

5. INSTRUCTION BASED PERFORMANCE

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JADE: We do have some questions that Gareth provided as steers or prompts. The first one is can you recall the process that led you towards giving explicit instructions to audience participants as the core technique of making a performance? What was its relationship to the work that came before? Was it an evolution, a decision, a reaction, or something else?

SILVIA: I could go on for a very long time. If in half an hour I haven't stopped yet, do stop me. I'm joking. For me it's definitely been a process, an evolution of a strategy. That is what we use for audience participant show which we call Autoteatro. I suppose it really comes from the idea of placing on stage somebody that is real. That is not wearing a mask. For a long time, and this seems like it's going back a long time, we did shows that were instruction based performances but not participatory performances. It wasn't an audience participant. But there were shows where different people at the time would come. Different people every night would perform for us. We would call them guest performers. They would arrive 30 minutes before the show knowing nothing about the show. Just agreeing to do everything we told them to do.

We did quite a few of those shows which really looked at what was the relationship between the watcher, the watching and the being watched. The viewer and the subject in a way. Sort of trying to manipulate that normal relationship where the audience sits back and the person on stage has got all of the power and the knowledge of the piece and is explaining it or opening up to an audience. In the shows that we were doing in a way the audience knew more than the performer or guest performer, as we used to call it. Because you're sitting comfortably in your seat you're hearing the instruction that a performer is hearing. You don't have the pressure in reality of being watched whilst the person on stage is completely aware of having all the eyes of everyone stuck onto them. That decision-making process that for the audience would happen in their mind as in imagining themselves having to do the instruction. It was much easier for them to imagine than it was for the person on stage just because of the sense of being watched and the sense of urgency.

This was a very long thing to say that my experience with audience participants, instruction based performance, comes from a stage before giving the audience instructions. It was the stage where we gave a performer, let's say, instructions. A person that was in fact not necessarily a performer but a person. That it wasn't prepared and still being watched. We did a lot of shows like that. Slowly, slowly we realised, especially from talking to people, how there was something about the freedom that one could find in being told what to do and having no

responsibility whatsoever for what they were going to do. They knew they were relinquishing all of the responsibility to the writers. It was knowing that something had been talked through. They had no responsibility to come up with anything interesting or improvise anything. They just had to exactly do what they were told to do. By doing that, something would happen.

That freedom of actually I am on stage. Actually I am part of a show or something special that is happening for someone who is watching that is seeing something. An event happening. But yet, I don't have to be responsible for the event and I can just leave it rather than having to ... I keep saying explain but I don't mean explain. More like exteriorise. Instead of having to tell the story, you are the story. By doing that more and more and thinking about the responsibility and the freedom that people were finding, at this point with Anthony Hampton as Rotozaza, we started thinking about this idea of creating something that was very intimate for somebody to take home and they could share with a friend or with somebody. A really intimate performance that would work for anyone that was a present for someone else.

We were thinking about that quite a long time ago and we weren't quite ready for it. Instead we made something else for LIFT Festival. We had this in our head and so at some point we just decided to try something out and we decided to write Etiquette. This was 2006. It was the very first Autoteatro show which is a participatory instruction based performance for an audience to perform. Autoteatro is exactly that, is the idea that once you press play there is no input from the outside. Nothing that is manipulated for you. Everything exists in your headphones and in the relationship with the person that you're having the experience with. Everything else is untouched and doesn't touch your performance either. You're sort of in a bubble although completely in a public space and you're listening to instruction telling you exactly what to do and what to say. By doing that there is a conversation that starts with another person that leads to an experience.

I even lost my own trail of thought. The Autoteatro is the idea that once you press play all that happens is the two people following the instructions. There's nothing from the outside that is going to influence the experience. Although, obviously, particularly when it's in public spaces sometimes there's things that jump in. Even though you hadn't planned them. They are all great and welcome, so it does matter.

I suppose that was a very long-winded way to say for me it was a process and it started making normal shows in a way but would get performance. And then the curiosity with that feeling or freedom of relinquished responsibility became the impulse that made us create shows for an audience to experience themselves rather than to watch.

JORGE: Did you want to?

JADE: No, go ahead.

JORGE: I guess same question. It's interesting you mention 2006 because there are definitely similarities around the time frame. 2006 is also when Jade and I started working together formally. In response to the process that led you towards giving explicit instructions to audience participants, I guess the keyword is explicit. Before 2006, the work I was doing with my company was in a variety of spaces including, for example, a moving train and then performances are scheduled for each station or a converted garage or a gent's toilet. Although there wasn't instructions for the audience during the performance on how to participate, there were instructions about how to watch or where to be because every single piece had a different set of expectations than a traditional theatre piece will have. We were forced to communicate this is where you sit, or this is where you turn up, or this is what you bring. Even though doing the piece there were no ... I can't imagine any of the pieces that we made between 2000 and 2006 having explicit instructions as the core technique. Most of it would have been implicit or there would have been a way of performing around the spaces that guided audiences to be a way or another or interact or not, so definitely not explicit.

In 2006 once we started making *Hotel Medea*, I guess the other question is, is it an evolution, a decision, a reaction, or something else? I guess the obvious challenge we had was we will have this group of audiences, that at some point was around 70/72, overnight with us from midnight until 6:00am. We knew that we needed to use every single trick, every single strategy, every single mode of participation, every single thing that we could possibly draw from to make it a rich experience at every moment as opposed to a repetitive one or a boring one or a tiring one. But that we needed to shift every few minutes because people otherwise would literally fall asleep. Unless we wanted to use falling asleep as a mode, which in the end we did for 20 minutes.

I guess instructions became one more way of engaging with audiences. It certainly wasn't six hours of instructions. It certainly wasn't that. But there was significant moments, and they had a significant need in order for audiences to become really engaged participants in that piece. That was from the outset. From the training camp that we set-up for audiences, how to be an audience in this participatory interactive piece that lasts from midnight to dawn. How to be an audience. Don't worry. You don't need to know this, but we'll train you to be an audience. Then there was a training camp and so on. I guess the one that I remember being the newest area for us was game design and rules of engagement that aligned themselves with the dramaturgy what we were doing. Instructions also became a way of setting up challenges and giving meaning to the relationships of this audience and that audience member and this group of audiences. They had really distinct roles and they could see each other with different types of meaning and they knew how to behave. They were given permission to play that structure through instructions.

I think maybe because we have other questions maybe I will keep it to this moment when things shifted which was 2006. After we've heard from Jade, maybe we can go to the next question.

JADE: I think I'm going to go back in my history a lot further to when I started to have my contact with any kind of performance which was in around 1994. I was kind of part of the legacy of Jerzy Grotowski's work across Europe and in Great Britain. It was very much focused on the voice as tool for elucidating meaning as much as literary meaning. Coming from theatre this idea that it's the words that carry the meaning that is going to make the sense for the audience. I think Silvia you were saying something as well about that kind of thing that there is no other story except the thing that is happening.

We were trained and I was working a lot with dealing with the voice as the main vehicle for intercommunication through mutual and through shamanic practices. I'm interested in this because I feel like I've slightly come at this work from a different angle because I have been always very interested in sound. Part of me thinks that it's because I have a condition called prosopagnosia which means that I can't recognise things visually very well. Especially people and stuff, I can't recognise faces. I think that because of that I developed a really good ear, like a really keen ear. My relationship to all of this sort of work comes from much more sound. When I was little I was lessoned in reciting the litany of Zoroastrianism which is the religion that I was born into. This litany is basically mantras. They're utterances or sequences of sound. They are in a language which is called Avestan. But the meaning is located in the sound of them. Rooted in how they're said. It's in the vibration of them. It's in the power of that repetition and the strength of the resonance of your voice and your tone etc. I was already trained from since I was very little, and I still know them until today because of the way of being taught. It's in your body. It stays with you for life.

The closest word to the Sanskrit word, which is mantra, in English is spell. Spell like the noun. Like a put a spell on you. That kind of spell. That word is a Persian word and it basically means things that you do that can dispel illnesses and diseases etc. and bring to you good stuff. Nice stuff. Positivity and stuff like that. What is still really fascinating to me is the effect that a word or a sound can have on the environment. I'm not a very woo-woo person. I'm not very mystical or esoteric in that way. But there is something about the magical effect of words when they're uttered with intent.

To cut a long story short, that was my first experience of sound. I think the thing that drew me to headphone work was this idea that you could exclude everything else and only have the energy or vibration that could go directly into somebody's head, regardless of whether they even understood because it was kind of gibberish. You're always looking for this reverberation even when we're working with actors or training other actors. Dealing with audiences, always looking for this reverberation. I worked with Jonathan Grieve in the beginning and we were quite influenced. He was really into experimental music, so my way into this

work was via the experimental music scene. A kind of post-punk industrial movement, experimental noise. I was coming from sound, the idea of sound, do you know what I mean? From a slightly different angle.

One of our very early works, I can't remember when *The Onion Bar* was, I think maybe '98, slightly guessing. No, it was probably later. It was probably about 2000. We did a show called *The Onion Bar* and in that Jonathan and I, who ran *Para Active*, we were already working with instruction based theatre. We were already talking directly to audiences and telling them what to do and how to be. They were cast as other members of the chorus, as it were. An audience member would turn up, but they would then be expected or requested or required to play a sort of role. They didn't have to do very much, but they were given things that made them complicit in the action. It could be very simple. For example, we're just taking people who are members. If you are a member, hold up your membership card. Okay, everybody hold up their membership card. Audiences would hold up their membership card. They wouldn't even know what they were doing. But they're following instructions. We've taken it out of the level of can you move to the corridor, please, into you are in the dramaturgy now. You are inside the dramaturgy.

I haven't really thought about that much before today. It's kind of freaking me out how longstanding the roots go back as to when do you say that you started this kind of thing. We did another show called *The Zoo-oid Fight Night Experience* which was absolutely crazy. We had loads of racialised stereotypes that would come and fight each other in a big gladiatorial arena. They were awful characters. It was kind of crazy and they were very unsympathetic. But the audiences were forced to vote for one or the other. Forced as in you need to wave a red flag or wave a blue flag. Again, this is instructional on a very simple level. That is for me how it started was how I could get audiences to take on responsibility, to take on that responsibility.

SILVIA: I think it's interesting. It's really like you say, it's all about the audience. It seems to me we're all drawn towards trying to create an experience for an audience that is neither just a game nor just sitting down and watching, but really creating a real experience which is happening live at that very moment for the audience. It's interesting because that seems to me like the real heart. It's the desire to create something for an audience. The idea of affecting them physically in a way through being part of an experience. In one way some people developed it with more immersive theatre kind of thing, big sets and extravagant stories and moving people around. I suppose that's why you're saying in the very beginning of things like how you move around an audience. It's already thinking about how do you instruct somebody. How do you make them go through the journey that I want them to have? Instead of sitting them down, actually involving them.

JADE: There seems to be a real difference in terms of there seems to be a difference between managing people which I feel other groups do and they do it very well.

But they manage audiences and there's something a little bit conflicting in that for me. On the other hand, when I think about that we're working with audiences and not really about managing them, it's about involving them. You know what I mean?

SILVIA: Yeah. Definitely. They become a character in the fiction that you're proposing to them. If the audience is present, the audience has to be part of this almost a character within the fiction that you build for them. That's a very different way of envisaging an audience. When they become a character you have to write them into your play or into your performance.

JORGE: Also, I don't know about different personalities and what might draw us to make work imagining ourselves as audiences. Because one of the things that it suddenly drew me to, game design, and not video game design, but game design as in thinking of the audience as a player. As some sort of engagement or character or role. And can activate certain things or find out about certain things or find out about certain things. It suits me because I grew up with probably undiagnosed ADHD and not being able to sit still for more than a few seconds. The idea of sitting in the dark for two hours watching something on a stage as a mode of engagement doesn't suit me as a person. Modes of engagement that started to suit me were where people acknowledge my presence and also gave me things to think and do whilst other things were happening. I also understand that that must have influenced my desire to really care for the audiences. Are they bored? Are they feeling disengaged or is this inaccessible? Is this just something that we're just going to play along with this until it's over, or actually we've made the effort to come together here? We have some time together. What are the possibilities of this engagement? Where can this go?

JADE: If we look at, Jorge, our collaboration when we started in 2006, I think it was around there where we started to make a lot of one-on-one work. I don't know, Silvia, if you've done that. But I think that there's something about having started from one-on-one which has provided a super powerful base on how you can conduct yourself with an audience member. Like what has to be in place to get the best out of the audience member in the sense of how confronting it is to just have a one-on-one experience. And how much learning went into that for me in terms of instruction-based work because it was different to doing *Onion Bar* or *Zoo-oid*.

When you're giving instructions to a mass of people, there's something a bit known about that. When you give instructions through the headphones, it's closer to a one-on-one experience. It has that immediacy, that personalised effect. Nothing much has to go on in a one-on-one experience to make it an instruction-based performance, because if I even if asked you a question, it doesn't matter what the question is. The implicit instruction is that you respond. The verb that the audience member does is to respond to my question. You are instructing them to action as opposed to just having a conversation because you're now in that kind of theatricalised frame. I thought I would put that in because I think

instruction-based work now has its roots in all these delicate little moments that provided lots of learning.

SILVIA: I think it's definitely, like I was saying before, about the fact that I have always been involved in things that somewhat always took the audience into consideration whilst writing the thing as this is for them. It's an experience for them. Whether it was Shunt or whether other little bits of one-to-one performances or a Clod Ensemble, Red Ladies, even the performances have been involved with the people that I find myself collaborating with is often people that really have a real consideration for the audience and the experience that they want to have. Definitely it gives you an insight on how to then speak the instructions when you then go to instruction-based performance.

JADE: Without a doubt, yes. That with this layer of sound. Working with sound as well, it's been so interesting now almost going full circles coming back to understanding what kinds of sounds have what kind of effects on the brain neurologically, which is what I'm looking at, at the moment. Always knowing that instinctively and not scientifically. Making decisions based on your instinct. We are now at a phase in our careers where we can look back and go, okay, what did I do? What was that? It's this looking back at one's process in which you can start to create a narrative of how you got from A to B. Well, A to Z in my case. How I got from the beginning right until now is this question of sound. A very simple example is when I speak live on the microphone I have a certain tone. When we create soundscapes with our sound design or sound technologist, we try to pick up the note that my voice tends to resonate on. Then we use this as a chord in the drone or whatever the soundscape is behind my voice. I'm always trying to create a really full sonic picture even if it's just about giving instructions. That there's lots of depth.

The other thing that you said that I wondered if I could put to you guys which I thought was interesting was this idea of what you were talking about with your stuff, Silvia. It was about the person being there slightly mask-less. Them having to act out and showing us their vulnerability and the simplicity of what it is to be a slightly lost human being on stage. I'm really interested in the layers of mask, because there isn't just one mask and there isn't just one kind of mask. Even when we are a solitary figure on stage, there's still a persona that we have. It's really hard to ignore. But I do think that when we make these instructions, these invites to people, that it's really clear to me that a person has to then ... like a person arrives to *Binaural Dinner Date*, let's say, and then they have constructed their sense of self. There's a construction. And then we do things, certain techniques, and certain ways of being with them, so invites, that we'll deconstruct. Something else will happen and there will be a change of mode and then they need to reconstruct themselves again. In some ways, I don't know if you found the same thing, but with audio work there is this process that happens on a psychological level where you are on show yourself and so you are constantly deconstructing and reconstructing yourself from moment to moment on a really atomic level. What I mean by atomic is bit by bit. I don't know if that's -

SILVIA: It makes sense, and I would say this. This sense of the masks, the masks not just when you're on stage, they're always, isn't it? It's all the time in real life we are constantly dialoguing with ourselves with a part of our brain telling us what to do because they'd made a plan and then yourself dealing with it and then yourself, which has already changed a little bit, the initial instruction, put within the real world which changes everything again.

JADE: Yeah.

SILVIA: I think it's a constant rebuilding, constant.

JADE: Yeah.

SILVIA: That happens in real life normally. I would say that this idea of the voice in the head, it's always been there with all of the work that I've done with Rotozaza. Even before getting to the instructions, but they struggle. I suppose that's what I'm really interested in is what do we come out as? How do we show ourselves that there's a constant struggle, a constant work that is done because, as you say, you're constantly building to a point and then you're having to rebuild or deconstruct. In a way in the pieces that I do that are audio pieces, Autoteatro, the sound does that all the time. You start off and the sound is the sound of the environment. You're very familiar. You know where you are. That's a bit what you're saying, isn't it? You're familiar. You know where you are. The sound makes sense and suddenly the sound cuts off and the reality that is around you changes through the introduction of a new interpretation of it through sound. That's a really interesting thing to do and one that I really love and maybe because we're constantly doing that in real life. Or maybe because it's what we are constantly craving for. The sense that you get to know something and then something else changes, surprises you, offsets you a little bit, which makes you do more or different. Definitely the deconstructing.

JORGE: I was going to say that the next question was about whether we recognise instruction-based performance as a thing or just something we're doing in the business we've made. I think one of the things we've been talking about already is that it's actually about the audience whether we use instruction or not. It might be that there is something that is specific about instruction. One thing that comes to mind for me is the shift of model as a company and as a set of collaborators that the change that we've had to make in our roles, our making roles, our collaborators, the way we work and test work in order to achieve the new kind of work that we wanted to make. I think in that sense we might call the process something like an instruction-based work making process.

Where, Jade, you went from, for example, being a performer and trainer of performers into being a writer of training for training that didn't exist, and it was needed for actors to behave in a different way with audiences, to being a director and sort of adapting text to being a writer. That move from roles that are

actually quite different was absolutely essential otherwise the work that we wanted to make could not be made. We couldn't just reuse the tools from that time because they were meant for something else. The same with collaborators who just couldn't keep working with everyone just because we liked them. We had to work with people that had the skills that we didn't have that would fill the gaps in order to do the best work we could do for audiences. Does that resonate and is instruction-based performance, I think?

SILVIA: What you said definitely resonates. I do also lots of different shows. They're not just all instruction-based, audience participatory performances. But I feel, like we've said, that there is an element that is at the base of it which is common to different forms. I would say that right now that instruction-based performance is a thing. As in when you say that to people they understand it. Other people in theatre, they understand it as something that is starting to become a thing that people say let's do an instruction piece. I think it has become that, but my experience is that of wanting to put on stage people that were really all-in creating situations that were really live, even when the story was completely fantastical. The way that we did it with instructions is just a way to create what I want to create.

Equally, like what you're saying, in a way the technology that I need isn't what makes me decide to do the piece. It's just something that allows me to do the piece if I need it. It might not be this one and I can throw this one away and go and pick up another one because now I want to work with video. But at the base that might be always the sense because at the base there is a desire to create an experience for the audience. Right now I find that it's become something that I do very often. The strategy of Autoteatro is the strategy that I now am very involved with and I like to push it and pull it and prod it and see what else I can do with it. But it's not always necessarily an audio piece. It could be an Autoteatro all written on a book. Or it will be an Autoteatro postcard in your mail. It really doesn't matter which kind of technology. I would say that instruction-based theatre is especially when talking about audio performances now.

JADE: I don't know if it's a thing.

SILVIA: You don't think so?

JADE: No. I don't know.

SILVIA: I don't know it.

JADE: I know that since we started making work other things happened on a similar level. I know that that guy from Shunt doesn't stop doing headphone work, right? There's somebody that keeps doing headphone work. Then I think this brings me to another moment of inspiration which was doing an audio tour in a gallery. I found it really moving. This is years before I even started thinking about making

this kind of work. Going around, I think it was Tate Britain, and it just so happened that the kind of tour on the headphones that I did just gave me this really singular sensation which also strikes a chord with my interest in hauntology. There's something a bit ghostly about the disembodied voice, some kind of querying around presence and absence because you hear somebody but they're not there and they're in the past and you're in their future. I don't know. There was just something about when the fabric of reality starts to become a bit splintered that I found really interesting. I don't know, Jorge. Obviously, it is a theme thing. Did you want to say something about it being a theme?

JORGE: I think that's it. I think that we had already been talking -

SILVIA: It's a theme but it was -

JORGE: Yeah. We had already been talking about it without having posed a question. I think we were already talking about what is driving the work. I don't think we woke up one day and said I would love to make some instruction-based theatre. I think we arrived at it through a combination of different desires and interests in the audience's experience and the potential of their role, their engagement. I think more interesting is the next question around agency. My experience, there is this widespread expectation that any interactive or participatory or immersive or instruction-based work is necessarily trying to give audiences agency and that there is a widespread understanding that agency is a good thing and should be aimed for. Maybe we could take that, unless you want to say anything else about instruction-based performance?

SILVIA: No. We can move forward. Yes, let's move forward.

JORGE: Are you interested in participant agency? Where is the space for any pieces? Real pieces create problems for people to solve or struggle with. If so, how does that become a part of the show?

SILVIA: Earlier I think I mentioned it already when I talk about the freedom that people felt relinquishing responsibility. Knowing that they had no agency. The truth is that they completely changed the piece. Even though the structure of the piece is really rigid, I'm really talking about Autoteatro and my work as Autoteatro. Even if the structure is super-rigid you cannot escape your script because it's all pre-recorded and, like I said, Autoteatro, once you press play there's nothing that can be done. You just have to keep going. In a way I would say I'm not so interested in the agency of creating space for agency for the audience. I'm interested in relieving them from the responsibility of it so that they can fully let themselves go into an experience which has been very carefully choreographed so that they get the experience. Every experience is, of course, 100% personal and changes completely depending on who is experiencing it. In a way the agency that they have is that of being themselves. And by being themselves, changing the show. That's what I would say.

JORGE: Did you want to say something?

JADE: Yeah, sure. What's the question?

JORGE: This is about participant agency.

JADE: I don't know why there is some kind of pressure on our artists to work like we do to provide agency when it's not required in any other art forms, like with painting or music or any other art form, or even conventional theatre. I think that if you set yourself up as if you give agency and then it's not really there, that's when there's disjunct. I think that's when participants can feel slightly cheated or a little bit tricked or that it's a bit cheap. I think in our work we tend to write into it, and I think in yours as well, Silvia, it's kind of implied that when we're doing instruction-based work you are a consumer of your own output. You are going to be giving back in order to have this experience. This experience will be something that you create with us. Even when you try to make to make them as autonomous as possible, it's still your game. There's no amount of giving audiences agency that is going to take away the fact that you are the makers. That you've made that game. Maybe there's more pressure. I don't know. I feel like I'm also a bit bored of this idea.

SILVIA: Of giving the audience agency?

JADE: No. Just this idea that in critiquing, there's a lot of critical scholarship around this work that is always focused on audience agency as a measure of the quality of something. I don't know how that started because that's not really...

SILVIA: I don't know. Like I said, I'm not so interested in giving the audience that much agency. I am interested in giving the audience an experience.

JADE: Yeah.

SILVIA: More than anything else, that's what drives it. It's not my critical thinking around agency. The most important thing for me is to give the opportunity for that person as themselves to really follow the instruction and be able to follow them so that something does happen. It's very minimal agency. Apart from the fact that, of course, they have to do the instructions, but that's a given. If you don't follow the instruction, then don't come and do the show. Once you've bought the ticket for an instruction-based show, you know you're going to have to give. The giving in this case is just about following the instruction. You know what it is, it's totally just personal taste for me. I know that I am a very terrible audience member for participatory theatre because I hate having to come up with something. I just want you to take me on a journey. I don't want to be responsible for the journey. That's your job. As I say, it's probably taste. Just personal taste.

JADE: I just want to take you back to something that you said that you've bought a ticket and you know what you're getting yourself into, so why wouldn't you play the game?

SILVIA: No, it's ... sorry, carry on.

JADE: Sorry if I missaid what you said. But just on the point that you talked about which is about people coming to your work, what happens if they don't know that that's what they've come for?

SILVIA: They always know.

JADE: You're contracting that before they even -

SILVIA: Yes. Before a person puts the headphones on it has to be really clear. It is a really clear contract. Obviously not one that they sign, but a vocal contract. Here there is a series of instruction. You don't have to worry about anything. You don't have to improvise. You don't have to be good at acting or anything at all. All you have to do is follow the instruction and do them as best as you can. If you're lost, it doesn't matter. You will find space to come back to it. If you don't do, nothing happens. There is nothing else in an Autoteatro piece other than people doing the things. If they don't do them then nothing happens.

JORGE: Then I think it is interesting for the sake of defining a mode of audience engagement to say there is such a thing as instruction-based work or work that doesn't happen if the audience decides not to follow instructions. It's based on this is how you experience it. You need to do these things and if someone says I'm not interested or I'm not following instructions, the work doesn't exist by itself.

SILVIA: Exactly.

JORGE: I guess that's probably what is a bigger similarity in our work or what we invite audiences to sign up to, then agency or having a choice about how it ends or being able to change the course of things. For us, I guess we're less interested in what they do and more in how.

JADE: Yeah. It's like inviting someone to go on a ride. You wouldn't go to Alton Towers and then sit on the rollercoaster and then say why aren't I driving this rollercoaster. We're not at any point positioning them as an author or an agent that has power to create or enact concrete change in some way but that they are going to experience the ride. They're going to, all aboard, jump on. This is where we're going. Do you want to come, or you don't? It's that kind of feel. That experience. It's interesting the word listen as well, I think. We create pieces in which people have to listen and then they have to listen, if you know what I mean? There's the listen that is the hearing aspect but there's the listen. Listen to me means do what I say. There's this interesting listening as obedience

and fulfilling the instructions or the ask. Of course, in both of our works, yours is more complicated than just listening, and certainly in ZU's work listening is only part of the experience. It's not the whole experience.

SILVIA: Shall we move on to another question?

JORGE: Yeah. Maybe we go to what is the process from conception to realisation like for a piece in this style? How closely does the outcome match the inspiration? Where did the obstacles become the material? Is it different from other kinds of work? How much time do you spend playtesting? When do you know the work is ready, finished? Maybe we bundle together the five questions.

JADE: Yeah.

JORGE: We can pick whatever you're most interested in talking about.

SILVIA: Do you want to go, Jade, or do you want me to go?

JADE: I don't mind. Jorge, do you want to say something? Is there a question? They're quite different.

JORGE: Maybe I'll pick out the playtesting element. In one way he's asking is it different from other kinds of work, the conceptualisation, realisation of a piece and how much time we spend playtesting. If anything what has absolutely drastically changed the mode of production or the mode of structuring a process from beginning to end was the need for very clear engagement with the end audience. Especially after *Hotel Medea*, I realised that not only we needed bodies and audiences to test our assumptions about the work as we developed it and learn more from them so we could redefine, rewrite them and republish them, but we also needed to know who we were making that work for so that that community of people were part of our testing and developing process.

Binaural Dinner Date and other pieces that took place in a more public sphere, because *Hotel Medea* wasn't in a public space at all, it was a ticketed event in a venue in a festival. After that we've been very interested in putting pieces that either are not ticketed or that if they are ticketed there is also the chance that someone can be invited in who just happened to be there without having to pay for the ticket. That started to become a thing that affected our making process where how can we create a piece that will speak to a kind of audience. If we've been making this piece for three years on an assumption that it will work, and we will do is put it out there and try to convince them to do it. Instead, it was going, okay, at every level of testing and at every stage of the prototype trying to be really careful about how who was invited and about how we were using that testing feedback to influence the decisions we made after. I think that is a definite change between how we used to make work before *Hotel Medea*.

JADE: The thing about when do you know that work is ready or finished, for me that's really impossible. I never finish. *Hotel Medea* was seven years at its last performance and I still hadn't finished it. *Binaural Dinner Date*, I'm still working on a last scene. I tend to have problems with end scenes. I'm constantly rewriting, rewriting, rewriting. Constantly adding to, changing, updating. That's why I'm so slow. My process is very slow. Testing has got to do with that. In the beginning it was an absolute nightmare. For someone who had gone from rehearsals, rehearsals, showing, showing, reworking, showing, reworking to this other model, which was get something together, knock it up, knock it together, show it, see what works, take it back, stay with the thing that worked. Keep working on that bit that worked. Throw everything else away. It was very different. It was a big switch for me to work to that. I found that very hard. I'm getting more used to it now. But I found it quite difficult to have to keep being involved energetically with so many different people in the making process as opposed to it all just being in my head, how much more collaborative I've become through that process and how the technologies that we work with have a say in where things go and how much now I'm leaning towards technology leading me actually.

I'm quite interested in that little shift. That's only really happened in the past year or so where I'm interested in new technologies and what the affordances of those technologies might mean for what I can now make with audiences. Which is completely different to, oh, this is what I want to do. What can help me do that? It's totally different. And it's very exciting. It's really exciting to work from the technology first. I like it. It's different.

SILVIA: I was going to say, a bit like you Jade, it's very hard to finish a piece. At some point I just have to slap myself to stop going back to editing. Just like both of you have said, testing is the most important thing of this kind of work. As far as I'm concerned, when I'm making Autoteatro pieces I don't have actors to work with. It's just me. Maybe some collaborators to do some recordings or my sound engineer. It's literally just me making it all up in my own head, a show for 100 people following instructions. But the people are not there. I can't call them. What I normally do is create the opportunity for workshops where I can test little bits and it's testing, testing, testing. I got the whole base in involved in testing for me a dance. Everybody was laughing because up until the very last minute, two minutes before going on stage I'm still probably recording the last instructions and dancing the last track. Until somebody drags me away from the computer basically, it's very hard to know when it's finished. At some point I just have to say that's it.

Mostly, it's about can people follow the instructions? Is the instruction clear? That's why testing is so important. Test with different people all the time so that they never know what you're going to ask them to do and tweak and tweak until finally at least you know that they can do what you wrote. Then it's also about deciding this is what I've done. This time I wanted to create a collective experience where people would create the show themselves in a big theatre.

Done that one, let's move on because there will be lots of things in that that I would still want to change. At some point you've got to stop, at least I do. Stop it. Put it away. Move on to the other one. The other one will have the considerations that I have in my head. What didn't satisfy me over there might then come into play in the next one. That's all I want to say.

JADE: That's interesting. I'm just going to talk about something that I'm interested in in terms of how we work differently. I really like how you have managed to find a model where it's completely autonomous. You can just send off, like with *Etiquette*. You can literally put it in the post, and it gets set-up in a venue with the facilitator. It's so light in that way and a lot of our stuff is very heavy and we have a tendency towards heaviness. Just from the point of view of resources and how it's condensed.

I had the same experience when I went to the Raindance VR film festival. I was there and everybody else had sent their VR pieces literally just in the post. They just had it on a phone and they just posted it and the people at the other end, the festival, just opened up the phone, put the phone in the goggles, bish, bash, Bob is your uncle, as they say. For us we would have had a bed and an actor and then another actor to replace the actor in case that actor got tired. Economically, not very sustainable. We have this constant tension to try to create work that is scalable and tourable and moveable and light in that same way. Somehow there are too many things that I'm still too attached to perhaps. I bring that up because in our case it's a question of live transmission as opposed to a pre-recorded text. Do you work predominantly with one or the other or a mixture like us or do you try to work with pre-recorded -

SILVIA: The instructions are really always pre-recorded. The live element is really the audience. In a certain way it does have a mixture of live and pre-recorded, of course. The complication of technology sometimes is a bit of a pain. For *Etiquette* or *Wondermart* I just send a link. They download the track. As long as there is a supermarket. It's just because it's what is already there that is adding the liveness of it, the chaos and the unprepared in a way. I don't know. It's mostly pre-recorded and the live element is the audience.

JADE: I don't mean the live element. I'm talking about whatever you say through the headphones -

SILVIA: No, of course. But thinking about technology, it really depends because *Macondo*, for example, totally the opposite of the other shows. I go around with four massive suitcases with hundreds of headphones and transmitters and microphones because sometimes the audience members are instructing another audience member live, following a pre-recorded instruction. That complication of technology that has to work on both levels is there. Definitely as far as the Autoteatro. When I talk about Autoteatro, definitely there is no live instructing.

JADE: Jorge, did you want to come in on that?

JORGE: I was looking at the next question which was about putting the participant at the centre of the work and what that has taught us about accessibility in typical or non-typical audiences, resonances or provocations you see in each other's work, which is sort of how you started to answer the last question, and whether we have shared reference points or different influences. In terms of accessibility, especially when you work with something that assumes a kind of fluidity of hearing an instruction, performing the instruction whilst hearing the next instruction, there is the ultimate timing which is if someone is really quick and they don't get confused. You're the kind of person that you're here, you're doing it. That's fine. There's a flow and a timing. But the main thing that I think changed for us is when we decided to work without performers and to have an audience-to-audience relationship.

It's just as you said, an audience needs to hear and give an instruction to somebody else. At that moment you need to consider so many things because you're putting all the weight of one person's experience on another person who you don't know who that's going to be. Why should they? You don't know that they're going to care about it as much as you do, as much as the other audience does. I think it was around ... I can't remember the year now, but a number of years ago we took part in a performance that was very interesting and very engaging, but it relied so much on all the other audience members and the audience on that day happened to be absolutely unbearable and cliquey and just the last set of people I wanted to be with. It meant that I couldn't access the potential of that work as an audience. I was there. I was doing my best. I was interested. I was curious. But my fellow audience members were destroying it for me.

As a maker you can't blame it on the audience. As a maker the responsibility is mine, is ours. How do you design for that handing over of power and responsibility to someone, you don't know who it's going to be. It's a bit like one of our last playtests we had someone introducing it and at the end after talking about ethics and audience engagement with one another and dealing with this sharing a space with other people and then it ended with just don't be a dick. Which ultimately is what you want. Without having to say that to someone, how does your design that you're not bringing the dickness out of the person. You're bringing out the empathy, the care, the responsibility. The best in them. I think that's part of why we find so much immersive work problematic is that the conditions bring out the worst in people. Competitiveness. Seeking out VIP experiences. Elbowing each other for the best one on one performance in the corner hidden somewhere. This sort of hunger for self-pleasure. I think if anything our design is intentionally thinking about the behaviours that it elicits.

SILVIA: It's interesting, because I feel that all the Autoteatro pieces I've done before *Macondo* were quite safe. Like I said, the testing and testing makes it possible for you to give enough time for everyone to actually be able to do it. Sometimes you can play with them being confused and that becomes a thing about being

confused. I find that as long as you always give them points where they can recover, that's always great. Here I'm not talking concepts, but practicalities really. Also, this big question about the responsibility came out with *Macondo* where I did the show that was suddenly for a very big audience. Not anymore just two people in a public space where they feel in a way super safe, not really watched by the outside world because they know they're just like everybody else wearing headphones behind their trolley. It's okay. This time it was 100 people, and they were looking at each other. I created it so that I got inspired by certain methodology of gaming, so decided that I could choose between beginners, intermediate, advanced and heroes because not everyone can be a hero. Not everyone can be a hero.

It was already like that in the instruction based performance that I was doing with *Rotozaza*, where we had a guest performer different every night. Not everybody could do that role. There was a bit of finding out. In *Macondo* I have about 30 minutes before the beginning of the show to pretty much talk to every single person in the audience to identify those that I believe will be okay as heroes. I'm not looking for good looking or cool. I'm looking for somebody who is quite happy with themselves and open to, okay, I'll do it. Somebody that is available. Then somebody that is maybe a bit more excitable, I'll probably put them intermediate where they're in a big group in a part that is a dance part and it's quite chaotic and funny. I know that they'll be kind of ready for it. In a way it's your responsibility as a maker to make sure that everybody can do the role that you're assigning them to do. That takes either some time to go and talk to people and get a little sense -

JORGE: You're casting them.

SILVIA: I'm casting them, yeah. Without telling them. The truth is that I don't really ask. I tell them that there will be some participation and that there are some really great actors that will be helping them along the way. That they can decide whether they want to be beginners, part of a group, or a bit more involved. Depending on how they react to that, I sort of decide. It wouldn't be fair at all to just do it blindly because the audience is the most important person in the room. You've got to make sure that they feel comfortable first of all. That's tricky.

JORGE: What about reference points or influences? Any influences you are aware of in your work?

SILVIA: As you know very well, definitely a massive influence is *The Girl Chewing Gum* by John Smith, the short film made in 1976, which is all about creating a way of looking at reality and making reality into poetry or fiction. But then that it's ultimately all about our gaze as duos and how we change our relationship with the material that we are watching. That's what inspired me. I love this little piece by Janet Cardiff where you were looking at a theatre model and you were in a cinema. You got your headphones, and it was the first time that I experienced binaural sound and that was really very interesting. It definitely has influenced a

lot. A lot of Italian cinema, strangely. I like lines of cardinals cutting through suburban horrible places outside Rome or things like that.

JORGE: Do you think part of making instructional work is about giving people this feeling that they're in a film?

SILVIA: In a way, as in elevating their environment to a fictional one. One which you're the main character in. Yes, in a way it is like being in a film because there's nobody watching you and reality is going ... your fiction fits within reality perfectly. Even when your perception of reality is completely the opposite of what the rest of the world has in that very moment.

JORGE: I've seen people define it as such. Say as if I was in a film.

SILVIA: Yeah.

JORGE: I'm interested how audiences describe their own experiences and often they will describe it with the vocabulary they have all the things that are familiar to them.

SILVIA: Yeah, I suppose.

JORGE: It wasn't until you said about your film, the Italian film that has influenced that, I went, ah, okay, that's nice.

SILVIA: Yeah.

JORGE: That there is a world that is created that is elevated. On the other hand, I guess you have the choose your own adventure books where some people are making theatre that want people to choose their own adventure, which is not what we're doing from the conversations we've had. We're not creating a version of choose your own adventure. One of things we might be doing is creating a personal film for a person to ... that's been craft for them that they enter.

SILVIA: I suppose it's you giving them the possibility of becoming a hero in a little story. Even if the story ends up just being a conversation like it was for Etiquette or a stroll through the supermarket to realise that everybody around us is actually interesting, still you are the main character and I suppose it's quite a ... but without all the complication of having to be looked at, learning lines. Taking the right decisions. You can just follow, and it will feel like you are because everything, the whole world seems to be built for you. A little bit like the Truman Show, isn't it?

JORGE: Right.

SILVIA: It's only the over-imposed sound or fiction.

JADE: The film idea is something that I work with all the time. There is always a cinematic perspective, especially in the soundscapes that I work with. I've been super-influenced actually also by Italian filmmaking, funnily enough. And choose your own adventure, because that's the sort of thing I did as a teenager. Also, as a teenager I was really interested in things like astrology and psychometric testing. Anything that was question based, I work a lot now with questions. With how to ask the right question. What's the perfect question? I think in terms of the audio work that I'm making I'm always putting things in question form. I try to stay away from the imperative all the time because it's so bossy. It's like necessarily bossy. I think questions which are about interiorising the perspective and has also this cinematic feeling because when you talk about being the hero cast in the film, for me what it's more like is when you're in a film you're always watching the film through one of the character's eyes. The POV of the character. The point of view of that character. When you're working with headphone work you are always referring to this point of view of the participant. Their point of view. What they're seeing. What they're feeling and the questions are a bit part of that.

When I was younger there were things like Tarot reading and I Ching and esoteric practices. Also, psychology, personality tests. All those kind of things that I think anyone that grew up in the 80s, that was quite big then. It was the beginnings of therapy as a normal thing that people do, that they have a therapist like you have a dentist. In those days it was just on the edge of therapy, a way to talk about myself, my own experiences being of value as opposed to some literary character in a book or some other worthy person of note. In some ways I think those probably are really big influences as well. I guess I'm speaking about the writing, the kinds of writing that I do. For this kind of work it has a certain tone.

I kind of had wanted to talk about this live transmission versus pre-recorded text a bit more, because I think there's something important in that in the sense that when you work with pre-recorded text, which is something that I would love to do more of because of the demands on the company would be much less, the relationship feels to me a lot more complicated with pre-recorded text. The fact that that person isn't there sharing the same room, sharing the same space and the same air means the disembodiment is even more exaggerated. This absence of the voice's owner makes it feel very much like that voice only exists in my head. Then there's also the issues of pace. How do you deal with that? I feel like for us I work quite a lot on the testing element that we spoke about earlier. It's about the rhythm. I'm sure you do that as well. It's how spaced out do the instructions have to be because otherwise you end up dragging the audiences by a pace that you've set as a maker, as the voice. Because people are different, we're inevitably slightly out of synch. I try to really take care of that aspect of rhythm. Is that something that you work on as well?

SILVIA: Yeah. Definitely rhythm is super-important. Especially when it came to *Macondo*, the writing was almost choreographing. The story, it's a different story. But the actions and the movements on stage is really creating a

choreography, so rhythm is fundamental. Which is why sometimes you build in things that are maybe faster. Maybe a little less precise. I think, yes, absolutely. Rhythm is very important. I think you can create that with pre-recorded as well.

JADE: Yeah.

SILVIA: Of course, it depends on how much agency you've given to your audience. Therefore, if they're in the middle of something that they're developing, then you don't want to ... or maybe you do. Maybe you want to adjust to cut them halfway through.

JADE: Yeah.

SILVIA: It really depends what in the whole that does to the show because the rhythm is important, yeah.

JADE: The rhythm is gonna get ya.

SILVIA: Yeah.

JADE: The words of the great Gloria Estefan.

(laughter)

JADE: Also coming back to that, I'd quite like to talk about manipulation as word which I think is also gets used a little bit in a way of thinking about analysing this work critically. I just wondered where you both stood on that really. Manipulation in the sense of we choose. Coming back to that thing about the agency, thinking about how it's dangerous because in some ways the work looks like the person has agency. If somebody is doing one of our works and they're moving and they're doing something, they're following instructions, because they are embodying the instruction there's a sort of activeness. But actually, it's not an active state. It is a passive state because they're following instruction. We personally mitigate against that by ensuring that in almost all the work we do we are bringing to the surface the biographical material of the participants.

That's something that we often do. We often work with audience's stories themselves. Whether it's touching on it, whether it's asking them to think about it, whether it's actually asking them to speak about it, the scale of it, the degrees in which we do that varies. If you're told where to go, where to look, what to think, what to look at, of course, there's undeniably a form of submission in the play and they are actually actively stripped of agency, which I don't think is necessarily negative. As we've already talked about, I don't want to go back there, but I wonder also talking about films and everything, that it's not actually that different or is it? Is it that different to being guided where to look at if you're looking at a painting or being guided where to look cinema or films or

video art. When a film uses a panning or if a film uses a close-up, those are also manipulating ways of experiencing. Ways of having a perspective.

Games do the same thing. A game closes down. It eliminates choice by giving you right structures and tight rules. That's the same thing. But there's something so much more immediate about it when it's on a headphone going straight into your head. I wonder if that's what people respond to when they say everything is very manipulative and it's kind of easy to dredge up feelings by putting that bit of music onto that tone, onto that. That's what I wanted to -

SILVIA: I don't think I've ever experienced somebody saying that it was manipulative. Apart from, again, we're talking about a very long time ago, 2004 maybe when we took *Doublethink* to Edinburgh. That was a very hard thing to watch for the audience. In *Doublethink* there are two guest performers. The stage is split into two. They can't see each other. They don't know who the other person is on stage either. But there is an audience. The discomfort wasn't that of the guest performers, the discomfort that sometimes would come out was from the audience's point of view who felt like the guest performers were being manipulated because they were following orders, as they saw it. They slowly realised that they're also being instructed in a way or lied to directly from the stage. The whole relationship, like I was trying to explain earlier, really badly falls apart. The normal structure of the relationship, audience/performer/writer.

I have never experienced anyone thinking that the piece was manipulative. Maybe it's a lot to do with really thinking about who is the voice and what is the relationship of the voice with the person who is listening? What is the tone? Where am I taking them? It's about building trust so that you actually want to follow. There is no imposition ever. There is no real manipulation ever because if you feel manipulated, you can just take your headphones off and go. I suppose I can understand that fact that people, when they hear instruction, somebody following the instruction, it feels like it's manipulative. But I don't think it is.

JADE: Yeah. I suppose I can see how they wouldn't from what I know of your stuff. I think with our stuff it's a bit different. There are moods that we try to conjure up and that I am very much aware of orchestrating a feeling.

JORGE: The personal autobiographical ... I guess the closer you get to the individual and to sharing their own information. I don't know, maybe *Binaural Dinner Date* is the most extreme example because you are facing someone potentially you don't know.

SILVIA: And you don't know you're being recorded.

JORGE: Yeah. That was my other point is the trick. To what extent do you betray the trust and the pay off is enough then for people to go you betrayed my trust. But I quite liked it, so it's okay. It really resonates when you talk about that trust in the beginning because of the voice. The need for, I think, and back to agency,

more important than I agency I feel is honesty. I don't mind as an audience member hearing the maker going you're going to go on this journey and we're going to manipulate you. I wouldn't even mind that because of the upfrontness of going, okay, this is what's happening. I'm standing upright It's my responsibility now because I'm not being tricked.

SILVIA: It's your choice. You cannot be manipulated. You've chosen to take part.

JORGE: My agency is I choose to do this.

SILVIA: That's pretty much all.

JORGE: I can ask any questions beforehand, but what about this ... I've got the clarity, the minimum clarity. Obviously, I don't know the ins and outs. I know the minimum clarity. I know I'm not in danger. I know I have kind of a way out if I want to. Good. And now I choose to go in. Now that you're in, this is how it functions. It functions like this not just for you but for others, so you don't mess it up for others.

SILVIA: Exactly.

SILVIA: *Binaural Dinner Date*, you're sitting opposite someone for almost 90 minutes. And what you see in your stage, in your frame of view, is that face for most of it. If that person messes it up then you're going to have a horrible experience. It's kind of negotiating the instruction and manipulating in the sense of what is at our disposal to manipulate the behaviour so that it doesn't spoke it for the others. I guess this is curbing certain ... or even an abrupt cut where you think things might have gone wrong. Just in case, let's cut here so that it fixes it for everyone.

The other thing that you mentioned was to what extent do you betray that trust, and do you have enough of a reward or are you going to offer something that is so interesting to the audience that they won't mind that you've betrayed that trust? That point is the spoiler alert, the moment people realise that they've been listened to. Not only that, that then the script has been rewritten based on what they said. Anonymised, but they still all hear those kind of personal confessions. Towards the end hearing themselves in their conversation again half an hour ago and measuring themselves against that moment of beginning. We didn't ask their permission to do that. But when they know why it was used and from that point onwards it's destructed, then they go like, ah, okay. I like that game. I like that play. That risk. I don't know if that answers the manipulation question. I guess trust is honesty. What is the invitation so I can genuinely say yes or no to it.

JADE: You need to be able to be comfortable, even without knowing the specifics.

JORGE: Just to go back to the question of influences, I had a very early influence that I didn't realise was an influence, so I didn't pay much attention . Until I realised that it was actually very useful, which was the work of Augusto Boal. At first

learning about *The Rainbow of Desire* and forum theatre. I also took it for granted because I'm from Rio and he was working in Rio and this company was in Rio that I had access to that work, that I did a course. At that time I didn't think much of it because the work I was making at the time wasn't for political change. It wasn't for social mobilisation. It wasn't for participation. It was sort of, ah, that's really interesting. It's a set of tools. As soon as we started to work out audience participation, transitioning from a spectator to active engagement, a kind of negotiating audiences then going, well, actually the work of the joker here is exactly what we need as a starting point.

The role that I play in *Hotel Medea* welcoming the audience as they arrived was a hybrid between the captain of the north eastern folkloric traditions and the rituals that go on overnight and the joker. There was a methodology there that was readily accessible to us that we didn't tap into for years. Then I guess one of the things that I really appreciated from Theatre of the Oppressed since is just the clarity. In a sense some of the people that reject it as not being art or not being aesthetic is about the intention. It has a purpose. Invisible theatre has a purpose to initiate debate in a public space based on a confrontational situation. Or the engagement of people imagining themselves in a situation of dispute or confrontation and being tooled up to step into that role and kind of try and resolve that in a social/political situation. I guess that as a reference has become a lot more influential.

JADE: We have a piece that I want to resurrect because of social distancing now when we come back to a quasi-normalcy. It happens on headphones, even though I've been moving away from headphones and I've been moving towards making our own headphones which are built out of bone conducting technology, and neck wears and constructing a few pieces around people's ability to hear instructions. To experience a soundscape and to be able to just have normal conversations with each. To be able to talk and be heard to each other because their ears are open. That is quite exciting in terms of where I want to go with the next part of this journey. The next stage in a way of what does certain technologies afford you. Going back to this piece that's going to be on headphone work which takes place in a mall, and I want to do it in the mall that's near me which is Stratford Mall. It's the little poor man's mall right next to Westfield. It's right opposite Westfield.

That's the note that I wanted to end on. I just wanted to talk about that a little bit because it felt like it's one of the answers to one of the questions because we have shared reference points. One of those reference points is what can you do when you create these bubbles but in public space. There's a lot to say about that. I wanted to point out that because we won't be able to be together-together for quite a long time. It might be it's an interesting time to be involved with headphone work.

SILVIA: Yeah. It's definitely an interesting time.

JADE: I think that's a positive place to end.