practical interest both in terms of (as we shall see) what Heidegger values, and also the relevance of Heidegger's ideas in relation to my research methodology.

Dreyfus states that ‘In 1950, Heidegger declared that we were entering a new and especially dangerous epoch in the history of being which he called the technological understanding of being (Dreyfus & Spinosa.. 2003:334)’. What Dreyfus and Spinosa are highlighting here is that Heidegger, when he talks of modern technology, is no longer referring to machines so much as a new age of man which is precipitated by technology, a technological age, a technological world. As Mark Blitz propounds, ‘while we have already seen how the essence of technology prevents us from encountering the reality of the world, now Heidegger points out that technology has *become* the world (Blitz. 2014)’. This new technological world is best represented by the online world, our own modern age of the internet and cyberspace. Walters and Kop observe in their article, ‘Heidegger, Digital Technology, and Postmodern Education From Being in Cyberspace to Meeting on MySpace’ that

> the dominance of technology in life today led Heidegger to propose that a new way of understanding what it is to be human was emerging—the technological way-of-being. Heidegger’s starting point is human familiarity and practical engagement in life and the world, which he calls “being-in-the-world.” Hence, it is a fundamental human experience to be at home in a world and culture that is already understood. This understanding of the world is practical rather than intellectual. Phenomenology describes this understanding and hermeneutics interprets the meaning latent in this description of experience. Individuals today are immersed in a digital world, and Heidegger’s technological way-of-being can be viewed more clearly in the context of digital technology, particularly the Internet (2009: 279)

This article is of particular interest here as the authors highlight how they see digital technology as a means to personal and cultural development. They uniquely identify that cyberspace is a place where Heidegger’s philosophical idea of *dasein* (being-in-the-world) can flourish and contend that the online world is a place where one is able

to understand what it means to be human, citing Heidegger's idea that by beginning with the individual, his approach situates us in a practical and cultural background – in his/her world. They then proceed to argue that cyberspace constitutes such a world, one where it is possible to examine the individual's implicit beliefs and patterns of behaviour (2009: 279-280).

This characterisation of the impact of the internet on the individual's experience of being-in-the-world is difficult to accept. I cannot see how the online world as it stands, in terms of the proliferation of social media and avalanches of unsubstantiated information, could constitute a world where examination of the individual's beliefs and behaviours can be conducted online, and this raises questions, given the often isolating nature of an online world which purports to connect everyone with everyone else.

However, if the online world were utilised as an environment for creative endeavour, then this creative pursuit could go some way to highlighting how Heidegger's phenomenological philosophical approach examining notions of technology can form, in part, a conceptual framework informing my research and my approach to online practice.

Mark Blitz offers a perspective on this possibility when he states that

> [p]erhaps the key to understanding technology and to guiding it is, despite Heidegger's animadversions, precisely to wonder about the ordinary question of how to use

> technology well, not piece by piece to serve isolated desires, but as part of a whole way of life (Blitz. 2014).

What Blitz advocates here is a way to interact with technology in order that we do not become simply a resource by avoiding the dangers of modern technology which Heidegger has warned us against.

I would suggest that the importance of reading Heidegger on technology is not to see him as pro- or anti-modern technology, but to continue on the journey he has set us, by way of thinking about how to operate alongside modern technology in the pursuit of truth. Heidegger opens the essay with the following aim in mind:

> We shall be questioning concerning technology, and in so doing we should like to prepare a free relationship to it. The relationship will be free if it opens our human existence to the essence of technology. When we can respond to this essence, we shall be able to experience the technological within its own bounds. [We will] attempt to bring man into the right relation to technology. Everything depends on our manipulating technology in the proper manner as a means. We will, as we say, “get” technology “spiritually in hand.” (1957: 1)

Rather than seeking to destroy or reject modern technology, Heidegger seems to be advocating a relationship with modern technology, albeit a tentative one. Mark Blitz argues that Heidegger does not think it possible to reject modern technology, but believes it is necessary that we are able to perceive its dangers (2014).

So what then are the dangers Heidegger sees as related to the dominance of modern technology? Heidegger saw modern technology as heralding a time of isolation, of

distancing, the abolition of a sense of community, of closeness. He saw modern technology reducing beings to a state where they lost sight of what it means to be human. This is certainly true of aspects of the online world, which reconfigures the meaning of ‘community’ as a peculiarly non-social or even anti-social engagement, confined to the home and the monitor screen. Borys M. Kowalsky has argued that modern technology has precipitated a global culture where racism and hatred has become widespread, that alienation and victimisation can be facilitated by the online world in ways which seem connected to the Heideggerian diagnosis (2011: 28-42).

Responding to an idea of community as the gathering of people, I brought together an ensemble of actors online in a time when people could not get together, to develop a *good* relationship with technology in the service of a common goal, the artistic production of comedic scripts, rather than a reductive, perpetual process which does not value its constituent parts. What I hoped to see was the beginning of a relationship with technology which could be utilised for better things, the unearthing of truths and the production of art which Heidegger associates with historical technology rather than modern technology.

Heidegger warns us that modern technology’s obsession with efficiency is dangerous, so that even humble, everyday human activities and practices could become mobilized as resources (Dreyfus & Spinosa. 2003: 344). Dreyfus and Spinosa discuss how, for Heidegger, socialising is of great importance for mental wellbeing and development, allowing us to ground situations and make them matter to us. Heidegger notes that social activities are not rooted in efficiency, quite the opposite, and therefore they are

the antithesis of modern technology (2003: 344-345). My own awareness of the essence of modern technology, arrived at through Heidegger's thought, means that I am able to inquire into the nature of creative practice in an epoch defined by cyberspace. This inquiry into creative practice takes us to the one thing that Heidegger holds dearest: poetry, and as Roberts points out, 'when Heidegger speaks of poetry he means all the arts (2012: 27)'. The importance of "The Question Concerning Technology" then is its interrogation of what Roberts calls 'the essential original relationship of technology and art (2012: 25)' in order to find a way of relating to and interacting with modern technology in order to serve humanity without dominating it.

The problem for Heidegger is that, in terms of experiencing a phenomenon, it is a matter of *revealing* (revealing truths, insights), and where poiesis *brings forth*, modern technology instead *challenges forth*. We must return to Heidegger's use of the origin of the word technology, *techne*, to grasp his meaning here. Roberts argues that

> [i]t therefore follows that the essence of techne concerns revealing. It is 'as revealing, and not manufacturing, that techne is a bringing-forth' (1993: 319). Heidegger stresses the importance of the connection between techne and episteme. Both words designate knowing in the widest sense. 'They mean to be entirely at home in something, to understand and be expert in it' (1993: 318). […] For Heidegger, modern technology no longer brings forth in the sense of poiesis. [Therefore the] crux of Heidegger's critique of modern technology is the charge that it strips objects of their inherent potentialities by reducing them to raw materials (2012: 27-31).

What Roberts offers us here is important in two ways. First, where Heidegger talks of 'being entirely at home in something to understand it and be expert in it'. This statement is of relevance to my research, as I am a scriptwriting practitioner, with considerable experience of writing, improvising and working with actors, I would argue

that I am ‘at home’ within that sphere. Where I am in unfamiliar territory is working online – but through my research I will seek to be ‘at home’, insofar as that is possible, in the online world. Secondly, what if we could develop a means by which modern technology could *bring forth a sense of poeisis*? What if conducting an enquiry into creative practice through the use of modern technology could be achieved? Then surely, we might once again find a method of research into the phenomenon of creativity (specifically scriptwriting through improvisation) of which Heidegger could approve.

We will revisit Heidegger later in the methodology chapter where I will demonstrate how it is Heidegger’s notion of the reductivity of modern technology when it comes to human interaction with the essence of technology that reveals its clear relevance to my own creative enquiry, specifically in the genre of comedy which is central to my practice in this project.

Having grounded the terms and key concepts used throughout this thesis, let us now move to the next section of this literature review, to examine and contextualise my research within the existing discourse related to Mike Leigh’s practice, the use of improvisation and how this might relate to the use I have made of online forums for improvisation and creativity.

2:2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2:2:0 Introduction

In this section, key texts related to Mike Leigh's approach to character, narrative and text will be evaluated. Through this evaluation, gaps in research will be identified and thematic and methodological strands explored, in order that my research can be contextualised properly. It is essential to identify and examine the field of existing research in order to highlight how my own is located within this prior exploration and to identify where my research is offering new insights in the field of scriptwriting.

Some texts, particularly in the case of Mike Leigh, offer invaluable insights into the practitioner's approach, but are not written by the practitioner, as in the case of *The Improvised Play*, by Paul Clements (1986). *I am here now*, by Michael McCall (2018) is a PhD thesis that has utilised a similar methodological approach to their research in areas related to my own work.

Given the recent pandemic, I have also explored the limited discourse around the practice of improvising online. There is little in the way of research currently undertaken in this field, which demonstrates a portion of the original contribution to knowledge that my research provides. However, out of necessity, the use of online tools to create work has become more commonplace and there does exist some recent research in this field. Therefore, the research paper 'Tele-Immersive Improv Effects of Immersive Visualisations on Rehearsing and Performing Theatre Online (Branch, *et al*. 2021) has been consulted in this literature review, as it seeks to develop

a new platform for online improvisation. The essay addresses issues such as the limitations that Zoom and MS Teams present for online improvisation.

2:2:1 The Improvised Play

Leigh's use of an improvisational approach is no secret. However, when it comes to the details involved in this process, not much is known outside a few academic sources. Paul Clements' book, *The Improvised Play* (1986), sheds some light on each stage of Leigh's process and is therefore invaluable in understanding and utilising Leigh's method. Clements provides a step-by-step account of how Leigh works, defining not only the process as it stands but how that approach has developed over the course of Leigh's career. The book examines Leigh's formative explorations in the use of improvisation, before setting out each stage of the improvisation process separately, although he does point out that some parts happen simultaneously. So little has been written about the intricacies of Leigh's process that this text presents one of the few key insights into it and the book is therefore cited often within the Leigh chapter (Chapter Four).

Clements worked with Leigh during his (Leigh's) early days at the Midlands Arts Centre and he (Clements) purports to have worked closely with Leigh during the writing of this book. Although the text does not come from the practitioner himself, it does provide many details concerning Leigh's process – though it should also be noted that there are still areas where details are lacking. It is these absent details that my own research, in part, attempted to address.

Leigh himself has stated that ‘It is simply not true that you can just work how I do, or adopt my approach, because what I do is too complicated, too personal (Leigh in Covney. 1996: 167)’. Although Clements details Leigh’s approach more fully than most, he doesn’t give the kind of details which would make his description full and definitive. For example, he discusses each stage, say, for example, the one-to-one character development sessions, but he does not describe the conversations, questions or details that Leigh and the actor explore during this part of the process. Clements describes Leigh’s ‘Quiz Club’ but again does not tell us what the questions asked are.

It is, therefore, essential, if one is to evaluate the practicalities of Leigh’s method, to undertake your own practical experimentation to ascertain what information is required to develop the robust characterisation which the method produces.

2:2:2 I Am Here Now.

In Michael McCall’s 2018 doctoral thesis, ‘I am here now: A play – and – Polyvocality, the unhomely, and the methods of Mike Leigh in playwriting: An exegesis’, he set out to write a play by utilising Mike Leigh’s improvisation methods with a group of amateur, African-Australian young actor/participants with no prior experience or training. His aim was to explore the efficacy of Leigh’s methods within an improvisational devising process which would culminate in a single-authored play. As Leigh always works with professional actors, McCall states why he chose to work with those with little to no experience of theatre performance techniques:

> They [the participants] had limited or no experience at all in theatre making processes or acting technique, although experience in the theatre was not a precondition of participation. I wanted to develop a new written play with a group of people who were not steeped in Leigh's or other acting techniques. I was interested in the rawness that this would bring to a theatre making development process and that would assist the writing (2018: 1).

McCall's project is relevant to my own because, not only has McCall evaluated the strengths and limitations of Leigh's approach by their practical application in a practice-as-research methodology, but he has also sought to utilise Leigh's approach to produce a written play as a primary research output. Both of these elements are clearly pertinent to my own research. So how does my research differ from McCall's and what can be learnt from McCall's findings that can assist me in developing my own research?

The first thing that it is important to note, is that McCall used what might be considered a condensed form of Leigh's approach. That is to say that having gone through the character construction phase of Leigh's process (introducing one-to-one character development, Road-Testing, improvisations where the characters are brought together and then the Quiz Club (although McCall uses more of a 'hot seat' format)), McCall then utilised Leigh's improvisatory phase to generate material. However, after this initial improvisatory phase, McCall then disbanded the ensemble and used the material as a jumping off point for the writing of the script: '[at] the end of the improvisatory development [process], I chose parts of the generated material, sometimes only fragments, with which to form a cohesive play structure (McCall. 2018: 166)'. This is a clear departure from Leigh's method, as Leigh continues to work with the actors for a longer period, where, through further improvisation and rehearsal, the

project is brought to fruition. Where my research differs from McCall's is that the actors participated in the process right up until the penultimate draft was completed. This does however, beg the question, at what point is the script complete and where, in relation to that final draft, does the involvement of the actors and improvisation end?

Another key element is the use of inexperienced actors or non-actors. McCall claims that

> [w]hile professional actors may have been useful, in developing story threads directly from improvisation, there is also an argument that with the less experienced participants something quite raw emerges, producing something completely unique for the project (2018: 60).

Throughout the latter part of his thesis, McCall highlights the problems this caused and is explicit that Leigh's use of professional actors is clearly central to the success of his approach (2018: 12-17), noting that a lack of consistent engagement and dedication to the project could be seen in the (unpaid) actors that he used as participants.

> This also points to the difficulties in application of the Leigh techniques in a community setting. This raises the issue of whether his process lends itself to workshops that are voluntary and amateur in nature, or if they are exclusively designed for professional actors with a background in improvisation (McCall. 2018: 61)

In a discussion with Dr. McCall, he suggested that the use of inexperienced actors posed both problems and opportunities for his project. Where the inexperienced actor may be unaware of possible story strands being created during improvisation, the

experienced actor is often highly aware of the potential for narrative development. If the actor with no experience has little or no awareness of narrative possibilities, few arise from the improvisations, or, at the very least, it takes much longer for them to emerge, whereas with the experienced actor results are likely to transpire much sooner, given the practiced awareness of narrative. However, McCall did agree that where the inexperienced actor lacked that awareness, this naivety did allow the actor to concentrate much more on the pure evolution of character, where it could be suggested that an experienced actor might drive an improvisation in a certain direction in order to realise those narrative possibilities (Interview with McCall. Middleton. 2020). This could have implications in the improvisation, where the organic creative process could be hijacked by one actor to push a particular narrative strand. Again, this can be combatted, in the main, by stringently adhering to Leigh's process where actors are kept in the dark as to the developments of all the other characters until they (in character) meet the other character(s), and are only then furnished with the information that that character would have of the other character at that particular time.

McCall himself admits that he found himself departing further and further from Leigh's method both in the improvisatory stages, due to the use of his own choice of actors and due to the fact that he wrote a single-authored play, meaning that the generated material in those improvisations was, in truth, only a starting point for the generation of a script (Interview with McCall. Middleton. 2020).

A core finding of McCall's research appears to be that actors with experience of improvisation and some actor training is essential.

Another area for consideration is related to the use of actors with no experience and Leigh's Cardinal Rule when developing character. Leigh is very clear from the outset, that the characters created and developed must be external to the actor. That is to say, that no personality trait or nuance should be taken from the actor themselves.

This is to ensure that every detail, no matter how tiny, must be considered. The questioning around why a character does something is not meant to be some personal exploration, but a way to develop a more robust character. What we see with McCall's research is that with non-experienced actors, there was always a danger that they would portray a version of themselves, rather than an external constructed character, which McCall identifies as being related to the confidence of the actor in their character when improvising (2018:53). He also notes that one particular participant who had been a child soldier presented McCall with an exceptionally fertile dramatic possibility. However, the risk of unearthing deeply buried trauma (in the participant), together with the fact that to do so would break Leigh's Cardinal Rule meant that McCall did not explore that avenue (McCall. 2018: 46-52).

Having identified the gaps in knowledge that my research might address, in terms of McCall's research, such as McCall's limited application of Leigh's full approach and the pitfalls of using non-experienced participants, we might next also identify what worked in McCall's research and therefore what could influence me in terms of a methodology that my research might appropriate and build upon.

As noted previously, the details of what information should be included in the character studies, early on in Leigh's character construction phase, are ultimately unknown. However, McCall sheds some light on details of the character questions, as he includes in his account the particulars of the character studies he completed with his participants (McCall. 2018: 49). One such detail is knowledge concerning the characters' desires and aspirations. This is a key piece of information, because knowing the characters' desires allows one to present barriers to these desires/intentions. The questions McCall posed during the questions phase of his (and Leigh's) character construction are of relevance as they had potential to inform what questions I posed when developing my character questions.

In a discussion with McCall, he stated that the reasoning behind the primary research output being a script rather than a performance was one particular consideration – editing. He noted that having worked with the participants for several months, when it came to editing, the possibility of cutting a character back, or cutting a character completely would have implications if a performance of the script was involved. 'How could you say to an actor, "Thanks for the three months' work, but you're not in the finished play!" and so that would mean that the writer would be less likely to cut a character, even if it was the best thing for the play (interview with McCall. Middleton 2020)'. In order to allow for editing based solely on artistic considerations, I decided that I too would present only scripts as the creative component of my thesis, McCall's caveat, however, was not the only consideration that heralded this decision.

During our discussion/interview, McCall also mentioned a few things he had learnt that were not in his final thesis. Upon reflection he said that he had wished he'd spent longer on the one-to-one character development stage but had 'rushed' through it a little, due to his awareness of time constraints, particularly in terms of how long the participants would be willing to participate and the looming deadline for the completion of his thesis. He identified that the participants, and it's worth remembering that they were oblivious to Leigh's work and methods, rushed him through the process keen to get to the 'exciting acting bit', rather than sitting around discussing character (Interview with McCall. Middleton. 2020). It is clear that Leigh spends a large (perhaps the longest) portion of time on character development, in order to give the actors as much character information as possible, so that they are properly prepared before they go into improvisations. To have to stop and think, "I hadn't thought about the character's feelings about X" in an improvisation stops the flow. It was an issue that reared its head in McCall's improvisations and therefore a longer period, closer to that prescribed by Leigh's process, which was, lacking in McCall's research, needed to be allotted in my own planning.

Another recommendation that McCall made was the use of a debriefing after the end of the project. McCall said he felt that a full debrief with the actors after the end of the process would have been invaluable in offering objective (as well as subjective) insights into the process, once the participants had time to reflect and be distanced from it. Despite the end goal being ultimately a script, this debrief was intended to offer McCall insights into the process, which he required for presentation in his doctoral thesis (Interview with McCall. Middleton. 2020).

Having examined McCall's research and its pertinence to my own, let us now turn our attention to Chiara D'Anna, whose research, although not exploring Leigh, is relevant to my research, in that she utilised improvisation in her practice-as-research approach to the scriptwriting process.

2:2:3 A Journey Back Home

Chiara D'Anna's research utilised Commeda Dell'Arte principles and techniques to underpin a devising process that culminated in two performances and two scripts. D'Anna's focus was the Commedia's use of masks as denoting clearly defined characters in terms of voice and physicality. This use of exaggerated characteristics was the starting point for the development, through improvisation, of characters which had their basis in the actors' own lives, but then developed the characters into caricatures or extreme versions of those characters. This research is of use due to the striking similarities with D'Anna's approach and Leigh's approach, although D'Anna does not draw this parallel. D'Anna is interested in the actor-centred practice of actor-as-author/creator as a departure from traditional theatre where the playwright or director is central and where the actors are interpreters of the text or of the director's instructions. Where D'Anna departs from Leigh's approach is where the characters become exaggerated and removed from representations of real life and real people.

Although she utilises the Commedia technique of the mask denoting a predefined character, with specific vocal and physical traits, D'Anna does not rely on stock characters, but encourages her participants to utilise exaggeration to create new

characters, rather than characters that are synonymous with Commedia Dell'Arte. She calls this *The Experiential Mask*.

Just as Leigh (and his actors) start creating characters from a list of people the actor has met, so too D'Anna (and her participants) drew from people, such as relatives, to form the basis for their characters. Those characters were then, as with Leigh, developed away from that person to create an entirely original character – although Leigh tends towards the representation of the real and D'Anna seeks out the extreme. As D'Anna states, 'in my Artisan Theatre 'sophistication should be avoided' in favour of an everyday language (Scala, 1619) rooted in the reality of actors and spectators; their jargons, accents, dialects and languages (2019: 91)'. Indeed the use of dialect and accent is a superb route to take when creating robust characters. (For my own Masters thesis, I examined the use of dialect and accent as a way to demonstrate character and identity).

Where D'Anna's research differs from McCall's, is that along with the scripts (one ensemble show and one, one-woman show) D'Anna's research outputs also included performances. This was essential to D'Anna's research, as certain elements of onstage audience participation and improvisation in response to the audience are key elements of the Commedia.

McCall had identified the problem of what to do if characters developed in the improvisatory process proved not to be viable in the finished piece, and a similar issue arose in D'Anna's research. However D'Anna was able to overcome this, as it was

characters developed for her one-woman show that were eventually cut or amalgamated into one character (D'Anna. 2019: 134).

It is worth noting here that, just like McCall, D'Anna identifies that a more rigorous debriefing of the participants after the end of the project would have been useful. She states in her recommendations that, '[a]s a possible development of my creative outputs, it could have been useful to integrate even more the actors' input into my thesis (2019: 211)'. It is therefore necessary, given that both D'Anna and McCall have identified this as a useful element that they wished they had included, that my research made provision to undertake such a debrief in my research after the process had been completed.

If we now return to D'Anna's use of text in her approach. D'Anna states that

> like Commedia dell'Arte performances, my work integrates written text, devised material and improvisation within the same performance. Embracing the notion of 'reconciliation of opposites' – i.e. the integration of written and improvised theatre (2019: 29).

The important part of this statement is the integration of texts and scripts, and the way this offers a parallel with the proposed methodology of my research where, through improvisation, characters are created and developed, then, through further improvisation, a written script will begin to take shape. The script, then, will form the basis for further improvisations, where the script is honed and developed, always using the input of the actors in the writing process.

D’Anna used experienced actors as her participants, where, as we’ve seen, McCall did not. As we saw when evaluating McCall’s work, the potential dangers of using experienced actors means that they may attempt to force a particular narrative during improvisations. D’Anna also noted this. She states, ‘I often have to ask actors to fight against their need to impose a narrative and allow it to emerge by ‘accident’ (2019: 125)’. It is clear that my research should be aware that this was a possibility, and I should ensure that mechanisms were in place to avoid this. If nothing else, as with D’Anna, actors should be guided away from this propensity to force improvisations if they err towards them.

2:2:4 Discourse on Mike Leigh: Gaps in Knowledge and Approach to Practical Experimentation

It is only through the practical application of Leigh’s method, detailed in part by Clements and progressed by McCall, that insights into the nuances and actual mechanics of Leigh’s process could be explored and each element evaluated as to its efficacy for online working. There was a possibility that elements could be appropriated from both McCall and D’Anna to develop a new way of working which learnt from and build upon the results of their research.

The aims of my research reflected my intention to apply Leigh’s method, in order to gain greater insights into his approach to scriptwriting through improvisatory practice. It had been highlighted by evaluating McCall’s thesis that a closer adherence to

Leigh's method would be required in order for it to be properly evaluated and I hoped, to yield better results.

It was also clear that a more protracted involvement of the participants in the process was needed in developing the script as a whole. In the case of my Online Ensemble Project (OEP), this continued collaboration with the actors/participants was in keeping with Leigh's improvisatory approach to film making but might also have yielded greater insights and developments that might not have been apparent when utilising a more traditional single author approach. It should however be noted that there came a point where I as the facilitator/researcher moved away from the ensemble and finalised the script, and in the case of the Monologue Project, a sole-author approach was utilised. In both cases this was in order to address the research aims central to my investigation.

This section of the literature review has identified several gaps in the knowledge surrounding Leigh's approach to comedy script writing. It has also identified the need for debriefs and the implications of using non/experienced actors. These gaps and recommendations were, therefore, considered and addressed in my research methodology.

This section of the literature review has highlighted how the research-into-practice phase of my research sought to progress a greater understanding of Leigh's approach by its application. The second research-through-practice phase of my research explored how Leigh's approach could be adopted and adapted for online working.

Therefore an exploration of the limited discourse around online improvisation will now follow in section 2:2:5.

2:2:5 Tele-Immersive Improv Effects of Immersive Visualisations on Rehearsing and Performing Theatre Online

Little research has been conducted in relation to conducting improvisations in an online setting.

However, given recent events there has been more development of platforms for people to converse and interact on remotely (e.g. Zoom and MS Teams), but also in allowing people to improvise online. One such piece of recent research into this field is the paper, 'Tele-Immersive Improv Effects of Immersive Visualisations on Rehearsing and Performing Theatre Online' (Branch, Boyd and Efstratiou, Christos and Mirowski, Piotr and Mathewson, Kory and Allain, Paul. 2021).

Branch *et al*. identify that existing video conferencing tools, although they have been utilised by performers, exhibit clear impediments to theatrical interaction, as they are not designed for this type of working:

> Popular video conferencing tools being used by performers, however, have been generally designed to meet the needs of remote business and education which do not take into consideration the unique collaboration demands of teaching, developing, and performing theatre when each actor is isolated from the others (2021: 2)

This highlighted the need either for a bespoke platform, or indeed, as my research argued, a method that could be effective on an existing platform.

Branch *et al.* attempted to develop a new platform to accommodate and address technical limitations of remote improvisation, whereas my research sought to develop a method whereby remote improvisation could be utilised within existing platforms and concentrated on an approach using a method of improvisation, rather than looking to develop the arena where the improvisations take place.

Their research tested the platform via theatre/improv 'games' and short improvisational performances. They did not experiment with a large project, where my own research concentrated on a full project rather than isolated self-contained short performance. This more expansive and professional use of improvisation highlights one aspect of the original contribution that my research aimed to provide through practice.

Branch *et al.* utilised psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihaly's 'nine dimensions of flow' as a framework to analyse the experiences of the improvisers involved in their study. The researchers identify these nine dimensions as

> (1) an equal balance between challenge and skill level, (2) a merging of 'action-awareness' or being fully absorbed in the moment, (3) a clear sense of purpose, (4) direct and immediate feedback meaningful to the task, (5) the ability to concentrate on the task, (6) a sense of control, (7) a loss of self-consciousness, (8) a distorted sense of time, (9) being an autotelic or intrinsically rewarding activity (2021: 5).

These nine dimensions were predominantly related to the immersion (when using the platform) of the participant and do not seem to relate particularly to the participants' ability to improvise in a creative sense, the material produced, or to the actual process of improvising.

Where this research did assist my own was the identification of some key barriers to improvisation, which are specific to an online setting. This was useful, as having an awareness of those prior to conducting my own research meant that I could address them when in the planning stage of my research experimentation.

Branch *et al.* identify the most obvious barrier to online improvisation, that, '[m]any improvisational theatre pedagogies […] argue that live performance is dependent on an immediate sense of co-presence (2021: 7)'. It is this sense of 'presence' which can foster the visual and unspoken cues that are exchanged between actors during an improvisation and which are at the core of improvisational interactions. The first obvious issue with online improvisation lay in whether these non-verbal communications could still occur, in an online setting, where the actors are not in the same room and potentially only the head and shoulders of each actor are visible. As Branch *et al.* state

> improvisational theatre is ultimately dependent on tight collaboration, so performers must become acutely aware of the nuances in behaviour of their partners as well being [sic] able to make verbal, physical, and gestural offers that will contribute to the veracity of the relationships and story (2021: 8)

In order to address this first challenge, the primary aim of their research was ‘to see to what extent we could help the improvisers feel fully embodied in the virtual space and be responsive to the physical and verbal behaviour of their partners (2021: 9)’. The researchers focussed on developing a new platform, which could allow the participants to see more of each other and therefore, it was thought, encourage them to be more immersed. Essentially, the research sought to find solutions to the technical and practical problems of existing platforms, in order to facilitate more successful online improvisation work. It could be argued that rather than see if the responses to ‘physical and verbal behaviour’ could still flourish within existing online settings, the researchers presumed it could not, and so they sought to find new ways to respond to the perceived failure of existing platforms.

One small admission was potentially of great importance; the idea that ‘there inevitably is a slight delay (2021: 12)’. The delay they refer to here is the delay between an improviser speaking and a fellow improviser hearing and being able to respond to that line. This has implications for the flow of any improvisation, where in a face-to-face improvisation an improviser is able to respond quickly to another improviser, which is essential for an improvisational interaction to work most effectively. As we shall see, when I began my own experimentation, any delay with the sound was a huge issue when improvising online. It was, however, only during the practical experimentation that the magnitude of this issue was identified and no real solution to the issue could be found.

Branch *et al*.'s research also identifies another key issue relating to online improvisation, that of 'focus'. On Zoom or MS Teams there is a tendency to look at your own image (onscreen), or to look at the onscreen image of the person you are talking to. It was noticed in my own research that participants rarely looked at their own camera, which would make their image appear to be looking directly at another participant or participants. They identify that improvisation requires the participants to 'be exceptionally attentive to the physical behaviour of their remote partners in order to enter flow with them (2021: 15)', and that this can obviously be impeded by improvising via a screen. The research quotes its participants' experiences of performing with popular video conferencing tools: 'participants in our study reported a tendency to shift focus regularly between their scene partners and their own videos which meant they often would lose a sense of flow (*Ibid*)'. Therefore Branch *et al*. felt that 'designing platforms that can minimize visual distractions for performers is therefore crucial in order to allow them to develop cohesive scenes (*Ibid*)'. It is likely that participants could learn to deal with this temporary loss of focus, or it could be argued that, if people naturally flit between their own image and that of their fellow participants, is it not just as natural for the participants in character/the characters to do this too. It should be noted that this issue is more related to the later improvisatory rehearsal phase (after pre-rehearsal), rather than the early character construction phase. It is also not entirely clear where the participants were when they improvised, and therefore, how entirely online they were.

Branch *et al*. noticed that, '[b]esides a sense of relief from social-distancing, the increased sense of physical engagement might be related to how performing virtually gave them a safe space to practice intimacy that would be uncomfortable on a physical

stage (2021: 11)'. This is no doubt accurate but, I would argue, must also be related to how experienced the actors are.

This literature review has now examined the existing discourse surrounding the praxis of Mike Leigh, the use of improvisatory practice in scriptwriting and the use of improvisation online. We have identified gaps in knowledge and the considerations that may have had implications for my research. These gaps and considerations were therefore addressed in the proposed method of practical research that was at the heart of this thesis. What follows in the next chapter is the methodology that was utilised for this practical research – by way of research-into-practice and research-through-practice.

3:0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3:1 Introduction

This chapter will introduce the multi-mode methodological approach that was applied in my *research into* and *research through practice* as a means of first revealing insights into British film director Mike Leigh's approach to developing character, narrative and text through improvisation practice. It will go on to demonstrate how these insights into Leigh's praxis then grounded and informed my emerging approach to the praxis of developing character, narrative and text through improvisation, undertaken entirely in an online setting. Responding to the challenges posed by an online research method, the adaptations to Leigh's approach were applied both in the Online Ensemble Project (OEP) and then subsequently in the later project developing monologues, to discover if the adapted method, developed and refined in the OEP, could also be applied (in its entirety or as elements of the approach) to creating character, narrative and text for effective monologue writing. The use of a *practice-through-research* method presented the best methodological procedure to ascertain the efficacy of my new approach, developed online through practice.

The multi-mode research was conducted online as a *practice-as-research* investigation, exploring both Research *into* Practice and Research *through* Practice. The umbrella term of *Practice-as-Research* is applied here to encompass and include, *Action Research*, *Research into Practice* and *Research through Practice*, all of which will be defined in more detail later in this chapter. These research methods place practice at the heart of the research, both as a method of research and, to a greater extent, the focus of the research. Chiara D'Anna (whose work we explored in the literature review, 2:2:3) offers both a useful distinction and a parity between *Practice-*

Based and *Practice-led-Research*. D'Anna defines '*Practice-based-research* as a research where, the creative work 'acts as a form of research'; and *Practice-led-research* is where the practice leads to research insights. *Practice-as–Research* (PaR) may be said to embrace both research methods (2019: 82)'. Here, as an improvisation practitioner, D'Anna offers us an overarching term that contains within it a multi-faceted approach with practice at its core. D'Anna goes on to distinguish this from established and traditional quantitative methodologies, which seek, via procedures and protocols, to address

> approaches, naming the research problem, controlling variables, disciplining data and specifying findings [that are] fundamental quality assurance measures [whereas, with] artists and creative practitioners, [an approach is required where] the definition of problems, variables and data is subject to its own peculiar complexities (2019: 87).

D'Anna recognises that, for research into the arts and creativity, 'scientific' methods of research are not suitable, and therefore, the now established *Practice-as-Research* paradigm will be the most appropriate method of investigation. This method is applicable because the challenges the research in practice may come up against and attempt to address are nuanced and specific to the particular art form being pursued, so that a more traditional and established methodological approach will prove too inflexible and is simply not designed to elucidate complex and idiosyncratic circumstances like those which made up my project.

The multi-mode research utilised *Action Research* in a process of firstly *research into practice*, where the insights gained through my practical experimentation, were

reflected upon and analysed via a cyclical process of evaluation and then application/adaptation to develop and hone the emerging practice.

These insights gained from reflection and analysis were then applied in *Research through Practice* to develop my own emerging praxis. Dr. Amy Rome defines *Action Research* as 'research into practice by practitioners (2007: 12)', going on to state that, ‘action research links practice and the analysis of practice into a single, continuously developing sequence with academic rigour (*Ibid*)’. We can see here that it is through practice that insights, first into others’ practice, can be gained, and then by reflection and application (through further practice) that insights into one’s own practice can be achieved. As Zuber-Skerritt states: ‘the aim of any action research project or program is to bring about practical improvement, innovation, change or development of social practice and the practitioners' better understanding of their practice' (1996: 83)’.

In essence the *Research into Practice* allowed me to analyse Leigh’s approach to these three key elements and then adopt and adapt Leigh’s approach (by way of *research through practice*) to develop a new approach for use in online environments and latterly in the monologue writing process.

It might be useful to reiterate my research questions at this juncture, in order to illustrate later, how my methodology addressed the research questions within this methodology chapter:

1, Can the elements of Leigh's, collaborative approach to developing character, narrative and text (through improvisation) be utilised and adapted (in response to the needs of online working) to generate a new approach, which can facilitate online working in the field of comedy script writing?

2, Can the practical experimentation with, and application of, Leigh's approach to the creation of comedy film scripts reveal hitherto unknown aspects of his improviser's methodology in the development of character, narrative and text?

3, Can the new scriptwriting approach, developed during the ensemble project, adapting and adopting elements of Leigh's approach, then be applied to writing successful monologues?

Let us first examine the methodological approaches applied to my research.

3:2 Methodological Approaches

The principal approach engaged during this research saw a cyclical process of action, followed by reflection and then application of further action in response to what the reflection brought to bear. This included regular debriefs with the participants, in order to facilitate this reflective process. Although undertaken separately, the experimentation was examining the same things. Any failings, say, during the Monologue Project, highlighted how and why the same aspect or action *did* work for the OEP and vice versa. This section discusses this cyclical approach in more detail.

Just as with Leigh (and on the recommendations of McCall and D'Anna, see Chapter 2), regular debriefs after each of the improvisational workshops were utilised to explore the participants' experiences of the workshop and the activities undertaken therein. These were essential in deriving insights into what the participants considered effective and what aspects were less effective. Along with this the debriefs provided an opportunity to discuss (between myself and the participants) the creative choices that were made and the ideas and material that were generated during the improvisations (or one-to-one character discussions) and how this affected the project as the process moved forward. A further debrief/discussion was held at the end of the project and evaluated the process as a whole.

The methodology included qualitative research from debriefs/interviews conducted with the participants (collaborating actors), as an on-going iterative analysis method: 'rather than analysis being a one-off event taking place at a single point in time, the analysis [will tend] to be an evolving process in which the data collection and data analysis phases occur alongside each other (Denscombe, 2010).' Participants were interviewed to aid evaluation of the effectiveness of the methods and/or stimuli, in terms of their perception of what worked for them. The proposed multi-modal research method aimed to discover a comprehensive and documented, improvisatory approach to forming character and narrative for comedic film scripts.

Having evaluated which improvisational methodologies (Leigh's or adapted from Leigh) yielded the most efficacy from my OEP, this new knowledge, through practice,

informed a subsequent research project that saw character and narrative for several monologues created and developed. Essentially, elements (alternatives/adaptations to Leigh's approach) developed during the OEP that had proved effective were then applied and evaluated as to their efficacy in monologue writing. For example, character questions developed during the OEP were utilised again during the character construction phase of the Monologue Project.

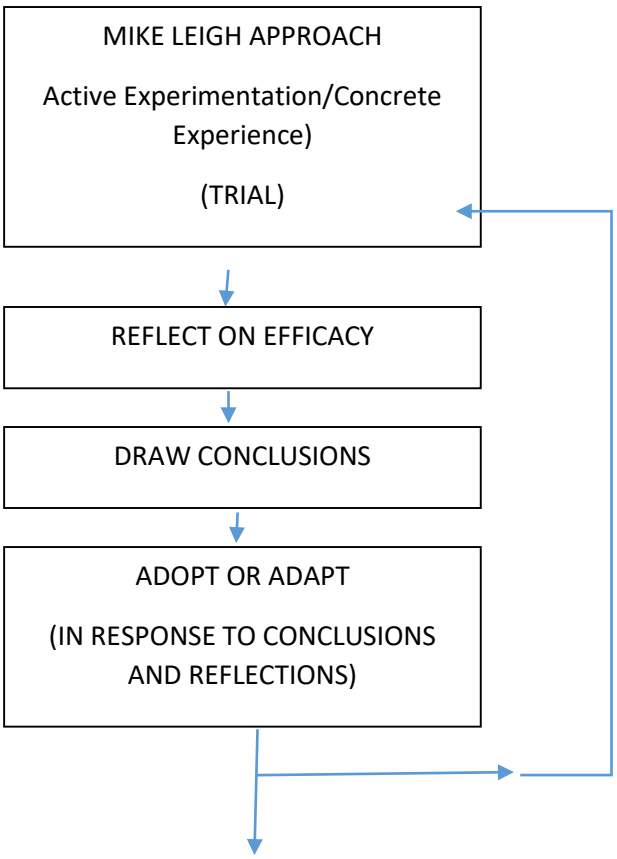
A cyclical model for reflection, Kolb's *Experiential Learning Cycle* (1974/1984), was utilised, alongside the *research-into-practice*, and *research-through-practice*. The use of Kolb's cycle allowed the researcher an opportunity for some objectivity, to counter-balance the obviously subjective nature of the research. By immersing oneself in the *Concrete Experience*, then stepping back to reflect upon the successes of the process by way of *Reflective Observation*, then, through a period of A*bstract Conceptualism,* alterations could be conceived and applied in further *Active Experimentation*, facilitating the refinement of the creative process (Kolb, 1984). Let us take a moment to unpack Kolb's cycle.

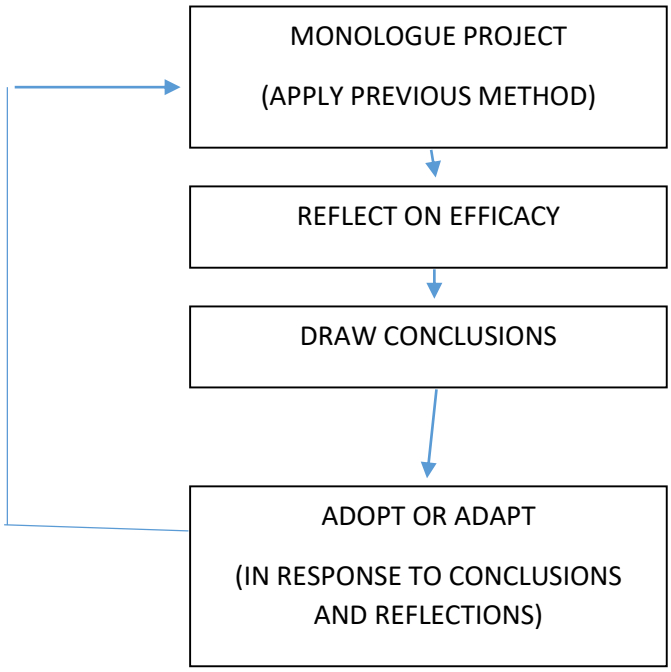
The *Concrete Experience*, is the initial action. It is during this experience that one acts deliberately, or something unplanned occurs. One might come up against a problem and have to find a solution to that problem in the moment. Next, we take time to examine and reflect on our response/reactions to that problem, by way of *Reflective Observation*. Following that *Reflective Observation*, we draw conclusions from the reflection attempting to understand the experience and the problem-solving and draw conclusions from *that* experience, this forms the *Abstract Conceptualism*. Finally, we

adapt and modify our approach to the experience by taking into account the insights we have gleaned from the initial experience and the reflection/conceptualism that has been undertaken during the process. Those adaptations are then applied in the *Active Experimentation* phase, leading to another *Concrete Experience* and so the cycle continues.

Kolb's cycle provided the framework in which I conducted my practical research. As the figure below illustrates, the process was to feed back into itself, through its cyclical nature, but also feed from the OEP into the subsequent Monologue Project.

Fig 3:1 - Reflective Research Method Diagram





The OEP was conducted through weekly workshops with the actors. Each workshop trialled and examined each incremental stage of Leigh's approach. The workshops examined the efficacy of each of those stages for working in the online setting, by practically experimenting with Leigh's approach and holding debriefs after the practical element of the workshops to assess the ensemble's thoughts on the practical work undertaken. If it was found that Leigh's approach did not work, or could not be conducted, as Leigh conducts each stage, in an online setting, then alternatives were found. This adoption and adaptation of Leigh's method enabled me to develop my own approach to scriptwriting through improvisation conducted entirely online – the details of these workshops are outlined later in this thesis (see chapter 5).

As Moustakas states, 'The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also

experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge (1990: 9)'. I believed the best way to undertake this research was to embark upon this practical approach, as this would enable me to 'generate knowledge and understanding that may not have been revealed through other previous explored established research approaches (Barrett, 2012: 1)', in the field of comedic film script creation and its development through improvisational methods.

Having presented the framework for the Online Ensemble and Monologue Projects, let us next explore other aspects of the philosophical theory that underpins my research as a whole.

3:3 Philosophical Underpinnings

It is Heidegger's goal that we as human beings gain a free *relationship with technology*. It was thought that the reconnecting of technology with art might allow me to gain phenomenological insights into the kind of relationship Heidegger prescribes – although this was unlikely to reveal any major philosophical truths. Instead, I hoped to show that there could be an inherent comedy extractable from the ways in which technology uses humans and conversely how humans use technology, which would demonstrate another factor in the relevance of Heidegger's philosophy to this research.

These relationships with technology highlight the comedic features in situations where human beings demonstrate an inability to engage fully with modern technology and therefore cease to be the efficient commodities that Heidegger suggests modern technology attempts to transform us into.

I hoped that some insights and possibilities would emerge from this recalibration of Heidegger's thinking on technology and its confrontation with human beings, in the form of comedic scenarios which emerge from this confrontation. Blitz offers us an interesting statement from Heidegger: 'To experience technology is also to experience its limits (2014)'. This is of interest as it highlights a key conceit: the limits of modern technology. If, as Heidegger suggests, Modern Technology is concerned primarily with efficiency, then is this efficiency undermined by the fact that Modern Technology and the human beings who use it and are used by it are not infallible? Computers need to be 'turned on and off again', WiFi signals drop out and mobile phone batteries are in need of regular charging. These limitations demonstrate a lack of rapport with even the most tech-savvy of human beings. If we then introduce a human being's limits when interacting with technology – anything between the momentary lack of attention by the expert user and the complete ineptitude of the novice - we can identify real problems in the relationship between humans and Modern Technology

Before continuing any further with Heidegger's philosophical theory, we might pause briefly to clarify and contextualise Modern Technology in terms of a setting in which I conducted my research and practice. There has been reference previously to the

online world - the internet and cyberspace. It is best, perhaps, to properly define the platform on which I am working – Zoom.

Eric Yuan, having experienced the limitations of existing video conferencing software, sought to surpass it with his own programme, Zoom – released in 2012. Initially developed for meetings and conferences, Zoom (amongst other platforms) came into its own when it was adopted *en masse* during the pandemic, allowing people to work from home. It was on this platform that I chose to conduct my Online Ensemble Project. As noted in the literature review (Chapter 2), there have been attempts to develop programmes on which people can more effectively improvise online, but for my own ends, I wanted to develop a method that could use the existing technology. Arguably, the use of Zoom to develop scripts is not using Zoom in any ground-breaking way, after all, improvisation is a human activity and a means to an end. It simply provided me with a means of communication and a way to collapse distances, an easy way to conduct meetings (in my case improvisation workshops and discussions), and the opportunity to record those workshops.

With the adoption of a Heideggerian philosophical framework, the artistic productions that I undertook hoped to offer both reflections upon technology and a confrontation with it. Essentially, the comedy was founded on the utility and, more importantly, inadequacies of Zoom to facilitate efficient productivity. The comedy was embroiled in the unavoidability of digital technology, in a world where everyone is forced to engage with it (due to the pandemic), and not everyone is able to do this effectively. The comic elements where humanity collides with technology are precisely those moments where

artistic production can expose or deny technology's efforts to dominate us, to order us, and to *position us as working*.

It is the incongruity between modern technology's ideal of frictionless proficiency and the unreliability of technology itself, and/or the inability of humans within that technological sphere, which presents amusement. The person who is not muted but thinks they are, the person who stands to reveal they are only dressed from the waist up, Zoom calls with parents, where only an ear is visible throughout the extent of the conversation, are familiar to us all and a product of the environment that the pandemic has necessitated. All these things highlight the comic potential that is born out of human, often unintentional, resistance to technology's reduction of mankind.

Aside from the comic possibilities, there are the limitations modern technology imposes on us, and by 'us' I mean specifically on me. In a purely technical sense, the time limits imposed on my workshops by Zoom, the various technical issues myself and the participants encountered, all represent an incompatibility with the perceived freedom of improvisation. These technical issues also belie a discrepancy between the actual working in/with Modern Technology and the efficiency of which the technology boasts.

Having now explored the underpinning philosophy of Heidegger. It is important to define how the research will be documented and presented in this thesis

3:4 Documentation and Accounts of the Practical Research

This practice-led-research is presented as a written account of each of the practical experimentations (Online Ensemble Project and the Monologue Project), with accompanying video documentation, which offer the reader an audio/visual source to further engage with the written analysis. In addition to these accounts of the experimentation, a creative component, in the form of scripts generated and developed via the practical research is also presented. These three facets of documentation (video, analysis and scripts) are included in this thesis, in order to provide the reader with the necessary fluidity to interact with both the practice and the written account of the research.

3:5 Online Working

It is important to explain why this practice-led-research was undertaken online. In direct response to the limitations imposed (between 2020-2021) on any practical experimentation during the recent pandemic, the first practical project, it was decided, would be conducted entirely online. Although precipitated by the restrictions placed on ensemble working by the pandemic, I would argue that the rationale for my research through practice being moved wholly online did not necessarily function as a short-term response to the pandemic; rather, the pandemic expedited a move online which was part of an emerging and technologically driven global culture and it was this cultural phenomenon that explained and informed my emerging praxis. Given the shift to more digital communication and online pedagogy, it was important that the research should respond to these new contexts and demonstrate whether or not methodologies constructed for in-person workshops could be re-invented for ‘remote working’, without

face-to-face interactions. The development of an approach that can be applied to online working highlights the original contribution of my research and demonstrates how it fits into contemporary research in this developing online field.

3:6 Outline of Ensemble and Monologue Research Projects

What follows is a detailed breakdown of each stage of the practical experimentation. Firstly, the Online Ensemble Project (OEP) is outlined, as the research evaluated each incremental phase of Leigh's approach to character, narrative and text – and that particular phase's suitability to the online setting. Next, a similar timetable is presented in terms of how the Monologue Project was conducted. Where the OEP is detailed week by week, the Monologue Project is outlined simply as each stage that must be reached as each individual monologue was written – the process was then repeated with each subsequent monologue.

3:7 Online Ensemble Project.

A detailed timetable for the practical project is detailed below. The timeline was drawn predominantly from how Clements (see chapter 2) outlines Leigh's approach. In response to time constraints, I was only planning to dedicate a week to each stage, or phase, of Leigh's method. However, included in the report of the project (Chapter 5) you will note that changes were made to the original timeline, to meet the challenges of the project as it unfolded.

What follows is each stage/phase of Leigh's approach (as detailed by Clements). Each of these phases was conducted in one session per week and in the case of the character one-to-ones, per participant. Phases 1-6 represent the character stage; the subsequent phases constitute the narrative and text stages of the process.

Fig 3:2 - Detailed Timetable of the Online Ensemble Project

Key

	Character
	Narrative
	Text

Date/Week	Details	Aims	Expected outcomes/notes
1	People you know list and initial one-to-one discussions with actors all in isolation.	This session will begin research into character. In this session the aim is to use a real person as the basis for a character.	Begin to explore possible 'real' people who might form the basis of the actor's characters. Debrief after session
2	Decide upon original	As with the previous session the work will examine how a fictional character can be created using a real person as the basis. It will examine what attributes are useful in creating a character – especially when creating a character where there exists no preconceptions of narrative.	Begin to create fledgling character. Start to define details age, DOB, initial backstory, utilising the details of the real person who formed the basis, but start to add fictional details. Debrief after session
3	Create/Develop character Character identity Begin to look for running condition Naming ceremony	This session will explore what is required to build a character. Just as a solo writer might create a character study, similar things are at work here, but a much more physical and practical method of developing that character will be undertaken. It is also the case that the actor is able to take ownership of the character	Debrief after session

		and each character developed in isolation in an in-depth way, again without any preconceived notions of plot and character arc	
4	Actors begin improvs (in isolation) Mainly humdrum improvs Physicality Behaviour & Bearing Road testing	Where a solo writer might construct a character study, it is less likely that the physicality of the character will be considered to a deep level. This session will enable the actors and researcher to explore these elements of character.	Debrief after session
5	Research External research/literary research etc. Immersion into character in daily life	Leigh would have his actors undertake a few weeks working in the characters occupation. This cannot be done, however research into those occupations along with the immersion into the characters' worlds can be undertaken. This session will examine the importance and impact of such research when developing a fictional character.	Debrief after session
6	Bring actors together Look for relationships, reasons why these characters would be involved with each other Quiz club	At this stage the work is still concentrating on character, but possibilities regarding narrative are expected to begin to present themselves at this stage. This session will explore relationships between characters.	Debrief after session
7	Begin to create/develop narrative.	The focus shifts at this point and explorations into narrative begin. The session will examine what impact emerging themes can have on plot and character arcs. The organic growth of thematic strands which have come about through the character building process are expected to suggest possible narrative strands and plot. This session will attempt to examine these relationships	Debrief after session

		and how themes influence narrative possibilities.	
8	End of pre-rehearsal Start formal script development (1st draft)	Although possible developments in character may occur the primary focus of this session is narrative. This session will attempt to identify the controlling idea, along with story, plot themes and central message of the piece. It will examine how the interlinked relationships of these elements works and reveals possibilities for narrative.	Debrief after session
9	Development of script through workshops using text, exploring possibilities Structuring	This session will focus on creating a text utilising the material generated by previous sessions. The session will examine how this material can be used, altered or discarded in the scriptwriting process. As the script is formed and developed the continued involvement of the actors will be assessed as to its importance.	Debrief after session
10	Finalise script	At the latter part of this stage of the process a more traditional use of improvisation will be utilised (that of improvisations using the formal script as the stimulus) to explore the text and create a greater understanding of the work. It will also allow for attention to the nuances of performance.	Debrief after session
11	Extra time if project runs over Debrief of whole project	Along with the debriefs, after each session, a full debrief of the entire process will be invaluable in gaining objective (and subjective) insights into the process as a whole.	

After the end of the practical experimentation, a complete debrief between each individual actor and the ensemble as a whole was conducted, ipso facto. A small amount of time needed to be allowed to pass, so that the objectivity of those involved was more assured. This debrief was to be in relation to the project as a whole, rather than the debriefs conducted after each session which concentrated purely on that individual session.

It is worth noting that what is outlined above is constructed entirely using Clements' template and reflective of only Leigh's approach. Therefore, in order to adapt to the online setting, changes were made in the experimentation for the online environment, and these changes are detailed in the account of the project (chapter 5).

It should also be noted that, initially, the OEP was to be followed by another ensemble project, and there is some mention of this in the account (Chapter 5). The thought was that the first project would be a smaller project both in terms of its duration and the length of script produced. However, the first ensemble project yielded a much lengthier script than expected. Further to this, the second ensemble project was plagued by problems. Nearly all participants were forced to withdraw, or simply never attended (online). It was therefore decided to abandon the second project. In its place, after some consultation, it was suggested that the process developed during the first ensemble project might be trialled in another form of scriptwriting, that of monologue writing. The use of Leigh's approach had never been applied to monologue writing and this secondary project was thought to be illuminating in terms of the extent of my new

method's application to other forms of writing. With this in mind, what follows is the outline for the Monologue Project that was arrived at after these issues arose.

3:8 Monologue Project

The Monologue Project aimed to apply my new method, developed from Leigh's approach to character, narrative and text, to the process of writing monologues. As noted earlier, the schedule is set out as milestones to achieve during the process of writing a monologue. Having reached the end of that particular monologue's process, a new monologue would begin and the process begin again.

Just as with Leigh's work and the work undertaken in the OEP, no preconceived ideas regarding character and narrative would shape the work, rather the character, narrative and text would emerge from the process. This emergence, as we have seen both from Leigh and my research (the OEP), hinges on a robust character being developed at the start of the project. Although the process would not involve one-to-one discussions the essence was to remain the same.

The table below outlines the milestones which must be reached during this second research project.

Fig 3:3 - Timetable of the Monologue Project

CORE ELEMENT (Character, Narrative & Text)	**PHASE (Activities undertaken)**	**Expected Outcomes/Milestones**
CHARACTER	1:1, People You Know list	Original decided on.
	1:2, Character Questions	Character backstory developed and the character is named in the 'naming ceremony'
	1:3, Physicality	Improv in character, aids development of the physicality and bearing of the character.
	1:4, Voice and Road Testing	Character further developed through improvisation. The character is given a voice and interacts with other people.
	1:5, Research	Elements of the character's life, in terms of occupation etc. is researched to allow a grounded knowledge of elements not familiar to the researcher for the portrayal and understanding of the character.
	1:6, Quiz club	Character knowledge furthered by examining the character's attitudes and thoughts on a myriad of subjects
NARRATIVE	2:1, In character improvisations	Monologue style improvisations (actor talking to camera) will be undertaken, discussing different subjects. Identify possible narrative strands and character arcs for the script – from the improvs. Identify material generated by improvs, which could be developed in the script.
TEXT	3:1, Write first draft of script	Begin to develop the text.
	3:2, Redraft script	Begin to polish the script

	3:3 Improv around existing script	Through improvising around the existing script see if any improvements can be made by improvising with the existing text.
	3:4, Read through/performance of script	Evaluate the text (which has been redrafted after each phase of this part of the process) by way of a rehearsed readthrough – performed to camera and then watched back to evaluate it.
	3:5, Final draft of the script	Arrive, through redrafting, at a final version of the script.

As can be seen here, the outline for this second practical project follows the previous OEP's trajectory closely. As it involves only myself, it is not broken down into weekly stages, so much as a process, with key milestones and a progression through each individual phase - that of character development, moving towards narrative and resultant texts.

Having established the methods and outlined the details of how the practical experimentation was to be carried out, let us now examine how data was collected for analysis and reflection, from the practical research.

3:9 Methods of Data Collection

3:10 Documentary Evidence

For the OEP, all improvisational workshops, discussions and one-to-one sessions were filmed – essentially, the entire process was documented through video recording. This allowed the researcher to be immersed in what is going on, rather than having to pause periodically to write down notes, which could impede the flow of things. If we return to D'Anna, whose research bears some similarities to this research, she offers some insights into the benefit of recording the practical work.

> The practice of recording my work - and my students' work - through writing and filming, served as a foundational tool to evaluate and analyse my practice. It allowed me to look at my work as an 'outside eye' to understand it better and improve it. This offered me a) artistic insights to redefine my devising methodology and develop my productions; and b) research insights to reformulate my research aims and reflect on my findings. The process of 'stepping in' and 'out' of the creative process is essential to my practice due to the demands of simultaneously wearing many hats; actor, director, writer and researcher. I had to define specific work parameters due to the different set of skills required by each role. This was the biggest challenge during the creation of my solo piece when I had to switch role many times both during rehearsal (actor/director/researcher) and outside rehearsal (author/director/researcher (2019: 84)

It is worth noting that D'Anna progressed, as I did, from an ensemble piece to a solo piece. It was during this solo piece where the recording of the practical work was most useful, in order to allow her to revisit each stage of the practical experimentation in different roles (that of actor, director, writer and researcher), as the research demanded.

Just as with D'Anna, in order to 'step in and out' (as I assume different roles), the films were then viewed (either shortly after or immediately after the sessions) picking out key moments, which were then noted in the session reports. The session reports then formed the basis for the full report (the account of the practical research), which gives a full account of the research project after the project was concluded. Key moments

included creative choices where insights and results were apparent as the process progressed. Key character choices, or discussions where vital turning points were arrived at were of most interest in highlighting the intricacies of the process, but also in identifying effective elements for my emerging praxis.

Alongside the recordings being a useful tool for analysis and reflection, some of the recordings are presented as part of the thesis submission, both as an aid for the reader, but also as a documentation of the process as part of the final submission. As Nelson points out, ‘Practice as Research thesis submissions typically contain written dimensions, but if a major part of the research enquiry has been conducted through practice, documentary evidence of the process and product may be included in recorded form (Nelson. 2013: 101)’.

Although all sessions were recorded, not all the recordings are submitted as part of the thesis. It would be unhelpful for the reader to sift through the inordinate volume of footage, where only key moments are likely to have relevance in the navigation of this thesis. Instead edited video clips are offered (as in-text links), which have two purposes. The clips offer the reader further insights into the process, by way of demonstrating exactly how the session(s) were conducted. It is not enough to state what was being undertaken and what that session intended to achieve. Rather, the reader is able to see how the session was conducted, in terms of the discussions around the creative and practical choices. The second purpose of providing video clips is to help illustrate what is actually being discussed in the written account of the project. For example, the report might discuss how the participants had edited their ‘People

You Know Lists', prior to the one-to-one session. The accompanying video clip will help illustrate this point and the discussions that arose around such a research result. The use of video references does not feature in the account of the Monologue Project, as the practical project was conducted solely by the researcher. The account involves the written report only. It was envisioned that physical improvisation would feature more prominently in this project, but as we shall see, it did not. Therefore, no video evidence was recorded to support the written account and analysis that is presented in relation to the Monologue Project.

A written journal of the process was kept (in the form of session reports), which was composed shortly after each workshop – using the video recordings. This enabled reflection on the process and possible alterations to the approach as they occurred. This documentary process aided both the evaluation element of the thesis and formed part of the 'evidence' (as does the documentary films) that supports the thesis.

3:11 Questionnaires/Debriefs:

Martyn Denscombe asserts that data collection through a phenomenological research methodology tends to rely on interviews with the members of the group whose experiences are being studied. This use of interviews as a method of data collection allows the researcher valuable insights into the phenomena from the group's point of view. These interviews are generally over a long duration and tend to take the form of discussions, rather than formal interviews, where there are pre-set questions posed by the researcher. These unstructured *discussions* allow those being studied to articulate their experiences and views in their own words (2021:135-136). The method

of data collection that Denscombe describes here demonstrates direct parity with the method of data collection which was undertaken in my Online Ensemble Project. The debriefs, after each workshop and then after the process was completed, took the form of unstructured informal discussions between myself and the participants to discern how they (the participants) experienced the process – as a method for developing and honing the process/my practice.

Debriefs are a key component of Leigh's approach and therefore cannot be dispensed with, as they provide valuable information as to how the actors experienced the process. The questions and debriefs were invaluable in evaluating the efficacy of each element of the process – discovering which methods produced the best results and, in particular, which elements of the approaches the actors found were most valuable and effective in helping them create and develop characters and which elements aided the creation and development of narrative. These debriefs are in relation to the OEP only, however. Reflections on the experience of the Monologue Process are documented within the final report of the project. These are still essentially reflections and evaluations but were conducted in a more cerebral and inwardly facing manner.

Sometime after the OEP reached its conclusion, a further debrief/discussion was undertaken regarding the process as a whole. This allowed for the fact that where something might not have seemed to be working, or seemed unnecessarily complex, or even arbitrary, at one stage of the process, it may then have been revealed that it was necessary to be that way to aid the process further on down the line. For example, participants might have been overwhelmed by the breadth of the character questions

in week three, only then to realise that the level of detail required was needed in order to facilitate later work on character and the move towards the narrative section of the process.

It was also an opportunity to explore suggestions from the participants, in terms of alterations to the process, towards a more effective method of approaching character, narrative and text, through online improvisation, in comedy script writing.

3:12 Writing as Research

The writing of a script can form both a research method and a research output. All character development, one-to-ones and improvisation workshops feed into and develop the script. The script is present at every stage of the process. The early one-to-ones and improvisations are laying the ground-work for the creation of the script and then the later parts of the process are involved in developing and finally honing the script. The ever-present script therefore forms both the method of research and the outcome of the research. As Batty and McAulay state in 'The Academic Screenplay: Approaching Screenwriting as a Research Practice',

> Screenwriting is an emerging research practice within the academy, whereby the act of writing a screenplay is understood as a form of research. The resulting "academic screenplay" or associated screenplay work functions as both a method of research enquiry and also a research artefact, valuing screenwriting as a way to generate and disseminate new knowledge and – crucially – new ways of practising (2018).

What Batty and McAulay offer us here is a snapshot of the legitimisation of this approach as an accepted method of research and a viable choice for my undertaking.

The script can clearly be viewed as an artifact in its own right, but also allows for an evaluation of the processes that led to its creation and development.

3:13 Research Outputs

The primary research output is the thesis. This takes the form of two parts: the accounts of the projects, including their evaluation, and several formal scripts.

The scripts: As previously noted, the scripts can be viewed in two ways;

1. The script as a stand-alone artifact.

2. The script as the culmination of the entire process.

The script can be viewed simply as a script in and of itself and critiqued for its worth as a piece of writing, but it can also be utilised as a product of a process, where its worth can be examined as a sum of its parts, including the methods that brought it into being which can be examined and utilised by others as a new way of approaching scriptwriting in an online setting.

4:0 MIKE LEIGH

4:1 Introduction

This chapter, will conduct an in-depth exploration and critical analysis of Leigh's praxis, as Mike Leigh is a key practitioner who uses an improvisatory approach to create and develop character, narrative and text. In order to later evaluate and apply Leigh's approach in a practical setting, it was essential to develop a secure grounding for my approach to practice, by first evaluating Leigh's approach on paper.

It should be noted here that, in Leigh's case, written versions of the dramatic product, arrived at through improvisation, are relatively rare, for example, only a few scripts of his plays exist. A script version of *Abigail's Party* (1977) has been performed by a different cast. As we will see, the early parts of Leigh's process involve the actors submerged in the creation and development of their characters. It is likely, therefore, that a lot of the information arrived at, regarding character, is not contained within the script. Any actors in hypothetical future productions would not have been party to that information so the way Leigh works doesn't really lend itself to subsequent performances

Some authors state that Leigh writes a script after the improvisational period and before filming (Ellickson & Porton. 1994. Movshovitz ed, 2000: 59), others state that an assistant writes a script for continuity (Trossle-Jones. 2004: 17), others state that Leigh merely drafts a very brief outline (Coveney. 1996: 80) and in a 1991 article about Leigh, Judy Stone reports that Leigh drafts his outline and then it is 'worked up and written to a very precise state (Movshovitz ed. 2000: 28)'. In all cases, and for the

purposes of this thesis, these documentations of the project do not constitute the text, only the final product, which in Leigh's case, is the film. It should also be noted that conversely, for the outputs of my research, the script *is* the text.

Vague notions of Mike Leigh's close collaboration with an ensemble are widely held but the details of Leigh's way of working are perhaps less well known, and this is largely down to the fact that Leigh himself is notoriously unforthcoming about the details of his method. My main source of information concerning Leigh's method is *The Improvised Play*, by Paul Clements (1986). I have also gleaned insights from things that Leigh himself has said in interviews, along with drawing information from other sources.

4:2 The Mike Leigh Process

The following is an account of Mike Leigh's method as defined by Paul Clements. Some elements run simultaneously within the process, but in the pursuit of clarity I have defined each step separately. It is also worth noting that Clements offers the caveat that the process defined is in no way a definitive 'system' which Leigh utilises every time, but that each project sees the process's duration broken up differently (1986: 22).

A key principle in Leigh's process that exists from the very outset is that characters remain 'external' from the actor. Leigh insists that the actors refer to their characters in the third person as 'he'/'she', rather than 'I'. Clements states that this is in order that

‘an objective stance is taken to their [characters’] actions and behaviours (1986: 23)’. Clements goes on to state that Leigh avoids actors who are typecast, who always play similar characters or play ‘versions’ of themselves, as this impedes the actors’ ability to create, develop and portray a clearly defined and singular character (*Ibid*)’.

The acute awareness that events and experiences can have psychological and physical implications in someone’s later life is at the core of acting. Most actors work out a back story for their character based on clues in the received script. They put themselves in the character’s situation, considering how they would feel. Leigh (and his actors) certainly explore this psychological and physical *heritage* of the character, but do not work backwards from a received script; they begin at the start of the character’s life and move forward chronologically. It could be argued that Leigh’s character construction phase is an expedited journey through the character’s life and explores how the character’s early experiences are manifest in the psychological profile evident in later life, culminating in Leigh and the actor bringing the character up to the present day.

It is important to explore one key difference between the use of the self and the use of ‘external character’. As Marchand states, ‘because this is a fictional character being constructed under controlled parameters, with acting followed by debriefing, and with both actor and director reflecting on the implications of unconscious processes, these can be altered (2015: 48)’. These alterations can be extensive or minor at almost any point in Leigh’s entire process. Elements of backstory can be added or removed for a significant amount of time in the whole process (certainly up until final rehearsals), and

elements can be added in order to help the narrative develop and to allow Leigh to start to fit the characters together in situations. This cannot be done if you, as an actor, are drawing largely from yourself and your empirical experiences.

Leigh's work is not about questioning oneself (as an actor) it is about questioning what it is to be human. This question is posed for the audience to consider, more than for the actor. This approach departs heavily from, say, Grotowski's approach to improvisation and praxis. For Grotowski his acting research uses theatre as catharsis, for self-exploration, self-dissection and self-discovery. Grotowski wants his actors to look deep within themselves in order to offer a 'true' performance. In his seminal work, *Towards A Poor Theatre* (1968), Grotowski states that 'we believe that an actor reaches the essence of his vocation whenever he commits an act of sincerity, when he unveils himself, opens and gives himself in an extreme, solemn gesture (1968: 92)'. He goes on to say, 'it must not be said that a role is a pretext for the actor, nor an actor a pretext for the role. It is an instrument for making a cross-section of oneself, analysing oneself and thereby re-establishing contact with others (1968: 180)'. This philosophy of acting as self-discovery is in clear opposition to Leigh's approach, despite the fact that it could be argued that both approaches are in search of the same authenticity of portrayal through the humans on the stage and on the screen respectively.

4:2:1 Step 1: The Selection of Actors and the Auditions

Leigh uses 'the pyramid process', which involves him selecting a small number of actors with which to work for the lengthier periods of rehearsal (from the very beginning

of the project) and then further actors are brought in at a later date. The reasoning for this is two-fold. There is a financial consideration: Leigh can have fewer actors for a longer period, allowing for the protracted and intense pre-rehearsal period, rather than a lot of actors in a shorter period (Clements, 1986: 24). Secondly, given the nature of Leigh's approach to character, having fewer characters being developed helps Leigh to keep track of all the developing characters and the information related to those emerging/developing characters. The consideration is dictated by the practicalities of his working method, as Leigh himself states,

> Sometimes these things are a function of economics. You can't afford to have everyone there at once for the rehearsal period. Indeed, it would be wasteful because people would be hanging around for much of the time, and I can only work with one person at a time (Quoted by Movshovitz, 2000: 73).

The other element to consider is the fact that, as no one knows where the project will go, it might not be until much later in the process before it is realised that some more 'peripheral' characters may be needed – although it should be noted that some actors, involved from the very beginning, could well (as is the nature of Leigh's process) develop into less prominent characters.

The actors Leigh tends to cast have a direct correlation with the nature and demands of his approach. Leigh wants actors who will respond to his approach (which at times can be very demanding), actors who will throw themselves into the process. In order to 'refine his artistic statement', Leigh wants actors who understand that artistic statement; as Marchand states, 'Leigh seeks out professional 'character actors' because their training and experience provides discipline and precision (Cardinale-

Powel & DiPaolo eds. 2015: 42)'. Because of the highly structured nature of Leigh's method, he is in need of actors who can separate themselves from the characters they are creating; they must

> all understand the representational conventions that are used to create fictional identities; they are using a process that draws on lived reality to bring a seeming verisimilitude to the imaginary; their characters 'stand' for real people in their reception by the audience (*Ibid*).

This statement returns us to the heart of what Leigh is trying to achieve: he is working with actors to develop representations of characters who seem identifiably real to the audience and who are far removed from the generic, undeveloped characters of Hollywood. This is why Leigh has been known to work with the same core of actors (and crew) on several projects. Once Leigh has found an actor who responds well to the process, he is more likely to work with them again.

Arguably there is a danger that using the same actors again might result in those actors repeating traits they used in previous projects. Francis Lee, who has worked with Leigh as an actor and since become a director who utilises elements of Leigh's process (in terms of character development) responded to the dangers of actors treading the same ground by saying that it was definitely likely to occur, but it is with 'gentle encouragement that he steers actors away from this danger (Lee. Film Hub North Webinar. 2020)'.

In the case of David Thewlis, Leigh felt that Thewlis's characters had never become 'central characters' - in the case of *The Short and Curlies, (1987)* and *Life is Sweet, (1990*). It is the nature of Leigh's work, that a character is never predefined as a central character, but either becomes one or doesn't, depending on the direction in which the improvisations take the project. Therefore, Leigh used him (Thewlis) again in *Naked* (1993) to give Thewlis a chance to develop a character that might become more prominent, and in the case of *Naked* Thewlis' character did indeed become the central character. The implication here is that there was every chance that Thewlis' character could again end up being a minor character. Coveney claims that 'Johnny in *Naked* would undoubtedly have been a major player whatever happened, but Leigh is adamant that the film could have just as easily have been concentrated on the vile landlord Jeremy, or the three girls in the Dalston flat (1996: 166)'. Leigh also stated in interview regarding this matter,

> Thewlis was in some ways short-changed because there wasn't much of him in the film [Life is Sweet]. He was disappointed, but people often are, it happens all the time, especially in my films. He was fine about it; he just didn't want to do it again. […] Therefore, when I asked him some time later if he'd be in the next one, he wanted reassurance that the same thing wouldn't happen again. I promised him he'd have a fair slice of the pie (Quoted by Raphael. 2008: 211).

This clearly calls into question the validity of Leigh's claim that the improvisations take their own direction and that any character could become the prominent character. It is undeniable that he is stating here that he somehow engineered a way for Thewlis' character to become more central, or at the very least they (Leigh and Thewlis) engineered a character that would be far more prominent, which, it could be suggested, is not the way Leigh normally works, or that it illustrates a previously unacknowledged level of control that Leigh can/does exert over his project. As

Coveney states, ‘in the end, it all comes down to how Leigh, as the dominant artist himself in the creative process, absorbs and responds to what the actor brings into the discussion and the rehearsal room (1996: 166)’.

As we saw in Chapter Two, in ‘I am here now’, Michael McCall utilised Leigh’s methods of improvisation to write a play using a group of young non-experienced actors who identified as African-Australian. In his thesis McCall identifies the ‘reflexivity’ of Leigh. ‘Leigh’s reflexivity within his process appears to come from the unique position of being unencumbered by a script during the initial devising process, from the ‘originals’ to the structured improvisations (2018: 36)‘. What is interesting here is that whereas many would consider the lack of a script to be a real barrier, McCall notes that this lack of a script is actually an emancipation. It is important to unpack what McCall is talking about here. Arguably, it refers to a reflexivity that is enabled by the process and allows for character creation and development, which sees actors more involved in the creative process – creating, rather than just developing a character that is already pre-defined. This is essential if the actors are to remain objective about the characters they are creating. As previously mentioned, an awareness of the process is important in enabling actors to construct characters in the third person, rather than a first person manifestation of the actor’s self – an issue evident in Leigh’s Cardinal Rule regarding the use of personal pronouns (he/she) and an objective stance in the discussions between himself and the actor regarding character (Clements. 1986: 23).

This freedom goes some way to answering the question, ‘Why does Leigh work in the way he does?’ From a very early point Leigh had decided he didn’t want to be the kind

of writer who sits in a room and writes (Clements.1986:12). For Leigh, there is huge value in collaboration. Therefore, it is essential that there is no script. It could be argued that the presence of a script would mean there are limitations on any improvisation, it would simply be the development of pre-existing characters and narrative – meaning Leigh would have sat in a room and written a script (of some form). Leigh's approach, if he is to be believed, is embroiled in a process where not knowing what will happen is essential for a fecund ground where creativity can flourish.

McCall identifies that Leigh's reliance on his instincts is present from the very beginning, in the selection of actors. Leigh states,

> In the first place, I'm pretty careful about whom I choose. I instinctively look for the kind of actor who is going to be trusting. There are all kinds of insecure people out there called actors; and some deeply untrusting actors: the kind that need to know exactly what's what at all times—might be quite good within the parameters of a certain sort of acting. But I can't work with such people. On the whole, I get people for whom not always knowing what's what isn't a problem (Quoted by McCall, 2018: 34).

Clements claims that Leigh is looking for objective actors, who consciously identify nuances in people and utilise these idiosyncrasies in order to produce and portray incredibly well drawn characters, whilst putting their unequivocal trust in Leigh as he guides them through the journey (1986: 23). The very foundation of improvisation is trust. By trust we mean that the actors allow themselves to be guided by Leigh and believe that Leigh's guidance will result in great work. Leigh's approach is noted as being a definite departure from the sort of improvisation that many actors may have encountered at drama school, where improvisations are governed by pre-defined situations and characters.

Casting is conducted by means of an interview and work out, which utilises a condensed version of Leigh's pre-rehearsal process, where Leigh spends a little time with each actor and then the actors (in character) are brought together in a dramatic situation of Leigh's defining (Clements. 1986: 23). It is worth noting that at this stage the 'characters' are not necessarily the characters that the actor will develop in the project (if cast), but 'a' character for the purposes of the casting session. Situations such as a funeral are most often used. The situations chosen are those that 'lend themselves to hysteria (Leigh. Quoted by Clements. 1986: 23)'. The reasoning behind this is to see if the actor will 'over-act' or offer a more subtle performance. Leigh is looking for the subtle actor, rather than the ham (Clements, 1986: 23). The implication here is not that Leigh is looking for minimalist actors, rather that he is looking for actors who are expressive in a more naturalistic way, rather than offering a demonstrative performance that is unnecessarily heightened.

Auditions use the first step of the method in order to take some of the mystery out of Leigh's process. Auditions are also an opportunity to see how the actor responds to the method. This is to avoid the actors being 'overawed or inhibited when the rehearsals begin (Clements. 1986: 23)'. Actors who have never worked with Leigh before may be under a set of misconceptions concerning Leigh's method and what it involves. Clements points out that due to the audition interview and 'work out', when the actor arrives for the first day of rehearsal (when cast) they are already on reasonably familiar ground (1986: 24). The elements of uncertainty are reserved for the improvisations and the character building rather than the mechanics of the process as a whole.

In the interim between audition and first rehearsal, Leigh instructs the actor to compile a list of people that may provide the basis for their character. This takes us onto the next stage, 'The People You Know, or Have Known, List'.

4:2:2 Step 2: The People You Know List.

The first formal step in the method is conducted through one-to-one discussions between Leigh and each individual actor. The actors do not meet each other until much later on in the process. At this stage the actor is required to produce a list of people they know, or have met, who could provide a suitable basis for a character. Each real person or 'original' is discussed and the list is slowly whittled down.

Only Leigh and the individual actor is present, and it is only Leigh who is privy to the sum of all developments between Leigh and each individual actor. At this early stage, Leigh is considering the potential relationships that could exist between characters – but the actor has no knowledge of any of the other actors' characters. It is essential that the actors do not discuss their characters with any of the other actors. Leigh wants to avoid actors engineering backstories or subsequent events in improvisations in order to create their own connections between the characters. The danger to be avoided is that actors are less likely to investigate all the possibilities of the character, when they take improvisations in a certain direction that would link the characters together prematurely. It is important for Leigh's method that the explorations to develop character are wide-ranging and thorough. Clements identifies these potential

implications, both in terms of hypothetical attempts at premature connection, but also regarding engineered narrative trajectories,

> The purpose of these solo rehearsals is for the actor to create a character with an entirely individual and particular identity. If the actors were to talk to each other about their characters it's easy to imagine how they might begin to try to fit them together, making, perhaps unconsciously, compromises and accommodations in their own impulses. Equally damagingly they might surmise about the nature of the finished piece and become self-conscious about the narrative nature of subsequent improvisations (Clements. 1986: 31)

Not knowing about any other character means that the actors are unlikely to push an improvisation/character development in a particular direction, in order to create a narrative, rather than allowing the development to progress in a way that throws up more possibilities. Leigh's use of collaboration has been developed to arrive at characters and narratives in a singular way and any prior knowledge would work against that process.

Secondly, in the pursuit of 'real' moments, it is key that the characters receive information and undergo revelations *in character* during improvisations. This enables the actors to retain and revisit that spontaneity of emotions in the final performance. This could not be done if the actors already had this prior knowledge.

Returning to step two, Leigh questions the actor's previous portrayals of other characters in his or her (the actor's) previous work – in order to open up the creative process to the actor, but to reinforce the idea that the character is entirely separate to the actor (Clements. 1986: 26). This reinforces the idea of developing an 'external

character'. In this discussion it is intended that Leigh will illustrate to the actor where they have drawn inspiration from in order to build or portray previous characters. It may be that they have used someone they knew, which will help them in Leigh's process. It might be that they drew from themselves, in which case Leigh is able to steer them away from this, and avoid playing a version of themselves (Clements. 1986: 26). It may also be an opportunity to steer actors who have worked with Leigh before away from repetition, using the 'gentle encouragement' detailed previously. All of this is slowly immersing the actor in Leigh's process and introducing them to its mechanics.

At this stage of the character construction phase of Leigh's process the original is decided on from the short list (developed from step 2) and the embryonic character begins to emerge. The character is taken away from the original by many questions, posed by Leigh, where the actor fills in details, building upon what is known about the original and adding fictional details to move the character away from its basis. This is the point where the character becomes its own entity. The questions posed by Leigh enable both Leigh and the actor to start to build the character, by way of backstory. The questions are intended to start to build a biography of the character, whereby the character is developed by exploring the character's identity through their past. Leigh and the individual actor 'invent' details of the character's backstory, and it is this invented information that moves the character away from the original. It should be noted that the fictional information is not just plucked out of nowhere, the details are discussed and considered (between Leigh and the actor), paying close attention to how this information will impact on the character in contemporary life.

The original forms the jumping off point and further (fictional) details then supplement the actors' and Leigh's discussions. This forms one of the lengthiest parts of Leigh's process. It is essential that adequate time is allowed for the character to be developed into a truly *motivated* character. The motivations of the character are key, both in terms of developing the character but, more importantly, those motivations will be essential in the development of plot and narrative later in the process. A character's motivations are what drives them towards an object or goal and placing barriers in the way of achieving these is where the tension and drama lies.

The essence here is creative freedom. Leigh is aware that actors are generally trained to work quickly under the time constraints of theatre/film rehearsals. Leigh wants to allow ample time for the actor and himself to explore all facets of the character, which 'represents a fundamentally different experience of work from what most actors are used to, and an implicit acknowledgement of the creative possibilities of acting (Clements, 1986: 25)'. The departure from a traditional short rehearsal period, marks one key difference in Leigh's approach. It is also important that at this early stage in the process, the actor is reassured that their input is useful and valued. Clements points out that Leigh expends a significant effort to demonstrate that the actors' observations are worthwhile and will be taken seriously (1986: 26).

It is around this time that the character is named. Although Clements does not mention this element in his account of Leigh's process, Leigh does mention this 'naming session' in an interview with film critic and theorist Sean O'Sullivan. O'Sullivan asks Leigh if the actors have any say in the naming of the characters. Leigh replies that

they do up to a point, but ultimately, it is Leigh himself who ‘guides’ the naming to fit with his canon of work - where no name is duplicated and that the character name ‘fits’ with the other characters’ names on the project being worked upon. Leigh explains it in the following way:

> A part of my art is that I collaborate, so I work with each actor and I say, “Right, let’s name.” For a while in embryo form the character is going unnamed, and then I say, “Okay, let’s think about it and make a long list of all the names it could be.” We make a long list of first names, and then we select, if I’m smart, four, with reference to how they will go with the other names. And I also carry a permanent index, a notebook which I have with me at naming sessions of all the names in all of my work (Quoted by O’Sullivan, 2011: 161)

Names can often be class-specific, have certain associations and connotations and even be regionally specific. It is therefore an important decision that Leigh and the actor must make and not one to be taken lightly. The name of a character could take the character in a particular direction, the name could suggest certain personality traits and suggest a particular backstory and origin. It is due to these implications that the naming ceremony takes place very early on in the process.

A high degree of secrecy is called for at this stage, as each of the characters are being developed separately, with only Leigh being party to all of the developments. In discussion with McCall, he stated that he has merged several characters (from early drafts) into one character, because they were, essentially, versions of the same person. This is not unique, it is often the case that characters, written by a solo author, end up being merged because they are undeveloped or have similar characteristics. This is less likely to happen when the characters are created separately by a collection of different people. Like much of Leigh’s process, outcomes are reached that would

not necessarily have been arrived at, had a traditional single author approach been utilised.

The level of secrecy is also important, when, later in the process, Leigh brings the characters together. The actors only know as much about the other characters as the character would at that given stage – for actors to know more would potentially be disastrous for the improvisation. This, as we will see, is done by briefing each actor before the improvisation begins. Leigh's finished project(s) rely heavily upon a 'simulation of reality' in rehearsal so that there will be a 'convincing representation of reality, the action and behaviour of the characters must correspond to (Clements, 1986: 31)'. It is worth mentioning here that Michael Coveney explains that the inspiration, at least in part, for this element of Leigh's process can be traced back to Leigh's days at RADA. Coveney explains that

> [a]t RADA it was a particular improvisation conducted by Peter Barkworth in which two actors […] were separately briefed with incompatible information then thrown together. It remains a fundamental rule in Leigh's way of working that each actor in any improvisation, or rehearsal, knows only as much about any other character as his own character would know at that point in the story. In other words, the films and plays are developed in such a way that the actors (and indeed the director) do not know what will happen until they have explored and discussed [all] the possibilities in the situation where Leigh has placed the characters (1996: 61).

This is clearly a key feature of Leigh's method that yields realistic responses and spontaneous possibilities as to where the story could go.

<u>4:2:4 Step 5: Behaviour and Bearing.</u>

At this stage the character's inner elements have started to be defined and their behaviour and bearing is worked on, i.e. how the character walks and talks, how they gesture and how they demonstrate externally what is going on internally.

This part of the process was illustrated in the 1982 *Arena* special, *Mike Leigh Making Plays*, where Leigh and actors Sam Kelly, Alison Steadman and David Threlfall worked with Leigh in a short version of the process to demonstrate how it worked – this was performed purely for the programme. In this demonstration each actor (individually) spent time in a bedsit set and was encouraged to just do nothing. They read the paper and smoked etc., but ultimately inhabited the character alone in a room. Clements notes that at this stage 'the actors have been attending rehearsals for about two weeks and this is the first time they have been instructed to do any acting (1986: 34)', because, as he says, it is essential that the actors be 'liberated from the need to be instantly entertaining, illuminating, funny or sad" as long as they are *real* (Leigh, Quoted by Clements. *Ibid*)'.

Clements states that this is where the actor becomes 'more confident and fluent in his [or her] portrayal [of the character] (1986: 35)'. It is clear both in the *Arena* programme and in Clements' account, that what is being explored is how the character reacts in relatively mundane situations. The actor and Leigh then conduct debriefs after the improvisation to explore what new information was unearthed, which could form the basis for future improvisations – related, principally to character, as we are still in the character construction phase. Clements discusses how, if a character has become angry whilst making a cup of tea because they couldn't find a cup then, in the debrief

Leigh and the actor can explore the implications of this for the character, moving forward (1986: 35). By utilising that anger as a key component of the character Leigh and the actor develop what is called the 'running condition'. A character with an underlying predisposition to lose their temper is then examined in terms of how that is demonstrated in the external facets of the character – for example how this 'running condition' is apparent in their gait and outward demeanour. This can be seen in the *Arena* special, where Sam Kelly, in character, walks around a room. This improvisation is then followed by a debriefing session. What Leigh and Kelly are exploring is how Kelly's character demonstrates his running condition in the way he walks. In the subsequent debrief, Leigh identifies that Kelly's own physicality is coming through and that it is not right for the character's movement but is useful in exploring how the character thinks about himself (Leigh. *Arena* Special. 1982). What is at work here is a highly reflective, even dialectical method that allows Leigh and the actor to develop a character in as objective a way as possible. This is achieved by the use of regular debriefs and Leigh's Cardinal Rule regarding the character (in those debriefs) being referred to in the third person. It is worth noting that at this stage the actors have all been kept separate, working with Leigh individually in one-to-ones. The final part of this stage is to take the actor out of the rehearsal room and into the public, so that the character can interact with other (*real*) people, although the characters/actors continue to remain apart at this stage. This next phase of Leigh's character construction stage is referred to as 'Road Testing'.

'Road Testing', sees the actor leave the rehearsal space and go out into 'the real world'. A favourite exercise for Leigh is to take the character shopping. The purpose of this is to allow Leigh and the actor to see how the character reacts to other people,

as it is a little too soon to allow the characters to meet. Instead, the unwitting general public are ideal for this purpose. This is also the beginnings of the next stage, the external research.

4:2:5 Step 6: External Research

During the research phase of Leigh's process, the actor immerses in 'the world' of the character. In most cases the actor is exposed to the social situations in which the character would move. The actor will either observe or, more often, actually work in the occupation of their character; Clements describes this as 'research [which] helps the actors to absorb the social milieu of their characters (1986: 42)'. As well as allowing the actor to experience first-hand the social and environmental reality of their characters' world, it may provide them with potential material for the improvisations that come in the next stage (*Ibid*). There are some limitations to this practice, of course; for example, in Leigh's biopic *Topsy Turvy* (1999), it would have been difficult in contemporary England to live as Gilbert and Sullivan did in their day. In this case, the actors spent time with the Gilbert and Sullivan Society and theatre productions of the relevant works. In the process of devising *Vera Drake* (2004), it would have been impossible to expect the actor Imelda Staunton to perform abortions, so where the actual job cannot be performed, and the historical context has vanished, then historical research and reconstruction can be undertaken in its stead.

4:2:6 Step 7: Bringing the Characters Together

Until this point, each actor has been working with Leigh separately from the rest of the ensemble. On satisfactory completion of the external research phase, Leigh begins to

bring the actors together but the nature of the process means he often must synchronise the troupe to ensure that all of the characters come together in the same time:

> because the actors have been working alone in rehearsals where the principal emphasis has been on the individuality of their characters, adjustments are usually necessary to bring everyone to the same point of time and circumstances so that a fresh set of chronologically governed improvisations may be launched (Clements, 1986: 35).

This is done via one of two methods: 'figurative' improvisation, where things happen in real time in real situations, and another scenario, where two actors may sit down and invent a joint biography – under the supervision and input of Leigh. It is often the case that a joint biography discussion can provide the basis for the actors to then use figurative improvisations to further explore the relationships between the characters.

Figurative improvisations are often banal, humdrum situations where the subtext is allowed to blossom. The mundane scenario allows them to concentrate on the psyche of the character, rather than any action that might take place in a more dramatically charged scene. In many respects this is similar to the earlier stage where the actors (individually) spent time doing nothing in the bedsit set, but this time they are doing this with another actor present. At this point in the process, the considerations are still with the 'running condition': the internal and psychological factors that manifest themselves in the character's bearing, movement, but also now with their reactions to others. Also, as all improvisations are done chronologically, this allows the actors to experience the day to day lives of their characters. Aside from these formative improvisations with the characters, Leigh seeks to bolster the actors' knowledge of

their characters and their characters' shared backstories through an intense session known as 'Quiz Club'.

4:2:7 Step 8: Quiz Club

This exercise sees Leigh bring all the actors together as the pre-rehearsal stage nears its end, for a whole day, to answer a long series of detailed questions about their character and it is viewed as an indispensable stage in the devising of the artwork. The questions range from existing information, such as character names, dates of birth etc., then move further afield to the characters' attitudes to art, literature and popular culture. However, Clements offers no definite examples of the subjects covered, save a vague list. This highlighted an area where my research could offer some insights into Leigh's approach. The purpose of the activity is to solidify what is already there and also 'to fill any holes', because no matter how thoroughly the characters have been investigated there are inevitably gaps where things have never been discussed or considered (Clements, 1986: 44)'. Quiz Club occurs late enough on in the pre-rehearsal stage that the ensemble has gelled, but early enough in the process where the actors will benefit from the exercise and where it serves as another area of character development, in preparation for the improvisational stage proper (*Ibid*).

Quiz Club marks the end of Leigh's pre-rehearsal phase and the process next moves towards the rehearsal/improvisation stage. This is where Leigh begins to explore narrative possibilities. It should be noted, however, that, although the character construction phase has reached a conclusion, and the attention is turning towards

narrative, character (in terms of details and backstory, etc.) is not *entirely* finalised and is still open to alteration.

4:2:8 Step 9: The Rehearsal/Improvisation Stage.

This stage of Leigh's process sees all the in-depth character work put into action. The ground-work has been in order to develop a fully rounded character and give the actor as much detail as possible, so that he/she will not falter during the improvisations. Narrative begins to be formed, relationships are fully explored and a story line starts to take shape. As Clements states, 'work on narrative content flows from characterisation, characterisation will stimulate narrative content and, by the same token, research will inform and amplify aspects of each. The process is fluid, particular and unpredictable (1986: 48)'.

Clements defines three fundamental principles that underpin this part of Leigh's process. These principles set the parameters of the improvisations, enable the facilitation of these improvisations and allow them to flow and be productive.

1. Sustaining the Improvisation.

From the beginning, actors are told that they must not come out of character until instructed to do so by Leigh. Clements suggests that this is in order that if something is not working for an actor, persevering may take them to a place where the improvisation does begin to work. Equally so, it may be that the improvisation isn't working for one actor but *is* for the other actors involved in the improvisation. By

coming out of character, this could impede others and mean a creative opportunity is lost.

2. Actors are not to invent information

There is an important distinction to be drawn between Leigh's process and what most people think about when improvisation is mentioned. Leigh's improvisation is not a theatre game, the type seen on *Whose Line is it Anyway*?, or the sort of improvisation taught in drama schools. Clements suggests that these types of improvisations, where actors improvise by accepting any random information they receive, should remain as a game to play in amateur theatrics and this type of improvisation has no place in the explorative arena that Leigh's work inhabits. In fact, this is one reason that Leigh goes to such great lengths to furnish his actors with as much character information as possible before this stage of the process takes place. Clements simply states that actors having to deal with spontaneous information leads nowhere in an improvisation, 'because they're undercutting each other's work all the time and introducing elements, which aren't only irrelevant, but also evasive. The information which is being invented is getting in the way of anything they might be exploring (1986: 49-50)'. What Clements refers to here is the invention of backstory elements relating to off stage events. As we have seen in all these elements (backstory, off stage events) have been carefully mapped out in previous parts of the process and careful work undertaken to connect these events with the other characters' past events. To suddenly change this information would undermine the previous work. The distinction to be drawn is not that there are no revelations, but they are pre-planned (between Leigh and the individual actors) and are introduced in a more naturalistic way; they are not just invented on the

spot, in the immediacy of the improvisation. Where these revelations come in Leigh's process are when, say, a character learns about their connection to another character. A famous example of this is in *Secrets and Lies* (1996), where Cynthia (Brenda Blethyn) is faced with the revelation that Hortense (Marianne Jean-Baptiste), her daughter, is a person of colour. This information was kept from Blethyn until she met Jean-Baptiste (while both were in character) in the first improvisation of that scene. This moment of realisation could then be revisited in subsequent performances of the scene in rehearsals, retaining the initial surprise that the character felt in that moment.

3. Notes

According to Clements there is little in the way of note-taking during Leigh's improvisatory, narrative stage. He states that Leigh keeps copious amounts of notes in the early one-to-one stages, but when the improvisations start he takes no notes and discourages the actors from taking notes also. He suggests that this is because things are changing all the time and that Leigh and his actors would get bogged down in the swathes of notes that would be if produced each person involved was documenting the work undertaken (Clements. 1986: 50). Clements quotes Leigh on a key principle underpinning this lack of note-taking, 'it only exists if you remember it […] it must be in their [the actors'] heads and not on paper (1986: 50)'. Key revelations will only come across as authentic if the actor remembers it as happening to their character, in the same way the character would remember it if they were a real person. There is some suggestion that an assistant does take notes for continuity (Trossle-Jones. 2004: 17), although this may be done when the project nears readiness for shooting and the improvisations/rehearsals come to an end, or it is possible that Leigh

‘reminds’ the actors of these ‘moments’ in improvisations. Also at play here is the notion that if something happened and was forgotten then it couldn’t have been worth retaining anyway. Leigh is always trying out other possibilities during his process and the lack of documentation feeds into the necessity for fluidity in his approach.

4:2:9 Step 10: The End of Rehearsals – Development, Challenge and Clarification

The amount of time the company have been able to schedule for the project, must play a large part in determining at what point the end is reached. Clements suggests that thirteen weeks has become the norm for a play of any complexity, stating that eight weeks of the thirteen is spent in pre-rehearsal when budgeting for a film (1986: 51).

At the end of the rehearsal process, Leigh writes down a scenario. This is not, Clements states, just a matter of honing the material that has been produced in rehearsal, but is a matter of really concentrating on the narrative of the project. It may well utilise some or many of the events produced in (pre)rehearsal, and equally it may use none. (1986: 52).

It should be noted that the scenario is in no way a treatment, step outline or script. It takes the form of a compression of themes, ideas and sometimes events from the (pre)rehearsals. The scenarios are brief and contain little more than scene headings that provides a very loose and rough structure for the improvisations to explore and

offer a sketchy structure of action upon which the piece can be built (Clements. 1986: 52).

The spirit of open-ended discovery is still very much the culture that Leigh fosters, and the improvisations which follow are still a form of exploration and experimentation. They are, however, unlike previous phases, not bound by chronology. Instead of unfolding in a progressive way, the improvisations can begin from any point in the loosely formed scenario (Clements. 1986: 53).

In a single scene all possible avenues are pursued, right down to the minutiae of action and motivations. Clements identifies the essential reason for this: 'Leigh's principle in keeping the structuring process as open-ended and free as the pre-rehearsal work is to avoid closing down his options too soon (1986: 54)'. Although Leigh is now moving towards solidifying the work, he is attempting to leave definitive decisions to a later stage.

Leigh will often set up an improvisation in isolation from its context in the emerging structure in order to 'overlay one moment's tension with another in order to make it more dense (Clements. 1986: 54)'. Clements gives us an example, from *Abigail's Party* (1977), of how these isolated improvisations are used to layer a particular sequence or scene, within the emerging structure.

> There is a moment at which Laurence puts on a record. In the preparatory improvisations there was a pause here while the characters waited for the music. There was nothing awkward or hollow about it, but Leigh decided that it could be filled in and

> the moment rendered into a more dense experience for the audience. A parallel improvisation was initiated in which Beverly and Angela admired the fibre-light on the coffee table. The dialogue distilled from this improvisation was then overlaid onto the moment at which Laurence puts on the record (1986: 54)

Clements offers us insights into the use of detail in Leigh's method of working. It is these later improvisations that allow the opportunity to add the finer details that enable Leigh to represent reality through that detail.

'When each scene has been investigated in this manner the rough assembly stage is complete. […] The next phase of structuring is to go over all the material again and challenge it moment by moment (Clements. 1986: 55)'. It is clear that Leigh is keen to leave the door open to new possibilities for as long as possible. Clements offers us a superb phrase in discussing Leigh's cyclical process of refining, until what is reached is a 'text without a script (1986: 55)'. The finality of a script is what stands in the way of the exploration of all possibilities, which is at the heart of improvisation as a method of investigation for dramatic potential.

<u>Leigh's Aims and Intentions</u>

In terms of how Leigh shoots his films, he is 'aspiring to the condition of documentary (Movshovitz. 2000:32)'. Leigh explains that: 'when you film a documentary, you do not question that the world that you're shooting actually exists in three dimensions and that it wouldn't exist if you didn't film it (*Ibid*)'. This clearly illustrates Leigh's intention to present his fictional world as a facsimile of the real world. In fact, in order to achieve this degree of verisimilitude, Leigh needs to ensure the fictional world he has created

is real, to the characters and appears real to the audience. As stated, it is character which will act as guarantor for this exacting form of realism. Leigh has discussed the lengths to which he and his actors will go when in a 'genuine pursuit for character (Movshovitz. 2000:4)'. When working on *Life is Sweet* (1990), Leigh mentions the work he and his actors did exploring a family holiday, which never made it into the film. Leigh points out that the exploration was valuable and necessary, as the detail is not just filling in the backstory for the characters for a narrative purpose, it is 'creating them [the characters] so that we really believe they are real (Movshovitz 2000:19-20)'. It's interesting to examine this statement in terms of who the 'we' is. Leigh makes no distinction, I believe, between 'we' (the actors and director) and 'we' (the audience for the film). As Judy Stone writes, 'Leigh's goal is to put characters on the screen like real people. Idiosyncratic, unique and individual and properly placed in their social context (1991:27)'.

One thing Leigh is quite clear on, in terms of what he wants to achieve with his social documentary is to show how people conform to others' expectations rather than their own truth. He states that, 'One of the prevailing themes or issues in all of the films is the hopelessness of being truthfully what we are as opposed to what other people expect – what our received roles are (Movshovitz. 2000:18)'. Amy Raphael echoes this statement when writing about Leigh's work, 'Leigh's is a world where realism triumphs over hollow beauty […] where people behave as they are expected to, rather than being themselves 2008:x)'. When Leigh talks about his time at RADA, he declares that while studying there he 'never made an organic or truthful statement [...] everything was second-hand or borrowed or learnt (*ibid*)', in other words, his own education in the dramatic arts was largely an experience of conforming to the

expectations of tutors and peers. This must have urged him towards his own process that would be ‘an area of creative investigation, instead of mere reproduction (*Ibid*)’. Leigh is clear that his approach is the only way he can work. He admits that anything he could write in his ‘ivory tower with his quill’ would be a lot less interesting than what he can do with actors.

Often the way Leigh structures his films is related to the slow revealing of character in a way which will challenge the assumptions the audience makes about a character. This method can also be seen in the monologues of Alan Bennett. Leigh explains, ‘I just try to make the film work, as it progresses, the way you relate to people in real life. You meet someone and you make some assumptions, then as you start to get to know them, the whole picture changes (Movshovitz. 2000:31)’.

5:0 OEP: ONLINE ENSEMBLE RESEARCH PROJECT

5:1 Account of Practical Experimental 'Online Ensemble Project' (*Being Normal*)

This chapter offers an account of the practical project referred to throughout this thesis as the 'Online Ensemble Project' or OEP. The project was designed to examine and operationalize an adapted version of Leigh's method to create and develop character and narrative, which then generated a written text - the script. Each section of the chapter outlines what was done in the workshop sessions, what they attempted to achieve and whether alterations were made to suit the requirements of working online.

In addition to the written analysis of the OEP, in-text links to videos illustrating key moments of the research are presented within this chapter. Clicking on the blue links, will take you to the relevant video. The videos provide an audio/visual demonstration of how key phases of the process were undertaken, in order to support the written account. Along with the video and written documentation, the first draft of the resultant script, *Being Normal*, is included in the Appendix (D: LVIII), so that it can be compared with the final draft presented on page 197 of this thesis.

Initially timetabled for ten weeks, the project intended to dedicate one session a week (or, in the case of the one-to-one character work, one session per participant, per week) to each of the steps of Leigh's approach, to the creation of character and narrative, through improvisation and actor-as-author collaboration. The evaluation of this process informed how these steps could be applied in my practice.

The move towards exploring a method for remote working was in direct response to the pandemic. As I was already exploring Leigh's approach to film making, through actor-as-author improvisation, I decided to see if Leigh's approach would initially lend itself to an online setting and, where necessary, attempt to adapt Leigh's process, to create a new way of working online.

5:2 Introduction, Preparation and Aims

In order to evaluate Leigh's method of creating and developing character, narrative and text through an improvisational approach, in terms of its efficacy for working online, each stage of Leigh's process - of first creating and developing character, then through ensemble improvisations developing narrative and character arcs, culminating in a final piece of work - had to be explored through the practical application and adaptation of that process. Each individual phase of Leigh's entire approach would be trialled to examine how Leigh's established method would lend itself to online working and if necessary, where it was not practical, or not suited to online working, how it had to be adapted or an alternative found. This practical project also allowed for an exploration of the finer details of Leigh's approach – areas that were not well documented (such as what questions were posed to the actor in the early stages of character development).

What follows is a detailed account of each session and what was undertaken, along with insights into Leigh's approach which could be applied to my emerging praxis.

5:2:1 Unexpected Developments

As the COVID19 pandemic struck, my intended face-to-face practical research quickly became unfeasible. Where the one-to-one work might have been possible at certain times where restrictions were modified, later ensemble improvisations would have been either impossible, or so limited by regulations that the potential for any sustained creative interaction would have been minimal. The ethical implications of endangering the participants by getting them together even when gatherings were permitted also fed in to the decision to prevent the workshops from running.

In response to these limitations I was forced to adapt the research to the exploration of a method whereby actors could improvise entirely remotely. As I had already been researching Leigh's approach, it seemed at first sight that his method may well lend itself to an online setting. It was likely that some adaptations would have to be made but, as an existing framework, Leigh's approach seemed most pertinent.

It was envisioned at the early planning stage and as the project began that the one-to-one sessions, prescribed by Leigh's method, would still work just as well remotely, as they would have done if they were conducted face-to-face. Any improvisation in the real world was not going to be possible so it was decided that the action of the piece would take place on Zoom, simply because Zoom seemed the easiest platform in which to manage the setting up of meetings and the sending of links to participants.

Props and costume, if used, were to be provided by the participants, from what was already present in their home. The legal restrictions in place meant that only what was already to hand could be utilised, which imposed a set of aesthetic restrictions akin to the manifesto of Dogme 95.

During the whole process a detailed Session Report was kept and all sessions were recorded using the record function on Zoom.

Two participants had graduated from UCLan with drama degrees (BA Hons in Contemporary Theatre) and one participant had worked on a myriad of projects as an actor and writer. For the project to have the most chance of success it was necessary to work with actors who had an extensive awareness of character construction and experience of improvisation.

It was expected that the project would generate a short (approximately fifteen minute) script and then a lengthier project would follow. However, this first experimental project became the major project, generating a much lengthier script than envisioned. This is why there is some mention of the 'major project' in the accompanying videos.

5:3 The Initial Meeting

The initial meeting was introductory and served mainly to explain and reiterate some of the clauses in the participants' consent form - see appendix. I also outlined the nature of the research and what was required of the participants. I laid the ground

rules and gave an explanation as to why they were in place, including clear information about basic improvisatory protocols. The participants were all experienced actors and were therefore aware of the fundamental rules governing improvisational exchanges, however, it never hurts to remind participants of these fundamentals.

1. You must not shut any other actor down, by saying no, etc.

2. Even if you are corpsing (laughing/slipping out of character), fumbling your lines, you must persevere with the improvisation and ride it out or until instructed to 'come out of character'.

3. Even if the improvisation is not working for you, continue with it, as it may be working for the others,

Leigh's Cardinal Rule was also articulated; that the participants must not add any personal information into the emerging/developing character. They were not to play, in any way, a version of themselves. As we shall see, I had adopted this rule for two of the three participants. I had wanted to know if this rule could be broken, or at the very least, to shed some light on why it was so important. I therefore (privately) instructed Participant B to disregard this rule, to see what effect it would have, whilst observing their actions alongside the other two participants who would adhere to it.

Finally, I explained the 'People You Know List' (PYKL) and how it was designed to give their characters as solid a basis as possible, while highlighting the dangers of using close friends or family as potential originals, since they would be put under the microscope and their flaws interrogated, which is not necessarily healthy for friendships and relationships.

An early concern for me was whether the participants would be able to improvise in an online setting. As Frost and Yarrow state, 'Actors need to be 'in the moment' and to react truly instinctively to other people on the stage (2007: 9)'. The question was, would the actors be able to be 'in the moment' and react 'instinctively', when they weren't in the same room and couldn't rely on physical cues, as they would in a face-to-face improvisation? All were comfortable and familiar with the Zoom interface, which seemed to remove at least some of the barriers that might have stood in the way of successful online improvisations.

5:4 Character Construction Phase (Weeks 1-5)

5:4:1 Week 1 'People You Know List'

Video Clip One VC 1: PKYL is presented alongside this section of the report – please click on the blue link (as with all blue links that follow). The video shows participant A's 'People You Know List' (PKYL). The clip presents how the PKYL session was conducted and highlights the following discussion regarding how the participants' lists were streamlined before the session (by the participants), how the participants had inklings of which original would be chosen and the possibility of amalgamations of character traits. The video also shows the discussions regarding what we were looking

for in terms of the qualities of the original and the creative and practical considerations involved in making a choice. The video, although only showing participant A's session, reflects how all the PKYL sessions were conducted between myself and the other participants (individually) and offers the reader further insights into how the session was run. Another important element to observe is that the debrief is sewn into the discussion and seamlessly moves from the work to the debrief.

As two of the three participants had been instructed to play a character that was far removed from their real selves, the participants had selected people they had known who they considered to be quite distinct in terms of personality and life experience. Early in the character construction phase, there was no narrative considerations, the character was to be formed in a 'vacuum', that is to say, isolated from the other participants and away from any idea of story or plot, connected only with myself. Each person on the participants' lists was discussed, with as much information provided as the participants possessed.

It was essential that the decision (as to which real person from the participants' list would form the 'original') was made by both the participant and myself, and that this decision was an informed, unanimous choice. At this early stage it was important to ensure the participants remained objective about their characters (only referring to the character with third person pronouns, as per Leigh's method), to further avoid any personal information creeping into the developing characters. This was easy at this early stage in the character development phase, as the participants were only ever talking about the character, rather than 'playing' the character

The participants used the originals' real names, noting that the name would be changed. After all those on the list had been discussed, one original was decided upon – in a unanimous vote between myself and the participant, although in some cases there was some negotiation regarding an amalgamation of several originals.

In the cases of participants A and C, as soon as one particular original was discussed, it was apparent that this would be the one taken forward – although I did go through their entire list just to be sure that that original was the most promising option. They both picked originals who were the most unlike themselves and characters that they had never played before. Participant C noted that their original would be more effective if played subtly, as the original was something of a monster. It was noted that the subtle portrayal would make for a more monstrous person than playing a caricature or heightened version of this person.

It was also noted that the participants had instinctively started to filter their lists, offering the most suitable originals first and having back-ups that were considered less practical – this suitability lay in the dissimilarity to themselves (participants) and that there was little known about the original, which facilitated the input of fictional information. Both participants (A & C) chose people with whom they had worked. This seemed appropriate, as they were not people that the actors had an emotional investment in. The actors were more familiar with the originals' mannerisms, personalities, idiosyncrasies, than their personal details and backstory. It was identified that these proved best for originals as too much knowledge of their backstory

could prove an impediment to developing the character, as there was less room for fictional detail and there was a danger that the actor could end up playing the real person, rather than a fictional character.

The use of amalgamated character traits came into play with participant B, who was the one actor allowed to integrate personal traits into the character. B's original was a friend of theirs, mixed with some traits from others that they had worked with and parts of their own personality. The problem here, which I did not see at the time, was that it eventually became difficult to discern if injecting personal information was either a problem, or an advantage. The difference between those not using personal information and B was muddied because B's original was better known to B than A's and C's original – that is to say, I couldn't easily discern what was actual information (drawn from the original) and what was personal information supplemented by participant B. On the occasions in debrief sessions where I tried to establish what was personal information and what was not, the participant became guarded. It became clear that Leigh's Cardinal Rule was worth adhering to, since the discussion of, for example, mental health issues or critical events in an actor's or a character's past might overlap in an improvisatory performance. Often, participant B would feel the need to say that particularly sensitive details/events were not drawn from their own personal experience and felt there was a danger of them being analysed or judged.

It was decided that I would release a large collection of questions to the participants a few days before the scheduled individual sessions (as a form of 'homework'), so that they could give the answers some thought and then I would discuss with them what

they had arrived at and push them for further information/embellishment. The questions (see appendix) covered the character's birth and early life, along with details of parents' backstory and to a degree, that of their characters' grandparents. The questions then covered school and college, into early adulthood and finally brought the characters up to the present day. Given the amount of questions and ground that was to be covered, the backstory work was conducted over two weeks.

5:4:2 Week 2-3 Backstory Work.

Having decided on an original for all three participants' characters, the next step was to move them away from that original and develop a fictional backstory for each character. Although it is not necessary to go into detail for each of the participants' originals at this stage, participant C's original is of use here. C's original was a woman that the participant had worked for in a family-run restaurant. The original was horrible to the participant for reasons they couldn't understand, save that they were attractive to the opposite sex and received a lot of attention from male staff members. This allowed for an opportunity to develop a (fictional) backstory that would explain why the character was such a horrible person (because of a troubled past) and allowed us to move the character away from the original - by adding fictional information where the real-life details were lacking.

The development of the characters' backstory was conducted in one-to-one sessions with the participants kept apart. The aim here was to work chronologically from their characters' birth to their manifestation in the modern day. The backstory details were designed to inform the modern-day persona, in terms of key childhood experiences,

which would influence a particular way of being and worldview. This ultimately was an in-depth character study, which sought to go very deeply into the character's past. The details covered were also intended to arm the participant with the information that they may need when improvising. The sessions were conducted purely by way of discussion and no improvisation was undertaken at this stage. The participants were also instructed not to discuss any of the character work with any of the other participants.

I believe that pre-releasing the questions, rather than hot seating (firing questions at the participants, which they have no prior knowledge of, and having them answer in/as the character) made for a better approach to backstory and character creation/development. If I had hot seated them, snap decisions would not have produced as considered a backstory as we arrived at with pre-released questions. Being able to think about the implications of early experiences and family life was essential for the backstories to function as desired, that is to say how those early experiences manifest themselves in the personality and actions of the character in present day.

I had thought that we would need to conduct the naming ceremony at the end of the first session of this part of the process because it would be difficult to talk about the character (in the third person) without giving them a name. However, all participants wanted to hold off with the name until they had explored the whole backstory up to the present day, so the naming ceremony was the last thing to be done during the backstory work. It seemed that the finality of naming the characters at this stage

worried the participants, so I postponed the naming until the participants were comfortable in doing so.

As the backstory/character work continued over these two weeks, I became concerned that it would be difficult to establish relationships between the characters or to find a reason for them to come together. They were placed in different parts of the country (Preston, Wales and London/Brighton) and although some similarities were apparent (similar jobs/time spent in London) it appeared that bringing them together later in a scenario would be tricky. It is likely that Leigh has some ideas very early on about how the characters might fit together in a range of ways. It is also possible that changes are made to a character's backstory to facilitate relationships later in the process, possibly during the early improvisations or even during narrative stage of his process.

However, being on Zoom provided the answer to this conundrum. Where I had thought the limitations of being on Zoom would be a hindrance (people don't just bump into each other online, as they could in life), it became apparent that this would give me the reason they could come together. They would all be strangers to each other, but we could find scenarios where strangers meet in a Zoom meeting. Another benefit of them being strangers meant that character exposition would be easier; the audience would learn more about the characters, as the characters learn more about each other.

5:4:3 Week 4 Physicality and Bearing

Video Clip four VC 4: Physical Character Work - accompanies this section of the report. VC 4 shows participant B working on the physicality and bearing of their character. The video demonstrates how the character was physicalized (without any verbal expression during the improvisation) and how the session was conducted. It demonstrates how the actor was prompted by myself in order to evoke certain feelings in the character, which were then supposed to be articulated through movement and bearing. It also illustrates the discussions undertaken after the improvisation to aid understanding and insights into the character. The clip gives the reader further insights into how the workshop was conducted and into the discourse that follows regarding the experiences of the participant and researcher during this stage of the process.

Having developed the character on paper by creating a backstory for them, the participants now had to bring the character to life by performing a mundane task in character. It was the aim of this session to explore ways in which the backstory might reveal itself in the character's actions and responses to the prescribed situation. Additionally, the character's response to emotionally charged prompts (from myself), was expected to reveal what Leigh refers to as the 'running condition'.

In this session the participants improvised in character for the first time. The aim here was to allow the participants to work on developing the physicality of the character as part of the incremental development of backstory, physicality and then vocal performance. The participants, in character, undertook a mundane task. The purpose of specifying a *mundane* task was that it would take little thought, so the participants could experience character and the character's thoughts without having to concentrate

on much physical action. It was also intended to aid the participants' performance of the character. They were charged to manifest the thoughts the character had physically, as they couldn't voice them. The other result was to see if any tics or tells occurred, which could feed directly into a permanent element of performing the character. Tics and tells were going to be important, as the Zoom screen would only show their head and shoulders (in the main), so subtle gestures would play an important role. The physical tics were also a way to 'get into character'. For example, in later improvisations, as I said the words 'go into character', I noticed that participant A would fiddle with their fingers nervously as a way to access their character quickly.

Before each session started, I reiterated the ground rules for improvisation (See section 5:3). Especially important was that they must remain in character until instructed to 'come out of character', even if the improvisation wasn't working for them. This was because, in later ensemble improvisations, the improvisation might not be working for *them*, but may be going really well for another participant. Just as with Leigh, each participant was instructed to 'go into character', to start the improvisation, and then when I wanted to stop the improvisation, I would instruct them to 'come out of character'.

Each participant spent time just being in character and then, in the second improvisation, they undertook the mundane task. What I hadn't told the participants was that during the mundane task, I would then attempt to evoke some emotion in them by saying that, as they were undertaking the task, they came across their most treasured possession (identified in the backstory sessions). They were then to

physically exhibit their feelings without words. After each improvisation we debriefed regarding what went through the character's mind and what emotions were at work.

Turning our attention to the next phase, we were faced with the challenge of 'Road Testing'. A solution to the Road Testing issue was proposed by participant B, who suggested that a survey call, or cold call, might be a way of getting the characters to interact with another person, in a real life setting. This would be a controlled way of Road Testing the characters (as Leigh does), but safely and in line with lockdown guidance.

[During the work with participant A, I paused the recording until they joined and forgot to turn it back on again. I ensured that I did not make this mistake again!]

5:4:4 Week 5 Road Testing and Voice Work.

Video Clips Five VC5a, VC5b, VC5c : Road Testing – shows the Road Testing sessions of all three participants and the discussions undertaken related to those sessions. This part of the process is where Leigh's method was adapted in order to facilitate online working and sees the 'Road Testing' of the character, not by going into the real world, but through a simulation of the real world in two phone calls. These calls were intended to frustrate and anger the character, in a hope of unearthing greater understanding about their mind and actions in the facilitator and the participant playing the character.

Having worked on the physicality of the character, this week's research aim was to develop the character's voice.

Several improvisations/exchanges between myself (in various characters) and the participants (in character) were undertaken. These exchanges were in the form of phone calls. One call was a survey call which was meant to infuriate the characters. The other call was tailored to each of the individual characters. It was a work call and revolved around people that the characters hated at work (again, identified in the backstory session), with the exception of participant C, who received a call threatening to cut off the gas to their restaurant due to an unpaid bill. Once again, the questions posed in the backstory sessions, proved useful later in the process. Being present during those sessions meant that I was in a position to best gauge how the characters would react. This was helpful, as I scripted the calls (see appendix).

First of all, discussions were undertaken regarding how the participants thought the characters sounded vocally, in terms of accents and dialects. In the case of participant A, the character had a Welsh accent. The introduction of accents was also the case for B's and C's characters. B's character had a northern accent and C's character spoke with Received Pronunciation. With all participants, elements of dialect or other languages were explored, for example A's character might occasionally say a Welsh phrase and C's character, having Italian heritage, might swear in Italian when angered. Familiarising themselves with these languages/dialects would form part of the research period. With these decisions made, we went into the improvisations.

I had planned to telephone the participants and instructed them to log on with a different device, so as to be able to take the call. It became clear that not only would calling the participants on the phone not work, but that it was unnecessary. I trialled it with participant A and the delay threw us both off so, to address this, I carried on with the Zoom meeting and turned my camera off, but left the participant's video on. The idea was that the participant couldn't see me but could hear me (as is the case with a phone call), and it was important that I could see them (and so could record them) to examine how they (in character) behaved physically during the calls. In order to denote when I was 'ringing' and when the participants/characters had decided to hang up, we organised a ringing sound, just vocally, and then a 'click' when hanging up.

This first improvisation also got the participants to deal with material that may make them laugh. I purposefully added lines that would make it difficult to stay in character – the hope was that they would be able to ride this out and keep the improvisation going. This was designed to train them to persevere with improvisations, even if they were losing focus. It was essential that they remain in character until instructed otherwise, so that the improvisation continued to run, despite stumbles, especially as we moved towards ensemble improvisations.

The second improvisation was a work call where someone or something prodded the character towards either panic or stress. These extremes were in the interests of alacrity, in order to reveal new layers of character - the nicer, more sedate versions were to be explored in the group improvisations the following week. This departs from Leigh, where the sedate version of the character would be explored in the Road

Testing. Leigh might take the character shopping and observe from afar. These exchanges are likely to be pleasant and it is unlikely that Leigh subjects the characters to any extreme emotions during Road Testing. As noted previously, the main driving force of this departure from Leigh was time management. I believed that putting the characters through more extreme emotions might reveal more insights into the characters for myself and the participants, than more sedate scenarios would.

A benefit of drawing the original from a group of people the participants had worked with meant that they already had (in the main) experience of the occupation carried out by the character. This enabled us to side-step part of the research stage of the process – where Leigh has the actors work in the characters' occupation for a few weeks. It was noted that the participants had already undertaken that research, by just drawing from personal experience of those kinds of work. Participant A had worked with troubled youths and had some experience of rest homes. Participant C had worked in a restaurant, the very restaurant where the original was manager and participant B had worked in a community arts initiative with members of the community that were in housing association accommodation. It is important to clarify that utilisation of personal experience, such as occupational experience or experience of a certain place, was not considered to be prohibited prohibited by Leigh's Cardinal Rule.

Leigh, of course, would never excuse his actors from this part of the process, but he has both the time, renown and budget to accommodate his actors spending time with the police, plumbers, or any such place of occupation.

Participant B did not respond quite in the way expected. The character side-stepped the business call, by transferring the call. This was in character and wasn't the actor just not dealing with the situation. Although this was right for the character, we had to run the improvisation again and get the character to deal with the call. The character also saw the survey call to the end, which was surprising, but in hindsight was right for the character. Both the side-stepping and the perseverance during the automated call, all represent key elements of the character. As we shall see, the version of the character that was developed was far removed from any initial ideas we had about how the character would be. The character (initially very professional and attentive) soon developed into quite the opposite type of person. In hindsight, the character's reactions to these calls demonstrated the beginning of this change.

5:5 Setting and Start of the Narrative Development Phase (Weeks 6-9)

5:5:1 Week 6 Scenarios (1)

In this session, the research aim was to bring the ensemble together to trial several pre-defined scenarios that I had chosen, mainly from likely Zoom meeting situations and one that was a little more abstract: an online management training forum, a self-help group, etc. The hope then was that at the end we would debrief and one particular scenario would stand out as having the most possibilities (character development, narrative, comedy) for the developing project. It was also hoped that these early forays might offer some embryonic relationship possibilities between the characters. It could be argued that with the pre-defined scenarios comes with it something of a mini-narrative, or a more likely narrative is precipitated by certain scenarios. However, all

the scenarios defined were formulated as open-ended, rather than situations where a particular narrative suggested itself. All scenarios, including the unreleased one, were merely situations where people might meet on Zoom and characters could then find their own direction within that setting.

The Ensemble Improvisation Scenarios were as follows (see appendix for full scenario outlines);

Scenario #1: Management Training.

Scenario #2: Speed Awareness Course

Scenario #3: Self Help Group

Scenario #4: UNDISCLOSED

The scenarios (all but one) were pre-released to allow the participants time to consider key information, such as the circumstances in which they were caught speeding, and an anecdote relating to the prosecution, which was likely to form the basis for any initial dialogue within the scene, given that this shared experience was to be the only common ground between the characters – at least to begin with, until the conversation developed into other areas. I had also decided that the participants should come armed with this information, rather than make the information or anecdote up on the spot. For example, in the case of the speeding awareness course, the story of why they were speeding and their attitude to the authorities that had prosecuted them, would be revealing in terms of character. Some time to work out these attitudes and

stories should be, therefore, informed by the backstory work and if it were made up spontaneously, it might not be as revealing. I was also aware of the time limits I faced and thought that in order to achieve results quickly, giving the participants an opportunity to do some preparation would mean we didn't have to keep running the scenarios until something occurred or spend time explaining the details of the scenarios.

The one improvisation where no information was disclosed in advance was designed to see what results would come from a more spontaneous and obscure situation.

Participants were asked to change their name on Zoom to their character name. This is the one piece of information that is revealed to the other characters and the audience from the beginning.

Participant B was unable to attend due to ill-health. This presented a problem at first. Whereas Leigh brings the characters together incrementally, to search for relationships between the characters, I could not perceive of any reason why these people would know each other, and be meeting on Zoom, so I decided to bring them all together as strangers. However, because B was absent from the rehearsal, we were able to explore the dynamics of the relationship that formed between the two other characters. Then, after experimenting with the scenarios, it was decided to hold off on a decision regarding which scenario to go with, until the other character had been introduced, to see how that changed the dynamic. Where A and C fitted well, one being very stressed and the other being calm and welcoming, it was highlighted

that the introduction of another character would upset this balance and therefore no decisions should be made until all the characters had improvised in at least some of the scenarios together.

It was noted that the more realistic scenarios began to tread the same ground, but with the speed awareness course, participant A attempted to inject some tension by way of the character's world view, demonstrating a problem with authority figures and what the character perceived to be a corrupt and unfair legal system that had brought him to the meeting. It was highlighted that some tension could be developed by participant C's character opposing A's political stance.

This clearly demonstrated that the participants were already looking at narrative possibilities and ways to raise the tension for dramatic effect.

Scenario 4 (See Appendix and above) offered possibilities for both comedic and dramatic narrative strands. I had for some time thought this was most likely to be the scenario that we used. However, I was conscious that I should be careful not to guide the participants towards one particular scenario. I also became aware that the scenario offered so much in the way of narrative that maybe this wasn't suitable for a short piece and it would require longer for it to come to fruition/resolution. This scenario differed from the others as I was aware the scenario was pregnant with narrative possibilities before it was improvised, whereas the others would need improvisational exploration to reveal a narrative or narratives.

Scenario 1 also worked in terms of character development and narrative potential, whereas Scenario 2 offered less. The latter improvisation felt constrained and the dialogue soon covered most expected topics of conversation in that situation. By the time the improvisation ended there seemed to be nowhere else any further improvisations could go. It was identified (in the debrief after the improvisation) that Scenario 2 was likely to hit a brick wall quickly, fittingly for an improvisation around the topic of speeding, and so should be discarded. At this relatively early stage it might be asked, 'How do you know these possibilities/limitations are related to the nature of the scenario rather than the limitations of the characters/actors?', and I would reply that I didn't. I had to trust in the ability of my participants and the robustness of their characters. Later on in the project, when the participants/characters had flourished in every other scenario, demonstrating their range in various improvisations, I was able to identify that it was in fact an issue with the scenario and not with the participants/characters.

It was essential that a debrief be conducted after each improvisation to highlight the pros and cons of each scenario, in terms of the scenario's efficacy as a vehicle for the project. A final discussion was conducted between myself and the participants as to whether or not to decide on the scenario and it was decided that we should hold off until the next week where we could run all the scenarios again and trial scenario 3, which hadn't been trialled in this session. It was decided that we would be in a better position to make a decision once we had explored all scenarios with the full cast – save the speed awareness course which was dropped.

5:5:2 Week 7(a)

Week seven proved difficult because one participant had no internet connection and another was ill, so the session was cancelled. At this stage in the project, where I was bringing everyone together in pre-set scenarios, there wasn't really anything I could do with just one participant. This was a worrying situation, as the project was already slightly behind schedule. The planned session was then moved to a week later and became week 7(b).

5:5:3 Week 7(b) Scenarios (2)

Video Clip 7 VC7 – Self-Help Scenario shows the improvisation which explored the scenario that was chosen to be that the work we would use moving forward. It also shows the discussions around that final choice and the thinking behind choosing that particular scenario over any other. The reference to the 'major project' (as noted at the beginning of this chapter) relates to an expected second ensemble project, which was abandoned later on.

This session aimed to develop and explore the dynamics and interactions between characters in full ensemble improvisations. It also aimed to test the explored dynamics of the relationships experimented with in previous rehearsals. The main aim of this session was to explore and evaluate which scenario would present most possibilities for character arcs and narrative. This session also presented opportunities to further

develop character, as the interaction with other characters not present in the previous workshop was explored.

This was the first time all three participants improvised together. In the previous session, participants A and C had improvised together and a productive dynamic had emerged.

Almost immediately an issue arose. Where in the previous improvisation (with just two characters) the conversation naturally bounced between the two talking, with the introduction of a third person a limitation of online improvisation became apparent. When actors talk over each other together in a room, they will notice immediately and take action, but online it took some time to realise that someone else was talking, and people also became muted when more than one person talked at the same time – this is a technical issue on Zoom and therefore, unavoidable. In scenario three (the self-help group), having a facilitator manage the room and prompt one person to talk at any one time was helpful in avoiding this issue.

I noticed that often the best material came when the improvisation seemed to be stalling and the characters were sat with little to say. I think this was indicative of a stage in the improvisation where the participants had started to relax into the work and were therefore more comfortable in their characters. The participants were then able to allow the improvisation to take its own natural direction, finding a rhythm and not trying to force the improvisation into producing dialogue or action.

This also precipitated moments where the characters asked each other about themselves, which allowed for character exposition. I became aware that it was important to allow the improvisations to run for as long as possible and it became a skill to learn to avoid the urge to jump in and end the improvisation just because I (mistakenly) perceived it to be stalling or going nowhere.

By the end of the improvisations a decision had to be made, as to which scenario would be chosen.

The self-help scenario allowed participant A, whose character was facilitating the group, to pose questions and manage who spoke and when. This would help avoid the issue of talking over each other identified earlier and it worked well. The fact that the character of Gwyn was drastically underqualified for the role of facilitator offered clear comedic possibilities, as did the metaphors and similes used throughout the improvisation of the self-help group scenario, where a faux mindfulness parlance was used.

It was therefore decided that the self-help group scenario offered most comedic possibilities, along with some moments of pathos, some thematic strands and social commentary too. Not only that but, as the work is attempting to respond to, and make comment on, experiences during the pandemic, an online self-help scenario seemed

to offer a setting to fit the zeitgeist. Later on in the project, we would have to discuss the frequency with which references to the pandemic were made.

These last two sessions were also revealing in terms of how effective remote improvisation could be. Aside from sound issues, the improvisations seemed to work well. It was clear that the backstory work was valuable, as much of the information covered in those early sessions featured in conversation during the dialogues. It also helped when the improvisations seemed close to stalling or slowed right down. These moments of dead air spurred the dialogue to take different turns. The fact that the participants began to corpse, suggested to me that they were in the moment, immersed in the infectiousness of laughter, which one often sees in face-to-face improvisations.

It was at this point that the project really seemed to be coming together. The choice of scenario and the initial character relationships and dynamics which had begun to establish themselves had real potential. The increased involvement of the participants in most aspects of the project was also very exciting and had already shown that they felt a tangible ownership of their characters and the project as a whole. The next step would be to improvise around this scenario and see what was produced. At first the improvisations would be unguided and I expected them to start to generate material for the script and yield ideas as to narrative and character arcs.

5:5:4 Week 8: Unguided Improvisations

Video Clip 8 (VC8): Possible Relationships Discussion – shows the discussions regarding a possible relationship between Eden and Gwyn and also a discussion as to what level of reference to lockdown should be prevalent in the final piece. It also shows the improvisation between participant A (Gwyn) and participant B (Eden), which generated an idea for a later step outline improvisation, which in turn generated material for episode two of the final script – which was ultimately the aim of this session.

We aimed here to begin to search for possible narrative strands, story lines, character arcs and action for scenes. These would then be harvested and developed for the final script. The term 'unguided improvisations' refers to the lack of direction or external stimuli to which the improvisers would normally be responding. The unguided improvisations were intended to yield material as the participants, in character, interacted with each other.

Initially, discussions were conducted about a possible history between Eden (participant B's character) and Gwyn (participant A's character), as the relationship that came out of the improvisation seemed to suggest some prior experience of a self-help group or of each other. However, it was decided that, although they might have done similar things before (in terms of self-help groups) it would be a better dynamic/interaction if they didn't know each other.

It was during the first unguided improvisation (of the session) between participant A and B that the first major setback was encountered. We (the participants, with me

observing) had been improvising for a period of time, when I received a notification that ‘the meeting would end in ten minutes’. Previously, Zoom had allowed me to run well past the 30 minutes that Zoom allows you per meeting. It seems that after a period of time, Zoom will eventually limit your meeting time – unless you pay for a premium membership. The obvious issue here is that, if you are in the middle of an improvisation which is really working, to then have to end it prematurely will interrupt the flow of the improvisation, with the likelihood that you will never be able to recapture that moment, or regain that flow.

Ways to deal with this issue were sought. Zoom does allow you to schedule multiple meetings of 40 minutes in length, one after the other, which solved the issue except for the possibility that the switch between meetings might briefly cut an improvisation off mid-flow. By scheduling multiple meetings, you can have a meeting and/or debrief and then start a new meeting where the participants log on in character. This logging on in character clearly helped the participants get into character as an improvisation began.

Another function that Zoom offered which was of use was the chat function. This allowed me to give direction (i.e. ‘move the improvisation on’) to the participants (in particular participant A, whose character was facilitating the group meetings), without disrupting the flow, which could occur if I were to voice my direction, rather than to subtly nudge the participants via a short message, in a less obtrusive manner.

The first improvisation saw Gwyn (participant A) and Eden (participant B) in a one-to-one self-help extra session – away from the main group. The improvisation was unguided, aside from the details of why they were meeting (a private tutoring session between facilitator and group member) so I just let the participants improvise in character to see what would come of it. They began a role play idea, which provided valuable material, but also presented a scenario with comedic potential and possibilities for a future ensemble improvisation with all three characters undertaking a role play exercise. It was therefore used for a guided improvisation later on in the process. Once again this demonstrated the strengths of using improvisation. Ideas are revealed organically and then can be revisited, developed and honed.

The recording function on Zoom, as previously noted, is an excellent, unobtrusive method of recording the sessions. These recordings were helpful when writing the reports. To have taken notes during the session would have meant that I wasn't totally present, always pausing to write something down. With the recording, I was able to be fully involved in what was going on and then write a detailed account afterwards.

A discussion (as noted earlier) considered whether experiences of lockdown were in some way the controlling idea of the piece and if references to lockdown might overtly be made. At this stage, I felt that references *should* be made. Not only is my thesis responding to the situation, but the work should make direct reference to the pandemic, even if it does not amount to a clear comment upon the situation. I had noticed at the beginning of each session, as we waited for all participants to join, that the participants' own lockdown experiences were the main subject of conversation. As

can be seen in the early drafts of the script (see appendix) some of these stories/discussions were in the dialogue but were later removed.

5:5:5 Week 9 'Slightly Guided' improvisations

At this point there was a need for me to offer some guidance/direction regarding a sequence of events, or a subject matter, which they could improvise around. Previous scenarios had merely defined a situation, which was the reason why the characters had gathered. In these more guided improvisations, more detail was given or specific actions prescribed, for example the reason the characters were gathered was still for an online self-help group but there was now the prescribed action - they would undertake a role-play exercise, where the characters would all play versions of the other characters or people defined by the characters as the source of their work stress.

In order to combat the time limits imposed by Zoom, I set up three consecutive meetings. The first was to allow the first improvisation to run. The second was an interim meeting, where the first improvisation was discussed and the second improvisation outlined. The third meeting allowed the participants to log on in character and begin the second improvisation straight away. At the end of the improvisation a short discussion regarding the second improvisation was held.

To ensure clarity (in terms of the participants keeping track of where in the timeline these improvisations took place), all improvisations were in chronological order – each improvisation continuing where the last one left off. As with Leigh, the use of a real-

time timescale allows character and narrative to evolve naturally and facilitates the requirement that the actors only know the information (about the other characters) that the character would naturally know at any given moment. That is to say, the characters (and therefore the actors) learn and possess the relevant character knowledge in a more realistic way than having to 'forget' anachronistic character knowledge that they would access if jumping from the end to the middle.

After the first improvisation it was agreed that more direction might help, as the two participants felt that they were flailing a little and, without a third character to help drive the improvisation, felt that it stalled slightly; they had struggled to move forward.

For the second improvisation we revisited the role play idea. I had privately spoken to each of the participants and discussed a scenario where the character might have lost control of their anger or allowed their stress at work to get the better of them. For participant B we looked at the character backstory work to see if there was a figure who might be the focus of this anger. The question 'who do they least like at work?' presented such a person. For participant C a customer-related outburst seemed most appropriate for restaurant work. C noted that they had actually witnessed a similar situation in real life and therefore was able to draw from that experience. Participant A was instructed to facilitate the session and swap the roles around, where possible. Once again, it was deemed that personal experiences of events/occurrences did not contravene Leigh's Cardinal Rule, as it differed from drawing on personal feelings. It was considered that any experience that the actor was not emotionally invested in

could be used, as Leigh's rule was in place to aid an objective stance and such experiences allowed the participants to retain that objectivity.

As time was now pressing, it was decided to dedicate the last few weeks to further improvisations to generate material, rather than developing and honing a script. After the discussion about fears of improvisations falling flat, it was decided that I would write step outlines for the next few improvisations. This departure from Leigh was, once again, time related. In order to expedite these results, the step outline provided a method to generate material quickly.

Traditionally a step outline contains details of each scene and a description of the action within that scene, without dialogue. For the purposes of the next few improvisations, the step outline would prove ideal. The step outline allowed me to detail the key beats within the scene for the participants to hit, without being as prescriptive as a script. The hope was that the use of the step outline would enable the participants to be creative, without them having to worry about how to move the improvisation forward. Having direction to the scene and a clear path to an end point would allow the participants to improvise within the parameters of the scene, while still allowing room for creativity.

This marks a departure from Leigh's approach. Leigh doesn't use any written prompts or anything approaching a script but it is likely that Leigh will prescribe both scenarios and action for improvised scenes to respond to – in order to give the improvisations some direction. This departure was purely related to making my own approach

workable. It allowed the participants time to prepare and gave them direction to work with while improvising. Having written down the direction (and pre-releasing it) meant that we were able to go straight into the improvisations, rather than me having to outline it before we started. Leigh has his actors every day for several months but I did not have this luxury, so allowing this preparation time meant that we could make the best use of the limited time we had for the practical project.

5:6 The Transition Between Narrative and the Development of the Text (Weeks 10-11)

5:6:1 Weeks 10 & 11 – Step Outline improvisations

Video Clip Ten (VC10): Improvisation responding to Step-Outline – shows an improvisation responding to a step outline, where the improvisation began to stall *because* of the step outline. The improvisation did generate material for the script, however, and the video should aid the reader's understanding of the following account.

Having decided that step outlines (SOs) would form the stimuli for the following improvisations, I felt I could provide the improvisations with some direction, and by prescribing action, the improvisations might generate material for the script. As always, the scenes were chronological. The step outlines were released in advance of the improvisations, in order to give the participants some time to consider possibilities for dialogue and to prepare for the improvisations. The step outlines, in a departure from the traditional step outline format, contained some suggestions for dialogue, in terms of the sort of thing characters might say, but it was made clear that these were only suggestions and the dialogue was ultimately open to the participants' discretion,

interpretation and ideas. This was, perhaps, misguided. Most actors will see the written dialogue as a script and therefore, lines to say, rather than seeing them as suggestions.

Before the improvisations started, I told the actors that if there was deviation from the SO at any point they should go with it and not necessarily try to return to the SO/script. It was up to participant A's character to guide the fictional session/improvisation and it would be A who would steer the improvisations back to the SO if required.

Step Outline D was run next, after a brief discussion about the previous improvisation. All logged on to the new meeting in character and it began. Initially, the participants took it in some interesting directions. What became clear, quite early on, was that an organic character shift between Gulia and Eden had begun to take place. This shift was not suggested in any of the SOs, but had developed quite naturally as the improvisations had gone on. Eden had become less confident and her wellbeing had deteriorated, whereas Gulia had become more confident and attuned to the self-help world. This immediately suggested a clear end point for the two characters and a promising dynamic to explore in the script.

After the first two sections of the improvisation it began to stall and essentially petered out. It was noted that participant A couldn't find a way to move from the first section/exercise to the next. The step outline detailed a selection of mindfulness exercises and advice for Gwyn to impart to the participants. Gwyn was giving the participants a tool kit to cope with stress and the hope was that these strange exercises

would lead on from one another and yield some comedic moments. It was noted that the more detail there was in the SO the more it hindered creativity, as the participants were conscious of trying to hit the key points. This issue was further highlighted by the week eleven improvisation and SO.

For the final scene, I had imposed a five act structure as a template and could see that each of the ensemble improvisations fitted into Freytag's Pyramid. I therefore set about identifying the end points for the characters and the piece as a whole when I should simply have offered a loose outline with little dialogue and watched how it panned out. Fortunately, the participants were able to produce some good material in the improvisation. This takes us back to one of the fundamental reasons that Leigh works in the way that he does, in that the presence of any form of written script can be constrictive. While departing from Leigh's approach with the step outlines was right, on the whole, for my own approach, at times I should have remained more open, as in the way that Leigh works.

Discussions were undertaken regarding the end points for the three characters. As the piece was character driven, it was the most suitable approach to offer character journeys rather than plot twists. Each participant was asked, away from the others, what the end point for their character might be. I had already observed the character shift between Gulia and Eden but was interested to see what the participants' thoughts were, to see if they had any ideas that would be better. Participant C suggested end points where their character had developed and made changes for the better, that they didn't mind what as long as something good happened to the character. This clearly

demonstrated how attached to the character they had become. The character of Gwyn had the least scope for development and I didn't want to go for the obvious 'self-help instructor has a breakdown as his tutees get better' kind of scenario.

In order to avoid predictable end points, I turned to the mechanics of Pemberton and Shearsmith's writing in the BBC series *Inside Number 9* (2014-Present), where a conceit is set up and then subverted, giving the episodes a twist as an end point. This type of subverted audience expectation as an end point for Gwyn's character was not only appropriate for the character but would give the piece as a whole a surprising conclusion. I didn't just want a twist that came out of nowhere, there had to be clues seeded throughout the piece. It then occurred to me, after a discussion with participant A, who had no ideas for a resolution for their character, that Gwyn might actually be an inmate in an asylum. With a few subtle changes to backstory this was made a realistic possibility. In the backstory sessions Gwyn had been wrestling with mental health issues most of his life; it seemed fair, then, that he could have lost his battle and ended up in an asylum. The subtle change to the line 'I've been working in mental health and care for ten years now' became 'I've been in institutions and care for ten years now'. This was the first seed to hint to the audience that Gwyn was not at home. The balance we had to find was to seed it without giving the end away, and at the same time not be so cryptic that the end comes out of nowhere.

While transcribing/altering the script it became apparent that the script in its initial form was too conversational and in need of much cutting – which is to be expected in a first draft. In this part of the process, I was altering and adding to the script material from

the improvisations. I expected to have to make huge cuts to the final script. It was suggested to me by a writer friend that, rather than scenes comprising a whole, they all worked as individual ‘episodes’. This meant the ‘scenes/episodes’ could be longer and allowed the audience to attend the sessions each week with the characters. The considerations in my mind regarding cuts were related principally to the duration of the piece. The suggestion of ‘episodes’ relieved this concern and meant that many of the perceived cuts were no longer necessary.

5:7 After the Project Has Ended - Final Debrief

A short time after the end of the practical phase of the project, I brought the ensemble back together to discuss their experiences of the process. The hope was that after some time had passed, they could offer their views regarding its successes and failures, in terms of developing through practice new approaches to the development of character, narrative and text online.

This session offered some excellent insights into the process (which are detailed in this section), particularly in terms of how amendments to the schedule could be made. As the project had dedicated just one session per week to each of the phases of Leigh’s approach, I had been aware of the necessity to ensure the participants were totally prepared, in terms of confidence in their characters, before entering into the improvisation/narrative stage of the process. Despite my best efforts, they hadn’t felt as prepared as I had thought. The participants offered me insights into what they felt had helped them flourish creatively, along with those elements of the process they found challenging – all of which are detailed below.

Participant A stated that they found the unguided improvisations were where they were most comfortable and found it was in that arena of freedom where they were best able to get to know the character. They found the step outlines far more constrictive, especially having to hit key points in the scene, while improvising

Participants B and C echoed participant A's thoughts, stating that particularly in the early stages (pre-rehearsal), the free improvisations enabled them to explore their characters and to get to know them better. Participant C noted that, with the guided improvisation, it was difficult to improvise when they knew in the back of their mind that they would have to engineer a moment to insert the line or action prescribed in the outline. I believe the more detailed step outlines have a place in the process, but it is clear that these SOs should occur much later and should perhaps revisit material or situations produced in free improvisations instead of suggested dialogue

Participant A stated that they felt the SO came too early in the process, feeling that had they had more time in the pre-rehearsal free improvising then the SO would have been easier to work with. A stated that they were still getting to know their character when the SOs were factored in. This highlighted a key issue. It seemed that all three participants were not completely comfortable in their characters (although I had thought they were ready) when the guided improvisations took place.

Participants B and C noted that their characters changed in the ensemble improvisations and were nothing like how they had envisioned them in the backstory sessions. B stated that once the ensemble got together for improvisations, they felt the character needed to be played differently to fit into the dynamic that had begun to establish itself in the early improvisations. Participant C discussed how their character had changed from the original and emerging character in the backstory phase. They highlighted that in attempting to humanise a horrible person (which the original was) they had found the character became more pleasant and vulnerable. C had not envisioned in those early stages that their character would find this happy ending. This highlights a key success of the process, where the original is moved away from (creating a new character) and a clear character journey reveals itself during the process. Participant B noted that this may have been in relation to the scenario of the piece. Had it been work meetings (such as the management training scenario) then the character may have evolved differently, a possibility which shows how the scenario of the piece can affect narrative and character arc and demonstrates the importance of choosing the right scenario in those early stages, as the scenario comes with its own set of narrative possibilities.

Participant A also stated that, out of necessity, they had substituted their own reactions in improvisations (rather than their character's), just because they didn't know the character well enough. This is very close to breaking Leigh's Cardinal Rule, regarding substituted personal information and experiences being syphoned into the character. It is clear that to avoid this happening more time should be spent allowing the participants to get to know their characters fully, before going into the narrative phase of the process.

Participant A also noted that quick fire dialogue was not possible in remote improvisations, due to the delay. It was apparent in the improvisations that the dialogue generally consisted of longer speeches and each character taking it in turns to speak. The same actor also discussed lack of eye contact being a limitation to Zoom. People generally look at their screen and the person's image on the screen when they are talking to them, or their own image. People rarely look at the camera, which is the closest thing to eye contact, when on Zoom. In fact most participants noted that they had never even thought to look at the camera. Just as eye contact is important in conversation as subtle cues to sincerity and attention, so too eye contact is important when improvising. Lack of eye contact is therefore to be counted as an issue to be addressed in relation to online improvisation.

Participant C stated that they had benefitted from the 'Road Testing' phone calls and recommended that the process should contain more of those 'real world situations' before leaving the pre-rehearsal stage. They found it helped them to think as the character in a spontaneous way, which really prepared them as they went into improvisations and particularly in ensemble improvisations.

The final thing that was discussed during this debrief was a possible table read, as a way of evaluating the drafted script and to see how it worked being performed.

5:8 Ensemble Reforms for Read-Through

Videos of the read-through can be found here - EP1, EP2, EP3, EP4, EP5. It should be noted that these videos demonstrate some changes to episode titles and dialogue that were made in response to the participants improvising with the script and discussions undertaken after the read-through session.

I was lucky enough to be able to bring the ensemble back together for a table read of the drafted script. Although this wasn't the level of involvement (in terms of honing the script) that I had wanted with the participants, it did offer an opportunity to see how the piece was paced and was a final chance for the participants to improvise slightly with the lines, without wandering too far from the written script. It is natural for an actor to occasionally rephrase a line. In the read through, this would be important as this could precipitate a rephrasing of the line in the script. Essentially, an actor might consciously or unconsciously alter a line to make it easier to speak. On both occasions this was what I was looking for in the read through – lines that were fine on paper, but difficult to actually say.

The hope was that the recording of the read through could offer an audio-visual demonstration of the script, as a document to demonstrate in practice the culmination of the work (the text).

However, I was contacted by one participant to tell me that they were ill and unable to participate in the read-through. With just hours until the scheduled reading I was forced to make a decision: to try to get someone else to stand-in, or to read the part myself. The problem with a stand-in was that they wouldn't have been involved in the process

and even though there were recordings of the improvisations, the deeper grounding of the character, which was developed in the early backstory sessions, was not something with which an actor could acquaint themselves within an hour. The only other person who had been present throughout the whole process was myself. This was a huge setback, but I had little choice. If I read, I could not objectively watch the reading and give notes. I could, of course, view the recordings back, so I would have the opportunity to scrutinise the reading, but only after the fact. The benefit was that I could still see how the piece read and was paced, so I had no choice.

The first reading was of the whole script. For the second reading, as the piece took far longer to perform than I had expected, we (as an ensemble) selected the first two episodes for a second reading. It had taken the first read through for the participants to reacquaint themselves with the characters, so a second pass of the first two episodes was organised to allow for a more assured performance.

On both passes of the readings, the participants improvised slightly with the lines in the script, making additions, or alterations. These were of use as some further comedic lines came out of this and some of the lines, which were hard to deliver, were altered to aid speech. It is often the case that what seems to work on paper doesn't always work in the delivery. As Harrison Ford famously said on the set of *Star Wars*, 'You can type this shit, George, but you sure can't say it'. It is true that the majority of the lines were derived from improvisations and, therefore, they followed natural speech patterns. What might have been in need of alteration by way of the read-through were

the lines that had been inserted by myself. This demonstrates another insight into why Leigh doesn't write a script.

5:9 Heidegger's Question of Technology and the OEP

Although present throughout the research, Heidegger's ideas concerning technology helped concentrate my ideas during the final phase of the editing process. Reflecting on the incongruity between technical efficiency and human beings identified in my examination of Heidegger's theory (see Chapters 2 & 3), I considered how the comedy born from that incongruity might feature in the script.

Looking first at the now commonplace experiences of poorly framed video-chats (only ears or parts of a face visible) and people only dressed from the waist up, etc., I decided that these should feature in the script. Although some discussion related to pandemic experiences had been undertaken (see section 5:5:4), we had only really touched on whether or how these experiences might feature. They were generally visual and never really featured in the improvisations, but as the script was nearing completion it seemed the correct time to consider (and include) some of these human beings versus technology scenarios. I decided that the first scene would prove interesting if one character's ear was the only thing appearing on their video, for the entire scene/episode, and that no one would make much mention of it. Exploring and applying the comedic potential of a human being's ineptitude when engaging with technology, something Heidegger fails to account for, enabled me to add another layer to the script.

5:10 Findings and Conclusions.

What follows, in this section, is an overview of the insights that have been gained through the conduct of my research, along with conclusions reached and recommendations to anyone who might utilise my new approach to create and develop character, narrative and text through online improvisation.

First, a revised timetable offers a detailed summary of each of the phases to be undertaken and what each session aims to achieve. Although suggested in a weekly timeframe, the timetable can be accelerated if more sessions are run per week, or even per day. It will be necessary for anyone utilising the approach to judge when their own ensemble is ready to move onto the next stage of the process. Thereafter, the key points are given in terms of results that were revealed during the research which have informed changes to the timeframe and the mechanics of the process as a whole.

Fig 5:4 - Recommended Timetable for use of New Process

Date/Week	**Details**	**Expected outcomes/notes**
1	People you know list and initial one-to-one discussions with actors all in isolation. Decide upon original	Begin to explore possible 'real' people who might form the basis of the actor's characters. Decide at the end of the session, who will form the original. Debrief after session
2&3	Backstory work Wk3 - Naming ceremony	Begin to create fledgling character. Start to define details Age, DOB, Initial backstory, utilising the

		details of the real person who formed the basis, but start to add fictional details. Debrief after session
4	Develop character Begin to look for running condition Actors begin improvs (in isolation) Mainly humdrum improvs Physicality Behaviour & Bearing	Explore how the participants perform the physicality of the character, without words Debrief after session
5	Road testing phone calls	Participants to give the character a voice (including accent/dialect), idiosyncratic speech patterns and unique phrasing. Debrief after session
6	Road testing Zoom meetings improv (researcher/individual participants).	Allow time for the participants to get comfortable in character. Get to know character in stressful and calm moments Heighten confidence in the portrayal in preparation for group improvs Debrief after session
7	Research External research/literary research etc. Immersion into character in daily life	Debrief after session
8-9	Bring actors together Look for relationships, reasons why these characters would be involved with each other	Incrementally bring sets of characters together to explore dynamics between them. Debrief after session
10-11	Quiz club Scenarios Improvisations	Improvise several scenarios and by week 11

		decide upon one for the project.
12-13	Free improvisations within decided scenario	Begin to generate material for script. Search for character arcs and possible narrative strands.
14-15	Begin to create/develop narrative. SO Improvisations	Improvise within outlined/guided improvisation Developing narrative Debrief after session
16	End of pre-rehearsal Start formal script development (1st draft) Development of script through workshops using text, exploring possibilities Structuring	Read through and improvisation around drafted script. Debrief after session
17	Finalise script	Researcher drafts script
18	Debrief of whole project	Sometime after the end of the project, participants return to give insights into their experiences of the process.
19	Final draft of script.	

5:10:1 Conclusions and Recommendations

From the debrief with the participants it was clear that more time is needed in the pre-rehearsal part of the process, to ensure that the participants know their characters well enough before they are all brought together. By introducing Zoom calls where I play a character and the participant and I improvise in those meetings, I believe this will satisfy this need for preparation during the character development stage. As the Road Testing phone calls appeared to have helped, this use of further improvisation, while still isolated from each other, builds on the phone calls' success.

It is clear that, just as Leigh does, bringing the characters together incrementally is more useful than just bringing them all together in one fell swoop.

The use of step outlines should occur in the latter stages of the narrative development/scripting process and they represent a useful tool to help guide improvisations, giving them structure, direction and stimuli to which the improvisations can respond. These step outlines should be less prescriptive and less detailed than the ones used in my project. It may be that step outlines with more detail can be used towards the end of the narrative section of the process.

It is recommended that the actors should adhere to Leigh's rule about forbidding the use of personal information and should observe this rule from the very outset of the project.

The one-to-one backstory and character work, in the main, was successful and it is recommended that this be retained as it was conducted in this project. In particular the backstory questions proved invaluable, not only in developing the emerging characters, but they proved useful in later parts of the process, in order to evoke responses from the characters and in terms of useful detail that occurred in conversations, during the improvisations.

The Road-Testing element of the process (based on Leigh's, but adapted to facilitate online improvisation/character development) should be adopted and prolonged, so the

participants have longer to get to know their characters, but also to get to spend time with/as them in more sedate situations rather than extreme emotional states. The Road-Testing phone calls should be revisited, but as an extension to this, the participants should improvise with the director/facilitator, in character.

For my own process, I think it would be a mistake to alter the backstory questions, or any of the early stages of the process, to try to accommodate, or even force the establishment of relationships between characters. It may be that there are natural relationships formed the next time the process is implemented (by subsequent practitioners utilising the new approach), which can then be identified and developed.

The use of pre-released scenarios is recommended. Once again, this is a departure from Leigh, but one that allows time for the participants to prepare for the improvisations in terms of characterisation and performance. Leigh's actors only know the details of the improvisations on the day. Pre-release means the participants have some time to prepare and offers them an opportunity to fit into the actor/author paradigm. However, they can't *drive* an improvisation *because they are improvising*, meaning they've no idea what the others will say or do. What is of interest is the question of why Leigh does not pre-release information of improvisations. I would argue that the issue of time is, once again, at the heart of this. Leigh has time to improvise all day every day with his actors. It is the fact that I was so time-bound that pre-releasing information was used in order to expedite results.

<u>Critical Evaluation of Creative Choices</u>

It is noted in this account of the OEP that many decisions were made in the interests of time management. However, some decisions were made for creative reasons, either in relation to adapting Leigh's approach to facilitate online working or in other interests of the project, such as to improve the content of the emerging script. These decisions are detailed below, by way of a critical evaluation of the process and the phases the process went through. This section also offers discourse related to what worked and what didn't, what I learned from this, and it offers recommendations for how future practitioners might benefit from this analysis and utilise my adapted process.

One-to-one Character Development: PYKL and Character Questions

The one-to-one character development stage that Leigh employs, worked as well in the online setting, as it does in person. The use of Leigh's People You Know List (PYKL) allowed the participants to ground their characters in reality and the character questions I devised allowed the participants and myself to travel on an expedited life journey with the characters learning about them and their backstory as we undertook that journey.

PYKL

The use of the PYKL was effective in that it gave the participants an accessible group of characters to work with and offered, to some extent, a ready-made character to develop – or, at least, a solid jumping off point. Had they been asked to create a fictional character, this might have proved problematic, or at least, it would have required a lot more work on the part of the participant. The other boon to using known

people, meant, just as it does with Leigh, that the participants were able to ground their characters in reality. Difficulties arose with respect to how well the participants knew the originals. In order to develop the character, fictional details needed to be added to the character's backstory. If the original was well known to the participant, there was far less room to do this, which would result in the participant essentially playing the real person, and not playing a fictional character. Though I wanted a grounding in reality, I also wanted the participants to be active in creating a fictional character for the work. They needed to have to think deeply about the character and their past in order to be able to improvise effectively as that character. For this element of Leigh's approach to work well, as a creative process, it was apparent that the character must be moved away from the original and, moreover, that the participant be actively involved in creating the character's fictional backstory.

On reflection, what I noticed, was that originals that were chosen from the PYKL that the participants had worked with and, therefore, knew only a little about their life and history, proved to be the most suitable. Therefore, any future practitioners choosing to use this phase of the process should urge their participants to make their PYKLs with this in mind.

Character Questions

The backstory work, which was guided by the creation of the character questions, demonstrates not only some potential insights into Leigh's approach and, once again, how this part of his process proved effective in online working, but also where creative

decisions were made and the effects and insights that were gleaned from those choices.

There is little documentation regarding what Leigh's character questions are, other than an idea that amount of questions is vast and the subject matter is wide ranging. In the main, I decided to structure my character questions in such a way that they interrogated the characters' entire life to date. Along with this chronological life journey I put in questions that would give colour and detail to that life – like the colour of the characters' school uniforms. Arguably a creative choice, it was intended to guide the participants through their character's life, in the hope that life experiences would manifest a lasting effect on the character's mind-set and bearing in contemporary life – that a character might respond in a particular way to a situation in the present, because of an event that had happened in their past. This is a fairly basic character building technique, but what I realised is that I had hitherto never undertaken such an in-depth character study in my creative practice. Having seen how effective this character construction phase was, I am keen to adopt it in my approach to future writing. Undertaking such an in-depth character study enables you to develop a detailed and robust character, even if much of the information covered never actually features in the script. To know one's characters to the extent that the character construction phase allows one to do is essential, in my view, to effective writing.

Although they weren't Leigh's questions, per se, I didn't see what I had done as a departure from Leigh, as the principles were the same. I had done extensive research into Leigh's approach and knew that the whole process was dependant on robust

characterisation, and moreover, I understood the importance of the participants possessing extensive knowledge of their character for the later improvisations to be effective.

Having identified the type of questions Leigh is likely to ask of his emerging characters, I made the decision to pre-release the questions to the participants prior to the next session. This was to give the participants time to truly consider their answers. Whether Leigh pre-releases the questions or asks them in the moment is not documented, so I had to make the decisions based on what would work best for me and more importantly, for the participants. I felt that if the participants had time to consider each answer, and have an awareness of how this would impact on the contemporary character, the backstories, and ergo, the characters would be more robust as we moved through the project and process.

The effect on the participants was unexpected. They all seemed somewhat overwhelmed with the extent and range of the questions. However, once I had explained why it was necessary to have such an extensive exploration of the characters' lives, they engaged with the backstory sessions with aplomb. Once again this part of Leigh's approach leant itself to online working, which involved one-to-one sessions, where myself and the participants (individually) worked through the questions and I periodically pressed the participants for further detail on their answers. What is clearly in play at this early stage is developing a character, and the participant's knowledge of their character, as it forms the basis on which the whole

process is built. If this stage is not conducted correctly, later improvisations (in character) could fail.

Behaviour and Bearing

The next phase of Leigh's approach is the physicality and bearing phase. Leigh has his actors, in character, spend time in a bedsit environment, to settle into how the character carries themselves, but they do not undertake anything other than mundane tasks, such as making a cup of tea. This phase, and how it is conducted, leant itself well to the online environment, aside from the technical issue of where to place the camera so that the participant did not walk out of shot, where I couldn't see them.

Although this part of the process could help with some character development in terms of the thought processes the character went through, the main aim of these workshops was to aid the participants in their performance of the character. We might see this phase and the next (Road Testing) as predominantly preparatory work for the coming improvisations. In the physicality and bearing sessions the character was not allowed to speak, rather they must demonstrate their characters' feelings and thoughts purely through their physical behaviour. The other consideration, again, mainly concerned with the participants' performance, was to identify any tics or tells that the character might have. I was acutely aware that when we got into the improvisations (conducted on Zoom) there would be little room for movement. Therefore, if we could give the characters micro-gestures (in the form of tics or tells) these would be magnified onscreen. I therefore, urged the participants to consider these gestures, but did not insist on them.

It is true that the decision to evoke an emotional response in the characters during this phase (a departure from Leigh) was in relation to time management, but *how* I would evoke such emotions was a creative decision. I had identified that during the character questions, a prized possession had been chosen and discussed in terms of the emotions and memories attached to that object. This gave me a ready-made way to induce strong emotions in the characters by mentioning the item during the improvisation. In the main this was effective, with just one participant responding in a way that I didn't expect – Participant B becoming more thoughtful than emotional. I didn't see this as a failing though, as even this response demonstrated an emotional shift in the character, albeit a less impactful one than I was aiming for.

The second part of this phase was to develop the characters' voices. Leigh does this, in part, with his Road Testing phase. This was where I was forced to depart from Leigh and find an alternative approach that would still yield the same results as Leigh's Road Testing does.

Road Testing

Leigh's Road Testing just wouldn't work online during the pandemic. I could argue that there might be away round it in a non-pandemic climate. For example, participants could go shopping (as with Leigh's approach), but with their phone on a video call. However, this seems to undermine the whole notion of conducting the project entirely online. If they were to go out into the real world and video call me, I might just as well go with them, thus negating the online/remote crux of the research/writing process.

Initially inspired by a suggestion from Participant B, I decided that two phone calls could be utilised to yield the same sort of results that Leigh's Road Testing does. Leigh wants his actors to interact (in character) with people, in order that they can develop the character's voice and to get them acclimatised to improvising; responding in character to interactions with others, and thinking and behaving as the character in spontaneous situations. I felt that the phone calls could facilitate these aims. I decided that the two calls would be one universal call (a call for all the participants), which would be an automated survey and the other would need to be tailored for each of the participants' characters.

As a writer I decided to script the calls, as much as I could. I realised that since the participants would be improvising, I would need to have some contingencies, as the script would need to respond to the participants' responses during the improvisations. As I had been party to all developments during the process thus far, in terms of character and backstory, I was confident I could gauge (to a large extent) how the characters would respond. The survey call just needed to be long and frustrating; the tailored calls needed something else, an antagonist. I went back to the character questions and looked at the people who frustrated the character at work. These work related-calls would, therefore, be populated by people who were likely to irritate the characters. I wanted to put the characters under a bit of pressure during these calls, again the initial reasoning was related to time management, but there was also a feeling that the participants would benefit more from a bit of prodding, than just a pleasant jaunt round the shops. I also made a conscious effort to put lines in the script that might make the participants corpse or throw them off slightly. The purpose of this

was to further prepare them for the ensemble improvisations, where there would likely be times where they had to fight to stay focused and stay in character.

Having prepared the scripts in advance of the sessions, the only other thing to do before we commenced the calls was to discuss with the participants how they thought the characters spoke. Although I had departed from Leigh in terms of his approach to Road Testing, I returned to his method in terms of a balance between practical improvisation and objective discussion. Building on my MA research I was interested in how accent and dialect could be utilised to imply character identity and backstory, and although I didn't insist on any character having a regional accent or using dialect, I urged the participants to consider these elements of their character's voice. Given each character's backstory, it was decided that all the characters would use some accent and dialect. The main consideration, aside from what that accent might be, was if the participants were able to sustain that accent during improvisation. They all felt confident that they could, so we moved to the calls.

I feel the use of the calls was very beneficial and achieved much of what Leigh's Road Testing does in, arguably, a shorter period of time. Any future practitioner utilising my method in its entirety, or in part, could use the calls, remotely or otherwise, for the results detailed above. The only hindrances that I encountered were the technical issues around delay. With Participant A we had tried to use Zoom and actual mobile phones. The delay threw us both off and it seemed unnecessary to call, when we could just as easily use Zoom and run the improvisation as if we were on a normal phone

call. Once this had been decided, the calls all ran smoothly and were effective in their aims.

It was clear that these early character construction and development phases of Leigh's approach (with the exception of Road Testing, as Leigh does it) were completely applicable to online working. As we moved into the improvisation phase, I had to adapt to meet the needs of the project, as I couldn't pin down exactly how Leigh conducts this phase, as it is not detailed in the existing literature.

This heralded the stage where character development continued, but narrative was beginning to emerge also. This next stage was the scenarios phase.

Scenarios 1 and 2

Leigh, almost certainly, will define, to some extent, parameters that the improvisations will operate within, even if it is as simple as character A and B meet on a park bench. However, to what extent he does this is not well documented. For my own part, I felt it necessary to predefine the scenarios for the first improvisations. Because we were working on Zoom, I decided that we should trial situations where people would meet on Zoom. The benefit of the contemporary climate was that many strata of society had turned to Zoom in order to communicate, where prior to the pandemic, it was limited more to business meetings, for example. I also felt that, although they were all experienced actors, some direction in terms of where they were and why would give the characters something to talk about until the improvisation moved forward and

found its own rhythm and flow. I decided that it would be pertinent (like the character questions) to pre-release these scenarios in advance of the ensemble improvisations, again for the same reasons as the questions, that the participants would have time to consider how their characters might conduct themselves in these scenarios and where pertinent, have developed reasons why their character had attended such a Zoom meeting.

As a writer and director this phase was a chance for me to not just define the scenario, but also offer situations from which narrative and character development might begin to emerge. I had in the early stages helped guide the participants, and from the Road Testing calls had now begun to increase my creative input into the project. What I noticed on reflection as the process progressed and came to an end, was that at this early stage the scenario would have a great impact on character. Almost immediately Participant B's character changed when improvising in the scenarios and latterly, as a scenario was selected and developed Participants A and C's characters also changed as a result of the scenario that was selected.

Unguided, slightly guided improvisations and the use of Step Outlines

The improvisation stage of Leigh's approach is not well documented in terms of the detail of how he conducts his improvisations and what level of guidance or what (if any) parameters are set by Leigh. Therefore, it was necessary for me to find my own way of conducting improvisations, a way that worked for me, the participants and for the research as a whole. I utilised a combination of free, unguided improvisations with the use of more specific parameters and the application of Step Outlines (SOs) to give

the improvisations direction. In several cases the SO built up ideas that had emerged from previous improvisations and ultimately were intended to give structure and direction to that idea. For example the role playing episode was inspired by an earlier improvisation between Gwyn and Eden that I considered worthy of further exploration.

The use of detailed Step Outlines, as I reflect on the process now, was me as a writer attempting to write the script, in terms of how I thought the script should go. On reflection this was a mistake and this was apparent when participants began to struggle to get to the next scene beat or section (specified in the SO) whilst improvising. Future practitioners may wish to observe this finding and trust in their participants, that they will progress the narrative and script naturally without the need to push the work in a particular way, as I did initially in this project. On reflection the SOs were far too detailed and prescriptive. The fact that they contained suggested dialogue was a mistake and the fact that I thought it was suggested dialogue was a delusion, as, to an experienced actor, written dialogue (in a script or an SO) *is* prescribed dialogue. As a writer it is infinitely difficult to relinquish control of a piece of work, and I think this loss of control was at the heart of why I wrote such detailed SOs. With this in mind, if I were to undertake this project again, I would still use SOs, but in their traditional form, where action is described, but no dialogue is offered. I would even go as far as to strip the SO back further and detail the overall scene, but without scene beats – scene beats are small milestones within a scene. In many respects I needn’t have worried about the loss of control. As the improvisation phase came to an end, this was the time where I, ultimately, took control of the writing as we considered the end points for the characters and I undertook the first editing passes.

Character Endpoints and the Script's Resolution

As the improvisations phase was reaching its conclusion, it was time to make a decision about where the characters would be at the end of the script; how the script would end and what, if any, resolutions there would be.

For two of the three characters I observed that there had been a natural shift and the two characters' through lines, in terms of character journey, and their endpoints, were obvious. Eden had started confidently and relatively well, where Gulia had started shy, hesitant and unwell. Through the improvisations, Gulia had begun to gain confidence as she engaged with the sessions and was reaching a point where she seemed to have benefitted from the 'therapy' – despite it being conducted by Gwyn, a woefully inadequate facilitator. Eden had revealed, during improvisation, that her coping strategies were misguided and dangerous and therefore unlikely to offer any lasting benefit. It seemed obvious to me that Gulia would get better, and Eden would continue her search for wellness, which just left Gwyn. What was of great interest to me, was, to my mind, there had been no conscious decision made, on my part or the participants, regarding Gulia and Eden, it had just evolved organically during improvisations.

In order to find an endpoint for Gwyn, I conducted a discussion with Participant A, who had no idea how Gwyn could be concluded. This was not surprising, as quite early on in the process, Participant A and I had identified that there was not a lot of scope for the character as he was positioned within the piece. As he was facilitating the therapy,

we didn't really get an insight into him, other than that he was comically under qualified to be conducting such a therapy course. Although onscreen we knew little about Gwyn, the participant and I knew a lot, from the backstory work. We knew he had struggled with mental health issues and had come out the other side. It was returning to the idea that he was a dreadful facilitator that sparked the idea for me. Couldn't we push this idea further and put him in a position where he really shouldn't be attempting to help anyone with their mental health? This gave me not only an endpoint for the character, but also a twist for the resolution of the script as a whole. The twist that Gwyn was in an asylum neatly solved both these writerly issues for me. What I could do was alter Gwyn's backstory slightly in order for this to make sense. As I noted earlier he had struggled with mental health issues, so rather than him getting better, it was plausible that he had lost his fight and been institutionalised. There was even a line in an earlier scene, 'I've been working in mental health and care for ten years now', which needed only a subtle change to seed the resolution. This change to character was only possible due to Leigh's method, where character is only really set in stone at the very end of the process, when filming begins. Due to the fluid nature of character in Leigh's approach, what might be considered quite major changes to character are still possible even towards the end of the process.

Script Additions and Editing Passes

After I concluded the project, in terms of the ensemble's involvement, I then took complete creative control of the script. This meant that I didn't just transcribe the improvisations into a script, but made additions and edits in order that the script made

sense, in terms of flow, exposition, character arcs and through lines and the script in dramatic terms was fully developed and worked as a piece of writing.

Additions were made in terms of either sections based on or influenced/inspired by improvisations (such as the Moo section in Episode 2), as well as new sections that I thought developed the comedy or were necessary in developing and progressing the script. What follows is a detailed discourse around the writing that I did, although as noted, some of the 'new' writing was inspired by scenes and dialogue that the ensemble had generated and responded to in the context of the script, that is to say the existing writing from improvisations.

In Episode Two, the scene where they say 'moo' at the beginning of each line was inserted by myself. It stemmed from something Participant B said about a friend telling them that if you say 'moo' in an accent it allows you to continue talking in that accent. The idea that the characters would take this to a ridiculous level, 'moo-ing' at the start of every sentence, as some form of bovine Tourette's, seemed to be an amusing conceit to me, and one I wished to progress in the script. It demonstrated that the participants in the self-help sessions had become so receptive to instructions that they would take it to the nth degree – it was important to me to ensure I didn't just crowbar comedy in without it containing some other narrative purpose, in this case showing how they would take an idea on board and, ultimately, over-do or overuse it.

References to the pandemic were constantly in my mind. Should there be clear references to the pandemic, or should they be more subtle? This question stayed with

me until almost, the final draft. It seemed that as we were working on the project, overt references didn't seem right, maybe it felt 'too soon'. It also felt to me, for most of the time, that definite references to the pandemic were too ham-fisted and detracted from the central messages that were emerging as the work progressed – I didn't want the piece to simply be 'about' life in the pandemic. It needed to be more related to the characters and not just the situation, so I added some subtle references to life in the pandemic. The beginning of Episode Two sees the Justine/Just Eat joke. This was a reference to the proliferation of delivery companies during the pandemic, but was also a good way to progress the relationship and dynamic between Gulia and Eden. It was important, I thought, to have at least some dialogue between the two characters without Gwyn being there. This reference was a way of giving the characters something to talk about. In the first draft (See Appendix D1) there are notes on a scene between the characters and suggestions of reference to pandemic-related subjects. There is also a reference to the temperamental nature of technology ('technical issues'), which is where Heidegger's influence is beginning to creep in. The other function of this technical issues reference, is a way of explain why Gwyn hasn't logged on. Really, although it isn't clear in the script (which is, perhaps, a failing) is that Gwyn isn't logged on because he's waiting for his slot on the computers at the hospital. This was supposed to seed some doubt in the audience, which would feed into the reveal/resolution at the end of the piece.

Episode Three saw additions that were related to improving and developing ideas that had been trialled in previous improvisations. The sequence where Gwyn is supposed to be a focus for the others' stress, but everything goes wrong when there is some confusion as to whether they are laying into their stress or Gwyn was an idea that we

had worked on in a previous improvisation, but the improvised exchange needed tightening up for it to really work.

Episode Five saw the most additions, although, in truth, much of what happened in this penultimate scene was contained in the corresponding SO. Where the participants had wandered from the SO, I reinstated it. The importance of this final scene, in terms of resolution for the characters, needed to be clear and it needed contain the information and final speeches that demonstrated the characters' journeys. I added these speeches or reworked the speeches from the improvisation. The SO for this episode contained some lines that again were a nod to the pandemic and communicating remotely, 'emotional lockdown' and 'online hangover'. This demonstrates that I was leaning towards more references to the context, but these were still quite veiled.

I also added elements of speech that had been discussed during the backstory work, but which had never really materialised during the improvisations. Gwyn's use of Welsh phrases and Gulia's reliance on Italian swearwords was required, I felt, to help the exposition related to their heritage and character. There was also the phase, 'ooh, here they are. The most healed people in the room'. This was a nuanced speech pattern that A's original had, which had been discussed in the character phase, but never used during improvisation. I felt it needed to be added, as it helped to give Gwyn some depth and idiosyncratic dialogue.

The use of faux therapy speech, particularly the use of metaphors, ‘the mollusc of destiny’ and ‘the Electric Eel of purpose’ were added to refer back to the earlier exchanges in the first few episodes, but also, the fact that Gulia was using them demonstrated how she had embraced this online self-help world. It was interesting to me to show that, although it was all complete nonsense, someone had actually benefitted from it.

I revisited the backstory work again, for Eden and her appearance in the LEP with her turnip. This had been identified in the early phases as her most proud achievement, so when the conversation came to such achievements, there was one, amusing, if a little sad, such accomplishment. The purpose of this anecdote was to demonstrate how Eden’s self-confidence was so desperately low that she couldn’t identify having achieved anything of worth in her entire adult life. This was used to underpin her character endpoint, in terms of having not benefitted from the sessions at all, and in fact, that she had got worse during the whole course.

In the final scene, I had to decide how to reveal the twist. Since all the other episodes had been on Zoom, I didn’t want to cut away to a camera shot of Gwyn and the nurse, in a hospital – it simply didn’t fit with the rest of the piece. So, I decided that we would see Gwyn as we had seen him throughout and have the nurse’s voice off-screen. The addition of his ‘finger tic’, which had been developed in the behaviour and bearing phase had been present to an extent, in that the participant had used it as a way to get into character, but it hadn’t really featured in the improvisations. By seeding the tic throughout the script and then having him, as the stage direction says, exhibit, ‘an

extreme version of the tic', at the end, was a method to demonstrate his state of mind. It should be noted that in the first draft (see Appendix D1) that Gwyn just exhibits a bizarre tic. It was by going back through the process that I was able to identify that the finger tic could be utilised and seeded throughout the script.

Having made these additions, it was necessary to undertake an editing pass, to tighten up the script. By the nature of its development, the script was very conversational and I worried that it might read as slow and need much revision. However, I sent my draft to a writer friend who suggested that the script would work as episodes, rather than scenes. I realised that by making them episodes, I had the time and space to keep much of the dialogue in, and that it worked better in real time speech, rather than slick dialogue exchanges. The idea that the audience attended the sessions with the characters offered a realism that I wanted and meant that the conversational, slow pace was actually better. I decided that only minor cuts were required.

The final leg of my writing process saw a finished draft arrived at through late additions in response to a rehearsed read-through and some last minute creative decisions. The read-through was less helpful than I would have liked as, in the end, I had to read as Gulia, rather than being able to reflect on the script as it was read by the participants. One thing it did highlight, was that the quick-fire dialogue did work when scripted. The other revelation was just how long the script was. This first project was to be a small diagnostic work, but had become a rather more extensive piece of writing. Despite not doing many months of improvisations (rather a matter of weeks), the material generated was not only substantial, but of very usable quality.

Ultimately, the final changes, by way of additions, were related to the ever present question of what level of pandemic references there should be, how overt they were and also how Heidegger's philosophy inspired the work, in terms of direction and comedic material.

I decided that more overt references to the pandemic should be included in the script. These references were to be coupled with technical issues that were encountered during the pandemic. These technical issues tied Heidegger to the work, in that the notion of technology assimilating humans into effective working commodities, and indeed, technology's own boast of infallibility, provided comedic moments that should feature in the script. The idea that I could have an entire episode where one character's ear was the only thing that could be seen of them, was both amusing, but was something that many people had encountered during the pandemic. This also availed me the chance to write the 'I can see your ear', 'I am 'ere, I'm very present', line. I don't think anyone has ever written a scene where a single body part is all that is visible of a character, and arguably, before the pandemic, nobody would have experienced that.

Two other additional moments were introduced to the script. The report of Paulo going to the toilet with his camera left on and Gwyn stranding up to reveal he is only dressed from the waist up were things that people had encountered during the pandemic. Though amusing, they did also relate to the underpinning theme that people could never be assimilated by technology as efficient, because some people are incompetent in their interactions with it.

The next step was to apply my approach in the monologue writing process, to ascertain if my approach was as effective in other forms of scriptwriting. Before I offer an account of my Monologue Project, it is worthwhile to examine the monologue form. In doing so I can clarify both the mechanics of the monologue but also the specifics of form and genre, which impact on how a monologue is approached (in terms of writing).

6:0 MONOLOGUE CHAPTER

6:1 Introduction

This chapter will define the term monologue and the manner in which I have used the term within this thesis. The chapter will then progress to exploring monologue writing through the lenses of character, narrative and text.

What differentiates a monologue from a soliloquy? The *Cambridge English Dictionary* defines 'soliloquy' as 'a speech in a play that the character speaks to himself or herself or to the people watching rather than to the other characters'.

This is, in part, supported by Brian Richardson in his monograph, *Point of View in Drama: Diegetic Monologue, Unreliable Narrators, and the Author's Voice on Stage* (1988). Richardson employs Seymour Chatman's categorisation of the soliloquy as possessing two main attributes: it is spoken by a character, and that 'either he is alone on stage, or if there are others they show by their demeanour and actions that they do not hear him (Richardson. 1988:199-200)'. Richardson does highlight that these apparently obligatory features can be transgressed, for example, in Shakespeare,

> one may observe that Chatman's other obligatory feature is conspicuously violated in the famous balcony scene in Romeo and Juliet (II.ii). Romeo, after giving a solo speech himself, overhears Juliet's soliloquy, and at one point wonders aloud whether to interrupt her but decides instead to hear the rest of her thoughts (*Ibid*).

If we deploy Chatman's categorisation, then the soliloquy is the vocalisation of a character's inner thoughts and is directed at no one, but is overheard by the audience – and in some cases other characters. How then, is this different to the aside?

6:2 The Aside

> The definition of aside is when a character in a work of fiction addresses the audience directly for a moment to either express a truth, reveal a feeling, or comment on the events of the story. This device is commonly found in books, plays, television, and film. During an aside, a character may literally step aside to deliver commentary that cannot be heard by any other characters in the story, only the audience. The character may "break the fourth wall"—the implied plane that marks the "edge" of the onstage action—and address the viewers directly, or they may make brief comments to themselves that the audience overhears (Mamet. 2021).

Two key factors of this definition (of the aside) are of use here. Firstly, the aside is not heard by the other characters - but there *are* other characters present. Secondly, the address is to the audience and the audience's presence is acknowledged by the breaking of the fourth wall.

If we return to the *Cambridge English Dictionary* for a definition of 'the monologue' we find, 'a long speech by one person: a short play for one actor'. The key factor, then, which separates the monologue from both the aside and the soliloquy, is the lack of any other characters in the piece. The other point that we return to is to whom they (the character) are speaking. The monologue sees the speaker not speaking to the audience, or acknowledging their presence, in fact, not really speaking to anyone, as with the soliloquy. The monologue is the vocalisation of a single character's inner

thoughts. Boltaboyeva and Khalilov, in their journal article, ‘The Director’s work on monologues and mise-en-scenes’ (2021), offer us a definition and real life example of why anyone would orate their thoughts aloud. They state, ‘.A monologue is an open expression of thoughts hidden in the web of the heart. […] In our daily lives, we involuntarily talk and argue with ourselves out loud. We explain, we say, we talk to the listener in our imagination (2021:72)’. Although, this supports the monologue form, I would argue that most of us, seldom speak our thoughts out loud.

With this in mind, we may find that the lines between the monologue and the soliloquy are somewhat blurred, and it therefore becomes necessary to offer my own definition for the purposes and use of the term in this thesis.

A monologue, then, is a piece of fiction whereby one character is present throughout (and no others) and speaks their thoughts out loud to no one and without any acknowledgement of the audience.

6:3 The Question of Audience and The Modern Monologue

The above definition is, however, problematic. Miriam Chirico contends, ‘Like the stand-up, the monologist acknowledges the audience’s presence, although there is no direct commentary or audience involvement; rather, the monologist addresses the spectator directly as an accomplice and a watcher-hearer (Pavis. 1998. Quoted by Chirico 2016: 25)’. What Chirico states here contradicts what I have said relating to audience in my working definition.

However, in order to address the issue of audience in the working definition we might turn to the online world. In this modern age, with the advent of YouTube, Tik Tok and Instagram, there are thousands of individuals talking via a camera to an audience which is not 'present' as such. The opportunity to reset monologues in a manner where they are talking to a distant viewing audience via social media enabled me to address the question of audience in terms of a definition for this thesis and revise it. We might then say that there is acknowledgement of the audience, despite the audience being unable to interact but still be positioned as the 'accomplice and watcher-hearer' that Chirico talks about.

6:4 The Unreliable Narrator

The very nature of the fictional character speaking in a monologue, means that there is an implicit unreliability around the status of what the character is saying. As Alan Bennett notes, the account of any event by a speaker in a monologue is based on their own experience and perception of that event and all speech by others is reported, 'none of these narrators, after all, is [sic] telling the whole story (1998:32)'. This notion of unreliability feeds into the classic archetype of monologue structure (particularly in Bennett's work) where the character's faults and true self are revealed as the monologue unfolds, which relies, in part, on the narrator being unaware of these reveals. As Bennett states, '[the narrator is] telling a story to the meaning of which they are not entirely privy (1998:32)'.

The notion of unreliability also has a resonance with my work for the ‘online’ monologues. The nature of posting a video, say, on YouTube, means that you, as the viewer, only see what the YouTuber wants you to see, as they have invariably edited the video prior to posting it. This means that anything presented has been selected consciously by the person posting it, and revelations are for effect. As we shall see, this had implications for my monologues and proved a relatively constricting element for monologue writing.

6:5 The Mechanics and Structure of Monologue Writing: Character and Narrative

A character narrates the monologue and their perception of events forms the account that is narrated. As the narrator is the only person who is present, robust characterisation is required. Leigh’s character construction phrase, and my adaptations of the same, were in play at the formative stages of writing the monologues.

However, when the narrative stage was reached, my adopted and adapted method proved less fruitful. Bennett likens the filmed monologue form to that of the short story: ‘[aside from the narrator] the rest of the story [is] pictured and populated by the viewer [and] more effort is demanded of the imagination. In this sense to watch a monologue on the screen is closer to reading a short story than watching a play (1998:32)’.

The parity that Bennett observes between the monologue and the short story is important, as it highlights the constraints of the monologue form. When approaching

monologue writing, it is important to have some pre-conceived ideas as to the narrative and theme of the piece. Unlike with an ensemble script, there isn't the space for slow developments in terms of the narrative trajectory. This can be limiting in terms of the use of improvisation and organic development of themes and character arcs. As we will see in the Monologue Project report (Chapter 7), having some pre-set parameters can allow for a form of improvisation through writing.

Along with character, narrative is an essential element of the monologue. Given the requirements of the form, in terms of revealing character and the expectation of a twist (as with the short story) it is difficult to write the piece without knowing what either the character revelation or the twist is going to be, a fact which supports the seeding of clues in the body of the script.

The static, often austere and reported nature of the action in a monologue can place restrictions on the writer. Bennett explains how there are certain patterns to the form of monologue writing of which, when he began writing *Talking Heads*, he was unaware He identified these, in the process of writing, as essential to the action; in essence, they *were* the action (Bennett. 1998:11).

With no dialogue exchanges, other than those reported, and the action, as Bennett highlights, only occurring away from view, it can be difficult to hold the viewers' attention. The static nature of the monologue presents the writer (and performer) with only micro-gestures and the necessity for a commanding performance. The viewer

must concentrate on every word, searching for clues to make sense of what is going on, what the piece is saying and where it might end.

Returning to Bennett's statement about the audience having to picture and populate the story from the information relayed by the narrator, the challenge for the writer is to seed the inevitable reveal, without giving the end away, while at the same time not underestimating the audience's ability to second guess the ending – essentially attempting to subvert the audience's expectations and presumptions. This form of writing, I would argue, can be seen in the work of Steve Pemberton and Reese Sheasmith's comedy anthology series, *Inside Number Nine*. Pemberton and Shearsmith write using a method which means they are blind to how the piece will unfold. This method of 'blind' writing is a form of cerebral improvisation. Though not unique to Shearsmith and Pemberton, I would argue that it is a rarer form of approaching writing. Although events in a story might take an unexpected turn (for the author), generally speaking, a writer will have plotted the major plot points and story line, knowing where the story will conclude.

The monologue, whether it's a vocalisation of inner thoughts to the ether, or to an absent audience, is likely to be in a conversational tone. It should be noted that the use of accent and dialect will be precipitated by the character, in terms of their geographic and cultural backstory. That is to say, for example, that Bennett's narrators are ostensibly northern and speak with a northern, often Yorkshire, accent accordingly. The characters' lexicon therefore is likely to contain regionally specific dialect words and phrases, within a more Standard English framing. The same is true of my

monologues, where there seems to be a manner of speaking that is peppered with predominantly American phrases which have become synonymous with the way influencers speak on social media.

This conversational style has further implications for language use. Bennett explains that as

> [the monologue] is a stripped-down version of the short story, the style of its telling necessarily austere. 'Said' and 'says' is generally all that is required to introduce reported speech, because whereas the novelist or short story writer has a battery of expressions to choose from ('exclaimed', 'retorted', 'groaned', 'lisped'), in live narrations such terms seem literary and self-conscious […] or else acquire undue weight in the mouth of a supposedly artless narrator. And these narrators are artless (1998: 32).

Bennett's observations are important as they highlight how language choice (in the representation of perceived real or spontaneous speech) must be both character driven and relatively limited, to use Bennett's own word choice, 'austere'.

6:6 Monologues: Autobiography and the Illusion of Spontaneity

It stands to reason that the monologue, as a story from one person's perspective should contain, at least an element of spontaneity. It is important to acknowledge that the predominant feature of most monologues is their autobiographical nature. This relates to the apparent spontaneity in the form, the paradox of a *performed authenticity*, which is born out of the autobiographical nature of the monologue genre. As Miriam Chirico states in 'Performed Authenticity Narrating the Self in the Comic Monologues of David Sedaris, John Leguizamo, and Spalding Gray',

> Stand-up comedy and comic monologues involve a paradox: the performers convey authenticity even while staging a performance. By juggling multiple selves during the act, the monologist appears authentic not only because of the autobiographical premise commonly invoked in the genre, but also because of the implication that a truer self will emerge from behind the public façade (2016:22).

As we have seen with Leigh's approach, the onus is on the construction of a robust character that offers the illusion of being a real person.

6:7 The Revealing of Character

As indicated by Chirico and by Bennett, the monologue often has a trajectory whereby a character is *set up* and then that *set up* undermined. The audience is encouraged to make assumptions about who this character is. These assumptions are then slowly undermined to reveal a darker or, as Chirico identifies, a 'truer' side of the character.

> However, performing authenticity goes beyond a simple acknowledgment of biographical truth. Behaving authentically is a practice of being true to one's self despite the pressures of society. Thus, in order to perform the authentic self, the monologist has to enact both the public mask everyone wears and provide a sense of a deeper self within. The audience must believe they are witnessing a performer pulling back layers of a public façade to get at a purer version of the self (Chirico. 2016: 25).

This is certainly true of stand-up and of the particular comedy monologues that Chirico is examining (those of Sedaris, Leguizamo and Gray), and equally accurate, of Bennett, in terms of a revealing of 'true' character as the monologue progresses.

6:8 Conclusion: Final Definition of Monologue

It is clear the lines between the soliloquy and the monologue are somewhat blurred, which is why I must offer my own definition of the monologue for its use within this thesis. I have, at least been able to offer a differentiation from the aside and highlighted that the general convention of a soliloquy appearing in a script that contains other characters as differing from the monologue. I now offer the definitive definition of the term monologue, as it is applied in this thesis:

MONOLOGUE: A fictional piece of writing/performance, which is narrated by a single character who is the only person present although others may be referred to within the narration. Autobiographical and often confessional in nature, the narration appears spontaneous and is presented in a conversational manner. The narration is directed to the camera and a perceived, absent audience.

7:0 MONOLOGUE RESEARCH PROJECT: Account of Monologue Project

7:1 Beginnings

Having worked with and adapted (where necessary) Mike Leigh's approach to creating and developing character, narrative and text, through online improvisation during the OEP, I wondered if my new adapted approach might be applied to other forms of scriptwriting, e.g. monologues.

I had noticed when working with the ensemble in the previous project that the character construction phase of Leigh's approach (and my adapted approach) had been fruitful and wondered if I might use this approach to create a character and then see if any themes and character development strands might suggest themselves. I had developed a swathe of character questions which had previously helped flesh out the characters, which had been based on an 'original'. The idea of using someone I had known as a starting point for a character also appealed.

A more detailed account follows but once I had created and developed a character, I thought that improvisation could play a part in the writing of the monologue. Although there would be no ensemble improvisations, I thought I could improvise in character, talking about different subjects including the character's opinions on things, telling anecdotes from their past etc., which would generate material for the script. I hoped that thematic strands might start to reveal themselves, which could give the piece its controlling idea, which would in turn drive the narrative.

In total, two cycles of monologues were written, along with a more traditional monologue, which stands alone from the first and second cycle and utilised a more spontaneous approach to writing. The first cycle, *The Lester Monologues*, used my adapted approach (developed in the OEP), but relied on the traditional conventions of Bennett's monologues, where the character was not using social media as the platform for their narration. The first monologue *Lester Sees Stars,* was an experimental and exploratory writing exercise to discover the character, and more specifically, a foray into the character's speech patterns and language use. The second in this cycle, *The Reunion*, took a more structured writing approach, whereby I plotted out how the monologue would unfold.

The second cycle of monologues, *Logging On*, was different in two ways. Firstly, the setting was the online social media world, where the narrators were talking to an audience that wasn't present (i.e. not in the room, but perceived by the narrator) via their YouTube channel or other social media platforms. This meant that they would periodically use direct address and the material discussed wasn't necessarily an unfettered outpouring of their thoughts and feelings. Secondly, some of the monologues were written in a more spontaneous and improvisatory way where, as we shall see, certain parameters were set, but the resolution to the piece was not known until I reached it. This improvisational writing will be explored in more depth later in this chapter.

This spontaneous improvisation through writing approach was then applied to a more traditional monologue (like those in the *Lester Cycle*). Where this differed from the

Lester Cycle was that I neither undertook a character study, nor did I have any idea where the monologue would go and how it would resolve.

What follows below is an account of the project, defining the creative choices I made and also how I applied what was learnt from the previous OEP to help guide me through this project.

As with the OEP chapter, it is recommended that you read the scripts first, as the chapter does contain information which reveals the endings to the monologues and therefore contains 'spoilers'.

7:2 A Character is Born: The People You Know List

A read-through of the first monologue written for the project can be accessed here - Lester Sees Stars. This video is presented to support the discourse around the process of writing the first cycle of monologues and illustrates details and considerations such as how the character speaks, etc.

The purpose of this first step was to ground the character in real life, by using a real person as a vessel or template for the emerging character. Therefore, a list of people I had known who could potentially form the basis for the emerging character was compiled. The aim was to select a suitable original from the list I had prepared.

I listed men (for the sake of realism, as at this stage I was expecting to be improvising/performing as the characters) who were a similar age as I am now (again for realism) and who I considered ‘characters’, in that they had idiosyncrasies in behaviour, speech or in their personality and bearing, which would make for an interesting and comedic basis for a character.

Of all the persons on my PKYL, ‘Lester’ displayed, I thought, the most potential. He had very idiosyncratic speech and a curious bearing. He was an unusual person, whose career as a psychiatric nurse meant he probably had a very interesting life and past. Also, I did not know a great deal about his past but was party to a proportion of his experiences from times I had talked to him; he had regaled me with anecdotes and stories. The only issue with the original was that he wasn’t really very outgoing. However, I felt the character wouldn’t need to be, given the monologue form can be a private outpouring, which doesn’t necessarily demand an outgoing personality.

Having now picked my original, the next step was to build the character’s backstory, filling in what I knew to be true about Lester and his past and then adding fictional details, where the facts were not known. The key to this part of the process was getting to know the character through their life experiences. So, the next step was undertaken, the character questions.

7:3 A Character Develops: Character Questions for Backstory.

This next undertaking aimed to develop the character's backstory, by way of joining the character on an accelerated life journey. The character's entire life, from early childhood to present day is covered by answering many questions designed to explore the character's entire life to date as was the case in the OEP.

In the OEP the participants completed the questions away from the session and then discussed the answers with me, whereupon I pressed them for more detail and corrected timeline issues and addressed issues of plausibility. In this project I had to perform both roles.

Lester made for an ideal original because there was a balance between what was known to be facts about his life and the scope to add fictional information to help construct the character's backstory. It had been noted, during the OEP, that the characters who seemed to be most robust after the character development process were based on originals that the participants had known in later life but they had known little of their early life. It was also an interesting opportunity to create a backstory that would explain how the original/character had become who they were in contemporary life.

What I did know of the real Lester enabled me to answer some of the questions 'truthfully' and what was interesting was by answering those questions, I was reminded of things that I had forgotten I knew about the real Lester. For example, I had completely forgotten that Lester had once told me that his Christmas Day routine involved listening to Fairport Convention's folk rock album, *Liege and Leif*. This

allowed me to add details such as understanding how the character (and indeed the real Lester) might find contentment on being on their own at Christmas.

I also remembered that he used a ladder to go upstairs. He had begun to replace his staircase, but had never got past ripping it out, so used a ladder to reach the upper floor of his house. The notion of a character who never finished anything and therefore, rather than complete a job, found a 'temporary' alternative (which became permanent) became an interesting character trait.

I waited until this point to name my character. I searched around for an alternative for the name Lester, but none seemed right. Could I retain the real name without bucking the rules of Leigh's/my process? For myself, I saw no reason why the original's name could not be used. Therefore, I kept Lester and gave him a suitable surname, Houghton – I had no idea what the real Lester's surname actually was.

7:4 A Character Speaks: Voice

The real Lester has a very idiosyncratic way of speaking and I wanted to perfect this. The danger as always, was to get the voice right, but avoid playing the real Lester. I tried a few improvisations just talking in the character's voice but found that I was struggling to take the improvisations anywhere. It was at this stage that I wondered if the character I had developed was too constricting. The problem lay in the fact that the character was too close to the original. I had to move the character away from the real Lester, in order to develop any narrative possibilities. Quite simply, I felt the

character was limited in both his lack of opinions and limited in the world that he inhabited. Inspired by the monologues of Simon Armitage, I thought I would trial something more abstract. Armitage, in *Seeing Stars* (2010), seemed to offer a curious and surreal collection of monologues, parables and allegories from an array of unusual narrative voices. By using a more abstract stance I thought that the experiment might yield some interesting results and given that this was to be a test write, I did not need to ground the piece in realism, so I wondered what might happen if the character had encountered a celebrity. The celebrity, for the sake of *some* realism, had to be someone who wasn't a Hollywood star, so much as a television celebrity. I thought it might be amusing for the character to give Richard Osman a lift and see what transpired. I conducted a test write on this premise and found it came together quite quickly. This departed from my approach to an extent, but was, initially, utilised as a method to help develop character and practice writing in the character's voice – as the use of practical improvisation had proved generally unfruitful.

Next, I began to consider the notion of how reliable the monologue narrator actually is. As noted in the Monologue Chapter (Chapter 6) the account of any experience is entirely from the narrator's perspective. I considered whether this could either be magnified or could form the basis for the resolution of a monologue. This quickly precipitated the premise for *The Reunion*. In order that the audience did not see the twist coming, the monologue would, for all intents and purposes, seem to be narrated by Lester. It is only at the end that we realise it is not Lester at all. This was realistic as the true narrator was an identity thief and adept fraudster, which mean his skills of mimesis would be excellent. It meant that all the character work stood and that, in

order for the reveal to work, the audience needed to believe that it was Lester narrating.

The nature and speed with which the monologue developed meant that no improvisation was used. It's true that the character construction phase had been adhered to and some improvisation to develop physicality and bearing had also been undertaken, but there was no material generated by improvisation that made its way into the script. This began to highlight the unsuitability of a key phase of my developed approach. The nature of the monologue, in that there is the ubiquitous twist or character reveal, meant that the form offered little room for improvisation to generate material beyond some character development in the early stages of the process. Where, in the OEP, dialogue had been born out of interactions between two or more characters, there was no such opportunity in this monologue writing project.

This lack of scope for improvisation began to highlight how my adapted approach, in relation to the improvisation phase, appeared to be unsuitable for monologue writing. This failing demonstrated why the improvisation stage did work in the OEP. It was the interaction between the (established) characters that had driven the production of narrative. No such interaction was available in the monologue form, as the narrative conventions seemed to dictate that their importance outweighed that of the character narrating. In the OEP, the narrative was character driven, whereas monologue writing appeared to prescribe a narrative driven approach. I therefore needed to either adapt my approach or find a way of including an element of improvisation beyond the physicality and bearing stage. I decided to depart from the traditional monologue form

and sought out a way to incorporate a more improvisatory approach to my monologue writing process. The second cycle of monologues had begun.

7:5 Online Monologues (*Logging On*)

It was becoming apparent that the method developed in the OEP simply wasn't working for the monologue project. Certainly, the character development stage had some application. However, the issue remained as to what level of improvisation could be used within my adapted approach.

7:5:1 A Serendipitous Podcast

A serendipitous podcast was to provide both the answer to the question of improvisation and provide an exciting opportunity to position the next cycle of monologues within the online world, offering key links between the scripts and the research thesis as a whole.

The podcast, *Inside Inside Number Nine* (2022-Present), features writers Reece Shearsmith and Steve Pemberton giving information as to how the writing and development process of their anthology TV programme *Inside Number Nine* was undertaken. Whilst discussing the episode *Thinking Out Loud* (S5 E6. First broadcast March 2020)) they highlighted that in the modern age there are many situations where people sit alone talking to an 'audience' that isn't present. Alan Bennett had identified that there was always for the potential for an audience to question to whom his characters were talking to in his T*alking Heads* series (Bennett. 1998:11). The

opportunity to solve this by way of people talking to a non-present audience meant that technically a monologue could be set within, say, a YouTube channel and I could write a series of monologues within a social/modern media setting, a *Talking Heads* for the digital generation.

Initially my thoughts were that the setting would provide me with a lexicon or manner of speech that most YouTubers employed and also some subject matter for discussion. From there I could develop characters (using the adapted method), and then I could improvise alone, just talking to the camera as a YouTuber would. Then, using Alan Bennett's framework, a character would be established and then the darker underbelly of that character would slowly be revealed in some sort of twist or resolution. Consideration would be given to whether the monologues would form a cycle of individual pieces that could be linked, or whether they should stand alone, as with *Talking Heads*.

The modernisation, by way of the online setting, meant that the monologues now linked more neatly with the underpinning philosophy related to Heidegger and technology, the pandemic and the move to the digital online environment. This could also provide thematic strands that examined loneliness, isolation, fear, mental health, body image as the central 'message', commenting on both life during the pandemic and online life in general. I also turned to Heidegger for inspiration as to the sort of characters I might draw. I considered people who had the wrong relationship with technology (the type of relationship Heidegger warns us of). People who had been assimilated by technology, people who had in some way been isolated, or imprisoned

by technology, people who had lost their perception of reality, by an immersion in computer games and the online world, I thought, might prove to be interesting, both in terms of characterisation and narrative.

The first monologue in this cycle, *Online* began with, first, a vague notion of the setting and subject matter, and secondly, with the character work.

7:6 *Online*

7:6:1 Beginnings/inspiration

The starting point for this first monologue was a character with a pastime that had connotations of isolation and social awkwardness: the idea that a lonely person might find an outlet and feel a sense of belonging in an online community through a train spotting YouTube channel. Later it became necessary to turn the films into a video diary and recorded suicide note. By positioning this monologue as a video diary, I was able to begin the transition from the traditional monologue to the online monologues, in that the video diary format possessed traits from both the Bennettesque monologue format and the online monologues. There was a perceived but not present audience, but there was also much more of an outpouring of personal emotion. As noted in the previous chapter, the YouTube narrators would have edited their videos prior to posting, which meant that no information other than what they wished to broadcast would be included. With the video diary/suicide note, this was not the case, as the film was created incrementally with no editing.

I soon had the idea that rather than looking for good train spotting locations, the character would actually be reconnoitring a spot where he could commit suicide. With this loose trajectory in place I began the character development stage, using my adapted method from the earlier ensemble project.

7:6:2 Character

The essential question to be answered was how had the character come to a point where they were considering suicide? As no detailed information exists regarding the questions Leigh poses, the questions I developed during the OEP allowed the actor/director to travel along the character's entire life to date, to create the character's backstory. However, in order for my adapted process to work, I was in need of an original. I therefore researched train spotters on social media. I came across Francis Bourgeois, a train spotter who had found fame on TikTok. Bourgeois presented me with a suitable original and a way to inject some comedy into the piece – something I had worried about, given the serious nature of the subject matter. As I knew little about Bourgeois, this allowed me to inject the necessary fictional information into the backstory (required for the resolution of the monologue).

The discovery of Bourgeois could also have provided me with a basis for the physicality and bearing for the character, however, no improvisation was undertaken to develop this character. With regard to the monologue scripts, I wasn't necessarily going to play the role so, where the physicality and bearing and Road-Testing phases of my approach might have been applied, there seemed little need for them here.

7:6:3 Narrative and Text

The monologue needed to drive towards a final breakdown, with incremental pressures placed on the character. The process had, in an unforeseeable but necessary way, jumped straight to the text stage of the process and had bypassed the *in character improvisation* stage.

It was clear that although elements of my adapted approach had been useful, the method as a whole seemed unsuited to monologue writing. The improvisational elements of the approach were either inapplicable or needed to be altered to fit within the monologue form, which needed a clear narrative framework. Where, in the OEP, too strict a framework had hampered the improvisation, introducing improvisatory techniques in the development of the monologue would have endangered the generic requirements for certain narrative structures.

7:7 *Computer Virus*

7:7:1 Beginnings and inspiration

Early research had yielded some key types of YouTube channel presented by and featuring only one person. A popular type of channel was the Urban Exploration or UrbEx channel. As the name suggests, these channels feature explorations of abandoned and derelict buildings.

I had an acquaintance that had a hugely unsuccessful UrbEx channel and was something of a paranoid conspiracy theorist. It did not take long to adopt him as an

original. Though I knew him better than I knew Francis Bourgeois (who I didn't know at all) the paranoid nature of the UrbExer meant that once again there was space for fictional information that wasn't in conflict with factual information that I possessed. Also, as I was able to appropriate elements of his actual UrbEx videos, in terms of style and narration, he provided me with a rich seam of material to mine.

7:7:2 Character

Once again I started with the character development stage of my approach. The character questions, again, allowed me to accompany the emerging character along their expedited life journey. The consideration here was to ascertain how and why the character had become such a paranoid person. An early bad childhood experience of performing in the school Nativity play was responsible, it turned out, for his later performance anxiety, which explained why you never saw him on camera. This was also to facilitate the computer game aesthetic, but it was important to give a realistic reason for his shyness onscreen. Before any possibility of improvisation to generate material (for the script) could be undertaken, the need for a narrative reared its head.

7:7:3 Narrative and Text

The real YouTuber was a pandemic sceptic and it soon became apparent that this was where the plot might go. Many of his videos were him wandering around abandoned places pretending to be hunting zombies or vampires, whilst exploring the building. It almost immediately suggested to me that the character might catch COVID and thought he was turning into a zombie. The conceit was that, as he denied the existence of COVID, his only 'rational' explanation was that he had contracted a virus that would

turn him into a zombie. The message of the piece concerned people finding it increasingly difficult to differentiate between an online/computer game world and the real world, something that has been a concern for some time, but undoubtedly an issue that has been exacerbated by the enforced isolation of the pandemic. The character, Byron, represented an element of society that had lost its grip on reality. Having retreated into a fantasy world in order to escape the horrors of real life, they had reached a point of no return where reality was lost forever.

After these ideas for the narrative, the writing essentially developed of its own accord, with no requirement or opportunity for physical improvisation – this was also in relation to the fact the character would never actually appear onscreen. The only issue that I was left with was how to end the piece. It became apparent that, in his deluded state, it would be unlikely that, having caught COVID, he might cease to be a pandemic denier, so some form of open ending would be required. As I had integrated the computer game aesthetics, I realised that I could use classic computer game semiotics to conclude the script. Traditionally, a computer game player has three lives in a game, so as the piece progresses, we see that Byron loses his three lives, gaining one back from the 'health pack' he finds. The ending therefore merely needed the game to be declared over.

It was apparent again that no improvisation had been used in this monologue, but it did begin to occur to me that as the writing had progressed at speed, the writing could be considered a form of improvisation. For the next monologue, I would see if I could improvise through writing.

7:8 *Dark Web*

(The script of *Dark Web*, can be found in Appendix D: XCVII)

This monologue sought to utilise the adapted version of my method that had yielded some success in the previous monologue writing process. Where this differed from the previous projects was that there was no framework to work within. The purpose of this monologue was to discover if the improvisation element (in this case improvisation through writing), with no character work could be utilised to write a monologue. The research phase came first. Compiling a list of words and phrases that were prevalent in 'YouTube speak', I was able to get a feel for the idiosyncratic speech of influencers, which helped me, in terms of general ideas, and to discern some of the character traits that were at my disposal.

Initially, I began to write, using the YouTube-speak lexicon, using ideas around the phenomenon of SWATing. This is when an influencer anonymously calls the authorities reporting a fellow influencer as a terrorist. A SWAT team is sent to the location. I wondered how this might be done in England but I soon lost interest in this as a possible narrative arc. Instead the notion of romance fraud entered the frame along with a wider sense of how real and trustworthy any relationships formed online with strangers could be, in fact the idea of how to establish if anyone online is really genuine.

I decided that I would introduce a character the audience would not like and then, as the monologue progressed, attempt to make the character more sympathetic. Having done this, I then thought about subverting this trope and having the character, who had at first appeared quite banal and vacuous, turn out to be much more intelligent than she had presented herself. A further twist occurred to me in the writing at this point, that she had branded the George character as a fraudster, only to discover he was not in fact a conman, but just a self-conscious young man who had taken the opportunity to disguise himself in the online world, that is to say, in the online world he could be and look like however he wanted in compensation for his perceived failings. The final twist came in the form of TA being a robot. The conceit was that we had witnessed a person go through a whole gamut of human feelings only to find that they were not, in fact, human.

Dark Web while the weakest of the monologues, successfully represents both the speech and the mandatory personality of the influencer. However, the narrative arc and ultimate resolution of the monologue are less successful. With no preconceived direction (or resolution/character arc) the twists seemed to be, in the main, unfounded; the end comes without warning and has no seeding in the body of the monologue. The character revelations are prepared more carefully, as TA does make reference to her GCSE results and uses uncharacteristically long words occasionally. This is surprising as no in-depth character work was undertaken, but the lexicon and atypical character traits of the influencer were enough to write the character without the character work. At the same time, this lack of character work as preparation seems to have resulted in a more difficult writing process and a long time passed before any resolution revealed itself. In fact the narrative as a whole took a long time to unfold.

It was apparent at the end of this monologue writing process that without any structure or framework, the spontaneous improvisation through writing method didn't work. It could be that it was the subject matter, setting and characterisation that impeded the use of improvisation through writing. It was certainly a world (Instagram and fashion) that I was not at all familiar with. Therefore, I decided to undertake one last attempt using the improvisation through writing element to write a monologue. This time though, I would write a traditional (Bennettesque) monologue and try drawing from my own experiences to help facilitate the improvisation through writing.

7:9 *The Nandemic*

In light of the failings of the improvisation through writing during the process of developing *Dark Web*, I returned to the more traditional monologue format. I also relied partly on my own personality and experiences. This is a break with Leigh's Cardinal Rule, but in previous monologue projects I had broken this rule without any adverse effects. Again, I had no idea how the monologue would progress and ultimately resolve itself. All I had was the opening line, 'I lost Mother today… She wandered off in Waitrose'.

By using a version of myself for the character of the narrator, the character work could be considered to have been done. I soon decided that referring to the narrator's mother was just a bit too Alan Bennett, so changed it to Nan. Once I had made this decision my own Nan and her exploits soon helped drive the monologue along. I began to wonder how my Nan would have coped during the pandemic, had she still been alive.

I imagined moving in with her during lockdown, what we might get up to and what she would make of the technological advances like Zoom. As the monologue progressed the theme of talking (and indeed not talking) began to reoccur. This got me thinking about what Nan (and Granddad) didn't talk about. As the monologue was written close to Armistice Day, there was an obvious answer, the war. As I got onto the subject of the horrors of war, I thought about how, maybe, she would have taken the hardships imposed by the pandemic in her stride. I then thought. What if she had died of COVID? This gave me the resolution I needed. Notions that the narrator's Nan had died at the beginning of COVID and he was merely seeing her in his day to day life in spirit only, or that he went to coffee mornings to be around women like his Nan, revealed themselves quickly. All that was required was to change the phrasing of certain passages in the script, to illustrate/facilitate this. If you look at the early draft (See Appendix D: XCV) then you can track the changes made to support this resolution and to seed the clues for the reader/viewer.

The Nandemic demonstrates, once again, that the improvisatory element of my process can be applied to monologue writing, if certain structures, or in this case, an established character (drawn from myself) is present to support the writing. I consider this monologue to be one of the strongest ones, though changes had to be made after the narrative phase, in the 'test' phase of the process to polish and refine the script.

7:10 Conclusions: Character, Narrative and Text

7:10:1 Failings

As the monologue form requires planning and some idea of how the monologue will develop as it unfolds, and because physical improvisation in the absence of any other performer seemed redundant (unless to develop speech, physicality and bearing) it seemed that virtually the only form of improvisation that could be utilised in monologue writing, is improvisation through writing.

However, even on the occasions where improvisation through writing was trialled, where the writing took its own direction, with little or no preplanning, the success rate was negligible. This affirmed that the improvisational element of the process, an intrinsic element of the approach, had proved ineffective. However, the failure of this element in the monologue project does highlight why the same elements worked so well in the OEP.

7:10:2 Character and Narrative

Where the ensemble work was character driven, allowing a narrative to evolve from the interactions between characters, the monologue is clearly more narrative driven. Even in the case of monologues where character is revealed as the main narrative trajectory, it was difficult to arrive at an end point for the monologue without some preplanning, more or less negating the place for improvisation and the development of character/narrative that seems to evolve organically from it.

7:10:3 Text (and performance)

The demands of the monologue form, along with the idea that the writer would not necessarily perform the character, had implications for the applicability of my

approach. Where, throughout the process (in the OEP) the actors worked to develop and then improvised/worked *in* character, the performance element was important, more so than the actual culminatory text – the script. The solo writing of the monologue project meant that performance was of less importance, however, and the text was the primary consideration as a culmination of the character and narrative elements.

8:0 CONCLUSION: DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8:1 Introduction

Although the Full Report chapters (Chapters 4 & 6) discuss my findings within the account of the practical research, this chapter, in the interest of clarity, presents the key findings in line with the questions and aims that this research sought to address.

In terms of the original contribution to knowledge, this thesis is the first attempt to adapt Mike Leigh's methods to offer a new way of approaching scriptwriting that can be conducted entirely remotely.

Conducted in response to the limitations of lockdown, this experiment sought to find a way to approach ensemble character development and then improvisatory workshops in a manner that did not require the participants to be in the same room, initially for reasons of safety and to find a way to work within governmental restrictions.

After lockdown, the approach still offers a certain number of advantages. Firstly, my method is a way of working which collapses distances; there may still be reasons, outside of a pandemic, why workshop participants cannot, or do not want to be face-to-face.

The research was designed to assess Leigh's process's applicability to online working, and where a particular phase couldn't be applied, an alternative was found. To my

knowledge no such research methodology has been conceived in terms of adapting Leigh's approach for scriptwriting, through improvisatory practice, entirely online.

The adaptations made to Leigh's approach have resulted in the development of a new approach to scriptwriting, through the use of improvisation, that differs from Leigh's approach in several ways, for example, by using faux phone calls, rather than Road Testing, as Leigh does it. The instruction of step outlines to guide the improvisations and the character questions developed in order to aid the character construction phase all represent changes to Leigh's approach that enables my approach to be differentiated from Leigh's and anyone else's.

8:1:1 Research Questions

1. Can the elements of Leigh's collaborative approach to developing character, narrative and text (through improvisation) be utilised and adapted (in response to the needs of online working) to generate a new approach, which can facilitate online working in the field of comedy script writing?

2. Can the practical experimentation with, and application of, Leigh's approach to the creation of comedy film scripts reveal hitherto unknown aspects of his improviser's methodology in the development of character, narrative and text?

3. Can the new scriptwriting approach, developed during the online project, adapting and adopting elements of Leigh's approach, then be applied to writing successful monologues?

8:2 Ensemble Project: Insights into my Practice

8:2:1 My Approach to Character

In the interest of clarity the findings and insights identified from my research are sub-divided into the three foci of character, narrative and text. What follows are insights related to the focus of character.

8:2:2 Leigh's Cardinal Rule

As previously discussed, I sought to ascertain whether Leigh's Cardinal Rule could be broken. The rule is that no actor should add any personal information or personality traits from themselves into the developing character. For my ensemble work, I found that this is a rule that should not be broken. In *The Improvised Play* (1983), Clements details Leigh's reasons for insisting on his rule remaining unbroken, highlighting that it is important to separate the actor from the character, as it can lead to challenges when improvising (see chapter 3). I found that by allowing one actor/participant to break Leigh's rule, it was confirmed that these challenges are likely to occur. There were several occasions where the actor/participant felt the need to point out that a particular experience or trait was not theirs. The need to clarify this demonstrated that the actor/participant was feeling like I, as facilitator/director, was in some way analysing them and that they were being judged. It also became apparent that breaking Leigh's rule didn't actually assist the character development process in any discernible way and was in fact, more of a hindrance to that part of the process. It should be noted,

however, that adherence to Leigh's rule did not need to be so rigid for monologue writing. In many cases, the inclusion of personal traits or experiences actually proved useful in the monologue writing process.

8:2:3 The Original and People You Know Lists

Drawing inspiration from the real world from the very outset creates a precedent and establishes a mind-set revolving around 'the real'. The use of the original highlighted the effectiveness of Leigh's approach, and identified which people proved most effective for the *People You Know Lists* (PYKL) that the participants created at the beginning of the character construction phase. It became apparent that close friends and family were people to avoid (in terms of originals), because the process saw the original (and the resultant emerging character) exposed to analysis regarding their perceived failings and 'darker' side.

It was found that people the actors/participants had worked with proved the best originals. The main factor in this related to the amount of information the participants knew about the original. People they had worked with provided a grounding in reality but left space for fictional information to be injected into the backstories of the emerging characters. It was found that in the case of one participant who used someone they knew very well, there was something of a challenge to create a fictional backstory when so much was known about the real person – and therein a danger of playing the person, not a character. Instead, in the case of the other two participants, the originals provided a basis and then the fictional backstory was able to be formed without the question of substituting known information for a fiction. Knowing

information about the real person's backstory inhibited, or seemed to diminish the need for, the development of the fictional element, which meant that the participant was playing a version of the real person.

8:2:4 Character Questions

The character questions developed for the OEP represent what Leigh might ask his actors during this early stage of character. However, in terms of my practice the questions offered tangible results in terms of character development; in addition to the backstory work, some of the information covered in the questions was able to be revisited when working on the characters' physicality and bearing stage of my process.

Leigh and his actors go through the questions together (in one-to-ones) and the actor and Leigh answer the questions there and then. For my own practice it seemed infinitely more practical to pre-release the questions (a few days in advance), allowing the participants time to consider their answers and then discuss the answers during a one-to-one. The rationale behind this departure from Leigh was twofold. Firstly, the issue of time management necessitated the need for the participants to spend time considering their answers. Where Leigh can spend all day with an actor, where they take their time considering the answer to a character question, and the implications for that character of that answer, I simply did not have that amount of time. Therefore, time away from the one-to-one for the participant to consider the answers, and then a discussion with me in a one-to-one seemed the most appropriate way to approach the character questions. Secondly, I was new to both Leigh's approach as a whole and to this part of Leigh's process. Where Leigh has clearly honed each part of his process

and has become adept at executing it, I was still finding my feet, so this way of approaching the character construction phase seemed, to me, most logical. I felt that answering important questions on the spot would not develop as robust a character and participants should be able to make informed choices when building the backstory. During the one-to-one discussions I was able to help the participants refine their answers and, where appropriate, delve deeper into their character's past. That is not to suggest that my characters were more robust than Leigh's, rather I had to find a different way to get the same results as Leigh, in a manner that addressed the reasons mentioned above.

8:2:5 Naming Ceremony

The Naming Ceremony (as Leigh calls it) was something that I expected to undertake quite early on in the process (when Leigh does it), for the simple fact that I thought it would prove problematic to discuss a character without using a name. This was not the case, however. It seemed that the importance of the character's name meant that rather than decide it early on, the participants wanted to hold off until they knew much more about the character's life. This was an interesting departure from Leigh, and one that was instigated by the participants rather than by myself. It was considered that the name should fit the character once developed, rather than the idea that, perhaps, giving a character a name early on, would in some way prescribe personality, or that the name wouldn't fit the character when fully formed. The significance of this is difficult to pin down. It could suggest that to Leigh, the characters' names are, perhaps, more arbitrary, given that Leigh never duplicates a character name in his oeuvre. It could

equally be more reflective of the participants' placing importance in names as a perceived embodiment of character traits and personality.

8:2:6 Character Relationships and the Online Environment

I was unable to find a way to develop (prior) relationships between the characters – as Leigh does. As noted in Chapter Four, Clements suggests that Leigh is formulating relationships between the characters in the early character construction and development stage. In my experimentation, as the characters were developed away from each other, they simply didn't have enough in common to support any connection. There was some opportunity during the early improvisations, where once the characters had met, some alterations to the backstory could facilitate such relationships, but I was simply unable to develop those relationships at the point Leigh does.

8:2:8 Road Testing

It was clear early on, that I would not be able to conduct the Road-Testing stage of Leigh's approach in the manner in which he does. The alternative came in the form of two telephone calls. By identifying what Leigh is trying to achieve with the Road-Testing, it became apparent that the same results could be gained from approaching Road-Testing in a different way. Leigh wants to allow his actors the chance to interact with 'real' people as they and the character go about arbitrary day to day tasks. Leigh takes the character shopping, so a way to allow the characters to interact with other people lay at the heart of what needed to be done. Therefore one automated call and one business/work call were set up to facilitate this – this marked the first major

departure from Leigh and was in direct response to both the pandemic and to online working.

My method can offer alternative ways of replicating interactions between actors and 'real people' without involving the general public (for needs of safety or practicality), in order to achieve similar results to those which could be achieved through an 'in-person' process – in this case, in terms of character development.

8:2:9 Narrative

As previously mentioned, the insights are sub-dived for clarity. What follows are insights directly related to the focus of narrative.

8:2:10 Group Improvisations and Scenarios

The adaptations to Leigh's approach were also in relation to the online setting and, therefore, all the scenarios were situations where people could feasibly be meeting online. In order to find the situation that would form the basis for the final piece, and in order to introduce the characters to one another, different scenarios were trialled in the first group improvisations. I had planned to bring all three characters together at once, but illness meant one participant was unable to attend. This was in fact useful as it allowed me to explore the dynamics between two characters, before introducing the third, just as with Leigh, the introduction of characters, incrementally, allows one to explore, and more importantly, manage, the dynamics between characters. In terms of 'managing' the dynamics, it is not just a matter of keeping track of developments,

but with the use of Zoom, more than two voices at once proved problematic – with characters talking over one another. By exploring the dynamic between two characters first, one is able to observe a natural ‘to-ing and fro-ing’ dialogue, which is complicated (certainly in a technical sense) when a third voice is introduced. As noted, on Zoom, issues with people being muted, if someone talks over them, realising someone else was speaking, or the delay, between speaking and hearing the response, initially, proved to be a stumbling block in improvisations; it was only as the improvisations continued that a natural flow developed. Therefore, by incrementally introducing characters in improvisations, this goes some way to combatting that issue in the early stages.

Along with the incremental introductions of characters, another way to combat the issues around characters talking over each other was addressed, in part, by selecting a particular scenario whereby one character facilitated the Zoom meeting, meaning that a three way conversation became more like a two person conversation, as everyone stopped speaking for the facilitator and he/she could also address a particular character so that each could get a chance to speak in a more orderly manner.

The importance of the use of scenarios is worth noting. Where the characters were gathered together remotely/online and for what common purpose would have obvious implications for where the narrative would go. A self-help group determines a likely chain of events aimed at the return to good health, for example. Arguably, the scenario

or setting is less pivotal to Leigh's approach, as in many of his films it is simply a place for the characters to dwell, rather than something that influences the narrative.

8:2:11 Limitations/Benefits of Zoom

Early improvisations encountered issues with sound, but the major factor with Zoom was meetings timing out. If the practitioner is unable or unprepared to pay for Zoom, then eventually Zoom will impose time constraints on meetings. The implication of any improvisation timing out is that the creative flow is immediately cut off. In order to combat this issue, I was able to schedule several consecutive meetings/online improvisations, to minimise the impact on 'creative flow' without being able to reduce it completely. If, for example, an improvisation exceeded the time limit, even with another meeting scheduled, everyone was forced to log back on.

The chat function, on the other hand, allowed me to give direction (i.e. 'move the improvisation on') to the participants (in particular participant A, whose character was facilitating the group meetings), without interfering with the flow, which might have occurred if I had voiced my direction rather than to subtly nudge the participants via a short message in a less obtrusive manner.

What was of particular interest was the lack of eye contact when on Zoom. When improvising face-to-face an actor will make eye contact, but also be able to identify body language and subtle cues from the other actors. On Zoom, it was identified, participants looked at the image on the screen (looking for body language and cues),

rather than at the camera, which would have appeared to others like they were making eye contact – although the camera was not the eyes of the others. This created something of a paradox. If ‘you’ the actor looked at the actor speaking (or rather their image), it could feel like ‘you’ were making eye contact with ‘them’ (to a degree), but in order for ‘them’ to feel like ‘you’ were making eye contact with them, ‘you’ would have to look at the camera, thus ‘you’ felt you were no longer making eye contact with ‘them’.

Given the need for cues from fellow actors for improvisation, it was expected that this may be an issue. However, it proved not to be the case. It is likely that, since all the participants had some experience of video conferencing (out of necessity during the pandemic) that they had become acclimatised to the platform and were able to not only effectively communicate online, but also to learn to improvise within that environment.

8:2:13 Guidance During and Prior to Improvisations

The level of guidance in later improvisations became an issue during the practical experimentation. Early improvisations had few parameters, save the scenario/setting. Later improvisations had some detail regarding action, for example the characters would take part in a role-play exercise, but the introduction of detailed step outlines meant that improvisations began to stall. It was found that too much detail left no room for the improvisation to move forward creatively, although it was important to offer *some* direction after the initial improvisation phase, as the project would have taken an inordinate amount of time to develop if we had relied entirely on free improvisations.

Where early step outlines had been traditional step outlines (detailing action, but no dialogue), the later step outlines contained more information and suggested dialogue – including key lines which were essential for the scene. It was this essential dialogue, making the step outline more like a script, which proved to be the reason for the improvisations stalling. The problem that these detailed step outlines created was that participants were so preoccupied with trying to hit the key points that they were not totally immersed in character and therefore found it difficult to balance their creative mind (improvising in character) with their conscious mind, which was aware of trying to progress the improvisation in a prescribed direction. For the OEP at least, it became apparent that trying to force improvisations into a particular direction was detrimental, if the parameters were too rigid.

8:2:14 Text

The insights, gained from the practical research, related to text, now follow.

8:2:15 Character End Points

As we neared the end of the improvisation/narrative phase, considerations had to be made regarding the end points for the characters. This move took us into the text stage of the process, as the considerations were related to the emerging script. The decisions around the character end points were conducted as individual discussions (between the individual participant and myself), rather than through improvisation – although the endpoint scene was improvised in response to a step outline. Participants B and C had shifted, in terms of power balance, so that apparently the most confident character (Eden) had begun to reveal a loss of confidence and a clear

mental imbalance, whereas Gulia had clearly benefitted from the sessions and had become more balanced and confident. Gwyn, on the other hand, had slowly deteriorated and proved to be unequivocally unqualified for his role as facilitator, but for him to have a breakdown at the end seemed like far too obvious an end point. The idea that he had long ago already lost his grip on reality seemed the best way to complete the character. This decision had implications however. Some major changes to his backstory had to be undertaken in order to facilitate this new revelation.

Although not new knowledge per se, this does support the reasons why Leigh leaves backstory/character development open until the very last stages of his process. By cementing a character and their backstory too early, there are inherent limitations imposed later on in the process. This demonstrates that the fluidity and uncertainty which is prevalent when working with improvisation requires a similarly open approach to key elements such as character, in order for the process to work.

Further Reflections on the process

In further reflection (continuing from the above) on the OEP process, I can say with certainty that Mike Leigh's improvisatory process, specifically the early character work, lends itself very well to working entirely online. I can also say with some certainty that my adapted method does not work well for monologue writing. I can also confirm that the use of improvisation does lend itself to online working, with some practical exceptions for example, quick fire dialogue is not a possibility when working in a group online, and I found no way of rectifying this in improvisations.

Recommendations for future projects and rationale

In terms of recommendations for the future, elements of my adapted approach could be utilised by other practitioners, in terms of the character questions I developed and the Road Testing phone calls. Also, as noted, the opportunity to collapse distances by working with my approach entirely online offers a practical and financially viable method of gathering performers together. It may be that people do not wish to work remotely, if they don't have to, but what this research offers is a way to do so, if working online is considered a viable or preferable option.

There is the opportunity to build on my research, certainly in terms of any investigation into the finer details of Leigh's approach. Where I was unable to offer detailed information in terms of exactly how Leigh works, I would like to think that other researchers could use my research as a jumping off point for such an enquiry. I have offered a speculative account regarding how and when Leigh is able to develop relationships between characters that have been constructed in isolation and this could offer some options for workshops to explore.

I would recommend that any practitioner to work along these lines assign a more extensive amount of time to their practical research project than I did. As noted, the OEP was supposed to be a trial run, and the timescale reflected this. To work with Leigh's approach means the timescale should be similar to that which Leigh employs. On many occasions I was forced to make decisions based on time management rather than, creative choices. Although this occasionally paid off, I would have preferred to

make choices that furthered the work and delivered insights into the creative process, rather than just to save time and keep to the schedule.

The use of improvisation in a writing process is not new, but the protracted use of improvisation and the use of Leigh's improvisatory approach is rare. Where my research furthers the use of improvisation was to see if improvisation could be conducted online and whether it would work effectively. I would argue that to know it can be done is valuable and to demonstrate it can work very well is also of worth.

That long-form improvisation can work in an environment where the actors are not face-to-face, illustrates the possibilities of the use of improvisation and how, with the correct preparation, it can be applied beyond just the rehearsal room, demonstrating that although some might think improvisation can only work when the actors are in the same room and able to, for example, pick up on subtle cues, my research offers evidence that refutes this. Aside from these insights, my thesis offers an exploration of available technology, its advantages and disadvantages, in a particular context but never set out to 'improve' or 'advance' the comic genre itself.

8:3 Application of my Approach to Monologue Writing

It has become clear that my adapted method, in its entirety, simply does not work for the monologue writing process. Individual elements of the method, however, can be utilised for effective monologue writing. What follows is a discourse around the elements or particular phases of my process that did yield results during the practical

experimentations, but also some explanation around what wasn't effective and why the two forms (monologue writing and ensemble work) are incongruous in relation to the application of my approach. As we shall see, in each case (the process of writing each monologue) certain elements proved effective individually, but the whole approach didn't – it was the *Lester Monologues* which came closest, using several elements of the approach, but the approach as detailed for the Online Ensemble Project wasn't totally applicable. It was revealed that other mechanisms needed to be in place to support the use of each particular element; these mechanisms are also discussed in this chapter.

8:3:1 Character

Once again (as with the previous sections) the foci of character, narrative and text allow the insights gained from the practical experimentation to be presented clearly. What follows are observations related to character.

8:3:2 Character Construction Phase

Character is arguably where elements of my approach were most useful in the monologue writing process. The character construction phase of my approach enabled me to develop effective characters for several of the monologues.

8:3:3 PKYL and Character Questions

The use of the People You Know List (PKYL) was used to identify an original for the *Lester Monologues*. People I had known, or YouTubers that I was familiar with, formed

the basis for several of the characters in the *Logging On* cycle. In response to insights gained during the OEP, originals were chosen from people I knew a little about, but not too much. This allowed room for the fictional backstory to fill in the blanks. The fictional backstory (in the case of *The Lester Monologues* and a few of the *Logging On* monologues) was developed using the character questions created for the OEP. Although the information yielded from the character questions didn't come into play, as it had with the OEP, it was still valuable to follow the character on their life journey and learn more about them, before the actual scriptwriting started. In fact, the character questions, as an individual element, could be utilised by anyone for any writing project and could form the basis for a detailed character study, independent from my approach.

8:4:6 Leigh's Cardinal Rule.

It was discovered that a rigorous adherence to Leigh's cardinal rule was not required during the monologue writing project. In fact, in the case of *The Nandemic*, it proved useful to add supplementary personal experience and information into the character of the narrator. However, in the main, I continued to adhere to Leigh's rule for all the other monologues.

In the case of *The Lester Monologues* all phases of the character construction phase (save Road-Testing) were applied in the monologue writing process with success. Two of the three *Logging On* monologues (*Online* and *Computer Virus*) utilised the character questions and use of the PKYL, but no other elements of my approach were applied. There seemed no need to work on the physicality of the characters as there

was no point where I would actually be playing the roles. Having constructed and developed the characters, I moved on to the narrative stage of my process.

8:4:7 Narrative and Text

The following insights are related to the foci of narrative and text.

8:4:8 Improvisation and the Requirements of the Monologue Genre

It had been hoped that improvisation would feature beyond its use in character development, in the narrative stage of the monologue writing process. However, having identified early on in the *Lester Monologues* that improvisation was difficult to undertake without anyone to respond to, the use of practical improvisation was also identified as being further impeded by the requirements of the monologue form. The monologue is told entirely from a single person's point of view, reporting action and conversations/interactions which severely limits the scope of the story and how it is relayed to the audience.

This then concludes the critical section of the thesis. Presented in the next section is the creative component of the research.

PART 2: CREATIVE COMPONENT

9:0 Scripts

This Creative Component presents the final drafts of the scripts generated during the practical experimentation. *Being Normal*, developed during the OEP, is presented first, the three cycles of monologues follow.

9:1 Online Ensemble Project Script: *BEING NORMAL*

A video of each episode being read by the participants (but not participant C) can be accessed here - EP1, EP2, EP3, EP4, EP5.

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BEING NORMAL

WRITTEN BY

HOUSE OF MISERY PRESENTS

FINAL DRAFT 05/08/21

EPISODE 1/1: WEEK ONE: 'THE FOREST OF CONFUSION'

INT. PARTICIPANTS' HOUSES/ZOOM MEETING. DAY.

FADE IN FROM BLACK:

One by one, the participants' images click up on the screen. First GWYN (*WHOSE EAR AND RIGHT SHOULDER CAN BE SEEN, THIS IS THE CASE FOR THE ENTIRETY OF THIS FIRST EPISODE*), then GULIA and then EDEN.

There is a short pause while this occurs. The participants scrutinise each other.

GWYN: Hello. Is this everybody?

GULIA: Erm. I don't know.

GWYN: How many have we got? I had four confirmations on email. How many of you are there?

EDEN TENTATIVELY RAISES HER HAND, SO TOO DOES GULIA.

GULIA: Erm. Well, there's me and I can see one other person.

GWYN: Can you see me?

GULIA: I can see your ear.

GWYN: I am here. I'm very present.

EDEN: I'm here too. I sent an email.

GWYN: Yes, hello, Eden. We've spoken on email.

EDEN: Yeah.

GWYN: There's nobody here who hasn't turned their camera on, is there? I've had that before.

GULIA: No, just us, I think.

GWYN: And Goolia?

GULIA: 'Juilia'.

GWYN: Hello, Gulia, Eden. It's nice to meet you both.

GULIA: It's nice to meet you too.

GWYN: Welcome to week one, of a five week mental well-being course. I think we'll make a start.

GULIA AND EDEN NOD AND SMILE.

GWYN: (Cont.) A little bit about me. My name's Gwyn Davis, I've been deeply involved in care and mental institutions for about ten years now. I think mental well-being is very important. So, I tell you what we're going to do. We'll go round the virtual room here and introduce ourselves. Why don't we start with you, Eden?

EDEN: (BEAT) Oh, me?

GWYN: Yes, please.

EDEN: Sorry. I thought you said Ian. Erm, hi, I'm Eden Binns.

GULIA REACTS TO THE SURNAME.

EDEN (CONT.) I, erm, manage a small team of people. In a housing association, situation. So I have to be in charge of lots of people's well-being, and I would say I'm quite mentally well, but some of them aren't. So I need to be able to help them, Gwen. Do you know what I mean?

GWYN: Well, it's Gwyn.

EDEN: Gwyn.

GWYN: It's Gwyn.

EDEN: Quinn? Quim?

GWYN: (STRESSING THE WELSH 'KK') Kkgwyn.

EDEN: QQQGwyn.

ALL THREE REPEAT THE THROATY/DUCK SOUND SEVERAL TIMES.

GWYN: Alright, thank you, Ian. Gulia. Why don't you tell us about yourself?

GULIA: Erm. I'm Gulia Lawrence. And I own and run an Italian themed family restaurant, Piatti Miglori. And I'm here because I don't feel like I've ever been (BEAT) accepted, or in place? I'm out of place, I don't fit and this makes me (BEAT) angry, all the time. I may take that out on my staff, a little. And I just want to get to the bottom of it. Nip it in the bud.

GWYN: Well, let me just say. Your deposit's gone through, so there's a place for you here. Self-help is all about helping yourself. We're all here to support each other, in helping yourself, but you've got to do the work. However, there's a dichotomy. Think of life as a buffet. Go to life's buffet and help yourself. You want all meat. Help yourself. You want chips and four puddings, help yourself. You want lasagne, Gulia, and a bit of Thai on the same plate. What you gonna do?

GULIA: Erm. Help myself?

GWYN: That's the ticket, yes. Help yourself. Gorge yourself on the buffet of life. (BEAT) So, how we all feeling, so far?

EDEN: Hungry. I've not had me tea yet.

GWYN: Great. So, what I'm feeling from the room, is stress. There's lots of stress in here. So, we're going to start off today with a little mindfulness exercise. It's about being present and finding yourself. You can't help yourself, if you don't know where you are. So clear your mind.

GWYN, GULIA AND EDEN TAKE A MOMENT TO COMPOSE THEMSELVES.

GWYN: Clear your mind. If you have a thought, don't. Don't have that thought. You're going to picture your thoughts on a stream. Any time one comes into your mind… Give me an example? What kind of thoughts might you be having now? Anyone in the room.

EDEN: A stream.

GULIA: What's going on at work right now.

GWYN: Eden, you're a little more on message. So, Gulia, try to be more like Eden. She's thinking about streams, that's what you want to be thinking about.

GULIA: (IN DISBELIEF) Streams?

EDEN: Streams.

GWYN: Streams. Any thoughts you have. Pop it on a leaf. And watch it float away. Watch it float away, down that stream. Are you watching it, Gulia?

GULIA: (MYSTIFIED) Yeah.

EDEN: What I do, right? Is I visualise the problem and then this giant fish just gets it.

EDEN MIMES A FISH'S JAWS GRABBING THE PROBLEM

EDEN: (CONT.) It just gets it and pulls it under the water.

GWYN: Right, that's very good. Very good. What do you imagine, Gulia?

GULIA: I imagine that… That I'm being pulled under the water.

GWYN: (UNDER BREATH) Jesus Christ. Okay, that's what we're here for. Why don't we start with a description, of our stress? So we can visualise it, grasp it and just, throw it away. Why don't you tell me what your stress looks like?

(BEAT)

GULIA: Who?

GWYN: Well, you can start.

GULIA: (STAMMERING) Like… A… Big ball of flaming… metal? And it's just huge and tight.

GWYN: A big, tight, flaming ball of metal. Okay. And Eden, what should Gulia do with that big, tight, ball of flaming metal?

EDEN: Just swallow it, mate. Swallow it down. Spit on it. Spit those flames out, sit on it and then swallow it.

GWYN: Okay, yeah. Spit on it, sit on it, swallow it. That's good. Very good.

GULIA: I, erm, don't feel like I have enough spit.

GWYN: Don't worry about that. We've got enough spit between the three of us.

GULIA: I'll be honest. I'm a little out of my depth here. I'm finding this really hard. This is really uncomfortable for me.

GWYN: It's often the case that the road to recovery is filled with potholes and uncomfortable. But your journey has begun, you've started down that road. Okay?

GULIA: Okay.

GWYN: Okay. So let's look at what it is about our work that causes this stress. Eden, have you got any thoughts on this?

EDEN: Well, it's people, innit? Get rid of the people, get rid of the stress. The way I see, right? Is, the corporation is this big snake, with sharp teeth. And within that snake is another snake, and another, until it comes to me and I'm just like this

little, tiny snake, trying to taste me way around. Do you know what I mean?

GWYN: I do, I do. This is an issue very close to my own heart. So, I'm going to give you a technique to use. Next time you come face to face, with that snake of stress, I want you to visualise a triumphant mongoose of relaxation.

EDEN: Hmmmm

GWYN: You be the mongoose of relaxation and you ATTACK. And often, you find, that'll take a snake.

GULIA: I'm sorry. I've absolutely no idea what you two are talking about. Snakes in snakes and mongooses of whatever. I'm sorry, it all sounds ridiculous.

EDEN: It's just like your big ball of flames, Gulia. It's how you visualise it, intit? There's no actual snakes, Gulia. I don't work at a zoo. It's not real.

GULIA: Yes, I realise that. But what my ball was, was a metaphor. I'm sorry, I'm just not getting it. This is completely alien to me. I just don't get the mongoose thing.

GWYN: Don't worry, Gulia. You're new to this. What we've got here is advanced level stuff.

GULIA: I'm sorry, Gwyn. But I'm finding it hard to believe that this is next level stuff.

GWYN: This is real stage three stuff, that me and Eden are talking about here. But we're gonna walk you through it, okay?

GULIA: Yeah. I'm a bit lost. I'm in the forest of confusion right now.

EDEN: See, now she's getting it. Now, she's getting it.

GULIA: (GETTING ANGRY) There's streams and snakes and mongooses and we're sitting on fire. I mean what are we talking about here? What does the mongoose represent?

GWYN: Okay, let me clear this up. It sounds like you're lost in the forest of confusion, okay? Am I hearing that right?

GULIA: Yeah.

GWYN'S SHOULDERS REVEAL HIS EXCITEMENT.

GWYN: (EMPHATIC) Eden, get the axe of clarity. Hand it to her.

EDEN: (EXCITED) She needs the scythe of clarity.

GWYN: You need the scythe of clarity. That's very good.

EDEN: Yeah, it's what you need. And you need to take that and just hack away at that confusion.

GWYN: (MIMING CHOPPING) Piece by piece, let some light in.

EDEN: (MIMING) Branch by branch. Take it leaf by leaf, if you need to.

GULIA: Right. Yeah. (SARCASTIC) Like the banana of hope.

GWYN: (IMPRESSED) Like the banana of hope. You have done this before.

EDEN: Genius. This is beautiful stuff. Suck on that banana.

GULIA: Why am I spitting on balls and sucking bananas?

GWYN: It'll make you feel better.

GULIA: This had better be a fucking good banana!

EDEN: Take Gwen's banana, take it deep.

GULIA: Can I bite?

GWYN: Not on the first try. That comes later. (BEAT) Right, this is a good start.

GULIA: (LAUGHING NERVOUSLY IN DISBELIEF) This is not worth a hundred and fifty pounds.

GWYN: That's just the deposit. If you want to do all five weeks of this course it's /er…

GULIA: (LAUGHING) /I'm not coming back.

EDEN: Gulia, you need to be open. You need to be more open.

GULIA: I have never been more open in my life. And I have never regretted opening up so much. I can't believe I've told you stuff. I'm furious. But you have to laugh, right? Or you'll die!

GWYN: Alright, let's go round the room and say a little bit about how we're going to take what we've learnt into our future? Let's start with you, Eden.

EDEN: Well, just from the short session we've had here. I think I will try to embrace things with a more open outlook. And visualisation techniques that work.

GWYN: They do work. They do work. That's very good, very good. Gulia, yourself?

GULIA: I don't think I'll take anything from this session. Except don't sign up to stupid courses run by charlatans.

GWYN: Brilliant. Okay, well, that wraps today's session up. I hope to see you both same time next week. I'll email the links. Thank you everybody. Stay well and remember to help yourself to life.

One by one the participants' windows click off.

CUT TO BLACK:

EPISODE 2/1 WEEK 2: 'VERY MOO-VING'

INT. PARTICIPANTS' HOUSES/ZOOM MEETING. DAY.

FADE IN FROM BLACK:

EDEN and GULIA log onto the meeting. Gwyn is nowhere to be seen.

EDEN: Is it just you, Gulia, love?

GULIA: Erm. Yeah. It would appear so.

EDEN: I can't see Gwen. (SHOUTS) Gwen?

GULIA: I don't think he's here yet.

GULIA: I don't think he's logged on. (BEAT) How are you?

EDEN: I'm alright, love. How are you?

GULIA: Yeah. I'm okay. (BEAT) I'm not too bad. How's your week been?

EDEN: Oh ye know? All these Zoom meetings, it's just straight to business, there's no chatting before the meeting. You know? Like you used to do. I used to love a good chinwag before a meeting. Now there's nothing.

GULIA: Yeah, it's difficult with us too. Everyone has to book. I'm in Brighton and we rely on a lot of tourists, so, well, we're not busy, that's for sure.

EDEN: You should do deliveries like with that Justine.

GULIA: Justine? Who's Justine.

EDEN: Ye know. (SINGS) Did somebody say Justine.

GULIA: Oh, Just Eat. Yes, we're doing that, but we're a bit high end for most of the locals.

EDEN: Yeah. I can imagine. I wonder where Gwen is.

GULIA: It's a bit weird. I mean, normally he's the first here, right?

EDEN: Well, yeah. I don't know how we got into the meeting without him. Maybe he's been caught short, or something.

GULIA: (CHUCKLING NERVOUSLY) Yeah, good point.

EDEN: He must be having internet issues.

GULIA: It's a common problem.

EDEN: Hmm. So how come you came back?

GULIA: Well, I don't really open up. I think I have a fear of being emotionally honest. I did it once and it didn't work out. But, I don't know, after thinking about last week, something kind of clicked, you know? I felt like…

EDEN: Ooop, something's happening.

GULIA: Exactly.

EDEN: No, sorry, Gulia. Something's happening on the screen. I think it's Gwen.

GWYN'S PICTURE POPS UP ON THE SCREEN. THIS TIME WE CAN SEE HIM PROPERLY.

EDEN/GULIA: Oh, hi, Gwyn.

GWYN: Hello everybody, sorry I'm a bit late. Technical issues. Oh, hello, Gulia. It's great to see you back. We weren't sure we'd see you again.

GULIA: Yeah, well. I was just telling Eden. I've had some time to think this week and implement some of your training, and it's really helped, actually.

GWYN: Of course it has. Positive thinking, that's very good.

EDEN: One week and she's a legend, already.

GWYN: (ASIDE) Sometimes that's all it takes. (CHANGING) Anyway, we're all here now, I think. So I expect we'll dive right in then.

EDEN: I love diving.

GWYN: We've not got a lot of time this week, but we have got quite a lot planned. So you'll all need to get comfy, because today's session is going to go pretty deep. Alright?

EDEN: Oh, I do like it deep.

GWYN: I thought you might. The first thing I want to talk about tonight, today. I don't know what time it is where you are. I want you to think back to a time when you lost total control. A time when you've totally lost it at someone. Take a minute to think about it now, and then we're going to do a bit of role playing.

EDEN: Love it.

GWYN: Eden, you look confident. You look like you want to say something.

EDEN: No, I'm just saying, I love a bit of role play.

GWYN: We're going to try and satisfy that now. Have either of you got an example?

GULIA: Erm. Yeah. I kind of lost my shit at a customer. Where I work, erm. It was pretty embarrassing.

GWYN: Well, if you're comfortable? Why don't you talk us through it and then we'll do a role play scenario. Where you can vent your frustrations and one of us will be them.

GULIA: Okay. Well. As you know I run an Italian restaurant. It's been in the family for years. And we pride ourselves on the authenticity of the food. And someone asked for some mayonnaise to go on their garlic bread. Which is a disgrace. So I got quite irate and then it became a battle of wills between me and the customer. I wanted to punch her in the tits. I was really mad.

GWYN: Well, this sounds like a good one for our purposes. I'll tell you what we'll do. Why don't I be the customer? Gulia, you be you. But who'll be me? Eden, you'll have to be me, and you mediate it.

EDEN: Okay, love. Is there a safe word?

GWYN: What do you mean?

EDEN: Whenever I do a bit of role play, we have a safe word, in case it goes too far, you know?

GWYN: (BEAT) I think you'll just have to judge it.

EDEN: Fair enough.

GWYN: Okay, Gulia. Are you ready?

GULIA: I, guess.

GWYN: That's the spirit. Okay. Give me a minute to get into character. (COMPOSING HIMSELF) Garlic bread. Mayonnaise. (IN CHARACTER) Excuse me, miss.

GULIA: Hi. How can I help?

GWYN: Listen. You've given us some garlic bread here, but there's no mayonnaise.

GULIA: It doesn't come with mayonnaise.

GWYN: No mayonnaise? What type of place are you running here?

GULIA: I'm running an authentic Italian restaurant, where garlic bread doesn't come with mayonnaise. Just the bread. You are not having mayonnaise. That is sour dough, fresh as fuck bread.

GWYN: Now look here. I've never been so insulted. I'm a paying /customer.

GULIA: /I don't give a shit. You don't come into a restaurant like this and demand mayonnaise. What's next? Perhaps you'd like a dollop of HP for your arrabiata? Or custard on your fucking pizza?

GWYN: Custard pizza, my arse. I want fucking mayonnaise on me garlic bread. Now go and get some, or I'll come back and I'll burn this place down to the ground.

GULIA: Burn it down. You'd be doing me a favour. Maniac.

EDEN: (WELSH ACCENT) I feel this is going very well.

GULIA: I'm sorry. I feel really wound up now. That was quite difficult. Fucking garlic bread with mayonnaise. Jesus Christ!

GWYN: Right, let's do a quick swap around. See if you can benefit from the shoe being on the other foot, as it were. Eden, you be Gulia, I'll be me again and Gulia, why don't you be the customer?

GULIA: Erm. Okay. Okay.

GULIA: (CHAV VOICE) Excuse me.

EDEN: (GULIA'S VOICE) Yes.

GULIA: I've got some garlic bread, but I want some mayonnaise with it.

EDEN: Sorry, darling. We don't do mayonnaise here. That's just facking sacrilege.

GULIA: But I want mayonnaise with me garlic bread.

EDEN: Well, you're not getting it. You're not having it. You silly bitch. Now fuck off to a kebab shop, you chav.

GULIA: Exactly, right?

GWYN: Alright, everybody breathe. Everybody breathe. Now, how did it feel to be on the receiving end of your anger, Gulia? Did it help?

GULIA: No, not really. I just feel more angry. Do you get me though? Am I a just a bitch? I know I'm a bitch. But do you think I'm a bitch?

GWYN: I don't know. I'm allergic to bread.

EDEN: I love mayonnaise with garlic bread.

GULIA: Are you joking?

GWYN: Well, it's clearly a hot topic, but let's stay focussed. So, let's move on. Eden, have you got a scenario for us?

EDEN: There is this person at work, and, we just don't get on. And I have to manage him. And you know when you just don't get on. Do you know what I mean?

GWYN: I know exactly what you mean.

EDEN: They just grind ye in the wrong way. You know? And he's been grinding me a lot, this week.

GWYN: Has he?

EDEN: He has. He's hard. He's hard, ye know? And sometimes it's too much. But you've to be careful, he's me underer, you see.

GWYN: He's under you, is he?

EDEN: He's trying to get my job, if you ask me. Do you know what I mean? So he's grinding me into oblivion.

GWYN: And how are you… How are you taking that?

EDEN: I'm taking it very hard.

GWYN: Well, this is a safe space for you to say how you feel.

EDEN: What happened was, this guy at work, proper knobhead. And he keeps coming to me station. He just keeps coming and taking me stuff. (GETTING ANGRY) I just don't like people touching my things! Do you know what I mean?

GWYN: Well, let's not over-analyse it straight away. Let's role play it out, a bit.

EDEN: Alright. So someone's going to be Paulo, touching my things?

GWYN: Paulo, is it?

EDEN: Yeah.

GWYN: Alright. I'll be Paulo. Erm. Who's going to be Eden? Oh, well. Eden, you can be Eden. That makes sense. Gulia, you'll have to be Gwyn. Then, what we're going to do. Gulia, we're going to have a confrontation. Right? Then if you could guide us through, to empathise with each other.

GULIA: Okay.

GWYN: We need to get on-board with each other. So, if you could mediate us through to that.

GULIA: Okay.

GWYN: Right. This Paulo. What's he sound like? Eden?

EDEN: Well, he sounds Italian, dun't he?

GWYN: Oh, shit. He's not Welsh?

EDEN: Eh? Who?

GWYN: This Paulo. He's not Welsh?

EDEN: No. I don't think so. He talks Italian, then drops into being dead Northern. So, he'll say (BEAT) Ehup. (ITALIAN ACCENT) Friends.

GWYN: (NORTHERN ACCENT) Ehup. Just give me a minute to get into the Italian accent, then we'll start our confrontation. Alright? Okay? I've got a couple of phrases, to get me going. (ROPEY ITALIAN ACCENT) Lamborghini, Spaghetti…

GULIA: This is so offensive.

GWYN: Okay. Let's go.

EDEN: Sorry, Gwyn, just as a note. I had this friend once, who, erm. To get her into accents, she would moo. In the accent. So, like you would go (NI ACCENT) moo. Then she'd be doing Irish.

GULIA: (IMPRESSED) Ahhh. I'm not very good at doing Welsh, I'm afraid. So, please don't be offended, Gwyn. By what I produce. But I'm going to give it a go.

GWYN: That's fine. Let's give it a go. Moo, you say?

EDEN: Moo.

GWYN: Moo. (DODGY ACCENT) Hello, Eden. I've come to take some of your pens and pencils.

EDEN: Moo. (SHOUTING) Why, Paulo?!

GWYN: Moo. I need them, to write with.

EDEN: Moo. What you putting your mucky paws on everything for?

GWYN: Moo. Sorry, Eden.

EDEN: Moo. Sorry isn't good enough. But it's not all about pens, is it? You keep putting your rubbish in my bin. As if the touching isn't enough. Why put your rubbish in my bin? Now everyone thinks I eat six chocolate bars a day, I only have five. Put your own rubbish in your own bin.

GWYN: Moo. Have you ever considered why I keep coming over, taking your stationery and putting my rubbish in your bin? Maybe I'm trying to get close to you, Eden.

EDEN: I don't want to get close to you, Paulo. Ye stink! I don't want ye near me, sunshine.

GWYN: Moo. Is there any chance that, if I buy some deodorant, get my own stapler and stop using your bin… Is there any chance of us getting together?

EDEN: Not a chance. I don't like your face.

GULIA: (DREADFUL WELSH ACCENT) Moo. Ooww, Eden. Calm it down there, laddie.

GWYN: (OWN VOICE) Eh, that's good.

GULIA: Moo. Why don't we start putting ourselves in each other's shoes? And see how it would feel if it was the other way around?

GWYN: Moo. Yes, Eden, give me your shoes. I will touch them.

GULIA: Moo. Go on, Eden. Give Paulo your shoes.

EDEN: You want me shoes? I'll give ye me fucking shoes, mate. Right round your face!

GWYN: Moo. No, you misunderstand. Give me your shoes, so I can walk one mile.

EDEN: (CALMING HERSELF DOWN) Okay. You want my actual, physical shoes?

GULIA: Moo. No, no, no, no. Your metaphorical shoes. (MIMING) So he can walk in your shoes. Come on now.

GWYN: I'll tell you what, why don't we swap it around, quickly. Eden, you be Paulo, I'll be me, and Gulia, you can be Eden.

GULIA: Okay. That's better. Moo.

GWYN: Okay, Paulo, Eden. I want you to tell each other one thing you do like about each other.

EDEN: Okay. Who am I again?

GWYN: You're Paulo.

EDEN: Okay. (GOING FROM ITALIAN TO NORTHERN) Hello, Eden. I really like your shoes.

GULIA: (MIMICKING EDEN) Thank you. I really like your… Tie.

EDEN: (OWN VOICE) Well, I like it when you're off ill. How do you like that?

GULIA: You're Paulo talking to Eden, by the way.

EDEN: I know.

GULIA: Do you think Paulo likes it when you're off work? Or do you think he likes it because you're there?

EDEN: I'm confused.

GWYN: Now, Gulia's hit upon something there, which I was trying to hint at during my portrayal. That's very perceptive that, Gulia. Very good. Very good. A lot of your complaints, Eden,

about this Paulo chap, are that he keeps hanging around you. I think maybe there might be a little bit of a spark there.

EDEN: (DISGUSTED) Oh, no.

GWYN: (TILTING HIS HEAD) Umm? Umm?

EDEN: (PULLING BACK IN HER CHAIR) I'm not sure I can retract any further.

GULIA: I think it sounds like he likes you and that's why he hangs /around you all the time.

EDEN: / Oh, you're all liars. I can't. Just change the subject. (GETTING EMOTIONAL) I've had enough, or I'm going.

GWYN: Alright.

GULIA: Aww. I didn't mean to upset you, Eden. Please don't cry.

EDEN: (CLEARLY CRYING) I'm not crying. I'm alright.

GWYN: Okay. Listen. I think that's as much progress as we can make today. You both look like you're feeling a lot better. Okay, I'm going to give you a bit of homework. Eden, I want you to say something nice to this Paulo feller. And Gulia, you're going to try mayonnaise with garlic bread.

GULIA: Oh, fucking hell.

GWYN: So, both of you have a great weekend.

GULIA: Thanks, Gwyn.

EDEN: (STILL CROAKY) Thanks, Gwyn.

GWYN: That's alright. A pleasure as always.

FADE TO BLACK:

EPISODE 3/1 WEEK 3: 'A MAN-SHAPED RECEPTACLE'

INT. PARTICIPANTS' HOUSES/ZOOM MEETING. DAY.

FADE IN FROM BLACK:

ALL PARTICIPANTS ARE ONSCREEN. THE MEETING IS ABOUT TO BEGIN.

GWYN: Hello.

EDEN/GULIA: Hello.

GWYN: Oh, hello. It's nice to see you all. How are we?

GULIA: I'm good, thank you.

EDEN: Yeah. I'm alright, thank you.

GWYN: Well. Welcome. How's everyone feeling today?

GULIA: Erm. Stressed.

GWYN: Stressed, Okay. Okay. Well, we can deal with that. That's what we, I'm, here for. Eden. How are you?

EDEN: I'm alright, love. Yeah. I'm a bit tired. I've been out int sun all day. Sunning me bits, you know?

GWYN: You look very well for it.

EDEN: Thanks, mate.

GWYN: Listen. As glad as I am that you're doing well, Eden. Gulia… I'm quite glad you're feeling stressed. Because that's going to feed nicely into what I want to do this week.

GULIA: Oh. Okay.

GWYN: So, if you think you can handle it, we're going to dig deep into some of that stress this week.

GULAI: (APPREHENSIVE) Okay. Right.

GWYN: Is that going to work for you, Eden?

EDEN: (BEAT) Me? Oh, yes. I can't wait.

GWYN: How long did you spend in the sun today, Eden?

EDEN: Well, I might have had one or two wines, you know?

GWYN DOES HIS FINGER TIC

GWYN: (TITTERS) Fantastic. That'll help with the stress.

EDEN: Yep.

GWYN: We're going to try something a little different this week. Okay?

GULIA: I'll give it a go. Like every week, I'll give it a go.

GWYN: Okay. Let's start with you telling me a little bit about your stress. What's been getting at you this week?

GULIA: It's the same stuff. For the last fifteen years. I just hate my day-to-day life, which is no life at all. I'm getting pissed off with the people I have to be around, on a regular basis. And then there's just general strangers, who drain the life out of you. And it's getting to the point now, where I don't even know who I am anymore, or even if I ever did know.

GWYN: That sounds like some powerful stuff. There. There's clearly a lot of stress happening. Thank you for sharing. Eden, I'd like you to share a little bit about your stress, as well.

EDEN: Well. I feel like it's just. I mean, I know I say, I'm alright, but it's just what you say. Intit? You don't feel like

anyone wants to hear you. Like if someone asks if you're alright. You just say, 'yeah, I'm alright'. Don't ye? Do you know what I mean? They don't really want to know. When someone asks how you are. You don't tell them how you really feel. Do you?

GULIA AND GWYN SHAKE THEIR HEADS.

GWYN: No. You're absolutely right.

EDEN: So, I feel like I just keep it all in. This side of me you see here, isn't how I am at work. At work, I'm horrible. You don't think I'm horrible here, do ye?

GULIA/GWYN: No.

EDEN: Well, I'm not nice at work. I'm stressed all the time and it's just got to the point where it's just a part of me. It's just become who I am. I don't want it to be who I am. Bit like what you were saying, Gulia.

GULIA: Yeah. That does sound familiar.

GWYN: Listen. Thanks for sharing that, Eden. What you've both said, is going to be a lot of use, this session. Because what we're going to do today. I'm going to be that stress. I'm going to be that focus point of rage. And you are going to have the opportunity to tell me, your stress, how you feel. Okay? We're going to let it all out. And I'm going to take it all in. Alright?

EDEN: You're going to take it all, are ye?

GULIA: I was going to say. Are you sure? I mean, you might die.

GWYN: I'm a tough Welshman. (BEAT) But not today. Today, I am your stress. It's what's called catharsis.

EDEN: Like when you get a cold?

GWYN: No, I think that's catarrh.

EDEN: What's that? Welsh?

GWYN: No, no. cau'r drws! Let's try and stay focussed, shall we? Eden, I want you to go first. Sounds like you're on the brink of a breakthrough. So look at me. Eden, look at me. I am what's bothering you.

EDEN: You are what's bothering me.

GWYN: Me. I'm your stress. And I want to hear what you feel about that.

EDEN: Can you just walk me through it a little bit?

GWYN: Yes, of course. Maybe I wasn't being clear. Every time you've stubbed your toe. Every package you've missed. Every time Paulo has stolen your pens. I will be the embodiment of your rage, stress and worry. A man-shaped receptacle, fill me up. But address me as Eden's stress, not Gwyn. Okay?

EDEN: Okay. Gwyn, stress. My stress. Every time I look at you, I feel enraged. Sick. But I know that without you, Gwyn. Stress, sorry. There would be no relief. I know I need you to give me balance, that there is no calmness and relief without stress and anger. I embrace you, anger and stress, you are part of me… (BREAKS OFF) I'm sorry, Gwen, it's just not coming, I'm emotionally constipated I think. I can't get it out. Do you know what I mean?

GWYN: Listen. I do understand. I think you might be saying what you think I want to hear, using self-help parlance, rather than saying how you really feel.

EDEN: Sorry, Gwen. I just worry that if I open the flood gates, they're not going to shut. Like a night on the beer. Do you know what I mean? When it comes out like hot soup.

GWYN: This is your chance, with us here, to let it all out. Flood the place.

EDEN: I just don't think I'm ready. Maybe Gulia should, erm, should take the reins on this. It's been one of those days. I'm sorry.

GWYN: That's okay. You can offer us just as much, by being here and being that support. We're here to support each other. So

maybe, maybe, when Gulia's giving it to her stress, you'll find a way to jump in.

EDEN: Alright.

GWYN: Gulia.

GULIA: Hmmm.

GWYN: Gwyn's not here. Just every slight upon you. That's been passed.

GULIA: (TENTATIVE) Okay. My stress. (BEAT) You fucking gastropod. (BEAT) You make me sick. I hate you. I hate the way you make me feel. The way you're always lurking there like a… Toad. I hate everything about you. You shit. I hate listening to you, you Welsh prick.

EDEN: Has anyone ever told you, you look like a shit Bradley Cooper from *A Star is Born*?

GULIA: I want to just gouge your eyes out and stamp on them. I'm going to rip your dick off and shove it up your arse, then take it out and burn it. Then put the ashes in water and make you drink it, but you won't be able to piss, because you have no knob. Vaffanculo. You, Welsh Rarebit eating…

EDEN: Hi De Hi-watching…

GULIA: Tom Jones

EDEN: Mother Fucker!

GULIA: (RISING TO A CRESCENDO) I'm sick of being talked to like shit, every day. I just want everybody to FUCKING DIE!

LONG PAUSE AS EVERYBODY CALMS DOWN, GWYN IS VISIBLY UPSET.

GULIA: (CONT.) Was that what you wanted?

GWYN: (HOLDING BACK THE TEARS) That's very good. Yeah.

GULIA: Yeah?

GWYN: Very powerful stuff.

GULIA: Sorry about that.

GWYN: No, that's very good. Some very comprehensive insults there.

EDEN: Too specific?

GWYN: Some of them, yeah. (PAUSE) Anyway, powerful stuff this week, guys. (VOICE GOES HIGH PITCHED WITH EMOTION) Next week, eh? (WAVES).

CUT TO BLACK:

EPISODE 4/1 <u>WEEK 4: 'FEELING ANIMALS'</u>

INT. PARTICIPANTS' HOUSES/ZOOM MEETING. DAY.

FADE IN FROM BLACK:

GWYN'S AND EDEN'S PICTURES COME ONSCREEN.

EDEN: Hiya, Gwyn.

GWYN: Hello, Eden. How are you?

EDEN: Oh well, ye know. Not bad.

GULIA JOINS

GWYN/EDEN: Hello.

GULIA: Hello.

GWYN: How are we?

GULIA: Good, thank you. Are you okay?

GWYN: Good, very good. Nothing gets me down. Nothing I can't deal with anyway.

GULIA: I must admit I been thinking a lot about last week, and I just wanted to apologise. It was an accumulation of a lot of different stuff, and well, you asked for it.

GWYN: Don't worry, it wasn't what I was expecting, but it was definitely what we were all hoping for. For you, and Eden, to have that release. Okay? Both of you did very well. And actually, that's brought me on to what I want us to do today. This week. Okay? Something I've been doing a lot this week. I've been focussing on mindfulness. Focusing on, how to conquer the bad thoughts, okay? Are you aware of any of these techniques?

EDEN: Just lock em away. Stuff em in there. Is that the kind of thing you mean, yeah?

GWYN: Well, that's an unconventional approach.

EDEN: Oh yeah. Anything, just lock it away. Don't ever even think about it again. There in a box, in a room, in a mind palace. Like Sherlock, only really fucking dark.

GWYN: Ah, the memory palace. I'm aware of that.

GULIA: Are these, what? Thoughts, or memories, or what?

EDEN: All of it, love.

GULIA: All of it.

GWYN: So you put them in a box and then you put that box in a palace?

EDEN: In a room, behind a locked door. In the mind palace. (BEAT) It's a creepy cottage in the woods, if I'm honest, but mind palace sounds better. Dun't it?

GWYN: Your mind palace, is a mind cottage?

EDEN: It's not a mining cottage, we're not in Wales. Well, you are. (BEAT) It's just a creepy cottage. I mean I like it there if I'm honest. There's a babbling brook, and on a nice day. I'll not get lost in thought, but, it's alright down there, you know? You can hear the thoughts screaming to get out, (SHRILL VOICE) 'think about me. Aaagghh'. But ye don't. Don't let them out.

GWYN: And you just keep pushing them further back, do you?

EDEN: Yeah. I mean, it's getting pretty packed in there if I'm honest. It's pretty backed up, to be fair. But that's the healthy way to deal with them, intit? That's what you were saying.

GWYN: Well, it's good to have a tactic, I suppose. Albeit an obviously misguided and clearly insane one. Gulia, have you got something like this?

GULIA: Erm. This all sounds a bit counterproductive. In the way that… Isn't there a chance of them exploding out, maybe? I mean I went apeshit last week, because I was provoked. And that's probably because it had all been locked in there for some time. Do you know what I mean? Is it the best way, to bury them? Or…

EDEN: No, they're not buried. They're only loosely locked up. And there's every chance they're going to get out, but erm,

GULIA: Oh, okay?

EDEN: It's just one of them chain locks. You know, like on a council house door? So they can reach their arms through, but they can't get fully out. Or a foot, or a nose, or a cheek. But they can't get fully out.

GULIA: How long have you been putting these feelings in these boxes, in the cottage, with a shitty lock?

EDEN: Well, I just thought it was what everyone did. Some of them are alright, so you let them out. Like, to pasture. They have a little run around the field in the day-time. Usually when you're at work. Maybe Gwyn's got some better ideas.

GWYN: Well, as much I like the idea of a grazing field for your inner demons, we're going to try something a little different today. Okay? If you're all on board, what we're going to learn about today, they call this mindfulness. Right? We are going to share some personal things, we're going to share some details. Not your bank details, or anything like that (LAUGHS).

EDEN AND GULIA LAUGH NERVOUSLY.

GWYN: (CONT.) We're going to look at language. Wittgenstein said, "The limits of my language mean the limits to my world." I'm not sure what he's on about, but there's some key words. We're going to think about limits and we're going to think about language. Sometimes it's hard to put how you feel into words. So, we're going to find different ways of articulating how you feel and build up from there. I want you to name an animal that best describes how you're feeling now. Okay? I'll go first. I'm feeling like a llama, today. I'm feeling droopy, I'm feeling enclosed, with a very long neck. Alright? Gulia. Do you wanna go next?

GULIA: Erm. I feel. Like. A. Hybrid Sloth-Hyena. That's the best way I can describe how I'm feeling right now.

GWYN: That's some genetically spliced feeling animal there.

GULIA: Yeah. I just want to hang around in a tree all fucking day, but I'm also ready to rip someone apart, whilst laughing maniacally.

GWYN: Terrifying. Eden. How's your animal looking?

EDEN: Well, I think the best way to describe it, would be… You know that star-nosed mole? (MIMES). Do you know what I mean? Now it's got a lot going on here. Have you sin him?

GULIA: Yeah. He's weird.

EDEN: Yeah. He's an ugly fucker. But it does what it needs to. And it buries deep. Goes deep. And he's velvety.

GWYN: That's very good. A lot of complex, intricate thoughts and structures there. So, that's one way we can get a handle on our feelings. That's a way of visualising them. We can see them there, clearly. But how can we hear our feelings? How can we give the image sound? Okay? So, what we're going to try, is.

We're going to make the noise that your feelings are. Okay? It could be a low grumble, it could be a high-pitched squeal, or it could be one of those springy noises, like on a door - Doooiinnggg. It's up to you. Would anybody like to go first?

EDEN: Are we doing it separately, or all together, like a primal… No?

GULIA: Yeah. Could we have an example of what kind of thing?

GWYN: Sure. The way I'm feeling this week. I've not had the best week. I've had a lot going through my mind. Just, you know? Thoughts, some people said some things. So, I'd say the sound that most accurately represents how I'm feeling is, erm.

GWYN MAKES A SOUND LIKE A WHALE WITH HEARTBURN.

EDEN: I can feel that.

GWYN: Okay?

GULIA: Yeah. Gwyn, mate, I honestly didn't mean what I said. I'm really sorry. I'm really hurt to hear that it's played on your mind all week. I can't have that on me as well.

EDEN: I'm sorry that I said you looked like Bradley Cooper, Gwyn.

GWYN: Water under the bridge.

GULIA: It doesn't sound like that.

GWYN: Don't worry. It's funny, I've never been called a gastropub before.

GULIA: I think I said gastropod.

EDEN: What's one of them, then?

GULIA: A slug.

GWYN LOOKS HURT.

GWYN: Oh. (BEAT) Well, to be honest. (BEAT). Yes, what you said had an effect. But what all of us say is going to have an effect, over the next week, as we beat this stress together. Okay? This is a team effort, and what you did was right for the team, no matter how much it hurt. (PAUSE)

ALL NOD THEIR HEAD IN THOUGHTFUL AGREEMENT.

GWYN: (CONT.) Eden. Have you got a noise for us?

EDEN: Yeah. I will try to do the noise of the star-nosed mole that is my inner feelings. My portrayal. Okay. Okay.

EDEN MAKES A SOUND LIKE BRIAN BLESSED BEING ELECTROCUTED.

EDEN: (CONT.) I didn't think it would come out like that, if I'm honest.

GWYN: Very stark. Very good. It sounds like your mole is struggling a little.

EDEN: It's the constipation. The emotional constipation. And it's all that burrowing, he does.

GWYN: Well, that's very good. Very powerful. Gulia? Time to give a voice to your emotions.

GULIA TAKES A FEW MOMENTS TO COMPOSE HERSELF.

GULIA MAKES A SOUND LIKE A GREMLIN BEING DROWNED AND THROTTLED.

GULIA: Hmm. That felt good.

GWYN: That's very good. Good stuff.

GULIA: Thanks. It felt good.

GWYN: I'm really glad we were able to give a voice to our feelings there. It gives them character. And if they've got character, they can be beaten down.

EDEN: And should be.

GWYN: And should be. Okay, well, that's all we've got time for this week. So I'll see you next week for our very last session.

EDEN: Gwyn, could I just ask…

GWYN: (RUSHED) No, sorry, Eden. We've run out of time. It'll have to wait till next week.

QUICK CUT TO BLACK:

EPISODE 5/1 <u>WEEK 5: 'PETRICHOR'</u>

INT. PARTICIPANTS' HOUSES/ZOOM MEETING. DAY.

FADE IN FROM BLACK:

EACH PARTICIPANT'S PICTURES COME ONSCREEN.

ALL SEEM UP-BEAT AND ARE SMILING.

GWYN: Ooop, here they are, the most healed people in the room. Hello.

EDEN: Hiya.

GULIA: Hi.

GWYN: It's good to see you all again.

GULIA: It's good to see you guys too.

EDEN: Yeah.

GULIA: How's everyone's week been?

GWYN: Oh, you know? Ups and downs, ups and downs.

GULIA: Ups and downs.

GWYN: You alright there, Eden?

EDEN: Yeah. Are you?

GWYN: I'm very well, thank you. Listen. I'm very excited for today. We've been on a long journey together. Five weeks now, is it?

GULIA: Yep.

GWYN: A lot of work's been done. A lot of progress. How's about we have a little round up. How's your week been?

GULIA: Well, I'm going to go, because I'm, like, really excited. I have, just, I feel good and I don't think I've ever felt good in my life. Really, not really. Recently, and I put this down to you guys, to be honest. I've decided I'm going to sell my restaurant, I'm going to leave. I'm going to do something different. With my life. And I am petrified and excited. I don't know. There's a lot of love here. For you guys, a lot of appreciation. Because I feel like, I don't think I could ever have done that before coming here. It would just have been a dream. So, thanks. I feel really good (TITTERS).

GWYN: Good for you, Gulia.

EDEN: That's amazing, Gulia. What a break-through, eh?

GULIA: I know, right? It's insane. I never thought I'd get to this point, ever.

GWYN: You've been an absolute star, these last few weeks. I'm not surprised you've had a breakthrough.

GULIA: It's all down to you guys, I swear to God. And I really hope we can stay in touch.

GWYN: Diolch yn fawr. That's fantastic. We're very proud of you. Eden. How's your week been?

EDEN: Me?

GWYN: Yeah, you.

EDEN: Well, it's been okay, actually. You know? Because we've gone back into the office now. So, I feel like a huge, big… What's the word. Weight, has been lifted. I mean it's no great breakthrough, like Gulia's. But it's been a relief to get back into the office, because I've just, I'm sick of these Zoom meetings. Not this one, not these ones. I'm just sick of staring at a screen all the time. Sick of looking at all these tiny faces, and then when you see them in real life, they're bloody massive. It's not reflective of the real world, is it? I feel like I've woken up from a year-long bender. Do you know what I mean? I feel tired, like an online hangover. And, I think these bloody Zooms reveal too much about people. This one guy. That bloody Paulo, have I mentioned him? He thought he'd turned his camera off. He only went to the toilet. We all saw it!

GULIA: Oh my God.

EDEN: Honestly. No one needs to see that.

GULIA: Was it a number one, or number two?

EDEN: Well, I saw his bare arse, so. Just dropped his kecks. So, that's how my week's been.

GWYN: That's fantastic. It sounds like you've both had excellent weeks, Paulo's arse notwithstanding. And that couldn't be more fitting, as it leads into our last session today. We've explored our flaws, but we've not looked at our achievements. Too often, it's the case that we hold ourselves to account for our flaws and pass off our successes as blind luck. Something that the universe provided. Don't we? So today, I want us to talk about some of our greatest achievements. So go right ahead, think back. I want to hear about your greatest achievements.

GULIA: I can honestly say that up until now, I don't feel like I've achieved anything. Honestly, recent events have highlighted

to me that I don't have a life outside work. I have no life at all. I've been locked in that place since I was a kid. And talking with you guys has given me the strength to strike out on my own. To build a new life, to build 'A' life. A life full of achievements. I don't quite know what I'm going to do. But I'm quite excited to find out.

GWYN: You've already started achieving. You've achieved truth and freedom.

GULIA: (SMILING AND NODDING) Truth and freedom.

GWYN: Eden. What have you got for us?

EDEN: To be honest, I think my greatest achievement was being in the Lancashire Evening Post in 1992. I grew the biggest turnip in the school. Front page. Front page news that were. 23rd July, 1992. It were this big. I mean I was littler then, so me tiny hands, it could have been even biggerer. It had… What's the word? Girth. It were girthy.

GWYN: A girthy turnip?

EDEN: Exactly, Gwyn. It felt pretty big in me little hands, anyway. It's a right achievement that. I often think about it. Do you remember that turnip, Eden? Yeah, it were great, weren't it?

GWYN: Well, that sounds fantastic. Quite the triumph.

EDEN: Is that the sort of thing you were after?

GWYN: That's the sort of thing, yeah. You've got to think to yourself, Eden. It was you that grew that turnip. Gulia didn't grow that turnip. I didn't grow that turnip. But you *did*, Eden. Take ownership of your turnip, Eden.

EDEN: Thank you, Gwyn.

GWYN: Now, Eden. I want you to think about what changes you can make to your life that will mean even greater achievements moving forward. Like Gulia has this week and you did in 1992.

EDEN: Should I grow another turnip?

GWYN: Well. I think, maybe, you've ticked that box already. Try something new.

EDEN: A pumpkin!

GWYN: Let's move away from the groceries. What changes can you make now?

EDEN: I don't know, Gwyn. I just don't have that sort of confidence. I can't just up and leave, like Gulia. I'm a coward. That's why I bury my problems, rather than face them. I just feel alone in the world, without connection. I feel, Gwyn, like I'm in an emotional lockdown. I just need more time. I think I'll have to sign up for another five weeks.

GULIA: Eden, I understand your reluctance. It's taken me my whole life to make this change. Remember you're in control of your own destiny. There's more on offer at the buffet of life than turnip. Like Gwyn says, help yourself to the buffet of life. I say, 'sure', only bring your own big plate.

EDEN: Thank you Gulia, that was really inspiring. I think the student has become the master there.

GWYN: Your own big plate. I'm so proud.

GULIA: I learnt from the best.

GWYN: I've got to say, that's some level five stuff, coming out there. Hasn't she come along, Eden?

EDEN: Oh. That was moving. You should become a motivational speaker, Gulia.

GULIA: Yeah. Maybe that's what I should be doing.

GWYN: Listen. I'm touched. I'm very moved by that. That's a very special thing that's happened here, over the course of these five weeks. And sometimes five weeks is all it takes. Gulia, I've got to say, you're a new person.

GULIA: I do. I feel reborn. I definitely do, and I owe it all to you guys. I owe it to snakes and rivers. I owe it to sloths, which are also hyenas, moles and llamas.

GWYN: That's like music to my ears. Weird animal music.

GULIA: I've been doing my noise every day. Every time I got triggered, I'd do my noise, dig in deep and there it was. The soul I'd been looking for.

EDEN: Do it for us, Gulia.

GULIA MAKES HER NOISE.

EDEN: That's emotional.

GULIA: I know, right? It's so powerful. So powerful.

GWYN: Well, I don't think there much left for us to do this week. That's as good as it gets. Gulia, I think you've surpassed expectations. Eden, I expect I'll see you next week?

EDEN: You're probably right, to be fair. I'll be back.

GWYN: You always come back.

EDEN: They don't call me Boomerang Binns for nothing.

GWYN: Well done, everybody, thank you so much for your hard work. Sometimes it's quick, sometimes it takes time. But we always get there in the end.

EDEN: We should all make our noise, to end the session.

GULIA: Yes. Yes.

GWYN: That's a bloody good idea. Okay. Three… Two… One…

ALL MAKE THEIR NOISE.

FADE TO BLACK:

5/2 A FEW MINUTES LATER.

INT. GWYN'S ROOM. DAY.

FADE IN FROM BLACK:

WE SEE GWYN ON HIS OWN (HIS CAMERA IS STILL ON). WE HEAR A VOICE OFFSCREEN, BUT DO NOT SEE WHO IS SPEAKING.

NURSE: Gwyn?

GWYN: Yes, Nurse?

NURSE: Come on, time for your medication and then back to the day room.

GWYN: Is it jelly for pudding?

NURSE: It is.

GWYN: Oh, lovely. My favourite.

GWYN EXHIBITS AN EXTREME VERSION OF HIS FINGER TIC, STANDS UP TO REVEAL HE HAS NO TROUSERS ON AND THE CAMERA CLICKS OFF

CUT TO BLACK:

END CREDITS

9:2 Monologue Project Scripts

The monologue scripts that follow are divided into two cycles with a third monologue presented separately from the others.

The first cycle, *The Lester Monologues*, features two scripts. They were developed using my adapted method and involved some improvisation to help to develop the character's voice and physicality. The first monologue in this cycle is a short piece which explored the emerging character. The second monologue, *The Reunion*, has some links to the online world but not to the extent that I can include it within the subsequent online cycle.

The second cycle of monologues, those that are referred to in the thesis as the *Online Monologues*, are entitled *Logging On*. This second cycle contains two scripts: *Online* and *Computer Virus*. As noted in the introduction the third script from this cycle, due to it being less successful, is presented in the appendix.

The third monologue *The Nandemic*, combines elements of the preceding monologue cycles, in that it conforms to the structure and form of a traditional monologue but was written using a more spontaneous approach, which had been trialled in the *Logging On* writing projects.

9:3 *The Lester Monologues*

The Lester Monologues

9:4 *Lester Sees Stars*

A read-through (by myself) of the following script can be accessed here - Lester Sees Stars

Lester Sees Stars

By

David A. Middleton

Did I ever tell you about the time I gave Richard Osman a lift to the railway station?

Well, I'd had a drive into town. I should have shaken mesen earlier, as a rule, as by the time I getten there everywhere were shutting. So, I gets back to me car and I'm driving back, through the one way system, which takes you right round Bill's mother's, and I'm bloody caught short, aren't I?

So, I parked up at a taxi rank outside the polytechnic. Well, it's a university now, but I can't see any difference. Anyroad, I parks up and I shot into the public convenience for a Jimmi. When I comes out, there's this bearded feller, stood there like one of Lewis'. Now it's late on and there's not a soul around, so I sez, I sez to him, 'Ista reet?'. And the gadgee never even gorms me. So I sez again, I sez, 'ista reet?'. He fixes me with a keen gaze, but I can tell he's going through his machinations, trying to decode what I've just said. Eventually, I think the penny drops and he sez, 'Could you take me to the railway station?'.

Well. As I said, there's not a mon around and I don't like to leave a feller adrift, so, as it's on me way, I sez, 'Aye, why not? Hop in'. So this bearded feller picks up his bag and we toddle over to the car. I unlock the car and gets in. Well, bugger me if he didn't get in the back seat! I sez to him, I sez, 'half a minute, Jack. What's caper here? Get int front'. Well, he looks at me in surprise, but fair dos he fires his bag in the back and climbs in the passenger seat.

I introduce mesen, 'I'm Lester', I sez. 'Richard' sez yon mon. It's then that the scales fall from me eyes. I sez, 'you're that Richard Osman, off the telly, aren't ye?'. 'I am', he sez. Well. I remember thinking, ferra feller who's a big noise in small rooms, he's not very chatty. Anyhow, we set off, but he's not for talking. So I asks him, I sez, 'what's that Neil Armstrong really like?', He replies, 'I've no idea, I've never met him.' You bloody liar, I thought, you're on *Pointless* with him. Still, I said nowt, just kept driving.

We drive in silence for a time, he's just staring out the window, looking at the sights. Well, what sights there are. Bloody council has knocked down most of our heritage, but don't get me started on that one! So we're back through town. I have to take a detour, because of the bus and taxi lane 9am to 6pm. I fell foul of that once before. Sixty quid, it's a bloody racket is that.

Anyhow, appen we're sat at the lights just opposite Bus Station, when I sez, 'so, what brings you to these parts?', He replies, 'I was giving a guest lecture at the university', well, I had nothing to add to that conversation, but at least I'd getten him talking.

‘Where you off to next then?’ I asks. ‘Yorkshire’, he replies. ‘Oh wrong side o’ Pennines is that fettler’. I sez. He sez nowt. ‘I’ve getten a joke about Yorkshire. Would you like to hear it?’ I ventures. ‘Yes please’, sez Osman, at least he’s polite, I thought. So I tell him me joke,

There’s a Yorkshire mon and his cat is badly. So he goes to the vet and sez, me cat’s not well, can you do ouwt? The vet sez, Aye, let’s avva look at it, is it a Tom? And Yorkshire mon replies, no it’s here int basket.

I don’t think Osman got it, as he just smiled thinly and nodded. Well that went down like a sack of the proverbial, I thought, but I presses on with the chatter. So I sez, ‘I believe your brother is a musician’, He sez, ‘That’s right, he was in Suede’. ‘Really?’ I sez. ‘I’m not a fan of suede’, ‘no?’ he sez, a bit annoyed, ‘no’, I sez, ‘I find it chafes, no, I prefer cotton or wool’. Richard Osman smirks at this, the way he smirks ont telly.

We’re not too far from the station, and I thinks to mesen, ‘Lester, you’ve got to ask him now, or you’ll never get another chance’. So I sez, ‘Richard… can I call you Richard?’, ‘Yes, you can, Lester’, he sez. ‘Richard, who are these bloody gobbins you ask questions to for *Pointless*?’. Osman looks confused. ‘What do you mean, the contestants?’. ‘No’, I sez, ‘the one hundred people, who have one hundred seconds to answer. I were watching an episode tother day and there were 14 people had heard of an Elephant Hawkmoth and then on another day, there were only 36 people knew who Charles Dickens was. Do you alternate between yer Cambridge pals one day and then the kids at the local primary school, the next? There’s no consistency, it’s as if you just make it up as you go along.’ ‘We just ask people in the street’, sez Osman, ‘Where? On what planet?’ I sez. ‘Well, I don’t personally interview the people’, is all Osman can say. ‘Well, it’s not your fault my-mate’, I sez. ‘We’ll say nay more about it’.

We arrive at the station and I drop him off. He offers me money for the journey, but I don’t take it. He trots off and then comes back to the car. ‘At home, I get it’. ‘Eh?’ I sez. ‘The vet, a Tom, at home’. Yes, well done, Richard, I thinks to mesen. But just as he’s leaving, I feel a little bad, for giving him such a roastin, so I sez, ‘Eh, Rich. I love your *House of Games*, very funny’. He smiles, thanks me and he’s off.

If there were a question on *Pointless*: ‘we gave a hundred people an hundred seconds to name someone they wouldn’t give a lift to’, then Richard Osman wouldn’t be a pointless answer!

9:5 *The Reunion*

The Reunion

By

David A. Middleton

Lester is a man in his late 50s, with a pronounced East Lancashire accent. He is sat, wearing a shirt, no tie and a pale blazer, which is too big for him, he is surrounded by boxes and addresses the camera directly.

Well, it all came out of the blue, really.

I were on Facebook when I noticed I'd had a friend request from a name that struck a chord with me. An old school friend had cropped up and was keen to rekindle our friendship. So I accepted, both the friend request and the notion of reigniting our comradeship. I hadn't seen the feller since school. And try as I might, couldn't recall the circumstances in which we drifted apart.

Looking at his Facebook page, Facebook stalking, they call it. But I don't see why, when people are broadcasting this information for the world to see, that I shouldn't be allowed to have a sken at what people are posting. It turns out, the awkward teen that I had known, was now a successful businessman, involved in charity work and doing rather well for himself, thank you very much.

Anyroad, we exchanged a few messages and emails and the day came where, John, that was his name, John Horrocks, was going to be in town and we should meet for a drink. So that's exactly what we did. I suggested a place near the station, I didn't fancy taking him to me local, I reserve that just for mesen.

Lester is sat packing a few objets d'art into a box

So the day came and I went to meet him. I was a bit late, as I find I always am, I should really shake meself as a rule, but I never seem to get going. Anyhow, I got there and get a pint and sat at a table, as it appeared he wasn't there himself. Then, there's this voice from behind me, 'Lester?' I turns round and blow me if he isn't sat behind me. In truth, as I'd skenned about and I hadn't recognised him. He were a far cry from the scruffy teenager I'd known – all unbrushed hair and charity shop jumpers. There he were wearing a suit from Marks & Sparks, shoes from Clarke's and Lynx deodorant!

I said, 'Bloody hell, John, I didn't recognise you there. How are you doing?'. 'Bearing up under extreme pressure, Lest. One has it to do'. Well, that got me laughing, he always did have quite the turn of phrase. And of course that were the ice well and truly broken. We got on famously. He were head of a NHS Charity and found the work

fulfilling, and it certainly took him to some interesting places. I told him about my nursing and we talked about the impressive pension that I had, now I'd retired. We chewed through the past, people we'd known at school, teachers and pupils alike. Who were where and with who. We had a good few pints, and he stood his round. Then he says that he's thinking of looking to move back to the shire. Well, I thought, it'd be nice to have a friend, as aside from the pub, me Greek class and me ramblers group, I'm left to me own devices most of the time. We parted in good humour and he went for his train, with plans to meet up next time he were in the vicinity.

Lester is drinking a cup of tea, there are less boxes around.

John was in town a week that Wednesday and we decided to go for somat t'eat. I get the feeling he's a bit lonely. Well, it's hardly surprising going from port to port, type of thing, you know? Now, I don't like restaurants as a rule, but the place he chose were more of a pub as does food, than one of them fancy bistro places, so I was well pleased. Anyroad I getten there pretty much on time, which is bloody rare. This time I made sure he weren't sat at another table, afore I getten a pint and got mesen comfy. And blow me if there's not a voice behind me, 'Lester'. Bloody hell, I thought, I've done it again. But as it turns out it weren't John, it were someone from me local pub, who was on his way to the toilet. Next thing I know, I getten a call on me mobile. Well, this is a rare occurrence, in truth, as it's only ever some bugger trying to sell summat, as calls, else it's Noel from me Greek class, telling me his woes.

So, I gets this call and it's John, he's running late. I know the feeling. Signal failure on the approach to Preston. They're all controlled remotely from Manchester, they shouldn't have shut Preston power box in my opinion, but don't get me started on that one. Anyhow, he doesn't know if he'll be there in time and he's reet sorry. Well, I thought, I may as well enjoy mesen, since I'm here. When in Rome, sort of thing, you know? So, I peruses the menu. There's all the pub classics, so I has a mixed grill. Very tasty, it was too. I'm just finishing me peas, I always leave the peas till last. I don't know why they put peas on a mixed grill, but there you go. So, I'm just shovelling up the old peas, when John rushes in, all fraught and worried. The journey's doubtless taken its toll on the poor fella.

He sits down and takes a minute. Apologises for his tardiness and then seems peeved that I've started without him. I says, 'Sorry, fettler, I weren't sure you'd get here at all. And I fancied we'd be going Greek anyhow.' There were a moment here when he sort of recoiled in horror, 'What do you mean?', he says. I says, 'Ye know, pay for what you've had, separate like, with the bill'. He starts to laugh. 'What's crack here?', I says. 'Lester, that's *going Dutch'* he says. 'Well, what's going Greek then?', says I. 'Up the bum, Lest. Anal sex'. Well, I were mortified. But we were laughing so much, that I were spared the shame of it.

Anyroad, after we get over that, he has a look at the old 'me-and-you' and reaches to his back pocket for his wallet. Suddenly, the colour drains from his face. Then he starts searching his inside pockets, his coat, his bag. So, it comes to bear that he's lost his

wallet somewhere between here and Burnley Interchange. As luck would have it, he'd pre-booked and prepaid for his hotel. So the least I could do, as I saw it, and as I'd accidentally propositioned him, was to treat him to a bit of a feed, which he insisted he would pay me back for when he had got his new cards. He had a steak and a pudding and three pints, which I didn't mind, since I would get the money back.

It were a decent evening all told and I walked him to his hotel. Nothing too fancy, but it wasn't a Holiday Inn, that's for sure.

It were several weeks before I heard from him again. He'd sold his house and was waiting for it to all go through. He'd found a house in Preston and was staying in a bed and breakfast in the interim. He seemed very positive about it and we saw quite a bit of each other over the next few weeks.

There is now only a few sticks of furniture, no boxes, the room appears to be quite bare.

Then one day, he telephones me, saying that he'd been forced to vacate his lodgings and was a bit stuck for somewhere to stay. The house sale was imminent and he was loathe to fork out for somewhere else, when it was only a matter of days until he could move into his new house. Straight away I suggested he come and stay with me, if it was, as he said, just a matter of days. I mean, what are friends for, sort of thing, you know?

It were a bit of an adventure at first. You see I took me stairs out some years back, with a view to replacing them, but I've never got round to it, so there's a ladder to the upstairs. Of course, I've getten used to it, but having someone new in the house it sort of highlights these little things, dunt it?

Lester is now in an empty room, no boxes or furniture.

Well, the days turned into weeks, there were several ongoing issues with the sale of the house, I thought nowt of it, as I know these things can take time, yer always relying on the others in the chain, aren't ye? But as the weeks turned into a month, I thought, this feller's taking the Michael here. Ye give someone an inch, sort of thing, you know? But he assured me everything was back on track and he'd be out of me hair in a matter of days.

After about six weeks, he were like Lord Lucan, there were evidence of him still at me house, but I never saw him. He were always out somewhere, or he'd just pop back and then be off like a shot. I didn't really mind this, but I were reet keen for him to bugger off.

Then, one day, I finds a letter addressed to mesen, apparently I've applied for a credit card, which I bloody hadn't. Then, after looking at me bank statements, I haven't gone paper free, there's this strange spending from me bank account. Me first thought was that scammers had getten me details from me online purchases, which has happened afore. So I reported it to me bank and they said they'd have a look into it.

The report comes back, that there's no fraud that the bank can find. I manage to catch John and I ask him if he knows ouwt about it. He denies all knowledge. But there's summat rotten in the state of Denmark, for sure. So I called the police.

Lester is now in what appears to be temporary accommodation, a B&B room with a bed and sink. The place is sparse and clearly not an expensive lodging.

They came for him today. You should have seen him, he were like a wild animal. It took three bobbies to restrain him. He were screaming 'I'm Lester Houghton. I'm the real Lester!' It were reet difficult to watch. But the truth remains he's cleaned me right out. Savings gone, I've had to sell me house to cover the money he borrowed under my name. I'm buggered. I don't know how I didn't see it. I am, in the main, a believer in people, so maybe he exploited that side of me. I feel so stupid.

Lester is wearing a fairly expensive suit.

Well, I've just been looking on Facebook. I've found an old school friend, who I haven't seen in years. Given that I'm so skint, I thought I might see if I can stay with him for a while.

Lester's voice changes to 'someone else's' voice.

Extreme close up of the face

I do love a good reunion, me.

9:6 *Logging On*

Logging On

9:7 *Online*

On Line

By

David A. Middleton

NOTE ON AESTHETIC

Unlike most YouTube channels, where there are jump-cuts and many micro-cuts, this piece should be in real time with any stutters, awkward pauses or line fluffs left in. The quality should be obvious cheap video footage and the sound rather bad. The film should appear to be as if the whole thing has been recorded incrementally on the camera with no cuts other than when Terry has turned the camera off and then on again later – like a video diary over several days.

SC 1

EXT. A RAILWAY CROSSING. DAY.

A figure, Terry, steps back from turning the camera on and stands by a level crossing, in the near distance a train is approaching. We can hear the fizzing of the tracks and the bleeping of the level crossing sirens.

TERRY: Look at this little beauty, folks. On its way up the West Coast Mainline. It's a class…

At this point what Terry is saying is drowned out by the roar of the train's engine as it passes him. Finally as the train continues on its journey we are able to hear Terry again.

TERRY: I'm Terry Thomas and welcome to Trainspotting Tips with Terry.

Terry walks forward and turns the camera off.

SC 2

MONTAGE SEQUENCE

The following sequence should show a poorly framed TV, rather than framing the screen, the sides of the TV and some of the surrounding periphery can be seen.

A brief introductory sequence plays out with shots of trains and Terry in various railway locations. These are cut together badly and a dreadful electronic tune plays as a theme tune, before finally the credit 'Trainspotting with Terry' comes onto the screen. The music drops out immediately and there is a shot of Terry next to a large railway engine and he shouts 'Full Power' putting his thumbs up to the camera.

Audibly the camera is turned off.

SC 3

EXT. A RAILWAY BRIDGE. DAY.

Terry turns the camera on and shuffles into shot and over his shoulder the railway can be seen running under the bridge and away into the distance.

TERRY: Now. I want to give you some tips as to where to trainspot. I find that the railway station, the railway station, not the train station, mark you, is fraught with dangers. There's too many people, you can't film and there's ticket checks, and you have to explain that you haven't just got off a train and not bought a ticket – I've had that one a few times. No, there's too many people interfering. Me and me dad used to go to the station and trainspot. You could buy a platform ticket in those days. But since he died, I've not… I've not. Well, I've not been inclined to go very often. No, what we're after is a place where we can get close to the trains at full speed, as they majestically roar forward on their journey. Full Power! Erm…

Terry pauses awkwardly, then moves towards the camera to turn it off.

SC 4

EXT. LEVEL CROSSING. DAY.

Terry steps back from turning the camera on and stands next to a pedestrian level crossing with no gates or lights.

TERRY: Now, this is an excellent spot. Now when looking for these spots, it is important that you don't actually trespass on the railway. It used to be £200 fine, now it's about a thousand. (*Whistles to show amazement*). Also you need to be careful of the trains. Even a slow moving set will kill you instantly and then drag your mangled body for a mile, as the air brakes try to stop the train. So safety first, folks. Now let's talk sustenance.

Terry steps forward and turns the camera off.

SC 5

EXT. GRASSLAND. DAY.

Terry turns the camera on and then goes to sit in a camping chair, which immediately collapses as he sits in it. He rolls over, angrily resets the chair and gingerly sits in it. He is some way off from the crossing – occasional trains can be heard passing, but not so loud that it affects the audio. He has his rucksack next to him. He extracts a pack of sandwiches (wrapped in tin foil) from the bag and shows it to the camera

TERRY: First we've got some butties. Egg and cress today. Me mam used to say, an egg sandwich without cress is like a cannon without balls. She had lots of funny phrases, did mam. I actually grow me own cress. I grow it on the window sill in a yoghurt pot. I learned to do it at junior school and I've been enamoured with cress cultivation ever since. Next we've got something to wet our whistle. Ooop, here we go, class 390, Pendolino. What a beauty.

Terry watches the train go past (off camera, but it can be heard). He extracts a juice carton from his bag.

TERRY: Now in terms of liquids, I favour an Um Bongo or any reasonably priced tropical juice drink. Don't, as I have in the past, fall for the plastic cartons with the film lids. They make you thirstier than you were before you drank them. Oh no! I do on occasion have an energy drink, a Rubicon Alert, a Relentless or on special occasions a Monster. I'm having trouble sleeping at the moment, so I'm steering clear of them and having a tropical juice. Very refreshing and a good way to keep your sugar levels up when out doing some intense spotting. Talking of sugar levels, what about a little treaty treat?

Terry produces a small selection of biscuits in a plastic freezer bag. He holds them up to the camera.

TERRY: I've got a lovely selection here. I don't favour your Rich Tea. No, as Mam always said, you may as well eat the packet they came in, as eat a Rich Tea. They always got Rich Tea in hospital, that's the NHS for you, and mam hated it, but then she had more to worry about than biscuits. Erm… But not us. Biscuits are essential when trainspotting. In here I've got shortbread, Ginger Nuts and as a special treat a couple of Garibaldis. Oh yes. Full Power!

Terry struggles, like an upturned tortoise to get out of the chair, and knocks the camera over trying to turn it off. The camera shows him pick it up and there is a close up of his face as he looks for the on/off button. The camera is turned off.

SC 6

EXT. RAILWAY BRIDGE. DAY.

Terry turns the camera on and stands in shot. He is stood on a railway bridge. At the start of the scene a train rushes under the bridge, after that there are no more.

TERRY: Traaaaaiiin! Now we've fuelled up and on full power, we need to find the perfect spot. You might think that a bridge is a good spot, but it's not. To get a good vantage point we'd have to climb up onto the parapet of the bridge. If I did this and fell, I'd land on those overhead power lines, which is where the pantograph draws power for the train. There's about twenty thousand volts running through those lines, it would be an agonising death. Also, we can't see the engine names or numbers from up here. No, what we need is to be at ground level, level with the trains as they pass.

Terry steps forward and turns the camera off.

SC 7

EXT. PEDAESTRIAN CROSSING. DAY.

Terry turns the camera on and stepping back stumbles on something, just keeping his balance, he composes himself and then speaks to the camera.

TERRY: So we've found our spot, so next I will demonstrate how I, the enthusiast, set my camera up.

Terry gets his tripod out of his bag and immediately drops it on the floor.

TERRY: (Angry with himself) Come on! If there was a train coming you'd have missed it by now.

Terry extends the legs but doesn't lock them down so when he stands the tripod up, it drops to the floor. He becomes even more frustrated.

TERRY: You're useless. Come on, sometime this fucking week. Get it done.

Terry locks the legs in place and dips out of shot to get his camera. He knocks the tripod over in doing this.

TERRY: What ye doin'? You're fucking useless.

Terry picks up his tripod and launches it to the side in frustration. He takes a moment and then remembers he is filming himself. He looks directly at the camera and smiles.

TERRY: And that folks is how not to set your camera up. Erm… Full Power.

Terry walks towards the camera to turn it off.

SC 8

EXT. ROADSIDE. DAY.

Terry is stood on a grass verge at the roadside, the railway embankment is behind him, there is a signal in view and steps leading up the embankment to that signal.

TERRY: I would say trains have been a constant for me. They have been up and down all my life. I mean at secondary school, I suppressed my interest, because trains aren't the coolest thing in the world…

Off camera a car horn beeps and something incomprehensible is shouted. This draws Terry's attention in that direction.

TERRY: Yeah, whatever. (*Shouts*) WANKER! Ooop, he's stopping, he's stopping. No, we're fine. No, he's getting out the car.

In a panic Terry grabs the camera and starts running. We can only see tree tops and sky. Terry falls and we can only see grass. The camera remains on the ground. Out of shot we hear Terry

TERRY: I'm sorry, I'm sorry. AAHHH.

Terry's exclamations of pain can be heard and then him whimpering. After a few moments the camera is picked up, we can hear Terry crying. He then whispers under his breath.

TERRY: (whispering) You stupid, stupid cu…

The camera is turned off.

SC 9

EXT. RAILWAY OVERBRIDGE. DAY.

Terry steps back from turning the camera on. He has a black eye and cut lip.

TERRY: Whenever I'm feeling depressed or upset, being by the railway soon perks me up.

A train approaches and Terry turns to wave, the driver sounds the horn in acknowledgement. This elates Terry, who turns back to the camera.

TERRY: Did you see that? There's no greater medicine than that sound. I'm going to have a biscuit to celebrate.

Terry walks forward and turns off the camera.

SC 10

INT. TERRY'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Terry turns the camera on (handheld), he is sat in bed. He looks as though he is about to speak, but then seems too upset. Turns the camera off again.

SC 11

INT. TERRY'S KITCHEN. EVENING.

Terry switches the camera on and sits at the kitchen table. His bruises have begun to fade, which demonstrates some time has passed.

TERRY: It's been a hard few weeks. I'm not feeling very good. In fact I'm feeling unusual. What's worse is I can't even go trainspotting, because the drivers are all on strike. It's a lonely game this video diary lark, folks, I can tell you. I've tried to talk to other enthusiasts in online forums. I've shared some of my pictures and tried to chat, but, it's not the same. Not only that, but people are vicious. They think they can insult you with impunity. There's no comebacks and I'm just left feeling shit. Well, I'll show them. We're going trainspotting tomorrow and I'm going to get the driver to really sound his horn.

Terry turns the camera off.

SC 12

EXT. PEDESTRIAN CROSSING. DAY.

Terry turns the camera on and stands in shot next to the crossing. He is much nearer to the railway line than usual.

TERRY: So we're back here again. Of all the spots I've looked at, this is the perfect one, for our needs. We can get as close as we like, no barriers and no one to interfere. When mam was released from hospital, despite being an emotional wreck, no one interfered then, did they? Well, the time has come. I've scouted out several locations and this is by far the best one. So folks, I'd just like to say to my viewers that it's been great talking to you. I did try and contact you, but you didn't reply. But that doesn't matter, you've been the only two friends I've had, since mam killed herself. And if the train driver ever sees this, I'm sorry. Really sorry, I don't know how you'll get over this, but just know it wasn't your fault. It was mine. It's always my fault. I've tried, I've really tried. They say you're a coward, but this is the hardest thing I've ever done. So goodbye and (*Half-heartedly*) Full power.

Terry turns and walks away from the camera, which falls over, obscuring the view of what happens next. There is the sound of a train approaching and then the desperate squealing of breaks being applied. A large thud coincides with the CUT TO BLACK.

END

9:8 *Computer Virus*

Computer Virus

By

David A. Middleton

NOTE ON AESTHETIC

The film is shot as a YouTube Urban Exploration (UrbEx) channel. The narrator (Byron) never appears on camera, we can only ever hear his voice behind the camera – occasionally a hand, arm or leg comes into shot. The film is like a first person computer game. The settings are of abandoned buildings in different states of disrepair. The editing and sound are of a fair standard, but by no means professional – every time Byron stops speaking the ambient sound drops out.

SC 1

EXT. ABANDONED FACTORY. EVE.

The camera pans around the exterior of an abandoned factory, which is wrapped in scaffolding, fencing and tarpaulins. We hear Byron's voice (English with a slight faux American accent) from behind the camera. As the scene begins the credits 'The Moronovirus Control Room', fades on and off the screen.

BYRON: Greetings. People of the world and welcome to another exciting video. I spotted this earlier. The date is the sixth of September 2021 and we're in the old Aqueduct Soap Factory. Is there anybody about?

The camera pans around, and then returns to the building's exterior.

BYRON: No. Right, check that out. There's a ladder there, a possible way in. Yes, I think you know what I'm gonna do, I'm going to have to get over this fence. Why the hell not, one last visit, one last mission. Whoa!

Bryon loses his footing and stumbles, the camera judders as he rights himself.

BYRON: Bloody hell. There's loads of booby-traps here. Right, let's do it. Sod it. Let's get over this fence. I can't waste any time. It's about half eight at night now. Right, how we gonna do this? I don't really want to be on camera. I can put the camera round me neck. Right. Let's go for it.

On the side of an outbuilding there is a piece of graffiti, which depicts three male figures, one is just the outline the other two are fully block coloured in black. Byron attempts to climb the fence. The footage is shaky as he does this.

BYRON: Oh shit. Ouch. Fuckin hell. I'm stuck. I can't get me leg over. In fact I've not been able to do that for some time. Oh bugger. No this isn't going well at all. This is turning into epic fail. No. I'll just pause the camera and see you on the other side.

CUT TO:

SC 2

EXT. ABANDONED FACRTORY. EVE.

We are now on the other side of the fence.

BYRON: Right. I've made it. Holy crap, this is exciting, this is what makes life worth living. Shit, I've made a noise. Keep watching out for security. There's a gate here. Oh shit. That was noisy. Shit. Bloody hell, we can't let that slam.

SLOW FADE TO:

SC 3

INT. FACTORY. EVE.

The camera walks around (as Byron films). The scene is an empty factory with passageways and bare rooms.

BYRON: I hope there's no zombies about. If there is, I've got my anti-zombie blaster.

A child's toy, a plastic laser-gun, comes into shot (held in Byron's hand). The gun fires a foam projectile.

BYRON: Oh, shit. I've discharged me weapon. I hope I'm not overrun whilst I reload.

We continue to move around the building. The next area is full of wires and rubbish. There's a small toilet just off to one side.

BYRON: Right, let's go round here. Look at all this garbage. There's an old mattress. There's clearly someone living in here. Toilets there. They're not in bad condition, if you're caught short. It's not like that one in *Trainspotting*, if you've seen that film? Right, what's up these stairs? Shall we go and have a look?

We walk up the stairs with Byron. We come to a room which houses control panels and switches.

BYRON: This seems to be some sort of control room. Hey, there's a control panel. You know what this could be? This could be the control panel for the Moronovirus. Currently it's only low. It's on 15%.

The camera zooms into a pressure gauge and stopcocks.

BYRON: This could be the local release point. We could turn the virus off here and prevent another pandemic.

Byron's hand can be seen flicking switches and turning the stopcocks.

BYRON: That seems to have done it. Oh wait, there's the master switch. That's off, surely. There, I've done it. I've turned it off. Good move. There, I may have killed the virus off and saved hundreds of humans. But only my 98 subscribers will ever know. That's if everyone watches this video, which they don't always. Another successful mission. Wow. Right, well, we better get outta here, before I'm seen. So let's stay low, commando style and stealthily escape.

Byron hastily moves through the building as he exits. We return through the route we took to get in, only now at quite a fast pace.

BYRON: Is there a different way out round here? No, we checked. I'm going to have to be fast now. We've done what we needed to do.

We reach the outside of the factory and approach the fence, but in a different section. There is a gap in the metal fence.

BYRON: What's this? I don't believe it. There was an easy way in all along. I ripped me crotch climbing over that fence before. It just goes to show that you should do a thorough reccy before you attempt these UrbExs. Right. Let's get out of here.

The camera walks through the gap in the fence and onto the street. Now calmly strolling along the pavement.

BYRON: Right, I'm gonna wrap this up, cause I'm conscious that I'm probably being watched. Take care. I will see you all in the next exciting adventure. All the best. Over and out.

FADE OUT:

SC 4

EXT. ABANDONED CINEMA. DAY.

We are at the rear of a large building. There is nothing to suggest we are at an old cinema (from the outside), but we are. A low doorway is open. As the scene begins the title 'The Ritz Cinema: In Search of the Alien Landing Craft' fade in and out on the screen.

BYRON: Greetings, people of the world. We're on a mission today to find the alien landing craft, buried deep in the bowels of the old Ritz cinema. Conveniently, someone has left the door open for us. So let's go and have a look see, shall we?

The camera takes us through the door and into the basement of the cinema. Strewn around are bundles of film magazines and other film-related tat.

BYRON: Hey, check this out, some old film magazines here. Maybe I should take one. No, I better not. It's against the UrbEx rules. Take only pictures, leave only footprints. No, we're here to look for evidence of the alien spacecraft. They landed in the eighties, bided their time, took over governments, then they created this pandemic, so that they could inject us all with a chemical that puts you to sleep. Then they plug you into the matrix. But I'm wise to them, I won't be caught out, like everyone else. Hey, check that out. A cardboard cut-out of Arnold Schwarzenegger. That'd be handy for the front room, wouldn't it? Hey, maybe Arnie was the alien leader. He came out of nowhere in the eighties as Conan the Barbarian. Then he played a robot from the future. Alarm bells are ringing. Then he ended up in politics. Mystery solved. There's an electric fan there. They could do to plug that in today, it's quite hot. Well, it's hot in here. We must be getting close to the spaceship's power source, the core. Right. What's through this door? Oh, bugger. It's locked. You could get in through here last time I came. Maybe there's another way in. Let's have a look down here.

The camera continues down a corridor. We reach a small door. On the door is some graffiti, which reads 'Bonus Life'.

BYRON: What's this? I didn't see this last time. Shall we see if it opens?

The door opens.

BYRON: Hey. It's like in a computer game when you unlock an additional.

The open door reveals a small cleaning cupboard/room. There are cleaning products and tools. There is a first aid kit on a shelf.

BYRON: Look at this. A health pack. I better take this, as I might get infected and need the health to regenerate. Right. Let's carry on.

We move further along the corridor to some stairs. We go down the stairs to another door. It's locked.

BYRON: Another locked door. This is turning into an epic fail. They must have got wind that I was coming and sealed the access to the spacecraft off. Damn it! Well. I suppose we better get out of here. At least I found that health pack in that secret room. Mission accomplished. Well, not really. Right, let's sod off.

The camera (wielded by Byron) begins the journey back out of the building. Very shortly we reach the entry point and daylight.

BYRON: Okay. I'm gonna sign off here. We didn't find the alien spacecraft. But we did find that health pack, which will come in useful. Take care, and I will see you all in the next exciting adventure. All the best. Over and out.

CUT TO:

SC 5

EXT. AN ABANDONED PUB. DAY.

We see a boarded-up pub. Traffic can be heard swishing past. The pub is set off from the road and the surrounding area is overgrown. This provides cover from the said road. As the scene unfolds, the title 'Zombie Safe House' appears and then fades away.

BYRON: Greetings. People of the world. It is Wednesday 25th of October 2021 and we're here at the Zombie Safe House. I've been watching this place for a while and I've seen zombie-like people coming and going. I've got me Zombie blaster and I'm all prepared for an exciting UrbEx. But first we've got to get in.

As Byron continues talking we take a short circuit around the building looking for a way in.

BYRON: On the face of it, it looks pretty secure, but there's got to be a way that these zombies are getting in and out. There must be a portal somewhere round here.

At the side of the pub is a boarded-up door that has been forced.

BYRON: Check this out. You need some real force of strength to pull that boarding off. But that's our way in.

The camera takes us through the opening into the darkened pub.

BYRON: Right, I'll need me torch in here, I think. Like I said. I believe this is a Zombie stronghold and, as you know, the Moronovirus has taken over people's minds and it's turning them into zombies. There could be survivors in there.

The limited illumination of the torch reveals tables and chairs and the bar. The place is in disrepair and has been, apparently, ransacked.

BYRON: Check this place out, it's completely trashed. It's like there's been some kind of shoot-out. It's like the Wild West, but with zombies. Hey, that'd make a pretty good film that. You could call it *Dances with Zombies*, or *A Fist Full of Zombies*. No, I've got it, *The Good, the Bad and the Zombie* (*laughs to himself*). There's evidence of someone sleeping in here. There's a mattress and clothes there, look. Oh, I'm quite nervous about this one. I have seen people coming and going. I'm shitting me self a bit here, which is surprising because I've been constipated recently. Still, let's press on. Bit too much information. Shall we see what's upstairs?

The camera continues through the pub and up some cluttered stairs. The torch light starts to dim and then flick off. We are plunged into almost darkness.

BYRON: Oh no, me torch battery is flat. Bloody hell, this is scary. Shall we go, or shall we keep going? Ooop shit. I tripped a bit there. Eh, there seems to be light coming from that doorway.

We continue up the stairs and near a door from which emanates cracks of light. Suddenly the door bursts open

BYRON: Aaaah FUCK. There's someone in here. Aahhgghh!

We hear Byron running down the stairs stumbling and knocking things over and something that sounds like a struggle.

CUT TO:

SC 6

EXT. PUB. DAY.

It is a little time later and Byron has escaped from the pub. He is out of breath and clearly shaken. As Byron walks away from the scene we see a piece of graffiti on a back-street wall which depicts three figures one is an outline the others are full block coloured, as in scene one.

BYRON: Well, I nearly didn't get out of there in one piece. I fell and I've really cut my arm. I can't believe there was something in there. Okay, I'm going to end the video there, I think. Shit. That was scary. Take care, see you on the next exciting video. All the best.

CUT TO:

SC 7

EXT. UNDERPASS. DAY.

We walk slowly along an underpass and subterranean, labyrinthine passage as Byron talks to us. As he walks along the underpass, we see a piece of graffiti which depicts three figures. This time there is only one that is fully coloured the other two are only outlines. He frequently coughs as he talks.

BYRON: Greetings, people of the world. I haven't done a video for a few weeks now. I'm really under the weather. I've no appetite. I'm aching. Food makes me feel sick and I can't taste it anyway. I've got chills, a headache and a bastard sore throat. It's like I'm coming off heroin. I think that zombie I met in the pub has infected me. I think I'm turning into a zombie. Maybe I should seek out some of the people from school. Eat them, see who's Byron Wanker now. Ha. No, I won't do that. I rise above it. I'll keep making videos for as long as I can, until I succumb to the zombie virus and then, well, I'll be too busy eating people's brains, I guess. Well, take care, you guys, and I'll see you on the next exciting video, I hope. All the best. Over and out.

CUT TO:

SC 8

EXT. ABANDONED OFFICE BLOCK. DAY.

The light is fading and we are at the rear of a big office building.

BYRON: Greetings, people of the world. Well, I've not turned into a zombie yet. But I still feel really bad. I've engaged the health pack I found when we were looking for the alien landing craft. If you remember that mission? But the pack is yet to take full effect. It might not work, the virus might be too powerful. If computer games have taught me anything, if you keep trying, you succeed eventually. Shame you can't die and be re-spawned. Anyway, one last mission. Let's get into this old office building. This used to be the DWP building. I've signed on in here many times. So it's quite nostalgic really. I'm going to cut the camera here, because I don't want to advertise how you get in here, as it's quite treacherous underfoot.

CUT TO:

SC 9

INT. OFFICE BUILDING. DAY.

The building has been stripped, there are piles of wires and rubble dotted around.

BYRON: We're in. This used to be the Restart room. There's one of Pauline's pens there, look. Right, last time I was here there was access to the roof. So let's try and get a view of the city-scape from there.

We move through the building up some stairs. We reach the top of a final set of stairs, but the steps to the roof hatch are missing – they have been removed.

There are some existing banisters and upper steps, but they are slightly out of reach.

BYRON: Oh, bugger. How are we going to get to the roof? I wonder if we can find something to help us get up there. Let's have a look, shall we?

We move around the upper floor. There is something that could be used as a ladder, it is essentially a frame built out of bits of discarded wood.

BYRON: Oh hello. What's this? Are you thinking what I'm thinking? Yes, a ladder. Let's take this over there and get up on the roof.

Byron picks up the makeshift ladder and take it to the missing stairwell.

BYRON: Right, this might work. How secure is this ladder?

Byron's foot can be seen trying the first 'rung' of the ladder.

BYRON: This could be okay. Right, here we go.

Byron begins to climb the ladder. He gets about half way up. We can see his gloved hand reaching for the roof hatch. There is suddenly a crack and Byron falls. We hear him hit the ground and he cries out. The camera is pointing up at the celling. We see a piece of graffiti on the celling which reads, 'GAME OVER'.

FADE TO BLACK:

9:9 *The Nandemic*

The Nandemic

By

David A. Middleton

I lost Nan today.

He takes his glasses off and wipes them. He then puts them back on.

She'd wandered off in Waitrose. I spotted her talking to a sales assistant at the Deli counter. She'll talk to anyone, will Nan, and at length. She's the only person I've seen talk to a couple of Godbods for so long that *they* made their excuses and left. To give them their dues, it was raining and blowing a gale, and they did stick it out for a good few hours. We don't get cold callers anymore. I think she got blacklisted. After the first forty minutes, it's pretty clear that Nan isn't going to buy a new kitchen, or double glazing – she's only got a galley and lives in a flat. It's soon apparent, you're not going to make your sales targets by wasting your time with a wittering old dear, like Nan. A personal injury company called once and Nan proceeded to detail every slip, trip and fall that she'd experienced since the age of three. I must admit it was quite detailed and I'm surprised Nan made it so far in life, given her clumsiness. I was round her flat one Saturday afternoon when she received a call. "Hello", she said. Then after a moment a wry smile crept over her lips. "Oh they're white, what colour are yours?". I said, "Who's that, Nan?". "Some feller asking what colour me knickers are", she said. "The dirty perv", I said and, after giving the feller down the banks for his filthy proclivities, I said, "and don't call here again, or I'll phone the police". Nan seemed a bit mystified. "I don't know why you were so hard on him, love. It's just a bit of fun". "No, Nan", I said. "It is not".

The truth is, it's loneliness. I like to spend time with her. During lockdown, I moved into her flat. I was there all the time, but I lost count of the amount of Zoom meetings she padded into shot, asking "who are you talking to?". Then, once she realised she was on camera, rather shyly waved at senior management and offered them a brew. We got a cat. Horace. But Horace is a vicious little bastard. If he's not swiping your ankles from under a chair, he's pouncing off the stairs, claws out, onto your back. It's like having a Bengal Tiger in your house. In hindsight, a hamster might have been a better choice, but given how clumsy Nan was, or if the personal injury call is to be believed, has always been, it would only be a matter of time before she squashed it.

Nan and I go to the coffee mornings at the Methodist Church on Saturdays, we're not really religious, but it's a chance to talk and spend time with the other women who are just like Nan. We both enjoy it. They talk like mill workers. I come out with my head spinning from the information that is propounded and the time it takes to propound it. I feel like I have whiplash from nodding silently. It is amazing in a way. They never draw a breath. Even the tea and biscuits, which one might think would be an

impediment to incessant conversation, aren't. It is a sort of relay where, as one stops to take a sip, or to nibble a Garibaldi, another starts up. And the people they talk about. I soon lose track of who is who. It's like reading the telephone directory or watching *Game of Thrones*! Or "Tits and Dragons" as Nan calls it. That's the thing about being a hundred years old, your filters seem to degrade, and you can get away with saying almost anything.

Nan's not much of a fantasy fan, she much prefers *Heartbeat* or *Call the Midwife*. It's the only time she's quiet, when we have a few hours in the evening 'looking at the telly'. Then before bed we have a Horlicks or Ovaltine and she regales me with tales from the war, populated by characters such as Cod-eyes, so-called, "Because she had eyes like a cod!" and Black Mac, on account of her jet black hair. I've heard them all before, but I never tire of Nan's stories. Dancing shoes in her gas-mask box, air raids as soon as you got in the bath and boiling eggs in a device you plugged into the light fitting. All great stuff. My personal favourites include stories of a woman who was so fond of male attention, it was said that she had the imprint of every tree in Hyde Park on her backside. And of course how she had met Granddad. Like many of those *how I met…* stories, they inevitably contain the phrase, "Well, I wasn't keen to begin with". After story time, we say goodnight and go to our separate rooms. I sleep in what was Granddad's room and she in the room we all use to sleep in when we stayed at Nan and Granddad's. My brother on a camp bed, me in one bed and Nan in her's. I never thought anything about why Nan and Granddad had separate rooms as a child. Even now, I can only imagine it was because Granddad snored, or it was something that was of its time, where couples slept separately other than on particular occasions.

Every Remembrance Sunday, we go to the Cenotaph. I always get emotional, but always keep it in. Nan and Granddad never really talked about the horrors of war, for obvious reasons. They would happily tell my brother and me funny anecdotes, but never about the friends they'd lost and things they'd seen. Granddad did towards the end of his life, as if some urgency was required for us to learn from history, or that Granddad might be seeking some form of absolution, before he met his maker. He had joined the RAF at the outbreak of war, because he thought it would be easier to shoot at planes, rather than people. For Nan's part, she was in the WAAF and being stationed in London during the Blitz must have been horrendous, but she never talked about it in any other way than with a fondness and sense of adventure and excitement.

I see Nan everywhere. At the deli counter in Waitrose. At the coffee mornings at The Methodist church and she's always there at the Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday. Granddad is there too, with their poppies and their memories, paying tribute to the fallen friends they could never talk about.

Nan was born in 1920, lived through scarlet fever, measles, chamber pots and World War Two. She lived until she was 100, when at the beginning of the pandemic, COVID took her.

And she's still talking!

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11:0 APPENDIX

Appendix A

A:1 Participant Consent Form

Participant/Co-Collaborator Consent Form

Research Thesis Title:	What's The Story?: The creation and development of narrative for comedy film scripts, through performance based improvisation.
Principle Researcher:	David Antony Middleton BA (Hons) MA (Res) DAMiddleton1@uclan.ac.uk
University & School:	University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) Humanities & Social Sciences

My name is David Antony Middleton, and I am a PhD candidate with the school of Humanities and Social Sciences at UCLan. I am researching different approaches to creating and developing narratives for comedy film scripts through a series of performance-based improvisations with actors.

I am recruiting actors to participate in those improvisations. You will be required to attend6-8 weeks' worth of weekly, 1-3 hour improvisation sessions. Within these sessions different approaches to developing character and creating narratives will be applied. The use of a unique approach, utilising one-to-one character development discussions and directed group improvisations will form the basis of these sessions. Further to this, participants will take part in interviews (with the researcher) to gain insights into which methods were most effective for each participant. These sessions will be recorded (video, audio and written documentation) in order that the researcher can keep track of developments and reflect on the process' successes and failures.

- Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and completely your choice whether you participate or not – see **clause 11**. Non-participation will have no implications on your status as a UCLan student, nor will it have any effect on your future grades, future study or participation in any other research. Similarly so, you may withdraw from the research at any time (as detailed in **clause 9** below), withdrawal from the research will also have no implications upon your status or studies as mentioned above.
- The research will investigate how different performance-based improvisation techniques can be utilised to create and develop narratives for comedy film scripts.
- All artistic material (character arcs and narrative strands) devised through these sessions will form the raw material for two comedy film scripts that will be written by the researcher and yourself.
- You as the participant/co-collaborator will be availed the opportunity to work in this highly creative way and be able to contribute heavily in the creation and development of one/two comedy film scripts.
- Within the body of the thesis any reference to yourself as a participant/co-collaborator, will be anonymous (for reasons of data protection), but you will have the opportunity to be named in the acknowledgements.
- By participating in this project you will have the chance to develop your own improvisation skills and work in a highly collaborative and creatively free environment, whilst being

instrumental in the discovery of new knowledge in the field of comedy performance-based improvisation and scriptwriting.

I, the undersigned, hereafter referred to as the 'participant' or 'co-collaborator', consent to the following clauses:

1) I consent to any material created during all performance-based improvisations, to be used in part, or its entirety, for the use in comedy scripts – which will form the creative components of the named PhD thesis; What's The Story?: The creation and development of narrative for comedy film scripts, through performance based improvisation.
2) I agree that all material produced during all of the aforementioned performance-based improvisations, will remain the intellectual property of the researcher/facilitator, namely; DAVID ANTONY MIDDLETON.
3) I consent to the recording (video, audio and written documentation) of all improvisation sessions, discussions and interviews, for the purposes of the research only. I acknowledge that these recordings will be stored securely and not used anywhere else, saving the thesis submission (see Clause 7).
4) I understand that I will remain anonymous throughout the research project. Any reference to myself or others, within the body of the thesis, will be anonymous and that any reference to myself or others will simply be, 'Participant A', Participant B' etc.
5) If I wish, my name will appear in the acknowledgements (only), however this is in no way mandatory and unequivocally my choice.
6) I understand that, any personal details (contact details only, eg email address, for the purposes of arranging improvisational sessions), will be stored on a password protected, secure, personal computer and not shared with any other person. Nor will any other information be shared with any other person, save in the event of a safeguarding or prevent issue arising. All details will be permanently deleted on submission of the thesis. All of this will be done in accordance with, and unerring compliance of, UCLan's data protection regulations - GDPR, defined by government.
7) I understand that some, or all recordings of improvisations, interviews etc. (in part, or in entirety) may be attached as part of the final thesis submission in the appendix. Any publications of the thesis (in part or entirety), will not contain these elements however.
8) I understand that I can place a complaint regarding GDPR to the university (UCLan) at any time.
9) I understand that I can both withdraw from the research at any time, and that I may also withdraw my consent at any time. Upon the withdrawal of my consent, any personal details will be immediately destroyed/deleted, but the researcher may still use any material (eg characters developed or artistic material, such as narrative ideas) after the point of my withdrawal of the said consent.
10) I understand that whilst involved with this research I will be expected to remain professional at all times. That I must conduct myself in a manner befitting a student, and therefore a representative, of the University of Central Lancashire. I understand that I must adhere to all UCLan codes of conduct and student regulations. These can be found at: https://www.uclan.ac.uk/study_here/assets/regulations_for_the_conduct_of_stude

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11) I understand that my participation is completely voluntary, and in no way mandatory. I understand that that non-participation, or withdrawal from the research will have no implications on my status as a UCLan student, nor will it have any effect on my future grades, future study or participation in any other research.

I agree, consent to, and understand all of the above clauses by the committing of my signature to this form.

Signature……..

Print Name……..

I further consent to the use of recording (video, audio and written documentation) of all improvisation sessions, discussions and interviews, for the purposes of the research only.

Signature……..

Print Name……..

I DO/DO NOT wish for my name to appear in the acknowledgements section of the thesis (delete as appropriate).

A:2 Project outline for participants

Project outline for participants

Participant Consent form

It is essential that you read the participant consent form thoroughly. If you agree with all the clauses then, please sign it and return it to me. The importance and seriousness of this form cannot be underplayed. It ensures your safety and details the protocols required throughout the process and the details the small implications, should you for any reason, have to withdraw from the project.

If you are not an existing student of the university, you are still required to conduct yourself in a befitting and professional manner. Similarly so, withdrawal, will have no implications, save that any material generated, may still be used (and remains the intellectual property of the researcher) after your departure.

Outline of project

You have been chosen for your experience, dedication and professionalism. These skills will come to bear in the progress and success of this project.

The project is a method, whereby an approach to scriptwriting, with a protracted and extensive improvisational element, is trialled. The purpose of this initial trial project is to assess the strengths and weaknesses (and to develop) the approach. Therefore, along with the practical elements of the method, an objective and analytical element will exist, where you will undertake regular debriefs regarding how you thought the sessions went and how well (or not) the methods allowed you, as an actor, to achieve what was required. There will also be an opportunity for you to suggest alternative methods to achieve results.

The method will utilise British filmmaker Mike Leigh's approach as a template to develop a new way of working, whereby a deeply collaborative approach is used to create and develop a script (and possibly, short film).

The developed method will then be applied to a larger project, which you may or may not wish to participate in also.

The method may differ from what you are used to during your training and experience as an improviser and actor. Where, traditionally, improvisation is used to interpret a received script, or improvisations are guided with set parameters (theatre games), this will not happen in this process.

At every stage of the process you will have a large and valued input into the developing script. Your contribution will be reflected in the writing credit 'written by House of Misery Presents', rather than the researcher being credited as the author.

The crux of the work is creating and developing characters that are separate entities to yourself and that are considered in every detail and motive. The first part of the process will concentrate on constructing and developing these characters. This character work will be done in isolation and **you are required to not communicate with the other participants in any way regarding your character**.

Later on in the process the characters will start to come together in improvisations and relationships between them explored. Thematic strands and possible character arcs will then be explored. This will then precipitate the narrative of the piece.

The final part of the process will see the script drafted and the latter improvisations used to hone the script – although there will always be some room for changes to character and narrative.

Essentially, where traditionally, a plot or story is set and then populated by characters, this approach constructs characters and then explores what direction they can be taken in, so as to create, organically, a narrative.

The process will culminate in a final draft script and possibly a short film. Then, ipso facto, a debrief regarding the process as a whole will be conducted.

Because this process will be undertaken online/remotely, it is likely that some parts of Leigh's process will have to be altered or dispensed with. The process at this point

remains in a general state of flux and your contribution to both the work and the process will be invaluable.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and I look forward to working with you.

APPENDIX B

B:1 Character Questions (Blank)

Character Questions

Childhood and parentage

1, Where and when was the character born?

2, What were their parents called?

3, How old were their parents when they had the child?

4, What were their parents' occupations?

5, Was the pregnancy planned?

6, Were the character's grandparents alive during their early childhood?

7, If so, what were the grandparents like?

8, What was the character's relationship like with their grandparents?

9, Does/did the character have any siblings?

10, Detail the names, ages and sequence of these siblings' births etc.

11, What was their early relationship with these (if any) siblings?

12, Where did the character spend the first years of their life?

13, Was there any family pets in these formative years?

14, Did the character receive any childhood injury, or illness?

15, What is the character's earliest childhood memory - if not covered by the above?

Early school

1, What, if any, memories does the character have of Infant and Primary school?

2, What was the name of their best friend at primary school?

3, What was the name of their infant/primary school?

4, Do they remember any significant influence (teachers/dinner ladies) from those schools?

5, What was the school emblem and uniform like?

6, How close to the school(s) did they live?

7, What was the walk/drive to school like?

8, What cultural references (TV shows etc) do they remember from that time – if any?

9, How did they feel about going to high school?

High School

1, What do they remember about starting high school – this may include the journey to and from school, parents' reactions to the first day, emotions and any anecdotes regarding school dinners, navigating the corridors and interactions between staff and older students.

2, Who were their circle of friends while at high school?

3, Give details of names and relationships?

4, Did the circle of friends change as high school progressed.

5, Did the circle of friends have any sayings/catchphrases or way of speaking/behaving?

6, Do they remember any significant teachers or influences from high school.

7, What were their interests/hobbies during high school?

8, What cultural references do they remember from this time?

9, Did the character have a crush and/or first love during this period?

10, What was the name of the school, the school emblem and uniform like?

11, Was the character bullied, or did the character bully anyone during this period?

12, What qualifications did the character come out with at the end of high school?

College

1, Did the character go to college?

2, If so which one? Where was it? And what did they study?

3, Who were their friends at college?

4, What are their memories of attending this institution?

5, Detail the relationships at play, with friends, romantic interests and family at this stage?

6, What is the character's fondest memory from this time?

7, What qualifications and experiences did the character leave college with?

8, Did the character have any part time Saturday jobs, paper rounds etc, during this period or prior?

Having now considered the character's past thus far and looking forward to bringing them up to modern day. What is the character's full name?

University and early work experience

1, Did the character attend University, or any higher education training schemes, including vocational courses, on the job training etc?

2, Give details of this – in terms of courses, duration, qualifications etc.

3, Describe the relationships between friends, family and romantic partners at this time of their lives.

4, What interests and hobbies did the character have at this stage of their lives?

5, What is their fondest memory from this time?

6, What is their worst memory from this time?

Contemporary character and identity/personality

Answer the following questions from the character's point of view, as they are now, in modern day. Consider the implications of all the backstory that has been constructed. How have these events manifest themselves in the character's present state of mind and personality?

1, What is the character's occupation?

2, Where do they live?

3, Who is their closest friend?

4, Do they have a romantic partner? If so give details?

5, Which family members, if any, are they closest to? Detail who is living and dead from the family.

6, With who do they share their secrets with?

7, With who do they share a secret?

8, Which co-workers can't they stand?

9, Which co-workers do they like?

10, Who would they turn to for help?

11, What does perfect happiness look like to them?

12, What are their interests and hobbies?

13, What means most to the character?

14, What is the character's greatest desire?

15, What is the character's greatest fear?

16, What flaws does the character have?

17, What is their greatest achievement?

18, Detail the most embarrassing thing that has ever happened to them.

19, If we googled the character's name, what would we find?

20, What is their biggest secret?

21, What is their greatest regret?

22, What is their most treasured possession? Why, what is its significance?

23, Does the character have any bad habits?

24, What is the worst thing that has ever happened to them?

25, What is their favourite film?

26, What is their favourite food/drink?

27, What TV shows do they watch?

28, What do they do for fun?

29, What is their favourite colour?

30, If the character were an animal, what animal would they be?

31, What extravagance do they allow themselves?

32, Which person(s), living or dead, would they most like to meet and why?

33, What music do they listen to? Give details as to what music they listen to in different states of mind. i.e. if unhappy, when happy, when getting ready for a night out, when doing mundane tasks etc.

B:2 Character Questions (GWYN)

Character Questions

Participant A

Gwyn Jonah Davis

Childhood and parentage

1, Where and when was the character born?

Fishgard. Pembrokeshire. South Wales. 21st June 1988

2, What were their parents called?

Keith and Cassandra Davis

3, How old were their parents when they had the child?

Mid 40s

4, What were their parents' occupations?

Royal Navy then Cargo Ship's Captain and Homemaker

5, Was the pregnancy planned?

No. Had tried, but to no avail. Had given up hope of a child when un-expectantly they fell pregnant.

6, Were the character's grandparents alive during their early childhood?

Maternal grandmother only. Paternal Grandfather killed in action during WWII

7, If so, what were the grandparents like?

Maternal grandmother dotes on the character (as does the mother and father when ashore)

8, What was the character's relationship like with their grandparents?

Treats the character more like a grown up. Allows him to drink tea and always has a store of broken biscuits.

9, Does/did the character have any siblings?

No. Only child

10, Detail the names, ages and sequence of these siblings' births etc.

N/A

11, What was their early relationship with these (if any) siblings?

N/A

12, Where did the character spend the first years of their life?

Rural village of Fishgard

13, Was there any family pets in these formative years?

No.

14, Did the character receive any childhood injury, or illness?

Yes. Broken leg from jumping off rocks on the beach. This occurred during infant school and meant some time off school – this is a fond memory.

15, What is the character's earliest childhood memory - if not covered by the above?

Broken biscuits and cups of tea with grandmother. On the whole the early childhood was idyllic and very loving. Although father was away a lot with work, when he did return he regaled the character with stories of exotic, faraway places and the mysteries of the wider world. The father's (and paternal grandfather's) experiences in the Royal Navy distil a sense of honour and comradeship (in sports) into the character.

Having had such a brilliant childhood, he is less prepared for the darker side of life which he will find himself as he gets older.

Early school

1, What, if any, memories does the character have of Infant and Primary school?

The schooling in Wales is imbued with memories of a close community, small building, nice teachers and general happiness.

This is in stark contrast to his experiences when he moves in the latter years of primary school.

2, What was the name of their best friend at primary school?

Josh, a local kid who the character kicks a ball around with and plays computer games (games console) with.

3, What was the name of their infant/primary school?

Holy Name Roman Catholic School (Infants and Primary)

High School the character would have attended; Ysol Bro Gwaun (Gwaun Community School)

4, Do they remember any significant influence (teachers/dinner ladies) from those schools?

Miss Bess (Unsure if this is her first name or surname, never found out). This is because she resonated with the character as being like his Mum and his Nan. She emanated a warmth and kindness, which made him feel safe and comfortable.

Significant male authority figure (in terms of scared, but respected) male headmaster – not a detrimental figure to his perfect childhood.

5, What was the school emblem and uniform like?

Grey trousers, white shirt and a red jumper, with a white outline of a Red Dragon.

6, How close to the school(s) did they live?

Walking distance

7, What was the walk/drive to school like?

Pleasant walk with Mum

8, What cultural references (TV shows etc) do they remember from that time – if any?

Cartoons etc. Also Clangors, Bagpuss, Ivor the Engine and Thomas the Tank Engine.

9, How did they feel about going to high school?

The character moves in the last year before everyone wishes you good luck and signs your shirt. This displaces the character as well as uprooting him. In the last year of the new Primary school, there is no time to make new friends, as everybody is moving onto different schools thereafter.

The move is to Tooting (Streatham) South London.

<u>High School</u>

1, What do they remember about starting high school – this may include the journey to and from school, parents' reactions to the first day, emotions and any anecdotes regarding school dinners, navigating the corridors and interactions between staff and older students.

When attending high school the character had to get public transport (not a school bus, but a regular service bus) to school full of terrifying strangers and crazy people. This differs greatly from a pleasant walk to school with Mum.

He has picked up some cockney phrases (and disarming phrases as a form of protection and a way to endear him to others), which he has 'pre-loaded' for when he starts high school, although there is something of his accent that remains, which the kids pick up on. This is the beginnings of his phraseology that now exists in the present day character – it is a form of defence mechanism, which he has honed over the years, but has its origins in the early days of high school when he is confronted and potential conflict is going to occur by/with others who pick on him.

This technique initially works and gets him out of a few scrapes – to him this is the incentive to continue developing this mechanism.

2, Who were their circle of friends while at high school?

His friendship circles (though relatively superficial) are centred around his athletic prowess and sporting interests/endeavours – they are however team mates, rather than 'real' friends and this means he still feels isolated. Being a member of the football/cricket team etc, means that he sits within a more popular/cooler strata of the student body.

3, Give details of names and relationships?

As above.

4, Did the circle of friends change as high school progressed.

At 14 he is stabbed in the leg, by another pupil. This incapacitates him both physically and mentally, has a protracted amount of time off school and as a result these sport ‘friends fall away. At this stage he realises how superficial these friendships were.

At this period a shared interest in video games with Barney ‘Crofters’ Crofton is discovered, where hitherto Barney was not considered friendship material by the character – due to a perceived lack of common interests. Barney is the next door neighbour’s child and a similar age to the character. This friendship remind the character of Josh and those early childhood idyllic memories. He is s friend that come out of nowhere and is a lifebelt for the drowning character at this time. His sport friends do not completely disappear, but for that period of injury, the boy next door is important.

Barney has a physical disability (Degenerative Wasting Disease, he’s in a wheelchair) and is therefore not active or sporty. This edges the character onto his path of being extra inclusive of all people – which was originally instilled in him by his mother and grandmother.

5, Did the circle of friends have any sayings/catchphrases or way of speaking/behaving?

In terms of the sport ‘friends’, the locker room humour constitutes another strand as regards the origins of the character’s modern speech, although rather than insulting people, it is meant for inclusion and disarmament.

In terms of the character and Barney phrases from computer games are prevalent, for example ‘Haduken’, when winning a point in an argument, make a good joke or get one over on someone.

6, Do they remember any significant teachers or influences from high school.

A difficult Gym teacher, who has a very macho (physical excellence and competitive) way of teaching (which the character doesn’t agree with) although the character still excels at sport, this teacher is not a pleasant memory for him – though a failing it is not deliberate malice on the teacher’s part. The character learns for the teacher, who is very macho and not inclusive, this is the point where the character is beginning to be more overtly forgiving and inclusive, which is in direct opposition to this teacher’s approach.

7, What were their interests/hobbies during high school?

As above

8, What cultural references do they remember from this time?

R&B and Hip Hop music. Emminem etc when angry. Dance music (Aphex Twin) when happy. These musical influences delineate the way the character dresses, but he doesn’t move towards a gangster or errant type of behaviour.

The character has fond memories of sitting in Croffers' house listening to some banging Hip Hop, whilst drinking cordial and playing video games like Grand Theft Auto, living vicariously through video game characters.

9, Did the character have a crush and/or first love during this period?

Miss. Catteral. She fills the female role model that is lacking as the female influence (mother) falls away at this time. He confuses this emotion and therefore lusts after the teacher.

10, What was the name of the school, the school emblem and uniform like?

Ernest Bevin College (all boys school) Founded in 1970, by James Bond.

11, Was the character bullied, or did the character bully anyone during this period?

Bullied early on (as noted in early Qs).

In the later period of high school, he is the one that stands up for those being bullied. In fact his sporty mates start to take the piss out of Crofters and he stands up against them for this. This is where the character finds his voice.

12, What qualifications did the character come out with at the end of high school?

The character does well at high school exams.

College

1, Did the character go to college?

Yes. However, this marks a dark period in his life. He starts to lose his way, feels landlocked and unmotivated. He has found a way of coping at high school, has found a voice and something of himself, but finds himself 'staring out at sea' again.

2, If so which one? Where was it? And what did they study?

South Thames College. Sports Science

3, Who were their friends at college?

Similar to those at High School both in terms of sports mates and Barney.

4, What are their memories of attending this institution?

Barney's degenerative disease worsens and eventually takes Barney at this time, which send the character to a dark place. This reinforces the idea the real world is not the perfect place he expected it to be and is stark contrast to childhood memories.

5, Detail the relationships at play, with friends, romantic interests and family at this stage?

As above.

6, What is the character's fondest memory from this time?

First love/girlfriend. However, the relationship soon ends, which is another damaging experience at this time.

7, What qualifications and experiences did the character leave college with?

As a result of these traumas, he graduates with mediocre grades.

8, Did the character have any part time Saturday jobs, paper rounds etc, during this period or prior?

While at college he is a lifeguard at the local swimming pool.

Having now considered the character's past thus far and looking forward to bringing them up to modern day. What is the character's full name?

University and early work experience

1, Did the character attend University, or any higher education training schemes, including vocational courses, on the job training etc?

After college the character became involved in care work. This experience shows him a darker side of life and offers him something of a basis for comparison. Life is shit, in comparison to my childhood, but it could be a lot worse.

After the death of Crofters, he is keen to help people in a similar situation, he wants to give back to society. This decision is not made straight away, he does spend some time in a dark place trying to make sense of the world and himself. Often people who have been down to the depths, come back stronger and more determined because of it.

His experience of Crofters' death, pushes him onto his true path.

After a few years, where he is coming to terms with and making sense of all that has happened, during which time he works in the care industry, he finally (when on the road to recovery) decides to go to university and study in order to pursue care as a career. He is academically astute enough and is able to write a compelling application and perform well in the interview.

He attends Bangor University (Gwynedd). This may be a subconscious choice to return to that happier place of his childhood, whilst it is still city living, which he had become acclimatised to.

2, Give details of this – in terms of courses, duration, qualifications etc.

3 year course, Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)

3, Describe the relationships between friends, family and romantic partners at this time of their lives.

The sport friends fall by the wayside.

He makes friends on his course and joins some of the university sports teams.

He enters into a romantic relationship with a girl on his course. The relationship eventually ends, but this does not affect him adversely.

His parents are both still alive, but he has limited contact with them at this stage of his life.

4, What interests and hobbies did the character have at this stage of their lives?

Roll-Play (Dungeons & Dragons), which then progresses to Live Action Roll-play although he keeps this interest from most.

5, What is their fondest memory from this time?

Roll-Play adventures and a little bit of romance. A semi-return to the happiness of childhood in the homeland. 'From simplicity comes contentment'. He sees the modern world as horrible and a more historic and simple world as beautiful and right.

6, What is their worst memory from this time?

There is no specific memory, other than an awareness that at this time, should any tragedy had befallen him, he could easily have spiralled out of control.

Contemporary character and identity/personality

Answer the following questions from the character's point of view, as they are now, in modern day. Consider the implications of all the backstory that has been constructed. How have these events manifest themselves in the character's present state of mind and personality?

1, What is the character's occupation?

Manager of a small, rural Respite Home.

(Valley Forge. Respite Home. ST, Nicholas. Goodwick. Pembrokeshire. Wales).

A decision to remain in Wales after university was, in part, so that he could be nearer to his parents who have returned to Wales. Goodwick is not far from Fishgard.

2, Where do they live?

St. Nicolas, near Fishgard.

3, Who is their closest friend?

His girlfriend Natalia, who fills the female void left by the heavy female role models he has had throughout life, thus far. She is an Eastern-European immigrant, whom he met through social care.

4, Do they have a romantic partner? If so give details?

As above.

5, Which family members, if any, are they closest to? Detail who is living and dead from the family.

The parents have now retired and moved back to Wales.

Fishgard

The grandmother died while he was at high school (last year), having lived away from her for some time, the connection between the two had lessened. He was therefore, not too affected by this death.

Last week, his mother has died, this is tragic, but the character is able to cope with this – although there is an underlying tension with the character because of how important his mother was to him. As a result he forms a much closer relationship with his father.

6, With who do they share their secrets with?

Natalia

He has acquaintances with whom he goes for a drink with, but he has no close friend. His only close friends (Josh & Crofters) both heralded tragedy and hurt, so he is guarded against allowing people in. Natalia, as noted, however performs a different function and in many ways represents a best friend, mother figure and confidante.

7, With who do they share a secret?

N/A (see20)

8, Which co-workers can't they stand?

Gerald Clarke, he is area manager and is seen as an interference to the character's home, which is his own little kingdom. Gerry has no business being in the caring profession and is just interested in figures and targets, not people – 'Corporate Care'. Gerry represents everything that the character despises about upper management and corporate care in the industry.

Having met Natalia at work, it was to Gerald Clarke that he had to disclose the relationship to. Natalia was not allowed to work at the home any longer because of this relationship, because Gerry would not allow it and saw it a conflict of interests. This further reinforced the character's dislike of Gerald Clarke.

9, Which co-workers do they like?

He likes all his staff at the home, they are hard workers, whom he trusts and respects.

10, Who would they turn to for help?

It would have been his mother, up until her death. He now has to seek that from his father.

11, What does perfect happiness look like to them?

A return to the simpler bucolic community based lifestyle and location.

12, What are their interests and hobbies?

He continued with his LARPing (which Natalia doesn't mind and he doesn't have to hide this guilty pleasure from here). This LARPing community form the basis for his friendships (albeit not best friends).

His positive coping mechanisms relate to sporty activity, and thus he is a member of the village cricket team. He also Gyms and goes for runs. He has a gym bike at home.

13, What means most to the character?

His little kingdom (the respite home) where he is free from that corporate structure.

14, What is the character's greatest desire?

As above. The corporate idea is something that angers him and he is able to operate with a large amount of autonomy, other than answering to Gerry. He sees being corporate as indicative of the modern world and all that is wrong with the modern world. This idea of the corporate instils and evokes RAGE in him.

15, What is the character's greatest fear?

That he will have another slip in his mental health.

16, What flaws does the character have?

He is very accepting and inclusive, but in terms of personal relationships he is very guarded – this is because anyone he has got close to, when the die, it floors him.

He is also prone to rage regarding corporate ideals.

17, What is their greatest achievement?

18, Detail the most embarrassing thing that has ever happened to them.

Having his clothes stolen from the changing room at high school. In the present day, given his basis for comparison, he doesn't really get embarrassed.

19, If we googled the character's name, what would we find?

A LARPing archive with videos of him in action dressed as a Knight.

Also profile of him as manager of the respite home.

Sporting achievement award from University.

20, What is their biggest secret?

In the difficult time between college and going o university, he attempted suicide. He called his mother and the parents rushed round. This was more a cry for help than a definite attempt. He then lived back with his parents, were they looked after him, got him help and supported him.

21, What is their greatest regret?

Not having made a proper friend in his adult life.

22, What is their most treasured possession? Why, what is its significance?

A ring (his grandmother's and mother's), which he intends to give to Natalia at some point. This represents Natalia filling the void that she fills in terms of a replacement for his Gran and mother.

23, Does the character have any bad habits?

The occasional binge drinking session. He is willing to go a bit further (get drunk) in order to ingratiate him into a group and on the surface be friendly, be one of the lads.

24, What is the worst thing that has ever happened to them?

Moving away from Fishgard, the death of Crofters, being stabbed in the leg and the deaths of his female influences.

25, What is their favourite film?

26, What is their favourite food/drink?

27, What TV shows do they watch?

28, What do they do for fun?

29, What is their favourite colour?

30, If the character were an animal, what animal would they be?

31, What extravagance do they allow themselves?

32, Which person(s), living or dead, would they most like to meet and why?

33, What music do they listen to? Give details as to what music they listen to in different states of mind. i.e. if unhappy, when happy, when getting ready for a night out, when doing mundane tasks etc.

B:3 Character Questions (EDEN)

Character Questions

Participant B

Eden Binns

Childhood and parentage

1, Where and when was the character born?

Preston, Lancashire: 12th September 1982

2, What were their parents called?

Brenda & John Binns

3, How old were their parents when they had the child?

30 & 32 respectively.

4, What were their parents' occupations?

Mother was a shop worker (local corner shop) & and father was a Car Salesman.

5, Was the pregnancy planned?

Yes. Planned for a family, had one and struggled for more later.

6, Were the character's grandparents alive during their early childhood?

Yes, both sets:

(Maternal) Pauline & Joe

(Paternal) Cyril & Sue

7, If so, what were the grandparents like?

The paternal Grandparents lived far away and there was little contact between the character and the Grandparents.

The maternal Grandparents lived locally and were very hands on, featuring extensively in the character's life, picking her up from school, visiting every Sunday.

8, What was the character's relationship like with their grandparents?

Only saw the paternal Grandparents once a year at Christmas, relatively estranged relationship, did not spoil her when they did visit, were 'just another visitor. Got on well with the maternal grandparents, very ordinary relationship.

9, Does/did the character have any siblings?

No.

10, Detail the names, ages and sequence of these siblings' births etc.

N/A

11, What was their early relationship with these (if any) siblings?

N/A

12, Where did the character spend the first years of their life?

Family stayed in Preston

13, Was there any family pets in these formative years?

A ginger cat called George. He ran away when she was seven. This saddened the character, but meant she avoided any experience pf bereavement at this early age.

14, Did the character receive any childhood injury, or illness?

She broke her arm (falling off her bike in the street), had Chicken Pox (at the age of 3) and broke her nose (when another child hit her in the face). As her parents worked a lot, the resulting attention showered on her due to this breakages she enjoyed. When off school due to illness and injury her mother took time off to care for her, which the character enjoyed also. A fond memory of these times is related to the attention from mum and dad and that she got a telly (the only telly in the house) put in her room for the duration of the illness/injury.

15, What is the character's earliest childhood memory - if not covered by the above?

Going to choose a kitten (George). She wanted a ginger kitty, she nagged her parents, “I want ginger kitty”.

Early school

1, What, if any, memories does the character have of Infant and Primary school?

Memories of these schools are predominantly related to school dinners. She remembers being forced to eat all the food on her plate, because one of her distant relatives (Jude Jones) was a dinner lady. So she had to eat all the horrible school food, as she was threatened by the relative that fi she didn’t then her grandmother would hear of it. The dinner lady was a great aunt, or her grandparent’s cousin.

2, What was the name of their best friend at primary school?

Beth. They were only best friends at school as Beth lived far away from the character and so she couldn’t go to each-others’ houses, without pre-arranged. They would fall out and make up all the time. The reason for this was that Beth was naughty and would get the character into trouble.

3, What was the name of their infant/primary school?

St. Peter’s in Lostock Hall.

4, Do they remember any significant influence (teachers/dinner ladies) from those schools?

See Jude Jones

5, What was the school emblem and uniform like?

The emblem was the name of the school with a cross, the jumper was emerald green

6, How close to the school(s) did they live?

A 5 to 10 minute drive.

7, What was the walk/drive to school like?

The drive to school was also rushed and last minute.

8, What cultural references (TV shows etc) do they remember from that time – if any?

When she got home from school, at about half three, the following tv shows were on; The Simpsons, The Fresh Prince of Bel Air and the Star Trek.

9, How did they feel about going to high school?

She was academically gifted, wore glasses, though herself something of a nerd and worried that she would be bullied for this.

High School

1, What do they remember about starting high school – this may include the journey to and from school, parents' reactions to the first day, emotions and any anecdotes regarding school dinners, navigating the corridors and interactions between staff and older students.

The character remembers being quite overwhelmed on her first day of high school. She was confident and comfortable in lessons, as she was bright, but somewhat reticent when it came to speaking up in class, despite knowing the answers.

In terms of school dinners (a bone of contention at primary school) she remembers the choice being refreshing and that she was being treated a little more like a grown up. She was also not force to eat ever scrap.

The older children were on a different yard to the youngsters, so this alleviated her worries a little.

2, Who were their circle of friends while at high school?

Beth went to the same high school. The character chose to go to the same high school. However, within a short time they separated and didn't remain friends. This was generally precipitated by Beth being less academic and naughty and the character identifying these differences as they are highlighted at this age. Also, being in different sets to Beth and this is where she formed new friendship.

3, Give details of names and relationships?

The new friends were; Laura, Lydia, Robert and Chantel.

Laura and Lydia are in most of the character's classes, but they are all in the same form. Robert is always just hanging around with them at dinner and break time. Robert and Chantel are in some classes, but they are the funny friends whom they hang out with out of class. Robert is the clown and Chantel is an 'air head' – silly, but lovely.

These friends are predominantly school friends, but as school progresses, they begin to meet out of school and after school.

4, Did the circle of friends change as high school progressed.

No. If anything these friendships progress and devlop over this high school period.

5, Did the circle of friends have any sayings/catchphrases or way of speaking/behaving?

A lot of Americanisms were banded about, influenced greatly by the film *Clueless*. Phrases like, 'whetever' and 'ohmygod', are prevalent within this groups lexicon.

The group (not Robert) attended cheerleading club (which they formed), which again revelled in the Americanisms. The club rehearsed at dinner time and after school. They occasionally were allowed to perform their routines in assembly in front of the school. Heavily dance based, they made their own routines up from watching TV

(recording dance videos and music videos off TV and watch them back) and a dance book in the library.

However, despite this the group and particularly the character went unnoticed. She didn't fit into the cool category, but also wasn't truly in the geeks either. The character coasts through high school very much under the RADAR. As a result of this, though not popular (outside of the friendship group) the character was not the subject of any bullying.

6, Do they remember any significant teachers or influences from high school.

Her favourite teacher was Mr. Starkey, a big guy (tall and wide), a funny down-to-earth teacher, who didn't talk down to the pupils, but didn't attempt to be one of them either.

7, What were their interests/hobbies during high school?

See Cheerleading Club.

8, What cultural references do they remember from this time?

See coded language (Q5)

9, Did the character have a crush and/or first love during this period?

Her first crush is James Halliwell, a boy in her English class. She liked him because he shared a surname with one of The Spice Girls. She saw him out of school and he noticed her. It was this acknowledgement that started the crush, which continued for many years – but nothing ever came of it.

10, What was the name of the school, the school emblem and uniform like?

St. Mary's High School (Leyland). A black uniform with gold writing, a red cross and a blue passant lamb.

11, Was the character bullied, or did the character bully anyone during this period?

She was not. However, she did have a fight with another girl (Crystal) after school. The character had said that she was harder than the girl (to Donna) and Crystal approached her to prove this wasn't the case. This caused the character to have a few days off school, but she and the girl (again) became friends after this altercation.

12, What qualifications did the character come out with at the end of high school?

Yes. She excels at school and leaves with good grades.

College

1, Did the character go to college?

Yes.

2, If so which one? Where was it? And what did they study?

Runshaw College, Leyland: Health & Social Care. She wanted to be a nursery nurse.

3, Who were their friends at college?

Laura, Lydia and Lyra. Laura and Lydia from School.

4, What are their memories of attending this institution?

5, Detail the relationships at play, with friends, romantic interests and family at this stage?

At this stage in her life her parents had broken up. The divorce was due to the father being abusive – physically and verbally. This had gone on since school and explains why she was quite quiet at school. The break up also explains her lack of focus in this period of her life. This meant that she had a stronger relationship with her mother, than her father.

The mother got a new boyfriend, but her primary (the character's) main focus became earning money to help pay the bills, as her mother still only worked at the shop.

The maternal grandmother is still alive here, but the character's mother is caring for her and running her errands.

The paternal grandfather, whom she had developed a strong relationship with over the last few years, has died and she blames the grandmother for his death. They were fairly wealthy due to the grandfather's hard work, and the character thought that the grandmother, who led a leisurely life on the proceeds, continued to expect the grandfather to do everything, even in retirement. The character sees this lifestyle to be the reason for his death and the fault to be laid at the grandmother's feet.

The grandfather was up a ladder cleaning the gutters (on the grandmother's behest) and fell off the ladder. This realised asbestos, which is what eventually killed him.

The character now wants nothing to do with the grandmother and has cut all ties with her. This is made worse by the fact that the mother is running round after the grandmother, and struggling for money, while the grandmother is well off and offers no financial support to the family.

The death of the grandfather has had an adverse effect on her.

The paternal grandparents have died by this stage and the character did not attend their funerals, as they were distant both geographically and emotionally. This didn't particularly effect the character as she had little in the way of a relationship with them anyway.

6, What is the character's fondest memory from this time?

Driving around in her friend's car. Her friend Lydia learnt to drive first, so they used to drive around in Lydia's car, listening to music, ditching college to go to MacDonald's and a feeling of freedom. This period is the start of her rebellious streak (a way of coping with her anger regarding the parental beak up and death of her granddad) where she plays the wild child a little. Despite this, she keeps her job

at the restaurant, in order to financially support her mother. This is the period where she ‘finds her voice’ and becomes more outgoing. The wildchild/rebel sticks with her a little, but is not really problematic – she learns that speaking her mind works for her.

7, What qualifications and experiences did the character leave college with?

Left without completing the course.

8, Did the character have any part time Saturday jobs, paper rounds etc, during this period or prior?

Yes. Whilst at college, she worked nights in a restaurant, which made her tired and she didn’t get up in time for college. She ended up leaving college and tried for an apprenticeship. However, this also was short lived and she soon (after 8 months) gave up her apprenticeship (YTS, on the job training) at a nursery – children, not plants. She continued working in the restaurant throughout this period. She retained aspirations to being a nursery nurse at this time.

Having now considered the character’s past thus far and looking forward to bringing them up to modern day. What is the character’s full name?

University and early work experience

1, Did the character attend University, or any higher education training schemes, including vocational courses, on the job training etc?

No. She is however, enrolled on a on the job training scheme (YTS) for book keeping.

2, Give details of this – in terms of courses, duration, qualifications etc.

N/A

3, Describe the relationships between friends, family and romantic partners at this time of their lives.

Relationships with relatives are as they were previously.

She is still friends with Lydia, who is her best friend, but she has friends from work.

She has a boyfriend (George Manley) that she has been with for 13 months.

4, What interests and hobbies did the character have at this stage of their lives?

She attended a lot of gigs, obsessed with music, lots of glitter and blue eye shadow.

Ashe dabbled in some lighter drugs, but it was never a big thing and it didn’t continue for long.

5, What is their fondest memory from this time?

Watching The Manic Street Preachers at Manchester Academy.

6, What is their worst memory from this time?

Being dumped by George Manley, after the Manics' gig. She paid for the tickets and never got the money back from him.

Contemporary character and identity/personality

Answer the following questions from the character's point of view, as they are now, in modern day. Consider the implications of all the backstory that has been constructed. How have these events manifest themselves in the character's present state of mind and personality?

1, What is the character's occupation?

Administration Officer for a housing association

2, Where do they live?

Layland, Preston: Lancashire

3, Who is their closest friend?

Kate, whom she became friends with when she went to gigs in the 90s. Lydia is still a friend, but Kate has taken the role of best friend.

4, Do they have a romantic partner? If so give details?

No. She has been single for ten years.

5, Which family members, if any, are they closest to? Detail who is living and dead from the family.

Her mother, 70 and now retired, is still her closest relative. Her mother is healthy and mobile enough. The character takes her shopping and drives her around a bit. They enjoy spending time together.

Nana is now dead. The nana left the character's mother the house, so she is more financially stable now.

6, With who do they share their secrets with?

Kate and Lydia.

7, With who do they share a secret?

Kate.

While Oasis were playing on Avenham park (the character had a boyfriend at the time), she kissed her boyfriend's best friend in a bush. Kate was the lookout.

8, Which co-workers can't they stand?

Bernice and Paulo.

Bernice is always gossiping about other people and continually bangs on about her children.

Paulo is sexist and in the main can't be understood, because he mutters.

9, Which co-workers do they like?

She works with Kate (despite having met in the 90s), they ended up working at the same place. This means they are able to have lunch together.

She is happy with her team, as she got to choose them. Bernice and Paulo are on her team, but on the periphery.

Rochelle, Thomas, Lewis and Phyllis form the core of her team, whom she likes.

10, Who would they turn to for help?

If she needed a normal kind of help, she would go to her mum. But

"If she needed to bury a body, she'd go to Kate and Lydia. And they would help!"

11, What does perfect happiness look like to them?

The character is happy with a mundane existence. She doesn't wish for grand things. A barbeque with friends, a walk in the park. Having worked hard in the week, the perfect weekend is just pottering around and relaxing, going and buying a plant and socialising with friends in the evening – nothing extreme.

12, What are their interests and hobbies?

Watching sci-fi and horror films, attending related events (Comicon etc), collecting figurines from popular culture (Star Wars figures etc.) and building unusual jigsaws (3D Jigsaws etc.).

She is however, occasionally prone to a boozy binge, which takes a while to recover from. This could happen mid-week or at the weekend. She doesn't have a problem, but when she does go drinking, she goes at it hard.

13, What means most to the character?

Family and friends, over money. She wouldn't think twice about spending £100 on a mid-week night out.

14, What is the character's greatest desire?

To have a family of her own.

15, What is the character's greatest fear?

Being alone.

Although she lives alone, she has the awareness and support network to reach out to friends when feeling low and lonely.

She is content being by herself, but there is a deeper sadness, which comes from an awareness that the dream of having her own family (which is the societal expectation) is becoming increasingly unobtainable.

16, What flaws does the character have?

She will go out on occasion and get ‘hammered’. Although she has a good support network and many positive coping mechanisms. The binge represents a way of having a more self-destructive blow out to clear the air and then she can return to normality.

She will do more for other people and less for herself. She puts others’ before herself.

She swears a lot.

Her sharpness and quick wit is a form of defence mechanism. Therefore some quick quips may take the form of a more scathing/caustic or passive/aggressive repost/jab.

17, What is their greatest achievement?

Finally getting a new cat (Wilson).

She has met many stars from the Sci-Fi world, including Kenny Rogers, Bret Spiner and Dave Prowse.

To be discussed Further?

18, Detail the most embarrassing thing that has ever happened to them.

Fell off her bike in spin class. (Revisit?)

19, If we googled the character’s name, what would we find?

The front page of the LEP. She won a competition for growing Preston’s biggest turnip in 1992. (Details)

20, What is their biggest secret?

She thinks she is probably a lesbian.

21, What is their greatest regret?

Not marring John Stone. John was her boyfriend when she was 18-28. They enjoyed many adventures, were engaged and had planned to make a family, but it sadly fizzled out before this happened. She was slightly younger than him and had wanted to go out and do things, so they postponed the children element of their relationship. She regrets having fun and partying in her early twenties, which meant she missed the opportunity to have children. They had saved together and after the split she was able to put a deposit down on her own home - get a mortgage.

22, What is their most treasured possession? Why, what is its significance?

A lemon jumper (with 2 lemons on the left hand shoulder) that was given to her by her granddad – it was bought at a car boot they visited together (every Sunday) when he was alive. She was a teenager when she received this gift and she periodically still wears it.

23, Does the character have any bad habits?

She smokes and swears and drinks too much. This represents the rebel that still lurks inside her.

24, What is the worst thing that has ever happened to them?

Witnessing the domestic violence, perpetrated by her father, towards her mother. Her need for safety and the mundane stems from this and represents the antidote to witnessing this and not feeling safe as a child.

This experience underpins all her defence mechanisms and need for coping mechanisms. Although she does occasionally slip in to more destructive ones and does return to a rebellious state on occasion.

25, What is their favourite film?

26, What is their favourite food/drink?

27, What TV shows do they watch?

28, What do they do for fun?

29, What is their favourite colour?

30, If the character were an animal, what animal would they be?

31, What extravagance do they allow themselves?

32, Which person(s), living or dead, would they most like to meet and why?

33, What music do they listen to? Give details as to what music they listen to in different states of mind. i.e. if unhappy, when happy, when getting ready for a night out, when doing mundane tasks etc.

B:4 Character Questions (GULIA)

Character Questions

Participant C

Gulia Rose Lawrence

(*Never Jools, only Gulia. Only Ricky ever referred to her as Jools. She will 'snap your neck' if you call her anything other than Gulia)*

(Grandparents called her Gulia Rosa all the time)

Childhood and parentage

1, *Where and when was the character born?*

Soho, West London: 1st April 1990

2, What were their parents called?

Cyrus (Si) & Patricia (Tricia) Lawrence. Grandfather (Theo) Italian, but accent and much of the Italian heritage is diluted by marriages to English people - Phyllis and the Cyrus.

3, How old were their parents when they had the child?

40 & 38 (respectively)

4, What were their parents' occupations?

Managers of family run restaurant – owned by maternal grandparents, who built the business up from nothing.

5, Was the pregnancy planned?

No, but after the initial shock, the parents rose to the challenge and the pregnancy did not become any issue.

6, Were the character's grandparents alive during their early childhood?

Yes, both sets.

7, If so, what were the grandparents like?

Theo and Phyllis (Maternal) & Names not applicable to paternal grandparents, as they do not feature in the character's life.

8, What was the character's relationship like with their grandparents?

Loving, but hard working. The character is loved, but no family members have much free time, due to working relentlessly in the restaurant. Close, but if the character wanted to be around them, then it would be whilst they are working. The character, at this age was more of a hindrance and was generally stuffed in the office out of the way. The parents/grandparents know everything about the business and little of real life – as a result the character grew up in, something of, a bubble. **Absent whilst being physically present.**

9, Does/did the character have any siblings?

No, only child

10, Detail the names, ages and sequence of these siblings' births etc.

N/A

11, What was their early relationship with these (if any) siblings?

N/A

12, Where did the character spend the first years of their life?

Soho, London (as above)

13, Was there any family pets in these formative years?

No. No time or capacity for any pets – family too busy.

14, Did the character receive any childhood injury, or illness?

Burn on her arm (aged 6), whilst in the kitchen. This resulted from her being banned from the kitchen and meant less time spent with the family at work (at this stage), This meant that if at the restaurant, she could only inhabit the office or front of house, where the customers were. This injury shows that the family cares about her safety, but means she is further ostracised from her family. However, mixing with the

customers allows her to gain some social skills and superficial relationships with older people.

15, What is the character's earliest childhood memory - if not covered by the above?

Memories of being in or around the restaurant, also the family live above it so the character doesn't really go far from the building. She gets her meals there and befriends some of the staff and regulars, but not in any really meaningful and deep way.

Early school

1, What, if any, memories does the character have of Infant and Primary school?

Little memory of school at this age. She was in school until the age of 6-7, but then was taken out to be 'home schooled'. This led to a feeling of isolation, but since she knew no different, the sense of missing out didn't feature. Being isolated and home schooled lead to a juxtaposition of being very adjusted and strangely maladjusted. However, a real work ethic was instilled in her at this young age.

2, What was the name of their best friend at primary school?

No true friends at this age, but time was spent with the children of regulars' of the restaurant. The character served as a distraction for these kids whilst the parents ate and drank – these relationships were again, relatively superficial.

3, What was the name of their infant/primary school?

Soho Parish Infant & Primary School

4, Do they remember any significant influence (teachers/dinner ladies) from those schools?

Several good influences, in terms of chefs or workers at the restaurant, who doted on her and gave her treats etc.

5, What was the school emblem and uniform like?

N/A

6, How close to the school(s) did they live?

20 minutes drive through rush hour traffic.

7, What was the walk/drive to school like?

A frenzied and stressful journey. The character associated school with stress and her parents' impatience and frustration, as they had to drive her through rush hour traffic and then get back to work. This is one reason, she is eventually taken out of school – more a parental decision though.

8, What cultural references (TV shows etc) do they remember from that time – if any?

Cartoon network and the Simpsons, which she watched either in the office or in the flat upstairs.

9, How did they feel about going to high school?

Didn't attend, but was jealous of those that did – watching the local children, in their uniforms waiting at bus stops etc on their way to school. The local kids would also come in and talk about school. The character would attempt to press her parents, to be allowed to go to school, but as she is now of an age that makes her more useful around the restaurant, they deny her request.

<u>High School</u>

1, What do they remember about starting high school – this may include the journey to and from school, parents' reactions to the first day, emotions and any anecdotes regarding school dinners, navigating the corridors and interactions between staff and older students.

2, Who were their circle of friends while at high school?

Although not at high school herself, she does have some relationship with the local kids, whom she gives free drinks to, or free food. She also starts to notice boys in this period of her life. Once again, these are superficial relationships, where she is ultimately being used for free food and drink, rather than a true friendship(s) existing.

The character's cousins would visit frequently, these formed something approaching a truer friendship, or real relationship.

3, Give details of names and relationships?

Cousin Franny and sometimes Cousin Ed would visit regularly, (with Aunt Chrissie). Aunt Chrissie was a single mum, the father (for the cousins) is unknown. The character would go up to the flat with the cousins, where they would smoke, listen to music and 'talk shit' about the family. The rapport at work here is the apparent errant nature of their parents – although the character's parents are present they are absent in terms of time and affection.

This rebellious streak surfacing in the character is motivated by a need to find some connection with others – in this case the cousins.

4, Did the circle of friends change as high school progressed.

Yes (although not at school). When the family Cyrus and Trish move away from the family business to set up their own in Brighton.

This is motivated by a family bust up, The character is unaware of what the argument was about, but both herself and the cousins have noticed some unrest, which they discuss when smoking on the flat.

The family up and leave, the cousins no longer visit and the character is jarred and becomes depressed. Any relationships she had forged (albeit rather superficial) are now shattered, she becomes very down. The new staff, as she is both the owners'

daughter and of an older age, don't dote on her for fear of inappropriate behaviour towards a pubescent girl, but also that anything they say will get back to the owners.

However, along with this uprooting, the character does now get to interact with her parents a lot more, as she takes on more shift and more responsibility in the new business.

5, Did the circle of friends have any sayings/catchphrases or way of speaking/behaving?

N/A in terms of circle of friends, but the character has a tendency towards the odd Italian swear words.

6, Do they remember any significant teachers or influences from high school.

7, What were their interests/hobbies during high school?

Drawing and Calligraphy, which is where she is able to express herself, at work she does the specials' board, menus and any other written artwork for the restaurant.

The parents are supportive of this, as long as it benefits them. They are worried that she may not want to stay in the restaurant business, which they see as her birth rite and destiny. The character enjoys the praise, but is aware that praise comes from working in the restaurant and that the expectation is to have a proper job, not mess about with art.

8, What cultural references do they remember from this time?

At this time the character is mostly interested in music, R&B and so forth.

9, Did the character have a crush and/or first love during this period?

Ricky the KP, a little older than her (17), forms the focus for her affections and blossoms into a romantic relationship. They have to sneak around, as if found out, Ricky is likely to be sacked by her parents. She hangs around him a lot and then plucks up the courage to ask if he wants to have a drink after the shift. Though underage, she has access to alcohol and a hangover from her Italian heritage means that she is comfortable with wine with meals and it is not the taboo it might be for others.

10, What was the name of the school, the school emblem and uniform like?

N/A- Work uniform, All black (Black trousers and black blouse/shirt) with the name of the restaurant emblazoned on the breast – *Top Dishes*.

11, Was the character bullied, or did the character bully anyone during this period?

N/A – However people at work unwilling to make friends with her as her parents were hard and had a tendency to sack people frequently. Also see above Q4. She is respected, but more out of a fear of her parents than any respect of her per se. this exacerbates the insular upbringing the character experiences.

This goes some way to explaining and grounding why the character (in modern day) is such a harsh and closed character.

12, What qualifications did the character come out with at the end of high school?

N/A

College

1, Did the character go to college?

No. She did push to do art and design. The parents gave her the ultimatum, you go, you're on your own. You don't need to go to college, as the business will be yours soon and you need to learn the ropes of being a manager, which we will give you.

2, If so which one? Where was it? And what did they study?

N/A

3, Who were their friends at college?

Not at college, but is reaching an age, where she is making work friends, where she is able to go out after a shift with colleagues. Again not true friends, but is developing her social skills and interacting with people of a similar age.

4, What are their memories of attending this institution?

Work is becoming a large part of her life, she has more responsibilities etc.

She works hard and has occasional arguments with parents. However, Ricky still works there and the excitement of sneaking around in an' illicit love affair' (hidden from parents) and mixing with Ricky's circle of friends makes this a happy time for her and one where she develops her hitherto undeveloped social abilities.

This marks a period where she comes out of her shell. She is able to open up to Ricky and trusts him. **Ricky is a key figure in the character's development – in terms of being an antidote to her insular upbringing thus far.**

5, Detail the relationships at play, with friends, romantic interests and family at this stage?

As above. Ricky eventually moves away, she is able to get away to visit him, for a time.

At the latter part of this period in her life, she is now a supervisor and her parents are giving her responsibility and autonomy. They are nearing retirement age and the relationship, though highly business orientated, is a smoother one, and one based in mutual respect of all parties – which she hasn't really experienced up till now.

Having now considered the character's past thus far and looking forward to bringing them up to modern day. What is the character's full name?

University and early work experience

1, Did the character attend University, or any higher education training schemes, including vocational courses, on the job training etc?

No.

2, Give details of this – in terms of courses, duration, qualifications etc.

N/A

In this interim period, the character works full time and slowly takes over as manager of the restaurant.

3, Describe the relationships between friends, family and romantic partners at this time of their lives.

The relationship with Ricky ends in this period. He leaves the restaurant, and moves on – the long distance puts a strain on the relationship. But due to work commitments the character sees him less and less. She wants more from the relationship than him and the break up occurs, with is heart-breaking for the character. This feeling of being denied a different future, feeds into the character's present day running condition – a harsh, guarded person. This represents a regret that stays with her, that she was unable to break out of her imposed destiny.

The character had seen Ricky as a possible ticket out of her destiny at the restaurant. However, he wants to move on in his own life and as they don't see much of each other the relationship ends. The character is torn between a future away from the restaurant and a sense of duty to her parents and therefore the restaurant. Her entire life, she has been sculpted to manage the restaurant and despite thinking she wants out, actually becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy.

4, What interests and hobbies did the character have at this stage of their lives?

5, What is their fondest memory from this time?

Her relationship with Ricky represents her fondest and worst memory of this time. This is also where a sense of resentment towards her parents begins to develop. This is a juxtaposition between a sense of resentment and the fact that she has now got a great rapport with her parents, who are giving her trust and respect – something that they have hitherto not really offered her.

6, What is their worst memory from this time?

See Q5

ADDITIONAL INFO:

The character learns that the parents had hoped that the (grandparents) family business was going to go to them. However, they learnt that the grandparents intended to sell up. This is the reason for the break up and relocation.

The way the parents were sculpted to become restaurateurs, is exactly how the parents have treated the character. When this break up occurs, the parents simply hit reset and begin all over again with their daughter (the character).

Discovering this reason for the break up, further reinforces the character's sense of duty to her parents.

This cyclical process of resentment and duty, exacerbates the resentment that the character feels towards her situation and to an extent her parents.

Contemporary character and identity/personality

Answer the following questions from the character's point of view, as they are now, in modern day. Consider the implications of all the backstory that has been constructed. How have these events manifest themselves in the character's present state of mind and personality?

1, What is the character's occupation?

Restaurant Manager.

2, Where do they live?

Brighton. Aldrington. Raphael Rd.

The parents have a house on (nearby) Lawrence Rd. The road name and surname being the same was what attracted them to this area. This demonstrates a sense of destiny, fate and serendipity, which is prevalent within the Lawrence household's psyche.

3, Who is their closest friend?

The assistant Manager – Sarah. This is a work friendship that blossoms into an adult friendship – beyond just work. Sarah, is possibly, aside from Ricky, the characters first proper friend.

Sarah is a single mother and need the job to pay the bills. The character pays her well, more than usual, and although Sarah doesn't really like the work, the money is very useful and is good for her at this time of life – Sarah however, can always leave and chase her dreams, the character feels she cannot.

Sarah is a confidante and friend. She respects the character without fearing her. She is a calming influence and someone who the character can laugh with. Sarah represents everything that the character has never had, up until this point.

4, Do they have a romantic partner? If so give details?

No. She has had some unsuccessful dates, since Ricky. There is Ron, who is a convenient and a sporadic partner, but the relationship is not serious – they are ultimately using each other for comfort, due to loneliness.

Ron occasionally comes to the bar of the restaurant, and he and the character occasionally have a little lock in, which culminates in an assignation. Neither the character nor Ron, have ever really found the one, so the relationship is one of convenience and one in which the character has control of.

5, Which family members, if any, are they closest to? Detail who is living and dead from the family.

The mother and father are still alive and are still a presence at the restaurant. The character still lives with them on Lawrence Road. She is physically close to them, but is keeping a lot from them in terms of her personal life. This secrecy is learnt behaviour and another element of her guarded behaviour.

Grandparents have died by this point.

6, With who do they share their secrets with?

Sarah is her confidante and is the person she s most likely to talk to about personal stuff. Occasionally the parents may be consulted regarding business stuff, but Sarah is the person she will confide in. She might talk to Ron when drunk, but she is rarely drunk – with Ron.

Sarah is her first true friend and someone that she is able to be herself around and open up. Sarah isn't in the job for a career and represents a former version of the character, who desired escape. Sarah represents what the character could have been – potentially. The character is able, in a way, to live vicariously through Sarah.

7, With who do they share a secret?

The character did 'something' (Pre-Ricky) with a young pot washer Dan, only she (then aged 13) and Dan know about this.

She may have told Sarah this when talking drunkenly about first sexual experiences etc. Only after a few drinks will the character open up, even to Sarah, given the guarded nature of the character.

8, Which co-workers can't they stand?

The Head Waiter: Darren. She feels he could probably do her job better than her. The interaction is sparse and business related only. She resents his abilities, the job never came naturally to her, but it comes naturally to him – he bruises her ego and threatens her confidence. Out of spite she dislikes him, because he is very good at his job, which also makes him essentially un-sakable. Although she comes from a line of people who readily sack employees, she is desperately trying to move away from that, although it is learnt behaviour for her.

9, Which co-workers do they like?

She believes she has a good team, but keeps everyone at arm's length (except Sarah).

10, Who would they turn to for help?

She is very proud and often suffers in silence. She might go to her parents, but things would have to be really bad. She is most likely to find a resolution on her own. This puts her under a lot of pressure.

11, What does perfect happiness look like to them?

Being alone in bed, or the bath with a glass of (red) wine, or watching TV. Just being in a quiet, calming environment. Having been alone, or in her own company her entire life, along with the stresses of work, this is a release for her.

12, What are their interests and hobbies?

She still loves calligraphy and art. She is constantly doodling and loves to do the seasonal menus and specials boards, which is does the art and writing for. She is working on a new logo for Top Dishes. She is trying to interweave her interests into the business. This allows her some feeling of independence and that she is following her dreams, although only a little.

13, What means most to the character?

The business, as she feels she has nothing else.

14, What is the character's greatest desire?

To live abroad and find happiness ('whatever that is'), an opportunity to find herself, as she has no real identity other than the one foisted upon her by her parents.

Sh is unsure of what she wants, other than she doesn't want her present life.

15, What is the character's greatest fear?

That she will lose herself entirely to the business and never accomplish anything that she wants to accomplish. Her greatest fear is that she will end up living this life that she hates.

16, What flaws does the character have?

She is snappy and short with employees for no discernable reason – other than to, perhaps, assert her authority.

She is closed off and comes across as cold and heartless.

17, What is their greatest achievement?

Becoming the manager of Top Dishes. Although this is not the great accomplishment, in her eyes, that it is to others.

18, Detail the most embarrassing thing that has ever happened to them.

She told Ricky, in front of his friends, that she wanted to marry him. He laughed at her and later confided that he felt the exact opposite. <u>This was the first time she bore her soul and represents the pinnacle of embarrassment and is the reason is unlikely to bare her soul to anyone ever again.</u>

19, If we googled the character's) name, what would we find?

The website for Top Dishes.

20, What is their biggest secret?

The underage assignation.

More importantly and more telling, the fact that she has never told her parents that she hates doing this! This is what she and Sarah talk about most, how they hate the job.

21, What is their greatest regret?

Ending up where she is. The repression of all these feelings of un-fulfilment, resentment and loneliness is building up inside her and is essentially a powder keg.

Chats with Sarah, allow for some respite from this. The dynamic of the friendship is that as a single mother Sarah is trapped and alienated, to a lesser extent, but the two women have this common ground.

22, What is their most treasured possession? Why, what is its significance?

A pair of earrings that Ricky bought her. She has never worn them. They always make her smile when she sees them, but convexly, often hides them away, as they represent the happiest part of her life and worst, in terms of the break up.

23, Does the character have any bad habits?

She bites her nails, through stress.

Snaps at employees (see above), often doesn't mean to, but is a tightly wrapped ball of stress. If someone makes a mistake, it is best to go to Sarah, rather than the character as you are likely to have your head bitten off. Sarah is an intermediary/buffer. You can talk to Sarah and she can, in turn, then talk to the boss. Sarah is important, not just as a friend, but within the dynamics of the business, ensure effective working relationships and practices. Sarah is a calming influence on all.

24, What is the worst thing that has ever happened to them?

Ricky leaving and with him, left any chance of ever getting out of her life, which she hates.

25, What is their favourite film?

26, What is their favourite food/drink?

27, What TV shows do they watch?

28, What do they do for fun?

29, What is their favourite colour?

30, If the character were an animal, what animal would they be?

31, What extravagance do they allow themselves?

32, Which person(s), living or dead, would they most like to meet and why?

33, What music do they listen to? Give details as to what music they listen to in different states of mind. i.e. if unhappy, when happy, when getting ready for a night out, when doing mundane tasks etc.

<u>B:5 All participants survey call.</u>

Hello. This is an automated call on behalf of your internet provider. We were wondering if you would be willing to take part in a short survey, to assess how satisfied with your provider you are? This will help improve your service and you could be eligible to a free upgrade or a month's discount on your bill. Would you be interested in taking part?

(PAUSE)

I'm sorry I didn't quite get that. Please try saying YES or NO.

Thank you. You have said YES, you would like to take part in the survey.

The survey will now begin. If you wish me to repeat any of the questions, please just say REPEAT at any time. If you would like to hear any of the options, just say OPTIONS at any time.

1, How satisfied with your present internet service are you?

Very Satisfied

Satisfied

Not Satisfied

Not satisfied at all

(REPEAT RESPONSE)

2, How would you rate the support your service provider provides?

Very unsatisfied

Not particularly Satisfied

Satisfactory

Very satisfactory.

3, On a scale of one to five would you recommend your provider to a friend

1 being yes I would and 5 being I definitely would not.

You have rated the provider as 1, is that correct?

I'm sorry I didn't quite get that. Try saying a number that relates to your answer. If you would like to hear the options again, please say OPTIONS

4, How competitive would you rate your monthly charges?

5 being very competitive and 1 being very uncompetitive.

5, What initially attracted you to your provider?

(PAUSE UNTIL THEY START TO SPEAK)

Answers could be related to the competitive rates, word of mouth, satisfactory support and supply

(PAUSE UNTIL THEY START TO SPEAK)

Or anything else that has not been suggested.

I'm sorry I didn't quite get that. Try speaking clearly into your phone.

Sorry. Would you like to return to question one?

You have said YES, is that correct?

6, What other providers have you considered?

You can say the name of other providers.

(PAUSE UNTIL THEY SPEAK)

If you have not considered any other suppliers, just say NONE.

7, Would you like to upgrade to the new premium internet bundle? This is £200 a month and comes with extra benefits and more data. Along with 24hr tech support?

Please say YES or NO.

You have answered YES. Is that correct?

You have answered YES and will now be put through to our customer accounts team to set this up. Your bill has been automatically generated. You're new bill is £250.98 per month.

You can opt out at any time, by saying CANCEL, or you can contact your supplier.

Please wait while you are connected.

You are number 50 in the queue. Please wait while we connect you.

You have now confirmed your change to premium.

Thank you.

Good bye.

<u>B:6 Ensemble Improvisations 1Scenarios</u>

In all cases the characters do not know each other.

Scenario #1: Management Training.

The three characters have either been forced to attend by their respective companies, or have chosen to attend the course on modern management techniques.

The action begins as all join and are waiting for the speaker to begin the session.

Scenario #2: Speed Awareness Course

The three characters are all obliged to attend a speed awareness course, rather than have their licence revoked.

Consider why your character was caught speeding. This may form the basis of the initial conversation.

The action begins whilst they are waiting for the host to arrive (online).

Scenario #3: Self Help Group

The two characters (Gulia & Eden) are attending a self-help group facilitated by Gwyn.

Gwyn leads the discussions and they potentially share stories and why they are there.

Think about why your character may be attending a self-help group.

Scenario #4 UNDISCOLSED – DO THIS FIRST ON ACCOUNT OF INFO ABOUT CHARACTERS BEING REVEALED IN OTHER IMPROVISTAIONS.

The last thing you remember is living your day-to-day life.

The next thing you know, you wake up on your bed, or the sofa, with no memory of the night before.

Your phone is dead and you cannot leave the room – you may wish to factor this into the improv.

You notice that your laptop is on and you are in a Zoom meeting with two other people.

You cannot leave the meeting

You have no idea why you are there, or why the others are there, or even who they are.

B:7 Examples of later STEP OUTLINES for Ensemble Project.

SCENE NO.	D	PAGE NO.	
SLUGLINE	INT. PARTICIOANTS HOME (ZOOM MEETING)		
ENDPOINT OF LAST SCENE			
CHARACTERS IN SCENE	GWYN, GULIA & EDEN		
POINT OF SCENE	WELLBEING TIPS SESSION		
CHARACTER GOAL			
CONFLICT			
TWIST			
ENDING/CENTRAL QUESTION			

SCENE DESCRIPTION

GWYN greets the participants and outlines the day's session

In this session Gwyn will give the participants some tips and tools to help them on their mindfulness journey. This session will involve the participants sharing personal details about their lives – not bank details and NI number!

The first tool is expanding your emotional vocabulary. As Wittgenstein said, "The limits of my language means the limits to my world."

Putting your feelings into words can have a therapeutic effect.

GWYN then asks the participants to name an animal that best suits the way they feel now and then one that illustrates where they want to be. Again GWYN goes first to illustrate the point.

He then asks them to make a sound that illustrates how they feel.

GWYN asks each participant to put into words how they feel, GWYN goes first to illustrate the point, then asks the others.

Saying No to yourself

There are plenty of day today temptations, social media, junk food, gossiping.

GWYN gets the participants to say No to themselves and urges them to set a goal of saying no to themselves in the coming week.

Be accountable for your flaws.

We are often critical of others, but ignorant of our own flaws.

GWYN gets the participants to explore their flaws. He goes himself to show everyone is accepting in the group.

Monitor your self talk.

There is a constant dialogue in our heads, which can mean negative thoughts and feeling soon spiral out f control.

Look at how you respond to your successes and failures. Do you pass your achievements off as luck and crucify yourself for failures?

GWYN goers round the group asking about their greatest achievements and failures.

GWYN asks the participants how they found the session. Then wraps the session up.

SCENE NO.	(F) FINAL SCENE	PAGE NO.	
SLUGLINE	INT. PARTICIPANTS' HOME/ZOOM MEETING		
ENDPOINT OF LAST SCENE	WEEK 4 'STRESS ANIMALS'/FALLING ACTION		
CHARACTERS IN SCENE	EDEN, GULIA & GWYN		
POINT OF SCENE	RESOLUTION AND END POINT FOR CHARACTERS		
CHARACTER GOAL			
CONFLICT			
TWIST	GWYN's SITUATION? GULIA'S TRANSFORMATION.		
ENDING/CENTRAL QUESTION	FINAL POINT FOR ALL CHARACTERS		

SCENE DESCRIPTION

(***SUGGESTED DIALOGUE IS IN ITALICS***)

It is the last session of the course.

Gwyn goes round the group asking them how their week has been.

Gulia is feeling confident and upbeat. She feels she has really benefitted from the course.

Eden is okay. *She is glad to be able to go into the office, as she has hated zoom meetings. She is tired and feels she has an online hangover, and an actual hangover*. Especially as recently, Paulo only dressed from the waist up and forgot, to turn his camera off, revealing his bottom half as he stood up. *No one should see that! Last time she saw legs like that, they were on a sparrow.*

For the final session Gwyn wants the group to consider their flaws and their achievements. It is often the case that we hold ourselves to account for or flaws and pass off our successes as blind luck.

Gwyn asks Gulia what her greatest achievement is.

Gulia details that up until now she couldn't have said she'd achieved anything. However, she has made the decision to leave the family business and make a new life for herself.
Due to lockdown, although horrible, it has served as a reset and not being at work has highlighted that she has no life outside work. Gwyn and Eden have been the greatest friends to her and given her the strength to go out on her own. She intends to retrain, maybe as a therapist, to help other as they have helped her.

Gwyn thinks this is great. He then asks Eden.

Eden's greatest achievement is being in the LEP in 1992.

Gwyn, in an attempt to support Eden, states that this is still an impressive achievement. He then presses her for any changes she could make to her life, as Gulia has.

Eden is not confident enough to do this. *She would like to sign up for another five week course with Gwyn. She realises that all she does is bury her problems and this is not conducive to well-being. She is lost in the world, alone and without connection, she is in a mental lockdown. .*

Gulia jumps in and orates a speech that echoes the first session. Gwyn and Eden sit in amazement of this.

I understand your fears, but you're in control of your own destiny. Grab the bull by the balls.

Be the Kestrel of courage and seize the shrew of indecision (<u>May wish to mime this).</u>

Draw your own roadmap to happiness.

Eden, you are sat on the mollusc of destiny, when you should be the Electric Eel of purpose.

Your happiness isn't to be discovered, it's already there. Colonise it!

Like Gwyn says, help-yourself at the buffet of life. I say, 'sure', only bring your own big plate.

Gwyn is amazed.
I see the student has become the master. That's level 5 stuff.

Gwyn and Eden feel they should attend Gulia's sessions?

Gwyn unable to progress the meeting further. Thanks everybody and draws the session to a close for the last time.

B:8 Debrief Questions

Debrief Questions – diagnostic arts project.

Wk 1-3 people you know list and 1to1 backstory work

Wk 4 Physicality

Wk5 Road testing

Wk 6-7 Scenarios

Wk 8-9 Improvs

Wk 10-11 Improvs with SOs

1, Which part(s) of the process did you find you flourished in?

2, Which parts of the process did you find challenging, find hard to work with?

3, Which part(s) of the process stick in your mind and why?

4, Which part of the process did you enjoy most/least?

5, Did you find that the work done during the backstory sessions, helped you in improvisations later on in the process?

6, How did you find improvising remotely?

7, What, if any, downsides were there to remote working?

8, What alterations, changes, or additions would you recommend to the process?

9, Do you have anything toad/any other comments about your subjective experience during the eleven week process.

Appendix C

C:1 Timetables and Timelines for Ensemble and Monologue Projects

Prior to embarking on the online project the ensemble will have been cast (2-3 actors) and all actors prepped as to what to expect and what is expected of them, which is as follows;

Secrecy: As with Leigh's approach the ensemble will be instructed to keep all developments during the initial stages of character creation and development completely secret from any other member of the ensemble.

Dedication: It will be explicitly defined that a complete dedication to seeing the project through to fruition is essential to the success of the research project. Therefore, if they feel they are unable to commit absolutely, they should not participate.

3rd person external characters: Again, as with Leigh's approach, the actors will be instructed to only ever refer to their characters in the third person. It will be explained that this is in order for them to remain objective about their characters and therefore able to objectively evaluate the decisions made in developing those characters at every stage of the process.

Avoid playing previous characters: The actors will be discouraged from playing versions of themselves and revisiting previously played characters. The intention of this project is to create and develop new characters and to do so in a thorough way. The dangers of utilising previously portrayed characters or versions of themselves, means that the actor runs the risk of 'filling in', whereas the success of the project relies on them making conscious decisions about character, which is easier if a character is formed from scratch. However, what all participants will not know, is that one participant will be allowed to break this rule – they will be allowed to supplement their character with personal information into their character. The aim here is to examine if Leigh's 'cardinal rule' is truly necessary for effective character building and if the rule is essential, why this might be.

Key

	Character
	Narrative
	Text

Date/Week	Details	Aims	Expected outcomes/notes
1	People you know list and initial one-to-one	This session will begin research into character. In	Begin to explore possible 'real' people who might

	discussions with actors all in isolation.	this session the aim is to use a real person as the basis for a character.	form the basis of the actor's characters. Debrief after session
2	Decide upon original	As with the previous session the work will examine how a fictional character can be created using a real person as the basis. It will examine what attributes are useful in creating a character – especially when creating a character where there exists no preconceptions of narrative.	Begin to create fledgling character. Start to define details age, DOB, initial backstory, utilising the details of the real person who formed the basis, but start to add fictional details. Debrief after session
3	Create/Develop character Character identity Begin to look for running condition Naming ceremony	This session will explore what is required to build a character. Just as a solo writer might create a character study, similar things are at work here, but a much more physical and practical method of developing that character will be undertaken. It is also the case that the actor is able to take ownership of the character and each character developed in isolation in an in-depth way, again without any preconceived notions of plot and character arc	Debrief after session
4	Actors begin improvs (in isolation) Mainly humdrum improvs Physicality Behaviour & Bearing Road testing	Where a solo writer might construct a character study, it is less likely that the physicality of the character will be considered to a deep level. This session will enable the actors and researcher to explore these elements of character.	Debrief after session
5	Research External research/literary research etc. Immersion into character in daily life	Leigh would have his actors undertake a few weeks working in the characters occupation. This cannot be done, however research into those occupations along with the immersion into the characters' worlds can be undertaken. This session will examine the importance and	Debrief after session

		impact of such research when developing a fictional character.	
6	Bring actors together Look for relationships, reasons why these characters would be involved with each other Quiz club	At this stage the work is still concentrating on character, but possibilities regarding narrative are expected to begin to present themselves at this stage. This session will explore relationships between characters.	Debrief after session
7	Begin to create/develop narrative.	The focus shifts at this point and explorations into narrative begin. The session will examine what impact emerging themes can have on plot and character arcs. The organic growth of thematic strands which have come about through the character building process are expected to suggest possible narrative strands and plot. This session will attempt to examine these relationships and how themes influence narrative possibilities.	Debrief after session
8	End of pre-rehearsal Start formal script development (1st draft)	Although possible developments in character may occur the primary focus of this session is narrative. This session will attempt to identify the controlling idea, along with story, plot themes and central message of the piece. It will examine how the interlinked relationships of these elements works and reveals possibilities for narrative.	Debrief after session
9	Development of script through workshops using text, exploring possibilities Structuring	This session will focus on creating a text utilising the material generated by previous sessions. The session will examine how this material can be used, altered or discarded in the scriptwriting process. As the script is formed and	Debrief after session

		developed the continued involvement of the actors will be assessed as to its importance.	
10	Finalise script	At the latter part of this stage of the process a more traditional use of improvisation will be utilised (that of improvisations using the formal script as the stimulus) to explore the text and create a greater understanding of the work. It will also allow for attention to the nuances of performance.	Debrief after session
11	Extra time if project runs over Debrief of whole project	Along with the debriefs, after each session, a full debrief of the entire process will be invaluable in gaining objective (and subjective) insights into the process as a whole.	

Revised Timetable for Online Ensemble Project

WEEK NO.	DETAILS	AIMS	NOTES
INITIAL	The initial meeting was merely an introduction to both the participants and the process that was going to be undertaken	• Bring ensemble together for first time. • Introduce and welcome all. • Briefly outline project and aims etc. • Set ground rules. • Answer any questions. • Begin process, by tasking the actors with the 'people	
1	One-to-one discussions were undertaken to identify an original, which will form the basis for character.	• Discuss 'People you know list', with as much detail as to the 'original' as is known.	

		• By the end of the session decide on the 'original'. • Debrief regarding both character, in terms of performance and possibilities for development, but also the process thus far, including the mechanics of the selection of original.	
2	A large amount of questions, designed to aid character backstory development, were pre-released to the participants. Each question's answer was review, discussed and expanded upon (myself pressing for further detail) to create an in-depth backstory for each character.	• Discuss pre-released questions to create and develop backstory for characters. • Discuss and develop characters backstory in terms of possibilities and implications to character in modern day.	There was so many questions and the discussions around the answers to these questions, along with time constraints, meant that this part of the process had to be spread over two weeks. I had intended to conduct the 'naming ceremony' to this session, however, it came to bear that the 'ceremony' would be better placed in the next session.
3	• One-to-one discussions were undertaken with each participant (in isolation) to answer pre-released questions in order to develop the character's backstory (as above).	• To develop the characters' backstory and bring them up to present day. • To start to consider potential 'running conditions' based on the life events that precede modern day. • To give the characters names.	Some questions were left for 'Quiz Club', as they didn't inform the character building at this stage. Therefore, those questions were left until a later date.

	• Discussion regarding the school names, which were researched and real schools in the areas where the characters were at that time – if not already defined.		
4	Intended to both aid the actor's performance, but also as a way to bring the character to life in a gradual way, moving on from just back story to a modern day version of the character. This session was the first time the actors improvised in character and was designed as a way to build the character.	• To initially pin down any details not fully covered in the backstory sessions. • To explore the physicality and bearing of the characters. Speech etc, will be covered next session. • To allow the actors to inhabit the character for the first time, by just 'being' in the character, without having to say anything or do anything other than a mundane task – to ease them into the character. • To explore how the character felt and examine any decisions as to how the character is played physically.	It was identified that, road testing in the way Leigh conducts it, could not be undertaken. Therefore an alternative had to be found.
5	This session finally allowed the characters to speak. Using information from the backstory sessions	• To develop the characters in terms of voice. • To road test the characters, by subjecting them to	The project was now beginning to fall behind. So the research part of the process had to be conducted parallel

	to evoke strong responses from the actors.	two phone calls designed to pressure them, anger them and frustrate them.	to the improvisations. The participants and myself conducted the research between sessions and shared information via FB messenger
6	Leigh's 'Quiz Club', was used as a warm up exercise and improvisations around predefined scenarios was undertaken to assess which one(s) might prove best for the project.	• To bring the characters together in several scenarios to look for relationships and dynamics between the characters. • To identify which scenarios offer most possibilities. • To further develop character through quiz club/hot seating	One participant was unable to attend, due to ill-health. Therefore the scenarios were trialled without them. Not all scenarios were trailed, as we didn't have a full ensemble. This meant that one scenario would be trialled with all three and some of the scenarios released were saved for an ensemble improv. Decisions regarding a scenario were postponed for one week.
7	One scenario from the previous week, along with others that had been released the week before were all trialled with the full ensemble, eventually at the end of the session, a scenario was picked to be the scenario that would be used for the project moving forward.	• To develop and explore dynamics between characters – full ensemble. To test the established/explored dynamics of the relationships experimented with in previous rehearsal. • To explore and evaluate which scenario will best present most possibilities for character arc and narrative.	

		• Decide on which scenario will be used moving forward. • This session also presents opportunities to further develop character, as the interaction with other characters is explored, along with how the characters react in these situations. • Begin to identify possible central messages and themes that could run through the final piece.	
8		• To begin to search for possible narrative strands, story lines, character arcs and action for scenes. • To generate material from improvisations, which may be harvested and developed for the final script. • To further explore the scenario and search for possible comments, themes and ideas which will inform the piece as it progresses.	Absences again, meant that full ensemble improvisations couldn't be conducted. However, this did give us the opportunity to explore dynamics between two characters. Although scripting should have started by now, there wasn't enough material, nor a strong idea of where the piece was going. So further improvisations must be undertaken.
9		• Explore relationships and dynamics between characters. • Through improvisation, begin to generate material for the script.	It was decided that, as we were running out of time, rather than conduct undirected improvisation, or start scripting, Step outlines should be

		• Attempt to find narrative strands, themes and character arcs for the piece.	written to guide the actors.
10	Discussions around possible through lines/end points for the characters were undertaken and these underpinned the content of the SOs.	• To create and develop material for the script. • To explore possibilities, in terms of scenes and scenarios for the piece.	Due to time constraints (the process supposed to have now ended) it was decided that the step outline idea, whereby SO were released and use to guide the improvisation, rather than scripting and developing the script that way. Therefore, the final week will see SOs used and the script written ipso facto, based on the material generated.
11	The final scene was improvised around a detailed SO. Exploring end points for all characters.	• To improvise around a pre released step outline for material for the final scene of the piece. • To generate material for the script. • To explore the end points for characters and evaluate them. • To explore and evaluate the strands that cam be brought together for the final scene.	Time has completely run out. At this point the script should be being honed. However, instead material for the script, to be written after the process was generated. The step outline for this final scene was as close to a script, where the others were less so. Meaning that the latter stages of the process remain un-trialled.

<u>Detailed Timetable of the Monologue Project</u>

CORE ELEMENT (Character, Narrative & Text)	PHASE (Activities undertaken)	Expected Outcomes/Milestones
CHARACTER	1:1, People You know list	Original decided on.
	1:2, Character Questions	Character backstory developed and the character is named in the 'naming ceremony'
	1:3, Physicality	Improv in character, aids development of the physicality and bearing of the character.
	1:4, Voice and Road Testing	Character further developed through improvisation. The character is given a voice and interacts with other people.
	1:5, Research	Elements of the character's life, in terms of occupation etc is researched to allow a grounded knowledge of elements not familiar to the researcher for the portrayal and understanding of the character.
	1:6, Quiz club	Character knowledge furthered by examining the character's attitudes and thoughts on a myriad of subjects
NARRATIVE	2:1, In character improvisations	Monologue style improvisations (actor talking to camera) will be undertaken, discussing different subjects Identify possible narrative strands and character arcs for the script – from the improvs Identify material generated by improvs, which could be developed in the script
TEXT	3:1, Write first draft of script	Begin to develop the text.
	3:2, Redraft script	Begin to polish the script

	3:3 Improv around existing script	Through improvising around the existing script see if any improvements can be made by improvising with the existing text.
	3:4, Read through/performance of script	Evaluate the text (which has been redrafted after each phase of this part of the process) by way of a rehearsed readthrough – performed to camera and then watched back to evaluate it.
	3:5, Final draft of the script	Arrive, through redrafting, at a final version of the script.

Appendix D

D1: OEP: Being Normal Script (First draft)

TOWARDS A NEW NORMAL

(Working Title)

WRITTEN BY

HOUSE OF MISERY PRESENTS

1/1: WEEK ONE INT. PARTICIOANTS' HOUSES/ZOOM MEETING. DAY.

FADE IN FROM BLACK:

One by one, the participants' videos click up on the screen. First GWYN, then GULIA and the EDEN.

There is a short pause while this occurs, the participants all scrutinise each other.

GWYN: Hello. Is this everybody?

GULIA: Erm. I don't know.

GWYN: How many have we got? I had four conformations on email. How many of you are there?

EDEN TENTATIVELY RAISES HER HAND, SO TOO DOES GULIA.

GULIA: Erm. Well there's me and I can see one other person.

EDEN: I'm here. I sent an email.

GWYN: Yes, hello Eden. We've spoken on email.

EDEN: Yeah.

GWYN: And Goolia?

GULIA: 'Juilia'.

GWYN: Hello Gulia, Eden. It's nice to meet you both.

GULIA: It's nice to meet you too.

GWYN: Welcome to week one, of a five week mental well-being course. I think we'll make a start and if anyone else joins, well, we'll deal with them as it happens.

GULIA AND EDEN NOD AND SMILE.

GWYN: (Cont.) A little bit about me. My name's Gwyn Davis, I've been in care and mental institutions for about ten years now. I think mental well-being is very important. So, I tell you what we're going to do. We'll go round the virtual room here and introduce ourselves. Why don't we start with you Eden?

EDEN: (BEAT) Oh, me?

GWYN: Yes please.

EDEN: Sorry. I thought you said Ian. Erm, hi, I'm Eden Binns.

GWYN REACTS TO THE SURNAME.

EDEN (CONT.) I, erm, manage a small team of people. In a housing association, situation. So I have to be in charge of lots of people's well-being, and I would say I'm quite mentally well, but some of them aren't. So I need to be able to help them, Gwen. Do you know what I mean?

GWYN: Well, it's Gwyn.

EDEN: Gwyn.

GWYN: Yes. Alright, thank you Ian. Gulia. Why don't you tell us about yourself?

GULIA: Erm. I'm Gulia Lawrence. And I own and run an Italian themed, family restaurant, Piatti Miglori. And I'm here because I don't feel like I've ever been (BEAT) accepted, or in place? I'm out of place, I don't fit and this makes me (BEAT) angry, all the time. I may take that out on my staff, a little. And I just want to get to the bottom of it. Nip it in the bud.

GWYN: Well, let me just say. Your deposit's gone through, so there's a place for you here. Self-help is all about helping yourself. We're all here to support you, helping yourself, but you've got to do the work. However, there's a dichotomy. Think of life as a buffet. Go to life's buffet and help yourself. You want all meat. Help yourself. You want chips and four puddings, help yourself. You want Lasagne, Gulia, and a bit of Thai on the same plate. What you gonna do?

GULIA: Erm. Help myself?

GWYN: That's the ticket, yes. Help yourself. Gorge yourself on the buffet of life. (BEAT) So, how we all feeling, so far?

EDEN: Hungry. I've not had me tea yet.

GWYN: Great. So, what I'm feeling from the room, is stress. There's lots of stress in here. So, we're going to start off today with a little mindfulness exercise. It's about being present and finding yourself. You can't help yourself, if you don't know where you are. So clear your mind.

GWYN, GULIA AND EDEN TAKE A MOMENT TO COMPOSE THEMSELVES.

GWYN: Clear your mind. If you have a thought, don't. Don't have that thought. You're going to picture your thoughts on a stream. Any time one comes into your mind… Give me an example? What kind of thoughts might you be having now? Anyone in the room.

EDEN: A stream.

GULIA: What's going on at work right now.

GWYN: Eden, you're a little more on message. So, Gulia, try to be more like Eden. She's thinking about streams, that's what you want to be thinking about.

GULIA: (IN DISBELIEF) Streams?

EDEN: Streams.

GWYN: Streams. Any thoughts you have. Pop it on a leaf. And watch it float away. Watch it float away, down that stream. Are you watching it Gulia?

GULIA: (MYSTIFIED) Yeah.

EDEN: What I do, right? Is I visualise the problem and then this giant fish just gets it.

EDEN MIMES A FISH'S JAWS GRABBING THE PROBLEM

EDEN: (CONT.) It just gets it and pulls it under the water.

GWYN: Right, that's very good. Very good. What do you imagine Gulia?

GULIA: I imagine that… That I'm being pulled under the water.

GWYN: (UNDER BREATH) Jesus Christ. Okay, that's what we're here for. Why don't we start with a description, of our stress? So we can visualise it, grasp it and just, throw it away. Why don't you tell me what your stress looks like?

(BEAT)

GULIA: Who?

GWYN: Well, you can start.

GULIA: (STAMMERING) Like… A… Big ball of flaming… metal? And it's just huge and tight.

GWYN: A big, tight, flaming ball of metal. Okay. And Eden, what should Gulia do with that big, tight, ball of flaming metal?

EDEN: Just swallow it mate. Swallow it down. Spit on it. Spit those flames out, sit on it and then swallow it.

GWYN: Okay, yeah. Spit on it, sit on it, swallow it. That's good. Very good.

GULIA: I, erm, don't feel like I have enough spit.

GWYN: Don't worry about that. We've got enough spit between the three of us.

GULIA: I'll be honest. I'm a little out of my depth here. I'm finding this really hard. This is really uncomfortable for me.

GWYN: It's often the case that the road to recovery is filled with pot holes and uncomfortable. But your journey has begun, you've started down that road. Okay?

GULIA: Okay.

GWYN: Okay. So let's look at what it is about our work that causes this stress. Eden, have you got any thoughts on this.

EDEN: Well, it people innit? Get rid of the people, get rid of the stress. The way I see, right? Is, the corporation is this big snake, with sharp teeth. And within that snake is another snake, and another, until it comes to me and I'm just like this little, tiny snake, trying to taste me way around. Do you know what I mean?

GWYN: I do, I do. This is an issue very close to my own heart. So, I'm going to give you a technique to use. Next time you come face to face, with that snake of stress. I want you to visualise a triumphant mongoose of relaxation.

EDEN: Hmmmm

GWYN: You be the mongoose of relaxation and you ATTACK. And often, you find, that'll take a snake.

GULIA: I'm sorry. I've absolutely no idea what you two are talking about. Snakes in snakes and mongooses of whatever. I'm sorry it all sound ridiculous.

EDEN: It's just like your big ball of flames, Gulia. It's how you visualise it, intit? There's no actual snakes, Gulia. It's not real.

GULIA: Yes, I realise that. But what my ball was, was a metaphor. I'm sorry, I'm just not getting it. This is completely alien to me. I just don't get the mongoose thing.

GWYN: Don't worry Gulia. You're new to this. What we've got here is advanced level stuff.

GULIA: I'm sorry Gwyn. But I'm finding hard to believe that this is next level stuff.

GWYN: This is real stage three stuff, that me and Eden are talking about here. But we're gonna walk you through it, okay?

GULIA: Yeah. I'm a bit lost. I'm in the forest of confusion right now.

EDEN: See, now she's getting it. She's getting it.

GULIA: (GETTING ANGRY) There's streams and snakes and mongooses and we're sitting on fire. I mean what are we talking about here? What does the mongoose represent?

GWYN: Okay, let me clear this up. It sounds like you're lost in the forest of confusion, okay? Am I hearing that right?

GULIA: Yeah.

GWYN: (EMPHATIC) Eden, get the axe of clarity. Hand it to her.

EDEN: (EXITED)She needs the scythe of clarity.

GWYN: You need the scythe of clarity. That's very good.

EDEN: Yeah, it's what you need. And you need to take that and just hack away at that confusion.

GWYN: (MIMING CHOPPING) Piece by piece, let some light in.

EDEN: (MIMING) Branch by branch, take it leaf by leaf, if you need to.

GULIA: Right. Yeah.

EDEN: Peel it away. Like Adam's leaf.

GULIA: Like the banana of hope.

GWYN: (IMPRESSED) Like the banana of hope. Yo have done this before.

EDEN: Genius. This is beautiful stuff. Suck on that banana.

GULIA: Why am I spitting on balls and sucking bananas?

GWYN: It'll make you feel better.

GULIA: This had better be a fucking good banana!

EDEN: Take Gwen's banana, take it deep.

GULIA: Can I bite?

GWYN: Not on the first try. That comes later. (BEAT) Right this is a good start.

GULIA: (LAUGHING NERVOUSLY< IN DISBELEIF) This is not worth a hundred and fifty pounds.

GWYN: That's just the deposit. If you want to do all five weeks of this course it's er…

GULIA: (LAUGHING) I'm not coming back.

EDEN: Gulia, you need to be open. You need to be more open.

GULIA: I have never been more open in my life. And I have never regretted opening up so much. I can't believe I've told you stuff. I'm furious. But you have to laugh, right? Or you'll die!

GWYN: Look I don't want any veiled threats in my well-being session.

GULIA: (SINCERE) I'm sorry Gwen. Gwyn.

GWYN: It's Gwyn.

EDEN: Quinn? Quim?

GWYN: (STRESSING THE WELSH 'KK') Kkgwyn.

EDEN: QQQGwyn.

ALL THREE REPEAT THE THROATY/DUCK SOUND SEVERAL TIMES.

GWYN: That's very good. You could be Welsh.

(PAUSE)

GWYN: (CONT.) Alright, let's go round the room and say a little bit about how we're going to take what we've learnt into our future? Let's start with you Eden.

EDEN: Well, just from the short session we've had here. I think I will try to embrace things with a more open outlook. And visualisation techniques that work.

GWYN: They do work. They do work. That's very good, very good. Gulia, yourself?

GULIA: I'm going to suck on bananas for the rest of my life, because it will give me the hope and strength that I need. And I'm going to learn to spit fire, out. I'm going to extinguish the flames of my stress with my spit snake.

GWYN: Your spit snake. That's very good.

EDEN: Spit on that snake. Spit on that snake, get rid of that stress. We should say that all together.

ALL: Spit on that snake. Get rid of that stress.

EDEN: That's your mantra.

GWYN: (EMPHATICALLY) Spit on that snake. Get rid of that stress. Brilliant. Okay, well that wraps today's session up. I hope to see you both same time next week. I'll email the links. Thank you everybody. Stay well and remember to help yourself to life.

One by one the participants' video windows click off.

CUT TO BLACK:

1/2 <u>WEEK 2</u> INT. PARTICIOANTS' HOUSES/ZOOM MEETING. DAY.

FADE IN FROM BLACK:

EDEN and GULIA log onto the meeting. Gwyn is nowhere to be seen.

Short scene----------

Lockdown no tourists

New apps

People off with COVD. Came in to tell me they had covid. Idiots?

GWYN FINALLY JOINS

EDEN/GULIA: Oh hi Gwyn.

GWYN: Hello everybody, sorry I'm a bit late. Technical issues. Oh, hello Gulia. It's great to see you back. We weren't sure we'd see you again.

GULIA: Yeah, well. I was just telling Eden. I've had some time to think this week and implement some of your training, and it's really helped, actually.

GWYN: Of course it has. Positive thinking, that's very good.

EDEN: One week and she's a legend, already.

GWYN: (ASIDE) Sometimes that's all it takes. (CHANGING) Anyway, we're all here now, I think. So I expect we'll dive right in then.

EDEN: I love diving.

GWYN: We've not got a lot of time this week, but we have got quite a lot planned. But before we do that, let's just have a catch up. Gulia how's your week been?

GULIA: Yeah, it's been a weird week. Like I said I've been thinking a lot about what you said and a lot of the stuff has actually stuck. It's made me feel quite different, so that's why I thought I'd come back.

GWYN'S response is muffled by EDEN opening a bag of crisps.

GULIA: Sorry what?

(BEAT)

GWYN: (SMILING) I said we're happy to have you back.

GULIA: Oh, that's nice.

GWYN: And you Eden. How's your week been?

EDEN: Well, ye know. Alright. I mean how much detail do you want?

GWYN: Well, not loads. A little perhaps.

EDEN: Well, it's been alright, yeah.

GWYN: Diolch yn fawr.

EDEN: What's that? Is that Polish?

GWYN: Welsh. It means thank you very much.

EDEN: I can't speak Welsh. But you're welcome.

GWYN: Okey dokey then. So you'll all need to get comfy, because today's session is going to go pretty deep. Alright?

EDEN: Oh, I do like it deep.

GWYN: I thought you might. The first thing I want to talk about tonight, today. I don't know what time it is where you are. I want you to think back to a time when you lost total control. A time when you've totally lost it at someone. Take a minute to think about it now, and ten were going to do a bit of role playing.

EDEN: Love it.

GWYN: Eden, you look confident. You klook like you want to say something.

EDEN: No, I'm just saying, I love a bit of role play.

GWYN: Were going to try and satisfy that now. Have either of you got an example?

GULIA: Erm. Yeah. I kind of lost my shit at a customer. Where I work, erm. It was pretty embarrassing.

GWYN: Well, if you're comfortable? Why don't you talk us through it and then we'll do a role play scenario. Where you can vent your frustrations and one of us will be them.

GULIA: Okay. Well. As you know I run an Italian restaurant. It's been in the family for years. And we pride ourselves on the authenticity of the food. And someone asked for some mayonnaise to go on their garlic bread. Which is a disgrace. So I got quite irate and then it became a battle of wills between me and the customer. I wanted to punch her in the tits. I was really mad.

GWYN: Well, this sounds like a good one for our purposes. I'll tell you what we'll do. Why don't I be the customer? Gula, you be you. But who'll be me? Eden, you'll have to be me, and you mediates it.

EDEN: Okay, love. Is there a safe word?

GWYN: What do you mean?

EDEN: Whenever I do a bit of role play, we have a safe word, in case it goes too far, you know?

GWYN: (BEAT) I think you'll just have to judge it.

EDEN: Fair enough.

GWYN: Okay, Gulia. Are you ready?

GULIA: I, guess.

GWYN: That's the spirit. Okay. Give me a minute to get into character. (COMPOSING HIMSELF) Garlic bread. Mayonnaise. (IN CHARACTER) Excuse me miss.

GULIA: Hi. How can I help?

GWYN: Listen. You've given us some garlic bread here, but there's no mayonnaise.

GULIA: It doesn't come with mayonnaise.

GWYN: No mayonnaise? What type of place are you running here?

GULIA: I'm running an authentic Italian restaurant, where garlic bread doesn't come with mayonnaise. Just the bread. You are not having mayonnaise. That is sour dough, fresh as fuck bread.

GWYN: Now look here. I've never been so insulted. I'm a paying /customer.

GULIA: /I don't give a shit. You don't come into a restaurant like this and demand mayonnaise. What's next? Perhaps you'd like a dollop of HP for your Arrabiata? Or custard on your fucking pizza?

GWYN: Custard pizza, my arse. I want fucking mayonnaise on me garlic bread. Now go and get some, or I'll come back and I'll burn this place down to the ground.

GULIA: Burn it down. You'd be doing me a favour. Maniac.

EDEN: (WELSH ACCENT) I feel this is going very well.

GULIA: (LAUGHS) Sorry Eden. I didn't expect the accent t be that good. I'm sorry. I feel really wound up now. That was quite difficult. Fucking garlic bread with mayonnaise. Jesus Christ!

GWYN: Right, let's do a quick swap around. See if you can benefit from the shoe being on the other foot, as it were. Eden, you be Gulia, I'll be me again and Gulia, why don't you be the customer?

GULIA: Erm. Okay. Okay.

EDEN: (MIMICKING) Okay.

GULIA: Okay.

EDEN: Okay.

GULIA: (CHAV VOICE) Excuse me.

EDEN: (GULIA'S VOICE) Yes.

GULIA: I've got some garlic bread, but I want some mayonnaise with it.

EDEN: Sorry darling. We don't do mayonnaise here. That's just facking sacrilege.

GULIA: But I want mayonnaise with me garlic bread.

EDEN: Well you're not getting it. You're not having it. You silly bitch. Now fuck off to a kebab shop, you chav.

GULIA: Exactly, right?

GWYN: Alright everybody breathe. Everybody breathe. Now how did it feel to be on the receiving end of your anger, Gulia? Did it help?

GULIA: No not really. I just feel more angry. Do you get me though? Am I a just a bitch? I know I'm a bitch. But do you think I'm a bitch?

GWYN: I don't know. I'm allergic to bread.

EDEN: I love mayonnaise with garlic bread.

GULIA: Are you joking?

GWYN: well it's clearly a hot topic, but let's stay focussed. So, let's move on. Eden, have you got a scenario for us?

EDEN: Well. Yeah. There were this one time, right? If we're talking about work, anyway. If we're talking about the work situation. There was this one time, and looking back it seems like nothing, if I'm honest. It's just… I just think things get to you sometimes, dun't it? What happened was, there's this guy at work, proper knobhead. And he keeps coming to me station. He just keeps coming and taking me stuff. (GETTING ANGRY) I just don't like people touching my things! Do you know what I mean? He's always touching stuff. Me cup. He get's his fat fingers in me cup, saying 'have you finished with this?'. No I haven't, or it wouldn't be there, would it? Me pens. Anything on me desk, he's after it. So, I think that's a time, and I said all that to him. Sorry.

GWYN: And how does that make you feel?

EDEN: Well, what do you think? Angry. He keeps touching me things. I think it's just work intit?

GWYN: Well, let's not over analyse it straight away. Let's role play it out, a bit.

EDEN: Alright. So someone's going to be Paulo, touching my things?

GWYN: Paulo, is it?

EDEN: Yeah.

GWYN: Who's going to do Paulo? Do you wanna do it Gulia, or should I?

GULIA: Erm. You can be Paulo.

GWYN: Alright. I'll be Paulo. Erm. Who's going to be Eden? Oh, well. Eden, you can be Eden. That makes sense. Gulia, you'll have to be Gwyn. Then what we're going to do. Gulia, we're going to have a confrontation. Right? Then if you could guide us through, to empathise with each other.

GULIA: Okay.

GWYN: We need to get on-board with each other. So, if you could mediate us through to that.

GULIA: Okay.

GWYN: Alright?

GULIA: Yep.

GWYN: Right. This Paulo. What's he sound like? Eden?

EDEN: Well, he sounds Italian, dunt he?

GWYN: Oh, shit. He's not Welsh?

EDEN: Eh? Who?

GWYN: This Paulo. He's not Welsh?

EDEN: No. I don't think so. He talks Italian, then drops into being dead Northern. So, he'll say (BEAT) Ehup. (ITALIAN ACCENT) Friends.

GWYN: (NORTHERN ACCENT) Ehup. Just give me a minute to get into the Italian accent, then we'll start our confrontation. Alright? Okay? I've got a couple of phrases, to get me going. (ROPEY ITALIAN ACCENT) Lamborgini, Spaghetti…

GULIA: This is so offensive.

GWYN: Okay. Let's go.

EDEN: Sorry Gwyn, just as a note. I had this friend once, who, erm. To get her into accents, she would moo. In the accent. So, like you would go (NI ACCENT) moo. Then she'd be doing Irish.

GULIA: (IMPRESSED) Ahhh. I'm not very good at doing Welsh, I'm afraid. So, please don't be offended, Gwyn. By what I produce. But I'm going to give it a go, though.

GWYN: That's fine. Let's give it a go. Moo, you say?

EDEN: Moo.

GWYN: Moo. (DODGY ACCENT) Hello Eden. I've come to take some of your pen and pencils.

EDEN: Moo. (SHOUTING) Why Paulo?

GWYN: Moo. I need them, to write with.

EDEN: Moo. No you don't. Honestly, the minute I hear your voice, I'm enraged. You. How can I work with you, like this?

GWYN: Moo. Ohh, what's this? It's your cable. I'm going to touch it, ah.

EDEN: Moo. What you putting your mucky paws on everything for? You touch your Italian hair and then you touch everything with your fat fingers.

GULIA: (DREADFUL WELSH ACCENT) Moo. Ooww, Eden. Calm it down there, laddie.

GWYN: (OWN VOICE) Eh, that's good.

GULIA: Moo. Why don't we start putting ourselves in each-others' shoes. And see how it would feel if it was the other way around.

GWYN: Moo. Yes, give me your shoes. I will touch them.

GULIA: Moo. Go on Eden. Give Paulo your shoes.

EDEN: You want me shoes? I'll give ye me fucking shoes mate. Right round your face!

GWYN: Moo. No you misunderstand. Give me your shoes, so I can walk one mile.

EDEN: (CALMING HERSELF DOWN) Okay. You want my actual, physical shoes?

GULIA: Moo. No, no, no, no. Your metaphorical shoes. (MIMING) So he can walk in your shoes. Come on now.

GWYN: I'll tell you what, why don't we swap it around, quickly. Eden, you be Paulo, I'll be Eden and Gulia, you're doing me very well.

GULIA: Oh, no, no.

GWYN: I'll tell you what. I'll be me and Gulia, you can be Eden.

GULIA: Okay. That's better. Moo.

GWYN: Okay, Paulo, Eden. I want you to tell each other one thing you do like about each other.

EDEN: Okay. Who am I again?

GWYN: You're Paulo.

EDEN: Okay. (GOING FROM ITALIAN TO NORTHERN) Hello, Eden. I really like your shoes.

GULIA: (MIMICKING EDEN) Thank you. I really like your… Tie.

29:17?

EDEN: (OWN VOICE) Well I like it when you're off ill. How do you like that?

GULIA: You're Paulo talking to Eden, by the way.

EDEN: I know.

GULIA: DO you think Paulo likes it when you're off work? Or do you think he likes it because you're there?

EDEN: I'm confused.

GWYN: Now, Gulia's hit upon something there, which I think we talked about before. That's very perceptive that Gulia. Very good. Very good. A lot of your complaints, Eden, about this Paulo chap, is that he keeps hanging around you. I think maybe there might be a little bit of a spark there.

EDEN: (DISGUSTED) Oh, no.

GWYN: (TILTING HIS HEAD) Umm? Umm?

EDEN: (PULLING BACK IN HER CHAIR) I'm not sure I can retract any further.

GULIA: I think it sounds like he likes you and that's why he hangs /around you sll the time.

EDEN: / Oh, you're all liars. I said this to you last time. I can't. Just change the subject. (GETTING EMOTIONAL) I've had enough, or I'm going.

GWYN: Alright.

GULIA: Aww. I didn't mean to upset you Eden. Please don't cry.

EDEN: (CLEARLY CRYING) I'm not crying. I'm alright.

GWYN: Okay. Listen. I think that's as much progress as we can make today. I don't want to ruin anyone's night, or their weekend. Everyone's dug deep and I'm proud of them. You both look like you're feeling a lot better. Okay, I'm going to give you a bit of homework. Eden, I want you to say something nice to this Paulo feller. And Gulia, you're going to try mayonnaise of garlic bread.

GULIA: Oh, fucking hell.

GWYN: We'll meet back here in a week and discuss how it's been.

EDEN: (CROAKS) Right.

GWYN: So you have both a great weekend.

GULIA: Thanks Gwyn.

EDEN: (STILL CROAKY) Thanks Gwyn.

GWYN: That's alright. A pleasure as always.

FADE TO BLACK:

1/3 WEEK 3 INT. PARTICIOANTS' HOUSES/ZOOM MEETING. DAY.

FADE IN FROM BLACK:

ALL PARTICIPANTS ARE ONSCREEN. THE MEETING IS ABOUT TO BEGIN.

GWYN: Hello.

EDEN/GULIA: Hello.

GWYN: Oh, hello. It's nice to se you all. How are we.

GULIA: I'm good thank you.

EDEN: Yeah. I'm alright thank you.

GWYN: Well. Welcome. How's everyone feeling today?

GULIA: Erm. Stressed.

GWYN: Stressed, Okay. Oka. Well we can deal with that. That's what we, I'm, here for. Eden. How are you?

EDEN: I'm alright, love. Yeah. I'm a bit tired. I've been out int sun all day. Sunning me bits, you know?

GWYN: You look very well for it.

EDEN: Thanks mate.

GWYN: Listen. As glad as I am that you're doing well Eden. Gulia, I'm quite glad you're feeling stressed. Because that's going to feed nicely into what I want to do this week.

GULIA: Oh. Okay.

GWYN: So, if you think you can handle it? We're going to dig deep into some of that stress this week.

GULAI: (APPREHENSIVE) Okay. Right.

GWYN: Is that going to work for you Eden?

EDEN: (BEAT) Me? Oh, yes. I can't wait.

GWYN: How long did you spend in the sun today, Eden?

EDEN: Well, I might have had one of two wines, you know?

GWYN: (TITTERS) Fantastic. That'll help with the stress.

EDEN: Yep.

GWYN: Were going to try something a little different this week. Okay?

GULIA: I'll give it a go. Like every week, I'll give it a go.

GWYN: Okay. Let's start with you telling me a little bit about your stress. What's been getting at you this week?

GULIA: It's the same stuff. For the last fifteen years. I just hate my day to day life, which is no life at all. I'm getting pissed off with the people I have to be around, on a regular basis. And then there's just general strangers, who drain the life out of you. And it's begging to the point now, where I don't even know who I am anymore, or even if I ever did know.

GWYN: That sounds like some powerful stuff. There. There's clearly a lot of stress happening. Thank you for sharing. Eden. I'd like you to share a little bit about your stress, as well.

EDEN: Well. I feel like it's just. I mean I know I say, I'm alright, but it's just what you say. Intit? You don't feel like anyone wants to hear you. Like if someone asks if you're alright. You just say, 'yeah, I'm alright'. Don't ye. Do you know what I mean? They don't really want to know. When someone asks how you are. You don't tell them how you really feel. Do you?

GULIA AND GWYN SHAKE THEIR HEADS.

GWYN: No. You're absolutely right.

EDEN: So, I feel like I just keep it all in. This side of me you see here, isn't how I am at work. At work, I'm horrible. You don't think I'm horrible here do ye?

GULIA/GWYN: No.

EDEN: Well, I'm not nice at work. I'm stressed all the time and it's just got to the point where it's just a part of me. It' just become who I am. I don't wasn't it to be who I am. Bit like what you were saying Gulia.

GULIA: Yeah. That does sound familiar.

GWYN: Listen. Thanks for sharing that Eden. What you've both said, is going to be a lot of use, this session. Because what we're going to do today. I'm going to be that stress. I'm going to be that focus point of rage. And you are going to have the opportunity to tell me, your stress, how you feel. Okay? We're going to let it all out. And I'm going to take it all in. Alright?

EDEN: You're going to take it all, are ye?

GULIA: I was going to say. Are you sure? I mean you might die.

GWYN: I'm a tough Welshman. (BEAT) But not today. Today, I am your stress. Eden, I want you to go first. Sounds like you're

on the brink of a breakthrough. So look at me. Eden, look at me. I am what's bothering you.

EDEN: You are what's bothering me.

GWYN: Me. I'm your stress. And I want to hear what you feel about that.

EDEN: Can you just walk me through it a little bit?

GWYN: Yes of course. Maybe I wasn't being clear. Every time you've stubbed your toe. Every package you've missed. Every time Paulo has annoyed you. I will be the embodiment of your rage, stress and worry. A man shaped receptacle, fill me up. But address me as Eden's stress, not Gwyn. Okay?

EDEN: Okay. Gwyn, stress. My stress. Every time I look at you, I feel enraged. Sick. But I know that without you Gwyn, stress, there would be no relief. I know I need you to give me balance, that there is no calmness and relief without stress and anger. I embrace you anger and stress, you are part of me. I'm sorry Gwen, it's just not coming, I'm emotionally constipated I think. I can't get it out. Do you know what I mean?

GWYN: Listen. I do understand. I think you might be saying what you think I want to hear, using self-help parlance, rather than saying how you really feel.

EDEN: Sorry Gwen. I just worry that if I open the flood gates, they're not going to shut. Like a night on the beer. Do you know what I mean? When it comes out like hot soup.

GWYN: This is your chance, with us here, to let it all out. Flood the place.

EDEN: I just don't think I'm ready. Maybe Gulia, should erm, should take the reins on this. It's been one of those days. I'm sorry.

GWYN: That's okay. You can offer us just a s much, by being here and being that support. We're here to support each other. So maybe, maybe, when Gulia's giving it to her stress, you'll find a way to jump in.

EDEN: Alright.

GWYN: Gulia.

GULIA: Hmmm.

GWYN: Gwyn's not here. Just ever slight upon you. That's been past.

GULIA: (TENNATIVE) Okay. My stress. (BEAT) You fucking gastropod. (BEAT) You make me sick. I hate you. I hate the way you make me feel. The way you're always lurking there like a … Toad. I hate everything about you. You shit. I hate listening to you, you Welsh prick.

EDEN: Has anyone ever told you, you look like a shit Bradley Cooper from A Star is Born?

GULIA: I want to just gouge your eyes out and stamp on them. I'm going to rip your dick off and shove it up your arse, then take it out and burn it. Then put the ashes in water and make you drink it, but you won't be able to piss, because you have no knob. Vaffanculo. You, Welsh Rarebit eating…

EDEN: Hi Di Hi Watching…

GULIA: Tom Jones

EDEN: Mother Fucker!

GULIA: (RISING TO A CRESHENDO) I'm sick of being talked to like shit, every day. I just want everybody to FUCKING DIE!

LONG PAUSE AS EVERYBODY CALMS DOWN> GWYN IS VISIBLY UPSET.

GULIA: (CONT.) Was that what you wanted?

GWYN: (HOLDING BACK THE TEARS) That's very good. Yeah.

GULIA: Yeah?

GWYN: Very powerful stuff.

GULIA: Sorry about that.

GWYN: No that's very good. Some very comprehensive insults there.

EDEN: Specific?

GWYN: Some of them, yeah. (PAUSE) Anyway powerful stuff this week guys. (VOICES GOES HIGH PITCHED WITH EMOTION) Next week eh? (WAVES).

CUT TO BLACK:

1/4 WEEK 4 INT. PARTICIOANTS' HOUSES/ZOOM MEETING. DAY.

FADE IN FROM BLACK:

GWYN AND EDEN'S PICTURES COME ONSCREEN.

EDEN: Hiya Gwyn.

GWYN: Hello Eden. How are you?

EDEN: Oh well, ye know. Not bad.

GULIA JOINS

GWYN/EDEN: Hello.

GULIA: Hello.

GWYN: How are we?

GULIA: Good thank you. Are you okay?

GWYN: Good, very good. Nothing gets me down. Nothing I can't deal with anyway.

GULIA: I must admit I been thinking a lot about last week, and I just wanted to apologise. It was an accumulation of a lot of different stuff, and well, you asked for it.

GWYN: Don't worry, it wasn't what I was expecting, but it was definitely what we were all hoping for. For you, and Eden, to have that release. Okay? Both of you did very well. And actually, that's brought me on to what I want us to do today. This week. Okay? Something I've been doing a lot this week. I've been focussing on mindfulness. Focusing on, how to conquer the bad thoughts, okay? Are you aware of any of these techniques?

EDEN: Just lock em away. Stuff em in there. Is that the kind of thing you mean, yeah?

GWYN: Well that's an unconventional approach.

EDEN: Oh yeah. Anything, just lock it away. Don't ever even think about it again. There in a box, in a room in a mind palace. Like Sherlock, only really fucking dark.

GWYN: Ah, the memory palace. I'm aware of that.

GULIA: Are these, What? Thoughts, or memories, or what?

EDEN: All of it, love.

GULIA: All of it.

GWYN: So you put them in a box and then you put that box in a palace?

EDEN: In a room, behind a locked door. In the mind palace. (BEAT) It's a creepy cottage in the woods, if I'm honest, but mind palace sounds better. Dun't it?

GWYN: Your mind palace, is a mind cottage?

EDEN: It's not a mining cottage, we're not in Wales. Well you are. (BEAT) It's just a creepy cottage. I mean I like it there if I'm honest. There's a babbling brook, and on a nice day. I'll not get lost in thought, but, it's alright down there, you know? You can hear the thoughts screaming to get out, (SHRILL VOICE) 'think about me. Aaagghh'. But ye don't. Don't let them out. Pushing at the doors.

GWYN: And you just keep pushing them further back are you?

EDEN: Yeah. I mean, it's getting pretty packed in there if I'm honest. It's pretty backed up, to be fair. But that's the healthy way to deal with them, intit? That's what you were saying.

GWYN: Well, it's good to have a tactic, I suppose. Albeit an obviously crazy method. Gulia, have you got something like this?

GULIA: Erm. This all sounds a bit counterproductive. In the way that. Isn't there a chance of them exploding out, maybe? I mean I went apeshit, last week, because I was provoked. And that's probably because it had all been locked in there for some time. Do you know what I mean? Is it the best way, to bury them? Or…

EDEN: No, there not buried. There only loosely locked up. And there's every chance they're going to get out, but erm,

GULIA: Oh, okay?

EDEN: It's just one of them chain locks. You know, like on a council house door? So they can reach their arms through, but they can't get fully out. Or a foot, or a nose, or a cheek. But they can't get fully out.

GULIA: How long have you been putting these feelings in these boxes, in the cottage, with a shitty lock?

EDEN: Well, I just thought it was what everyone did. Some of them are alright, so you let them out. Like, to pasture. They have a little run around the field in the day time. Usually when you're at work. Maybe Gwyn's got some better ideas.

GWYN: Well, as much I like the idea of a grazing field for your inner demons. We're going to try something a little different today. Okay? If you're all on board, what we're going to learn about today, they call this mindfulness. Right? We are going to

share some personal things, we're going to share some details. Not your bank details, or anything like that (LAUGHS).

EDEN AND GULIA LAUGH NERVOUSLY.

GWYN: (CONT>) We going to look at language. Wittgenstein said, "The limits of my language means the limits to my world." I don't know what the fuck he's talking about, but there's some good words there. We're going to think about limits and we're going to think about language. Sometime it's hard to put how you feel into words. So we're going to find different ways of articulating how you feel and build up from there. I want you to name an animal that best describes, how you're feeling now. Okay? I'll go first. I'm feeling like a Llama, today. I'm feeling droopy, I'm feeling enclosed with a very long neck. Alright? Gulia. Do you wanna go next?

GULIA: Erm. I feel. Like. A. Hybrid Sloth-Hyena. That's the best way I can describe how I'm feeling right now.

GWYN: That's some genetically spliced feeling animal there.

GULIA: Yeah. I just want to hang around in a tree all fucking day, but I'm also ready to rip someone apart, whilst laughing maniacally.

GWYN: Terrifying. Eden. How's your animal looking?

EDEN: Well, I think the best way to describe it, would be… You know that star-nose mole? (MIMES). Do you know what I mean? Now it's got a lot going on here. Have you sin him?

GULIA: Yeah. He's weird.

EDEN: Yeah. He's an ugly fucker. But it does what it needs to. And it buries deep. Goes deep. And he's velvety.

GWYN: That's very good. A lot of complex, intricate thoughts and structures there. So, that's one way we can get a handle on our feelings. That's a way of visualising them. We can see them there, clearly. But how can we hear our feelings? How can we give the image sound? Okay? So, what we're going to try, is. We're going to make that noise, that your feelings are. Okay? It could be a low grumble, it could be a high pitched squeal, or it could be one of those springy noises, like on a door - Doooiinnggg. It's up to you. Would anybody like to go first?

EDEN: Are we doing it separately, or all together, like a primal… No?

GULIA: Yeah. Could we have an example of what kind of thing?

GWYN: Sure. The way I'm feeling this week. I've not had the best week. I've had a lot going through my mind. Just, you know? Thoughts, some people said some things. So, I'd say the sound that most accurately represents how I'm feeling is, erm.

GWYN MAKES A SOUND LIKE A WHALE WITH HEARTBURN.

EDEN: I can feel that.

GWYN: Okay?

GULIA: Yeah. Gwyn mate, I honestly didn't mean what I said. I'm really sorry. I'm really hurt to hear that it's played on your mind all week. I can't have that on me as well.

EDEN: I'm sorry that I said you looked like Bradley Cooper Gwyn.

GWYN: Water under the bridge.

GULIA: It doesn't sound like that.

GWYN: Don't worry. It's funny, I've never been called a gastropub before.

GULIA: I think I said gastropod.

EDEN: What's one of them, then?

GULIA: A slug.

GWYN LOOKS HURT.

GWYN: Oh. (BEAT) Well, to be honest. (BEAT). Yes, what you said had an effect. But what all of us say is going to have an effect, over the next week, as we beat this stress, together. Okay? This is a team effort, and what you did was right for the team, no matter how much it hurt. (PAUSE)

ALL NOD THEIR HEAD IN THOUGHTFUL AGREEANCE.

GWYN: (CONT.) Eden. Have you got a noise for us?

EDEN: Yeah. I will try to do the noise of the star-nosed mole that is my inner feelings. My portrayal. Okay. Okay.

EDEN MAKES A SOUND LIKE BRIAN BLESSED BEING ELECTROCUTED.

EDEN: (CONT.) I didn't think it would come out like that, if I'm honest.

GWYN: Very stark. Very good. It sounds like your mole is struggling a little.

EDEN: It's the constipation. The emotional constipation. And it's all that burrowing, he does.

GWYN: Well, that's very good. Very powerful. Gulia? Time to give a voice to your emotions.

GULIA TAKES A FEW MOMENTS TO COMPOSE HERSELF.

GULIA MAKES A SOUND LIKE A GREMLIN BEING DROWNED AND THROTTLED.

GULIA: Hmm. That felt good.

GWYN: That's very good. Good stuff.

GULIA: Thanks. It felt good.

GWYN: I'm really glad we were able to give a voice to our feelings there. It gives them character. And if they've got character, they can be beaten down.

EDEN: And should be.

GWYN: And should be. Okay, well that's all we've got time for this week. So I'll see you next week for our very last session.

EDEN: Gwyn, could I just ask…

GWYN: (RUSHED) No, sorry Eden. We've run out of time. It'll have to wait till next week.

QUICK CUT TO BLACK:

1/5 WEEK 5 INT. PARTICIOANTS' HOUSES/ZOOM MEETING. DAY.

FADE IN FROM BLACK:

EACH PARTICIPANT'S PICTURES COME ONSCREEN.

ALL SEEM UP-BEAT AND ARE SMILING.

GWYN: Ooop, here they are the most healed people in the room. Hello.

EDEN: Hiya.

GULIA: Hi.

GWYN: It's good to see you all again.

GULIA: It's good to see you guys too.

EDEN: Yeah.

GULIA: How's everyone's week been?

GWYN: Oh you know? Ups and downs, ups and downs.

GULIA: Ups and downs.

GWYN: You alright there Eden?

EDEN: Yeah. Are you?

GWYN: I'm very well thank you. Listen. I'm very excited for today. We've been on a long journey together. Five weeks now, s it?

GULIA: Yep.

GWYN: A lot of work's been done. A lot of progress. Hows about we have a little round up. How's your weeks been?

GULIA: Well, I'm going to go, because I'm, like, really excited. I have, just, I feel good and I don't think I've ever felt good in my life. Really, not really. Recently, and I put this down to you guys, to be honest. I've decided I'm going to sell my restaurant, 'm going to leave. I'm going to do something different. With my life. And I am petrified and excited. I don't know. There's a lot of love here. For you guys, a lot of appreciation. Because I feel like, I don't think I could ever have done that before coming here. It would just have been a dream. So, thanks. I feel really good (TITTERS).

GWYN: Good for you Gulia.

EDEN: That's amazing Gulia. What a break through, eh?

GULIA: I know, right? It's insane. I never thought I'd get to this point, ever.

GWYN: You've been an absolute star, these last few weeks. I'm not surprised you've had a breakthrough.

GULIA: It's all down to you guys, I swear to God. And I really hope we can stay in touch.

GWYN: That's fantastic. We're very proud of you. Eden. How's your week been?

EDEN: Me?

GWYN: Yeah, you.

EDEN: Well, it's been okay, actually. You know? Because we've gone back into the office now. So, I feel like a huge, bit… What's the word. Weight, has been lifted. I mean it's no great breakthrough, like Gulias. But it's been a relief to get back into the office, because I've just, I'm sick of these Zoom meetings. Not this one, not these ones. I'm just sick of staring at a screen all the time. Sick of looking at all these tiny faces, and then when you see them in real life, they're bloody massive. It's not reflective of the real world, is it? I feel like I've woken up from a year-long bender. Do you know what I mean? I feel tired, like an online hangover. And there's no social element. Like if you were in an actual meeting, you chart beforehand. With Zoom its just straight to business. I think these bloody zooms reveal too much about people. This one guy. That bloody Paulo, have I mentioned him? He thought he'd turned his camera off. He only went to the toilet. We all saw it!

GULIA: Oh my God.

EDEN: Honestly. No one needs to see that.

GULIA: Was it a number one, or number two?

EDEN: Well I saw his bare arse, so. Just dropped his kecks. So, that's how my week's been.

GWYN: That's fantastic. It sounds like you've both had excellent weeks, Paulo's arse notwithstanding. And that couldn't be more fitting, as it leads into our last session today. We've explored are flaws, but we've not looked at our achievements. Too often, it's the case that we hold ourselves to account for or flaws and pass off our successes as blind luck. Something that the universe provided. Don't we? So today, I want us to talk about some of our greatest achievements. So go right ahead, think back. I want to hear about your greatest achievements.

GULIA: I can honestly say that up until now, I don't feel like I've achieved anything. Honestly. This pandemic has highlighted to me that I don't have a life outside work. I have no life at all. I've been locked in that place since I was a kid. And

talking with you guys has given me the strength to strike out on my own. To build a new life, to build A life. A life full of achievements. I don't quite know what I'm going to do. But I'm quite excited to find out.

GWYN: You've already started achieving. You've achieved truth and freedom.

GULIA: (SMILING AND NODDING) Truth and freedom.

GWYN: Eden. What have you got for us?

EDEN: To be honest, I think my greatest achievement was being in the LEP in 1992. I grew the biggest turnip in the school. Front page. Front page news that were. 23rd July, 1992. It were this big. I mean I was littler then, so me tiny hands, it could have been even biggerer. It had. What the word? Girth. It were girthy.

GWYN: A girthy turnip?

EDEN: Exactly Gwyn. It felt pretty big in me little hands, anyway. It's a right achievement that. I often think about it.

GWYN: Well, that sounds fantastic. Quite the triumph.

EDEN: Is that the sort of thing you were after.

GWYN: That's the sort of thing, yeah. You've got to think to yourself, Eden. It was you that grew that turnip. Gulia didn't grow that turnip. I didn't grow that turnip. But you *did* Eden. Take ownership of your turnip, Eden.

EDEN: Thank you Gwyn.

GWYN: Now, Eden. I want you now to think about what changes you can make to your life that will mean even greater achievements moving forward. Like Gulia has this week and you did in 1992.

EDEN: Should I grow another turnip?

GWYN: Well. I think, maybe, you've ticked that box already. Try something new.

EDEN: A pumpkin!

GWYN: Let's move away from the groceries. What changes can you make now?

EDEN: I don't know Gwyn. I just don't have that sort of confidence. I can't just up and leave, like Gulia. I'm a coward. That's why I bury my problems, rather than face them. I just feel alone in the world, without connection. I feel, Gwyn, like I'm in an emotional lockdown. I just need more time. I think I'll have to sign up for another five weeks.

GULIA: Eden, I understand your reluctance. It's taken me my whole life to make this change. Remember you're in control of your own destiny. You need to garab the bull by the balls and yank them. Be the Kestrel of courage and seize the shrew of indecision. Spread your wings and soar into your future. You've got so much potential, Eden and you've inspired me so much. Eden, you are sat on the mollusc of destiny, when you should be the Electric Eel of purpose. Your happiness isn't to be discovered, it's already there. Colonise it! There's more on offer at the buffet of life than turnip. Like Gwyn says, help-yourself at the buffet of life. I say, 'sure', only bring your own big plate.

EDEN: Thank you Gulia, that was really inspiring. I think the student has become the master there.

GWYN: I'm so proud.

GULIA: I learnt from the best.

GWYN: I've got to say, that's some level five stuff, coming out there. Hasn't she come along, Eden?

EDEN: Oh. That was moving. You should become a motivational speaker, Gulia.

GULIA: Yeah. Maybe that's what I should be doing.

GWYN: Listen. I'm touched. I'm very moved by that. That's a very special thing that's happened here, over the course of these five weeks. And sometimes five weeks is all it takes. Gulia, I've got to say, you're a new person.

GULIA: I do. I feel reborn. I definitely do, and I owe it all to, the pandemic, if I'm honest, and I owe it you guys. I owe it to snakes and rivers. I owe it to sloths, which are also hyenas, moles and llamas.

GWYN: That's like music to my ears. Weird animal music.

GULIA: I've been doing my noise every day. Every time I got triggered, I'd do my noise, dig in deep and there it was. The soul I'd been looking for.

EDEN: Do it for us Gulia.

GULIA MAKES HER NOISE.

EDEN: That's emotional.

GULIA: I know, right? It's so powerful. So powerful.

GWYN: Well, I don't think there much left for us to do this week. That's as good as it gets. Gulia, I think you've surpassed expectations. Eden, I expect I'll se you next week?

EDEN: You're probably right, to be fair. I'll be back.

GWYN: You always come back.

EDEN: They don't call me Boomerang Binns for nothing.

GWYN: Well done everybody, thank you so much for your hard work. Sometimes it's quick, sometimes it takes time. But we always get there in the end.

EDEN: We should all make our noise, to end the session.

GULIA: Yes. Yes.

GWYN: That's a bloody good idea. Okay. Three… Two.. One.

ALL MAKE THEIR NOISE.

FADE TO BLACK:

1/6 A FEW MINUTES LATER. INT. GWYN'S ROOM. DAY.

FADE IN FROM BLACK:

WE SEE GWYN ON HIS OWN (HIS CAMERA IS STILL ON). WE HEAR A VOICE OFFSCREEN, BUT DO NOT SEE WHO IS SPEAKING.

NURSE: Gwyn?

GWYN: Yes, Nurse?

NURSE: Come on, time for your medication and then back to the day room.

GWYN: Is it jelly for pudding?

NURSE: It is.

GWYN: Oh lovely. My favourite.

GWYN EXHIBITS A BIZZARRE TICK AND THE CAMERA CLICKS OF

CUT TO BLACK:

END CREDITS

D2: The Nandemic (First Draft)

I lost Nan today.

He takes his glasses off and wipes them. He then puts them back on.

She wandered off in Waitrose. I found her talking to a sales assistant at the Deli counter. She'll talk to anyone, will Nan, and at length. She's the only person I've seen talk to a couple of Godbods for so long that they, made their excuses and left. To give them their dues, it was raining and blowing a gale, and they did stick it out for a few good hours. We don't get cold callers anymore. I think she's blacklisted. After the first forty minutes, it becomes clear that Nan isn't going to buy a new kitchen, or double glazing – she's only got a galley and lives in a flat. It's soon apparent, you're not going to make your sales targets by wasting your time with a wittering old dear, like Nan. A personal injury company called once and Nan proceeded to detail every slip, trip and fall that she'd experienced since the age of three. I must admit it was quite detailed and I'm surprised Nan has made it this far, given how accident prone she is. I was round her flat one Saturday afternoon when she received a call. 'Hello', she said. Then after a moment a wry smile crept over her lips. 'Oh they're white, what colour are yours?'. I said, 'Who's that Nan?'. 'Some feller asking what colour me Knickers are', she said. 'The dirty perv', I said and, after giving the feller down the banks for his filtherous proclivities, said, 'don't call here again, or I'll phone the police'. 'I don't know why you were so hard on him, love. I's just a bit of fun'. 'No Nan', I said. 'It is not'.

The truth of it is, that she's lonely. I spend what time I can with her, but I have to work. During lockdown, I moved in with her, for a bit of company for her. I was there all the time, but I lost count of the amount of Zoom meetings she padded into shot, asking 'who are you talking to?'. Then, once she realised she was on camera, rather shyly waved at senior management and offered them a brew. Once I could get back in the office, I did. Is that terrible of me? I got her a cat. Horace. But Horace is a vicious little bastard. If he's not swiping your ankles from under a chair, he's pouncing off the stairs, claws out, onto your back. It's like having a Bengal Tiger in your house. In hindsight, a hamster might have been a better choice, but given how clumsy Nan has become, or if the personal injury call is to be believed, has always been. It would only be a matter of time before she squashed it. I drop Nan off for the coffee morning at the Methodist Church on Saturdays, she's not really religious, but it's a chance to talk spend time with other gossipers. She seems to enjoy it. I went with her once, never again. They talk like mill workers. And I came out with my head spinning from the information that is propounded and the time it took to propound it. I felt like I had whiplash from nodding silently. It is amazing in a way. They never drew a breath. Even the tea and biscuits, which, one might think would be an impediment to incessant conversation, isn't. It is a sort of relay, where as one stops to take a sip, or to nibble a Garibaldi, another starts up. And they people they talk about. I've lost track of who is who. It's like reading the telephone directory, or watching Game of Thrones! Or 'Tits and Dragons' as Nan calls it. That's the thing about being a hundred years old, your filters seem to degrade, and you can get away with it.

Nan's not much of a fantasy fan, she much prefers Downton or Call the Midwife. It's the only time she's quiet, when we have a few hours in the evening, 'looking at the

telly'. Then before bed we have a Horlicks or Ovaltine and she regales me with tales from the war, populated by characters such as Cod-eyes and Black Mac, so called because of her jet black hair. I've heard them before, but I never tire of them. Dancing shoes in her gas-mask box, air raids as soon as you got in the bath and boiling eggs in a device you plugged into the light fitting. All great stuff. My personal favourites include stories of a woman, who was so fond of male attention, it was said that she, had the imprint of every tree in Hyde Park on her backside. And of course how she had met Granddad. Like many of those *how I met…* stories, they inevitably contain the phrase, 'Well, I wasn't keen to begin with'. After story time, we say goodnight and go to our separate rooms. I sleep in what was Granddad's room and she in the room we all use to sleep in when we stayed at Nan and Granddad's. My brother on a camp bed, me in one bed and Nan in her's. I never though anything about why Nan and Granddad had separate rooms as a child. Even now, I can only imagine it was because Granddad snored, or it was something that was of its time, where couples slept separately other than on particular occasions.

Every Remembrance Sunday, we go to the Cenotaph. I always get emotional, but always keep it in. Both Nan and Granddad, never really talked about the horrors of war, for obvious reasons. They would happily tell my brother and I, funny anecdotes, but never about the friends they lost and things they'd seen. Granddad, did towards the end of his life, as if some urgency was required for us to learn from history, or that Granddad might be seeking some form of absolution, before he met his maker. Granddad had joined the RAF at the outbreak of war, because he thought it would be easier to shoot at planes, rather than people. For Nan's part, she was in the WAAf and being stationed in London during the Blitz must have been horrendous, but she never talked about it in any other way than with a fondness and sense of adventure and excitement.

Nan had lived through a world war, but had died at the beginning of the pandemic. But she's still with me. I see her everywhere. At the deli counter in Waitrose. At the coffee mornings at The Methodist church and she's always there at the Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday. Granddad is there too, with their poppies and their memories, paying tribute to the fallen friends they could never talk about.

I'll always remember them and I will talk about my Nan. That is, if I can get a word in edgeways.

D3: Dark Web

Dark Web

By

David A. Middleton

T-A: Hi guys, it's me again, Tiffany-Amber. I just want to say from the get go, to all my loyal subs. I love you, and you're welcome. Hundred percent. So, what am I going to talk to you about today? At the end of the day, what does it matter? It's me talking about it, right? I'm joking. But I'm not. But I am. No, seriously though, guys, I'm not that conceited. Just the chance to be part of this supportive and kind community, well, it's a gift. It's really a gift. Heartfelt gestures with the arms. Big hug emoji. Kisses (*blows kisses*), mwaa, mwaa, mwaa. So what's hot this week? Besides me. Well, vintage is going crazy at the moment, 90s band Ts are trending and, if like me, you weren't born in the 90s, this means bands like Nirvana. Nirvana was fronted by a guy called Kurt Coltrain and he shot himself in the foot and died. But there's a conspiracy theory. Now I know you guys just love a conspiracy. Apparently Coltrain's wife, Courtney Cox, who was in *Friends*. Oh My Gosh, I literally love Friends. Well apparently, Courtney, like, got Kurt to write all her songs and then got him super blazed on drugs. What do you guys think? Did Courtney Cox kill Kurt? Post a comment and let me know. Anyways, where was I? Oh yeah, trending this fall. Knee high boots are huge this season. Ari has been rocking the knee highs and they are red hot at the mo. I am loving these knee high platforms, they literally go with any outfit, so grab a pair ASAP. They are deffo Ari-approved. To go with my new boots, I've gone for a green turtleneck. Green was a super popular summer '21 trend that is just not slowing down. It's getting uberbaltic now and something snuggly and warm like a turtleneck is a must. On the subject of snuggly, you can go for an oversized hoodie. I am seeing the oversized hoodie all over Insta, with… You guessed it, knee-highs. I know, right? Told you so. If you're not going to go for the hoodie or turtleneck, then flannel shirts are coming back in a big way, kinda the 90s grunge theme that I was chatting about with the band Ts earlier. If you're not into that whole teenaged angst vibe, then a flannel shirt over a crop-top or summer dress, can be sooo cute. Then there's the plaid pants. This insta fashion has been heating up for the fall season. I mean they're an absolute must-have, plaid is a fall classic after all, right? I got these from Princess Polly and they are a must for that influencer vibe. Now let's talk accessories. The mini purse has been big for many seasons now. I got this Lani mini structured satchel and I, hundred per cent, recommend you scoop up an adorable, trendy basic to really, just lift your looks. Now let's talk hats. I love a hat and that is why I am rocking this bucket hat this fall. If you've been following me, you'll know I've been wearing bucket hats all summer, but it's not time to put them away just yet. Or you can switch them up with darker coloured ones that are just screaming fall. Okay, guys, just before I go I want to talk about some people messaging me. You know I love to hear from you, but be nice. Jodpurs19 asked me, 'Would you consider doing an Onlyfans?'. Well he's blocked! Like I would prostitute myself for money and popularity. And like, hello. My passion is fashion, clothes on, Jodpurs19, clothes on! And if anyone sends me any more

dickpics, I am going to scream. Blocked, blocked, cockblocked! Okay guys, much love. TA out!

CUT TO:

SC2

TA: Hey guys, it's me again Tiffany-Amber. Today I've got something intriguing. Wow, big word. Now, oftentimes, my fans send me gifts. This is so cute. Thank you. Well, today guess what just dropped into my PO box. Old school. A small box and a letter. I mean that is so... Just DM me, right? So this is like a mediaeval unboxing.

TA opens the box first. She extracts a single red rose.

TA: That is so Disney. A single red rose. Romantic. But what can it mean?

TA then opens the letter awkwardly, like she's never opened an envelope before.

T-A: This is like when I got my GCSE results. All A stars, if you're asking. Smart. I know right?

TA extracts the index card sized epistle within the envelope.

T-A: (*Reading)* Dear Tiffany Amber. I think you are the most beautiful person both inwardly and out. I can't stop thinking about you. Maybe we could start chatting. (To Camera). This is soo cute. You guys know I don't have like a regular boyfriend. I'm all free and easy. Commitment, arrgghh. I'm more of a swipe right, swipe left kinda girl. But this is so cool. What do you guys think? Should I message this guy? Answers in the comments, please. I mean, who hasn't met a stranger online and hooked up? My bestie Alishia-Anastasia. Link to her YouTube channel below. She is so old school and weird, I love it. She's totally got a Facebook account. I'm like, Alishia, how old are you? Thirty? She'll be dabbing on TikTok next. Anyways AA met a guy on Bumble and now they're legit a couple. He's well fit and drives a Benz. Admittedly he's cheated on her four times, but they got over it. You have to work at a relationship, everyone knows that. There's got to be some drama. You know what, guys, I'm going to message this mystery man now, and I'll take you along for the ride. I'm all about full disclosure. I think it's the duty of any influencer to help people by being genuine. I totally hate how fake people can be. Sorry guys, I don't like to be negative, it's all love with me, but girl's gotta vent, right? Okay, let's talk jacket dresses…

FADE TO BLACK:

SC3

TA: Hey, guys, it's me again, Tiffany-Amber. So big update. I have totally been messaging my mystery guy. He's called George. He's American and he is at college doing fashion at Harvard. We have got so much in common, its untrue. He likes cats, not dogs. Tick. He loves Italian food, tick. He's totally a vegetarian, but wants to go vegan. Tick, tick. We've exchanged numbers and have had some great chats for hours. We're deffo past the chatting phase and we are *so* speaking to each other. We are totally going to meet. He's flying over next week. I am so excited. I know he's watching, so. Hi George, can't wait to meet. Anyways, guys. Enough about my love

life, let's get on with this taste test. Because of George, today I am going to taste some American candy. First up we've got an Almond Joy. I like almonds, I hate coconut though. Let's have a bite…

TA unwraps it and takes a tentative bite of the chocolate bar.

TA: Urrgghh.

TA immediately and demonstratively, spits the chocolate out.

TA: Urrgghh coconut. I've been poisoned! God, that's bad…

FADE TO BLACK:

SC4

TA: Hey, guys, TA here. So, tragedy, drama. If you've been following me for a while, you'll know that I've been speaking to a guy. He was due to fly over from America last week. I've just found out he's in hospital. Some kind of car accident on the way to the airport. It's okay, he can still text and call, but he's broken his leg, arm and some ribs. I am totally devvo'd. I am so worried. (*Takes a moment to compose herself*) I've offered to help him pay his medical bills, but for all you doubters out there, he's refused my help. He is so genuine, I just hope he's going to be all right. I've topped his phone up, so we can still chat, he can't leave the hospital you see. So, if you're watching this, George, speak tonight. And I think all you loyal followers will join me in sending good vibes and healing energy. Okay, guys, let's talk fashion hacks…

FADE TO BLACK:

SC5

TA: What's up, guys, Tiffany-Amber here. Sending much love out to you and the universe. So George is out of the hospital and he's flying over tomorrow. I have sent him the money to buy the ticket, because all his money has gone on his medical bills. In America you have to pay, not like here in the UK. He's gonna pay me back, every penny, but I'm just glad to help out. I know a lot of you have messaged me telling me to be careful, and thank you so much for that. But I know this guy. He is such a shy and honest person. You know when you just know? I know we haven't met in person, but nowadays, who does. I've spoken to this guy and I just get that feeling, you know? Hey, why not tell me about your online dating successes I'd love to hear them. Anyway, I'll keep you updated. Okay, let's look at Halloween costume ideas…

FADE TO BLACK:

SC6

TA: Hey guys, how's it going? TA here, as always. So George didn't fly over. His passport was seized leaving the US. He's begged me for a thousand dollars to get things straight. He says he wants to be with me, that he's never been in love with anyone more than he is with me. I don't know what to do.

TA breaks down, for a moment and then attempts to compose herself. She shows a photo to the camera of a handsome young man.

TA: This is George. Cute, right? Only it's not, is it, George? This is a photo lifted from the internet. This person is really called Geoffrey Hitchens, a student at Oxford University here in England. A quick image reversal search and that's all I needed. So, George, or whatever your real name is. I know you're watching. If I was you, I'd check my email and phone, because I've had you hacked. I've also reported you to the police. Who do you think you are? What? Because I'm some dumb young girl, with great taste and flawless skin, you think you can scam me? Because you think I'm so vacuous and in need of love and attention, you think I'm ripe for extortion? You are what is wrong with humanity. Hiding behind someone else's image on the internet. You're pathetic. Well, you've met your match with old TA. I have totally scammed you. I was on to you for the begging. You don't fuck with iGens! Just like you, I am not what I seem online. The money I sent was worth it to expose you and bring you down. You guys out there watch out for these people, they are the lowest of the low. You come to me for fashion advice and stay for the scam wham bam, thank you, TA, ma'am. This is the kind of great content you come to me for.

FADE TO BLACK:

<u>SC9</u>

TA: Well, it's been a few weeks since our unmasking and George, well, he's actually called Jordan Makepeace. Ironic, really, because he reached out to make peace. It turns out he was genuine after all. He sent me all my money back. He was just a bit self-conscious about the way he looks, so he'd used a different picture. It just goes to show you, you just can't believe anything you see online.

TA starts to judder, like a robot malfunctioning and then she freezes.

CUT TO BLACK: