

# *In-Habit.*

## **The Oak Tree**

by Tim Crouch with Kim Gyngell as guest actor

Present: an artistic director, a performer, a musician/composer, a performer/writer, a writer

Four of the artists were regionally based and one was mainly metro based.

Directly following the performance there were very mixed reactions across the 5 artist/audience members. Two in particular were angry, two were vexed and one felt that if anything it was a celebration of Kim Gyngell's (and therefore "the actor's) generosity and trust.

We regrouped at the Festival Club. The composer kept notes of our conversation.

Form: Relationship of 2 people on stage, one writer/director/inter-actor, the other an actor with no idea what is to come or be requested of him but to adhere to an entirely scripted piece of theatre for which directions are given in situ.

Question as to whether they were on the same page despite the nature of this set up, and was the work just about the craft of the actor.

There was a general feeling of deception. Questions were raised regarding the staged director/actor relationship and the degree to which the whole work was controlled and manipulated as opposed to the sales pitch of contemporary performance risk taking and a revolt against psychological realism. There was a sense that it had been replaced by psychological manipulation.

E – found content and writing annoying

J – there's a dramaturgical conceit for audience to be active spectator, but we quickly had that taken away from us by Crouch and were left with the one possibility as presented – watching the actor "naked and shitting himself".

It was a heavily staged metaphor.

CHI –just when getting interesting, Tim kept pulling out of interaction himself (was it to keep roles clearly defined?) –frustrating as viewer but perhaps good as writing; became more perversely interesting as it went along, more complex in terms of what questions I was asking (but was it interesting to ask these? Did they add anything to the poetic experience – I don't believe so) and story more clear, the climax hypnotizing in the switch and its anti climax

P – function of it not following logical conclusion was the point –all set up –all we were doing was watching the action –an anti-climax

J – it became intellectual and self congratulatory

E – story was built to be incredibly moving but wasn't by principle. The emotion was kept at bay through the principles of the staging mechanics and this became just a kind of exercise that denied any engagement

J – hidden code was all known, so waiting on anti-climax

C –the combination of hypnosis and direction set to the same essential principle was as initially intriguing, as it was then a fairly obvious intention made

More collective discussions on:

Celebration of actor

Great start. State it and actor does/becomes it. (i.e. You are a Father). This initial moment held all the poetry – it was pure and simple and revealed the whole beauty of theatre – just being available to interpret the script or a line or a moment, and in collaboration with an audience who is prepared to cede to that. Problem was the rest of the show just restates that single moment, the story wasn't moving and we were left feeling duped by Roach's supposed risk taking approach.

Ultimately actor becomes hero where director/creator becomes cheap trick man showing himself as much the fraud as his own character does in the play –intentional as a statement on theatre makers or not that clever?

Best thing as agreed by all was moment where Tim leaves to go to the bar to get some water for the actor –at that stage then did the character, actor, audience live a suspended undirected moment together.

Condescension – illusion for audience or manipulation of actor?  
Kim framed as sidekick and underdog, which kept audience on his side

J - Tim playing loss as theme – it was all about loss and losers – a failed showman/failed hypnotist/failing the public/loser contestants/loss through death, loss of courage...and i reckon the risk factor in “losing it” was something Roach could have taken on board a much more. Instead he chose such tight control that he lost me as an audience member.

Intellectual and disengaged until only one moment.

Tim wanted us to go to an intellectual, smart and completely smug and masked place that one or two of us didn't want to go to. But we traveled with Kim because he remained unmasked, naked and generous

Remained an exercise/smart –not fantastical or of wonderment

He's written that he is frustrated by psychological realism.

If exploring representation and loss is the intention he imbedded into a psychological game so that it was all about manipulation – the director manipulating the actor – the writer manipulating the director, the actor manipulating the audience. There's a strong psychological realism in all that!

It's just at a different level.

If he wanted to deconstruct loss and psychological realism he could have chosen to compress “Death of a Salesman” as a script with Kim and it might have made “the exercise” richer

E – not sure what he wanted from the audience other than the audience questioning theatre

Only actual risk is working with different actors. There's no question: 'Where's the Show?'

Illusion of risk (perhaps intended like the hypnotist), but being NO risk = thread/carrot dangled. It's really perverse of him.

J – suspicious of him

Time/place/action – is really easy to bust by introducing the future and show/audience

P feels hoodwinked

E – analysis of marketing – get local hero guest actor wherever you tour the show to attract local audience curiosity, Crouch gets hailed as a clever writer/theatre maker and he doesn't have to be a good actor. Great touring product for international festival circuit. Problem was Crouch wasn't neutral enough. He was always playing "The Director's dilemma" – how much to feed the actor?

It was really telling about his fear of the emotional realm. He was definitely NOT letting us imagine freely - not a celebration of imagination at all.

e.g the scripted 'Do you think it's contrived?' 'I felt like yelling DER!

General feeling was disappointment after many responded to what appeared to be an interesting exploration risk taking adventure. Was it because it didn't really work or rather that ultimately it was highly contrived and over wrought 'smart theatre'?

J. If the blurb had said "Crouch's intelligent exploration of contrivance and control in performance reveals yet again that great actors will always be naked and shitting themselves in front of a captive audience" would we have thought any differently?

Conversation ran over one and a half hours.

© Jude Anderson – November 2008