

# PURE RESEARCH VANCOUVER – THEATRE REPLACEMENT

## June 13, 14 & 15, 2011

### FINAL REPORT

Theatre Replacement is a creation company led by Maiko Bae Yamamoto and James Long. The Pure Research sessions conducted in June 2011 enabled Maiko and James to confront a central issue in how they create new work. The format for their exploration was focused on this core question: how do we use choreography / physicality in our work, especially working with found material and verbatim texts or existing scripts? To conduct three days of experiments, they invited long-time collaborator, choreographer Sarah Chase, to join the research team, and requested a company of six physical performers.

The performers – Conor Wylie, Anne-Sophie Woolnough, Marcela Caceres, Minah Lee, Victor Mariano and Justin Reist – were assembled by DD Kugler of SFU Contemporary Arts, who collaborated on the research along with the Nightswimming team: Artistic Director Brian Quirt, Producer Rural Shah and Dramaturgy Intern Leora Morris. A series of dramaturgical meetings and conversations in the months prior to the June research explored the core question and developed an approach to the research that was pursued during the three day-long sessions. In practice, the template for the research experiments was often diverged from as new ideas evolved and fascinating physical and creation possibilities were discovered.

### The Research Plan

Maiko started with an external source (the film, 'The Outsiders') and used a personal approach to get closer to it. Jamie planned to start with the source, moving away from it into the realm of the personal.

### Day One

Topics for exploration –

- When have specific applications of movement in the past been successful/not successful in our work?
- How do we evolve this practice so that it feels like it is moving forward and evolving as our work evolves?
- How can it become distinct aesthetically in our work, or is it already?  
More hints about the “why” or “to what end?”

The day began with a physical work session led by Sarah, moving into a series of physical exercises.

**Exquisite Corpse** is a group creation exercise, based on the collective recall of a story, in this case pieced together through individual performers' personal memories of the movie 'The Outsiders' (a seminal movie in Maiko's teenage life). Participants had all watched the movie prior to day 1. The group did an exquisite corpse remembrance of the film from start to finish, using both words and physical movement recalled from the film. In this process they added on to each other's words and movements, one speaker at a time, until they

finished telling the story of the movie. They could only go back when they said “Yes, but before that...” The group was seated in a row of chairs while doing this and was asked to get up when they spoke and to physicalize their recollection of the film’s story.



*Justin, Marcela, Conor, Minah Victor and Anne-Sophie in action during Pure Research.*

We filmed the exercise to recall the physical vocabulary that developed during the exercise; we then used elements of this vocabulary to create a repeatable group score.

Over the dinner break the performers learned the song GLORIA by Van Morrison, while Maiko edited the Exquisite Corpse video. After dinner, the company worked with the physical score derived from the video (in other words, a second-hand score of ‘The Outsiders’) and used it as a consistent code with a different source material (e.g. texts and songs). Personal stories, text from other sources and poems were applied to the physical score.

*Curiosities:*

How/When does the movement become “codified?” How does it gain power? How do we use that power? How can we reference the original found material? When does it work? When does it fail? After it fails, if we keep going, does it get interesting again? Is failure a part of the process? How long until the codes become apparent and work as a tension? How/Why does it resonate?

## Day Two

The day began with a choreographic session with Sarah, followed again by games and physical exercises.

We capitalized on the creations of first day's work program and used fragments of the 'The Outsiders' to explore potential in the displacement (mashing) of 1) text from one source; 2) speculations and personal story; and 3) found physicality/choreography.

*Questions arising:*

- How much of the original source material (if any) is necessary to make the combination interesting?
- Can the two combine to create something that stands alone?
- How does specificity or rigor of replicating the found movement generate focus or sympathetic response on the part of the viewer?
- How does it heighten the centredness or focus of the performer?
- How can looping of the movement/text be used?
- How can the original movement gestures be stretched (*a la Toshiki Okada – cheltfisch*), slowed, sped up under or to reflect the text spoken?
- How can we create fictions (additional material) from the combined fragments?
- When does the mash-up riddle become distracting? The moment it is solved or given up on?

## Day Three

As in the first two days, the day began with a choreographic session with Sarah, and some physical review.

Continued with combining the material of interest and "mashing" them up in different ways. We mainly went from experiment to experiment as new questions and curiosities arose, until there was a natural ending to the exploration.

Please see the appendix, which is a point-form documentation by DD Kugler of the activities carried out during each of the research sessions.

## REFLECTIONS – Theatre Replacement



### **So what, in the end, was the burning question we wanted to explore?**

We took away a great deal from our experience in Pure Research. Most of it extremely positive. We are very grateful to have had this opportunity to not only luxuriate within process (something that we often do not have the time to do), and to feel the general pressures brought on by the whole Pure Research experience. All in all, the three days was what we hoped it would be: a much needed battery recharge and a starting point for a larger discussion for Theatre Replacement about how we make work.

For the most part, we can say what occurred was something completely new to us. Yes, we dipped into our existing tool bags a few times, we reverted back to our familiar tendencies, and our confidence faltered many times. But it was an incredible rush. The echo of Brian saying: “do the thing you’ve never done before” drove our experiments and our experience. This new territory was very exciting for us, it opened up many new possibilities around new ways to generate material and layer it together.

## Results:

In relation to our original curiosities about the role of the choreographic and physical life in our work, we discovered a few key things:

- **Better understanding of group action within set material**
- **A new physical treatment or technique with the “live learning” component**
- **Potential approach or “treatments” for movement within an established text or source**



### **Better understanding of group action within set material**

There were some great new discoveries around formations on stage. In our work, we use lines a lot — a line of chairs, standing in a line, etc. This is something we most likely picked up from working with Cathy Naden of Forced Entertainment. Forced uses the line quite religiously in its work, and on many levels it is a metaphor for their relationship as an ensemble. But we’ve been searching for ways to “break” the line and also to play with what it represents. That may sound like an easy task, but it is actually very hard for us, because the line works so well. But something happened in PR when we began playing with new formations taken from the “live learning” work (see below) that cracked this open. To



consider the line not just spatially but relationally was very effective, and we are curious to see how we can apply this to future work and in our teaching.

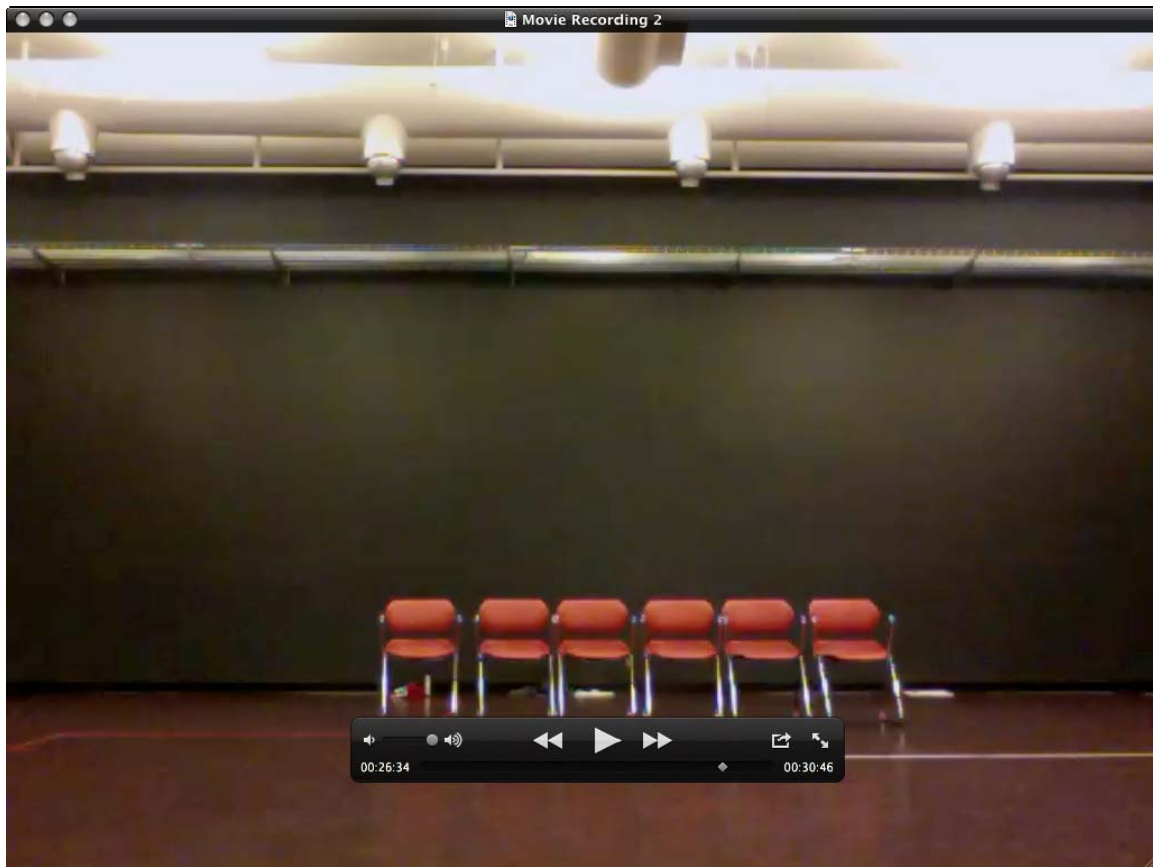
Another discovery was key for unlocking a certain frustration or block we have felt when we have tried to place movement on a set text or story, particularly where a larger group of performers was involved. Maiko kept referring to the frustrating experience with physicality around our show *The Greatest Cities in the World*. One big discovery/reflection was this: if we had somehow allowed our artificial layer in *Cities* (the layer of the pope and the queen, and the lords and ladies and their relationships and narratives, for those who have seen the show) to exist as the physical layer or the layer of “physical action” within the performance, we think it would have been a far more effective way to utilize the artifice. So, if for example, we created a complete narrative for the artificial layer and then placed it on top of the narrative created through the verbatim texts taken from the Tennesseans that made up the show, we think this would have been far more successful. That’s pretty exciting to think about.



In thinking about *Dress me up in your love* (another show with a larger ensemble), the PR discoveries are also very exciting because we get another chance to work on the show before it goes out on tour next year. With *Dress*, we intentionally stayed away from movement. But it is an area that needs further finessing, so how the PR experience could inform the next leg is important. Already, we see how the “live learning” component could be of great use here, especially with the body puzzle choreography, and we are really curious about trying to integrate this idea into the physical life of the show and to build a more significant presence for physicality within the performance.

## A new physical treatment or technique with the “live learning” component

This was a really exciting discovery because it was a complete surprise. Watching performers learn to do something live in front of you (thus, “live learning”) is utterly fascinating, and we feel like it was one of the most successful experiments to emerge out of Pure Research. It also felt like another effective way to layer physicality on top of something else. We also enjoy it because in so much work these days, you see direct address. Direct address has been particularly present in the kind of performances we have made, where the performers are playing themselves — or to be more accurate — some version of themselves. “Live learning” felt like a way to still maintain the self, while having some kind of fourth wall in place, which opens up a whole other world of storytelling.



We also felt like the component of “live learning” could be applied in many different ways. Not only could it be an effective way to insert a relatable physical layer that then gets revealed (i.e.: we show the audience the clip of ‘The Outsiders’ we’ve been working with, or we begin to integrate text or sound from the source), but it could also be applied to just text, or on a purely emotional level as well. It made us think about taking an existing source and trying to layer on top of it the emotional journey of a movie, i.e.: watching performers watch a scene from the movie, take on the emotion of the scene and place that onto their existing text could be very interesting.

## Potential approach or “treatments” for movement within an established text or source

This is a useful discovery when you consider where the work of the company is headed next. The next three years sees us developing three new projects whose texts will be developed and honed first. This makes it more difficult to see the potential role of movement within a work, so our Pure Research could prove to be a very useful tool in how movement gets developed for these texts. It is still very true that we like what a physical layer can do within a work; that it is still aesthetically tied to our work, and so it's vital to keep it relevant somehow.

It is difficult, when you are a company that prides itself on constantly changing the playing field and continuing to serve the curiosities of two very curious and differing artistic visions, to feel like you have any concrete or established aesthetic or method. But if we can speak of things more in terms of a practice, the discoveries made in our Pure Research time definitely feel they are contributing to and stretching our work — both as a company and as individuals — and revealing some new territories that we are all very excited to enter into.



### Acknowledgements:

We would like to express our gratitude to Nightswimming and Brian Quirt, Rupal Shah and Leora Morris for sharing time with us in the room, and to SFU Contemporary Arts and DD Kugler for also sharing time and supplying the room and other resources. And to our team of wonderful researchers: Conor, Anne-Sophie, Marcela, Minah, Vic and Justin.

We would also like to include, as part of this Final Report, DD Kugler's notes on our three days together, as they represent the process in a kind of “Kugler-code,” which we found helpful, insightful and inspiring. It is always a struggle to record these processes on paper, and so this record serves as a very concise and useful document.

*For more information about Theatre Replacement:* [www.theatrerplacement.org](http://www.theatrerplacement.org)

*For more information about Nightswimming:* [www.nightswimmingtheatre.com](http://www.nightswimmingtheatre.com)



## APPENDIX

Theatre Replacement / Pure Research, Vancouver / June 13,14,15, 2011

Day to day activities of the research sessions, compiled by DD Kugler

### DAY ONE

Lie on the floor, snowman, imprint floor, move & observe the imprint...

Find word, find song, let song influence you, move together, enjoy moving apart

Explore moving "in", one arm, both arms, body, add (spacey) music, move through "in" space, increase tempo, jumping into...

Stillness, find way to your feet, DaVinci man with eyes closed, trace rt-arm/torso/lft-leg, lft-arm/torso/rt-leg, try to connect... partner work... repeat with trace on back space, try to connect, partner work...

X-shape, breath out in 8 cross, 8 in parallel, repeat...

Left arm 1-2-3, right arm 1-2... left mother-father-me, right summer-winter...

Reverse arms, sight-taste-touch, field-lake...

Vic tells what he sees in each

Sarah's Mandela, 12 animals, 5 elements on the other side...

Create own Mandela, prime against prime, odd against even...

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Go & ball... no calling go, but move... smaller ball... no ball...

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Exquisite corpse of THE OUTSIDERS

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Two imitative gestures, presented, then all learned as a sequence...

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Watching exquisite corpse, especially the background... learn their own gestures in isolated moments... connect as a group sequence... enter/exit and perform as: 1) Minah telling narrative; 2) Conor telling personal story; 3) about love, accompanied by romantic music; 4) doing R&J scene; 5) full-out performance accompanied by "Gloria"

## DAY TWO

Spatial awareness warm-up... then on to double-task exercises...

Lie on the floor, snowman, imprint floor, moving imprint... let movement explored yesterday drop in... move more fluidly through the volume of substance, aware of interaction with potential space... begin to include your/others gestures...

Move to flat against the wall, continue movement, but each find different levels, stay connected, and move forward as groups sustain movement patterns & levels...

Partner-work: lie on floor on back... starting from the sternum, partner strokes left arm & leg ending simultaneously, repeat... starting from the sternum, partner strokes left arm & right leg ending simultaneously, repeat... repeat the process on the opposite side... switch partners... when complete, each track (through front & back of body) and explore the imprinting and cross-relationships individually...

Find way to your feet, DaVinci man with eyes closed, trace rt-arm/torso/lft-leg, lft-arm/torso/rt-leg, try to connect...

As a group, form an associative gestural score for the first two lines "Nature's first green is gold, etc"... repeat the score in a circle with a personal story (Vic)... each separately find a score for one of the subsequent lines... perform repeatedly as a group facing forward, trying to find the flow of the text, resisting the herky-jerky imposed by the gestures...

Explore personal memory attached to each gesture (Vic), then perform to reveal the meaning of the poem... each find a personal memory for each gesture, then say the line revealing the emotion... [a way to use the gesture not as presentation, but as a way to dig deeper emotionally]

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Recorded the reading of three scenes from Outsiders script: 2-hander, a trio, and a 6-hander... Two trios each learned the movement of the boys in the Outsiders church... when learned, the scenes were repeated in parallel: with increasing speed, with music, as Keaton...

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Octopus warm-up...

Three duos re-created the movement of the Outsiders hitch-hiking scene... performed simultaneously... increased attention to detail... Anne-Sophie tells personal story, then story of Oliver...

Presentation of the trio church-scenes, beside each other... add Kugler reading Outsider text, then Sarah reading... one church scene in which the other three individuals can sub in... continuous story-telling of three options: 1) personal story, 2) some story from Outsiders, not the church scene, 3) a little telling of the physical/personal moment on stage... more subbing in, with roles they don't know, even adding Maiko... multiple characters on stage, more insistent story-telling interruptions, and a slow reduction of the characters on stage until only Marcella remained, and her solo version eventually devolved into silence...

Three with text for the trio Outsider hospital scene recorded on iPods, one performs a gestural score from the movie retelling, the other two copy the gestures... the furthest away (Minah) has lots of difficulty... all five have Outsider text on iPods, follow one member's score as a group faces forward... the leader shifted, worked different levels, eyes forward... eventually only the girls (Marcela, Anne-Sophie) spoke the girls text, then Sophie spoke just her text, then she spoke the entire Outsider text.

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## DAY THREE

Lie on the floor, snowman, roll, fetal, snowman, vocalize/sigh, feel tissue along the bones... Sarah draws cross-lateral patterns on the body... stay aware of the contra-lateral surfaces of your body as you review all the movement you've generated over the last two days...

Group circle review of Frost poem movement with a focus on positive/negative space, re-connecting to the personal memory accompanying each gesture... allow yourself to be "blown" by the negative space as you review the gesture score... drop into the Outsider church-scene score, wherever you are... move into a cluster and continue the score, with Gone With the Wind soundscape...

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Find each of the five tableaux of the ensemble looking at the computer to see their physical score, and move from one to the next... then cycle through one the five tableau... without stops, with suspends... continue in a canon of the tableaux, add opening gestures, add exquisite corpse of Wizard of Oz, add score of the Frost poem... with Minah only in slow movements... add exquisite corpse of Outsiders in order... add remembered Outside dialogue... add touches... vary speed (fast/slow) on own impulse...

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Canon the tableau formations, and peripherally follow Vic's gestural score, Marcella & Justin sing what they hear on iPods (Gloria), the group tries to sing with them... repeat with Elvis on iPod, Vic gesture slower, imitate any gesture you can see...

Conor solo 5 tableau in rotation, with R&J text... Minah rotation with R&J... Vic/Anne-Sophie duet in relationship, add Marcella UL mirroring Vic, and Conor UR mirroring Anne-Sophie, add Justin UC doing gesture score off a hand-held iPhone, add Minah with Conor mirroring Vic, add soundtrack of Outsiders, Conor begins chair tableaux, Marcella begins tracking Justin, all but Vic follow Justin, Minah reads the Outsider book text in Conor's chair...

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Combine the ricochet moments from the exquisite corpse exercise in a continuous score from a row of chairs... overlap each others gestural elements... each work with a different tempo...

Marcella/Anne-Sophie play Outsiders sunset scene while listening to an iPods loop... add Justin/Vic saying the text at the same time, and imitate the gestures of the other pair... add Minah/Conor... change the lead couple, then use a solo leader... all follow Marcello's gestures, follow Pony & Cherry blocking, switch partners in couples after each round of text... drop gestures, but maintain character blocking, switch the partner in couple after each round of text... continue without iPods...

Each track three positions of notebooks, pens, and glasses during the first round of edited/combined exquisite corpse score... three pairs doing 1-5 tableau score, one pair watching 59:37-52 (Cage method) of Outsiders performing the head gestures, other two pairs imitate... repeat with Vic on iPhone of Outsiders

Minah does a Mandela (body puzzle) while the five others move through 5 tableau, but someone adds a moment of the Outsider story in response to Minah's description of the combination, they slowly tell the whole Outsider story... repeat... repeat again, telling whole story in 12 moves...