



Sleepwalk Collective: The Making of *Swimming Pools* (2020)

For this introductory episode of the laboratory, Sammy Metcalfe from Aural/Oral Dramaturgies associate company Sleepwalk Collective guides us through his company's Google Drive to give us an understanding of their work so far on their new performance, *Swimming Pools*.

Sleepwalk Collective make their theatre out of what Metcalfe describes as a 'feedback loop' of images, sounds, sentences, musics and atmospheres, which are palimpsestually layered throughout the devising and rehearsal process, being enriched by each company member's individuality and progressively forming a collective vision.

As well as affording a rare glimpse into the aesthetic and conceptual backbone of the company's methodology, this documentary reveals how, due to the Covid-19 epidemic, the company transferred this mode of working to the remote and virtual sphere to make their most ambitious show yet through online work: from fully-edited video works ('don't document the live: work for the camera instead'), to 'wish lists' made of sets of images and instructions ('make a portrait of yourself where your body is not recognisable', 'explore how to use a phone to light yourself', 'speak a previous text into WhatsApp voice message to me'), to mise en abyme Zoom games made with repeated images, impossible soundtracks, multiple screens.

While we will have to wait to learn what *Swimming Pools* is going to be until we can enter theatres again, in this laboratory we witness how Sleepwalk Collective responded to the current situation by unleashing a fervent inventiveness into digital and private space – exploding the confines of domestic space and ultimately also the confines of the theatre.

[00:00:23 to 00:11:45] *Swimming Pools* – Home Movie (2020)

[00:11:50] PROJECT BACKGROUND

Swimming Pools is a show that we first started talking about making in kind of the end of 2016. It was after we'd just done *Domestica*, which is our biggest show. And we were going: 'We want to make one which is on the same scale or bigger, the next big project will be this show', and we called it *Swimming Pools* pretty much from the beginning – which we tend to do, pick titles very early. And then it took us about three years to get to the point where we could actually start making it, which is not uncommon for us. We got close to being able to make it in early 2017 and it didn't happen. The funding didn't work out. And then finally, in [the] end of 2019, we managed to get into rehearsal room with it. A few things fell into place during the course of 2019.

So we started, we did a two-week residency at Graner in Barcelona, which was mostly physical, choreographic work. We were working with a choreographer called Alice Tatge – and that was the first time that we ever worked with a choreographer. That was a really integral part of that project, really from the beginning, as we wanted to be expanding the visual language of our work, the choreographic language. It feels like an area of the work which we are definitely less confident in, and also we haven't grasped what our specific language is, in the way that we feel we have quite a good grasp of our textual and sonic language, I guess. So from the very beginning of the project, we knew we wanted to focus on visual and choreographic work, and so that first residency of two weeks in Barcelona in November 2019 was very much focused on that.

It's a show with four performers, which is: iara and Nhung and Camilla and Rebecca – I'll mention them again later. But after we did that residency, the initial plan was that we were going to be doing a kind of – it wasn't necessarily going to be the final residency, but we were going to be doing a substantial residency at Battersea Arts Centre in London in April and early May this year, 2020, and we were also going to premiere – in my head it was always going to be previews more than a



premiere. We like to give our work space to evolve and to continue to develop things after we've premiered them anyway or after we've shown them publicly. We always had in mind that the finished version would be at the end of this year, but that was going to be a substantial period of time to really make the show, which obviously didn't happen. And we started talking quite quickly – when everything started shutting down in March – we did start talking quickly about how we would adapt to that, and we had various different options and one of them was we were talking to Battersea Arts Centre about just doing the residency behind closed doors if we could all travel there. Or doing some work in Madrid – and we knew we weren't going to perform publicly but we had various options. But when, finally, the moment came, it wasn't just that we couldn't all be in the same country because the team is predominantly based in Spain, but Nhung is based in Prague and it wasn't just that we couldn't all be in the same country. It was also that actually within Spain we couldn't travel at all. So it became immediately clear that we couldn't be in the same room, which we had accepted as a possibility from the beginning but didn't know until it actually happened. So we made this commitment to try and do it all online.

And actually there were two key things that informed the decision to try to do the work online rather than just go: 'Okay, we'll postpone it all'. The first one was just the fact that it'd taken us so long to get into a position to feel that we were actually able to make the show and that we would have the funding for it. So that was an additional pressure to do something. But the other thing was because the project has been in development on some level since – it really was the end of 2016 or very early 2017 – and we had constantly been trying to get into rehearsal rooms and not been able to. We had along the way done little bits of online work already, really consisting of just sharing ideas with the various collaborators, but also recording some very preliminary texts. And so the performers, wherever they were, would record them, send them to me and then I would mix them with bits of music and drafts of sound. So we kind of had that established to a degree that this project could accommodate that kind of work at a distance, or at least an aspect of it.

I think we were trying to be – we decided that we were going to stick to exactly the same schedule we originally had. So that was from 13th of April, up until 8th May. We decided to keep the same period, we would work five days a week, we would approximate the kind of hours, and we would allow that work to – I guess we didn't decide beforehand how ambitious we would be within that work, or we would accept that whatever came out of it would be what we were able to get from it. So if we had ended it with just a number of new recordings of text draft, that was kind of okay.

But I think one thing that's really critical in terms of how we approached it and, as a result, what was produced during that period, was that even though we knew that we would be sharing something of this period afterwards, because we'd had a conversation before we started with Battersea Art Centre, they'd mentioned they wanted to do a digital programme with artists who would have been performing there, and they were great, they just said: 'What are you working on and how are you working? What do you feel would be viable and useful for you to present at the end?' And I think we said straightaway: 'We can make a video of some kind. It will maybe be a document of the process or maybe it'll be a little bit more – maybe it'll have a kind of an artistic component as well. But you know, if it's just like a mini documentary, that's okay.' And also one of the partner venues, La Abadía in Madrid, similarly were kind of signed on to go: 'We'll take the Spanish version of it.' So we did know that we would be producing something through the process that we would present at the end.

We also committed very strongly to the idea that we weren't going to think about an audience through the process, and we weren't going to in any way plan making that video or think: 'What is that going to need?' And we very much treated it as a kind of R&D. I was going to say 'rehearsal period', but actually we weren't even thinking of it as a rehearsal period because I think another thing that was important was that we were saying – we committed to the idea that we weren't going to treat it like we were rehearsing and we weren't even necessarily going to treat it like we were making a show for theatres, because we didn't know if it'd be possible to work in that way and that could have become an obstacle. And it could have been frustrating because we would be so aware of what we were lacking at a distance, so we really committed to taking the experience on its own terms and taking the performer work for what it was, and adapting to that and trusting that something interesting would



come out of it in some way. Trusting that something would happen that would inform later work on the project that would be performative in some way. Now that we're in the period after that, we're starting to see some of the possibilities. But I think it feels important to emphasise that everything that was produced in that period, we just made for ourselves and for the project. There wasn't any sense of going: 'We're imagining an audience for this work.' There wasn't any sense of going: 'How do we make an interesting video out of this?', and there wasn't any feeling of, I guess, of demanding that certain things came out of it and I think that was kind of important.

[00:21:00] APPROACH AND STRATEGIES

So I'm going to show you how we approached it. This here is the Google Drive folder, which is everything that we did during that period.

[Window into the company's Google Drive folder.]

So this was shared and everyone could see it in their room and add to it throughout the whole process. I'll show two things to start with. One of them is – where is it? Okay. *[Screen-shares a folder.]* So I've got this folder here which are 'Wish Lists'. What we decided was also, rather than going: 'Here is a thing that we're all going to do on Monday, everyone will work on this thing.' We kind of felt it important to have a range of different things which people could choose they wanted to do on a given day. I think it was just accepting that it was a really stressful period of time to live through and also a strange way of working, and so it felt really important that everyone had the liberty to choose what they want to do in any given moment and change if they got bored of it or they weren't in the mood. And also to give themselves gentle days and give themselves days where if they were on a roll they could do a whole load of things. So we made these wish lists, which was basically – it was mostly me writing them and setting them for the performers, but there were also proposals from the performers as well. And basically I just wrote down: 'This is some things I would like to see.'

So actually before I open it and pick some stuff to show, it was three different types of things on the wish list. One of them was just recording texts and that was – literally just 'record into, like, a WhatsApp voice message and send it to me.' Because we have text from previous residencies, we have them from the November residency, we have texts that have been kind of gradually developing over the months leading up to it, stuff that we just want to hear that we didn't really have a document of, or that we'd only heard one person do and we wanted to hear various people do it. So, yeah, the simple, most straightforward thing was just 'record text' and then I would take recordings and add music underneath them or bits of sound design, just so we can start to imagine a show or imagine scenes on a purely kind of aural, sonic level. So that was one kind of category of thing. Another one which is very open would be just like think about different things, or do a little bit of research and reading, or we would make lists of different thematic things that would maybe be leading towards developing an idea or leading towards a bit of writing. So there was a kind of thinking and writing category of things. And then there was making videos. And that ended up becoming really central, we didn't know that was going to happen. I'll just give you a sample of something.

So here we've got a load of stuff that says: 'Record texts'. *[Shows a Word document.]* Various bits of writing stuff: so this was, I think, the first video task that we set on the very first day. I think I sent this on the Sunday before we started. This one was just: 'Make a video self-portrait where your body is not recognisable', and we had various – there's a few bits of notes and stuff related to that. And then there's some more screen experiments. Some of it was informed by images that we'd seen in November that we felt like we wanted to revisit in some way. Some of it was in response to some thematic stuff that we hadn't opened. It's like going: 'Can we open this up visually in some way and just see some possibility and understand a little bit of what this is?' And a few things were just trying to have an idea for something to do. There was a little bit of it in some moments of just going: 'What can we do in these circumstances? What can we invent to do?'

So yes, it's a number of different things, predominantly in those three categories. I've just mentioned – I should have mentioned earlier – but just in case it's useful to explain where everyone was during that period. So I was here in Madrid. Camilla was also in Madrid, but on the other side of the city and



we weren't even allowed to see each other because we weren't supposed to walk that far away from home. Right at the end of the residency we managed to see each other very briefly. iara was up in Uribarri-Dibiña, which is a village in the north of Spain. Rebecca was in Vitoria-Gasteiz, a city actually very close to that village, but again they couldn't see each other because it was slightly too far away. And then Nhung was in Prague. Every single member of the team was separate and was – not alone, people were living with other people – but it was five distinct points, distinct places that we were in. And one of the conditions for doing a lot of the video work especially was that people couldn't leave their flats. And this varied a little bit. iara had access to a garden and there was a couple of people who could go outside. Nhung in Prague – it was a lot more relaxed, the lockdown, so she had a lot more options. But it was – a lot of it – Camilla, especially, just had her flat to work in and shoot videos in. So we had to accommodate that and also embrace the fact that everything was going to be quite kind of DIY. Actually, one of the nice side effects of it was their process became strangely intimate in a really unexpected way because we were just seeing people in their bedrooms and – or just in their flats, and in houses and rooms that I've never visited. So you kind of got a window into people's lives and all the clothes that they've got and all of the objects that they had to work with. So it was very personal in that way, in that particular kind of limitation. But I think one thing – the video skills that they're kind of – because in terms of the text and the generating ideas stuff, that was a fairly consistent running thing, and some of that was really useful and some of it we still don't know what it is, but that was pretty straightforward. We did little bits of writing during the project so it was new text that came in towards the end. But it was sort of static, I guess, in that sense. The video work evolved a lot during the process, both in terms of figuring out how, what kind of tasks were worth setting, what would generate interesting things. And also just, like, technically in terms of the way in which the performers were able to develop a way of working, because pretty much everything was shot on camera phones.

And I was saying earlier about the fact that we decided not to treat it as a rehearsal period, and one of the key aspects of that was going: 'Anything you're filming, it's not about trying to make some performance material and documenting it.' It was very much: 'You're working for camera.' So you know, you hold the phone so you can see yourself on screen, and you look at that image and try to figure out what that image is. And just shoot stuff. There was also no responsibility for anything to be good, or for anything to be edited. And I think very much also it wasn't about getting something which is necessarily cinematically interesting or anything like that. It was just going: 'We want to see possibilities in images.' That was really the brief. So if something is ten minutes of just vague crappy figuring out what you're doing, but it's got ten seconds which has got a really interesting visual idea and then which maybe comes out of pure chance, that's valuable. That's what we're looking for. So we wanted to really emphasise from the beginning how – much of it was about embracing the technology that we haven't really worked in before. And sort of trying to embrace what it actually is and what we're actually able to do and working in a really DIY way, which is compatible with the kind of way in which we should work anyway.

So yeah, we shot – they shot, I didn't do anything – they shot a lot of video. There would be this general pattern where we would talk every morning on Zoom briefly, just to check in with each other and make sure everyone was okay and if there was anything anyone wanted to talk about. But we would do that, and then everyone would go away and work on their own things. Occasionally we would have little individual talks if it was something that felt interesting to talk about. But then around 9-10 at night, I'd start getting these huge WeTransfer messages with all of this video stuff, and fell into a pattern without really thinking about it. I think it just happened on the first day – I would then do a rough cut, just an edit of the material that come through on that day. And I would not think about it very much. I would often literally just scan through everything, not even watching the video sometimes, but just looking at the little miniature – when you've got it in iMovie, you can see what the images are. So I just kind of scan through that visually and go: 'This looks interesting, put that there. This bit of another video, put that there, it seems interesting. Take some of the music we already had prepared for the show and put that underneath.' And I mean, there was an ease to it because it was only working with stuff that had come through on that day. So it wasn't this big process of compositional thinking of going like: 'What did we do last week?', it was sort of done in a way that I



was allowing myself to kind of go: 'Well, you know, it doesn't have to be good. This is just so we see the material.'

And then I would finish that sometimes around kind of 1-2 in the morning, put that straight into the Google Drive, so when everyone woke up the next morning, they could have a look at it. And this turned out to be a really smart move because it meant that the video work could evolve really quickly because all of the performers could immediately see stuff that seemed interesting, they could see what everyone else was doing. We did end up actually adding in as an optional task to recreate videos that other people had already made. Which was interesting in itself because obviously people had very different resources to work with. So iara was shooting stuff out in the pond in the garden one day, and then Camilla, a few days later, was trying to recreate it in her living room just using whatever plant she could find, and so, yeah, it became something that could be very quickly responded to. Yes, I'm going to show the videos in a minute. Actually, quickly, before I show the videos I'll show one other thing which may be helps to clarify just how we structured everything – we also have this thing, which is 'Collective Minutes'. [*Opens Word document.*] Which is basically just a running document that we had through the whole period where everyone would just write every day what they had done. And sometimes that's quite straightforward and descriptive, and it was just to encourage people to say if there was stuff that they had wanted to do but hadn't managed to do, and they could also write that in. It was just a way of tracking what everyone was doing, and just feeling a little bit more connected to each other, and a bit more aware of each other. So we had that as a running thing.

[00:34:08] VIDEO WORK

I'll start by showing a little bit of the first one, I think, because the first one was– [*Scrolls through video files.*] They are all dated. There isn't one from every single day but there is stuff from quite a lot of the days. So this was the first video.

[00:34:35 to 00:36:58] Stop motion video montage from April 13

I just might skim – actually, I'll show you it because I think it's maybe useful to see how the first day, especially, was all – a lot of it is kind of quite abstract images. I think the big thing at that point was, I think particularly in terms of the performers, they were still figuring out how to film themselves within images. So this is the first one I remember being just a kind of mish-mash of abstract images where it was all kind of finding where we were. I think this is a fish tank maybe that Camilla filmed. And this first one was very much just, I think, starting to understand what we're doing. Although, actually, the first day had this image, I'll pause it there. [*Freeze-frame image of iara sprawled on the edge of a lake.*] Which we ended up putting into the film in the end. So even from the very first day we had something, and I think I remember watching it and going: 'Okay, that is interesting', because I think even though – so, the actual editing of the video that we did afterwards, I didn't even start doing that until after we finished the residency. It was in a two-week period where we were doing other things as well, but it all came afterwards. But there were certain things I remember looking at – stuff like this was, immediately: 'That is an interesting image! I will try to remember that.' So that one was really from the first day, and then there's other bits of abstract body stuff and more things that we – oh, actually this one, that image is also in the video! [*Freeze-frame image of iara's face.*] That little bit, also, we stuck in there, in the video. So that was the first one, and I think there was a really nice thing where I think there was a big leap from the first to the second day, and it was because everyone was able to see how everyone was doing. So the first one was this, quite abstract and maybe quite cautious, just shooting a little, just, I guess, trying to understand how everyone might be able to record stuff at home. And then in the second day, we got a chunk, which is actually more or less exactly the same as it is in the *Home Movie*. So this one is April 14th.

[00:37:12 to 00:39:08] Stop motion video montage from April 14

And right at the end, there is – I'll just play this bit through although [*plays video*] this really is a kind of extended version of the video, but it was one of the things that was really, on my part, a chance selection of images that I liked, with a bit of music – and this is slightly cut. This is just one of the bits



of music we have from all the work in Barcelona, that kind of worked, and I was like: 'Okay', and I ended up using this in the video. So that was – yeah, much as we weren't allowed... Also the bit which it goes into where it just cuts to white noise a bit – and then we have this image of Camilla, which I really liked. [*Freeze-frame image of Camilla between white lace curtains.*] It was just something that just arrived and presented itself in the process of editing at one in the morning, it just kind of made sense. And I think actually, maybe something that I didn't really emphasise enough earlier is a lot of this kind of work, particularly with video stuff, we really were trying not to be very cerebral about it. It was really going: 'Don't think about what anything means.' Just go: 'What feels compositionally interesting? What feels like an interesting way to respond to this particular task which you can understand in whichever way you understand it.' And also: 'When you watch the video, see what other kinds of things feel interesting to you.' So yeah, so that was a chunk that just kind of happened, and felt quite well-formed, and ended up in the thing.

The other one, this one. [*Lines up a video.*] Similarly, is almost exactly the same as it is in the *Home Movie*.

[00:39:26 to 00:40:00] Stop motion video montage from April 20

And actually, the first sequence of images in this is almost exactly what we saw in the video. And that was – and actually, if I remember right, I started to do all of the editing of these images for that particular bit of music and I was, like: 'That looks nice', and by total chance, while I was doing it, Iara sent the recording of that bit of text and I just put it straight on that night and looked at it tomorrow. So we had a couple of bits really – just these chance combinations of the bits of material that came through on that day fitted, and something worked. I mean, there's obviously a whole load of other bits which we didn't use in that way, or which are interesting in different ways but weren't immediately usable, and there's a load of stuff we didn't add in. I'll show a couple of other specific bits. This one was the only one where the task was to make a video for a specific text.

[00:40:41 to 00:41:20] Stop motion video montage 'Empty Pool April 19-22'

So this again, we used a version of this in the *Home Movie*. There is some slight variation in this version, but this one is the one where it's the same as the text. So we had the text, the music recorded, that the performers listened to, which was kind of: 'Okay, we'll try to make something for this.' So they shot a whole load of different things, which are then just edited really, really quickly together. And then as a few extra bits and pieces which are in there as well. So we did that as a slightly more focused bit of creation.

And another thing that we did was – and this was something that is a little bit closer to rehearsing maybe – we had some ideas in terms of, some thinking around how someone with a performance mode might be in the show, if that makes sense. And they did these extended videos of just improvising with just their faces, and shifting through different facial expressions and things. And as part of the task we set, the instruction was to shoot it in the style of the Andy Warhol screen test videos. So they did all – and this was also maybe the only time where we committed to all doing the same thing on the same day and really setting something specific to do. They shot all of this on one day and sent to me, and I made it into this thing. Again, we use this not in the way we necessarily expected – we used some of this footage in the *Home Movie*, because actually it was nice to have some stuff with their faces. This is something which was a nice exercise in doing something which was working. We did this maybe halfway through the process. So we were getting a sense of what we were doing, what the approach was. It was a video exercise, but also it was a little bit more guided towards exploring something specifically performance-related, which has informed the work we've just done, actually in rehearsals in the last week, because we've just been rehearsing in Madrid by some miracle!

So we did do a couple of things that were a bit more focused towards getting a specific result out of it. But yeah, a lot of it really was – I had no idea what they would be working on on a particular day, what kind of footage would be coming in. The performers generally didn't know because we would update the minutes, but maybe at the end of the day. So they wouldn't know what everyone else was doing, we wouldn't know what we would end up with at the end of the day. And one thing we spoke



about a few times that was a really nice part of the process, and I think we actually said we might try and incorporate some of this into the other projects we do the future – working at home and working individually and working privately, there wasn't any of the contamination that you get in the rehearsal room where everyone's kind of aware of what everyone else is doing, responding to that, maybe being self-conscious in some moments about fitting in with, you know, what the kind of mood and feel is in a particular room. Also, obviously, when you're working quite intensively together, you don't always have that much space individually to be reflecting on that. And during this process everyone had all of that time to think and reflect and work personally, and as a result, a lot of the work that was produced felt very personal, very individual in a way. And we've had conversations with all of the performers about the period we had in Barcelona, which had been quite focused, specific, intensive, period of time. Even though our process is generally collaborative, in one way or another, they had been working as performers and devisers as well, but it was ultimately as performers. And throughout this period they felt very much like they were working as artists and as creators in a very direct sense. So that was a really nice thing that came out of it: there was a lot of individual personality in the things that people were making.

I'm just going to show because this might be an interesting one to see – these are some images of them recreating each other's work. So in this one for example, this is iara's original video.

[00:45:41 to 00:46:06] Video montage of stills from other videos

[*Image of iara sprawled on the edge of a lake.*] And, I think the next – that's Camilla remaking it in her tiny apartment. [*Image of Camilla in water surrounded by plants.*] This is an original video that Camilla did. [*Image of Camilla hanging over the railing of a balcony.*] And then that's Nhung doing the same video in Prague. [*Image of Nhung hanging over the railing of a balcony.*] And that's iara doing the same video in the village in the north of Spain. [*Image of iara hanging over the railing of a balcony.*]

And was partly just for fun, or just to see, I guess, what came out of it. There is thematically something in the show about – we have been talking a lot about animal mimicry as well, and we're looking at processes of mimicry within rehearsal. So this was a very open-ended way of kind of doing that very literally in terms of videos. And also is a way I think for the performers to have periods of time where you can make something without having to put a lot of creative energy into it. Because I think there were moments where we needed that. There were definitely days where I was like: 'I want to work today and I want to feel like I've done something, but I don't have the energy for anything too serious', so you find little things that kind of keep you occupied. And then to feel like you're still connected with what that process is and connected with everyone else. So yeah, that's it. That's the serious extract.

This is all of the – so this is basically every video that we made. [*Scrolls through a directory of video files.*] A few of them are, sort of, duplicates of each other because we did an exercise where people could just record voiceovers for existing videos. And a couple of times, people would actually watch the video and try to write something, and then some of them were a bit more stream of consciousness, just talking into a phone while watching the video.

Quite a lot of this stuff and a lot of the video work, I guess, I don't totally know, and we don't totally know what it is yet, and how it's going to affect and inform the process. Which I think is totally fine. And a few things in the moment, and since then, have really shaped and informed a lot of ways in which we're thinking about the work. And there's even a couple of specific bits in the videos that we're now looking at how we can stage or recreate that mood, or that aesthetic, or even those images, in the theatre. Some of that work is quite direct. Some of the other stuff is almost a bit more – it's kind of ambient. It's a kind of thing which feels it's connected to the project in some way and we will figure out at some point what that is. And obviously, some things – they are what they are and they'll just kind of sit there.

So examples of the voice over stuff. [*Scrolls through videos.*] What have we got? This one will have a voiceover on it. I can't remember what any of the voiceovers are but I'll play – which is this one? This's the April 15th. This is a video I haven't shown, so I'll put it on.



[00:48:49 to 00:49:36] Video montage from April 15

I haven't actually watched that since we made it actually, I think! So it's kind of, in terms of what she's saying – because we were working in a mixture of languages, everything was in English. We actually had three languages in the project. So it's English and Spanish and Czech at the moment, and we were translating back and forth as much as we possibly could throughout that process, but also particularly some of the more spontaneous, improvised stuff, that would just come in whatever language people were most comfortable with. So in that one, that's Rebecca kind of free-associating, describing stuff that she's seeing in terms of the video.

Part of the reason for doing that, I guess, was partly to see if the videos provoked any little fragments of text, nice phrases, things that might feed into other bits of writing that we were doing. So yeah, it's almost using the image that we'd been making as a kind of cue for something else. And I think maybe that's a general principle we use where we could – this idea of like a 'feedback loop'. The things that were generated, which sometimes could be chance or sometimes instinct, could feed back in and inform and inspire other things that people are doing. So it's partly that: just seeing what text the videos would provoke. And also partly it was just about being able to see the images with voice as well, even if the text itself wasn't important, it's just adding a kind of extra dimension to the images. So yeah. I mean, it's funny because that's the first time I've seen it in a few weeks, because – this is the thing, there's this huge, this kind of wealth of material that I haven't totally processed yet. But I think that's partly that I'm kind of enjoying the fact that I can let it sit there for a bit and come back to it in a different kind of context and a different kind of headspace. We did some other things related to that idea, which I'll talk about again in a bit. But yeah, so that was a kind of additional type of video in which we just go: 'Just record yourself speaking, describe what you see.' Things like that. And actually, I'll show – there's another one. What we did was, with all of the screen test videos, we also did an exercise where they would then watch back their video and describe what they think they're thinking. Or more treat it like it's another person, and speculating about what they're thinking. So again, I haven't listened to this for a while but I'll just play a sample of this.

[00:52:19 to 00:52:38] Screen test of Nhung

So again, it was just free-associating along with their own material and with their own videos. And again, it was very much with this attitude of: we just make stuff. And don't worry too much about what impact that's going to have on the project, and don't worry too much about the fact that we're making a theatre show. It's going: 'What can we do, and how can we respond to that, and how do we respond to each other and how do we engage with these specific forms that we have available to us?'

So I think that gives us a sense, probably of the range of all of the videos. This is all of the edited stuff, and this is all the stuff that everyone's seen. I've also still got a hard drive, which has got all of the raw material, which is hours and hours and hours of stuff. I think I'm the only person who's seen all of it because it was so kind of overwhelming the whole period of time, anyway, so it's like: 'I think, I'm not going to like dump everything on everyone.' And so actually even just the initial, this initial impulse to kind of edit down something at the end of every day was just to be able to present material in a kind of digestible form. So all the videos are at most five minutes long.

So it was about just helping everyone, making sure that everyone can see what we're doing. And I think, the core, or the overriding impulse at the beginning, was about just presenting material in a digestible form that we would all process what it was, rather than even going: 'Are these interesting videos?', and it was really nice that, actually, a lot of the imagery very quickly as they were learning through the process of filming a lot as they were seeing what other people were doing and also processing what they were doing, seeing what it looked like when it was edited, a lot of that very quickly evolved and became something like this – a lot of stuff which I think is really interesting.

Oh, and there is one other thing in terms of the videos. We did a couple of times try doing improvisations on Zoom. And we actually did that relatively early in the process, and we only did it a couple of times and there was nice stuff. So this one is actually – I'll just put it on and explain what it is.

[00:55:18 to 00:57:07] Video of improvisation, 'April 17 (fast-forward)'



This is a fast-forward of an hour-long improvisation. And the idea, the setup was that everyone would prepare kind of two different spaces that they could work in. So we did a first round, which was like this, and then there's another round later on. There was a very simple text improvisation exercise that they would do while they were working. So the idea would be that one person would be speaking at a time but the core instruction was like: 'Just look at the screen. Look at yourself, look at the combination of images and, make images in relation to that.' And I think something about the idea of looking at yourself and thinking about what that experience is of watching yourself doing things was important for some reason, I think. But also, it was just about seeing what would happen. So yes, we ran for an hour in two different separate chunks and we were just waiting to see what kind of images would come out of it. And actually this part of the process is very similar to how we often work in the rehearsal room anyway, which is often about just generating chance combinations of different images, or chance relationships between a particular image and a particular text. So this felt in some ways the most similar to how we actually normally work in the rehearsal room. This is now the kind of second round in the different spaces.

So we did this a couple of times in the first week and then we kind of left that there. And I think, well, my sense of it was a lot of the imagery stuff was really nice. The text improvisation stuff, I felt like there is a kind of language to speaking to a camera in that context, which is very specific that's very different from working actually on stage or working, speaking to someone who's in the room with you, and that it would take us a while to crack exactly how that works. And we decided not to use the time for that. So yes, there was a point where we were – because also, we did have an invitation that we were considering with one of the partners in Madrid, with La Abadía. They said like: 'Do you want to do something live?', and we were kind of saying: 'Well, we could do a half-hour improvisation if we could understand and get a sense of how that works.' But there was some stuff there that I felt like we hadn't cracked enough and it would need time to sort of figure out what that was. So we kind of let those couple of days be what they were and it did, I think, help – and there's some nice images in some of this stuff actually, which we're still thinking about and going back to – but it felt kind of good, it just made sense to leave that there, and maybe one day in the future, if we end up working like this again, we'll try to figure out what that is. But we made quite a conscious decision to go: 'No, okay, we're going to focus on the kind of prepared film stuff on the kind of more composed, less spontaneous.' Well, I mean, actually a lot of what they were doing in filming was fundamentally improvising, but not that kind of collaborative improvisation. It was more individual working from home. So that's the final video stuff that we've got.

And in terms of, like – I'm trying to think of other things that I can show you in here. So that's the real dominant stuff I guess. The other files here – so if I go from the bottom. [*Scrolls through a directory of folders.*] We did record all of the Zoom meetings. I've never watched them again, but we do have them there. So maybe we will go back to that at some point. The wish list is a list I've shown. This is a couple of things that I – little kind of homemade animations that I made for people to put on their phones when they were doing film work. It uses, like, a little mini screen. We actually did a little bit of screen work. I'm wondering if there's something that's good to – actually, I'm going back to the videos, but then I think there is something there that might be good to show here, because this is a thing which is potentially part of the work on the show as well. We're kind of doing a lot of work – kind of working with little mini screens.

[01:00:10 to 01:00:43] Scrolling through video 'Replicas 2'

We did some stuff where they were – I think this was a task, which was about replicating yourself as many times as you can. And that was a response to a little game that Camilla had sort of invented in the series of videos she did, and we were like: 'This feels interesting.' She's working with mirrors and screens and things. So we did a kind of 'how many times can you replicate yourself?'. So this was something that Rebecca made, and then Camilla did this where she was actually using a load of bits of video footage which we also shot for something else. So we did some stuff like that but also – I made this. [*Shows animation.*] This is the mini homemade, flashy, GIF-style animation which people can put on their phones. It was, like, a little visual element, and it's something that might be used in the show in some way. So it was a way of testing that. You have a folder with the few of those.



[01:01:03] NOTE AND AUDIO WORK

This is just all of the bits of text we were working with. [*Scrolls through a directory of files.*] And this is just the stuff that was new or newly translated during that period so people could record things.

[*Another directory of files.*] This I won't dive into partly because it's in at least three different languages and also I can't remember – and I'm not totally sure what everything is – but this is all of the notes and writing. It's a lot of stuff. It's different little bits of writing exercises. Some of them are individual pieces that people are writing, some of these are sort of shared documents as well. And yes, everyone was adding different kinds of bits and pieces. Yes, so a mix of people's individual research, these shared writing documents which are just gathering up bits of stuff. There is a huge amount of stuff there, which I'm sort of still working on. Some of it's already fed into stuff that we've been doing, some of it still just feels like this, kind of – it's loads of stuff to work with, basically, and it's stuff that I'm going to be re-reading, especially once we've got a little bit of time and distance from the project.

[*Another directory of files.*] That is just more of that kind of material. Yeah, that's more notes. This is some stuff that I did. [*Opens text file.*] So this is some kind of just laying out the conceptual stuff. I had a whole load of post-its up on the wall here just trying to – because while the emphasis for the performers was on just generating stuff and not thinking too much about the show, I was in parallel using it as time to try to imagine what the show might be. So working with ideas and themes we had in Barcelona, other stuff we had since then, things that we've discussed or new possibilities around the material. I did start to try to map some things out, and then I wrote up those footnotes, essentially. So this is like a folder of more show-focused stuff that was running, I guess, slightly in the background. Yeah, I can show – which am I going to show?

So this is a concept map. [*Shows a concept map of the show.*] So this is a bunch of different things that we're thinking about in relation to the show. It's all kind of slightly written in shorthand. Because it's all stuff that we know what we're talking about. So it's not massively explained – or there are other documents which kind of outline that. But that was more about just going: 'This is how certain things are connected to each other, maybe, in my head.' Because, I think, it was this quite dense period of generating stuff and we obviously couldn't all be together in the same room to really talk things through and spoke a little bit on Zoom or via some individual vehicles and stuff, but a lot of the trying to put everything together or just keep track of everything, which I was taking responsibility for throughout the process, we just had to figure out how to express and share that a little bit and that's what we've been returning to now properly. Now that we're actually able to rehearse again. So yeah, this is the folder of show-focused stuff, and then this is a big folder.

[*Scrolls through another directory.*] This is all of the text recordings that we did during that period. So it's like a whole load of different things. Some of it is, like, we all have multiple versions of the same text but with different voices. And yes, some of this we then did use in the video, although, again, there wasn't the intention – we weren't recording the text to make a video at the end. That was a part of the process of trying to develop material in a way that made sense. And then some of it became useful in terms of videos that we were making at the time or the video that we made at the end. So there is stuff like – which ones? [*Scrolls through a directory of video files.*] Okay, so this one is–

[01:06:05 to 01:06:12] Video entitled 'Empty Pool (Nhung April 16)'

So that one is a bit that we use in the *Home Movie*. And that, for example, is a bit of text that is from November, and we didn't have a recording of, but we already had a sense of what that was. There was, I think, pretty much by total chance – when we were working in Barcelona, we did show about 15 minutes of material, in a fairly rough form. Or it was more just going: 'Well, this is some things that we've got ready enough, that we can share some things', with some thought put into general composition, but it was really just about seeing what some of those things were. And we did test a load of bits of texts. And one of the nice things in this process – all the stuff that's in the home video is a load of text that we didn't do in that particular show, so it's actually been really good to have, like, to separate sharings of very different forms and formats, of some very different bits of



material, which feels kind of good to have done. But again, it was fundamentally just chance. The *Home Movie* is made out of some stuff that we put together that seemed right to me.

There is one other load of things which actually aren't in the drive. They are all stored somewhere else, partly because it is, again, a huge amount of stuff. At the very end of the process, we did a thing where – and this maybe refers back I think to something that I said before, but I can't remember what – we kind of went: 'Okay. Last few days, there's a load of stuff, which we kind of maybe haven't managed, or tasks that someone wanting to do but never found the time for it. And so if you're not going to do something just describe that thing into an audio message' – like, just talk about that thing that you didn't do. And then we'll have that recording. So we don't have the thing that we haven't produced, but we have the idea.

And we also extended that – we did a few, sort of, imaginative free-association exercises of just talking for ten minutes into the phone. We also did an exercise of just people, everyone recording themselves talking about what this period of time has felt like. Not just in terms of the working process but in terms of that whole five, four-week period in the lockdown. There's been slightly different periods – for us it was almost three months, but it has varied a bit for different people. But it was just going: 'Just describe what this is, without thinking about it. Just talk about this experience.' We have that recorded, so we can come back to that at some future point, and partly it's just going – it feels important to have documented that period of time and because I think some of the work, in some sort of way, some of the performance work, might have been a response, or have been shaped by this period of time. And it was also partly in case it helps us, just because we've produced all of these different bits of material during the period, and maybe if we go back to it in three months, it will help us to connect to it if we can also remind ourselves of what the experience, of what this situation was when those things were made, if that makes sense. It's about being able to get back into the same headspace that we were in when the things were made. It feels like a sort of useful remark, and we haven't tested that yet. Everyone's deliberately not listening to them, yet. We're going to give it maybe another couple of months, but it felt kind of nice to have that. And I actually ended up, in the last few days, recording – I've got maybe three hours of just different recordings of people talking about different things, or recording ideas of things they haven't done, or just remembering things, or describing things. That felt like a good way to end the process with this slightly excessive – just pouring out a load of thoughts and feelings which might get in the show or might not. So yeah, that's the final category of things that we've got but that's not up in the drive. And I think that's kind of everything.

So I mean, where we're at now, a couple of months later, is we've just managed to spend four days in a rehearsal room in Madrid with everyone, we managed to get everyone here. And we really use that as a period of kind of doing all the things that we couldn't do at a distance. So doing physical work and some – well, a lot of physical improvisation kind of group work stuff, anything involving physical contact, which we weren't able to do and a little bit of work to start to see how we might be able to stage some of the images. So we did it as a – we kind of deliberately didn't put too much pressure on the period in terms of like going: 'Well, we've got to make material.' It was more going: 'Let's–', it felt more like a period to wrap up the whole online residency, rather than a new residency. It was like just kind of resolving that, and doing all the things we've imagined but hadn't been able to do. So it's been really good.

Transcription by Tom Colley & Duška Radosavljević

Clips Summary

[00:00:23 to 00:11:45] *Swimming Pools – Home Movie* (2020)

[00:34:35 to 00:36:58] Stop motion video montage from April 13

[00:37:12 to 00:39:08] Stop motion video montage from April 14



[00:39:26 to 00:40:00] Stop motion video montage from April 20
[00:40:41 to 00:41:20] Stop motion video montage 'Empty Pool April 19-22'
[00:45:41 to 00:46:06] Video montage of stills from other videos
[00:48:49 to 00:49:36] Video montage from April 15
[00:52:19 to 00:52:38] Screen test of Nhung
[00:55:18 to 00:57:07] Video of improvisation, 'April 17 (fast-forward)'
[01:00:10 to 01:00:43] Scrolling through video 'Replicas 2'
[01:06:05 to 01:06:12] Video entitled 'Empty Pool (Nhung April 16)'

Audio available at www.auralia.space/laboratory1-sleepwalkcollective/.

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