

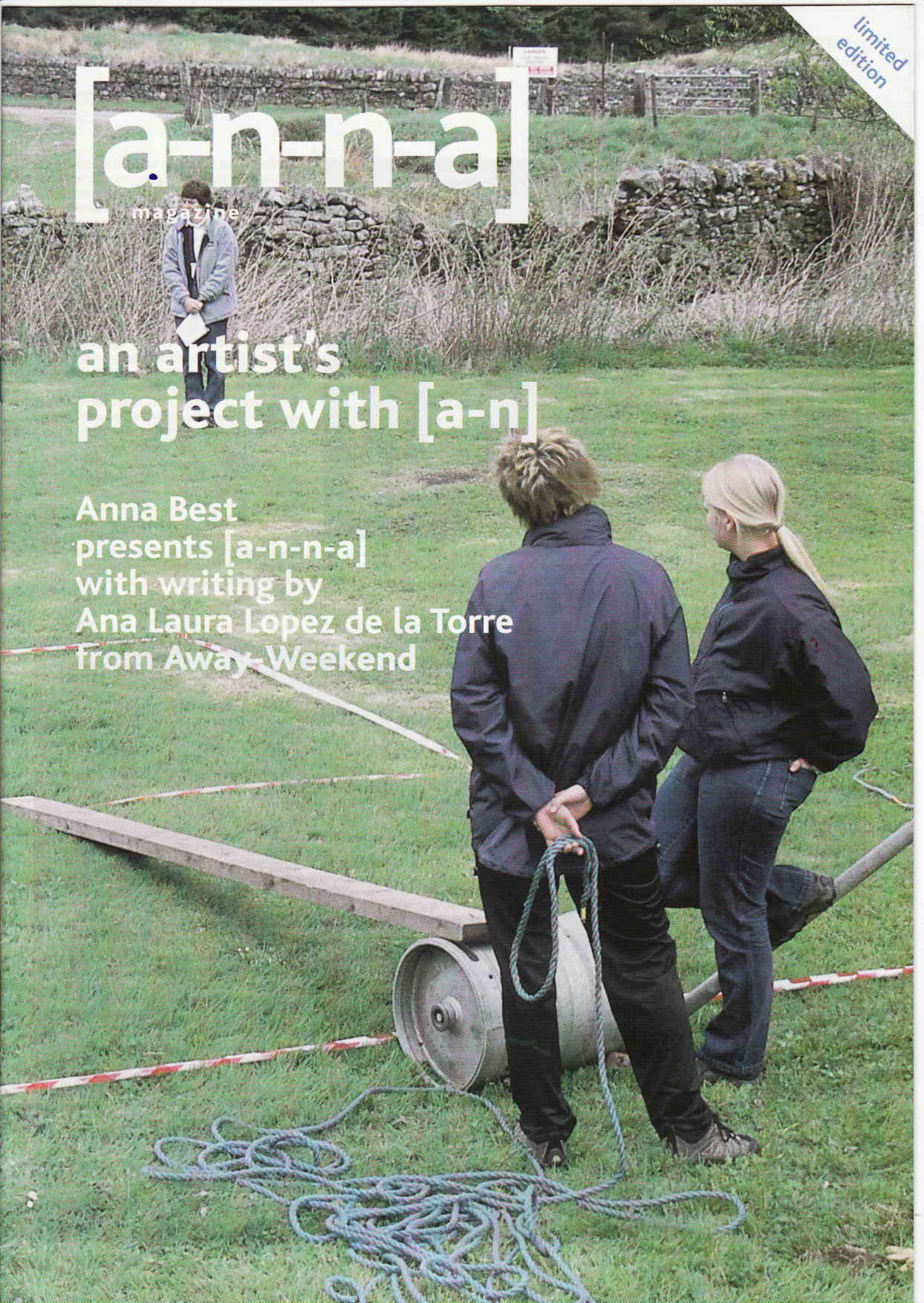
limited  
edition

# [a-n-n-a]

magazine

## an artist's project with [a-n]

Anna Best  
presents [a-n-n-a]  
with writing by  
Ana Laura Lopez de la Torre  
from Away Weekend



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## Intro

COVER	1	We arrive at the place, Reivers – a team building centre in Northumbria. As we get off the minibus, a couple greet us. We enter the house and the woman reads our names in pairs from a clipboard, we are shown to our rooms; we are asked to be down in the lounge in fifteen minutes. I am sharing a room with Anna, a nice big clear room, with a door to an ample terrace of wooden boards, running on top of the house's porch. From the terrace you can see green fields all around, and right across, a hill covered in trees.
INTRO & EDITORIAL	2	In the lounge Libby and Dave introduce themselves: <i>Any problem speak to us directly, better to know now than later.</i>
YOGA	3	<i>We are very relaxed about keys, don't take them away in case you drop them in the forest.</i>
TASKS	4	<i>You will see some individual customers around, but largely, we will have the place for ourselves.</i>
TASKS	5	<i>We are restricted by foot and mouth, technically we are not allowed into the forest.</i>
TASKS & ARCHERY	6	<i>Northumberland is "blessed" by midges (what's that?), they start coming out at night (???)</i>
QUAD BIKES & BADGERS	7	<i>A cigarette machine, and a pay phone, mobiles are not covered here.</i>
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used. The woman with short hair that sat next to me in the minibus asks: *Is she going to be gloves on or gloves off? Can we just be ourselves without fear?* I explain what I discussed with Anna: the writing will consist mainly of description and commentary. Her concern seems to be about subjectivity; personal opinion. I am not an objective recorder, there is no such thing as objectivity in documenting or describing. I will be framing things much in the same way as if I was using a camera, choosing where to direct my attention – voluntarily or involuntarily. Everybody is sitting around in the sofas, which have been pushed back against the walls to make room for the yoga lesson. Dave and Libby stand at one end of the sofas.

*This is a centre for training and development for senior executives, our objective in life is to be more effective. What we know... (lots of theory about team building) You won't be made to do anything you don't want, everything is optional.*

*Participation is crucial (people laugh at Dave's jokes). My background is in the pharmaceutical industry, at executive level, now I am doing what I've always wanted to do.*

*All staff in the centre are good facilitators, good with people.*

*We are here to serve a team, that's our concern.*

*We will go through a process of task, analysis and fun.*

## EDITORIAL

This project is a Year of the Artist National Media Residency hosted by [a-n] THE ARTISTS INFORMATION COMPANY in 2001. Anna Best was first invited by [a-n] to make a proposal in December 2000. She proposed a surprise weekend away, and a magazine. The three-part project explores [a-n]'s vision as an information provider and facilitator of artists, and has taken the form of a 'confidential' live event and a written text. The plan for a seminar arose through discussions with curators B+B (Sarah Carrington & Sophie Hope) about the need for increased visibility around this area of art practice. It also serves to bring the particular issues of collaboration and the model of the residency into a wider arena for debate.

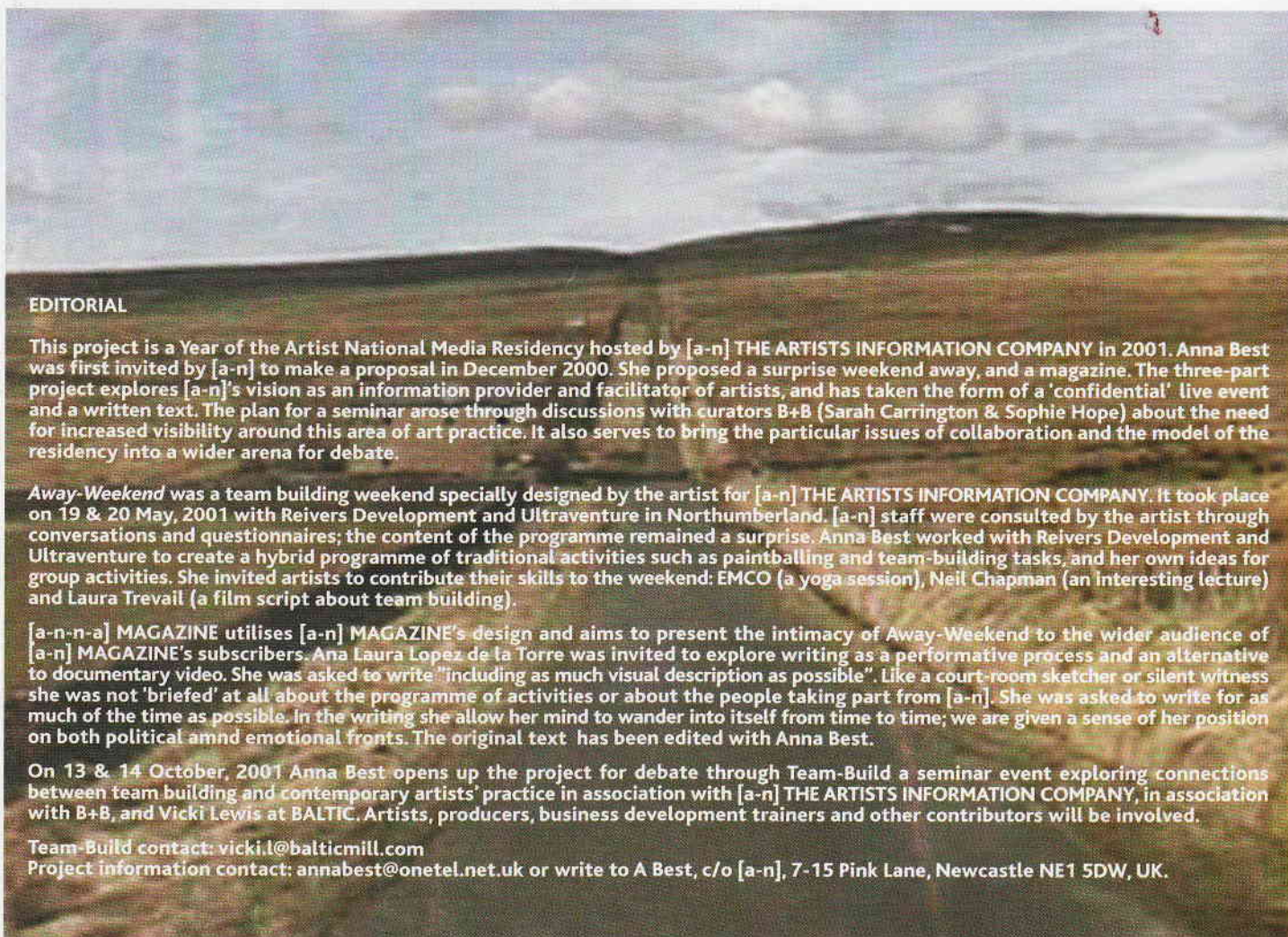
*Away-Weekend* was a team building weekend specially designed by the artist for [a-n] THE ARTISTS INFORMATION COMPANY. It took place on 19 & 20 May, 2001 with Reivers Development and Ultraventure in Northumberland. [a-n] staff were consulted by the artist through conversations and questionnaires; the content of the programme remained a surprise. Anna Best worked with Reivers Development and Ultraventure to create a hybrid programme of traditional activities such as paintballing and team-building tasks, and her own ideas for group activities. She invited artists to contribute their skills to the weekend: EMCO (a yoga session), Neil Chapman (an interesting lecture) and Laura Trevail (a film script about team building).

[a-n-n-a] MAGAZINE utilises [a-n] MAGAZINE's design and aims to present the intimacy of *Away-Weekend* to the wider audience of [a-n] MAGAZINE's subscribers. Ana Laura Lopez de la Torre was invited to explore writing as a performative process and an alternative to documentary video. She was asked to write "including as much visual description as possible". Like a court-room sketcher or silent witness she was not 'briefed' at all about the programme of activities or about the people taking part from [a-n]. She was asked to write for as much of the time as possible. In the writing she allow her mind to wander into itself from time to time; we are given a sense of her position on both political and emotional fronts. The original text has been edited with Anna Best.

On 13 & 14 October, 2001 Anna Best opens up the project for debate through Team-Build a seminar event exploring connections between team building and contemporary artists' practice in association with [a-n] THE ARTISTS INFORMATION COMPANY, in association with B+B, and Vicki Lewis at BALTIC. Artists, producers, business development trainers and other contributors will be involved.

Team-Build contact: [vicki.l@balticmill.com](mailto:vicki.l@balticmill.com)

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# Yoga

I ask people's names, I remember a few, Matthew, Steve (I have seen his name in an article in *Arts & Business*), Fran, Clare, Su, Richard. Em asks everybody to take their shoes off. They all sit on the carpeted floor. We are in the social area of the building, a long rectangular room with peach walls and low ceiling, and framed prints of landscapes on the wall. A bar with beer taps, green sofas, bronze light fittings. Su recommended I use mnemonics to remember the names of everyone.

Em asks the group to sit on their heels; some can't do it. She explains that if you can't reach a position you should use props (blocks), but she hasn't been able to bring any. She tells them to use cushions instead. Sitting on your heels, lifting up the front body, extension, close your eyes, forget about the journey.

Ooooooom... Most people have their hands folded on their lap. Em sings, her hands together as if praying.

An exercise to extend the back. Em shows the pose against the bar. They need to find an area they can lean against. Try to form a right angle with your bodies. Everybody find a place against the bar or along the bar. Someone asks: *is it supposed to be a right angle?*

Em is kneeling on all fours, lifting her hips until her legs are stretched, whilst keeping her hands on the floor. All the people around the room on hands and knees, amidst the sofas, and several cushions scattered on the floor. *I don't know why but I remember Salo*. Five of them are kneeling with their heads to the wooden panelled bar. The look like horses in a stable, the rural setting can be glimpsed through the windows. Some of them look up to check they are in the correct pose.

Em is wearing a t-shirt with an orange number six on the back. Here's a posture good for the back, Em looks towards where I am sitting and smiles. She says: *good for working at the computer*. Stretch your arms in front of you and interlock your hands. Lift the arms above your head, and stretch. Everybody is dressed in comfy clothes, barefoot. A phone rings, no one moves. White, grey, blue, black, no strident colours, only one girl is wearing a red t-shirt.

Next pose is the Head of the Cow; might be a bit stressful on the shoulders. Put your arms behind your back, one arm up, the other down, join your hands behind your back. Try now with inverted arms, someone says: *ughh, it is harder on this side*. Em explains that it depends if you are right or left-handed. When they leave the pose, several of them move their shoulders in circles.

Next posture: twist your arms around each other, interlock your fingers. People display different levels of ability in doing the exercises. Some of them cannot hold a pose for long. There is a very relaxed atmosphere, people laugh and joke about the way they look, the things they are becoming aware they can or cannot do with their bodies. Em shows the same exercise but with her arms interlocked behind her back. It seems to be a difficult one, only a few in the group can actually do it.



Everybody is looking for some wall space to lean their backs against. They start moving the furniture around, to make room. One of the sofas is pushed to the middle of the room. They look like kids playing. The room is so unsuited for yoga. They slowly start to make it theirs, to upset the regular layout of the furniture to accommodate their movements. Fran gets her camera out and takes a picture. Anna is also taking pictures. There is something very playful, very joyful in the air.

They lean against the wall. Em tells them to lift their arms up. As they do it, the lights fitted to the walls also come up. Everybody laughs, the first paranormal event of the journey. The blonde girl with the ponytail (Helen?) is standing right under a speaker. When she stretches her arms up, she looks as if she is holding the speaker up against the ceiling, a caryatid in jogging clothes. Anna takes another picture. Steve is standing in a doorway, his body tightly framed by the door. The sound of Em's voice fills the silent room: *with your hands and arms stretched above your heads, bend your knees and go down slowly*.

The next pose is called the Tree, a balancing pose. While Em shows them how to do it, they stand around the room like a small human forest. Stand sideways to the wall, arms stretched, lift your right leg towards the wall, and place your foot as far up your left leg as you can. They now look like a ballet troupe, arms up, like ballerinas. Some people lose their balance and **stamp** on the floor to stop their fall. Someone says: *my trousers are coming down*. I am sitting at one end of the room, and the green sofa that was pushed to the middle of the room is now between me and them. I feel I am entrenched behind an upholstered fence, with my computer on top of a white plastic crate, on top of the table. They stretch their arms over their heads and smile.

Fran, all dressed in grey, seems to be enjoying the session very much. She is very good and flexible. She bites her bottom lip, I can feel she is looking at me as I write this. Rebecca?, in a blue jogging

suit, looks concentrated. I am waiting for some idiosyncratic, personal movement, pose, gesture. I notice the aromatiser plugged in the wall. Matthew has his hand in his pockets, stands on one foot then on the other, scratches his head.

A moment of silence, the noise of the typing, and some birds singing outdoors. The sun comes and goes, sometimes shining through the window panes into the room. The girl in the red t-shirt sits very upright, looking out of the window. There is something very sculptural about the whole thing. A landscape of human figures accommodating to the shape and layout of the room.

Laying on your back, with your legs up the wall, a great way to relax. Rebecca tries to reach the light switch with her toes, to make the lights go up. Em tells them to stop talking, this is a relaxation moment but everybody is quite chatty, someone whispers: *shhhh...*

A quiet moment. Em look at me, smiles, and pulls her tongue out as she looks up to the ceiling. In the silence, a mechanical sound, like the air conditioning or something can be heard. The idyll of the countryside is put in check. Em tiptoes among the bodies scattered on the floor, comes to my table, and gets a drink of my mate.

Richard is the first one to sit up, folds his legs and looks out of the window. Everybody starts getting up, they all look as if they just woke up from a siesta. The noise level starts going up, conversations.

The yoga session is over, people rest on the sofas, some are putting their shoes on. Steve says: *the bit with the legs against the wall I didn't find relaxing at all*.

End of session.

## Task 1 – Jam Ex



After lunch the group is split in two, and walked to different spots in the wood – at the bottom of the hill facing the main buildings. Everybody has been given hardhats to wear. Richard seems especially reticent to wear his. Libby's team wear blue hardhats, Dave's team wear yellow ones.

We find the exercise ground in a clearing amongst the trees. There is a large blue plastic sheet stretched between two trees, with a triangular opening in it. The task involves recovering some of the objects concealed behind the screen and then suspending them using some poles provided. The triangular opening is the only obvious way to get through to the other side of the sheet where the objects are placed.

I sit on the ground with the laptop on my knees and get ready to observe and document. The group is given a blue sheet of paper with instructions detailing the task and the conditions to perform it. Libby tells them she won't be able to help them other than to clarify doubts about the rules.

Helen walks her way along the tape, puts her foot over it, she says: *this is what we are not supposed to do*. Matthew is reading the instructions and explaining them to the others. Fran is standing away from the group, just walking around, looking up into the treetops. Em is leaning against a tree wearing a daisy chain around her head. The voices are faint, swallowed by the vegetation.

All of them gather around the instructions sheet. Only Fran doesn't join in, she keeps walking around. The word *strategy* is used. Richard is finally wearing his hardhat. They seem to be delimiting functions in an intuitive way. Some concentrate on examining the hole in the plastic screen, trying to figure out how to retrieve the objects. Some look up into the trees, possibly trying to figure out how the objects could be suspended.

Cath pushes a pole through the triangular opening. She manages to lift up a red object that looks a bit like a LEGO block, about the size of a small stool, and with three steps on one of its faces. She swings it on the end of the pole, then drops it. Louise holds another pole with a mirror attached to one of its ends, and moves the pole around finding the right position to see the objects behind the screen. She issues instructions to Cath: stick it further out, sorry, further in, behind it and underneath.

Meanwhile, the others are walking around aimlessly, holding bits of rope. They all keep looking up at the trees, as if waiting for an answer from above. Helen now holds the pole with the mirror, while Cath and Louise look on. They establish a terminology of movements: *this is to rotate, this is to lift*. Someone says: *we got roughly twenty minutes*. Matthew holds the instructions and reads them over and over again.

They finally decide to lift the plastic sheet with the longer poles, a major breakthrough. Now they are able to see the objects. As I type I hear a voice asking: *how heavy is the red object?* They drag the objects into their work area quite unceremoniously, using the poles: the red object, a blue ball, a boot, a bucket.

I can see the other group in the background, just visible behind the trees. I see someone walking past holding a length of rope, looking quite determined. Richard reads aloud: *resources for recovering*. He says in a clear explanatory voice: *it is quite clear, we can use whatever was in the basket*. They all stand in a circle and listen to him without saying a word. Helen and Fran try to build a structure like the ones that support Indian tents, using three poles. Richard talks again: *who is going to make a decision about what we are going to do, otherwise we are going to miss the time scale*. They look up into the trees, there is a moment of silence.

Richard climbs on a car tyre leant against a tree, someone mentions they only have seven minutes left. He ties one end of the rope around the tree trunk, it's difficult to do it and at the same time maintain the balance standing on the tyre. Matthew takes over, and Richard goes on to tie the other end of the rope to a wooden stick, in order to pass the rope over a branch of another tree. He wants to use the stick as you would use a needle to pass thread through fabric. Five minutes left.

Matthew changes strategy, he now tries to throw the rope over the branches by rolling one end into a ball. The ball is now heavy enough to fly over the branches. Once they get the rope up the branch, they make a loop with it. Louise says: *right, there are about two minutes left*. The red object can't be touched, so Louise holds its weight using two sticks. The birds are chirping. At last, it's done. The red object is now suspended amongst the trees, like a weird heavy bird. Helen wants to take a picture. Anna gets the camera out. The group line up underneath the red object, and Fran asks if the object will get in the picture.

The group is taken back to the building into a board room, smart but casual, an oval table with chairs around it, a flip chart, a couple of small sofas. Libby asks them to repeat the words that best defined their mood on completion of the exercise. Fran – stressed, Helen – undervalued, Louise – exhausted, Cath – relieved, Matt – stressed, Richard – irritated. They are all sitting around the table, Matt and Richard on one side, the women on the other.

On the table there are glasses of orange drink, and a jug of water. Libby gives them an A3 sheet of paper with a pie chart on it. Each section will be used to mark their performance as a team in different aspects of exercise resolution. Libby asks them what are they going to give themselves for task understanding. There is consensus that it should be sixty per cent.

Motivation. Someone says: *we all panicked a bit*. Louise says they could give themselves fifty per cent, Matt reckons more, Richard thinks about sixty per cent would be fair. Their motivation was a bit uneven, with outbreaks of activity followed by paralysis. They get into a discussion about how adequate it is to work in subgroups, if that counts as teamwork. The conversation gets a bit tense. Cath reckons it would have been better to plan together how to suspend the object, rather than accepting one individual suggestion. Leadership wasn't resolved; it wasn't agreed who would make decisions. The word hierarchy is mentioned. Louise and Richard clashed, and two teams were created intuitively. Libby points out to them that a decision is a process.

Then they discuss the issue of skills. As it was a task they never had to do before, how could they know who would be good at doing what. For example tall people would have been better suited to hang things from the trees. Louise says to Fran: *you are brilliant at rolling fags*.

Libby asks the group what went wrong. She mentions a key decision was to go under the plastic sheet and drag the objects out. That wasn't a group decision but still was useful for the group. Richard thinks decision-making

was quite good. He says: *it wasn't neat, clean or tidy but so what, – it was done and it worked*. They worked on the task by exploring and experimenting.

Next they have to mark themselves on communication. Again they mention how they all panicked over time management and their ability to achieve the task. They finally settle for forty per cent. All along they seem really engaged, while I feel very detached. I cannot help but feel there is something unnatural about getting into this so intently.

Libby thinks some of the disagreements haven't been resolved, they need to talk about it more. There are a couple of things they should concentrate in bettering during next task, mainly leadership and planning. Louise raises the issue of enjoyment again. Richard says: *who says we are here to enjoy*. He thinks the objective is to complete the task, not to have fun.

Libby makes a diagram about problem solving, she writes on the flip chart: APLE – Analyse, Plan, Learn, Execute. The word LOVE is added, next to the word LEARN. At the end of the task, whether you are pleased with the result or stressed, you should know how to learn from the successes and failures. Libby takes a bit of Blu-tak and rolls it between her fingers. When they ask her where the tasks names come from, she acknowledges some of the tasks have obscure names. They were chosen by the people who devised them, they are personal names really.

They go on to talk about how competitive they could get, about the differences between play and work. Should they be having fun or performing to a high competitive standard? Louise thinks the two things are not incompatible. She says: *you have to strike a balance*. Richard tells Libby he thinks in the short run you shouldn't prioritise that people have fun, but that the task is completed to a satisfactory standard.

The yellow team walks past the window and waves goodbye. They start getting up and ready for the next task.

## Task 2 – Piranha



Everybody goes out again for the next task. I arrive late and the yellow team are already working, with Dave overseeing. We are now in another exercise ground, an open field to the back of the buildings. There are two stretches of tape delineating a square space in the centre of the field. They have already made some decisions, Sarah starts moving some bottle crates around, lifts a plank of wood, Rebecca is standing at a distance from the others, overlooking their movements and holding the instructions in her hand. She asks questions to the others, checks they understand what they are supposed to do.

The task involves them devising a system to cross the space between the stretches of tape. They can use the three plastic crates and the plank of wood, but they cannot touch the ground at any time. They spend a long time deciding what they are going to do, as if they were too aware of the need to closely follow the set of rules they have been given.

Gillian finally says: *I think we should just do it!* They start doing a trial outside the designated area. Like children playing but without any of the joy or the malice.

After a bit of practice, they come up with the answer. They will only use the crates, and just move one at a time, creating a mobile bridge to advance their way to the other end of the field. They start crossing; Sarah goes first, Steve follows. Rebecca takes a snapshot from one side of the exercise area, and Anna takes a picture from the opposite side. Sarah gets to the finishing line, and Steve returns to the starting point and gets Gillian. They are not allowed to talk, so Gillian makes gestures telling Steve that the crates should go closer to each other. I notice three persons jumping up and down to keep warm while they wait for their turn to cross. I hear the sound of Anna's clothes as she jumps.

Everything is so still I fear nothing spontaneous will ever happen. Rebecca is crossing now with Gillian. They are not crossing anything that can't be crossed just by walking. What keeps them engaged? Duty? Generosity? Respect? Lack of imagination?

Clare has her camera hanging from her neck and it bangs against the crate every time she bends down to pick it up. Su is crossing now with her. They put the crates down a bit carelessly. My desperation is such that I am thrilled by the slightest hint of messiness. They are the only ones that haven't laid the crates parallel to each other, and I am exhilarated, which relieves and worries me by turns. After two or three steps, they start aligning them properly, making sure they are parallel. Someone must be pleased. The crossing finishes and Rebecca takes a picture. There is no cheering or clapping hands. They still cannot talk, there is another part of the task still to complete. At last, someone speaks up: *we are finished*. Rebecca jumps and screams, Em whistles.

Dave approaches them and asks if the plank should have been left behind. He asks what their feelings are: Clare – happy, Su – cold; Steve – happy; Rebecca – satisfied. Someone says: *PROUD*. Dave asks them to expand on pride, group pride rather than individual. He asks them to identify elite teams: Steve says: *Manchester United*; and then adds: *Brazil 1970*, Rebecca says: *the waiters at 21 Queens Street*; a heart surgery team. Dave asks what makes them elite teams. People volunteer: results; each member is highly skilled; agenda; objectives. Dave says: *going back to the military and sports world, how do you think they feel?* Responsibility; Desire to win, to succeed; Individual responsibility for collective tasks; Difficult to get in and stay in.

They discuss what makes for effective silent communication. They agree that it is based on trust, and that it is as effective as discussion and verbal communication.

Su says she finds it interesting that the testing proved the plank wouldn't work; Rebecca that she always thought the plank wouldn't work, but as Sarah wanted to have a go, she agreed. Em is walking around with a mug in her hand looking a bit cold and desperate. Anna takes a picture of me typing. They are laughing at something that has been said. Again they make reference to silent language.

They all walk away, up the hill, looking happy. Anna talks to Em and me. She is still trying to decide whether to observe or take part. We ask her whether she feels she cannot engage unless she actively participates in the exercises. She says: *anyway, let's go in*.

When we walk in we find them standing around in a small room, drinking tea and talking about the experience using the language of team building. Em shows me a little picture of mountains, underscored by the phrase *quiet moments brings us closer to ourselves*. The group discuss what went on, and how to do things better, what was good, and what wasn't. The tasks have become central to their

conversation. There is no dissent, they all have their heads together in this. I wonder if I am normal.

Dave comes back to do the evaluation. They sit around a coffee table in the lounge. There is something really odd in the seriousness with which they can spend so much time discussing how wise it was to leave the plank behind. The overwhelming strength of the team was very real in Dave's words. He asks about enjoyment. Rebecca says firmly: one hundred per cent enjoyment. Communication was good. There were a few moments of hesitation at the beginning, Em is standing at the back of the room looking out of the window. Next time I look up she is gone. Anna wanders around, joins the group and remains silent.

They evaluate their use of time. Su thinks the only misused time was when Steve was jumping up and down. The others point out that it was actually experimentation time, which is as valid and useful as any other. Dave tells them there was quite a lot of honest communication; people pointing out error to others and acknowledging criticism. He says next task is more complicated, with more restrictions, and asks them to plan ahead how they are going to face the problems. They look at the plans they made for the previous task. The list is strikingly similar to the one they have just done. Dave presses for them to explain more clearly what are they going to do.

Dave says: Clare doesn't speak much but has very spot on ideas. He tells them communicating is telling the others what you are thinking. People should feel encouraged to speak even if it is only to express support. He suggests that they speak to each other more. He asks them: as individuals what are you going to do to improve the group performance? Rebecca: be more flexible and try not to push her ideas. Try convincing them if it is a good idea. Steve: try not to interrupt people once he gets an idea. Su: concentrate more. Clare: be more confident.

Dave tells them he is slightly worried because the next task will require a bit more swift action. He is afraid they might fall into what they call *analysis paralysis*, thinking so much you actually don't do anything. Dave introduces the name of a theorist in leadership, John something. He says there are three levels in effective leadership: achieve a task, build a team, and develop the individual. He presents the three levels as three circles. A good leader will be treating all the three at the same time. He asks what kind of leader will you have if one of the three rings of the circle is overlooked. The truth is being taught and learned in front of my very eyes, I am amazed. I think: what about hesitation. I remember Em saying: *there are no rebels in these groups*.

The lounge looks more and more like a peach coloured box. Dave speaks with the tone of someone that has read all the books and knows all the rules, encouraging, supportive. He keeps referring back to his diagrams to make things more clear. He tells them how these concepts are used in the commercial world, and how this is a guarantee that you are going to be successful. These rules create elite teams, and very good leaders. He asks for a leader to volunteer. Rebecca asks if people can be nominated. They are equipped with a diagram on how to be a good leader, pre-written, pre-typed.

The discussion loses momentum. Anna asks Dave to have a look at any material he will distribute to them beforehand. He defends the materials he is giving them as tools to equip them for better performance. Anna says: *yeah, yeah*. I can see people getting dressed for the next activity. They are beginning to move and behave like an elite team, or maybe I am just going completely mad. I hear Dave saying very emphatically: leadership HAS to happen. Su says: *you can get frustrated by consensus*. She mentions deadlines, and on how they might interfere with the very possibility of consensus.

## Task 3 – Nitro



I join the group in yet another exercise ground, which is more regularly laid out than the previous ones, more like a military training camp. The group is given some instructions and a number of props. The resources they have been given are more professional, but the number of choices have been restricted. The quality and quantity of the props, and the lay out of the exercise ground encourages structure rather than 'making do'.

The group has already specialised, divided themselves clearly in subgroups with assigned subtasks. They can now work in a team but without chaos. I start seeing the tasks interconnectedness, how one leads to another in some sort of grand demonstration of teamwork truths. What seems to be put forward is the idea that disorder, making do and improvisation are ineffective; while proper planning, proper tools, assigning definitive roles and tasks to individuals and having a leader guarantees success, pleasure, satisfaction, a rewarding feeling. Order is winning the day.

This exercise ground is out in the fields, a spacious and light space. I become very aware that during the first task they were working in the dark of the wood, closely surrounded by trees. Some more subtle hints, psycho-cosmic parallelism facilitated. In a certain way this task is a parody of the first one. They have to lift another red object (a small and heavy plastic container) using ropes and poles, and there are certain parts of the ground they cannot step in.

Even the way in which they are communicating to each other has changed. I suppose that's the whole point of being here, you could call it learning, if learning is merely a process of receiving information and assimilating it. Their voices sound more confident. They exchange ideas and lay out different options. They are communicating very rationally. Conflict is easing and less emotions are brought into play. They are here to perform a task.

Three of them are now standing on one end of the ground, behind a line of tape. At the opposite end, also behind a line, Richard is leaning against a metal pole. Matt stands close by, reading the instructions carefully. They all hold parts of a long rope, which links them as a team although they have to stay apart within their designated areas. Fran is standing alone in a small island half way between the two lines. They need to take the container from one side to the other without stepping out of their work area.

I look at them, handling the objects, standing in their assigned positions, and somehow it makes me feel extremely anxious. The whole thing reminds me of a labyrinth for rats. I wish they would all run away and disappear into the woods, naked or something. An act of wildness.

There is a little orchard surrounded by stone walls, a sense of neatness everywhere I look. I try to concentrate on the task. They finally have started to execute it, having settled for a strategy. The object is suspended from the rope and with considerable effort is being moved to the central island, Richard and Matt hold the rope high and the

container slides down towards Fran, who is alone there to receive it.

She now has to get it to Louise, Cath and Helen, who are waiting expectantly at the other end. Fran goes on her knees and starts pushing the container towards Louise. The distance between them is too big, and she has gone so far with her body that if she lets go of the object she will fall flat on her face. Libby steps in, grabs Fran by her coat and pulls her back into the island. When her hands leave the tank, she almost hits the ground.

Helen and Louise struggle with the weight of the container. Louise is standing on a plank of wood. She suddenly lets go, drops the object, and jumps off the plank making a dancing pirouette, with a joyful expression in her face. Feelings: Louise – joyous; Helen – tired, indifferent; Fran – irritated, we couldn't work out how to do it; Richard – failure, we failed in achieving the task.

Libby tells them how difficult the task really was. She says it was devised by someone very fit, as if to ameliorate their sense of failure. While she talks, Helen, Louise and Cath stand on the plank and jump gently up and down. Libby asks the group what are the issues they need to tackle. They volunteer some self-criticism. They didn't set up a good communication channel between islands, and task understanding was unequal. Libby points out that in a real work situation it is difficult to have the time and the space to work out understanding and overall vision across the group.

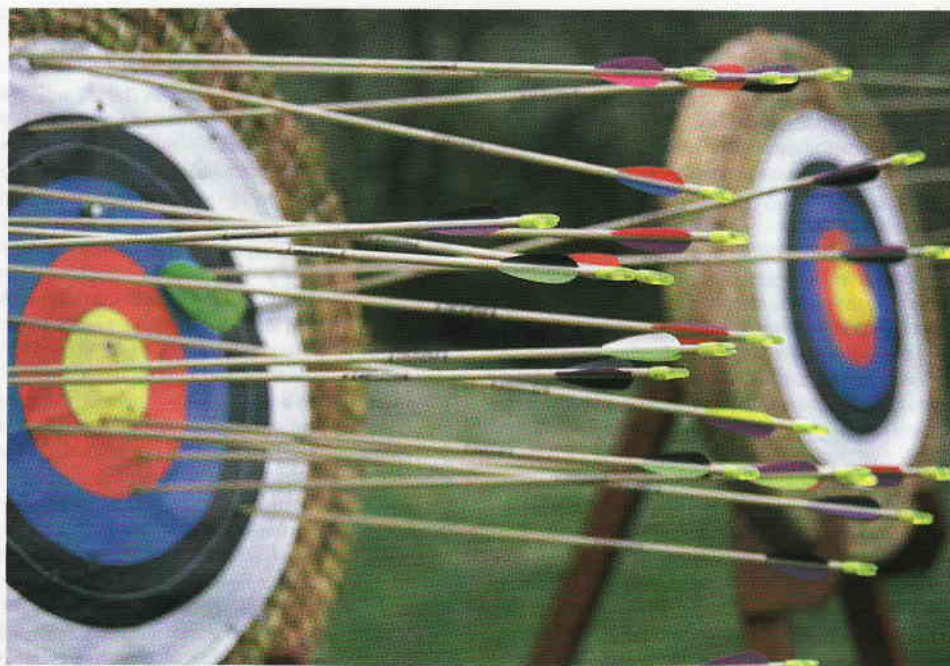
Matt was the leader for this task, his role could have been more effective if he had been on the central island. They acknowledge that in splitting the work into distinct areas of responsibility, they fractured communication. Libby insists that this was a more real scenario, a test on communication skills, and how can you work around communication problems. Louise asks if they were successful within subgroups. Richards says: *no, we failed because we didn't complete the task.* Fran says: *if it was a matter of life or death we would be dead, so we failed.*

Back in the meeting room they give themselves marks. Fifty per cent for task understanding, a low mark based on bad communication. Motivation: Louise thinks they were genuinely trying to achieve the task. They should give themselves a sixty per cent. Planning wasn't good. Libby explains: you can't plan successfully if you don't analyse well. They agree they deserve a very low mark on planning. Someone makes the mark on the chart, someone else asks: is it two per cent or twenty per cent? I hear: *it is two per cent.* They all laugh.

Leadership: this is the first time someone was acting as an official leader. They discuss the things that Matt did effectively, and the things that he could have done to make the task more successful. They give leadership a fifty per cent mark.

They change places around the table, and the atmosphere in the room lightens up, becomes more dynamic. They go into a heated argument. They seem to be really troubled by their mistakes and not getting things right. When they are in disagreement they become much more lively as a group, they are much more interesting to observe, more complex, more confrontational. Radical democracy instead of consensus.

Giving themselves a mark for enjoyment, they go through the funny moments. They laugh remembering when Fran was stretched out, clinging to the container for dear life. Louise stretches her arms towards Fran and shakes them, pretending to be physically strained. They give enjoyment a fifty per cent mark. Libby announces there will be a fun activity next. They will discuss the rest in the evening or tomorrow. Let's all meet outside in five minutes.



## Archery

We are driven in a 4x4 to a spot about five minutes away from the main buildings, where there are two war tanks and an army lorry. The place looks like a paramilitary training camp. We walk into a wooden construction, an octagon with all its perimeters roofed, and a large and clear space in the centre, a bit like a rodeo. There are wooden benches and tables all along the walls, the wood that the place is built with is burnt black for added effect. I hear Dave referring to this place as 'the stockade'. There are strings of red and blue light bulbs, like the decorations used in village fiestas.

The group are handed blue overalls, and asked to wear them. They are told they will do archery and quad biking. They start getting into their protective gear, there are some problems with sizes; Fran asks if she can get a smaller size. When they are ready, they gather for a group picture. They are split into two groups, who will take alternative turns to do the activities. The group that will do quad biking first are handed motorbike helmets. They leave with Dave for the quad biking ground behind the stockade.

I join the other group. Libby takes us in the 4x4 to the archery site, at the foot of a slope. There is a small sheltered construction, and beyond a barrier are six targets, colourful circles pinned to a straw base. A middle-aged man is waiting for us there. He introduces himself, his name is Doug and he will be in charge of showing the group what to do. He asks their names, I am sitting away from them at the computer. He turns to me and asks my name. When I answer he says something about my glasses, I don't understand, but don't ask him to repeat it.

Doug shows the group how to place the arrow on the bow, and how to shoot. He then starts bringing leather protection pieces for them to wear on their arms and fingers. This takes a long time to do as he has to go around showing each person. I decide to have a go. He helps me to fit the protection pieces. I shoot an arrow and it doesn't even make it half way to the target. I am surprised at how strenuous it is.

I am sitting under the shelter, and there are bits and pieces of archery gear all around me. They start shooting. The pace of things is so slow, and the excitement is so mild, I am desperately trying to engage or I will go mental. I have never

been to an archery ground before. I don't know how the real thing looks, but here it all looks a bit phoney. I try to concentrate on the performance of the archers, Richard is a very good shot, and shoots one arrow after another without interruption, looking focused and serious. Cath hasn't hit her target yet, but doesn't seem to be too bothered about it. She keeps her arrows lined up along the fence. She moves casually about and ends up knocking all her arrows down onto the ground. Clare has hit her target twice. She has a very nice style, very relaxed. When she finishes all her arrows, she turns round and asks Doug with a sweet tone: can I have some more? Helen has also done quite well, the same as Fran. Sarah has scored once.

They walk up to their targets to fetch their arrows. Doug pins half-inflated balloons to the bull's eyes. Now they have to try bursting them with an arrow. The targets are lined up right at the bottom of a very steep slope.

In the distance I can see a training circuit that looks like the ones used in the army. This place feels like a weird cross between a clandestine paramilitary training camp, a spaghetti western film set, and a rich kid's garden party.

People concentrate on their shooting, there is not much to describe and I start getting edgy again. I find it hard to believe that this can be sold as entertainment. It makes me wonder how boring your life can be. There is so little actually happening, just the same thing again and again. The feeling of the day so far is that you have to repeat the same process, go through the same routine over and over until you perfect it. The archery seems like a metaphor for the tasks they've done before, as if to make the message hit home in a subliminal way. Someone sets a target, then tells you the best way to hit it. You try your luck, and then it is just a matter of repeating the process until you get it right. Chance and repetition: the founding principles of behavioural learning.

All the girls are standing next to one another in a line, wearing their blue overalls. They stretch the arrows in their bows, and Doug takes several snapshots of them with a couple of their cameras. Su joins me at my improvised desk. She came with Libby a few minutes ago. She tells me she went with the quad biking team, but the fumes from the bikes make her sick.

## Quad Bikes

Libby drives us to a different spot, a very wide field surrounded by wooden fences. In the distance we can see the other group still riding the quad bikes. I have brought with me a high stool, and I sit there, just outside the fence. My group start walking across the field towards the biking area. I hear them laughing and shouting to the others as they get closer. This is clearly the hot spot of the day. They reach the far end of the field and stand together, looking at the bikers going round some sort of circuit. From where I am it is virtually impossible to see who is who. I notice someone is riding a bike while standing up.

I am bored and feel detached. There is the stillness of death in the air, but maybe it has to do with my position as a silent witness. I can see the group but I can't make out individuals. Sometimes the sound of their voices reaches me, I hear something about a helmet. Someone gets on a bike and rushes off up the hill. I can hear the sound but the bike is soon out of sight, hidden by the trees. The group that was biking before is now walking towards me. They will be picked up by Libby and taken to the archery site. As they approach the spot where I am sitting, some of them take pictures of me on the silly stool in the middle of this rocky patch. They all look very happy.

Over in the distance the other team is already sitting on their bikes and listening to the instructions. The landscape around us is very beautiful. The field is a flat strip of land enclosed by hills covered in trees and bushes of different shapes and colours. Birds are singing everywhere. I start to think about what I am doing in relation to what a camera can do. Also I have to consider Anna's expectations and how I can relate and respond to them. We have agreed that visual description needs to be the focus. How to make the writing more visual? When I write I tend to think too much in terms of how the words will sound. Image and word: I remember just a couple of days ago someone mentioning Spanish visual poets.

Maybe I should use my boredom as a tone and make the writing quite deadpan. I am interested and moved by little gestures, by the small things that happen when you are caught off your guard. I think that's what I resent about this experience. I find the purposefulness of the whole day very exhausting. A deliberate way of getting to be with each other is being put forward here.

It has to do with putting on a performance, with articulating things clearly, with being effective. It's as if the real you was too messy and too unstable to allow for communication and collaboration with other messy and unstable selves. So you are taught how to put all this aside, how to be a good team player in the dream team.

There is no time whatsoever dedicated to hedonism, not even a little luxury allowed, a very army style. One of the first things that struck me was that after lunch there wasn't time allocated for coffee and siesta, or even to hang around chatting at the table. I immediately thought: you would have a riot if there were any Latinos in the group. The total programme proposes a very sanitised way of being with each other. As in the army, you should only engage in exchanges with others using the correct language, the correct tone, and never letting your emotions get in the way of task resolution.

After what feels like a very long introduction, they finally start to go around on the bikes, one after the other. They circle around the field. After the first round, they get some more instructions from Dave. They start going round again. Someone's bike gets stuck in a pit. The driver is trying to get the bike out but can't. I hear the others laughing. Dave is now teaching the next one in the line how to drive through this pit. I hear him shouting: keep going, come on, keep doing it, smooth! Then he says: *gently, gently, well done.*

Dave gets back on his motorbike and everyone follows him on yet another circuit. I am fucking freezing because I am not wearing overalls, and have been sitting out in the cold for too long. I can't write anymore.

I decide to walk up to where the bikes are, to see if I can get my blood running again. Cath is standing by the side of the quad bike circuit, taking pictures. She tells me she didn't like the bike and got off. We chat for a bit. I now see the bikes close up, and the obstacles that they are driving through. I agree with her that it does look a bit scary. There is a wooden bridge and landscaped slopes and ditches and pits. The quad bikes are huge, it must be almost like riding a camel.

Dave rides past us, and stops. He says to Cath: get on the back, I'll give you a ride around the circuit.

I think: nice gesture.

## Badger Watch

After dinner people start to move into the lounge, relax, listen to music. During dinner there has been some deliberation as to whether people wanted to go badger watching. I have never heard of such thing. I am told it is a very English thing. Dave talks to the group and makes it sound rather unappealing, it is going to be cold, muddy, lots of midges and no certainty of any badgers. Still, a few of them want to do it; I want to go myself.

The caps we have been given are amazing. They are designed to protect us from vicious midges. Running on top of the cap's visor there is a pocket where a black net is hidden. If you pull it out, it covers your head, like the nets beekeepers wear.

I start becoming aware that this is a very different experience of nature from the one I have. We are asked to keep total silence, so as not to scare away the badgers. They are called *huronos* in Spanish, I have never seen one, such an exotic European animal. I am told you have to stay still until they come out and you can see them. We reach a spot, still on the footpath, and we line up along the fence.

Behind us is the forest, and ahead of us a clear valley closed by a hill covered in beautiful trees. It is late but the sky is still clear. We seem to be concentrating on the roots of a dead tree trunk. I want to ask if the badgers live under the tree roots, but we are supposed to keep very still so I don't ask.

I go into the trees, sit on the ground and get the laptop out. The light of the screen is the only light coming from the forest; the noise of my keyboard is the only sound, it feels very intrusive. I worry that maybe because of my typing, the badgers won't appear. I have a strong feeling of inappropriateness.

No one is wearing the nets over their heads yet. They look like Prussian soldiers with the net hanging to the back of the caps. They stand still and in silence. I look at them, and further away at the hills and the sky. There is still light and a strange mist. I think this is how a sunset looks when it is cloudy. More midges bang against my screen, they are attracted to the light, and I am blinded by it.

It is quite reassuring to know there are no snakes around. The forest feels lifeless, there are no insects making sounds or shining in the dark, no frogs or toads crying. As I write this, I hear the sound of an owl. I am such an alien here, everything that seems to be perfectly normal for them, is a revelation to me. I have a total sense of discovery.

I am seeing my first sunset without sun ever. The sky is still bright but it is very difficult to see, we are at that time of dusk in which the light is low but blinding. The stars start to appear, shining softly through the darkening sky. I try to orientate myself but I don't know this sky, I don't recognise the stars very well. I can't tell where the south is, this adds to my feeling of strangeness. Rebecca passes me a flask with whisky. I have a sip and it is nice and burning in the throat.

Everybody looks relaxed, tired, a bit drunk maybe. They seem to be enjoying. The house is very welcoming. Dave and Libby are very relaxed about the place. We have moved things around to fit our needs. There are bits of clothing all over the place, and several pair of shoes casually dropped in corners, under the tables. The bar is open. People get drinks, and chat to Doug and Dave as they stand behind the bar. I go out into the terrace to smoke a cigarette; the night is very still. When I leave my room to join them downstairs, I see there is the picture of an owl on the staircase wall.



photograph by Fran Bird

# Paintball Battle

During breakfast Louise comes to our table and after some hesitation, tells Anna that a group of people, herself included, don't want to do the paintball battle. She wants to know if that's OK. Anna doesn't answer, she doesn't seem very happy about it. She has told me she really wants to video the battle with Sergio Leone soundtracks. Anna finally suggests making it shorter, and allowing some time for the group to go on a walk or have a rest before lunch. As they negotiate, Dave joins in the conversation. There is some joking about a rebellion in the making. Dave sounds really heart broken about the fact that some of them are against the idea. He keeps insisting that it is great fun. At the end Louise and the other 'rebels' agree to give it a try. We get ready and leave the house.

We are taken in an army truck to the stockade. I have a very visceral reaction to all their military gear. As Dave helps me up the back of the truck, I tell him it is quite a daring thing to ask a South American to voluntarily jump in an army truck. He replies: *don't worry, we won't make you disappear*. At the stockade, three young men greet us. The group is asked to wear camouflage gear. One team gets uniforms with a green, brown and black camouflage pattern; the other team's clothes are green, red and black. I hear Dave referring to the former as the 'British army', and the latter as the 'Swiss army'. I find it rather strange as I always think of Switzerland as a neutral country; not very likely to go to war. They all get dressed, and then take pictures of themselves wearing their military costumes.

Dave gathers them in front of a flip chart, and gives them a bit of a lecture about warfare. He writes keywords about teamwork on the chart. He mentions there is an added factor now, it is a (simulated) matter of life and death. Anna takes a picture of me writing, and tells me I look very glamorous in my sunshades and wearing lipstick amidst all the military craziness.

From where I am sitting I see them all standing in the centre of the ring. Some look amused, some seem to be a bit anxious. The guys that gave them the clothes are getting the guns ready. Then they hang around, chatting, dressed in blue shirts and trousers, and wearing luminous yellow vests. We have been told it is the first time they have a group mainly comprised by women. We must be quite a weird bunch for them, me with my computer, Anna with her video camera and funny requests.

Anna takes a picture of Dave imparting war strategy and combat techniques to the two teams; Rebecca takes a picture of me writing. As the weekend progresses I am becoming more and more of a spectacle, and by now I figure rather prominently in the visual documentation that supposedly I am here to substitute. I don't mind it too much, I guess it balances the power I have been given to observe the group. Some small brown and reddish flowers are falling from the trees and over their heads. Anna's camera is standing on its tripod to one side of the group. I hear Dave saying: *this body fires, this body fires, this body fires, then it falls*.

On one of the tables there is a row of facemasks waiting to be picked by the 'soldiers'. The sound system where Sergio Leone's music will be played is next to them. On another table there is a row of helmets.



Dave warns them not to shoot the marshall. Only now I realise it is not a chaotic battle -- free style like a pillow fight -- but a simulation of real combat. There is competition involved, one team has to win.

Dave is explaining that decisions need to be taken beforehand, about who does what in the battle-field. Richard moves the pebbles on the floor with his foot and keeps his eyes down. Doug brings a gun and shows them how to shoot, how to lock the safety catch. When he shoots the gun, it's quite a shocking and violent thing. Fran is standing opposite him, holding her face in her hands with an anguished look that I completely empathise with.

He tells them: *if you are shot on the back, put your hand back and do a paint check to see if you have been killed*. He does a short run shooting, everybody moves out of his way. Don't worry about being shot by your team mates. He says: *if you shot yourself... everybody laughs*. He shows them how to wear the masks, they need to wear a balaclava underneath. More advice: *if someone hits you in the face and you can't see don't take the mask off, better to lose your sight temporarily than permanently. If paint goes in your mouth, well, it doesn't taste good*.

Louise looks back to where I am sitting and makes a mocking gesture of horror with her lips. They put their masks on. They look so weird, like soldiers, but of a variety of sizes and shapes you will

never see in a real army. They actually look quite sweet, standing around, without the stiffness of posture of proper soldiers. I am seeing the first cuddly army ever!

One team gathers close to me to plan their strategy. Dave comes round to take them to the battlefield. The battlefield runs along the side of a slope, and it is considerably large. It is enclosed by a high screen of green netting on the upper side, by wooden fences on the far ends, and it peters out into the forest at the bottom of the slope.

The two groups walk in the field and have a practice shooting a target, a cut-out man, with bright pink paint. Dave and Doug are wearing yellow masks that make them look like *Star Wars* characters.

Anna moves around in the field carrying her camera. The two guys at the stockade tell me how much fun it is to shoot. I can't help but disagree. I find it too violent, even as a game. I imagine another type of destructive activity being played out as a game, shooting heroin up your veins. I wonder if that would be funny.

Each team take its position in the battlefield, the Spaghetti Western music starts. The battleground is littered with wooden constructions: barracks, fences, watch towers. There are even trenches complete with sand bags. The music is very loud and it travels over the battlefield and bounces against the hill back to us. The effect is





overwhelming. Each army starts from one side of the battleground. Their task is to find and rescue a body hidden in the centre of the field. Dave has told me the body is a dummy he has made with old clothes and chicken wire, using his daughter as a template. Very charming.

They start running, both teams are advancing through the field, and I hear the first shots being fired, I have settled for sitting on a stool by a gap in the fence. I have to wear a mask in case a stray shot hits me, which, added to my glasses, make me feel I am inside a coffin. The team on my left are shouting something to each other. Their voices echo just like the music. There is more shooting. Two soldiers hide behind a small fence and shoot from behind it. Su runs across the field, pulls her mask up and shouts something to Dave. He shouts back angrily: put your masks down. Fran walks casually across the field, and is shot on her leg. Dave walks her out. Someone asks: *what's happening?* Su leaves the battlefield, comes up to where I am sitting, and tells me Richard shot her. When they are shot they need to put their arms up and wait for a marshal to come and take them out.

In the distance I see a member of the Swiss team dragging the dummy body towards a shed where their team are hiding. Someone walks past holding a gun up, as if surrendering. The wooden barracks and fences are splattered in pink paint. I am amazed at how quickly the whole thing has happened.



As they leave the battleground, I see Fran is holding her trouser leg up. She has a massive bruise on her calf, and another one on her thigh. Everybody that's been shot mentions how painful it is. They weren't prepared for it. They look shocked by the experience.

I sit next to where one of the teams is evaluating the task with Dave. They discuss how their communication fell apart because of the music. They couldn't hear each other, and visual contact was impossible as people were always sheltering behind the wooden constructions. Richard is sitting across from me, still wearing his head scarf and looking very cool, a bit like a mediaeval knight.

Dave tells the group how real armies move and work, the kind of problems they encounter and how they get round them. Real soldiers do a 'double tap', just two shots. He tells them: *you were shooting at least fifteen*. Steve says he got caught in Louise's mad firing, and still didn't get shot. They all agree they need to work out their strategy better. The defence team should go ahead first, covering the rescue team, while there should be also someone covering their backs. Having analysed what the problems were, they start moving back into the field.

I also take my position, I must look so weird, in my white fleece and wearing a mask, sitting with a laptop by the edge of a fake battleground. Anna is going around in her camouflage gear, videoing the set. I can see her across me, filming me as I type.

The two teams are still getting ready for the second round, planning their strategy. I smoke and play some music in my computer. I can see one of the teams talking to Dave, fitting their masks, and pointing at different places in the battleground. When we arrived here it was sunny, now the clouds are closing in. Someone, I think Richard, is in the middle of the field, lying flat on the grass. Someone else climbs over a wooden structure, another one strolls casually among the wooden barracks, holding a gun. The teams are finally ready and I see the Swiss team

walking to take their positions; one of them waves to me.

The amount of time that it takes them to get ready is so disproportionate to the actual time in battle. Now that I know how hard the paintball bullets hit you, I am a bit weary of being shot by accident. I see someone right across from me, hiding behind a wooden fence and shooting bright green paint. Someone small – Fran? – runs across the field along the lower side of the slope. The whole team is slowly advancing towards the lower end of the field. Steve has been shot, and stands close to where I am, giving tips to his team. He runs in and gives his gun to someone crouching behind a shed with a broken gun. There is heavy shooting.

I can't see anyone now, the battle is taking place at the further end of the field. Then I see the British team has gathered back at their base, and are starting the offensive all over again.

There is a lot of random running and random shooting, no-one seems to know where the hidden body is. The music is still playing but this time round it is not so loud. Anna is standing between the marshalls (Dave and Doug), and still filming. Someone is violently shaking a gun that seems to be blocked. Then she puts her hand up, which is the signal to get a replacement gun. A paintball hits the ground at my feet. I don't know where it came from.

Dave walks a 'killed' soldier out, someone one runs along a fence. This time round, the battle is longer and more strange. Most of the time I can't see anyone, sometimes I hear shooting, which is interspersed with moments of calm. Now and then there is a shot, seemingly without aim. Far in the distance I see someone searching the inside of a shed. Someone jumps into a trench, more wounded soldiers are walked out. Anna takes a picture of a female soldier waving the gun over her head. There is some more shooting in the distance. From where I am sitting it is impossible to tell what's going on. The sun comes

up again. I see a head sticking out of a trench. Anna films me wearing the mask and holding the computer on one knee as I write. The shooting recommences, then another silent gap. The battle seems to go on forever. The smell of the mask I am wearing makes me feel sick. The music escalates into a grand finale, adding an epic feeling to the action. Someone that has dropped a paintball, reaches out from behind a fence to pick it up, and puts it back in the gun. I notice there is an abandoned truck at the back of the field. War is finally over. The marshalls shout: *this way out!* And all soldiers dutifully follow their orders.

Back at the stockade, the group starts taking part of their camouflage gear off. They look sweaty and very thirsty. Someone says: *I need to have a shower*. They talk to each other about who shot who. Matt is leaning against a wooden pole holding a plastic cup in his hand, and looking a bit spaced out. Fran smokes and tells me that they ran out of ammunition. They were supposed to get some more from the marshalls, but it didn't happen, so they were shouting and swearing to try and catch the marshalls' attention. She asks me if I got the swearing, but I couldn't hear anything but the cowboy music.

Anna gives me the Sergio Leone CD, and I play it in my laptop. She tells me Dave is very happy that she added the music to the experiment. He had been thinking about having music as a regular feature of the exercise, and it has been a good test. He wants to play the *Apocalypse Now* soundtrack. The group is standing in a circle talking, while the DJ guys pack up the sound system, roll up cables, and put equipment in cases. They told me they only work here occasionally, if there is a party or a dance night.

We all get into the truck to be taken back to the house. We drive past Anna and Dave, who are walking back, talking and looking very concentrated on their conversation. In the truck, people are very quiet, looking tired, or troubled. When we arrive, everybody disappears into their rooms to get ready for lunch.

# The Quest for the Orb of Exciting Power

After lunch the group gathers in the lounge. Anna introduces the next activity: the task is to make a video from a script that has been written by Laura Trevail, a student Anna met in Brighton. The only information she was given were the names and pictures of the participants in *Away-Weekend*. Anna explains she will be the camera operator, just doing what they tell her to do. They have to work as a team, and decide how they want to go about it. She hands out copies of the script to everybody. They will be responsible for all the tasks involved in film making, from production to acting. Anna suggests that they divide roles. She says: *it's a time-based task, starting now 1:15pm til 3pm.*

They are all sitting on the sofas in the lounge, having tea. They start reading the script, they laugh when they read certain bits. Someone asks: did she know who we were when she wrote the script? I am sitting at a table at the back of the room. Anna walks up to me, and gives me the synopsis of the script typed on an A4 sheet of paper.

Anna gives them additional information. They will need to make some props, there is some cardboard and paper she brought for that purpose. She encourages them to use their creative imagination, to get organised in teams, to assign themselves specific roles. She then says: *just do it, try not to stop or we will run out of time.* People look very relaxed and happy; there is a lot of giggling. Anna sits back on a sofa and looks at them.

## THE QUEST FOR THE ORB OF EXCITING POWER

The synopsis lists everybody's names and assigns each individual a character. They laugh at the personalities they have been given in the script. Someone says: *it is a kind of drama, a melodrama.* Someone else asks: *what kind of look are we aiming for?* People volunteer ideas: Camp. Shaky camera. I hear them reading keywords from the script out loud: a smoking machine, the castle, foot and mouth issues. Gillian asks: *can anyone make props?*

Anna tells them she will show them where the stuff to make the props is. Dave walks past carrying an umbrella and a helmet. Gillian points out they should first decide who will be in charge of what, she says: *everyone can act.* She asks if anyone has any particular skills. They assign themselves roles quite intuitively, Gillian will be the producer, Louise will be the director, Helen goes to the sound team, Cath to props.

Gillian fits very well in her role as producer, assigning roles to people and checking who can and wants to do what. I hear Matt saying: *lets not worry about that.* Richard and Matthew will do locations, although Gillian says she doesn't know exactly what it entails. The two men have a quick chat and decide they can't do anything until they talk to Louise.

People start getting up and moving around to carry out their assigned tasks. Only Louise and Richard stay in the lounge, sitting together on a sofa and looking like a real film director and her location manager having a work meeting. Louise says: *I think you are trying to lead me...*

The production team gathers in another room, they are all busy doing different things. Su is highlighting bits of the script; Steve is colouring the lid of a cardboard box. I go to get myself a glass of water and find Rebecca in the kitchen getting some props: a tray full of crockery. She shows me the props list. I read: demo images, foot and mouth images.

Anna comes to see me and tells me Neil is here, he is having lunch in another building. Anna has asked him not to join the group until lecture time. I go to say hello to him, he's eating some Chinese food. He tells me Dave will take him on a tour of the place once he has finished his dinner.

I go out on the front porch and sit on a wooden bench with the computer on my lap. Sarah and Helen are sitting on the steps close by, going over the script together. I hear music coming from inside, fairground music. People wander in and out of the building. Sarah and Helen get up to leave, carrying the stereo. They tell me they are in charge of the sound and of moving props around, and they are also the happy witches of the story. Several of them start coming out of the house carrying chairs to a clear spot to the left of the building.

Richard runs past where I am sitting. Someone asks him if he knows where Louise wants the chairs. Anna follows Louise around with the camera. Louise jokes with Richard, tells him to go and get fifty chairs. He retorts: *you might get a strike on your hands.* She replies: *you are getting paid.* Steve appears carrying a cardboard box and a large sheet of paper with some demons drawn on it. The script seems to be related in some way to the foot and mouth crisis. I see a sheep skull sticking out of the box Steve has brought out.

The shooting starts. They have prepared several sheets of paper to be used as inter-titles. Two of them hold the first one up in front of the camera. The film opens with the words: THE WORLD. The card drops to reveal two blue helmets taped together as a makeshift globe, with the continents made out of pink paper. The fairground music plays, although it could also be some kind of military march. After doing the initial sequence they stop. There is a bit of deliberation as they realise that all the editing needs to be done in camera. They agree they need to have everything really sorted before shooting.

Louise says: *it has to look very amateurish.* Gillian answers: *it doesn't have to, it's going to.* Su pops her head out through the door and says: *don't you think we should put the name of our sponsors in the film credits?* Everybody looks at her in silence. She cracks up laughing.

## A TIME OF DEATH AND RUIN

The sheep skull is held in front of the camera by a finger that swings it sideways. Louise chucks a sheet of paper over the veranda. I can now read the next card: DISEASE STALKS THE LAND ON CLOVEN HOOVES, followed by a drawing of a demon. Anna focuses the camera on the navel of the demon. The sheet of paper flies backwards in the wind, someone hurriedly pulls it down. The paper falls to the ground.

Anna shouts: *cut!* I feel someone standing behind me and reading what I am writing. Gillian picks the papers up from the floor, someone tells her: *don't trash them.*

Anna is standing with the video camera hanging from her hand. She talks to the person standing behind me. It's Dave. I turn around and look at him, he is drinking coffee. The film crew start moving to another location, a clearing still quite close to the porch. A circle of chairs has been laid out on a flat area. The producer and the director are busy discussing something. Matt goes past me carrying some toilet rolls. The rest of the group seem to be rehearsing the next sequence. Cath nails a sheet of paper to the wall of a barn. Gillian and Matt decide the barn will be the castle and a nearby fence will be the entrance to the castle.

Fran and Steve are hanging around, waiting for their turn to act. Matt comes round and asks them to go and fetch the heroes. Anna films Cath nailing the sheet of paper to the barn, it reads: HEROES WANTED, accompanied by the drawing of a castle. Everybody moves to the entrance of the castle to wait for the heroes. Finally they arrive: Richard, Su, Steve and Clare. They decide that the quad bikes parked nearby can be their hero vehicles. Richard, Clare and Steve sit on the bikes, and Matt climbs in the back of Clare's. The four heroes sit casually on their quad bikes, and hold their scripts in their hands. One of them asks: *are the scripts going to be visible?* Louise answers: *of course, if we don't know the lines.* I am still sitting in the porch, observing the film crew from a distance. Fran, Cath and Rebecca are sitting next to me, giggling as they re-read the script.

They are now ready to start filming the heroes sequence. A red car drives into the parking space. They deliberate, will it be slow action or fast? They settle for fast. Anna starts filming, they get off the bikes and run in slow motion to the door of the castle/barn. Something went wrong, the camera faded out too quickly (Anna- what happened there?) and I have déjà vu for about three seconds.

The script requires smoke; my cigarettes are mentioned as a resource. The sound team talks while looking at the script. Helen holds the stereo through her arm, like a shopping basket. Louise asks me for a cigarette. Rebecca and Fran appear wearing blue helmets and walk inside the barn. They close the door behind them. I see a sign on the door: THE CASTLE OF PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT. Gillian is also inside the barn, she peeps out through the door. Louise is giving directions to the heroes while holding the script in one hand and the cigarette between her fingers.





THERE IS A FANFARE (MADE BY CATH, FRAN, REBECCA AND MAUREEN) AND THE GATES OPEN TO REVEAL A NEAT WOMAN (GILLIAN), SHROUDED IN SMOKE (IF YOU CAN GET SMOKE). SHE IS FLANKED BY CATH, FRAN, REBECCA AND MAUREEN. THEY ALL LOOK VERY SCARY.

GILLIAN: Welcome, Heroes! I am Gillian, personal assistant to The Facillitator..

MATTHEW: \*Gasp!\* The Facillitator?!

LOUISE: Who is The Facillitator?

EVERYBODY SILENCES LOUISE.

GILLIAN: ..And these are my staff. You may enter. We have prepared your rooms. I advise you all to get a good night's sleep, as the Quest will begin tomorrow morning at ten o'clock sharp.

THE HEROES FILE IN THROUGH THE GATES.

FADE TO BLACK.

<u>SCENE</u>	<u>INT/EXTR</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>TIME OF DAY</u>
4	INT/EXTR	CONFERENCE ROOM	MORNING

A CARD IS HELD IN FRONT OF THE CAMERA.

CARD: "MorNING..."

THE CARD IS PULLED AWAY TO REVEAL THE CONFERENCE ROOM.

GILLIAN IS STANDING BY THE DOOR.

THE HEROES ENTER IN THIS ORDER: CLARE, LOUISE, STEVE, SU, MATTHEW, RICHARD.

GILLIAN HANDS OUT NAME BADGES.

GILLIAN: Good morning Clare. Good morning Louise. Good morning Steve. Good morning Su. Good morning Richard. Good morning, Matthew.

LOUISE STANDS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CONFERENCE ROOM AND LOOKS AROUND.

THE HEROES PIN ON THEIR NAME BADGES.

CATH ENTERS, CARRYING A TRAY/WHEELING A TROLLEY OF COFFEE, TEA AND CROISSANTS. FRAN, REBECCA AND MAUREEN FOLLOW WITH MORE OF THE SAME.

CATH: Breakfast! There's coffee, tea and croissants here for breakfast!

CLARE: Croissants?

# An Interesting Lecture

*Hello everybody. My name is Neil. Is this the whole group?*

We are in another room, called the seminar room. People start coming in, bringing cups of tea and biscuits. Steve pours coffee for some of the others. Neil starts to get ready, while Anna sets her camera on a tripod to video the lecture. There is a TV high on the wall in one corner of the room, displaying a blue screen that reads: WELCOME TO USER-FRIENDLY ON-SCREEN. Underneath the sentence, a pixelated hand points down to an OK button. We are all sitting at a U-shaped table. There are several yellow hardhats on the table. Sheets of paper and pencils are passed around.

From left to right: Clare, Fran, Richard, Rebecca, Matt, Su, Cath, Louise, Gillian, myself, Sarah, Helen, Anna. Neil standing facing us, with folded arms and grabbing his notes in one hand. I have the computer on the plastic crate again. I am sitting between Gillian and Sarah. I become aware again as to how much my position determines how I frame and describe what I see.

Anna announces we will be leaving very soon after the lecture, the minibus will pick us up. Someone asks: *is it the same bus?*

Neil tells us he will show a clip from *Amadeus*, Milos Forman's film. He describes it as not very good (a cheesy film), but goes on to say that there is a particular moment in the film he finds interesting. We watch a clip where Mozart is composing; he walks up to a billiard table, grabs a quill and with his free hand throws a billiard ball out. The ball bounces against the edges of the table, which are out of the camera frame. While the ball runs through the table, he writes down on the score, until the ball gets back to him.

Neil describes the scene to us, and poses the question of the authenticity of the activity we just saw on film. He is still holding his notes in his left hand, people look on. Steve is looking at him intently. Clare looks out of the window, holding a cup in her hand. Fran rests her chin on her folded hands, and Richard holds a pencil with one hand, while sipping his tea with the other. Rebecca has her arms folded and seem to be listening with interest. Matthew runs his tongue against the inside of his cheek. Su listens with interest. Cath looks sleepy.

Neil talks about time being split up. He says: *imagine what goes on in his mind, a ball is like an alarm clock going off. On the wall there are some of the evaluation pie charts from yesterday. I can see a very successful circle drawn in pink, and a very uneven one in blue, showing a high peak in motivation. Louise is sitting very close to the table, next to her Gillian sits back. Sarah looks serious, with her hands in her pockets and staring straight ahead into the void. Helen looks towards the window. Anna is taking notes and taking pictures. Neil talks as he draws on the flipchart with a green marker — PRESENT MOMENT — He says: *the direction of time*, and draws an arrow. On the TV monitor I see the hand flipping up and down the screen, pointing like an arrow to the OK button. I notice there is a pile of books on a chair at the back of the room.*

Neil has divided the time arrow into past, present and future. He says: *this bit here, this is what concerns me*

*more*, while pointing at the present, a segment highlighted with green diagonal strokes. People look at Neil in silence, sometimes they look at one another in a deadpan way. Rebecca tries a little smile.

Neil asks the group to try a little exercise. After asking them to think about this instant as the present moment, he clicks his fingers once and says ok: now that moment is the past. He describes the present moment as a kind of void, mentions consciousness. I think about a conversation I had with Anna during lunch. She asked me when do I get my ideas or make my connections. She wanted to know if it is something that happens while I am describing what I see, or if it the result of posterior reflection. I write in the present moment, what I see and whatever comes into my mind.

Sarah starts doodling timidly on the side of a blank sheet of paper.

On the table: a glass of water, a roll of paper, a red folder, three yellow hardhats, an empty glass, a china cup, a pencil, another glass, another cup, a cassette, another hardhat, a camera (Rebecca takes a picture), a pencil, a mobile phone.

A list is mentioned, where the group wrote down possible topics for the lecture, things they were interested in. Neil reads through the list, he says he is a bit perplexed to see that the subject he finally chose is not on the list. He reads some of the topics that he particularly likes aloud: something wordy but not too cheesy, general things, lots of things.

He then goes on to talk about titles, he talks about lecture titles, and how they always seem to fail their mission, which should be to set the right expectations about the lecture to come. He goes into a long justification of the mental process behind his decision to give a lecture about time instead of addressing the issues suggested in the list. He hasn't got a title for it, but that the lecture is about time. He asks for suggestions as to what would be a good title for it, Clare volunteers: *time wasting*. He describes titling as an interesting activity. Richard doodles. He says: *a title is a space, space reserved in advance*.

Neil continues to talk about expectations raised about lectures on the basis of their titles. He thinks expectations can never be satisfied. He will now show slides of some artworks, and discuss the choice of titles. The first slide to go round the table is of Rachel Whiteread's house cast. Neil speculates as to how she might have chosen the name for the piece, how Mozart might have composed, how someone might approach this lecture, how this lecture can be delivered.

Some people try to engage with the issues Neil is presenting, but they are clearly making a big effort to remain interested. I can feel a sense of entrapment in the room, people keep turning their heads toward the window, as if wishing they could fly away. The word crisis comes up.

Neil continues with his examination of short titling. The slide of *Ghost* goes around in a yellow slide viewer. Next, Damien Hirst's shark in formaldehyde; an art work with a very long name. Matt looks at the slide by turning in his chair and facing the window. I hear Anna taking a picture. The slide of the shark goes round the table. Cath and Louise doodle.

Time for some questions, Neil brings back the issue of the present moment and asks why does that moment only last so long. He wants to know how long that moment is, he says for Mozart in the film clip it

lasts four seconds. Others try to come up with an answer. Rebecca mentions the night we went up in the woods, as an example of an extended present moment, a continuous present in which we couldn't say how much time went past. Su asks Neil if he had purposefully posited a question so ambiguous. The conversation gets more and more abstract, more and more meaningless. I hear random words: consensus, produced, existence, past future, consciousness, present moment, present moment, specifically, time, impact, speed, change, hypothesis, too fast. Fran looks quite cross, she says: *I am finding this very heavy, I can't see the point*.

Richard asks: *what's this got to do with time, what's this got to do with the present?* Louise criticises Neil's presentation very strongly, then says: *no offence*. Anna films around the room. Cath says: *would we have chosen to be in this present moment if we had had a choice?* Everyone laughs. Rebecca and Matt are doodling, so are Cath and Sarah.

A small revolt gathers momentum. The group asks what sense this lecture can make to them. They question the extrapolation of four seconds from some second-rate film into a lecture that they can't link to their own present moment. Steve doodles concentrated, leaning his whole body towards the paper. Neil walks to the back of the room to get some of the books I saw earlier on a chair. They are his books.

The lecture has turned into a rather frantic doodling session. All the talk about the present moment, about time, seems to be crystallising on the sheets of paper that were supposed to be filled with lecture notes. **The doodles operate as signs for each person's present moment. I hear the rustling of the pencils on paper.** I can see the doodles that Cath, Louise and Gillian are making. The three of them are drawing arabesque organic forms. Across the room Steve is having a break from doodling. Rebecca doodles with a very cool style, holding herself away from the paper, and running the pencil over the paper softly and quickly, keeping her arm stretched. Sarah draws kite shapes while holding her head with her hand. Cath has her free hand on her cheek. Rebecca takes a break, places her pencil along her nose; she then taps the tip of her nose with the pencil. Louise picks up her pencil and lowers her head to the paper. Anna asks Helen if she can use her blank sheet of paper to take some more notes.

I look around the room trying to find something interesting to write about. I see another plastic crate like the one I have the laptop on. That one has an I stuck on it, mine has an H, I wonder what they are used for.

Anna walks up to the window and writes something on a sheet of paper. She holds the paper up and waves it to Neil, asking him to finish in a couple of minutes. Last thought, last question. Neil shows the group another book. The lecture is now over. People clap their hands. It is 4:15pm now, we have to be down at the front by 4:30pm. I go to the room, pack my bag, when I come down into the lounge, only Dave is there. I ask where everybody is gone, he tells me they are already on the minibus. He thought people would gather for a ten minute evaluation of the weekend, and tells me with a disappointed look on his face: *they are in a hurry to go*.

I pack my computer, and Dave helps me to carry my bags to the minibus. I shake his hand and thank him for the weekend. There is a free seat for me, next to Su. We drive away.

**what are you curious about? What would you like to have a discussion about? What do you care about?**

something not worthy or cheesy – something lively and individual and not fascist – scared of George Bush – I am open but have opinions – animal welfare, environment, global and local – CND – finding solutions – general raft of liberal issues – labour party member – third world – the debt – global inequality – governments abuse of the disenfranchised – foot and mouth – music and film culture – Amnesty International – human rights – exploitation of women globally – lots of things, people – plants and gardening – environment and human rights – environmental issues, national and international politics – eco tourism – cultural difference and immigration issues – general things, local urban regeneration – culture, film, art reviews, etc.

## Space Reserved In Advance

I want to start by talking a bit about the list of possible subjects for this lecture which Anna has supplied, and about that process which attempts to involve – implicate even – you, the audience, in the development of the presentation which is to be made. The list of subjects has been my starting point although, as will become clear, the development of my thinking around these subjects has not been confined to the list and its logic.

You might have been under the impression when you made your suggestions that a suitable person would be found to speak on one of these subject already chosen. However, the invitation to speak seems to have come first. This would put any speaker in a slightly awkward position. The relation between speaker and subject is bound to be less a 'match' than a 'collision'. But then again, maybe this state of affairs is more often the case than one might imagine when the presentation of information is made.

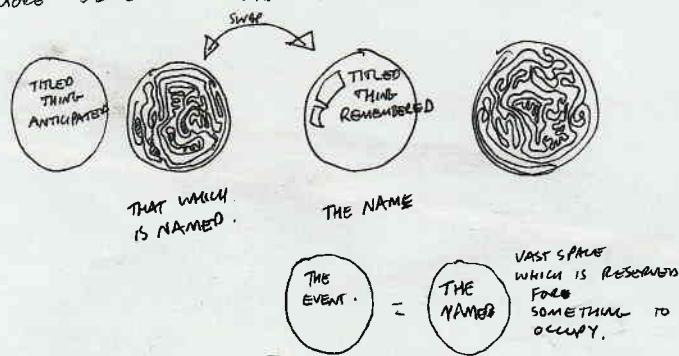
I have a number of options: I can choose a topic from the list and speak about that; I can speak, systematically, about everything on the list; or I can ignore the list more or less completely. None of these are ideal solutions... In the first instance, I would be trying to reproduce a lecture which, in a sense, has already been written by one member of the audience. This is a disconcerting idea for obvious reasons. The second option, of attempting to cover all the topics, would seem to be a similarly frightening recipe for disappointing

every listener in turn. But the second option might be technically impossible in this case, as some of the suggested topics more or less exclude others. ('Something not worthy or cheesy' might make it difficult to approach the subject 'finding solutions' for instance.)

The last option, of ignoring the suggested topics, is the trickiest because it could be argued that that's what I've done. But I would want to insist that this is not the case. What the list has given me is an incentive to think about the idea of 'the subject' in general. And in doing this, I have been able to bring into focus a particular suspicion which I have had about lectures for some time: lectures, for the most part, don't really have subjects, and certainly not in the straightforward way that titles tend to suggest. By this, I am not saying that lecturers can't do their job properly and that they tend to wander off the point. What I am suggesting is that the idea of 'a subject', the idea that a lecture, with all the complexity of its presentation, can be encapsulated in any sense, within the brevity of a 'title', is mistaken. Titles have their function in so far as they provide some kind of security – a provisional foundation on which the listener can begin to build their assessment of the argument or set of ideas which is being presented. But the activity of listening, I would want to propose, is about the enabling of thinking more essentially than it is simply about judgment. And often an excess of security in terms of what we feel is our own established knowledge, is the enemy of thinking.

③

FOLLOWING THIS: THE IMAGE OF TWO TOTALITIES. THE FIRST IS THE PRESENTATION IN ALL THE EARTHINESS OF ITS ACTUAL DELIVERY. THE SECOND IS THE TITLE THIS IS ALSO A TOTALITY - A SELF-CONTAINED THING BY DEFINITION: IT STANDS FOR THE LECTURE IT CONTAINS IT IN THE WAY THAT TITLES AND NAMES MORE GENERALLY STAND FOR COMPLEX STATES OF AFFAIRS.



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