IB Theatre HL

Task 4: Collaborative Project
Process Portfolio

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Table of Contents:

1. My Journey Through Theatre — Personal Context 1
2. Research into the Devising Process of a Theatre Company 4
3. The Formation of The Group 6
4. Starting Point, Target Audience and Artistic Intentions 8
5. Reflections on the Collaborative Development of Our Piece 9
6. Specific Explorations I Led With The Group 12
7. Evaluation of The Final Performance 13
8. My Contribution to The Final Performance 14
Bibliography 1
1. My Journey Through Theatre — Personal Context

I have been a storyteller since I can recall. I wrote my first script on an airplane when I was eight, but since then my tastes, personal preferences and views have undergone radical changes. My first big step into the boundless world of theatre happened when I was seven years old. My school had both a Drama Club and an ICT Club. I wanted to participate in both, however, they were scheduled on the same afternoon, and I was forced to make a choice. For how banal this might sound, I regard this as the first big decision of my lifetime, because those two clubs represented my two biggest passions. I chose the Drama Club.

*The Art of Lying — Favourite and Least Favourite Theatre Practices*

My journey in the world of theatre had officially begun back then and has continued uninterruptedly to this day. During those post-school afternoons I learnt about the value of theatre to individuals, and I felt ‘connected’ to the world of the dramatic arts, a world that has existed since before the Ancient Greeks and is still alive today: although more advanced forms of entertainment such as film and television have arisen, they have never posed a challenge to theatre, an art which still exists and is not comparable to other forms of entertainment. What is it that theatre has, and that other forms of entertainment lack? During those afternoon Drama Clubs, I understood that the essence of theatre is to *tell a lie*. Everything in a theatrical performance is a lie, and the more credible the lie is, the better it is. A lie that is told to you in front of your eyes, right there, right then, is much more believable than a lie that you see being told behind a television screen. The ‘*right here, right now*’ is what is unique to theatre and cannot be reproduced in any other form of art. My view on the ‘required truthfulness of a lie’ ties in with Stanislavsky’s realism. When an actor is completely connected with the character they play, to a point in which they believe that the character is them and that they are the character, and when their emotions start to become ‘real’ emotions as opposed to portrayed emotions, only then will a lie pass as the truth, and only then will an actor be able to express themselves through theatre. This is also why Epic Theatre and Musical Theatre are two styles which I have no interest in exploring, from the point of view of a performer — I think of them as not being in depth: Epic Theatre seems lacking in sentiment and meaning, staying on the surface and not diving deep into emotions. Musical Theatre, on the other hand, is not credible, as in real life, people do not suddenly start singing whilst in the middle of a conversation. I would rather explore the world of the abstract through Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty, which plays with deep, often repressed passionate sensations, evoking hidden feelings by pushing them to an extreme.

As I got older and gained more experience as a theatrical performer, something unexpected happened: I started to lose the connection to theatre that I used to experience often in Drama Club, and I hit a ‘downfall stage’ in my theatre journey. Theatre had become dull and repetitive for me, and I was beginning to feel a disinterest towards the dramatic arts: I had lost the energy and determination that were required when on stage, and I stopped using theatre as a means for my expression, because theatre “wasn’t doing the job” for me. Nonetheless, I learnt more
about theatre during this period of time than I had ever learnt before, and more than I have ever learnt ever since. I started experiencing theatre from the point of view of the spectator and not anymore of the performer. What I was interested in performing earlier became of less importance, and what gained value were my personal tastes, derived from the performances I enjoyed and did not enjoy watching. Here, I started being interested in spectacular illusions and special effects. Anything magical that surprises the audience, in my opinion, is always interesting to watch. This is when I started exploring blackout theatre — after having watched an unknown production of Alice in Wonderland by Puntozero (2010) — and multimedia performances — after having watched another production of Alice Underground by Ferdinando Bruni and Francesco Frongia. This also ties in with Erwin Piscator’s ideas about the use of video, stills and recordings in performances that I explored in depth in my IBDP Theatre extended essay. In fact, multimedia can be used as a tool for defying the limits of live performances while still maintaining the ‘right here, right now’ feature which is unique to theatre as a form of art and entertainment. I find this fascinating for a spectator, yet uninteresting to a performer, as it takes away the pressure and therefore merit involved when having to keep an audiences’ attention for the entire duration of a performance, merely through acting.

My Practical Experiences in Performing Theatre

My first year of High School marked my rediscovery of theatre: I found that all I needed to do in order to regain my lost interest in the dramatic arts was to challenge myself to participate in something bigger and more exciting. Here, with the experience of a knowledgable spectator on my back, I started taking part in an experience that changed my life. Giuseppe Scutellà, a theatre director who I have been lucky enough to work closely with and who I have learnt from, asked me to join him in his adventures as a volunteer in the juvenile detention centre IPM Cesare Beccaria di Milano. Shocked and unsure about what to expect, I chose to give it a shot. In Beccaria, Scutellà and a couple of other volunteers (either actors or people with previous experience in theatre) work with a few young adults to show them how theatre can signify for them an escape from their monotonous, caged prison world. In theatre they express themselves, they become communicators, something which they are unable to do in their everyday life. Here, I learned more about Theatre for Development (also known as Social Theatre), an application of theatre that was revealing to me in many ways. Theatre for Development is ‘practiced with the people or by the people as a way of empowering communities, listening to their concerns, and then encouraging them to voice and solve their own problems’ (Wikipedia). The most revealing aspect of Theatre for Development to me is that it has a clear and significant purpose: to help society progress and get better, and not merely for entertainment, in the way theatre is normally viewed. This experience as a volunteer also gave me some practical performance experience: I became an actor in the production Errare Humanum Est... directed by Giuseppe Scutellà, that has toured over 30 schools in the north of Italy, before having 8 shows at the Piccolo Teatro Grassi di Milano in November 2014. The crucial thing that I learned through this practical experience is the essential importance of the
audience in any theatrical performance, something which I will definitely take into consideration for our collaborative project. I found out that I work completely differently when I'm in front of a large audience as opposed to when I'm alone or in front of a few actors. As I mentioned earlier, I believe that the purpose of an actor is to communicate, and in order to communicate a message, there must be a recipient. This is why theatre helps the young adults in detention centres to express themselves, because the listeners they find in theatre spectators they do not find off-stage. The stage becomes their space to be heard, their place in the spotlight. Furthermore, every audience is different: the performance feels differently to actors every time, and spectators feel different emotions every time, and therefore react differently to the same dialogue and actions. Out of the 38 shows which I participated in, not two have been identical to each other in how they felt to me; the only variable being the spectators.

**Frantic Assembly Workshop**

I participated in a physical theatre workshop with Frantic Assembly run by Sean Hollands. This gave me a better insight on how physical theatre can be used to collaboratively create theatre and of the importance of trust within a group. I was inspired by some of the tasks we completed, in particular the lifts we were eventually managed to perform effortlessly. As with black theatre I was very interested in the use of the body to convey meaning either completely or partially eliminating the need for words.

**Butoh Workshop**

I participated in a Butoh workshop and again was interested in how the grotesque and incongruent movements when linked to music could tell a story. This sparked an interest in incorporating music into my work either as a soundscape or to accompany images.

**My Blacklight Theatre Experience**

One of my most recent theatre projects was based on black theatre, a technique that was first used in Japan and China, and later developed in the Czech Republic. The aspect that interests me the most about this theatrical technique is that it combines the 'expressive artistry of dance, mime and acrobatics', (WordPress.com) which I am interested in exploring, along with the lighting effects which is an area of theatre production I particularly enjoy. I believe this contribution could add originality to our piece and help present a story in a more sophisticated manner. The visual impact of this technique is its key feature, and I believe that it could resemble universal themes and emotions that all theatre performances have in common, such as fear and desperation, and could also establish an eerie atmosphere on stage, which we have previously experimented with in theatre class and have succeeded in.
2. Research into the Devising Process of a Theatre Company

*DV8 Physical Theatre* is a devising company that was first conceived in 1986 by Lloyd Newson, who has led the company to its formation and still takes an active role in their devising process, directing all of their productions since 1986. I had already heard of *DV8* because my teacher had mentioned them in class. Being interested especially in the social, psychological and political issues that are explored in their performances, I chose to investigate more about their devising processes.

*DV8* does not have a fixed cast for all of their productions, therefore, the first step in their devising process is to have auditions. The devising process for Newson, however, begins way before auditions: his ideas and feelings about a certain topic are what give birth to a project, and not the act itself of devising. *DV8* is different from most other theatrical companies because through their performances they try to achieve one specific aim, and this aim is common to each of their projects. In *DV8*’s artistic policy they state that:

> the focus of the creative approach is on reinvesting dance with meaning, particularly where this has been lost through formalised techniques. 

*DV8*’s work inherently questions the traditional aesthetics and forms which pervade both modern and classical dance, and attempts to push beyond the values they reflect to enable discussion of wider and more complex issues. *(DV8.co.uk)*

Similarly, in our collaborative project, I would also want to promote reflection and discussion of wider topics. Theatre, in this case, is used as a means to promote social thinking and change, and this ties in with my interests in *Theatre for Development*, which, as mentioned earlier, I have experimented with while volunteering in a juvenile detention centre (section 1, pages 2 and 3).

The first ‘official’ part of the process of devising begins when auditions are held, although Newton already has a partial idea of what he is looking for. During auditions, his vision is completed like a puzzle, one piece at a time, by the inspiration he finds while watching the actors and dancers in the audition process. This first step of the process is mostly useful to concretise ideas, which go from abstract thoughts to material moments of performance. However, for the purpose of our collaborative project, will have to find another way of concretising our ideas, since it is not possible for us to hold auditions, as our group will not be big enough.
The next step in the process, which is also the longest step, is concerned with a deep research into all the aspects and elements of a performance. Most devising companies first write a script, then make the script come to life on stage, and then, based on the structure of the actor's performance, build sets, decide the lighting to use, and add background music. This is also the type of process I have personally followed in the past when devising theatre. DV8's approach to devising, however, is a less systematical one: all of the elements mentioned above are thought about and considered at the same time, and develop in no particular order, following the specific requirements of the project. For example, set construction may precede (and therefore inspire) the ideas regarding movement and physicality, and consequently the storyline itself, which might be based on a specific set design construction. Newson states: "set design has become integral to our invention of movement. I am interested in understanding movement in different spatial contexts." (Newson). Similarly, for every project, DV8 commissions a composer to create music which is specific to their project, which can inspire movements and physicality. I do not know how attainable this approach is for our collaborative group project. Realistically, our group will not be large enough to assign to every person one element of production: it will be a more mixed process in which we all contribute and give ideas about each element of production. For example, I know I am strong at conveying meaning through lighting, however I will still expect to receive input and ideas from the other members of my group about how to light the scenes.

Unfortunately, there is not much information available for what exactly happens during the next stage of devising, however, it is clear that it differs for every project, as each project has its individual requirements and there is no one common structure. Nonetheless, nearly all of their pieces spend a long time in the process of creation, because the company does not impose deadlines for the completion of their projects. Instead, a project is ready only when the director, choreographer, and the performers feel as though it is ready to be shown and presented to an audience. For example, Newson stated in an interview that "the research and development period for Enter Achilles (1995) occurred almost two years prior to the piece being completed. This gap suggests that sometimes there can be quite a significant delay between ideas being initiated and the work that emerges a few years later" (Newson). This gap which he is talking about is a fundamental part of DV8's devising process, as it ensures that their work always maintains rigorous artistic integrity in every project. Our group, however, will not be allowed to do this, as our time constraints are too firm and we do have a deadline.

My favourite aspect about DV8 is that their work is lead by creative needs and artistic inspiration, not financial, organisational and touring demands. This is something that distinguishes them from most other companies, and it's also something which I would like to enforce in our collaborative group project. The only difference is that we will have a deadline for the completion and presentation of our project, while DV8 stays away from deadlines.
3. The Formation of The Group

The way in which our group was formed was mostly an implicit process, as it was sort of ready-made. We never sat down and clarified who was in our group and who wasn’t, since our school isn’t large enough for this. Instead, we all knew from the very beginning that we would form only one group of five members, without the need for us to sit down and decide it. Of course, we could have formed two smaller groups, one with three members and one with two, but none of us seemed to want this: we are so used to working together that we each have carved out our own function in the process of creating theatre. Fortunately, we are all interested in a variety of different aspects of theatre, therefore each of us will be bringing something unique and original to this project, and this is also what made us all implicitly want to work together, so we will be able to have a variety of diverse ideas and inputs, and we would never have to face writer’s block as there will always be one member of the group who has an innovative thought that keeps the project developing. Furthermore, since we have always worked together as one large group during our first year of IB Theatre, to split us at this stage would have had a noxious effect on the group, as we are used to take on collaborative projects all together. Furthermore, another advantage of working in five as opposed to working in twos or threes would be that the story can include more characters, since there are more performers available to act.

On the other hand, working in pairs or threes also has its own advantages. Firstly, in a smaller group the ideas developed feel more personal to yourself, and not merely as someone else’s ideas which you are obliged to carry forwards. This results in group members being more motivated and more artistically inspired by the project because they feel as though it is their own, since they are responsible for a larger part of the work. This does not mean that in our larger group we will feel as though the project does not belong to us, but some of us might feel more detached from the piece than others. Second, the ideas themselves develop more quickly as they need to be accepted and discussed only by one or two other members, and it is less likely that they will be criticised and argued against by other members. Especially in our group, and I say this because of our previous experiences, every idea that is introduced is most likely not accepted by someone in the group, and this leads to long arguments and discussions. Lastly, smaller groups benefit from the possibility of meeting after class hours to work on the project more easily. When organising this with larger groups, it is harder to arrange a time and place in which to work because there is often one member missing or that doesn’t show up. Therefore, we will have to try to be the most productive during our lessons, concentrating on what has to be done together as a group, and work on what can be done individually after class.

The Members of The Collaborative Group

Myself

My strengths and weaknesses: I believe I am a good performer and director. Also, since I am probably the member of the group with the most practical experience, I think I can help in bringing ideas to life on stage, taking the step from script to live performance. I am not the best at coming up with ideas when sitting down and not working practically; I need to work on stage.
What I'm bringing to the project: Lighting & Set Design. I am extremely versatile when it comes to being assigned an element of production to lead in. There was a lack of interest in lighting, so I chose to step in, since I have most experience in this, and I find the idea of using lights to convey meaning very interesting. Furthermore, lighting and set design are often intertwined.

's strengths and weaknesses: is a talented performer, both as an actress and a singer. My relationship with as performers/collaborators: I've worked with numerous times before, in both repertoire and devised theatre. Although we appreciate different theatrical styles, and her personal context is almost contradictory to mine, me and I work unexpectedly well together. It might be exactly because of our differing tastes that we act as examiners to each other, criticising the other person's irrelevant ideas and contributing to the more promising ones.

's strengths and weaknesses: can be extremely stubborn about his ideas from time to time, however, he also is one of the stronger performers from our group. Although I have never seen him direct, I believe that he has potential in this field, due to his character. My relationship with as performers/collaborators: is always one of two extremes: he either "zones out" in his own world, while still thinking about the project we are working on, not sharing ideas and not contributing to group discussion, or he is extremely present in group discussions, trying to promote his ideas in every way possible. This happens especially when he has his moments of realisation in which he comes up with "genius ideas".

's strengths and weaknesses: The most organised member of our group. She is also a talented artist, and is interested in both set design and costumes. Since she is quite new to the stage, I would consider performing to be her biggest weakness. My relationship with as performers/collaborators: Being very organised, she keeps our group on-track and always moving forwards. I disagree with over many ideas: I believe that hers are too simplistic. However, I must recognise that it is because of her that my ideas are not out of reach and unattainable. Although she does often cut my hopes, she keeps me "down to earth", which is something essential when working in theatre (especially as a director).

's strengths and weaknesses: is always original. Nothing that comes out of her mouth is cliché or already seen. However, she is not a strong performer as she is really shy. My relationship with as performers/collaborators: is a very good mediator: she helps our group stick together and solves disputes between different group members. Because of her presence, our group is almost always in a positive state of agreement, and this enables us to easily feel artistically inspired by each other's ideas.
4. Starting Point, Target Audience and Artistic Intentions

After explained to us the devising technique used by *Forced Entertainment*, we chose to all bring in a random object to class the following day, as *Forced Entertainment* often use random objects as their starting points and stimuli for their projects. I chose to bring some rope, as I thought that it could inspire some physical movements and set design ideas. brought a clapperboard and a small mirror, and the clapperboard ended up inspiring the story for our collaborative project. brought a DVD of *The Truman Show*, a pair of white headphones and I brought some pictures linked to the world of dreams.

We all seemed drawn to the same item: the clapperboard. This became our starting point, as it originated the context for our story, the idea of a forced reality, or a ‘fake’ world that hides a real world. This was a concept which we all wanted to explore and expand on. However, later found a sheet of paper with on the lyrics of a song: *Smile* composed by Charlie Chaplin, and the words inspired each one of us in our own way, with regards to the area or element each one of us is bringing to the performance. For example, felt inspired for a design of masks from the title of the song, while I felt inspired by the emotions linked with a smile, emotions which I want to reflect in the lighting and set design of our piece.

The first thing I thought of when I read the song lyrics was that smiles are an obvious expression of emotions such as happiness, joy and cheerfulness, but later, as our group thought about how the song lyrics could fit in with the concept of a forced reality, we reached the conclusion that smiles don’t always portray happiness: some smiles are fake, some are forced, and only a few are truthful. This idea seemed to incorporate both sides of our starting point, as the idea of forced reality implied that there are two sides to a world: a ‘fake’ side and a ‘real’ side, and the fact that smiles can be both fake or real made both ideas fit together seamlessly.

*Practical and Physical Explorations of The Starting Point*

The first thing we did once we identified our starting point was to brainstorm some possible ideas for our piece. However, we soon realised that we were not going to be able to establish the storyline, characters and scenes of our piece by just sitting and thinking. By the end of class, we had a vague idea of the world which we wanted to create and develop (the social pressure involved in always smiling and disregarding your true feelings), the main character (John) and the a vague idea for a possible storyline, but to clarify and further define the structure and development of our story, we chose to carry out some practical exercises that could stimulate new thoughts and ideas. Therefore, we all prepared some exercises for the following class, which would serve as inspiration to further develop and clarify our starting point.

The first exercise we did was *’s Trust exercise, which was aimed at bringing the group closer together by completing a tableaux-type image in which we all had to rely and fully trust our partners to keep us balanced in absurd positions. Then we did *’s word association exercise, aimed at creating interesting dialogue. We chose to not include this in our final piece as it was too complicated and the time constraints didn’t give us enough time to practice. *’s exercise, chair duets, was from Frantic Assembly, the devising company that she researched.
We found this exercise to be one of the most useful, as it fit our style of physical theatre, and it proved to be an inspiration for many of our scenes (such as the waking up and breakfast scenes). Sim’s exercise was from Trestle devising company, and was all about masks. In this exercise, we had to portrayal emotions through body gestures, since our faces were covered by masks. The restraints we found in this exercise helped us to get a grasp of the true essence and meaning of a smile, and to me personally, the emotions and feelings of the main character — the fact that he isn’t understood by society (since throughout the exercise I wasn’t understood by my group members while trying to express myself) and the fact that his feelings are hidden behind what society makes of him. I will talk about my exercise in section 6.

After we completed these exercises and had a bit more to work with, we decided to identify our artistic intentions for the piece, and therefore our target audience.

**Our Artistic Intentions and Target Audience**

We identified our artistic intentions by reflecting on the message that we wanted to convey and on our original ideas for the piece as a whole. We all agreed that our main intention was to make people reflect on their own lifestyles and on how these follow and mirror the changes of society. We wanted to make them reflect on how they fit in the picture of society as a whole.

At first, our aim was to keep the target audience as wide as possible, as the central issue of our piece (the theme of social conventions and changes in society) is relevant to every member of any society, so everyone. We all follow social standards, we all try to fit in some convention, and we all follow some norms imposed by society. In other words, the moral that we wanted to convey is universally applicable, and hence, we thought about keeping the target audience as broad as possible. However, this would bring about many problems, as our piece could result too “basic” for more mature members of the audience, and too “complex” for smaller children. Since we are in a school, we then decided that it was suitable for us to create our piece for our school peers, this way we could be more focused on a specific type of audience rather than having to keep it open for anyone. This decision turned out to help us decide between different possibilities when we were undecided on some aspects of our piece.

5. Reflections on the Collaborative Development of Our Piece

The way in which our piece was developed was divided into two sections: the devising of the piece and the preparation of our piece for presentation. This was mainly because in the early stages of development, we decided that we were all going to be actors, and this meant that we had to create a timed music track and automated lighting setup, since all of us were busy during transitions. This in turn meant that we had to learn how to act out the entire piece respecting the exact timing of the music and lights tracks. The first section of the development of our piece was concerned with setting the foundations of the piece: creating the story, setting up the scenes, inventing the dialogue and the blocking of the various characters, the set and costume changes, and the transitions between different scenes. The second stage in the development of our piece was concerned with timing the different scenes in order to create a timed audio and light track, and to continuously repeat the whole piece to practice the correct timing of the piece.
Structure and Development of Our Piece

The story of our piece developed like a puzzle: different parts of the story came to us one at a time, and completed the storyline piece by piece. One way in which we made this possible was by firstly defining the world in which our story is set: the context of our piece, which then acted as inspiration for our storyline and our characters (we derived this from our physical explorations of the starting point, as explained in section 4). This way, we could define the key moments that were required in order for our story to be understood, and one at a time, we could insert other scenes and moments which enhanced the flow of the piece and set the tone and style of the performance. This process was probably the one in which there was most disagreement between different members of the group. When there was disagreement, it was often between only two members of the group, whilst everyone else was trying to keep moving forwards. The disagreement caused the whole process to come to a hold, and we occasionally spent entire lessons arguing over a certain issue, which was often just a minor detail. For example, we had a long discussion about the name of our main character, Jhon. At first, we thought about going with the name John, as it conveyed monotony, and this fit in with the monotonous lives of the characters who live in Wellsville (the perfect sitcom-like world in which our piece is set). However, halfway through the devising process, thought about calling the main character Jhon, as this would hint at his 'different' nature, as he is the only one who distinguishes himself from the rest of society. The debate on this name went on for a number of lessons, and sometimes we would find ourselves blocked and not progressing because we would discuss about this name. This was a huge obstacle which I personally didn’t know how to overcome. I tried more times to direct the group back to what we were previously doing, but this not always helped. However, in some occasions, I can say that my focus on progressing with the piece helped the group move forward and overcome these major obstacles.

Approximately halfway through the devising process, we noticed that our piece was based on short, quick scenes, rather than longer, more intense ones, as is the case in the majority of theatre performances. This caused us to block and reflect on this issue and how we could overcome it, especially with regards to staging and lighting, as these could help create smooth transitions from one scene to the next. I thought that if we had a large stage, we could have the characters move across the stage from one side of the theatre to the other, and we could slip the stage into different parts, each representing a different location. However, our theatre was too small for this, and it was often the case that we needed to use the entire theatre space to act out one short scene, and we couldn’t only use half of the stage, for example. Set changed seemed to be the only solution to this problem, as they would allow us to keep the rapid pacing of our piece but also allow us to diversify the appearance of the different scenes to distinguish between various locations. Nonetheless, I, since I was mainly responsible for the set design of our piece, decided to keep the sets simple and elementary, so they could be easily changed and moved around the space. We found some plain white cubes in the backroom of the theatre, and we decided to use these as tables. We also used some black foldable chairs which we borrowed from the art room, since they looked elegant and the fact that they could be closed allowed us to keep them on the side of the stage, leaning against the wall, without them occupying much space. In the final stage of the development of our piece, I noticed that the set design looked a bit bare and plain. I overcame this by collaborating with and using video projections to complexify the stage and make it look more visually interesting.
Near the end of the creation of our piece we encountered a major obstacle: our group found itself divided in two factions which had two extremely different ideas on what the meaning and intentions of our piece were. Me and believed that the intentions of our piece was to portray Jhon as a person who is unable to change because of the strict standards imposed by society, while everyone else thought that the meaning of our piece was that society was changing around Jhon, and he was the only one noticing it. I still believe that the message of our piece would have been stronger if we would have chosen the first meaning, however, me and were in minority and we chose to stick to the other idea. This inevitably led to confusion also by audience members, as I will later explain in the following section.

Preparation of Our Piece for a Final Presentation

Once we had an overall structure for our piece, it was time to create the timed audio track and lighting setup. Originally, we each had a specific role in this stage: and were in charge of timing the various moments of dialogue, transitions, choreography, and miming, was supposed to create the audio track with he sound effects and music, was in charge of creating a video file with the projections she selected, and I was in charge of timing the lights on the mixer. However, these responsibilities weren’t always respected.

We were not expecting this stage of the devising process to take so long, but timing the different scenes was an extremely time consuming process, which often involved more than just and . , since they required me and other members of the group to act out different sections. Furthermore, by the time we had timed everything and we had the exact duration of the every part of the performance reported on our scripts, we were fast running out of time and we needed to produce the audio, video (for projection) and lighting tracks in a brief amount of time. was not producing any audio track, and both me and needed it to start working on our video and lighting timed tracks. I decided in the end to create the soundtrack file myself, since I needed it in order to create the timed light setup on the mixer. Furthermore, I also ended up creating the projection video file, since I thought it would be easier to have the audio track as background music to the video track, since this would make the timing of both audio and video to match perfectly. However, did choose which videos to use in the different projections sequences of the piece, and directed me as to when each projection would play. During this process, I would often share my work online with everyone else so they could help me identify the parts of the track that needed to be modified. This is an example of one of the early versions of our performance’s track file: https://youtu.be/q4hp7w8yPbU.

Once we had our video projection, audio and lighting timed, we could finally start rehearsing and running through the entire piece numerous times, to get used to the speed and rhythm required by the timed video projections, audio soundtrack and lighting mixer. One problem which we encountered during this stage of constant repetition was that, often, the other members of my group didn’t understand that it was us who had to stick to the timed soundtrack, lingering and video projection, and not these timed elements to keep being modified to fit our speeds and tempos. They saw this stage of production not as a way for us to learn the correct speed and timing, in order for our actions and dialogues to fit in with the timed tracks, but as a chance for us as a group to review the tracks and make corrections to them. This, however, was not even a possibility as we were fast running out of time, so I decided to speak to the group, and tell them that the tracks could not be further modified and that we had to practice on those tracks, and modify our own actions and dialogues to fit in with what was already created. After that, we kept rehearsing for a few classes, before the final piece was ready to be presented to an audience.
6. Specific Explorations I Led With The Group

In the devising process, I led the group in various artistic explorations, but the main two were one in the very early stages of devising, and the other near the end of the creation process.

**Activity: Chairs and Positions (from DV8)**

The first artistic exploration I led was an exercise we did to explore the starting point and generate more ideas regarding our piece. This exercise was invented and is used by the physical theatre devising company DV8, the company which I researched (pages 4 and 5), and was aimed at stimulating ideas for meaningful body movements and positions. The exercise consisted in four steps:

1. Have 4 chairs positioned one next to the other on the stage. Number the chairs, left to right.
2. Starting from chair 1, make one member of the group create 4 different positions around the chair, then repeat this process for all the chairs. All positions should be different.
3. All other members of the group will have assigned one chair. They will have to replicate the 4 positions while the external person counts 1 through 4.
4. After repeating this process 4 times, all actors should move to the next chair and replicate the respective positions. At every repetition, actions 1 through 4 are repeated one less time.

This exercise was extremely difficult for our group to perform. We thought it would have been quite easy, but when we actually tried it out, we kept getting confused and constantly failing. However, this exercise definitely helped us create some interesting body positions and movements, which we ended up using in our final production, for example, when we all go from standing behind our chairs to sitting on them in a synchronised manner, or when we stand up, move around the chair, pick it up and fold it closed, before walking away.

**Use of Projections Combined With Staging**

The second artistic exploration I led alongside the above, when we had already decided the plot and storyline of our piece, as well as having divided the performance into the various scenes. This exploration was aimed at combining set design elements with the projections which I had chosen, since the set design elements we had available were extremely plain and basic, and we wanted to complexity the stage, but without introducing more elements of set design, since these would have been too hard to move around the stage during transitions, and would make the stage look too messy, since we are working in a small space. I had previously tried to resolve this issue by exploring different lighting setups which could create a range of environments, but this only helped so much, and didn’t completely get rid of the plainness. Therefore, we decided to combine set design with projections to see if we could overcome the issue. During this exploration, we thought about placing wheels under the white cubes to enable us to move them around the stage easily and fluidly, without making excessive noise, and in an elegant manner. We chose to keep the wheels on the white cubes as they were extremely convenient and inspired some movements especially in the transition moments of our performance. Furthermore, the projections helped take away the impression of “staticity” which was present previous to this artistic exploration led my be and I . This exploration led to the creation for the whole Day Two scene (see page 13), in which the combination of projections and the moving white cubes help create a feeling of movement and repetition.
7. Evaluation of The Final Performance

In the following section, I will refer to specific moments from our performance, in order to explain the effect these had on the audience, therefore I chose to include a list of all the scenes and a small explanation of the purpose and meaning of each scene.

**Day One:** A perfect day in the wonderful town of Wellsville. The day develops as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Waking up</th>
<th>Breakfast</th>
<th>Marching</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Dinner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characters wake up on the stage, performing a dance routine.</td>
<td>Jhon and Mary have breakfast. Jhon leaves for work, meeting Jan and Jill in front of his house.</td>
<td>John marches to work, on his way he crosses other people, all walking robotically in a grid-like route.</td>
<td>Jhon and coworkers eat in a formation. Working is portrayed through a repetitive dance choreography.</td>
<td>Jhon, Mary, Jan and Jill have dinner in a restaurant. Eating is portrayed through a dance choreography.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Day Two:** Reiteration of Day One, but compressed and shortened in order to convey a sense of repetition and dullness, without however boring the audience members. In this scene, instead of Jhon moving across the stage, he sits centre stage for the entire day, whilst everything changes and revolves around him. The events occurring in this day are the same as those in Day One, yet everything is presented in a different way.

**Day Three:** More similar to Day One, in that it is not compressed. In this third repetition, however, the structure of the scenes remains the same but something purposefully goes wrong and changes in every scene, leaving Jhon stumped and puzzled. This includes Jhon waking up before everybody else, Mary dropping a cup while having breakfast, everyone being off-time in the marching scene and late to work, and the restaurant running out of Jhon’s usual meal.

**Final Monologue:** Jhon’s revelation and epiphany, in which he remembers that Wellsville is his creation, and that the changes occurring around him are for him to study human nature and social conventions. Jhon realises that he was so involved in this project that he had forgotten who he really was and what he was doing. He addresses the audience: “and what about you?”. 

**Presentation of Our Original Piece and its Impact on The Audience**

When we presented our final performance to an audience of students from our school, I “felt” the piece in a completely different way. I do not know whether our piece appeared to be stronger in rehearsals or in the final performance, as the two were widely distinct and incomparable. However, I am certain that to me, the piece felt completely different when performed to our audience, and, to a certain extent, “foreign”, although it was exactly the same piece that I had acted out when nobody was watching. This notable difference was somewhat expected: as I mentioned at the top of page 3, it is normal that when a piece of theatre is presented to an audience it feels entirely new and strange. I believe that this happened mostly because the audience forced each group member to stay focused for the entire duration of the performance, and this enabled the group to reach a certain level of concentration and professionalism which we have never managed to achieve previously, since it was often the case that half of the group wouldn’t be very focused and “in character” during rehearsals.

I find it of little importance to mention all of the “mistakes” and “slips” that occurred during our performance, since they didn’t have an impact on how the audience received our piece, holistically speaking. It was extremely professional of us, though, to have stayed in character and to have kept going through the piece every time we made mistakes, no matter how big or small, instead of blocking the performance and making our mistake obvious to the spectators. After all, our main aim as actors was to make the audience understand what was happening on stage so they could receive the final message, and not to perform a flawless and refined piece.
Immediately after the performance, we asked some questions to our spectators, in order to understand how they had received and experienced the piece. Firstly, since our purpose was to leave them questioning and reflecting on the central issue about the relationship between individuals and society, we asked them whether they understood the message which we were trying to convey and what they thought this was. The first answer was correct and straightforward to the point, thankfully, meaning that they had fully grasped the message which we wanted to convey. However, as I kept trying to ask them more in-depth questions about the central issue, they failed to provide thoughtful answers. This could mean one of two things: either our piece was superficial and not sophisticated enough from the point of view of the themes present and message we wanted to convey, or it encouraged them to really reflect on the issue, hence making them unable to answer in such a short amount of time, as they were still reflecting on it.

Secondly, a couple of audience members revealed to us that the performance was neither boring nor uninteresting, meaning that our piece did achieve one of its fundamental purposes: to entertain. However, one audience member commented on the fact that for them, the entire Day Two scene was unnecessary and unvaried, as they had already grasped the concept of monotony and repetition in the Day One scene alone. However, our aim for the Day Two scene was exactly that of emphasising the unvaried nature of Jhon’s everyday life, in order to make Day Three stand out even more. Besides, there was a contradiction between different audience members, as most believed that Day Two was a fundamental scene from the piece, and that the message would’ve been lacking depth if it wouldn’t have been part of the performance.

However, the spectator’s final thoughts and feelings about our performance could only tell us so much about the impact our piece had on them, since we already had a clear idea of what elements of our performance were supposed to strike the audience the most, and we knew what our strongest and weakest moments in the piece were supposed to be. For example, I initially thought that the apex of our story was the moment in which Jhon wipes his “smile mask” off, during his final revelation monologue, as there was a build up effect leading to this moment throughout the entire Day Three scene. This instant, however, wasn’t as effective as we initially planned for it to be: there was little or no reaction or emotive response from the spectators, and this is something I definitely felt while acting out the monologue. In my opinion, the reason for such a detachment from the audience in this point of the piece was because the ending was somehow predictable and expected, so it didn’t shock them as much as we thought it would have. This could be because our piece hugely resembled a melodramatic performance, as it was mostly based around cliché and stereotypical. If I were to start this collaborative project again, I would definitely encourage the group to avoid going in this direction, as it could add elements of shock to our piece, which would have caused a greater impact on the audience.

8. My Contribution to The Final Performance

The moment I chose is the entire Day Two scene: from 5:25 to 7:35 minutes.

The Day Two scene (a recapitulation of Day One in a briefer and more condensed manner, with the purpose of conveying monotony and repetition) has been present in the structure of our piece since the very beginning, however, we never discussed about how we would stage this moment until after the artistic exploration led by me and after which we decided to co-direct this scene together. As we had previously decided when structuring our piece, the purpose of this scene is that of showing the audience how every day is identical in Wellesville, and the feelings which I specifically wanted to convey to the audience were monotony, uniformity and lack of variation. Our biggest challenge was posed when deciding how to repeat
the same routine from *Day One*, but without boring the audience members, who had just seen it. To resolve this challenge, I thought about keeping the main events from the scene the same, but changing the point of view from which the audience view these events: previously, they would be external to what was going on in the scene, however, in *Day Two*, I wanted them to experience the world of Wellsville from Jhon's point of view, so they can observe a recapitulation of the same events from the routine — still conveying monotony and lack of variation — but with a higher degree of complexity, as they are now seeing everything from Jhon's perspective. I achieved this mainly through the staging and blocking of this scene: I decided to keep Jhon centre stage for the entire scene, and to have actors and set elements revolve around him.

This artistic choice had in turn various implications on different elements of production, i.e. the set design, movement, blocking, and physicality of the scene. For instance, during the artistic exploration led by me and we decided to attach wheels to the white cubes, so we could move them around easily and elegantly. As seen in the video recording, the movement of these cubes across the stage creates dynamic movement and gives the audience the impression that they are moving through space to different environments and locations, despite the fact that the main character Jhon is fixed centre stage for the entire time. Furthermore, since this scene was cut in order to speed up the tempo and rhythm of our piece, there is continuous movement of characters across the stage, from one side to the other. This movement makes the scene more dynamic, giving the impression of controlled chaos. This is a significant symbol in the story as this is the last day in which this chaos is, in fact, controlled, as in *Day Three* everything begins to be tumultuous. However, this radical change in blocking and staging created two unpleasant moments in the scene: whilst performing the dance routine, the different heights of the characters creates an imbalance on the stage. Furthermore, this new formation caused everyone to not be synchronised with each other because we were unable to see the other actors. If I had more time to rehearse, I would tell the other actors to follow me in performing that choreography, as I am in front and can lead: if everyone were to copy my speed and tempo, then we would all be on time. However, we did not have enough time to try this out.

I would also like to talk about the lighting in the first few moments of this scene: at first, the stage is completely dark. When the alarm goes off, two backlights turn on. The desired lighting effect for this moment was extremely different to what it turned out to be. Firstly, we were supposed to use a fog machine to fill the stage with smoke before the scene begun. This would have caused two rays of light to be distinctly visible from the backlights as they crossed and illuminated Jhon's back, creating a silhouette effect. This would have been much more visually interesting and complex, and it would have announced the scene's main "theme", as Jhon's centrality to everything is announced by his sharp silhouette, and the fact that he is the only one present on stage. In addition to this, the smoke would have also created a dream-like emotional landscape, which represents the fact that living in the wonderful town of Wellsville is like living in a dream town. However, the fog machine was not functioning on the day of the performance, so it was forced to give up on using this effect. Also, the chair on which I had to sit was not in its correct position, causing the rays of light to fall elsewhere, and not cause a silhouette.

Since *Day Two* is a reiteration of the events occurring in *Day One*, when I first designed the *Dinner* sequence of this scene, I had decided to keep the choreography as truthful to the original version as possible. However, this would have involved the characters turning around the tables, which in turn would have caused Jhon to move away from centre stage. I then thought about making the tables spin around themselves, as this would have caused the movement to still be present, without causing Jhon to change position. Although my idea was rejected by as she thought it was too complex (and we were co-directing this scene), I still believe that it would have helped convey the repetitive and unvaried nature of the scene.
Bibliography


Images

Image 1 available at: http://hdpixa.com/theatre-lighting-clipart

Image 2 available at: https://www.danceplug.com/directory/dv8-physical-theatre

Image 3 available at: http://culture.org.uk/2012/03/physical-fest-2012/