

Search Party for beginners...

Three months after those eleven, long, arm aching days in May, we travelled to Tasmania to play table tennis (*Search Party vs Launceston*). Before this our feet had never left the Northern Hemisphere. All the time with the nagging thought in our minds that we would have to think of something to write here on this page, to introduce you the reader to our practice...

Well it was wonderful in Tasmania. There's something to be said for travelling all the way to the other side of the world just to see clearly what it is that you are doing all the way back home. Something about all that space and clean air in Tassie, encouraged us to find some space in our heads, to consider and re-consider *Save Me* and how the work fits more broadly into our practice. And maybe there's something to be said for reflecting on a practice that's interested simultaneously in duration and ephemerality on an epic 23-hour long-haul flight with turbulence so bad that the thought that we might drop out of the sky at any moment is a constant worry. We've discovered that describing a practice from the inside is harder than it might seem. So we've enlisted the help of a couple of people who know us well to write alongside us, to draw out reoccurring themes, to share memories and to make playful insights into Search Party's work.

Pete & Jodie (Search Party)

1) The basics (*a description)

Search Party are a flag waving, ping pong playing, salt rubbing, whale watching, bus loving, moon orbiting, rhino running family whose interest lies somewhere between wanting things to last forever (or at least as long as the performance) and wanting to sneak off for a cuppa whilst no-one's looking. They are based in Bristol, where they go to book clubs, practice their table tennis (think you can beat Jodie? Wrong.) and take their daughter to see the ducks.

Gemma Paintin (Action Hero)

2) Sore eyes (*intimacy and distance)

As we look back over the performance projects that have characterised the first six years of our collaboration, it seems that we've always been interested in intimacy and distance. In our first work I was the moon and you were the command module and joined together by string tied around our waists, you orbited me (*The Long Walk to the Performance*). Or in sharing a private moment through a single spy hole along the length of a 12m x 0.5m home-made corridor (*Corridor*). Or when, like Olympic track cyclists, we chased each other around Lavender Hill on buses, a loving pursuit around a mile long circuit (*Outside*). Or more recently, in the recording of closing speeches to end

a life-long project that has only just begun (*Growing Old With You*). And then creating something both intimate and epic across the length of St Augustine's Reach, Bristol – using flagged symbols to discuss our enforced separation (*Save Me*). And I'm not sure what we've learnt about intimacy and distance, in fact it seems that the closer we are the less we talk. But in these repeated attempts to describe our own experience of intimacy, and the simultaneous attempt to stretch them out across physical and temporal distances we reveal ourselves, we are vulnerable and in these spaces we are able to communicate something that feels important with an audience.

Pete Phillips (Search Party)

3) Arm Ache (*effort and labour)

The arm is an amazingly adaptable tool. But after 11 days of flag waving I have muscle fatigue. But then again there has always been an interest in the sort of effort, the sort of labour, the sort of duration that necessitates a long post-performance soak in a nice warm bath. In the endless tirade of tragic stories about a made-up man called Trevor, the repeated soaking with half full/half empty cups of water until we are beyond wet through and the relentless attempts to light candles on a birthday cake with wet fingers and wetter matches (*The Long Walk to the Performance*). In the laps of a track I run until my feet blister, all the time you're shouting 'KEEP GOING JODIE'S HEART, JODIE'S LUNGS, JODIE'S FEET' (*Keep Going The Rhino!*). In the endless laps of Lavender Hill, a performance that doesn't stop until we catch one another (*Outside*), and the repeated back and forth, back and forth along a home-made corridor (*Corridor*). Or in the marathon 3-day Ping-Pong matches where I play for so long and you speak for so long that I start feel time slowing down and the ball becomes the size of a Beach Ball and you need to drink Lemsip in between the hoarse, raspy warm up texts (*Search Party vs...*). And then in the salt that stings your eyes, dulls your taste buds and can be found days later in ear holes and between toes, never quite washed away. (*Growing Old With You*). As if all this effort, all this labour is making the performance matter somehow. Or an acknowledgment that in this effort there is frailty, failure, accidents, mistakes, an inability to move the arm you want, forgetfulness, unrecognizability of a letter, of a word – moments where despite of and perhaps because of the effort and the labour the thing starts to break down – but at least we're trying.

Jodie Hawkes (Search Party)

4) Eleven Long Days (*duration and place)

The drinkers in the bars, the cyclists, the tourists, the walkers, the strollers, the parents with their pushchairs and their children all glance across the water, drawn to the unusual sight of a man in red waving Semaphore flags. But over the course of 11 days something changes. Like our 3-day marathon public Ping-Pong tournaments (*Search Party vs...*), my flag waving on Pero's

bridge, at first an oddity becomes familiar. It's a simple thing we're doing – talking with flags. But we're here day after day, same time, same place. And perhaps it is in the repeated dipping in and out of the project that makes it seem like something bigger – a part of the furniture. A convincing illusion because when so suddenly we are gone there is a gap, something has changed – like when the trees lining St Augustine's Reach have been too severely pollarded, providing more light and less shade, this place feels different. Or when thousands of amateur runners are plodding round St Augustine's parade, inspired or irritated by Heart FM's cheery pop classics, this place feels different. Like the pruned trees and the sweaty runners, us flag wavers reshape this place, in a way that is perhaps best measured by the moment of our absence.

Pete Phillips (Search Party)

5) Pete & Jodie (*autobiography)

We're a few days in, and an inquisitive scattering of passers-by are gathering at the foot of Jodie's pedestal. It's a foreboding sky, and the wind whips at the flags like a bird in flight. A man to the left of me, is standing very still, he squints into the distance trying to get a better view of where she is reaching out to. To Pete. 'What's all this then?' he asks. 'Some kind of art project?' Well, er, yes I begin the spiel, 'they are sending messages to each other...' I refer to the programme, point dutifully at the semaphore diagrams. He makes me feel faintly ridiculous. 'Do they know each other?' he continues, frown deepening. 'Well yes, they do. Very well. They live together. They have a child'. 'Well, why don't they just speak to each other then? Got something to say why doesn't she just go over there and say it to him'. I'm stumped. But he stays put, and takes the leaflet from my hand. And when I return later on, he is still there. Telling someone next to him all about it. Explaining about the messages. Smiling.

Kate Yedigiaroff (MAYK)

6) The People of this place (*audience and place)

Across a table tennis table in the Market square in the centre of Kuopio, Finland we meet a 17 year old trainee plumber called Matti (*Search Party vs Kuopio*). Matti, who having taken up our challenge and won a game of table tennis against us, called all his friends and told them to come down. Minutes later we hear the hum of teenagers on mopeds – the cavalry had arrived. Over the next three days he returns, he brings different people with him – as if when our backs are turned he's whizzing around on his moped, scouring the city for decent players to represent Kuopio. It seems to matter to him. And each time we heard the sound of mopeds echo across the square we knew Matti, the hometown hero was on his way back. To the point where he is as recognisable as us, and when people return to have another go or check on the score, they are relieved that Matti is still here. And of course its not just

Matti, every city or town we challenge has it's own heroes, people who become household names in the enduring narrative of these 3-day table tennis performances. And now we have these tags, personal offerings by people passing by, words and stories that have contributed to and defined a rich and varied conversation about separation. As the tags accumulate, our responsibilities shift. And what started as a domestic conversation between a pair of real-life partners, becomes a dialogue infused with the voices of a community reflecting on the nature of separateness.

Pete Phillips (Search Party)

7) The SEE SAW (*process: rehearsing whilst potty training)

Since having a third (very lively) person between us (our daughter) we've had to re-negotiate our working process. We've had to find other ways and spaces to communicate with one another. Conversations no longer take place in the rehearsal room (yet I'm not sure they ever did), now it's in the park across either end of the sea saw or long walks pushing a pram. And now with a (walking, talking) toddler we're finding that again there's need for new re-negotiations on how we might communicate. For a while we've been making work through a series of letters to each other, simple conversations stretched out of whole days or weeks despite our physical proximity. Understanding and misunderstanding each other, all the time, moving between closeness and distance, snatching pockets of time to work, to talk, to be together. And realising all the time that we are one of thousands, millions of people who are separated from loved ones, in whatever way you might take that to mean. And so the lines between work and life are increasingly blurred and it's impossible to talk about one without the other.

Jodie Hawkes (Search Party)

8) The Free Lunch (*the performance duo and their dramaturg)

"So the deal is you work with us.... NO, not all the time." Pete's face flickers (very slightly) with panic for a second. "... but on a number of days throughout the year. You drive to Bristol, sit in a basement, read fragments from my note book or from Jodie's note book; you see things 'on-their-feet' and ... well ... you dramaturg." "Is 'dramaturg' a verb?" I ask. "I don't know, but that's the kind of question you could usefully raise as part of the dramaturgical process." "Oh... right." Silence. "Then you drive home". "When?" "After you've finishing dramaturging." "If dramaturg is a verb." Silence. "So, does a dramaturg get paid?" Longer silence. "Well, we could put it into the next grant application: how much do you charge?" "I don't know." "Oh." Interminable Silence. Jodie joins in: "We'll pay your petrol." Pause. "And..." Awkward pause that borders on silence "...we'll buy you lunch." I brighten: "What... every time I come?" Awkward pause, bordering on silence, combined with a shared look between Pete and Jodie (a look that I get to know very well over the next eighteen months). "Yes" says Pete, with a hint of wait-till-I-get-you-home menace.

“EVERY time...” “So, there *is* such a thing as a FREE LUNCH: ha ha ha ha” Stop laughing. Silence.

19 March 2010: St Nicholas Market. Pie Minster. Ben has the last Steak and Ale Pie. Pete and Ben (No Jodie). Awkward. Will Pete get his wallet out? He does. Working on *Growing Old with You*. Letters to each other. One-on-one performance from Pete (43 Candles: the Victoria sponge sets on fire). We arrive at the idea of preservation. Salt? ‘Can we hang you, Pete?’ ‘Er...okay.’

7 July 2010. St Nicolas Market. Pie Minster (but Jodie wants a rather boring sandwich from elsewhere, which she doesn’t eat). Pete wears the same shirt. Jokes about the University of Chichester buying him a shirt (or a MacBook). Working on *Growing Old*. On the roof of the Old Vic. Not quite getting to work... Recapping what’s happened at Mayfest. ‘Did you get to hang, Pete?’ ‘No.’ Building towards Forest Fringe. ‘Can we hang you at Forest Fringe, Pete?’ Collective decision that it might not be best to try hanging Pete at the Health-and-Safety-Free-Zone of Forest Fringe. Write Text. Quite good actually...

21 August 2010. Edinburgh. Sandwiches from Tesco Express (missing Pie Minster.... Missing Bristol, frankly). Out on the Meadows: rehearsing *Growing Old* – feels strange to be ‘rehearsing’, but that’s what we’re doing. Student-theatre groups watching, think it’s a performance. They don’t get it. We do. Pete and Jodie talk quietly to themselves. Feel like a director. They feel like actors.

27 November 2010. St Nicholas Market. All bored with Pie Minster. But we still go to Pie Minster. Building to Inbetween Time. Text (again). We cut the idea of hanging Pete. Pity. Smoke. Some talk of working on *Save Me*. It needs a text. Or does it?

11 March 2011. St Nicholas Market. Moroccan takeaway. Feeling liberated. *Save Me*. Keywords: Bristol; Semaphore; Nautical; Harbour (or Suspension Bridge?); separation; living apart; including people, but how? Different from London, but how? 10 Days (or is it 11?). Feeling liberated at the end of the day.

13 April 2011. My Burrito, Broad Quay. Stepping out of our St Nicholas comfort-zone. A field-trip/site-visit. Feels along way from home. Very public. Feeling people are watching us, even now. Matthew and Kate take us to another level. A man wants to talk about semaphore, based on seeing the rolled-up flags. Might as well have been in Mexico.

19 April 2011. Back in St Nicholas Market, but we can't go back to pies now: something Spanish. In the basement at the Old Vic. Flags, flags, flags. Timings. Logistics. In the corner, writing, keeping out the way. We're ready. We're not ready. I'm keeping out the way.

15 June 2011. On my own. The funding has dried up. Pete and Jodie bring lasagne from home. There's only enough for two. I go back to Pie Minster. Arnolfini are interested in the book, so are we. Reading the tags. Don't get much further. Too many ideas. Almost worth paying for my own lunch.

Ben Francombe (Dramaturg, Search Party)