

# Production Toolkit

Putting together a production can be very challenging for youth theatre leaders. Not only are you generally working with a very limited budget, but limited resources may also mean that you effectively constitute the full creative team. At NAYD we felt it would be useful to run a series of articles over the coming years outlining the roles of each member of what would (on a full scale production) make up the creative team. Separating out the roles, and looking at them from the point of view of leading industry professionals may help leaders in production planning and assignment of roles, helping to give a clear brief when you are working with inexperienced personnel or when you alone are the 'personnel'.

I thought the best place to start would be with the producer, whose role it is to make sure the production runs smoothly from early planning stages to the final curtain call. Sharing her words of wisdom on the job is **Jen Coppinger**.

**I have worked on several theatre projects in various capacities over the last 12 years. In my experience there are a few things to keep in mind when working in a team where everyone needs to double and triple job to keep the show on the road. All these points are common sense. A good producer should be able to lead a team, problem solve, be a listening ear and do all of this on a very tight budget.**

**Here are some pointers that may help you in producing your show:**

- From the outset set your budget to reasonable targets, i.e., do get a quoted price for everything and do NOT guess budget lines. Talk to your production and design team in detail about their individually assigned budget line and make sure they are clear in what they have to work with. Keep in touch with all your team and make sure that they feel supported. You may not always have a big budget but have the capacity to problem solve if needs be. Know your budget inside out and keep a record of all moneys in and out so you know at all times how much money is in the bank.
- Be realistic with your contingency. I would recommend you budget at 4-5% of your overall budget. This gives you room to manoeuvre should things go awry. Invariably you will need to dip in to the contingency so having 4-5% should help you get to the closing night of the show.
- Be shrewd when it comes to box-office projections. Whilst we'd all love to have 100% houses it's not always the case. It's best to breakdown your box-office on a night by night basis and realistically predict your house – Monday to Wednesday generally is quieter than Thursday to Saturday, so budget accordingly. Talk with your venue and use their box-office data and use the data from your last youth theatre audience figures to see what seems fair.
- Make a reasonable time line and stick to it. When doing this it's best to begin with your opening night date and work backwards. Set achievable targets, which will be met and assign jobs to each person involved in the production team so everyone knows what needs to be achieved and when. It's best to manage this

by regularly checking in with everyone to see if they are hitting their targets and, if they are not and need assistance, is there something you can do to help them?

- Follow up all meetings and phone conversations pertaining to the production with an email clearly stating what was agreed, who is responsible for what, etc. Not only will this help everyone sing off the same hymn sheet but it is also a very informal 'contract' of agreement to help the production proceed. Oftentimes favours need to be called in and, if so, it's essential that the person is thanked and, if possible, invited to opening night. After all, the show would not have happened without them.
- Keep an eye on all areas of the production, i.e., are the Front of House staff informed about the show and can box-office sell the show to potential punters? It's your responsibility to make sure that all areas of a venue know what the show is about, who's in it, how long it is and feel confident with their knowledge. Your venue is your friend so keep your friend updated of any changes and as happy as possible – I find a nice cake helps!
- Similarly keep all the design team aware of how rehearsals are going and encourage them to attend as much as the director is happy with. Each show is unique so it's best for all team members to be aware of all of its uniqueness.
- Finally as a producer I think the most important things is to be hugely supportive and approachable. Make sure that everyone knows they can phone you if they are unhappy about any area regarding the show. Never underestimate the power of a cup of tea and a listening ear. Solutions are usually found and if a difficult meeting or conversation is required the team need to know that you are prepared for it to fall on your shoulders and that you will make the call and have the conversation.

*Jen Coppinger is Information Manager for the Irish Theatre Institute and has worked as a freelance producer for Peer to Peer Theatre Company's Celebrity and The Stomach Box's No Worst There Is None as well as on several other projects.*



### Body Graphics by Sue Mythen

This workshop was created for the National Festival of Youth Theatre, Carne in 2010 and its aim was to be a practical guide to the fundamentals of physical theatre. It offers a chance to introduce an awareness of the body, playfulness, creativity and freedom from intellectual and text driven drama. The drama arises from release of inhibition and encouragement of spontaneity and complicity between the performers, and an enjoyment of the dynamics of physicality. Exercises in balance, space, counterweight, timing, body quality, metaphor and isolations aim to liberate the imagination by creating high-energy movement sequences, which are improvised around a given theme. The emphasis is on extending the possibilities of articulation and expression of the individual performer's body through awareness and sensitivity as well as group work.

Sessions can begin in very different ways (i.e., games, abstract shapes, images, text, paintings etc). Each trajectory offers a way to devise, create and perform a movement sequence. The group begins with a warm-up, which is designed to support the development of the type of work that follows. It should not only be a physical warm-up, but an exercise in awareness of the body in space, other bodies and the connections that arise when fundamentals of movements are pitched one against the other (i.e., Discovery of the relationship between balance and gravity. How does a discovery of line and direction allow an exploration of gesture? How does space affect eye contact?) More than anything, the basis of the work is that movement has meaning. This session begins with stillness and awareness and works towards outer shape or graphic.



### From the inside out

Begin lying on the floor. Pay attention to your breath. Trace the journey of the breath in through the nose or mouth, into the lungs and out. Imagine the breath pumping the heart and the circulation of blood around the body. Focus on the details of how your body feels, at this moment. Allow the body to sink into the floor and imagine a thermo-image of your body on the floor. What parts are warm and what parts are cool according to your mental image? What does the body want to do? What adjustments does it need? Why? Allow sensations, feelings and images to drift through your mind and body. Maybe some memories or emotions filter through. You will notice that even in stillness the body is moving.

### Chain Reaction

With your eyes closed, begin to move only your index finger. Take it on a journey randomly in space, away from the body, towards the body, in every direction. There is a moment where another part of the body must follow if the journey gets bigger. How does this connection happen? What effect has been caused by moving your finger in a particular way? Allow the rest of the body to follow the movement of the finger. What sequence occurs? Allow the movement to increase in size and increase the range of movements in shape, space, direction and level.

Think about the movement beginning in your centre but moving to the periphery of your body to reach the finger. Get bigger and braver. Open the eyes and increase the scale of the movement in space, all the while noticing the cause and effect of the movement from the centre through your body. Pick different body parts where the energy is pulled from your centre to the outside of your body... a knee, an elbow, your chin, a toe... Continue the exploration from inside to outside. Play with the speed of the impulses shooting

through your body and beyond you into the space. The movement can take you to the next level of half your body height or turn you, twist you, suspend you... Be as creative as possible.

Allow a point on your body to connect with a point in the space around you, a corner, a window, a door, a switch. Connect the two points and release. Make the intention to touch clear, even if you can't get there. Notice what happens between each journey. The space between also has a quality...

#### Devise:

Create a solo of six moves leading from six body parts to six points in the room, and pay attention to the transitional moves between.

Allow one half of the group to watch and one half to move. Repeat but reverse the roles.

**Discussion:** What options are open to you in changing the quality of the movement?

Level

Direction

Points of contact with the floor

Breath

Weight

Timing

Space

Balance

Breath

Intention/Images/Metaphor

### Alphabet Soup

This is adapted from a Ruth Zaporah exercise to explore improvisation with body shape.

**Solo:** The leader calls out each letter of the alphabet. Give around five seconds for each letter. Each person makes their body into the shape of the letter. Don't wait for everyone to get it right. It is important to keep the game moving and not to think too much.

**Pairs:** The leader calls out each letter of the alphabet allowing a few seconds longer than for the solo.

**Groups of 5+:** The leader calls each letter of the alphabet allowing 10 seconds for each one.

**Discussion:** What has to change when more people are involved? How do the strategies of movement change with more bodies? What shapes are easier with two people and which are more difficult? How do balance, shape, space, weight, connection level, agreement, collaboration, change the exercise?

#### Devise:

Solo dance:

a) Dance the letters of your name using at least 6 letters. Use your surname too. Create the six shapes into a sequence where there is a fluid development from one shape to the next. Each shape must be in a different location in the room.

b) Develop the sequence by making changes to each of the five shapes by making the movements:

Bigger or smaller

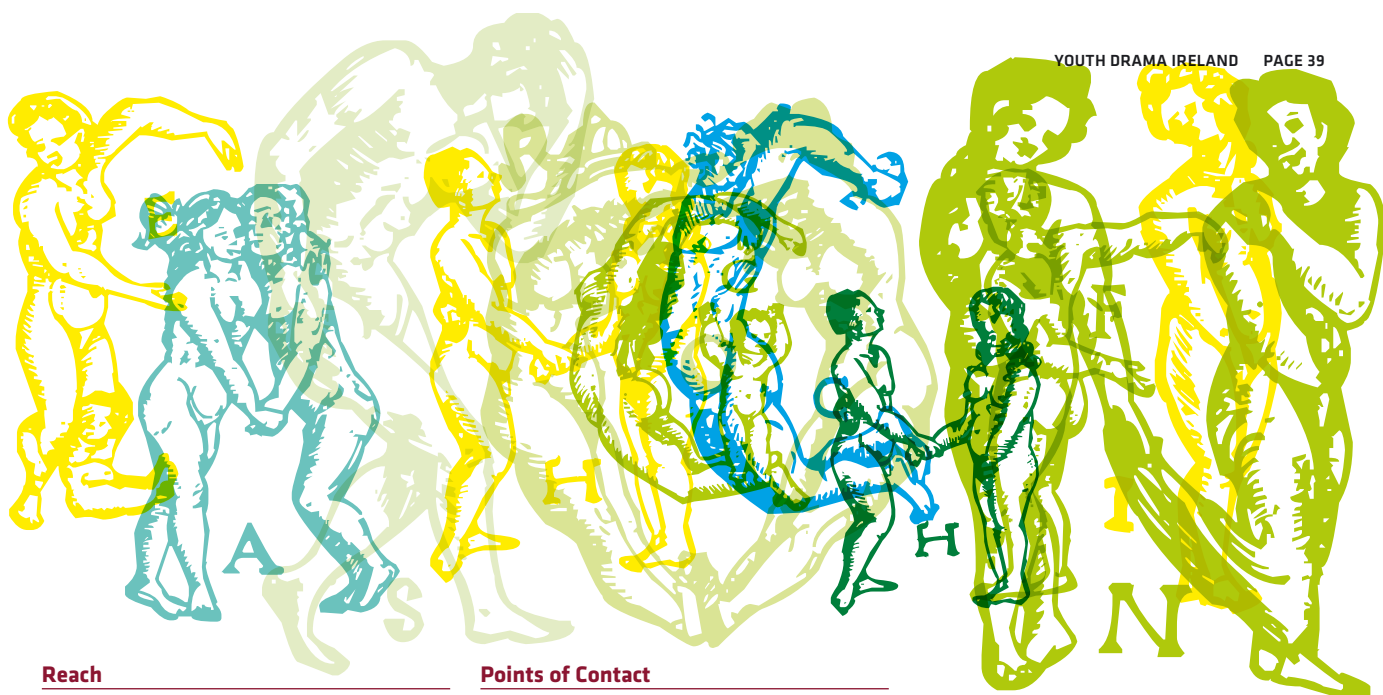
Faster or slower

Heavier or lighter

When making the changes to the shapes they should be taken to extremes. If the shape is to be bigger it can take up the whole room. Pay attention to the transitions. They are also part of the sequence.

One half of the group watch while one half perform. When finished your sequence, hold your final shape until everyone in your group is still.

Add this alphabet dance to the solo you created earlier and dance the whole piece. Programme the full sequence into your body memory as it will be used later.



### Reach

The whole group walk in the space noticing how they move. Let the previous work go. Trust that it's there in your body. Begin to shift your attention to how the foot makes contact with the floor. How does the breath change if you change direction or catch somebody's eye? Really see the other people. Let yourself be seen. What part of their body leads? Where do they focus the eyes?

The leader calls out a body part, which the group keeps in mind. Does this affect the way you walk?

The leader will say freeze and everyone must 'reach' with that body part. Reach right across the space to try and make contact with everyone in the group. Extend the reach to its fullest extent so that every part of your body is engaged. Even if you don't succeed in making contact the intention is to do so... Hold the intention as long as possible. This game is also a way into group tableau work. Repeat the exercise several times choosing varying body parts.

### Devise:

**Group 5+:** Each group devises six 'reach' images. Decide on the six body parts and the order in advance. Without anyone leading, the group feels when the stops and starts begin and end. Keep repeating the sequence until the transitions become fluid.

Perform for the other groups. Play music as a backdrop to the sequence.

All groups perform in the space at once. Really pay attention to peripheral vision so as not to bump into others. Keep the body soft and fluid.

**Discussion:** What happens to the movements when everyone performs together? Does the timing or quality of the movement change? Does it make you focus?

### Points of Contact

Allocate different numerical values to different body parts:  
 1 point for each foot  
 1 point for each hand  
 2 points for each elbow  
 2 points for each knee  
 5 points for the bum

### Solo

The leader calls out different values (e.g., 12, 18, 4 etc.) and each person adds up the value of body parts that should be in contact with the floor. Discover how this affects balance and gravity and how creative your body shape can be. Repeat certain numbers to find alternative shapes but still with the same value.

### Pairs

Repeat the same exercise in pairs, where the total value of contact with the floor is shared between two partners who must also be in contact with each other. They may lean, rest, support, balance against one another.

Develop this by asking pairs to begin at one end of the room and make a connection with the floor of a given value. Then they have to devise a strategy for travelling across the room with this shape. Repeat a number of times changing the value of the contact with the floor. You can make it more complicated by asking them to change shape several times throughout their journey.

This game provides a way into basic contact improvisation through weight sharing and can be a way to generate images and connections, which are useful for devising.

### Devise:

Create a duet, which has six moves with points of contact of six different values. Three of the shapes should be still images, in different locations in the room and three should travel through space.

To end the session co-ordinate the three devised elements: solos, pairs and group images, which can top and tail the piece. Play music and discover how it influences the quality of the movement.

This session is designed as an introduction to physical theatre and is suitable for any age. It can also serve as a basis to explore particular themes or texts in an abstract way. Overall, the work should allow the group to look at the component parts of movement so that they begin to grasp a vocabulary, which can be useful in making physical choices in any type of performance.

*Sue Mythen works as a Movement Director for theatre, film and opera and has worked for The Abbey Theatre, Opera Ireland and ITV Drama. She also taught movement for actors at TCD, RIAM, and The Gaiety School of Acting.*

## Voice & Communication Workshop: David Grant

Voice, language and communication is the core of this workshop but because we're a multi-lingual group we'll deal in images as well. We'll include a few activities to get your brains working in different ways this morning (sound and vision) before we move on to the core idea in 'Two Tribes'.

### Chair Exercise

Ask the group to form an audience and designate an audience and a performance space. Make sure that a number of chairs are available in the performance space. This is a Boal exercise, which is really useful in terms of explaining what it is to have confidence in your own ideas.

- Ask a volunteer to make one of the chairs more important than the other. The key to this is that there is no wrong way to do this. When a participant moves the chairs they become the artist.
- When the volunteer 'artist' has finished, ask everyone else to make their own decision about which chair they think is the most important. The facilitator points at each chair and if a participant thinks it's the most important chair, then they raise their hand. Ask audience members to explain their perspectives.
- Then ask the artist to explain which one was the most important chair from their perspective.
- Repeat the activity a number of times, asking different participants to become artists and make one chair more important than the others.

At some stage, participants will probably get to a point where they say, "These could be people", and start to project people, relationships or a story onto the chairs. This can be a useful starting point that says, "We're not all expecting to understand the same thing from what we do". The interpretations, the different ways people perceive the same things / situations can make art exciting. It's what opens up possibilities. Youth theatres are always throwing work out there and asking, "What do you think?". As theatre makers working with young people, we start from that point. We say we're not going to arrive at something which is fixed. We're moving towards something which we want to be open.

**David quotes Boal** "Where we don't understand the words, we can understand the image. Where we don't understand the words, we can sometimes understand the gesture or even the silence."

In the chair exercise, participants have to be free with their own ideas, have confidence in their own ideas and can't just wait to see what everybody else thinks. This is essentially about images. Avoiding words and avoiding language can open up possibilities.

### Numbers

Ask each participant to count to 10 in their own language. Ask them to work in pairs and share their sequence with each other. Ask participants to get back into a circle and listen to a few volunteers count to 10.

- How can the sounds of words influence us as opposed to the meaning of the words?
- What meaning did we take from the sounds when we didn't understand the language?
- What kind of narrative was there?

### Samson and Delilah

This exercise is based on rock, paper, scissors. Divide the group into pairs and ask them to spread out around the room. The facilitator teaches these 3 moves / sounds to the group:

**Samson:** big strong pose; roar  
**Delilah:** she's curvaceous; kissing noises  
**Lion:** show your claws; roar

- Samson is stronger than the lion because he kills him with the sword
- The Lion is stronger than Delilah because she didn't have her sword with her that day.
- Delilah is stronger than Samson because she can cut his hair off and remove his strength.

Ask participants to turn their backs to their partner. Each pair counts 3,2,1 - chooses a character, turns and poses. If they are both the same, then nobody scores any points. If they're different, then they work out who the stronger character is and keep score. Be as competitive as you like!

At the end of the exercise, check in with the participants. Did anybody get 5 points? 4 points? 3 points? etc., 0 points?

This exercise focuses on making shapes with our bodies - we're engaging with each other and trying to see how the other person thinks in that game.

# Poor Bird

## Machines

Ask everybody to form a circle. This exercise is a bit different but it's still about making shapes.

In the machine exercise, ask one volunteer to step into the centre of the circle and make a gesture and a sound. The other participants should watch and look for a way to add to the machine this person has started. Ask other participants to come in, one after the other, rather than everybody rushing in at once. After watching the creation of the first machine, can the group spot what works?

- People connecting their actions with other people in the machine?
- Comedy?
- Levels?
- Being creative!

Once the idea of the machine has been established, then you can begin to theme it. The facilitator or members of the group can suggest a theme for the machine, such as a 'happy' machine, a 'love' machine, an 'anger' machine etc. A volunteer goes into the centre and starts the machine and other participants join in. Language can be used if necessary because the *sound* of language can often be understood.

The machine exercise can be used to look at stereotypes as well. Ask participants to create an 'Irish machine' [*seeing as the course is based in Ireland*]. What do you think of when you hear Ireland? Ask for a volunteer to start the machine.

This exercise can be a nice way to expose the stereotypes that we hold about each others' countries. Let's just acknowledge that there are certain fixed notions about our countries and cultures before we go any deeper.

## Group Sculpture

Ask for 4 male and 4 female participants to volunteer for an exercise and ask the remaining participants to create an audience. The facilitator sculpts the 8 people into a group sculpture.



Photo: Rhona Dunnett.

Once the sculpture has been created, the audience can walk around to look at the image. Bearing in mind that there are no wrong answers, what do they see when they look at this image?

### Comments from audience group

- Relationships
- Status
- Power
- Resigned to things
- Some sort of military execution
- Life and death

This sculpture emerged from a workshop with the Community Relations Council in Belfast in 1993, before the Peace Process had really started. This was how a group of young people from different parts of Belfast saw their society. Now that you know that... can you put any extra meaning on it?

### Comments from audience group

- There are 2 sides and a wall
- A divided society

This sculpture can show the power of expression through images as well as through words.

### Ah Poor Bird

A little bit of singing just to get participants in the mood for sounds!

This is a 4 line song from the Shakesperian period. It can be a good way to get participants thinking about the musicality of language – about sounds and the way they connect with each other.

*Ah poor bird,  
Wing thy flight,  
Far above the sorrows,  
Of this dark night.*

- Sing the piece line by line, until participants are familiar with the song.
- Ask the group to make a square. Each side of the square will start at a different time and the group should sing the song **as a round**. (i.e., Group 1 starts and keeps singing the song in a loop, Group 2 starts when Group 1 begins the second line and they keep singing the song in a loop, Group 3 starts when Group 2 begins the second line etc.)
- Ask participants to move around the room and, maintaining the same groupings, sing the song again in a round. To help the group gain confidence in their voices, the facilitator could start the round with each group standing in the square and then ask them to move at a given signal. This can help the group gain confidence, group awareness and listening skills.
- At an agreed signal, ask the participants to get louder or quieter
- When the facilitator puts his/her hand in the air, participants should hold the final note of the line they're on.

In this exercise the quality of the singing is not the main focus. Any performance is about lots of people in tune with each other – listening to each other, the rhythms and the patterns.

### Knock, Knock

This is another round from the Shakesperian period:

*Knock, knock nobody at home,  
Meade, nor drink, nor money have I none,  
Yet will I be me - e - e - e - ery.*

- Sing the piece line by line, until participants are familiar with the song.
- Divide participants into 3 groups and practice the song as a round.
- Starting in a circle shape, begin the round and ask participants to go on a journey into the 4 corners of the room and then weave back into the circle again.

## Ah Poor Bird

Musical notation for 'Ah Poor Bird' in 4/4 time. The Alto part consists of two lines of music. The first line has lyrics: 'Ah, poor bird, Wing thy flight, Far a-bove the so - r - rows of this dark'. The second line has lyrics: 'night'. The Alto part ends with a double bar line. The Soprano part (A.) is a single line of music with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat, starting with a whole note on G4.

## Knock, Knock

Musical notation for 'Knock, Knock' in 4/4 time. The Alto part consists of two lines of music. The first line has lyrics: 'Knock, knock, no - bo - dy at home. Meade nor drink nor'. The second line has lyrics: 'mon - ey have I none, Yet will I be me - e - e - e - r - y'. The Alto part ends with a double bar line. The Soprano part (A.) is a single line of music with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat, starting with a whole note on G4.

## Two Tribes

This exercise requires 2 adjacent spaces.

### Step 1

Have an initial discussion with the group about the differences in the formation of vowels, and voiced and unvoiced consonants. Does everybody understand what a vowel and a consonant is?

[The song 'Ah Poor Bird' was more about vowels and the unstopped flow of sound 'Awww'. The "Knock, Knock" song was more about the hard, consonant sounds.]

Divide the group in two and place each group in a different room. If possible, assign an assistant facilitator/helper to each group and facilitate the exchange of ambassadors as a customs official. If you are working with a multicultural group, try and make sure the 2 groups are representative of the overall diversity of the group.

The facilitator should leave some props in each space. The groups' first task is to think about what the props mean to them. [This is similar to the previous chair exercise].

### Step 2

Ask one group to envisage a world in which their language consists only of vowels and ask the other group to envisage a world in which their language consists only of consonants. Once some ideas for their tribal language emerge, each group should:

- Think of a name for their tribe
- Think of individual names for themselves
- Think of a name for their country / place
- Think of a greeting – how does your tribe greet outsiders?
- Devise a tribal rite or ceremony
- [You can also ask the groups to create a monument which represents something important in their culture]

Each tribe can use the cultural artefacts (props) that belong to their culture and can do with them what they like.

Each tribe is going to be part of a cultural exchange. Once each group has established their own culture, they will be asked to send an ambassador to the other country.

- Finally they should choose one member of their group to be the ambassador who will visit the other tribe.

Setting up the exercise should be done in English. After that the group should only communicate in their own new language!

### Step 3

After a suitable interval, the facilitator arranges for an exchange of ambassadors between the two tribes. The facilitator or the customs officials can check on the progress of each group by asking them to present their names, greetings, ceremonies etc., as a final preparation. They can give guidance if needed. Does each tribe know how they will welcome the other ambassador and include them in their ceremonies?

When each tribe is ready, the exchange of ambassadors takes place. Once it has been completed, the facilitator / customs officials ensure their safe return home.

### Step 4

Each ambassador should try to convey in his/her own language the customs/nature of the other tribe to his/her own group.

[You could arrange a second ambassador visit. Ask each tribe to nominate another ambassador and prepare for another visit. Is there anything that the tribe wishes to change when welcoming the next ambassador? Is there anything their own ambassador would like to find out about the other tribe? The facilitator / customs officials should arrange for a second exchange to take place and these ambassadors should be given a chance to report back to their tribe afterwards.]

### Step 5

When this has run its course, declare the exercise over and bring the groups back together to discuss their findings.

- What did each tribe think of the other tribe?
- How did the role of the ambassador work?
- What sort of judgements were each tribe making about each other? What were these judgements based on?
- What learning can be taken away from their experience of this exercise?

Usually (but not always) the vowel culture is more peaceful, the consonant culture more vibrant!

### Variations

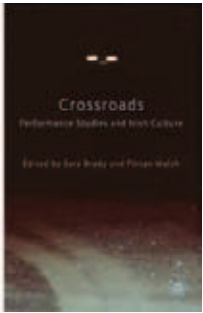
A subtler additional or alternative exercise is to characterise the two tribes by languages consisting only of voiced (B, D, Z, etc.) and unvoiced (P, T, S etc.) consonants. The results of this variant are much less predictable!

[This workshop plan was transcribed by NAYD staff from recordings of the workshop with additional notes from David Grant.]

*David Grant is Head of Drama Studies at Queen's University, Belfast, where his teaching and research focuses on actor training and applied and community theatre.*

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# TALKING TEXTS



## **Crossroads: Performance Studies and Irish Culture**

Edited by Sara Brady and Fintan Walsh

Palgrave Macmillan, 2009

256 pages

ISBN 978-0230219984

ST £58

In a time when Irish culture, politics and identity is in crisis, Sara Brady and Fintan Walsh have edited this book, which explores many facets of what it is to be Irish and how Irish Culture is expressed locally, nationally and globally. Appropriately called 'Crossroads' this book moves away from the literary canon that has often taken precedence over other forms of cultural and artistic expression and instead explores 'Irishness' through the theories and methodologies used in performance studies. This eclectic collection of essays is divided into five broad sections of:

'Tradition, Ritual and Play'

'Place, Landscape and Commemoration'

'Political Performances'

'Gender, Feminism, and Queer Performance'

'Diaspora, Migration and Globalisation'

Analyses of disparate subjects such as, roads, the 1937 Irish constitution, pageantry, parades, pilgrimages, murals, boundaries, borders, performance art, humour & comedy, folk lore, traditional Irish music, folk lore and performance, theatre shows, GAA, and ethnicity, explode open the question of what it is to perform, present and create 'Irish identity' in a multi-cultural, globalised, post-Celtic tiger Ireland.

Questions of authenticity, sexuality, ethnicity, construction of memory and creation of identity within community are all problematised and explored in various articles and present the reader with a multiple, rich and dynamically shifting presentation of Irish culture with fascinating references to history, politics, ritual and performance.

As with any collection of articles the writing and research standard varies and while some articles are enjoyable for the clarity and coherence of the writing, others are a morass of labyrinthine theoretical language and academic references.

The contributors are predominantly academics and as such – although it is called 'performance studies' I am with Susan Melrose's (<http://www.sfmelrose.org.uk>) way of thinking that calls this 'spectator' studies as it explores meaning after the fact and analyses product as opposed to the creative processes. As such, this book does not contain any great insights into the practice of the artists and will never be an essential handbook for the youth theatre practitioner.

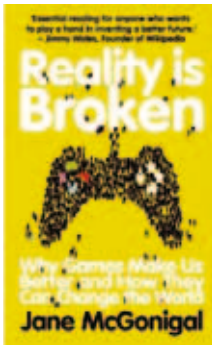
That said, the arts are often under-valued within society and this book is an important reminder of how fundamental the arts (and an understanding of symbolic work) are in the creation of cultural and political identity.

Reading some of these articles could encourage young practitioners to see their work in the context of both local and national political and artistic communities and recognise the importance of their work and processes in establishing meaning and identity.

For the Irish performing arts student and practitioners alike, I think this book is an important read to open up the vistas and possibilities of what we term 'art'. As the editors say in their introduction: 'the [crossroads]...mapped here are suggestive, multiple and mobile'. As we move through this economic crisis, with funding for the arts rapidly decreasing, the ability for the practising artist to be open to all possibility and to create work in a shifting cultural landscape is imperative.

*Amy Prendergast is currently an assistant lecturer at CIT Cork School of Music in Drama and the Recorder. A qualified drama-therapist she is also employed by the Co. Cork VEC to work with groups in the Mental Health and Disabilities sector. In the past she has worked in the Drama and Theatre Studies Department in UCC, Graffiti Theatre Company, Youth Reach, Foroige, Cork Music Works & CSM Youth Theatre.*

*She holds a first class honours BA (& subsequent MA) degree in Drama & Theatre Studies from Trinity College Dublin, an MA in Drama & Movement Therapy from Central School of Speech and Drama and an MA in Music Performance from CIT Cork School of Music and is currently completing her MA in Contemporary Dance Performance from University of Limerick.*



**Reality is Broken – Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World**

By Jane McGonigal

Jonathan Cape, 2011

388 pages

ISBN 978-0-224-08925-8

ST £12.99

Jane McGonigal is Director of Games Research and Development at the Institute of the Future in California, a research group that I had never heard of before encountering this book. I had never heard of many of the companies, individuals, games she references in her explanations as to why, in her view: 'reality is broken', and why games could be the best way of making things better, on an individual and also on a global level.

The book presents some interesting facts. By the age of 21 most young people will have clocked up 10,000 hours playing games, which according to writer, Malcolm Gladwell, is the amount of time it takes to become expert at something. Jane McGonigal begins to explain what generations of young people are becoming expert at: collaborating, coordinating, and creating, traits that she believes are crucial in reimagining the future.

Structurally, the book consists of 14 chapters divided into three broader sections: 'Why Games Make Us Happy', 'Reinventing Reality', and 'How Very Big Games Can Change the World'. McGonigal presents a convincing argument as to why games are not the waste of time that many people see them as, and how they have always been a crucial part of human development and culture. She references Herodotus' account in *The Histories* of the Lydian people, who invented games as a means of surviving a period of famine. One day the population would eat, and the next they would play games thus, halving their food intake and finding other ways to sustain themselves and engage as a community. What computer games offer us is the opportunity, not simply to engage on a local community level, but on a global level. According to McGonigal, across the world we are spending three billion hours per week playing computer games. Her objective is to look at how these hours of voluntary participation can be used to transform and improve the reality of the world we live in.

The book examines exactly what it is that games give us that reality doesn't seem to, and then begins to look at models where games are being used to shape reality. A particularly fascinating case study (in Chapter Seven of the book) describes a school established in New York in 2009, called Quest to Learn, where students are educated through a gaming structure: they 'level up' instead of passing exams; rather than completing homework assignments, they teach a slightly less advanced avatar what they have been learning, the principle being that if they can teach it, then they fully understand it; they uncover hidden quests to earn bonus points; and across the grades they can join forces, combining specialist skills to solve secret missions.

Across the book, McGonigal proposes 14 'fixes' for reality; ways in which games can be used to improve reality: 1 – Tackle unnecessary obstacles; 2 – Activate extreme positive emotions; 3 – Do more satisfying work; 4 – Find better hope of success; 5 – Strengthen your social connectivity; 6 – Immerse yourself in epic scale; 7 – Participate wholeheartedly wherever, whenever we can; 8 – Seek meaningful rewards for making a better effort; 9 – Have more fun with strangers; 10 – Invent and adopt new happiness hacks; 11 – Contribute to a sustainable engagement economy; 12 – Seek out more epic wins; 13 – Spend ten thousand hours collaborating; 14 – Develop massively multiplayer foresight. In the case of each fix, we learn, through example how computer games provide this, and the ways in which it could improve reality. Interestingly many of the 'fixes' struck me as something that 'play' through drama as well as through computer games can provide. What is missing from drama and theatre is the epic scale and numbers involved in successful computer and alternate reality games.

I am not a gamer, or an expert in the areas that the book discusses and explores, and was not at a disadvantage in understanding the arguments and examples used throughout the book. Indeed, if anything I found that the case was sometimes overstated and became repetitive, making the book difficult to get through in one go. While there are elements and sections that are very specific to computers and online engagement, I found that I could apply most of what the book offers to my own practice. For the youth drama practitioner, although it may not be an obvious 'bible', I think this book is well worth a read, in terms of understanding the new and evolving ways that young people are being engaged and challenged through games, and perhaps in terms of beginning to re-examine youth drama so that it can offer the same rewards. With inspiring and provocative case studies and new ways of thinking about social media and online engagement, I think this is a strong resource for the youth theatre leader- gamer or otherwise!

*Jody O'Neill is an actor, writer and is editor of Youth Drama Ireland.*

# TALKING TEXTS



## **Drama Games for Those Who Like to Say No**

By Chris Johnston

224 pages

Nick Hern Books, 2010

ISBN 978-1-84842-049-6

ST £8.99

The title of this book immediately caught my attention. As a facilitator who regularly works with young people whose default setting is NO, this seemed like an answer to a prayer. The description of Chris Johnston as a facilitator who works with young people who have 'opted for a life of permanent rebellion' rang bells for me. Unfortunately, there is a section missing from this book and that section is entitled '**How you get them to say YES**'. Its title and introduction leads one to believe that it would offer games, which would get one over the initial negotiations around actually being an active member of a group, perhaps would offer a series of interesting exercises, which would take the participants passed the NO default.

On the other hand, each section of the book is well laid out and the games are clearly explained, many are familiar and some contain interesting variations on well known games. For those working in a prison context the section named 'Challenges' is devised for young offenders and contains some very interesting exercises. Alternative title – *Drama Games for those who have got passed saying no.*

*Geraldine O'Neill is Outreach Director for Graffiti Theatre Company.*



## **The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre**

By Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett

248 pages

Routledge, 2009

ISBN 978-0415467605

Frantic Assembly have a slogan '*always move forward, never back*', this philosophy has underpinned the work of the UK physical theatre company since their inception in 1994. A few years ago I saw a trailer for their show *pool (no water)* by Mark Ravenhill and was hooked. Their visceral, highly physical and instantly recognisable style combines movement, music and text. Their work is definitely of its time and generation; it is unpretentious, intelligent and sharp. It engages, excites and energises its audience, creating a theatre that is really fresh and exciting and gives a passion and immediacy to the spoken word and physical language.

So, you've rightly guessed that I was a fan before I read this book. I watched their work with envy and when their first book, *The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre*, was launched I pre-ordered my copy on Amazon because I wanted to find out and understand how they make their work. However, this book does a lot more than just set out their methodologies, it reads almost like a companion book to the company. In many ways this book avoids telling you how *to* do it but tells you how *they* do it. From essays on their process, how they find the initial impetus to make the work they make, inspiration for devising, how they start creating a physical performance right through to practical exercises, music suggestions and a complete anthology of their work, the book is illustrated throughout and written in the first person by both artistic directors, Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett. Recalling their development as a company over the past 17 years it reads and sounds a lot like a conversation with an old friend. There is no pretension, not a lot of anecdotes and hardly any metaphor; instead it is presented in a candid, pragmatic and very useful way. Rather than just listing exercises and methods, they give you the background and context to the work, from their early 'back of the van days' to their international touring profile, they keep the tone light, jargon free and easy to engage with.

Everything in the book is clearly explained but very cleverly it also has a companion website (Routledge textbooks on YouTube) that you can use to see the exercises in practice (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1RvUMap6LI&feature=related>).

This book is a great resource and I have kept it close to me and have referred back to it time and time again. My personal favourite exercises are 'rabbit run' and 'chair duets'. If you want to find out a bit more about the tone of the writing, to see if this is the book for you or even just learn a little more about the work of Frantic Assembly, you can also download their resource pack: [http://www.franticassembly.co.uk/media/media/downloads/Frantic\\_Assembly\\_Resource\\_Pack.pdf](http://www.franticassembly.co.uk/media/media/downloads/Frantic_Assembly_Resource_Pack.pdf)

*Louise Lowe is a theatre director and playwright. Currently she is director of Anu Productions and joint creative producer / curator for Project Brand New. She was the resident assistant director at the Abbey Theatre 2008-2009. Louise trained at the Samuel Beckett Centre, Trinity College and holds an MA in Directing from The Central School of Speech and Drama (University of London).*

# THIS YEAR THEY SAID

"The world I live in has crashed about our ears, the market has collapsed completely and there are a lot of people being hurt out there... I've lived through three or four major recessions in my life, and I've never seen anything inflict the harm and damage this is... I'm an optimist, I'm a grafter, I'm a worker, I'm a supreme entrepreneur. Even I'm finding it incredibly difficult, and I have every facility. I have huge resources available to me, I'm surrounded by people who work for me who are the best at what they do, I have plenty of capital to make these things work and even for us it's a huge, huge struggle to keep everything together. So I can't imagine how tough it is for ordinary people out there."

**Harry Crosbie**, *Property Developer, Entrepreneur, and lease-holder for the Grand Canal Theatre spares a thought for the plain people of Ireland in an interview by Fiona McCann! Irish Times (26<sup>th</sup> June 2010).*

In a recent interview, Roddy Doyle, just returned from a week in the UK, remarked that it was a relief to be away from the non-stop coverage of the financial crisis here. People in the UK, it seemed, were just getting on with things. What was it about us, he mused, that left us unable to get this crisis out of our system?

Part of the answer, of course, is that the financial meltdown here is more severe. But another, more psychological narrative has also to be explored.

During the Celtic Tiger years, Ireland as a nation came of age. It was just at this crucial juncture that the crisis hit. We have suffered a huge blow to our confidence and self-esteem, both nationally and in our most private and personal view of ourselves. From a developmental perspective, we have been knocked off course in a very traumatic way.

...Our confidence in our own judgment is dented. Many of us now feel embarrassed to dole out advice to our kids anymore. Our guidance on worldly matters and our foresight are now very questionable indeed. We feel compromised and adrift. The man-of-the-world of the Celtic Tiger years is the rueful and worried parent of 2010.

**Maureen Gaffney** *on the state of the Irish psyche. Irish Times (24<sup>th</sup> April 2010).*

"There is only good theatre and bad theatre, it doesn't matter whether the target audience is children or not."

**Louis Lovett**, *clearly stating his case as he took up the position of resident Theatre Maker at The Ark. Irish Times (1<sup>st</sup> January 2010).*

On any given night, in any number of fringe venues, great work is happening. Young people are forming theatre companies, collaborating and developing their skills... The fringe provides companies and individuals with a structure...it is now within the fringe where the inexperienced rub shoulders and perform alongside the experienced.

...New work will still grow out of the hard times ahead, but we

need to plan for the cuts. This means giving youth theatre and new companies better platforms on which to flourish, drawing greater critical media exposure. This in turn will encourage audiences to discover that good theatre is taking place on their doorsteps.

**Anthony Alderson** *on the importance of the fringe in the UK - surely, nobody could argue that the same applies here in terms of supporting a new culture of theatre making? www.guardian.co.uk (8<sup>th</sup> October 2010).*

Nothing shakes you up like a near death experience. That may be an extreme characterisation of Irish theatre at the beginning of 2010 – but only just. When eleven companies lost funding in February, the outlook for productions, even survival, seemed bleak. In its wake, theatre gradually rallied, consistently articulating its value through Theatre Forum, the National Campaign for the Arts, and other channels. But on stage, its behaviour could seem surprising, its methods different. Some of it was encouraging, some mildly concerning, and much of it was out of character. You could call it a year of identity crisis.

**Peter Crawley** *reflecting on the year that was 2010 in Irish theatre. Irish Theatre Magazine (15<sup>th</sup> December 2010).*

Ireland's knowledge society must be broadly conceived. It will be inhabited by committed citizens who have access to a broad range of artistic, cultural and recreational opportunities in a sophisticated and tolerant society.

Given the right opportunities, the young people of Ireland will do us proud by staying at home and reminding us that harmony exists between anatomy and Allingham; biology and the bodhrán; chemistry and Coulter; Darwin and de Valera.

**Colm Kearney** *talking about the 'smartness' of the Smart Economy policies and the need to create an environment, not just to entice investment from abroad, but to try to hold onto a generation of young people, who are crucial in shaping the Ireland of the future. Sunday Business Post (27<sup>th</sup> June 2010).*

There is a new generation of Irish theatre-makers. They are here, they have things to say, and they have exciting new ways of saying them. In a time where, more than ever, we need to take a hard look at our surroundings and imagine a way forward, these artists are here to help us along the way... This generation are making work which is utterly of the present, dealing with the past and the future, exploring new forms of theatre-making and storytelling, and drawing large and enthusiastic audiences in the process.

**Tom Creed** *writes about a new generation of theatre practitioners, and their role in articulating the present moment. Village Magazine (1<sup>st</sup> December 2010).*

The above quotes have all been taken out of context, and have been edited to serve our mischievous purposes! The opinion is only that of the editor; the editorial board and NAYD cannot be held accountable.

## ABOUT NAYD

(National Association for Youth Drama)

Established in 1980, NAYD is the development organisation for youth drama and theatre in Ireland. NAYD supports youth drama in practice and policy and supports the sustained development of youth theatres in Ireland.

**NAYD** advocates the inherent value and the unique relationship between young people and theatre as an artform.

**NAYD** organises an artistic programme as well as a range of national and regional events and activities for youth theatres and individual youth drama practitioners.

These include:

- National and Regional Festivals of Youth Theatres
- National Youth Theatre
- New Stage – commissioning of new writing for youth theatre
- Stage It! – young playwrights programme
- Playshare – scripts for young performers
- Young Critics' Programme
- Inspiring Voices – critical debates and events
- Training (workshops, courses and seminars for youth theatre directors and leaders)
- Research and development of youth drama practice

**NAYD** also produces a variety of publications including *Youth Drama Ireland*, *Intermission*, *Playshare* script anthologies, *Step by Step – Introduction to Educational Drama* and the *Irish Youth Theatre Handbook*, along with information materials including guidelines, research and policy documents.

**NAYD** is principally funded by the Arts Council, the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, FÁS, and is also affiliated to the National Youth Council of Ireland.

Current NAYD membership rates are:

<b>Individual:</b>	€30
<b>Student:</b>	€10
<b>Organisation:</b>	€50
<b>Youth Theatres and Groups:</b>	€70

For more information on NAYD please contact [info@nayd.ie](mailto:info@nayd.ie) or visit [www.nayd.ie](http://www.nayd.ie)

## ABOUT THE NAYD BOARD

The Board of NAYD meets every six weeks, and agrees on the strategic development of the organisation.

- **Professor Áine Hyland** (Chairperson) – Independent
- **Caoimhín Corrigan** – Leitrim County Council
- **Ian Cummins** – Celbridge Youth Drama
- **Ella Daly** – Dublin Youth Theatre
- **Eoghan Doyle** – Clondalkin Youth Theatre
- **Caoimhe Dunn** – Bui Bolg
- **Emelie FitzGibbon** – Graffiti Theatre Company
- **Tony McCleane-Fay** – Wexford Youth Theatre
- **Sean O'Brien** – Independent
- **Geraldine O'Neill** – Activate Youth Theatre
- **Catherine Simon** – Co. Roscommon Youth Theatre
- **Darren Thornton** – Calipo Theatre Company
- **Gavin Quinn** – Pan Pan Theatre Company

## ABOUT THE NAYD TEAM



**Director**  
**Orlaith McBride**

Orlaith leads and manages the staff, resources and work programme of NAYD. She ensures that NAYD delivers on its role and mission as an organisation and works towards the effective delivery of the Strategic Plan 2011-2013. Orlaith has been Director of NAYD since 2003.



**Administrative Officer**  
**Katie Martin**

Katie maintains the overall administration of the office and assists with the managing of projects /work programme. She also looks after website management and development and manages internal and external communications with members and other organisations. Until recently, she was a leader with Tallaght Youth Theatre.



**Youth Theatre Officer**  
**Alan King**

Alan is the recently appointed Youth Theatre Officer with NAYD. He supports the sustained artistic development of youth theatres through the development of resources, training, support and advice. Alan also co-ordinates the *Young Critics Programme*, *Leading On...* training programme for youth theatre leaders and the *Youth Theatre Members' Forum*. Alan is a former member of Dublin Youth Theatre and an experienced actor and director.



**Research and Development Officer**  
**Rhona Dunnett**

Rhona supports youth theatres in working to identify local structures, agencies and partners supporting youth theatres at a county and local level, and develops measures to support their sustainability. She also carries out research and develops NAYD's work and relationship with the formal education sector. Rhona is a former member of Activate Youth Theatre, Cork.



**National Training Co-ordinator**  
**Dave Kelly**

Dave develops and co-ordinates the implementation of the national training strategy for youth drama, which is delivered regionally and locally. Training programmes include ArtsTrain, *Leading On...* Leaders Training Programme and Skills Development Programme. Dave is a former member of Dublin Youth Theatre



**ArtsTrain Assistant Co-ordinator**  
**John Taite**

John assists the Training Co-ordinator in the design and delivery of the ArtsTrain training programme. He is responsible for submitting required materials to FETAC and supports the ArtsTrain participants in achieving their accreditation. John also doubles as the resident IT expert and documentary maker! John is a former member of Red Lemon Youth Theatre.



**Youth Drama Ireland Editor**  
**Jody O'Neill**

This is Jody's third edition of *Youth Drama Ireland*. She is a former member of Activate Youth Theatre, and works as an actor, playwright and producer. Jody also compiles *Intermission* and works for NAYD on their new writing initiatives.

### VIRTUAL YOUTH THEATRE

Visit NAYD online at [www.nayd.ie](http://www.nayd.ie) for:

- Latest youth theatre performance listings
- Events news: National Youth Theatre, Regional Festivals, Young Critics, New Stage
- New training section: ArtsTrain, Leading On, Skills Support Programme
- Expanded resource section: advice, funding, workshops, policies & guidelines, press packs

- Reading Room: articles, addresses, debates and research projects
- And the rest: NAYD blog, youth theatre database, news, opportunities and much, much more

Sign up for NAYD's e-newsletter at [www.nayd.ie/users/newsletter](http://www.nayd.ie/users/newsletter).

Follow NAYD on Twitter @ NAYDIre.

Become an NAYD fan on [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) by searching for National Association for Youth Drama.



Above: Limerick Youth Theatre, *Women in Power*,  
Photo: Bud McLoughlin.



**BE OUR  
FRIEND!**

## BE OUR FRIEND!

Youth Theatre is all about making artistic dreams come true. We need Friends to help and support us in our endeavour to give young people in Ireland the quality artistic experience that is the right of every young person, irrespective of race, gender, creed or background.

Our Friends can support us in three ways:

- by spreading the word about the value of youth drama
- by going to see some of the many Youth Theatre productions taking place every month around the country (see [www.nayd.ie](http://www.nayd.ie) for the latest news)
- by making a donation of €100 towards our annual programme of work

## Become a Friend!

If you would like to become a Friend of NAYD, please send a cheque/PO payable to the National Association for Youth Drama to:  
NAYD Friends,  
7 North Great George's Street,  
Dublin 1,  
Ireland

NAYD is supported by The Arts Council and the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and is a non-profit, registered company (No. 191785) with Charitable Status (CHY9410).