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The absurd reality of satire in Neil LaBute's 'Fat Pig'

Hermione Gehle
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Edith Cowan University

The Absurd Reality of Satire in Neil LaBute's 'Fat Pig'

*A director's exploration to emphasize satire through the staging
of a production.*

Hermione Gehle

Principal Supervisor: Associate Professor Maggi Phillips

Associate Supervisor: Associate Professor Andrew Lewis

**Submitted as partial requirement for Master of Research Degree in
Performance: Directing**

Faculty of Arts and Education

WAAPA

The declaration page
is not included in this version of the thesis

Abstract

This research project examines the misreading of satire in some productions of Neil LaBute's play, *Fat Pig*. This practice led project aims to investigate why such misinterpretations occur and explore the theatrical styles that emphasise the satire in the text via rehearsal processes and production.

There will be three preliminary paths undertaken in this research heading toward a new production of *Fat Pig*; an exploration of the responses of audiences and critics to past productions; an analysis of the background to Neil LaBute and his work; and an examination of theatrical expressions of satire, experimental theatre, contemporary theatre, and their practitioners. The overall aim of this research project is to find ways, as a director, to experiment with theatrical styles as a means to expand the play's complex issues and ironic take on society's narrow view of female beauty. This study will explore the following questions: what is the correlation between staging and design (the director's influence) and how an audience interprets meaning; and what forms of theatrical expression will highlight and emphasise the satire and irony present in the text? In what ways can critical reviews and feedback from previous productions indicate the understanding (or lack of understanding) of the ironic content in the script? Can situating LaBute in the context of his satiric writing style that straddles literary elements from opposing absurd and realism genres shed light on how irony can be exposed in *Fat Pig*?

The project's new production aims to underscore the play's social commentaries by combining various forms of theatrical styles, philosophies, and methodologies. I wish to extend my directorial practice by investigating strategies to emphasise and highlight what I see as the underlying focus of *Fat Pig*; society's discriminating behaviour to those who sit outside mainstream ideals of physical beauty.

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Note to readers:

Please be aware the accompanying footage of the production (as is so often the case) does not do justice to the live performance. Allowing actors access to the stage and clear pathways for audience thoroughfare greatly limited possible positions to place the camera, as a result, sight lines and audio have been compromised. I ask you to view the video as a suggestion or sample of what we achieved instead of an accurate representation. The movie file has been broken down into easy view clips or alternatively if you play closed entire file it will play the clips in uninterrupted succession. The first five clips depict pre-show preparations with the performance beginning in clip six. I appreciate your understanding and hope you may glean a little of the magic this talented cast and crew created on the night.

Introduction

Brad Haseman, renowned expert of Practice led Research ,asserts that, in the duality of performance and writing, practice is primary and that “because creative practice is both ongoing and persistent, practitioner researchers do not merely ‘think’ their way through or out of a problem, but rather they ‘practice’ to a resolution” (Haseman, 2006, p. 147). The seed of this research project inserted itself in the fertile ground of my mind when, after an introduction to Neil LaBute’s satiric writing by my supervisor, the desire to stage a production of the play took root. My initial inquiry discovered an interesting phenomenon; the play and its title, persistently drew literal interpretations. I needed to know why the satire was difficult to convey and, subsequently, sought ways to combat the seemingly unavoidable misreadings.

Thesis Question

Neil LaBute’s play *Fat Pig* is a savage satire directed toward society’s preoccupation with physical appearance. By stressing the irony present in the text, via experimentation with varied theatrical styles, this research project asks: how could further clarity of the play’s complex issues be achieved in a new production of the play?

- What is the correlation between staging and design (the director’s influence) and an audience’s interpretations of its meaning?
- What forms of theatrical expression will highlight and emphasise the satire and irony present in the text?
- In what ways can critical reviews and feedback from previous productions indicate the understanding (or lack of understanding) of the ironic content in the script?
- Can situating LaBute in the context of his satiric writing style that straddles literary elements from opposing absurd and realism genres shed light on how irony can be exposed in *Fat Pig*?

Fat Pig

In this research, specific attention will be given to an analysis of the play, *Fat Pig*, as a satire through its themes, characters, content and structure. Consideration will also be given to the theatrical styles LaBute draws on and how those styles and others might be useful in exploring the theatrical expression of satire in *Fat Pig* throughout the rehearsal and performance process of a new production. I will initiate this process with a brief analysis of the play and its origin. In some respects, *Fat Pig* (LaBute, 2004) is a play inspired by LaBute's own battle with weight, yet, like so many of LaBute's other works, the play deals with larger issues such as cruelty, the individual's place in and responsibility to the world, gender struggles, and power and societal pressures to conform.

The story follows the blossoming relationship between Helen, an overweight librarian, and Tom, a 'good-looking' executive. Tom has an unresolved relationship with a girl at work, Jeannie, who is desperate for commitment and fearful of Tom's inability to be honest with her. Tom's colleague, Carter, is a stereotypical misogynist. He is unrelenting in his cruel attacks on Tom to make him conform to his own superficial perceptions of women and of life in general. When Carter learns that Tom is secretly seeing someone outside the office, he immediately informs Jeannie, igniting her fury. Carter is perhaps fuelled by jealousy, because Tom has the interest of two women simultaneously, or he just enjoys the entertainment of conflict: either way, he is aware of and welcomes Jeannie's hostility toward Tom. Carter manipulates Tom into giving him a photo of Helen, which he then sends to everyone in the office in which his opinion of women is made clear: "It's not, like, some derogatory thing I'm saying about her-not the therapist cunt, but Jeannie-it's just an idle thought. She seems to be packing it on some. That's the problem with winter: chicks don't get out much and they bloat up" (LaBute, 2004, p. 22).

Carter puts enormous pressure on Tom to not be with Helen by his constant jibes and assessment that they are too different to be together, supporting his opinion by saying, "it's one of the laws of nature. 'Run with your own kind'" (LaBute, 2004, p. 71). In a review posted on the Broadway World website, LaBute is quoted as stating in reference to *Fat Pig*: "[S]ince the original production, the text of the play has been seasoned over the past five years by both my experience and the continuing struggle for acceptance of people in the

world around me who fall outside of mainstream, classic definitions” (“FAT PIG to Broadway,” 2010). He further remarks that more *Fat Pig* audience members contact him to talk about the play than any other he has written and he acknowledges “the universal truth that gets pinched by this story” (“FAT PIG to Broadway,” 2010).

Although there are many plausible readings of the play including perspectives from gender, feminist perceptions of patriarchal paradigms, class inequalities or mass media social issues, the central focus of my research targets general societal acceptance of behaviours that marginalize individuals. I argue that the play predominantly challenges what is considered publically acceptable as stereotypical ideals of body image by a satirical presentation of the venomous and intolerant opinions of Jeannie and Carter. In doing this, LaBute invites his audiences to explore their own prejudices on bodily consciousness by accepting or rejecting the characters’ opinions and reclaiming the often-silenced voice of those who fall outside conventional ideals of beauty.

Neil LaBute

Neil LaBute is a contemporary American writer, playwright, screenwriter and director. Born in Detroit, Michigan on 19th March, 1963, he grew up working on his father's farm in Spokane, Washington, where he became accustomed to hard work and developed a strong discipline that he carried into his writing. LaBute had a tumultuous relationship with his long-haul truck driving father, whose mood swings made his homecomings unpredictable. This father and son dynamic would later become a recurring theme explored in his work (Bigsby, 2007, p. 2). After receiving a "minority-scholarship" as a non-Mormon, he studied theatre at Brigham Young University. In 1981, LaBute joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints with which he enjoyed a shaky relationship until 2004. LaBute performed as an actor at the university and began writing pieces for his fellow acting students. Many of LaBute's early works featured Mormons as the central characters whose often violent and morally corrupt natures made his plays unpalatable to the university. Several of his plays were officially terminated soon after their premieres. After graduating in 1985, LaBute married a devout Mormon, Lisa Gore, with whom he had two children. Lisa found it difficult to reconcile her commitment to her husband and the pressure she felt from the church to disapprove of the content explored in his plays. They currently live apart and his children do not approve of his work.

Although LaBute has managed to make a particularly successful leap from the stage to screen (and back again) in both writing and directing, it is his theatrical accomplishments that will be of greatest interest in this research project. LaBute has written a huge body of work for the stage, much of which has been premiered by well-respected theatre companies in the US and the UK, and followed by successful seasons around the world. To assist in a thorough analysis of *Fat Pig* and how to interpret the satire, I have been peripherally informed by my knowledge of his provocative body of works written between 1992 to 2009 including: *Bash: Latter-Day Plays* (1992); *The Shape of Things* (2001); *This is How it Goes* (2005) and *The Mercy Seat* (2002) to assist my identification of LaBute's stylistic influences.

Earlier Productions, Interpretations, and Analysis

The following promotional flyers of earlier productions illustrate how some interpretations of *Fat Pig*, whether deliberately or subliminally, have reinforced, rather than challenged, the discrimination LaBute set out to expose. Both posters seem to be drawing a literal correlation between the plus-sized character, Helen, and the title of the play. The design of these posters suggests the title is referring directly to her, thereby influencing audience opinion by associating a large woman with the words ‘fat pig’ before they have even seen the play.



Figure 1: Pangdemonium's poster for *Fat Pig*

Pangdemonium poster for *Fat Pig*, artwork and photography by Crispian Chan for My Milk Photographie, design concept Pangdemonium Theatre Company. Permission to cite granted by artist



Figure 2: Breathing Time's *Fat Pig* artwork

Breathing Time Productions *Fat Pig* flyer and poster, copyright Green Lavender Graphic 2008.

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I assert that, because this play is deliberately ironic to provoke social commentary, the title is, in fact, referring to the behaviour of Jeannie and Carter who are representative of society in the play. Their discriminatory and insulting behaviour toward Helen creates an insurmountable obstacle which ultimately destroys her relationship with the protagonist, Tom, positioning Jeannie and Carter as the real ‘fat pigs’ in the story.

In an article from a 2011 edition of *Health Education Journal*, Anat Endevelt and Ronit Gesser-Edelsburg published their research entitled, “An Entertainment-Education (*sic*) study of stereotypes and prejudice against fat women: an evaluation of *Fat Pig*”. The study aimed

to “evaluate the impact of *Fat Pig* on the attitudes of high school students towards fat women and investigate the perspective of dietitians (sic) as health professionals on the messages in *Fat Pig*” (2011, p. 1). Both the students and dieticians who participated in their research appear to agree that the play did not promote a positive role-model for larger women and the following is their analysis of the play:

Apparently, by naming the play *Fat Pig*, LaBute makes the large woman, Helen, the main character in the play. The rest of the characters (...) supposedly revolve around her. However, an analysis of the play reveals that the protagonist is society, presented by the rest of the characters, since the story of the love between Helen and Tom is being told through the eyes of the other characters/society and not through Helen’s character. (Endevelt & Gesser-Edelsburg, 2011, p. 376)

The research by Endevelt and Gesser-Edelsburg (2011) notes that the play seems to be titled after the character of Helen but also concede a need for deeper examination of the text is required. On face value, it may seem that LaBute is referring to Helen as the ‘fat pig’ in the play because of her obvious size, however, a more multi-layered, less-obvious and perhaps more nuanced representation might be more appropriate to expose the irony of the title. By writing *Fat Pig* as a satire, it is possible, as acknowledged by Endevelt and Gesser-Edelsburg, that LaBute is implying just the opposite and it is the other characters in the play who are in fact the metaphorical ‘fat pigs’ in the story. Endevelt and Gesser-Edelsburg’s suggest that society is the protagonist. While I agree Jeannie and Carter represent society; I argue it is Tom, the individual up against society, who is the protagonist. Jeannie accepts Carter’s summation of Helen as a fat pig solely based on her appearance, the inference being that it is merely an opinion of Helen which, like all ill-informed opinions, is shallow. Thus, LaBute comments not solely on Carter and Jeannie but on a society that perpetuates such appearance-based biases. By giving voice to their cruel judgements and their inability to look beyond Helen’s appearance because she does not fit into the mainstream ideal, LaBute highlights their ‘piggish’ prejudices and character faults. Individuals like Tom display piggish behaviour too because they are swayed by popular opinion formed from the normalization of this behaviour within society. Characters in the play are exposed as flawed, unlikable personalities, any one of whom could offer a far greater reason for the name of the play than Helen: Carter for his cruel and misogynist ways; Jeannie for her

aggressive, jealous outbursts and emotional manipulation; and Tom for his dishonesty and lack of courage. Some productions seem to have led their audiences to the superficial assessment that it is Helen who is the fat pig and ironically, by doing so, point out the failing in society to consider her and the other characters in the play on a deeper level. This value system perpetuates the very same societal pressures under which Tom buckles.

LaBute tends to use the smaller or more minor perspectives to reveal larger concerns: by exposing the individual, emphasis is placed on the flaws in society (in this case, the discrimination against Helen who falls outside Carter's idealised perception of physical appearance) that allow the possibility of these characters and scenarios to exist. Moreover, by

[t]elling the love story through the eyes of Tom, who represents society, not only reproduces the objectification of the woman as fat, but also deprives her of the stage she was given to tell her personal and social story (...) with which the audience could have identified. (Endevelt & Gesser-Edelsburg, 2011, p. 376)

In opposition to Endevelt and Gesser-Edelsburg's analysis, I would suggest, Tom is not representative of society but is the individual who lacks the courage to go against society which is personified by Jeannie and Carter who refuse to give voice to Helen. Helen's objectification at the hands of Jeannie and Carter ironically enables the telling of her story. In this way, LaBute seems to ask his audience to think deeper and to challenge their own preconceived judgments.

Endevelt and Gesser-Edelsburg conclude that their research shows:

that the play's impact on its viewers is completely opposite to the playwright and the health educators' original intentions regarding fat people: the social and cultural norms that glorify the 'thinness ideal' with which the high school students come to *Fat Pig* are reinforced by the play. (2011, p. 382)

Endevelt and Gesser-Edelsburg's research later adds that the participating dieticians could not see how they could use the play as a "treatment tool" (2011, p. 382), concluding that the play does not promote a "positive role model for fat women to identify with" nor was it a positive "influence on their self-esteem" (Endevelt & Gesser-Edelsburg, 2011, p. 382).

The finding of Endevelt and Gesser-Edelsburg's (2011) research is an unfortunate indictment on modern day society and indicates the satirical intent of the play seems to have been missed by many viewers. It could be argued that the students who participated in their research missed the satire because of a lack of sophistication, however, the fact that the dieticians also missed this point would imply that the irony in the productions viewed may not have been expressed clearly enough. That their findings could be so far removed from LaBute's satirical intentions merely emphasises the idea that Helen, in their minds, is no more valuable in an intimate relationship than society's judgement of her physical appearance will allow. Why did the students not condemn the other characters for their treatment of her? How did they not conclude that it is the society that should change and not the character of Helen, who I perceived as the most appealing of all the characters?

In private, Tom and Helen are presented as both physically and mentally attracted to each other, so it is not Tom's personal objection to Helen which forces him to break up with her. Helen appears perfect for Tom when, on an evening alone together she says "we fit, you know? Our mouths together" and later he says "how much it means to me, being with you ... I adore you" (LaBute, 2004, p. 56). Ultimately, it is his lack of courage (in the face of societal pressures) that is to blame for their break up, and not, as Endevelts and Gesser-Edelsburg's research findings would assert, Helen's over-weight appearance. Perhaps it can be considered that it is, in fact, society's condemnation of her that creates her self-dissatisfaction. Throughout the play, Helen seems quite comfortable with her appearance; Tom even remarks "She's happy with who she is" (LaBute, 2004, p. 53), and it is not until he rejects her that insecurity and desperation lead her to offer to have an operation to change the way she looks.

HELEN: I'll do something radical to myself if you want me to. Like be stapled or have some surgery or whatever it takes- one of those rings because I do not want this to end. (LaBute, 2004, p. 81)

Does the character of Helen negate her positive approach to life, love and beauty and thus her positive role-model appeal by offering to have the surgery? Exposing Helen's desperation, when she cracks and folds under the intense peer pressure to conform to society's ideals depicted in the play suggests she has become a victim of society's prejudice.

When faced with losing Tom, she begs to conform and uphold the accepted social norms which dictate that happiness and love can only be achieved if physical ideals are met.

In a review of a Queensland Theatre Company production, an audience member stated, the world of the play had “only thin, shrieking women and fat pigs on offer” (Perkins, 2010). Zoe, a respondent to the review wrote on the web page noted that “[I]really believe that a lot of the power of the message was lost because of Jeannie's portrayal. Had LaBute written her as a more nuanced character, or even just a little less deranged, it would have been much more interesting” (Perkins, 2010). I disagree that the play's ‘message’ lost any ‘power’ due to LaBute's writing. Jeannie is a parody representing satirized stereotypical female vices in the world of the play. She believes Tom is messing her around with his reluctance to be honest and give her a straight answer about their relationship, evidenced when she demands to know the truth about the girl Tom is rumoured to be dating: “talking around shit, that's what I'm saying. I hate that! Are-you-dating-someone?” and “I'm not anything. Except confused” (LaBute, 2004, p. 25). Jeannie has tried everything to manipulate Tom into telling her what she wants to hear: she is so self-absorbed that she fails to see Tom's squirming around, attempting to avoid her bullish inquisition. Jeannie is a complex character, with motivation and reason, yet she is grotesque and cruel in her behaviour. Far from just a “thin, shrieking woman” (Perkins, 2010), she embodies women who justify their intolerance because of frustration from being dismissed, objectified or lonely and her malicious actions are a product of the prejudicial society that accepts these behaviours. By emphasising, through theatrical style and choices, the internal world of Jeannie and Carter in the play (via clues LaBute offers into how these characters operate through their spoken revelations, rhythms and tones), an insight might be gained into the world at large. Parodying these characters as flawed aspects of humanity allows greater scope in performance to convey their satirical function as ciphers of society. This project will explore theatrical styles and methodologies to discover what possible performative concepts could highlight the tragic paradox of the external and internal worlds of these characters and thus better direct the satirical comment on the world at large.

Christopher Bigsby remarks on the “hostility” that LaBute's works received from members of the Mormon church when he began to write “plays which explored the human potential

for cruelty and violence” (2007, p. 5). According to Bigsby, LaBute describes himself as a “‘wide-eyed realist’, it was simply that his realism took the form of staging the contradictions in human nature” (2007, p. 6). *Fat Pig* does not explore overt physical violence, unlike LaBute’s earlier plays; no baby is drowned, as in *The Distance From Here* (LaBute, 2003), and no homosexual is brutally beaten, as in *A Gaggle of Saints* (LaBute, 2000, pp. 31-70). There is, however, emotional and mental cruelty expressed in violent verbal attacks on Tom and Helen from Carter and Jeannie. Tom appears desperate for peer approval and finds the assault too much to bear. Eventually he breaks up with Helen, unable to face the ridicule and judgement of society and, in so doing, the tragedy of his inability to challenge societal demands is brought to fruition.

A great deal of LaBute’s work has been identified, through his use of language and revelations of harsh truths, as exhibiting strong elements of Contemporary Realism. In contrast, the exploration of cruelty and violence in much of his writing indicates that certain absurd qualities are applicable to his work. *Fat Pig* is realistic in terms of plot, structure, naturalistic language and characterisation but, as a tragicomedy, it explores themes of cruelty and of the individual against society, which is much more in keeping with the concerns of absurd theatre. Directing a production of LaBute’s *Fat Pig* with greater emphasis on absurdity and experimental staging devices could be beneficial in highlighting the satire and thus locating the play squarely as a social commentary.

Anton Matz suggests that “An intrepid realism unearths the ugly; a committed satire rails against it” (2010, p. 123). The implication being that realism’s objective is to present aspects of human nature while satire needs to expose and condemn undesirable traits. Matz argues that contemporary satire lacks the intensity of its nineteenth-century predecessors because audiences are less likely to be shocked by the realistic representation of everyday life. With Matz’s observations in mind, it must be considered that although a contemporary satirist such as Neil LaBute conjures a familiar realism in his work, the absurdity or grotesqueness of the characters and situations his plays depict cannot be overlooked in order for audiences to appreciate the extent of the writing’s satirical content.

LaBute and his relationship to Contemporary Realism and Theatre of the Absurd

Christopher Bigsby explains in *Neil LaBute: Stage and Cinema* that LaBute has “staked out a distinctive, and disturbing territory” (2007, cover) within performance writing and provides a summary of LaBute’s work, his background and the writers who have inspired and influenced him. The stimulus from LaBute’s background is evident in his writing and so too is the effect of borrowing from multiple theatrical styles which has led to him becoming what Bigsby refers to as “one of the most exciting new talents in theatre and film to have emerged in the 1990s” (2007, cover). One of the great contradictions in theatre making and theatre criticism is the relationship between the Theatre of the Absurd and Contemporary Realist theatre. This research will explore LaBute’s literary style that draws from elements of both contemporary realism and absurdism in the writing of *Fat Pig*; however, for my purposes, the carnivalesque origins of satiric expression will dominate the focus for performative possibilities in LaBute’s striking integration of styles.

Emerging in Europe in the mid-nineteenth century “Realism” became a “nameable phenomenon” as a “movement in art and literature” (Darity, 2008, p. 91) which surfaced in the US as a theatrical form in the twentieth century. “[I]t claimed to represent common people and their everyday circumstances based on accurate observation. Realism challenged centuries of tradition, when the highest art aspired to idealized pictorial forms and heroic subjects” (2008, p. 91). Present day realists continue to reject idealism and their goal is to portray the literal truth of characters, society, behaviours and objects without any sense of glorification. They seek to question universal truths and often bring to the fore more sordid and unattractive aspects of the world around them (Bigsby, 2007, pp. 37-38). Many comparisons have been made between LaBute and the realism evident in David Mamet’s work. Bigsby argues that the influence is clearly evident in the comparison between LaBute’s *In The Company of Men*(1997) and Mamet’s Pulitzer Prize winning *Glengarry, Glen Ross* (1984) (Bigsby, 2007, p. 38), since both writers share a similar “language that is sometimes a blunt weapon, sometimes a fine-spun web” (Bigsby, 2007, p. 38). Bigsby argues that they “share a dark view of aspects of human nature but the cruelties LaBute chooses to expose and explore cut deeper” (2007, p. 39). A significant direction of

my production and research will examine contemporary realist work with particular consideration of LaBute's similarity to Mamet's approach to theatrical form and language.

Realism aims to reveal a truth that often exposes unattractive and immoral situations. In *Fat Pig*, Carter's intolerance of Helen and Tom's relationship, reveals societal discrimination toward a less-than-ideal physical appearance. The play, in terms of structure and theatrical conventions, appears quite realistic in its believable and rational depiction of events, linear narrative, and concrete plot driving to a climactic scene. The use of realistic language evidenced in the natural, every-day dialogue also aids in the plausibility of the characters and scenarios depicted in the play. Like Mamet, LaBute employs triple dots and beats in order to indicate emotion or subtext in the dialogue. In everyday speech, 'umms' and pauses are common; consequently, by writing them in the text, Labute mimics normal speech patterns. In the example below, the triple dots symbolize unspoken thoughts between dialogue, a thought process or search for the right word. The 'beat' signifies a short pause, a lack of thought, a complete change or start of a new thought.

TOM: So, then, ummm . . . I don't know what to say here exactly, but . . . (Beat) . . . Helen, I like your body . . . what I *imagine* your body to be (LaBute, 2004, p. 32)

While LaBute's dialogue appears realistic in the way the characters interact with each other, what some of them say is absurdly cruel. LaBute seamlessly mixes realism with absurd themes. Grotesque images are common in both satiric and absurdist traditions and it is these meetings and overlaps of styles evident in his writing that I wish to explore in the performance of his work.

Frederick Lumley (1972), in *New Trends in 20th Century Drama*, discusses shifts in styles, philosophies and movements in European, British and American theatres. The desire for popular and 'easy' entertainment by theatre goers during the first half of the twentieth century was challenged by certain practitioners to develop revolutionary philosophies and radical styles of expression in the theatre, prompted, in part, by the devastation and

suffering induced from the two world wars (1972, p. 10). Martin Esslin notes only two years before this same shift in popular theatrical style from naturalism to absurdism:

[A]bsurdists have further demonstrated the theatre's ability to deal not only with external reality in providing a concrete and photographically correct reconstruction of real life but also, and much more interestingly, with the vast field of internal reality- the fantasies, dreams, hallucinations, secret longings, and fears of mankind. (Esslin, 1970, p. 223)

Esslin (1961) explores, in *Theatre of the Absurd*, the philosophies and ideology that led to this departure from earlier forms of theatre and was the first to label the pioneers who explored these alternative concepts as belonging to a definitive group, the Theatre of the Absurd.

According to Esslin (1961), the absurdists questioned the purpose and existence of man and that the known quality of this exploration was, in itself, absurd. In a bid to move away from conventional forms of theatre, they borrowed comedic styles from silent pictures and vaudeville, juxtaposed with tragic, grotesque or horrific images (Esslin, 1970).

Dissatisfaction with, and the absurdity of, human existence are key characteristics of this style. An exploration of the absurdist elements in *Fat Pig* could assist in the expression of underlying metaphorical messages of intolerance, prejudice, human fallibility and discrimination and assist in distinguishing the stylistic influences in the play.

The French writer, playwright, actor, director, poet and artist, Antonin Artaud (1896- 1947) is considered by many to be the forefather of the Theatre of the Absurd and its break with superficial traditions of theatre commonly represented in nineteenth century productions. Edward Scheer investigates the work of Antonin Artaud suggesting that, in his experimentation in the theatre, realism was abandoned or depicted as a caricature (Scheer, 2004). I am particularly interested in how, by drawing inspiration from Artaud, my production of *Fat Pig* could be a vehicle for an intuitive theatre potentially igniting unconscious responses in the audience. For example, by exposing the internal world of a

character, an audience could subconsciously see beyond the character's physical appearance and perhaps even their personal prejudices.

Artaud experimented with gestures to convey internal states of being in non-verbal forms of communication with particular emphasis on human suffering and capacity for violence, culminating in his formation of "The Theatre of Cruelty" (Scheer, 2004). Scheer states that Artaud "transgressed the established conventions of society, transformed the traditional language of creative expression, and sought to redefine all cultural experience and its place in the world" (Scheer, 2004, p. 54). The avant-garde theatre maker Peter Brook, agrees in his book, *The Shifting Point* (1989), that Artaud's legacy is evident in nearly all forms of experimental theatre, none more so than the Theatre of the Absurd. Brook experimented with Artaud's concept of The Theatre of Cruelty because he felt that certain aspects of "theatrical expression were being neglected" (p. 56) in mainstream theatre. Brooks ran intense workshops exploring Artaud's concepts that encouraged actors to reconnect with the body through movement and physical contortion by unlocking narratives through gesture. Similar to Artaud and Brook's investigation of theatrical expression, I will experiment with gesticulation and non-verbal forms of communication in rehearsal to expose the cruelty and internal workings of the characters in *Fat Pig*.

Esslin (1982) describes Harold Pinter as an absurdist playwright and he has been identified by many writers as a strong influence in LaBute's work. In the preface to *This is How it Goes*, LaBute states:

I dedicated the play itself to Harold Pinter because, besides being a terrific writer and director, he continues to inspire me by his fearless examination of men and women while searching for answers, hoping for change, raging for equality- but never ducking for cover. (LaBute, 2005)

McLafferty (2009) explores and identifies how elements of the Theatre of the Absurd were prevalent through to the early seventies, and are still evident in the works of the

contemporary playwright, LaBute: “[W]hile LaBute’s works are not nearly as radical in situation as the works of pioneer Absurdist, they maintain principal devices which define the style” (McLafferty, 2009, p. 2). McLafferty makes a direct comparison between LaBute’s *Fat Pig* and Jean Genet’s *The Balcony* which, while very different in plot and content, are similar in their depictions of characters who fear losing social status and struggle to maintain it via cruelty: “[T]he staging of cruelty in response to fear and the struggle for power is apparent in both traditional absurdism and its contemporary equivalent” (McLafferty, 2009, p. 30). It is interesting to note that both Labute and Genet, despite differences in form and content and the generations separating them, turn social convention on its head via absurd techniques like cruelty.

In *Modern Dramatists: Harold Pinter* by Bernard F. Dukore (1988), Pinter’s plays are analysed in terms of the absurdist elements prevalent in his work. Dukore aligns Pinter with Ionesco’s explanation of the Theatre of the Absurd as an exploration of the human condition which brings into question, man’s purpose and place in the universe. Absurdist sought to convey the senselessness of pain, suffering, cruelty, violence and the mystery of existence itself (Dukore, 1988, p. 5). LaBute too explores the alienation, violence and cruelty of disconnected individuals in many of his plays, yet these absurd elements are firmly anchored within a realistic framing. Ilka Saal suggests, in an essay titled “Let’s Hurt Someone’: Violence and Cultural Memory in the Plays of Neil LaBute’ from the *New Theatre Quarterly*, LaBute shares similarities to a Brechtian style of theatre.

In marked contrast to Artaud, LaBute does not, however, absorb his audience in a total theatrical experience of visual metaphor, body action, language, and sound (which in confronting us with our own latent cruelties would ideally purge us of them). Rather, he keeps a Brechtian distance to his audience (Saal, 2008, p. 334). Saal later agrees with the indifference described by Christopher Bigsby who says “What is most striking about [LaBute’s] work is the coldness of his eye. He is an anthropologist exploring human behaviour with a detachment that can seem chilling” (Saal, 2008, p. 9). This research will

further explore how an understanding of experimental theatre could give alternative perspectives on how to express the satire in *Fat Pig*.

Esslin claims that the Theatre of the Absurd encouraged “a working hypothesis for the understanding of a large number of extremely varied and elusive phenomena” (Esslin, 1970, p. 219) and suggested that more important than pinning down a categorical definition, was a common “sense of bewilderment” expressed by the playwrights (Esslin, 1970, p. 220). The hefty mix of tragedy and comedy in *Fat Pig* firmly situate it as a tragicomedy, the predominant genre associated with Theatre of the Absurd. Further to these links to the absurd, satirists may start from feelings of bewilderment over a particular point but their compulsion to rail against it, particularly in performance drives tangible connections with satirical traditions found in early carnivalesque ideas, an association which I will pursue further in Bakhtin’s clarification of medieval festival customs and Rabelasian grotesque imagery.

Methodology

Practice as Research (PaR)

Robin Nelson defines 'Practice as Research' by way of "a research project in which practice is a key method of inquiry and where, in respect of the arts, a practice (creative writing, dance, musical score/performance ... theatre/performance ...) is submitted as substantial evidence of a research inquiry" (Nelson, 2013, pp. 8-9).

In Australia, the terms Practice-led Research or Practice-based Research are often used to describe the methods with which practitioner-researchers approach their research projects and Nelson acknowledges the terms are used "to indicate something very similar to my conception of PaR [Practice as Research]" (Nelson, 2013, p. 9). Practice-led research can imply that the research is more important than the practice; that the practice is separate from and merely informs the research; and that the written documentation is the research, as is evidenced in Nelson's appraisal; "'practice-led' may bear a residual sense that knowledge follows after, is secondary to, the practice" (Nelson, 2013, p. 10). There are arguments too against a preference for practice-based research as it suggests the practitioner's practice of their craft is a platform from where research is launched, which still implies an inequality or chicken and egg relationship between the two. Nelson argues that, despite the "semantic wriggling", "we are talking about a category in which knowing-doing is inherent in the practice and practice is at the heart of the inquiry and evidences it, whatever term used" (Nelson, 2013, p. 10). Nelson's Practice-as Research model follows many researcher/practitioner contentions that both practice and research are not separate but irrevocably entwined; the thinking about, the reading about, the rehearsing, the performing, the reflecting are all the 'doing' or practice for the research inquiry and are therefore, also, the research or 'knowing' for the project. Nelson's concept suggests that neither modality leads the other because they overlap and are one-and-the same; that practice *is* research and research *is* practice. Suffice it to say, my creative practice framework aligns with Nelson's definition of Practice-as-Research.

Nelson outlines a model that does not “claim to be the only one with the answers” but offers a functional framework that makes a “distinction between documentation (by way of translation) of a practice and documentation of a research inquiry based in practice” (Nelson, 2013, pp. 6-7). Research documentation in the form of practice, including performance, rehearsal, journals, and other audio-visual material, is distinct from the accompanying complementary writing about the context and process of the practice, but *both* provide evidence for the investigation. Nelson acknowledges the performative possibilities of research in the multi-mode approach advocated in his book where “different kinds of evidence serve to confirm the findings of a consciously articulated research inquiry” (Nelson, 2013, p. 6). In keeping with Nelson’s framework for recording research and practice in the arts, I intend to approach and document this research inquiry through practice within a multi-mode methodology, where the creative process, production, and supporting writing document my research project.

Nelson recognizes that far from the sceptical scholar’s notion of “PaR as insubstantial and lacking in rigour ... PaR projects require more labour and a broader range of skills to engage in a multi-mode research inquiry than more traditional research processes” (Nelson, 2013, p. 9). Creative research, by its very nature, seems to elude an academic desire to define approaches to research, as practice in conventional, quantifiable research terms, creates the need to map out a distinctly different yet equally valid research approach.

Brad Haseman adds to the evolving discussion, attempting to define the similarities, deviations, and possibilities of practice as a research mode as opposed to more scientific or traditional forms. While placing artistic practices on the qualitative side of research methodologies, Haseman claims that practitioner researchers tend to create, observe, reflect, analyse and also participate in the project which sets this form of research apart from customary forms of qualitative research conventions (Haseman, 2006, p. 101). This distinction, he suggests, stems from the performative and immersive aspects of practice as research (Haseman, 2006, pp. 102-104).

A trio of Haseman's graduates, Leah Mercer, David Fenton and Julie Robson (2012) document the diversity of thought in approaches to academic creative practice. Mercer and Robson observe that practice-led researchers can employ "metaphorical or imagistic thinking to articulate their method," explaining, that by "[e]xtending the poetic approach in this symbolic way can serve, at times, to explain the 'expert-intuitive' process without flattening the liveliness of the somatic, aesthetic approach" (Mercer and Robson, 2012, p. 16, ch 1).

My research follows the 'multi-mode' methodology described in Nelson's agenda as well as the metaphorical structuring raised by Mercer and Robson.

Nelson's Model

The praxis at the hub of Nelson's practice-as-research model embraces a practical application of multiple sources of learning; constantly cycling from the 'knowing' resulting in the 'doing' and the 'doing' informing the 'knowing', all proving data for the research inquiry. Nelson states, "Intelligent practice is at the core of my model and a practice is characteristically submitted as substantial evidence of the research inquiry" (Nelson, 2013, p. 40). Nelson's model advocates knowledgeable practice as a significant demonstration of the research idea. The following diagram visually represents the concurrent flow of information from multiple sources of learning into the research/practice praxis.

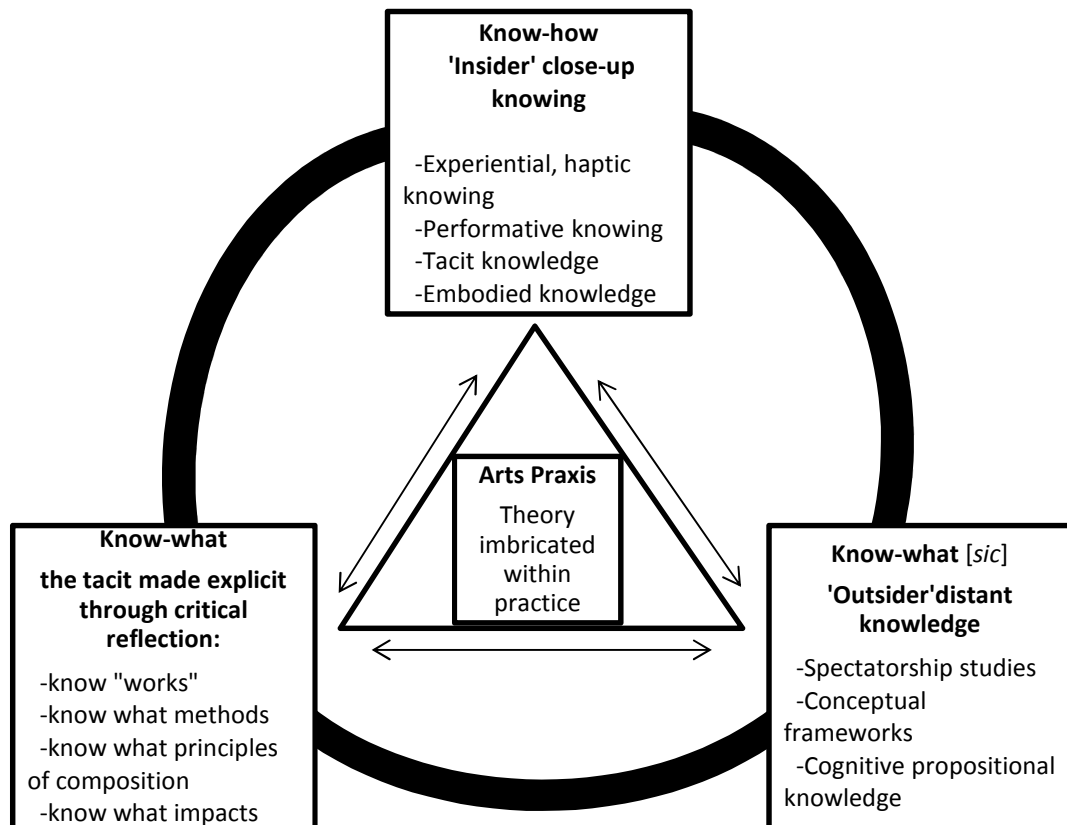


Figure 3: “Figure 2.2 Modes of knowing: multi-mode epistemological model for PaR” (Nelson, 2013, p. 37)

Nelson’s diagram repeats the heading ‘know-what’ for two of the three divisions but is later explained under the separate headings ‘know-what’ and ‘know-that’, so that I believe the former is a typing error and will treat it as such because of the detailed descriptions that follow in the book.

In the ‘know-how’ section of Nelson’s approach, he prescribes a ‘doing-knowing’, similar to the concept ‘knowledge-in-practice’ described in Schön’s seminal study on practice based research methods (Nelson, 2013, p. 213). The model presents the ‘doing’ informing the ‘knowing’ and, in turn, the knowing results in the doing which suggests an almost cyclic symbiotic and dependent relationship between the two. When applied to my research, ‘know-how’ encompasses informal, non-codified types of knowing that come from the experiential, performative, tacit and embodied knowledge of ‘doing’. This includes my acquired knowledge through training, experience, and practice, my knowledge of the play and its previous productions, extended by further contextual investigation, all

simultaneously impelling the approach and method of the practice (production) and the subsequent action of reflection and documentation, amounting to the evidential data of the research project.

This corporeal knowledge from the performance of a task is the practitioner's thinking, feeling, and doing of the practice. Physically knowing how to conduct a rehearsal, stage a play, direct actors or analyse a script stems from the experience of doing; performing the practice demonstrates a knowledge forged in the experience of action. Heidegger and Husserl's century old phenomenological tradition underpin numerous "accounts of the interrelation between physical and conceptual approaches" helping "refine understanding of 'embodied knowledge'" (Nelson, 2013, p. 57) by positing the idea that our perception of the world forms the world in the same way that the physical world moulds our knowledge of it. Thinking on an action deepens by the experience of the action, simultaneously informing the action through the intuitive, instinctive feelings or thoughts the action provokes, and consequently, again, the thinking. 'Know-how' covers the knowledge learnt and gained through doing; it includes knowledge from experience and knowledge that can be performed. My knowledge as a director is demonstrated through analysis of the text, casting, conception of a vision for the production, recruiting crew, the design process (lighting, sound, set and costume), rehearsal process, reflection of each step and evaluation/adjustment to remain on target and incorporate new information or circumstances.

The elements described under 'know-what' involve the articulation of implicit knowledge through reflection: "it covers what can be gleaned through an informed reflexivity about the processes of making and its modes of knowing" (Nelson, 2013, p. 44). If a rehearsal is conducted through a sense of know-how, then the reflective journal notes assessing progress of what is or is not working or how something was achieved falls into the 'know-what' which builds and shapes each successive rehearsal. Thus, the 'know-how' is developed through the 'know-what', it is the reflective component of the research that seeks a way to reflect on and articulate the implicit knowing found in action and from experience.

The 'know-that' section comprises the "'Outsider' distant knowledge" "drawn from reading of all kinds" (Nelson, 2013, p. 45). It parallels with traditional forms of academic research and "is added to, particularly in PaR, by knowledge gained through the experiencing of practices intrinsic to any specific research inquiry" (Nelson, 2013, p. 45). The three components of 'know-that'; spectatorship studies, conceptual frameworks and cognitive propositional knowledge, encourage a broad spectrum of tools to design, guide, and conduct the research inquiry. Qualitative methods of data collection including studies into how the participants and audiences are engaged in the project involve conducting interviews or a voting method to gather knowledge for subsequent reflection. Also, included in this research are the observation of rehearsals and performances of another company's staging of *Fat Pig*, followed by interviews with cast and crew members and foyer conversations with their audience members after the show. Conceptual frameworks of creative processes as described by renowned practitioners and philosophers shape the structure and approaches utilized in the research practice. Additionally, the research pathways raised through investigation of the playwright, his work and the context of the play, explorations of societal phenomena applicable to the understanding of the play, other productions, and satire as a literary and performative genre establish a 'know-that' intrinsically linked with the research inquiry and applicable to developing practice. The two way arrows in Nelson's diagram indicate a reciprocal flow of information from all areas of knowing forming the "arts praxis of theory imbricated within practice" (Nelson, 2013, p. 37).

Qualitative Research Methods

Clive Seale introduces the book, *Qualitative Research Practice*, which brings together an array of international authorities on practice-based qualitative research, each contributing to a "definitive guide to the major forms of qualitative methods in use today" (Seale, Gobo, F.Gubrium, & Silverman, 2007, xviii). Qualitative data collection provides, important evidence in support of research practice inquiries because the incorporation of particular methods align with "the viewpoint of real-life experience" (Seale et al., 2007, p. xviii). The book's contributors explore how qualitative research practice reveals a social engagement "[i]n an authoritative yet accessible manner . . . teaching us that qualitative research is as much of a craft and practice as it is a way of knowing" (Seale et al., 2007, p. xviii).

Petti Alasuutari acknowledges that “qualitative research is a very data-driven process” (Alasuutari, 2007, p. 507) and emphasises the importance of various data-collection techniques to support the validity of an interpretation. Qualitative practitioner researchers employ methods such as observation, interviews, video-recordings documenting the creative process and the practice itself to confirm “a point that we think holds not only in the material at hand but also more generally, we have to prove and illustrate it at a ‘local’ level” (Alasuutari, 2007, p. 507). These forms of data demonstrate practical evidence that inform and support the research inquiry and the possibilities of its broader implications.

Interviews

Interviews are a common method for data collection in all realms of qualitative research although technique, content and approaches vary considerably. Tim Rapley provides some clarity for the theory and practice of qualitative research via his insights into the purpose and function of interviews as a research method. He confirms claims that “[i]nterviewing is currently the central resource through which contemporary social science engages with issues that concern it” (Rapley, 2007, p. 15). Separating interview methodologies into two ideals, Ripley argues that neutrality can ensure less bias in an interview or adversely can lead to a hierarchical relationship in interview situations, whereas interviewing with rapport opens up a particular topic and often reveals deeper values held by the interviewees. Drawing from Ackroyd and Hughes, Rapley notes that rapport is defined as “something that should be worked ‘at/up’”, and the creation of a relaxed and encouraging environment to conduct interviews is pivotal to the interview’s productivity: “if the interviewee feels comfortable, they will find it easier to talk to you” (Rapley, 2007, p. 19).

In my research, I employ a number of interview formats including questionnaires, face-to-face and telephone interviews, which were informal and open-ended. All of these fit in to the data-gathering sphere which Rapley describes as “*Interview-data-as-resource*: the interview data collected is seen as (more or less) reflecting the interviewees’ reality outside the interview” (Rapley, 2007, p. 16). I asked interviewees to reflect on how they

approached an experience and how it affected them. In contrast to the traditional idea of silent or neutral interviewer style, Rapley opts for more “‘engaged, active or collaborative’ interviewing” (Rapley, 2007, p. 27). His interview structure for in-depth cooperative interaction suggests introducing the topic, developing a rapport through appropriate personal disclosure, as interviewees are more likely to talk freely if there is a certain amount of trust, listen to their responses with follow up questions that help ‘unpack’ key ideas, actively engage with the interviewee, and allow them the space to talk freely. Rapley names many influences and variables that can impact upon the course of an interview from location to the presence of a tape-recorder that contribute to the context of the interview but, ultimately, “the central ‘influence’ is both speakers’ actual conduct in the interview – your questions, their answers, your comments, your gestures. There is no ideal interview” (Rapley, 2007, p. 19). The idea of interview neutrality can be misleading as “interviewers are always active ... have overarching control ... guide the talk ... promote it through questions, silence and responses” (Rapley, 2007, p. 20). I agree with Rapley’s assessment that non-neutrality is almost unavoidable and that a personalised interview facilitates a more collaborative environment. I aimed to structure my interviews more like conversations that are flexible and encourage interaction where “both speakers are constantly ‘doing analysis’ both speakers are engaged (and collaborating in) ‘making meaning’ and ‘producing knowledge’” (Rapley, 2007, p. 27). The data collected from the interviews supplied important information supporting my suspicions and although they provided common characteristics of previous productions’ approaches I did not rely on them as the sole data instrument. I was able to utilize them as support for other evidence gathered to clarify what I could do differently and out of respect for the participants only used direct quotations from my interviewees when absolutely necessary.

Observation and Ethnography Delamont states “When the research is done, the result is an ethnography: a theorized account of the culture studied with ethnographic methods” (Delamont, 2007, p. 207). Observation, a widely utilised method in approaches to qualitative research, is often used interchangeably with the terms ethnography and fieldwork. In the context of ethnography, Sara Delamont explains observation as “spending long periods watching people, coupled with talking to them about what they are doing,

thinking and saying, [which is] designed to see how they understand their world” (Delamont, 2007, p. 206). Delamont describes fieldwork as “the data collection phase of the research” and deems “ethnography as the most inclusive term” to encompass all the processes involved (Delamont, 2007, p. 206). This observation in the field also includes interviews, and constant reflections. Delamont recognizes that “[e]thnography is hard work: physically, emotionally and mentally exhausting. The research does not proceed in a straight line, but in a series of loops, because each step leads the researcher to reflect upon, and even revisit, earlier steps” (Delamont, 2007, p. 211). My research fieldwork mainly involved the production of the play. These ethnographic phases comprised observing the rehearsal room and performances of my production, open-ended questionnaires revealing reflective thoughts from cast and crew and collecting audience feedback through conversations and via a simple voting system together with my rehearsal notes and reflective journal entries. Central to Delamont’s explanation of ethnography is observation and she suggests the difficulty often arises because “the method books are not explicit enough about what to observe, how to observe and what to write down. It is very hard to describe in words how to observe” (Delamont, 2007, p. 213). Delamont refers to “Geertz’s (1973) classic formulation” that prescribes an intention to create “a thick description, of the setting and the actors in it, sufficiently rich to enable a reader to live in that setting . . .” (Delamont, 2007, p. 213). Delamont recommends “an ethnographer observes everything . . . writes the most detailed fieldnotes . . . takes time to expand, elaborate and reflect upon them outside the field . . . and sweeps up any documents, pictures or ephemera available” (Delamont, 2007, p. 213). I kept a reflective journal during the rehearsal process which was documented on film and photographically as often as possible. Delamont draws on the 1995 work conducted by Hammersley and Atkinson on reflexivity in her summation of the concept: “Central to ethnography is the constant and tiring process of reflecting. Reflexivity is the most important characteristic of fieldwork, and of analysis” (Delamont, 2007, p. 214) and stresses the importance of developing reflective skills as a qualitative researcher contributes to the development of “what Coffey (1999) calls The Ethnographic Self” (Delamont, 2007, p. 214).

Visual methods

Increasingly, qualitative researchers are employing visual methods for documentation and supporting evidence to demonstrate practices within the field of inquiry. Sarah Pink's contribution to anthropological modes of research indicates that "[u]sing visual methods allows us to extend our research to incorporate knowledge that is not accessible verbally" (Pink, 2007, p. 361). "This adds significantly to both the knowledge that a researcher can generate when actually in the field and the options that she or he has later to represent the results of this work to others" (Pink, 2007, p. 361). In my research, the live performances including the film component, posters, flyers, programs, photographs, footage, and reflective journals documenting the creative and rehearsal processes form the interpretation of visual methods in the practice.

Voting

Gauging audience opinion or reception of the satirical messages emphasised in the performative framing we pursued in our production was an important, if tricky aspect of the research. In my mind, the inclusive, community-oriented concept of audience participation was conducive to inviting immediate feedback, a strategy that echoes some carnival festival traditions. The incorporation of some sort of platform to express spectator responses in an array of contemporary performance explore audience stimulation through secret ballots, questionnaires, a vote on an aspect of or entire production, or questioned throughout a performance to influence its development or outcome (similar to choose your own adventure story exemplified in Rimini Protokoll's 2010 show *Best Before* where audience members held a handset that allowed them to manipulate onscreen avatars and choose different scenarios).

Lengthy questionnaires or written ballot forms can deter some people from responding and as my intention centred on audience reception as opposed to perception (which would require much more detailed compilation of data), I resolved to keep it easy and reduce responders' time through a single answer voting scheme. The foyer (or rather, the narrow entrance from the bar to our backroom theatre) sported numerous information letters outlining the research project and process to vote after the show. All audience members,

ranging from four to eighty years old with a large proportion in their twenties to fifties, enjoyed the same opportunity to express their opinion anonymously, without categorization, restriction or obligation. Upon entry each spectator received a program containing a separate piece of paper explaining the voting question with character names and images printed on tear-off tags at the bottom. This enabled audience members to consider the question throughout the performance and show consent to participate by tearing off the chosen tab and placing it in a tin as they exited the theatre. By ignoring any demographic limitations in the collection of this data, I intended to garner an example of a 'societal response' as opposed to singular or individual reflections of the question asked. The core question I considered addressed the mistaken satire in other productions by simply asking to which character(s) they thought the title of the play was referring; I believe this voting system had the best potential for extrapolating the reception of the satirical undertones in the play. Hiring digital handsets to collect voting data seemed attractive at first but budget constraints limited this option, hence, the idea of a simple question requiring a straightforward response remained the ultimate objective.

Conceptual framework

Bakhtin

My investigation mainly focuses on Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of a carnivalesque genre, with attention to his philosophical arguments about creativity, answerability, 'otherness', 'authorship', and his thoughts on aesthetics, which are important elements that support and inform the underlying ideological platform for my research and thus pertain to my directorial approach.

Tzvetan Todorov claims that Bakhtin is "the most important Soviet thinker in the human sciences and the greatest theoretician of literature in the twentieth century" (Todorov, 1984, ix). The Russian essayist and theoretician, Bakhtin (1895-1975), worked mainly as a teacher but involvement in philosophical and literary spheres produced his most enduring accomplishments. In his lifetime, Bakhtin witnessed the Russian Revolution, the Russian Civil war, the installation of Stalinism, both World Wars and the Cold War, events which contributed in preventing the publication of much of his work and, yet, provoked and motivated his thinking. It was not until after his death in 1975 that his legacy of philosophical theory gained an international audience, when many manuscripts were translated and published posthumously (Haynes, 1995).

Todorov explains many core concepts in Bakhtin's tenets, among which is Bakhtin's advocacy of a "moral philosophy" concerning "a general conception of human existence, where the *other* plays a decisive role" (Todorov, 1984, p. 94). Todorov explains that Bakhtin's central notion posits the impossibility "to conceive of any being outside of the relations that link [that being] to the other" (Todorov, 1984, p. 94). Bakhtin's fundamental argument suggests that no individual can completely perceive his or her life without attention to another's perception. Todorov cites Bakhtin's assertion that "we appraise ourselves from the point of view of others . . . we oversee and apprehend the reflections of our life in the plane of consciousness of other men" (Todorov, 1984, p. 94). For Bakhtin, the multiple facets of a mutually interrelated yet mutually exclusive relationship between self and others, correlates with his ideas about their interconnectedness.

In much the same way, Bakhtin suggests that there is a governing responsibility in symbiotic relationships between life and art. He explains art as an event that exists as an object in the world while also participating in, reflecting upon, and interacting with the world; art is part of the world, not separate from it. Art finds inspiration in life and life takes inspiration from art. Therein, Bakhtin develops his concept of the art/life interrelationship along similar lines to the obligation he proposes an individual has to an 'other' in the world. The artist (or 'author') must create a unity of these responsibilities both within him or herself and in the work by considering "[t]hought about the world and thought in the world. Thought striving to embrace the world and thought experiencing itself in the world (as part of it)" (Bakhtin, 1987b, p. 162).

When considered in line with Bakhtin's definition of art, it is not difficult to imagine satirical works of art as possessing a sense of morality, obliging them to critically observe the world and to expose life's shortcomings in an attempt to influence behaviour in some way. An important identifying element of satire, expressed across numerous mediums, is its topicality. Satirists comment on the here and now, making satire part of the world in and about this place and time. The capacity of satire to reveal and deride undesirable societal failings hinges on the ability of its author to engage with the world and critically comment on aspects of life that provoke the work.

Answerability

According to Bakhtin, when there is no unity between an individual's responsibility to life and the obligation an artist has to life through his or her artwork, futility pervades the work (Bakhtin, 1990a, p. 54). Answerability is the key to unifying art and life, for when art relies too heavily on inspiration and life makes no consideration for art then there is no connection between the two. Bakhtin suggests the only thing that can unite the two is answerability.

I have to answer with my own life for what I have experienced and understood in art, so that everything I have experienced and understood would not remain ineffectual in my life. (Bakhtin, 1990a, p. 54)

Here Bakhtin suggests a unity within the artist as a human being corresponds to the responsibility their artwork has to be part of, not separate from; that both the individual and the artwork answer to and for the other.

Influenced by the writings of the eighteenth century philosopher, Immanuel Kant, Bakhtin claimed that art and life compel answerability and Haynes suggests that his goal “was to point out that through a process of consistent response or answer-ability, art and life can be unified by and in the person” (Haynes, 1995, p. 47). “The poet must remember that it is his poetry which bears the guilt for the vulgar prose of life” (Bakhtin, 1990a, p. 55). If particular works, whether in literature or in contemporary media, condone offensive attitudes they bear a responsibility for the formations these viewpoints potentially create in the society. For example, the use of coarse language in art because of its perceived proliferation in daily life, in turn, can perpetuate its acceptance in life and so on in a cyclical effect. Bakhtin observes that “answerability entails guilt, or liability to blame” (Bakhtin, 1990a, p. 54). Jeannie and Carter consistently use vulgar language and insults as their normal, everyday mode of communication in *Fat Pig*. LaBute sheds light on society’s normalization of vulgarity through satirizing the characters’ normalized offensive behaviour. LaBute ironically blames media for widespread social acceptance of intolerant behaviour by presenting it in a form of media; written and live performance. I aim to go one step further with the inclusion of digital media.

Bakhtin considered the act of entering a different world for the pursuit of creativity produced art that is “audaciously self-confident, and too high flown, for it is in no way bound to answer for life” (Bakhtin, 1990a, p. 54). Moreover, art that does not situate itself in the context of life relinquishes any capacity to comment on or influence the daily happenings of everyday life. My thoughts align with Bakhtin’s concept of answerability and the importance of art’s moral obligations to society or the ‘other’. Haynes observes that Bakhtin’s concept of answerability “offers a way of articulating the profound moral obligation and responsibility that we bear toward others” (Haynes, 1995, p. 67). They are the very ideas that compel me as a director and specifically relate to my investigation, interpretation and staging of *Fat Pig*. Earlier mentioned comments about previous

productions imply a denial of the play's moral sentiment, or rather, indicate particular constructions' failure to denounce intolerant behaviours to support the rejection of an 'other'.

According to Haynes, Bakhtin's concept of answerability "offers a way of articulating the profound moral obligation and responsibility that we bear toward others" (Haynes, 1995, p. 67). Haynes conveys Bakhtin's concept of answerability as an implicit and integral part of the creative process, stipulating "the moral imperative that artists engage with and in life, that the artist and the work of art answer life" (Haynes, 1995, p67). Thus art, according to Bakhtin, has a moral obligation, because of its potential to influence, reflect, and comment on the society and as part of that society. Haynes notes that Bakhtin's firmly entrenched ideology subscribed to the "art-for-life" camp as opposed to the "art-for-arts-sake" mode of thought and all his ideas on aesthetic activity build from this premise (Haynes, 1995, p. xiii).

"The individual must become answerable through and through: all of his constituent moments must not only fit next to each other in the unity of guilt and answerability" (Bakhtin, 1990a, p. 55) but also exist within and through the work he produces. Furthermore, "[a]rt and life are not one, but they must become united in myself- in the unity of my answerability" (Bakhtin, 1990a, p. 55).

Author

"As humans struggle to express and shape perception and experience, they engage in aesthetic activity. Bakhtin called such activity 'authoring', another name for creative activity" (Haynes, 1995, p. 5). The creative process, for Bakhtin, begins from a dialogue 'written'/'authored' by the artist, expressing a particular perspective of and in the subject. Bakhtin's complex thoughts on "the dialogical principle" (Bakhtin, 1981; Todorov, 1984) and Dostoevsky (Bakhtin, 1984) began in his early essays exploring the relationship between author and hero. Bakhtin describes "the aesthetic act as only a more developed version of this founding and constitutive relationship" (Dentith, 1994, p. 11). The ideas in Bakhtin's early essay begin with "the relationship between self and other, between I and Thou. Our sense of self, and our sense of the otherness of the other person, are grounded in and

indeed constituted by this relationship” (Dentith, 1994, p. 11). Often Bakhtin remarked that literary scholars looked for the author’s ‘voice’ in the content of a work and failed to see how form revealed the true nature of the author’s attitude to the other. “A work’s author is present only in the whole of the work, not in one separate aspect of this whole. He is located in that inseparable aspect of the work where content and form merge inseparably and we feel his presence most of all in form” (Bakhtin, 1987a, p. 187). These thoughts on author echo Bakhtin’s earlier ideas wherein the artist initiates a ‘dialogue’ with the subject of their chosen art. “An author is the uniquely active form-giving energy that is manifested . . . in a durably valid cultural product” (Bakhtin, 1990b, p. 8), although, as Haynes notes, is not clear from Bakhtin’s writing exactly how he defined durable or cultural (1995, p. 120). However, I choose to interpret the above terms not as general overarching standards, but as pertinent questions for individual artists to consider when creating their work from their unique perspective, in their own geographical and experiential context. The definition on The Oxford Dictionaries website states that durable is “able to withstand wear, pressure, or damage; hard-wearing” (“Oxford Dictionaries,” 2014). I imagine when Bakhtin made this statement he was not talking about the piece of art *per se* but the integrity of the creative process in that the ideology behind the art work is durable and able to withstand critical, theoretical, technical or social analysis. Blackburn suggests something is valid if the conclusion follows truthfully from the premise (Blackburn, 1996, p. 389) For an art work to be valid there must be a ‘truth’ that follows from its conception through to its realization. When an art work takes on the cultural “features of forms of life [that] are learned” (Blackburn, 1996, p. 90) within a society it contextually situates it in a particular frame.

Bakhtin’s argument for his concept of author seems to indicate that an artist’s unique perspective, from their particular environment and circumstances, when optimally expressed, produces a work that can withstand scrutiny, adheres to particular principles, and has significance for the intended audience. These ideas pertain to my work in three ways; firstly, consideration of the ‘other’ in all aspects of the work, including characters in the play, cast, crew, and audiences together with my unique experience in the world, influence and guide the approach and expression of the work. Secondly, the considered rationale with each creative decision throughout the process provides substance and

connections for meaning making (for myself and spectators). Lastly, the environment and values of the viewing community contextualise the framing, importance, or execution of the piece. The work/story unfolds from a collaborative, multi-authored, yet individually distinctive perspective.

Concurrent with the 'voices' that Bakhtin argues are inherent in a work are his references to a multitude of perceptions, to the "irreducible diversity of discursive types" (Todorov, 1984, p. 56), that create the language of a work, or what he terms a *heteroglossia* of languages where the artist's intended meaning finds transformation in interpretations by the participant and spectators. A text cannot exist alone or in separation from its perception since the performer as well as the reader/audience member brings their own experience that contextualises the piece and becomes, at least for each individual, part of the text. In the case of a play, the writer, director, actors and audience members all participate in the 'authoring'; they contribute to the many diverse 'languages' by which the story is told. Bakhtin explains that no word or utterance is neutral and language is not "an abstract system of normative forms" but "[e]very word smells of the context and contexts in which it has lived its intense social life; all words and all forms are inhabited by intentions" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 106). The text lives, Bakhtin notes, "only by coming into contact with another text (context)" (Bakhtin, 1987a, p. 189) and that literary understanding is always "historical and personified" (Bakhtin, 1987a, p. 189). Thus, the comprehension of an artwork is reliant on the contextualization by all 'authors' and from their experience of the work and life.

Following on from Bakhtin's artist/author line of thought, in the role of director, I in effect become a temporary co-author for the production I am facilitating. Concurring with Bakhtin's answerability, I am obliged to consider that I, and the art I help to create, must be answerable to others in its form and content. *Fat Pig's* thematic elements reveal a bullying culture that marginalizes those individuals who do not fit the construction of mainstream standards. If the production does little more than look pretty or, at worst, perpetuates the marginalisation of individuals based on appearance, neither I nor my art can be said to fulfil its Bakhtian answerability to society.

If my understanding has validity, my answerability to life does not diminish because of art nor should my art's answerability diminish because of life: therefore, a production of *Fat Pig* lessens in artistic integrity if it reinforces the status quo because it offers no illumination of an 'other's' perspective. Thus, it becomes imperative, if the art I create is to answer for life, I need to consider the responsibility of that artwork. Since I believe that the play condemns societal bullying and pressures to conform, I need to pay attention to the many studies reporting the rise and scope of social media's potential for harm in its promotion of unrealistic body ideals. Many people may not accept a body as healthy unless it is slim and may not waiver in their condemnation of Helen as obese but the issue here is not body size itself but the injustice of forcing a narrow view of health and beauty on others and the subsequent detrimental effects that may ensue. Bakhtin's dialogical principle stipulates the power of words, which are not neutral because of their history, form and capacity (or lack of) to carry intention; the speaker, receiver and their personal experiences will imbue words with particular contextual meaning. LaBute's well-documented struggle with weight may conceivably provide evidence of self-loathing in *Fat Pig* if it is read as a brutal attack on the overweight where Helen 'gets what she deserves'. However, my interpretation maintains that, rather than body size, LaBute targets the ostracism of an individual for appearance's sake and that it is from this perspective that his words require examination to reveal the pervasive depth of the intolerance and bullying.

My argument is not whether it is right or wrong to carry excess weight or to change any individual's opinion on the matter, only that the bullying pivoting on such an attitude as is depicted in the play is not 'normal' as Western society may lead us to believe; but is an act of cruelty which can lead to devastating consequences, whatever the justifications given for the behaviour. Simply put, bullying does not consider the 'other'. Specifically, by finding as many elements as possible that aim to clarify the satirical tone of *Fat Pig* through exaggeration and parody, I am attempting to address how that art considers the other and is responsible in its answerability to that other.

Other

“Bakhtin insisted that there is just one organizing power for all aesthetic forms: the category of the other and relationship to the other” (Haynes, 1995, p. 10). This organizing principle suggests art’s creation is for or because of the other. Identifying the other through the content of the work defines a connection with the other that informs and shapes the art. Haynes explains Bakhtin’s insistence for an ethical approach to the creative process from a basic awareness that

[h]is ethic emphasized the profound answerability and obligation we bear toward others . . . the answerability and obligation toward others compel the artist to consider moral and ethical issues in the creative act . . . such a sense of individual answerability must be balanced by a commitment to communal and collective solidarity with those who are different from us. (Haynes, 1995, p. 66)

By extrapolating Bakhtin’s ideology in approaching creative activity from within a creative work, there is great scope for analysis of the themes and characters in *Fat Pig*. There is a particular resonance with the satirical messages in the play that, in my reading, explicitly addresses the way mainstream society treats, or rather, mistreats those who do not fit into its widespread ideals. In the play, Jeannie and Carter perceive Helen as ‘the other’ and do not allow any opportunity to know her on a deeper more humane level than their superficial perception of her as unacceptably overweight. Moreover, their opinion of her does not change nor do they, as characters (and as representations of society) change, transform or grow across the duration of the play.

By Jeannie and Carter’s lack of potential to change through engagement with an ‘other’, they rob Helen of her potential to change and, thus, reinforce her sense of self-loathing. If, as Bakhtin implies, we are reliant on others to inform our sense of self through their perception of us, how can a character such as Helen not develop a diminished sense of self when she consistently encounters discriminating attitudes toward her appearance. If the play’s only function is to present Helen as the fat pig, as is suggested by the society LaBute depicts and offers justifications or a defence for Carter and Jeannie’s behaviour (and hence, society’s behaviour), then the play merely supports the esteem-breaking conduct that those who are different from mainstream experience daily in the real world. I believe LaBute

rejects this literal interpretation and the societal values depicted in the script because the play is a satire and, by definition, the performance needs to depict Jeannie and Carter's words and deeds negatively in an attempt to mock these societal norms. The greater the parody of the undesirable trait (bullying), the more grotesque it appears, and the more abhorrent the behaviour must be deemed by audiences who recognise the satirical barb.

Aesthetics

Like Kant, Bakhtin treated the aesthetic as "a sphere in which the cognitive-theoretical and ethical-practical spheres may be brought together" (Haynes, 1995, p. 4). Often cognitive approaches are divorced from ethical assessment and the aesthetic arrangement of the world by an assumption of superiority. This separation, Haynes explains, occurs because "ethical action differs from the cognitive, because one meets with conflict over moral duty and obligation" (Haynes, 1995, p. 4). Accusations of a particularly superior position might well explain many satirist's long defence of satire. On occasion, the basis of the cognitive idea behind a piece of satire operates from the premise that the satirist is 'right'; they are obliged to 'tell' everyone the error of their ways and little thought is given to the moral or ethical implications. Bakhtin prescribes a utopic situation for the aesthetics in creative development that unifies both theoretical and practical elements, where the artists, through their artistic works, strive to bring these together. Bakhtin's concept dictates "[t]he split between obligation and being has significance only within the realm of obligation; that is, this split exists only for an ethically acting consciousness" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 48). Haynes expounds this idea further by explaining the two spheres of action and cognition cannot, on their own, offer a substantial footing for a philosophy on the creative process but, for "artistic creation and the aesthetic sphere, Bakhtin stated that this sphere is fundamentally different from the other two, precisely because here reality and life interpenetrate with art" (Haynes, 1995, p. 5). There is an overlap, an integration that establishes "a unity of nature and humanity (and cognition and action) in society" (Haynes, 1995, p. 5).

Carnival

Satire owes much of its early development to the traditions of carnival. Bakhtin reads Rabelais' satirical tales about the giant Gargantuan and his son Pentagrueel in the context of

early carnivalesque customs to highlight the symbolic efficacy of the tales in *Rabelais and his World*. By incorporating ideas expressed in Bakhtin's appraisal of carnival and the importance of understanding the original folklore to unlock Rabelais' satirical work and Bakhtin's subsequent thoughts on the grotesque, I propose to elucidate performance options in my production.

Simon Dentith supports Bakhtin's understanding for the application of medieval traditions of carnival to contextualise the imagery found in Rabelais' five books describing the lives and times of Gargantuan and his son. Dentith recognizes that for medieval society "[t]he grotesque concept of the body lived especially in the familiar and colloquial forms of the language" (Dentith, 1994, p. 245) expressed to their fullest extent during carnival festivities. "The grotesque was the basis of all the abuses, uncrownings, teasing, and impertinent gestures (as pointing at the nose or the buttocks, spitting, and others)" (Dentith, 1994, p. 245). This suggests carnival was a time when all vulgar, inappropriate social behaviours were encouraged; the common people could freely express themselves without concerns for normal, everyday propriety restrictions or formalities.

Bakhtin argues that renaissance literary scholars ignored the medieval mythology of carnival and could not appreciate the symbolism inherent in the work or the many-layered meanings evoked. Dentith explains that the medieval "conception of the body is contained in the most varied types of folklore. These patterns were scattered everywhere and were easily understood and familiar to all Rabelais' contemporaries" (Dentith, 1994, pp. 245-246). Without knowledge of the medieval symbols and images in Rabelais' work, the deeper, satirical, political, and societal commentary is lost. This medieval concept of the open, incomplete nature of the human body with its gaping orifices, ability to give birth, grow old, die, eat and defecate constituted a transformative notion of the natural order and structure of things including the cycle of life. "The conceptions and the images of the higher and lower stratum as expressed in space value became the flesh and blood of medieval man" (Dentith, 1994, p. 249). The strict adherence to governing social structures is inverted during carnival, a time when the rules did not exist and all social constructions dissolved. "[T]he grotesque concept of the body" (Dentith, 1994, p. 248) put forward by Bakhtin

degraded, lowered and made flesh of all that which was abstract, ideal, noble or spiritual. The grotesque body in Rabelais' novels correlated political conflicts through exaggeration of the human anatomy. Carnavalesque-styled representations of outrageous behaviour that ridiculed those with perceived power through exaggerated grotesque gestures, emphasis on vulgar language and character parody could similarly support the satirical emphasis on the societal failings explored in *Fat Pig*.

Dentith discusses grotesque Rabelaisian images of the 'never-ending succession' of generations through the ages of human history and that "[t]he immortality of the ancestral body of mankind is rhetorically proclaimed" (Dentith, 1994, p. 252). The popular festive images in Rabelais' novels give form to abstract, existential ideas of not just the microcosm of life but also the macrocosm of existence. The images and ideas depicted by the human body have far reaching implications for human kind, they express not just "the biological body, which merely repeats itself in the new generation, but precisely the historic, progressing body of mankind [that] stands at the centre of this system of images" (Dentith, 1994, p. 252). The grotesque concept of the body allowed a tangible grasp of the world, past, present and future, and provided "the living sense that each man belongs to the immortal people who create history" (Dentith, 1994, p. 252). In the same way, the characters in *Fat Pig* represent more than individuals; they are part of the society that produced them and shape generations to come, like biological genes, social paradigm 'genes' are passed on. The fact that Tom crumbles in the play by deigning to popular opinion and Helen offers to change herself suggests a continuation of the status quo; the social paradigm is perpetuated for future scenarios. The implication here suggests the characters in the play need change, that if individuals in the real world did not fail like Tom and Helen or bully as Jeannie and Carter, they could redirect social order.

Bakhtin identifies two main subtexts in Rabelais' novels, the grotesque body he describes as 'grotesque realism' and the folklore images of carnival he terms carnivalesque. Satirical images are often synonymous with the basic needs of the grotesque body, portraying drinking, urinating, defecating, eating, sex, birth, and death; they are a celebration of the

renewing cycle of life but, in their negative aspect, they delve into death and decay, whereas their positive representation celebrates triumphant life through renewal and birth.

Medieval carnival gave the power to the people, a beneficial window to regenerate the social system by turning it on its head. Carnival became a time when it was appropriate to mock, ridicule and degrade the normal social order to initiate and promote change.

Michael Holquist (1984) defines Bakhtin as belonging to the social group called upon to interpret the world for society known as the 'intelligentsia'. "So large a task is difficult at any time, but there are periods when events threaten to outstrip any capacity to interpret them" (Holquist, 1984, p. xiii). Many political and social events had great bearing on Bakhtin's philosophical ideas, the Russian Revolution being just one example. Holquist acknowledges the environment in which Bakhtin worked, and observes:

At one level *Rabelais and His World* is a parable and guidebook for its times, inexplicable without reference to the close connection between the circumstances of its own production and Soviet Intellectual and political history. At another level, directed to scholars anywhere at any time, it is a contribution to historical poetics with theoretical implications not limited by its origin in a particular time and place. (Holquist, 1984, p. xv)

It would be wrong to limit the book to its soviet reality but without understanding its complete implications and historical significance, *Rabelais and His World* could be greatly diminished in value. Holquist notes that, despite the many diverse and distinct "differences between Bakhtin and Rabelais, the Russian critic and the French novelist have one fundamental feature in common: each created a special kind of open text inscribed themselves into their times" (Holquist, 1984, p. xv).

For LaBute, his time embraces the digital era, young and old alike, connected through devices in the palms of their hands, wherein social studies indicate bullying is on the rise and media facilitates the proliferation of unrealistic ideals. The normalization of poor behaviour in LaBute's world defines (at least in part) his time. Any individual with a mobile phone can exert power on those who are marginalised.

Carnival's inversion of the status quo involves mockery of the ruling class, of those who hold power or social standing similar to Jeannie and Carter in *Fat Pig*. LaBute ridicules those in his play usually endowed with high status in an attempt to turn normal social hierarchies in the real world on their head. As suggested in the studies I cite, in modern Western society, bullies seem to have increased power due to digital means that aids the standardisation of their behaviour and extent of control over others. Using grotesque images to highlight inappropriate behaviour and attitudes could ridicule and draw attention to society's acceptance of such behaviour. *Fat Pig* stops short of the traditional carnivalesque model as Helen does not get the opportunity to inflict power or control against her oppressors but, in an extension of the play and following my understanding of LaBute's intentions, I attempted to give power to the people by asking the audience to vote. The play offers a glimpse of what I refer to as 'the ugly truth about the beautiful people' and for a moment, spectators are given the opportunity to judge those who, in the play, do judge.

Body Image

Mainstream Western society's obsession with beauty ideals is currently the focus of much research. Marika Tiggeman reports that "appearance esteem and body satisfaction represent probably the major contributors to overall levels of global self-esteem; that is, they are very important components of how individuals feel about themselves as a whole" (Tiggeman, 2011, p. 12). The abundant projections of particular body ideals endlessly promoted in print and the digital media is seen to be the trigger in causing many individuals to perceive that they are physically lacking and, consequently, dissatisfied with their self-image.

At the same time, there are many convincing arguments about the pitfalls of obesity in debates concerning quality of life, longevity, health, and financial costs involved. I suggest that LaBute rather cleverly uses an example of obesity to reveal the subtler side of such debates by raising the complexities of social condemnation or bullying which emerge through intolerant opinions, in this instance pertaining to a particular physical appearance.

While it is not my intention to promote unhealthy lifestyles nor do I advocate any excessiveness that is detrimental to an individual's emotional, mental, or physical wellbeing, I do not believe that LaBute's play, *Fat Pig*, is actually about obesity, but rather, is about the social marginalisation of those who are different. Other readings and interpretations of the play seem to conclude the play is named after and does condemn fat people for their shortcomings, promoting a message that if only obese individuals would change, society could accept them and they can then find happiness. I argue that if a woman is comfortable with herself, recognizes value in the person she is, it is not up to society to demoralize or shun her based on superficial ideals. The negative result of promoting mainstream conformity is not only detrimental to the victimised individuals, but more importantly reflects unproductively on those who enforce such ideals and on a society that accepts such enforcement. It is my assertion that LaBute's satire condemns the upholders of those ideals and not individuals whose weight places them outside of that ideal.

For these reasons, I conclude that the production at the centre of Endevelt and Anat Gesser-Edelsburg's research (2011) somehow failed to convey the satirical tenor of LaBute's writing. Just because Tom's love interest, Helen is overweight by social standards does not make her a 'pig'. Rather than a literal statement, the title of the play is an ironic reflection on those who choose to call her a 'fat pig'.

LaBute could have attributed a number of personal traits to Helen's character, such as religious persuasion or sexual orientation, to place her susceptible to marginalization and, thereby, depict the ensuing societal protests. LaBute's indictment of prejudice and bullying is far more subtle. I suggest that LaBute has constructed the example of obesity to reveal the insidious nature of bullying and to condemn societal intolerance. A bullying society should 'look in the mirror' and reflect on behaviours that devalue, dehumanise, and destroy another individual's self-esteem. No matter how the other characters justify their prejudicial attitudes, their behaviour and actions that reject Helen are unwarranted and destructive.

Appearance in general and body image in particular have become very important constructs in contemporary Western societies, abundantly displayed on billboards, in shop windows, magazines, in everyday conversations and in the amount of money, time, and effort invested in the pursuit of beauty through clothes, hair, dieting, cosmetic surgical procedures and other grooming practices. (Tiggeman, 2011, p. 12) The human desire for acceptance and need to 'belong' creates an environment that drives many individuals to conform, to 'toe-the-line' and even reject those individuals who do not meet the accepted 'norms'. This sociocultural model is often referred to as the "tripartite model" due to the three main "powerful and pervasive" sociocultural influences that reinforce societal beauty ideals, namely "the media, family and peers" (Tiggeman, 2011, p. 13).

Fashion magazine pages are packed with women, where "perhaps the most obvious and consistent physical characteristic shared by these models is that they are also very thin. Not

only are they naturally thin, but digital modification techniques” (2009, p. 13) such as airbrushing exacerbate their thinness. Tiggeman suggests the criteria for ‘female beauty’ relies on the allure of thinness. More often than not, these emaciated ideals are unfeasible and unattainable in wholesome ways but are “nevertheless accepted and internalized by many” (Tiggeman, 2011, p. 13). Tiggeman considers that internalisation and diminished self-esteem form a vicious circle where an individual’s susceptibility to and integration of the prolific mass-media induced beauty ideal exacerbates low self-esteem and is a strong contributing factor to vulnerability (2009, p. 14). Helen’s offer to change her appearance at the play’s end perhaps indicates her final demise at the hands of persistent societal pressure.

Social Conformity

Jughyun Kim and Hee Sun Park’s paper, “The effect of Uniform Virtual appearance on Conformity Intention: Social identity model of deindividuation effects and optimal distinctiveness theory”, attempts to address the effects of mass media on an individual’s self-image. One theory, the “social identity model of deindividuation effects (SIDE) . . . posits that sharing the same visual cue can promote group identification process and eventually induce stronger conformity” (2011, p. 2). Individuals potentially develop similar opinions to others in a group when exposed to the same images. The study investigates the dual existence of individuals’ tendency to conform to as well as resist mainstream ideals promoted in the media.

The characters in *Fat Pig* behave in ways that indicate the influence of societal pressures and respond in the dichotomous attitudes described by Kim and Park. Helen initially resists pressures to conform by not defining her sense of self through societal ideals. In contrast, Jeannie and Carter’s lifestyles, opinions and ideas of self, adhere to and reiterate ideas formed by mainstream constructions. Tom’s opinions do not necessarily follow the socially accepted norms but, by finally kowtowing to pressure, he appears prepared to imitate his associates in order to ‘fit in’.

Kim and Park's research on social influence discovered a tendency for individuals to conform rather than choose nonconformity, "which is contrary to the value of individuals over groups manifested by Western societies" (Kim & Park, 2011, p. 2). They explained that an individual's ability to reject conformity drastically reduces in the face of societal influence and pressure. The democratic nature of most Western societies indicates a proclivity toward individualism and each single being's right to their own opinion but, as their research shows, group mentality can often supersede independent opinions. Kim and Park conclude that individuals "adopt norms and values of the group by not expressing their deviant opinions for fear of social sanction" (Kim & Park, 2011, p. 2).

Perceived pressures to conform may force individuals to deny their true beliefs, however, in *Fat Pig*, conformity pressures become bullying tactics. In the world of *Fat Pig*, Carter and Jeannie express their disbelief about Helen and Tom's relationship in direct communication with Tom. Carter's online campaign, circulating Helen's photo throughout the workplace, inevitably gains support from company members because many individuals feel a compulsion for acceptance within the group and feel obliged to agree with Carter's opinion of Helen in order to maintain their position in the community. Tom is a victim of this pressure to conform as he becomes increasingly incapable of expressing his thoughts freely to the extent in which he denies his feelings and ultimately alters his behaviour. The fear of refuting commonly held opinions exponentially decreases an individuals' ability to maintain their independent beliefs. The journalist, Laura Donnelly reports that modern social media platforms are negatively affecting society and evidence proves "the internet was fuelling a rise in the number of children suffering from anxiety and depression, with some taking to self-harm and attempting suicide" (Donnelly, 2014).

On the other hand, Kim and Park consider alternative results when the fear of individuation outweighs the desire for group identification and that "too much similarity can deter individuals' willingness to conform to a majority opinion" (Kim & Park, 2011, p. 2). Perhaps this tendency is the preferred reaction to over-zealous societal pressure and has the potential to empower individuals with greater conviction of their own attitudes. Kim and

Park state “it is possible to assume that the negative effect induced by individuals’ perceived deindividuation on majority influence should be weakened if they were given opportunities to regain their uniqueness” (Kim & Park, 2011, p. 7). This suggests there is a latent benefit that comes from an individuals’ increased ability to reject mainstream ideals, especially superficial trends by making allowances for the accommodation of uniqueness. However, at the end of the play, it is difficult to imagine how Helen might recover from the hefty blow to her heart let alone her self-esteem inflicted by Tom’s rejection. Jeannie, Carter’s and subsequently Tom’s behaviour can have none other than a negative effect on Helen and her sense of self. Helen’s sentiment that she “never allowed herself to believe she could experience such an intimate relationship” (LaBute, 2004, p. 81) indicates a unique trust in Tom which is broken when he breaks up with her because of other’s opinions.

Helen seems comfortable with herself at the beginning of the play (LaBute, 2004, p. 8 & 31). She appears to be an individual with a healthy self-esteem and able to resist pressures to conform. Her offer to change herself at the end of the play lie in direct response to the persecution Tom feels. Neither Tom nor Helen, in isolation from social normalisation, is unhappy with how she looks.

The work place bullying Tom personally experiences, in person and via social media, is a well-documented phenomenon in everyday modern society. Tom’s work place exhibits a culture that is rife with bullying tactics. Tom and Carter engage in a tit-for-tat relationship that cyclically ‘gets the other back’ through public humiliation. Judith Macintosh presents case studies of specific situations and strategies to deal with the topic because work place bullying is a “pervasive issue” that must be addressed (MacIntosh, 2006, p. 1).

It is not difficult in contemporary Western society to find ramifications directly linked to social pressures, particularly due to and increasing from online bullying. In response to a thirteen-year-old girl’s suicide, The *Daily Telegraph* ran a story revealing the suspected reasons. The mother of the girl’s ex-friend posed as a sixteen-year-old boy and developed

an online relationship with the girl, resulting in a very cruel deception and subsequent online breakup. “There was also a flurry of email postings labelling Megan ‘fat’” (Elsworth, 2007). Increased depression from bullying linked directly as the cause for her suicide. Many other stories reveal a similar strong association between diminished self-esteem and the persistent iteration of negative opinions specifically through social media. Online bullying increases the public humiliation because of its pervasive ability to influence popular opinions.

There is a great deal of support indicating the significance of sociocultural paradigms and their influence on physical appearance. Tiggeman comments on the extensive research that suggests “the societal beauty ideal for women has become increasingly thin over recent decades” (Tiggeman, 2011, p. 14). Further studies of body images promoted in “visual media including fashion magazines, film, television, and video games confirm this trend” (Tiggeman, 2011, p. 14). The persistent endorsement of these archetypal images by the media has shaped and influenced mainstream beauty ideals that are more often than not unattainable through natural or healthy means. Studies on exposure to these types of images indicate a decrease in “body esteem and greater desire for a thinner shape” (Tiggeman, 2011, p. 15) and standards of acceptable weight are subject to fashionable trends.

Tiggeman’s research acknowledges the role peer pressure plays in the development of body image from a very young age (Tiggeman, 2011, p. 15), teasing or bullying conversations about appearance concerns or dieting leads to “the belief that popularity is dependent on conforming to the thin . . . ideal” (Tiggeman, 2011, p. 16). Tiggeman agrees with Donnelly’s assessment that “the most powerful and pervasive transmitter of the sociocultural ideals of beauty are the mass media” (Tiggeman, 2011, p. 16). Even more alarming is Donnelly’s summation of a recent mental health report showing young people “are being bullied into a state of despair on social media” (Donnelly, 2014).

It is undeniable that all forms of media intend to influence or sway popular opinion in some way. Digital media provides a greater scope to reinforce modern Western ideals of beauty and acceptable physical appearance creating an often-unattainable thin model with often negative or devastating corollaries. Although media does not cause bullying in a literal sense, it does create aspirations for a particular way of being. Social media acts as a platform and vehicle for those bent on expressing and exerting particular ideas on others as a type of 'truth'; they forcefully pressure others to conform through insults suggesting there is something abnormal about them if they do not hold the same beliefs or aspire to the same goals. Already vulnerable from prolonged exposure and indoctrination, certain individuals experience irrevocable damage from their perceived experience of pressure from media, friends, family, and online communities when they fail to achieve desired mainstream concepts of beauty.

In my mind, this is where everyday life resonates strongly with absurdity. With an objective eye, it is nothing but tragically absurd for any healthy, young, intelligent person to suffer such intense trauma from negative opinions resulting in such intense feelings of appearance inadequacy that they resort to extreme measures. Many individuals choose to surgically change themselves, starve their bodies, or indeed end their life through fear of rejection. Not to undermine or belittle the pain these individuals must feel, it is still absurd that there are some sections of Western society that put physical beauty above mental or emotional well-being; it is absurd that anyone must endure such deep suffering from ludicrously superficial conceptions of worth or value.

I come from no moral stance on the matter of weight and am not concerned with anyone's personally accepted norms because my argument, and I believe the crux of the play, has nothing to do with weight. No matter what excuse Jeannie and Carter use to marginalize Helen, it is their intolerance and society's acceptance of this type of pressure to conform that is the focus of my investigation. Increased scope of bullying due to the reach of social media and the adverse social affects influence my interpretation of *Fat Pig*. The normalization of this behaviour is the core of my argument supported by Donnelly's report fearing "digital culture had created 'alarming and chronic' levels of intimidation" and the

swapping of indecent pictures had become 'normalised' (Donnelly, 2014), suggesting this is a growing social phenomenon in need of redress.

The Influence of Robert Lepage

My admiration of Robert Lepage's work and creative ethos sparks aspirations in my own directorial approach. My production of *Fat Pig* attempts to draw from ideas and concepts explored in Lepage's process of producing ground-breaking theatre which has gained him international recognition as a trailblazer. His transnational work with his Quebec-based theatre company, Ex Machina and his accomplishments as an actor, cineaste, dramaturge and director are acknowledged as "innovative theatre for a global community" (Koustas, 2009, p. 1). Jane Koustas' article about Lepage's success in Toronto focusses on his personal and artistic concepts of the 'other' which translate into the universal appeal of his work. Koustas states that Lepage "sees himself, and his theatre, and indeed perhaps his nation, as being both 'at home' and 'away' . . . thus implying a very different way of perceiving . . . [o]therness" (Koustas, 2009, p. 2).

The concept of the 'other' in Lepage's work more often than not refers to nationality, culture and language. "This encounter with the Other, the positioning or juxtapositioning of oneself with respect to 'outsiders' in an effort to better understand one's own identity, is an essential element of Lepage's theatre" (Koustas, 2009, p. 4). Lepage's approach to multilingual and globalised theatre is, in effect, an attempt to find unification in his own sense of self. "Lepage's attempt to 'other' himself – to use the stage as a mirror through which he can see his own reflection" (Koustas, 2009, p. 3) is a process where he endeavours to identify and reconcile multiple facets of himself as a member of a global community. The concept of using artistic expression as a reflective mirror to depict, reveal or comment on any number of aspects of humanity is not uncommon but, according to Koustas, here Lepage seeks to 'see' himself. I find correspondences in Lepage's exploration of the 'other' with Bakhtin's ideas about an individual's obligation to recognize self as distinct from and, yet, detectable in the other which should provoke empathy for and a responsibility to find unification in and 'answerability' between the self and the other.

Alexander Dundjerovic (2007) explores Lepage's creative process, ideology, and staging concepts which resonates with Bakhtin's principles. Dundjerovic notes Lepage's work reflects "the artistic and personal context of Lepage's way of creating performance as a director-author and deviser" (Dundjerovic, 2007, p. x). Echoing Bakhtin's author-artist

concept for artistic integrity that positions the artist within the community, with a responsibility in relation to that community and an accountability of the work to life. “For Lepage, theatre communicates through one or another art form; he believes in exploring this or that medium until he discovers something that has an echo in the audience” (Dundjerovic, 2007, p. 178). Lepage establishes a connection with the audience through the audience’s connection to the work. I communicate my interpretation of LaBute’s satirical message condemning intolerance through grotesque images in the work and invite the audience to participate or rather, invest in the work.

When developing a set design for *Fat Pig*, it was apparent that we needed something that was multipurpose, transformational and flexible. I turned to Lepage for inspiration. “His theatre requires *mise en scène* (meaning to put or make something in space) that is open to change and flexible in structure” (Dundjerovic, 2007, p. x). Dundjerovic maintains the integrity of Lepage’s work derives from his beginnings in fringe theatre and the necessary inventiveness of ‘poor theatre’ so that “the essence of his theatricality stems from the power of simple but magical, imagebased and performer-driven *mise en scène*.” (2007, p. 178) Despite the allure of an elaborate set and technological gadgets, I sought this ‘essence’ of simplicity as a basis of my production. Through necessity, budget constraints, fringe festival restrictions, and venue limitations, I had little choice but to embrace the attitudes of ‘poor theatre’. In many instances, as I later explain in my account of the production, the challenges inhibiting initial concepts required creative solutions and compromise which arguably enhanced the production in the end.

Lepage’s theatricality also utilizes technology and multimedia as further creative motivations. “In his productions, recorded visual and sound imagery allow the live action to intervene and, in a symbiotic way, connect humanity and the machine” (Dundjerovic, 2007, p. 190). Much in the same way, I also aimed to incorporate multimedia but perhaps for different ends. I intended utilizing multimedia to provoke a subtext of the adverse potential for social disconnection through technology and mass media. The corporate video, Virtucom, and the many digital devices the characters use are meant to create an ironic relationship between face-to-face human relations and the ‘machine’ of mass media whose

promise to connect people can result in the opposite effect of ostracizing individuals and promoting misguided opinions.

In scene five, Helen and Tom share an intimate evening together watching a film. Helen initially wants to watch the film but Tom convinces her to pay greater attention to him. I felt that it was important to play the sound and project the footage of the movie onto the actors to create a subliminal effect through which the film becomes a metaphor to attempt to shut out the world by ignoring media and mainstream ideals because they pay no attention to it in preference to intimacy even though it is still there, all pervasive, yet, they have no conscious awareness of it. Ironically, at this point, Helen perceives Tom's ability to stand against popular opinion akin to the hero's bravery in the film but, in truth, Tom is avoiding it.

"Like the theatre of Peter Brook, Lepage's theatre blurs the traditional boundaries between rehearsal and performance, transforming them into one continuous creative process" (Dundjerovic, 2007, p. xi). Lepage often uses an 'open' rehearsal process where public rehearsals are performed for outsiders (Dundjerovic, 2007, p. x). In a very limited sense, I attempted to incorporate Lepage's audience input in the rehearsal process. At each major progression of our production, we invited crew and peers to attend rehearsals to assist in gauging the potential audience response. This process became invaluable in developing characterisation. Initially, Jeannie's characterisation made her appear severely wronged and reasonable in her chastisement of Tom, causing sympathy for her position and attitudes. If Jeannie appeared as a victim, my objective to ridicule her behaviour greatly decreases. With feedback from invited guests, we adjusted Jennie's characterisation, giving her a more grotesque vocal delivery and behaviour befitting the intolerance which I wished to underline in her behaviour.

Lepage speaks of his directorial approach and advises makers not to "underestimate your audience's intelligence but do not overestimate their culture" (Allen, 2012). I believe Lepage's warning against patronising audiences, balanced against his consideration for an audience's values, experience, and social conditioning is informative when developing a directorial approach. By emphasising the grotesquery in *Fat Pig*, I aimed to reveal an

understanding of modern Western society as immune to much of the media-driven bullying and the prevalence of their projection of misinformed attitudes. If our culture accepts certain behaviours as ordinary and every day, that normalization needs highlighting and satire provided the vehicle. For example, grotesque parody may encourage audiences to view this behaviour as being outside acceptable parameters and potentially cause them to question its validity. Lepage's considered approach to theatre making, his audience's cultural context, and innovative use of various mediums inspire my directorial approach and specific aspects of my rehearsal and staging processes.

Account of Process

In the following sections I refer directly to participants in my production, the production I observed prior to commencing rehearsals for our production and written reports of previous productions. In order to fulfil my obligation to grant the people involved some anonymity, I have developed a code system that will hopefully provide clarity for the position and production in which they performed.

CODE KEY:

My production

- Helen, female actor 1-FA1
- Tom, male actor 1-MA1
- Carter, male actor 2-MA2
- Jeannie, female actor 2-FA2
- Graphic designer-GD
- Stage manager-SM

Observed production

- Helen, observed female actor 1-OFA1
- Tom, observed male actor 1-OMA1
- Carter, observed male actor 2-OMA2
- Jeannie, observed female actor 2-OFA2
- Director, observed director-OD
- Venue, observed venue-OV
- Crew, observed set and costume designer-OSC

Previous productions

- Helen, previous production's female actor 1-PFA1
- Tom, previous production's male actor 1-PMA1
- Carter, previous production's male actor 2-PMA2
- Jeannie, previous female actor 2-PFA2

Fat Pig Production Diary

At the outset of the planning stage, I knew I wanted to use both realistic and grotesque staging conventions in the production. My vision focused on locating moments in the script and particular character traits that evidenced the more absurd and/or excessive elements of

life and human nature. By intertwining exaggerated presentations of particular incongruous moments within an otherwise realistic performance, I hoped to achieve an emphasis on the repulsive behaviour that many in mainstream Western society accept as normal aspects of everyday life. My aim was to create a contrast between acceptable and repugnant behaviour by enlarging vulgar tendencies so often accepted as social norms to grotesque proportions. By enhancing ridiculous aspects in the script and characters amidst the context of moments that otherwise appeared as everyday life, I anticipated recognition of these elements by an audience as unacceptable, ludicrous, and in need of consideration.

Graphic Design

Envisioning this production, I perceived the poster, flyer, programme graphics and design to reflect a comical tone that in no way depicted the character of Helen. Too often, as noted previously, the poster design of many productions included an image of an overweight woman (Helen) with the title of the play, which I feel drew an immediate connection to the character and implied that the title described her as, or worse, was labelling her as a fat pig. I centred the entire graphic design process on LaBute's sentiment; "heroism, it would seem, is a tough gig" (LaBute, 2004, p. xii). The concept evolved from innocent, childhood ideas influenced by concepts of superheroes because, for children, the idea of bravery and standing up for a belief or for those more vulnerable seems entirely plausible and indeed possible. The play reveals that Helen has a penchant for war movies and their heroes, ordinary men brave enough to put themselves in the firing line to protect others less able. They act on a conviction, allowing them to achieve extraordinary things. Helen thinks Tom is brave and has the capacity to stand against the tide of popular opinion just because he is initially capable of entering in to a relationship with her. Tom eventually falters and caves in under the negative reception his relationship with Helen receives. With this idea in mind, I worked closely with our graphic designer to conceive an image of Tom, dressed in superhero regalia (indicating his initial bravado), but with the ironic twist of him running in the opposite direction away from background images depicting danger and people in distress. The overall intention was designed to indicate a satiric context for the play from the moment of audience's first contact. The designer began with a pencil illustration of the

super hero, and then the buildings followed by the girl, before digitally rendering all the elements to create the final image.



Figure 4: initial image for poster and flyer design

When questioned on the visual marketing design, the director of the earlier observed production commented, “I was really insistent that we not have on any of the [marketing] material [depicting the actor playing Helen’s] face with *Fat Pig* above it or over it. It felt like I was calling her that which, of course, was exactly the opposite of why we were doing the play” (appendix A, 2013, p. 2, ques. 8). The trajectory of this director’s sentiment echoed mine exactly, however, their marketing material, while not depicting Helen, did have a pig’s snout inside a heart, which, potentially guided an even more literal interpretation of the word pig. The flyer’s additional feature allowed the heart to be pushed out and worn as a heart shaped nose mask. Interestingly, an image circulated on the show’s digital page of the actor playing Helen wearing one of these snout masks. Our graphics and marketing in comparison deliberately made no connections between the title of the play and any possible literal interpretations. The following image representing the cover of our program shows the ironic depiction of our ‘hero’ in a style evocative of a satiric comic book

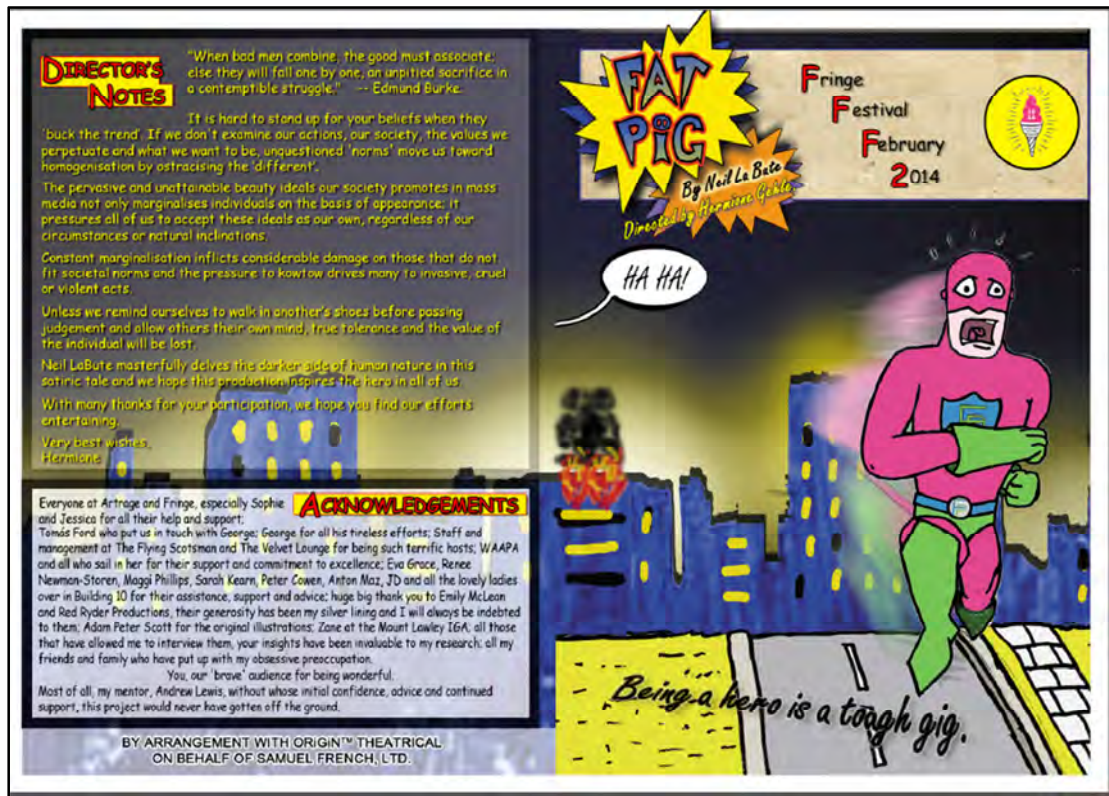


Figure 5: front and back cover design of program for our production

Casting Process

From my initial reading of this play, I was keenly aware that a great deal of sensitivity and thought would be required in order to cast particular actors for the roles this script demanded. I feel compelled at this point to note the ironic implications of even this basic element of the process. Here I am about to embark on a satirical exposé denouncing the judgemental attitudes of an appearance-obsessed society and I am charged with casting actors who represent the 'realistic' physical requirements of the characters, in essence, judging them on their appearance. I felt that the story necessitated this approach so I set forth on the task with a great deal of consideration and care. To investigate the satirical elements in the script, I had devised a rehearsal plan that would explore parody and grotesquery in the text. To recruit actors who would be willing to play and experiment with me through this process, I decided to take advantage of West Australian Academy of Performing Arts' actors in training with whom I had developed rapport on previous productions and other students I observed perform.

It was imperative that I find actors to play Tom, Jeannie, and Carter who could support audacious characterisations in a safe, secure, and creative rehearsal environment. A strong line distinguishing between the grotesque, exaggerated features of the characters and the enlightened performers playing them was of import in developing a cohesive ensemble. I wanted actors who could help me develop a warm and nurturing rehearsal atmosphere where there was a clear distinction between the actors as people and the judgemental or marginalized characters they were about to play. It was my intention to gather together well-bonded members of an ensemble who were markedly different from the characters in the play and yet were capable of convincingly using these characters to tell this difficult story. In other words, I wanted actors who could play these characters but who had little in common with the negative aspects of the personas I wanted them to play.

Tom is a very particular character and I needed a very specific actor to fill this role. I required an actor who could appear to 'fit' in the world of Carter and Jeannie yet reveal complete ease not just within himself but also with Helen in their more intimate scenes. I needed him to create a believable façade for his interactions with Jeannie and Carter but show the audience his 'true' self through his total comfort, happiness, and contentment when he finds himself alone with Helen. Additionally, I considered the generosity of spirit required to ensure the actor playing Helen felt she could trust her fellow actor on and off stage. After working with MA1 on *Speaking in Tongues* in May 2013, I felt that he became the obvious choice. He showed great generosity on and off stage, an intelligent approach to the work and an ability to interpret complex textual analysis with an emotional perceptiveness well beyond his years.

In casting Jeannie, I considered the idea that the actor should be brave enough to create an unlikable character. The female actor I cast as Jeannie (FA2) stood out as a physically appealing girl with a bright, friendly personality. Her performances had always seemed brave in previous productions where I'd seen her demonstrating bold character choices and a desire to serve the production by understanding her character's role within the story and transforming herself to fulfil this end. From working with her on *Speaking in Tongues*, I knew she would bring a welcoming and inclusive energy to the rehearsal room. The

character of Jeannie was far removed from her own personality and yet I was certain she was more than capable of performing the 'bitchiness' required for the role.

In my mind, Carter was the essential role for conveying the satirical cruelty in the text, presenting the greatest scope for an outrageous 'larger-than-life' character. The actor's ability to approach the work in an intellectual manner yet be able to physically express grotesqueness in thought and deed was paramount in choosing an actor to play this pivotal role. The male actor in the role of Carter (MA2) comes across as an efficient, confident, capable man and actor who is able to support the goals of an ensemble with an intense and vigorous focus on the work. Apart from being physically 'perfect' for the role of Carter, more importantly, his ability to access his body and physicalize his performance shaped the possibilities for the part. I believe his embodied approach to storytelling was vital in the development of his role as Carter.

In casting Helen, I entertained the completely absurd switch from the expected, to cast a slim girl as Helen and larger actor in Jeannie's role. Jeannie's insults describing Helen as huge are then exposed as ridiculous with her prejudices only existing in her mind, as she is obviously larger than the actor she is seen insulting. Such a choice potentially creates an outward show that Jeannie is what she fears, and may highlight the satirical comment that society's behaviour and intolerance constitute the play's fat pig in the story. However, such a strong deviation from other productions might deplete any possibility for comparison and possibly subvert the playwright's intended meaning of the play. Unfortunately, a carnivalesque, topsy-turvy Rabelaisian world that Bakhtin talks about was not entirely viable for our production, so a more subtle approach proved necessary. I considered that it was not necessary for the actor to be any larger than just slightly outside the mainstream ideal as I felt this had the potential to highlight the satirical content by making Jeannie and Carter's attitudes that much more ridiculous because the limits of their prejudice are comparatively narrow and, thus, more comical. Even though some reviews criticised previous productions because the reviewer did not consider the actor playing Helen was large enough, I decided to focus less on the physical appearance described in the text and, instead, concentrated on an actor able to elicit the deeper qualities of the character.

As soon as I witnessed this female actor (FA1) first perform, it was difficult to imagine anyone else capable of playing Helen. On a number of occasions, I observed her deliver powerful, charming, emotionally-connected and deeply engaging performances. She is an extremely brave, talented actor with a bright friendly personality that I envisioned as fundamental qualities to embody in the role of Helen. I imagined Helen to ooze confidence, wit, charm, and complete comfort in her own skin. In my view, she was the ideal actor for our production and, conveniently, she physically fitted the criteria for comparable casting with previous productions. I aimed to encourage her to bring as much of the colourful, joyful, beautiful and sexy parts of her persona to the character as possible, because it was important that we maximise Helen's humanity by allowing the audience to see the many qualities Tom recognizes and falls in love with. My vision of the play hinged on our ability to convince the love between Tom and Helen is not only 'real' but also passionate. I needed the audience to invest in Helen: they needed to get to know her and instantly like her so they care about her happiness and the cruelty that destroys it. I felt positive FA1 had the mental and emotional maturity to engage with the text and character and deliver a well-rounded and in-depth conception of the role. The actor herself easily dispelled any gross generalisations or stereotypes Jeannie and Carter espouse in the play with her enthusiasm, energy, and attitude, convincing me that her representation of the character had potential to challenge many preconceived ideas of accepted societal prejudices.

I personally approached the actors and explained my vision for the production. I clarified that the process was an experiment to discover how, through performance, the emphasis on satire could draw out the play's condemnation of bullying societal behaviour. Fortunately, the script and my vision appealed to the actors and they eagerly agreed to take on this journey with me. With such a talented cast, venue confirmation was now more pressing and urgent than ever.

Observing another production

Late 2012, I considered the best platform for this experiment was to stage *Fat Pig* at a particular independent local theatre in Perth. These organisations are renowned for their incredible support of emerging artists and innovative theatre making. I hoped to apply for a

Western Australian premiere season of the play in August 2013. My initial enquiries returned the news that another company had already applied to mount *Fat Pig* at the chosen venue in May 2013. Disappointed, yet unperturbed, I considered how their production might inform my investigation and proposed experiment. Embracing this turn of events, I approached the director and requested permission to observe their process and performance. I cannot thank them enough for their generosity in accommodating my request, which turned out to provide invaluable data for my research and subsequent process.

Their production was well-conceived, beautifully directed, and superbly acted. It was theatrically clever in device, convention, and staging. Their audiences enjoyed an extremely high, professional standard in all aspects of performance and production. The set consisted of three nesting narrow tables on wheels with boldly coloured, glossy surfaces, an office chair, leather sofa bed, with the backdrop rigged to hold removable blinds, curtains, and basketball hoop, while the remaining props also adhered to accurate representations of routine items. The everyday realistic costumes, characterizations, lighting, and sound designs provided each scene with a familiar appearance. Fluid scene locations (the configuration of the desk and lounge in the office scenes flexibly moved around the stage throughout the show) created a slightly unreal sense to space and time but did not remove the performance from the onstage sense of 'reality' altogether. The realistic staging of the production in appearance and in terms of naturalistic line delivery, lighting states, and sound effects gave an overall impression of the everyday to the performances.

Gauging audience responses after the show, remarks generally expressed dislike for Helen's treatment but many seemed to understand Jeannie and Carter's perspective and Tom's ultimate inability to stand up to them. To some particularly astute audience members, there was little doubt of their understanding of the facets of society the play condemns but I did overhear and talk with many audience members who blamed Helen for the situation. They felt nothing but sympathy toward Tom and found Carter and Jeannie reasonable in their attitudes because of their justifications, even if the audience members did not hold those views themselves. One audience member commented, "of course Carter has a problem with fat people, after all he's been through with his mother, I completely get it."

I agree with their director's choice to localize the play. By setting it in Australia, local audiences can more readily relate to home-grown elements in content and the characters. As an essential element of satirical form, achieving topicality is necessary: when content relates directly to the lives and experiences of audience members, enabling identification with the evident flaws in their own society to be more direct. Their production replaced American references with equivalent Australian locations.

The whole experience was inspiring and allowed me privileged insight into the potential misunderstandings of the satirical thrust of the piece. It seems to me, contemporary audiences struggle with satirical depictions of daily life because, just like with bad language becoming accepted in the vernacular, they have become numb and fail to see the behaviour as grotesque and ridiculous or realize it is being mocked. It reinforced my suspicion that exaggeration and a greater sense of parody was necessary to strengthen the satirical comment in the play. A greater adherence to earlier satirical traditions might provide greater insight for ironic representation in performance.

I asked this director (OD) what themes she considered important when first devising her strategy for rehearsal. I agree with her appraisal of

what it said about judging people on what they looked like before you give them a chance was really important to highlight (obviously fatness being the thing here). I loved that the people who were meant to be 'beautiful' were behaving in such an ugly way and I really wanted to not pull back on that unkindness. I wanted to let us see that cruelty. (Appendix A: OD, ques.4, p. 99)

With the glaring exception of 'fatness being the thing here', this appraisal is of course what LaBute wants readers to think, and brings out the cruel judgemental behaviour that she (OD) rightly assesses is the most important aspect for emphasis; Helen's weight is inconsequential. My assessment of their production asserts that they were not cruel enough and that their insults, in my opinion, were under played with too much emphasis paid to their 'very reasonable' justifications for their opinions which allowed many audience members to empathise with these "very real characters whose human imperfections made us cringe with recognition" (Appendix A: OD, ques.3, p. 99).

The director articulated a very similar understanding of the play to my own but various accounts reported the topic of satire was not overtly addressed in the rehearsal room.

I was really hoping the audience would take away a need to think and discuss the core issues. How name calling and all that lies behind this behaviour is not ok. How body image is [a] huge issue for some people and has a major effect on their lives. How we need to speak out for what we believe [in] is important. We need to take a stand at some point. (Appendix A: OD, ques. 14, p. 101)

The actors and crew member I spoke to espoused very similar views indicating an obesity issue was central in their understanding of the play which I believe was symptomatic of their director's initial trepidation evidenced in her phone call to offer the role of Helen: "I called her, in one of the most dreaded phone calls I have ever had to make" (Appendix A: OD, ques. 9, p. 100). Casting my Helen proved a lot less traumatic. Helen is a great role and my first discussion with the actor playing her (FA1) clarified the satiric nature of the script and it was society, as represented by Jeannie and Carter being mocked; the title of the play referred to their behaviour and the dramatic function of Helen was to make them look as ridiculous as possible. I reiterated this direction throughout rehearsal to all the actors. The actors playing Jeannie (FA2) and Carter (MA2) were to revel in their repulsiveness and enjoy playing the unlikeable villains. Helen (FA1) and Tom's (MA2) actors did an amazing job, convincingly portraying the love story between the characters and conversely deepening the tragedy of their breakup when Tom finally succumbs to the intense pressure he encounters from his peers.

One actor from the observed production (OMA2) shared his thoughts on the persistent use of fat references in comedy, "I think, obesity . . . and weight . . . [is] . . . almost like the one thing we're still almost allowed to laugh at" (Appendix C: OMA2, 2:49, p. 107). Helen is intentionally overweight because it 'taps' into one of the few remaining socially acceptable intolerances, ironically intended to comment on that intolerance. The task, then, is to shift focus from obvious weight related connotations that call Helen a fat pig or messages that admonish meanness toward fat people and guide attention instead to a condemnation of bullying and prejudice regardless of any perceived reason for the behaviour.

The observed production's set and costume designer (OSC) expressed her thoughts on the play, questioning "when do we laugh and when do we cringe, what kind of judgements are we willing to accept and when does it cross the line before we think we've become . . . sort of grotesque in our . . . judgements and cruel, we think we're being . . . frank about something" (Appendix D: OSC, 15:27, p. 125). One of the main thrusts of her (OSC) ideas stem from her personal view that the actor playing Helen was not obese, thereby negating Jeannie and Carter's behaviour as she was not 'big enough' to warrant such cruelty. This would suggest, in some minds and as Helen observes in scene 1, that once a person achieves a particular size/look/weight, it is then acceptable to inflict painful aspersions on them. When casting Helen, their director (OD) articulates a similar sentiment, "we had seen [this actor] (OFA1) and loved her work and even though she is technically not overweight enough we thought she would make a wonderful Helen" (Appendix A: OD, ques. 3, p. 99). She did indeed make a wonderful Helen; however, they are not alone in this consideration of when body size becomes obese as previous critiques echo the very same reservation. This implies a consistent misconception that the play's message has anything to do with Helen's personal appearance and, moreover, exhibits a delicious irony in LaBute's choice of physical abnormality. In some ways, casting a Helen who falls slightly outside the mainstream ideal could potentially make the attitudes of Jeannie and Carter more grotesque but to play these characters as three-dimensional, realistic personas, no matter the size of Helen, either makes these characters appear reasonable or they are dismissed as comical individuals who are not at all representative of society.

Overall the observed production produced a naturalistic representation of daily life differing greatly from what I envisioned for our interpretation. As naturalism tends to solidify the world as it is, a more absurd approach might challenge or destabilize current social conventions. It was my intention to meld the realistic scenarios in the script with parodies of the characters as my research revealed caricature was far more recognizable in form and content as satiric vehicles.

Fringe Festival Venue

The observation of another production in a conventional theatre environment, while providing a very welcoming and creative space, made me realise that the venue itself might be a crucial factor in establishing the context for the play. Satirical comedy and parody owe much of their history to the medieval tradition of carnival. The concept of subversive, grotesque, festive entertainment for the people, of the people, and by the people is at the core of carnivalesque theatre. Medieval carnival parodies aimed at disrupting the status quo and inverting everyday official standards within a festive, celebratory, and inclusive framing. I felt a contemporary festival environment could address some key carnivalesque ideas and when presented with the possibility of a local public bar's back room in Perth's Fringe Festival, I gratefully accepted this venue alternative as an appropriate location.

British Drama professor, Colin Chambers lectures on the origins and theatrical movements that contributed to Western fringe festival traditions. The 1947 Edinburgh International Festival saw the first British use of the term 'fringe' as representative of "those protesting at the lack of Scottish representation in the official program" (Chambers, 2011, p. 327). Audiences and popularity grew so by the 1960s the term "applied to the flowering counter-cultural theatrical activity" (Chambers, 2011, p. 327) similar in essence to the ethos of fringe festivals today. The definition, according to Chambers, while complex, is "primarily concerned with notions of challenge and hierarchy", "being at the cutting edge" (Chambers, 2011, p. 328) or different from the mainstream. Often, Chambers notes, fringe festivals were "linked to radical social movements such as the abolition of slavery or parliamentary reform" (Chambers, 2011, p. 328) and toward the end of the nineteenth century independent theatre's value increased throughout Europe and the US as "a reaction to the materialist values of the increasingly powerful bourgeoisie to which the practitioners and supporters of independent theatre mostly belonged" (Chambers, 2011, p. 328). There was an overlap between amateur theatre and independent theatre forming "a movement of ideas. At its root lay the questions: what is the value and purpose of theatre for a society, and what is the theatre's place in a country's culture?" (Chambers, 2011, p. 329) Both questions I attempt, some degree, to address in this research inquiry. Ironically, all of these notions fit well with the satirical points in *Fat Pig* and suggest that the fringe festival is a particularly apt setting for our production.

The back room bar of our festival venue provided an intimate, informal and non-conventional theatre environment for our show and the tradition of a public bar delivered an inclusive, readily accessible space for our audiences to engage with the performers. The space required the actors to move in and around the audience, allowing the audience to participate in and with the performance.

Crew recruitment

Exemplary Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts students past and present became the core and strongest asset for getting this production up and running. Technical help with filming, editing, and graphic design came from good friends and industry associates. It was extremely important to assemble all the crew on board with my vision for the show and I took care with all members ensuring they were aware that I wanted to move away from the play's realistic appearance on the page and aim for satirical and non-literal interpretations of the script. The following paragraphs explain how each aspect of the design and technical elements contributed to emphasise the ironic tone of the production.

Sound Design

After the first reading, the sound designer initially thought music choices needed to revolve around the love of food to lift the comedy in the play, however, his thoughts quickly changed the following week when we did a moved reading of the play. He was able to see more clearly the caricature and sense of parody already taking shape in the performances and agreed that we could use more ironic song choices to support a less literal interpretation. The sound scape needed to flow effortlessly from ambient, scene setting sound effects to contemporary chart toppers that could convincingly play in a restaurant or food hall interspersed with comical and absurd musical interludes that contrasted or echoed textual references. For example, in the opening scene where Helen is eating alone, the ambient sound indicates a busy food hall during the lunch time rush, with the music in the background a popular, commercial band and lyrics of a man wanting to give up the material world because of love. The song choice, while plausible for place and time, denotes a certain irony because Tom replicates the man in the song although he is completely unaware of it at the time. By the end of the play, his actions reveal he is incapable of being

man who sacrifices all for love. The long running television series, *Gunsmoke* is referenced in the text and echoed with a couple of bars from the theme song providing a non-realistic audio cue for the audience of what the characters are hearing in their minds. The scene ends with Helen giving Tom her number and the music playing in the food hall comically (for audience and characters on stage) switches to a song suggesting he give her a call. I purposely intended the song choices to reflect the possible reality of each scene while effortlessly revealing the internal thoughts of the characters. I also used sound to amplify certain instances, exemplified in scene two with Tom and Carter's office game set to the sound of tribal drumming, intended to suggest primal, competitive urges.

Lighting Design

Originally, the lighting designer considered the show straightforward with little more than naturalistic indoor/outdoor lighting states. The venue supplied a follow spot that she thought would be unnecessary. I discussed with her how I wanted the lighting to reflect the moments when the characters' thoughts or deeds lean towards the grotesque, perhaps underlined with ominous shadows and/or absurd colour choices. Non-naturalistic lighting states created with different coloured gels (transparent plastic sheets used to change the colour or intensity of stage lights) could reveal the sub-textual intentions of the characters: greens could express grotesque character traits, hot colours like red theoretically indicated anger, and together the clash of colours may assist to convey a character's cruel and aggressive attack on another. We decided to play with the follow spot in the final scene for Jeannie's entrance on the beach. I wanted to create a narcissistic tone to her catwalk style entrance so that she could strut through the audience as if they were an adoring crowd and she a super model accepting their accolades on her way to the stage. This way Jeannie could live out her fantasy as the centre of attention and the focal point for all eyes as the spotlight follows her bikini-clad, Pilates-fit, body-beautiful self-image from entrance to stage.

My intention was to externalise her conceited opinion of herself by creating the appearance of an extreme 'selfie,' whereby she enters into a flood of light and the focus is on the 'self' the character experiences in her mind. In the following image of Jeannie in scene four, her jealousy and rage at Tom are exposed in the abstract lighting. The green denotes her envy

toward Helen and the red indicates her anger at Tom’s rejection of her, immediately after this moment, the lighting returned to the regular lighting state establishing the Virtucom workplace.

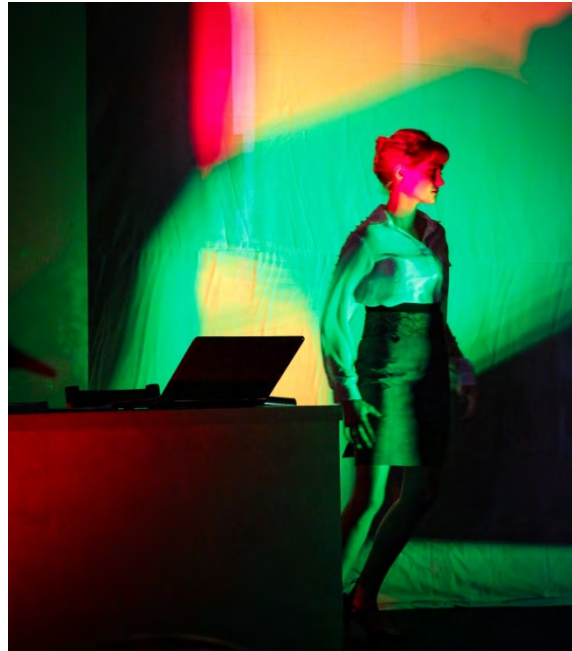


Figure 6: image of lighting design exposing Jeannie's inner thoughts.

The male characters in the script (specifically scenes two and four) enjoy a testosterone driven ‘boys club’ culture where guys are taught “how to *kick* stuff and tear the wings off shit” (LaBute, 2004, p. 60). I wanted to tap in to that primal, competitive urge that often drives men to battle it out on sports fields the world over. The script establishes that these characters regularly play sport together and, at work, play “Nerf ‘pig’” competitively for a “[d]ollar a point” (LaBute, 2004, p. 19). I wanted this moment in the play to reveal how these men interact, but also comment on the deeply ingrained, sports-oriented, masculine ethos that prevents these men from expressing their emotions. Instead of a ‘polite’ office game, I urged the actors to exaggerate their game-play and explore primal urges of competition with an aggressive, very physical version of ‘scrunched paper in cup toss’. Tribal drums and a dim red pulsating light in the performance evoked a strong animalistic, survival-of-the-fittest flavour to the scene.



Figure 7: MA2 and MA1 rehearsing competitive game of 'cup paper toss' interrupted by FA2's entrance

In performance this scene was lit with a dim, throbbing red glow, indicative of cavemen by the light of an open fire or the heat and aggression of unbridled male energy. The light then snaps back to everyday office style lighting as Jeannie enters, catching the men in a compromising position inappropriate for the workplace.

Set Design

It was crucial that the set design facilitated an effortless flow through the play's seven scenes and five different locations so as not to interrupt the pace and fluidity of the production. The confines of the venue posed even further restrictions and challenges for the design process. Each set piece (furniture items used to create a specific location) was required to move and change for multiple purposes as there was little room to remove set pieces from the stage. My initial concept required a self-standing frame that the actors could manipulate to change the shape of the space and redefine it as different locations, seamlessly allowing the action to move from food hall, restaurant and Helen's apartment, interspersed with Tom's office scenes, then into the final scene at the beach. Our set

designer came up with the original design where the frame was constructed with PVC pipe, in three hinged sections, making it lightweight and easy to manoeuvre. While limiting, the restriction motivated us to find a creative solution, which compromised our original ideas of moving frames and purpose specific furniture items. Our designer's primary design model required different set pieces for each scene, however, confronted with the substantially smaller playing space than we had anticipated, we settled on my preference for more 'stripped back', non-literal concepts of set, props, and locations.

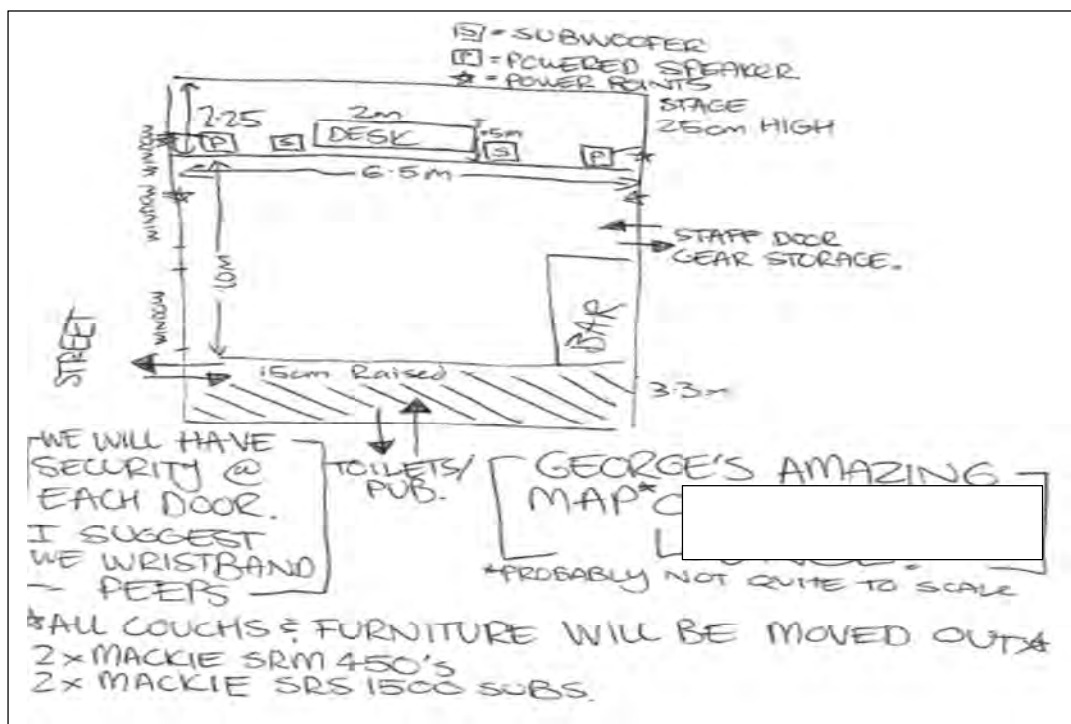


Figure 8: Floor map given by venue of back room

The shape and size of the venue left little choice as to how we could orient the audience and stage. We decided to design multi-purpose objects that remained on stage and maximised the performance space and negated any need for a large back stage area (which was non-existent at this venue). By working around these limitations, we developed a model more akin to my original non-literal concept, some aspects later still proved untenable due to the space restrictions but we were able to build a triangular piece of rostra that sat in the front corner of down stage right, providing a small, but much needed extra meter or so of playing space. The below image depicts Tom and Jeannie in Tom's office in the second scene. The picture shows our compromised set, the angled lines painted on the back and side flats

were reminiscent of the angular lines of the corporate, fast-paced world we had hoped to achieve with the articulated frame in our original design.



Figure 9: Jeannie and Tom at the office, scene 2.

Tom's desk was positioned on the extra triangle of rostrum indicating the extremely limited space the actors were required to perform. The desk itself was repositioned and placed on various faces to create numerous pieces of set throughout the play. While still at times cumbersome to manoeuvre due to the restrictions the venue afforded, the actors were still able to transform the stage into multiple locations and with minimal devices.

The Rehearsal Process

I arranged all rehearsals between 11:00am and 5:00pm, the majority of which, being held in two blocks of two-hour sessions each weekday. I aimed to structure the rehearsal schedule in a way that did not necessarily work each scene consecutively but gave actors the opportunity to work two to four scenes in a single afternoon and allowed a day off in between to consolidate the progress we made. When the actors came individually to work monologues, the lead actor, as he appears in every scene, was given some time off. By configuring the process in this way, the actors seemed to benefit through the separation of their characters' stories and function from the rest of the play.

First Read

On November 8, 2013, I scheduled a gathering of all cast and crew to experience the first reading of the script. All attended except the lighting and set designer because of work commitments. It was an informal affair and I directed the cast to read purely for sense and not impose any character or intent implied in the line. The day was for introductions, bonding, and 'giving voice' to the text. There was an immediate consensus from cast and crew that the play was far more humorous than it appeared initially and that the cruelty of Tom, Jeannie and Carter was far more apparent when heard out loud.

We talked about Neil LaBute, his writing style and the controversial content of much of his work. I spoke about the play in terms of satire, describing its ironic aspects. We considered the initial appearance of realism and discussed the underlying cruelty that could reveal satirical elements in the text. We considered how non-literal, absurd touches and parody could help emphasise the satirical notions implied in the script. To facilitate the idea that the play deals with particular societal issues and to assist our audiences to relate to the characters and issues raised, I felt it was important to impose a more personal perspective on the script. We all agreed to set the play in Australia and we immediately began collaborating how best to replace the script's obvious 'Americanisms' and location references.

The production's emphasis on societal flaws and treatment of non-conforming individuals was of vital import to convey right from the start and all facets of production and design needed to support these ideas. I spoke with the sound designer about how I wanted a continuous flow of sound that covered, initiated, and supported scene changes. I described how I wanted a sound-scape throughout the production with ironic or absurd musical touches and choices to highlight particular moments or sub-textual meanings. An interesting comment was made to the actor playing Tom at the end of the reading by a crew member: "You'll be lucky if you don't get punched by an audience member at the end of the show!" It was reassuring that even at this early stage, cast and crew engaged with ideas of the human capacity for cruelty, especially for those we profess to love.

Week 1

Our first week of rehearsals began with an analysis of each scene, unpacking ideas, themes, and noting references that all required further investigation. I set tasks for the actors to consider what 'is not being said' in the text, exemplified by Helen's omission of any reference to her mother. I asked them to research references in the play to films based on the hero stories in novels by Alistaire Maclean and how they resonated with the characters personally or the overall narrative. I felt it important, specifically for Helen's characterisation that she is aware of the hero image she imagines exists in Tom and since they share similar tastes in films it was equally important for the actor playing Tom to get familiar with them. The actors were required to consider how the characters relate to each other and how their lives intertwined and overlapped. I wanted the actors playing the nastier sentiments in the text to view their characters objectively and without judging them as good or bad; I suggested they create their characters as though they are unaware their behaviour is awful and are just behaving how they are conditioned to behave. We further studied the absurd and satiric elements of the text and considered the ironic qualities of the characters.

Australian audiences could find American accents and locations alienating or remove their personal experience from the ability to relate to the societal flaws satirized in the play. To ensure the relegation of these flaws as symptomatic of many appearance-obsessed contemporary Western societies, we adapted the setting of the play to Australia to provide the production with a sense of local topicality. We reached a consensus of location and setting to substitute New York with Perth and the Chicago Group for the Queensland Team. Other substitutions included: Cheetos- Doritos, Oreos- Tim-tams, Miami- Melbourne, thong-g-banger, cookout- barbie, 350 pounds- 180 kilos, Sonny Liston- Danny Green, shopping basket- trolley, sophomore- school girl, Amtel- Austel, Celtics- Brownlow, Albertson's- Woolies, ketchup-dead horse, couple towns over- down south and Windy City- City of Churches.

It became apparent that defining the company Tom, Jeannie, and Carter work for was fundamental to developing our adaptation since how these characters related to each other was dependant on the ideology of the world and echelon of society they inhabited. My vision of this 'mock' company guided them to reflect on the concept of an appearance-obsessed society that sells unattainable ideals but offers little substance or 'real world' satisfaction. The idea of selling an image or an idea that does not really exist as a tangible product resembles the way websites market virtual products for virtual worlds in online games which cost real money but do not actually exist. To support my claim that Jeannie, Carter and Tom are products of a society beguiled by mass media that supports appearance-based ideology, I formulated the notion that their company needed to represent a materialistic, body-beautiful, money orientated world of corporate high-flyers. I began planning to create a 'virtual' company that uses corporate speak to baffle and entice potential clients to buy an intangible idea they do not actually need.

Our conversations revolved around companies that use the media to impose appearance-based ideologies and unattainable notions of perfection on society. We considered the pervasiveness of high-end marketing campaigns spruiking luxury items and lifestyles of the rich and famous. New technologies, expensive gadgets, and the latest 'new improved' model of a communication device suggest a modern ease for connection and contact with the world and yet there is an overriding sense of superficiality or 'unrealness' within this desire of a greater capacity to communicate.

We agreed on a telecommunications company that did not actually manufacture a product but rather sold a concept whereby they would 'strategize' with a client to expand their communication networks. By combining the words virtual and communication, I created the name of the company that alluded to a product which is 'virtual' and not 'real'. From the two words 'virtual' and 'communication', we derived a name and purpose for our company. Virtucom, a global telecommunications company, that sells nothing more than ideas but promotes the 'must have' mind set of modern Western societies, was formed as a representation of the big-business conglomerations that are the insidious instigators of many avaricious elements of popular culture.

To support the mass-media idea and allow me to use a multi-media approach as a device to emphasise further the satirical nature of the production, I realised that a company like this would inundate the public with advertising and self-promotion. I decided we needed to make a satirical commercial for Virtucom that ridiculed corporate-speak and materialism.

Creating the Virtucom corporate video concept:

We began by constructing Virtucom's corporate identity by defining what the company sells to their clients:

- Virtucom offers Client Relationship Management, Marketing and Corporate Communications services to businesses, positioning themselves between vendors and end-users;
- Their sales pitch is an attempt to convince potential clients that business retention is not a matter of pricing, products or services, but some 'other' quality that VirtuCom is best able to provide;
- In reality, VirtuCom creates nothing;
- It inserts itself into existing business processes and claims it is an essential element of that business' success;
- VirtuCom tributes an illusion of virtue to business processes.

From these initial concepts, I developed the 'corporate speak' which promotes a 'positive spin' on who they are.

Ethos ideas:

The underlying agenda for Virtucom is to gain the trust of billion dollar companies with the promise of strengthening communication between them and their clients. They then aim to gain access to those clients and selling this information to expert digital communication companies for targeted marketing opportunities. Virtucom receive monies from all parties just to pass around information. The more caring and trustworthy Virtucom appears in slogans and marketing, the greater the irony because they are in truth predatory and produce nothing but an 'idea'.

- "Here at VirtuCom, we care about your clients for you."
- We have a team of experienced professionals dedicated to maintaining the very best relationships with your customers.
- In this rapidly changing marketplace, VirtuCom allows you to focus on the core elements of your business while we manage all your external communications, ensuring your business always has access to expert advice and technologies as they arise.

From these points, I formulated the following script.

FINAL DRAFT OF SCRIPT:

SLOGAN: Today's Thinking For Tomorrow

VIRTUCOM SCRIPT:

Stirring, epic music swells.

Graphic: VIRTUCOM logo

Music ebbs slightly and plays under entire commercial.

VO: The virtual leader in global communications

Graphic: GLOBAL

Cut to Carter to camera

Carter: We want you to Rethink how you think and think the way we think.

Graphic: RETHINK

Cut to montage office images

VO: Here at Virtucom we believe in structuring up and moving forward with vertically integrated strategic networks.

Graphic: STRATEGIC

Cut to Carter to camera

Carter: let our brand help your brand reach its optimal potential.

Graphic: OPTIMAL

Cut to office montage images

VO: We take pride in developing today's thinking for tomorrow

Cut to cheesy Virtucom team office group shots

VO: Virtucom, making your business our business

Graphic: VIRTUCOM logo

VO: Benefiting Big Business Always

Music swells as screen cuts to black.

We scheduled the filming and editing for week five and our graphic designer got to work on the design of the Virtucom brand name and slogan. Eventually the non-sense corporate video, parodying the digital media's approach to sales, consumerism, and its promotion of societal pressures endorsing excessive or unattainable life styles presented the greatest deviation from LaBute's text. The proposed Virtucom infomercial was intended to play on multiple screens as the audience enter during preshow. The video aimed to establish the absurdity of an image conscious and materialistic society in which the characters exist.



Figure 10: Banner for Virtucom brand and slogan

Here the graphic of the circle with arrows is designed to imply a devilish hand with a tight grip on the world, satirizing widespread corporate control of minds the world over.

Week 2

Our discussions from textual analysis turned to the topic of mass media's role in influencing contemporary society and facilitating bullying. Most noteworthy were incidents of online bullying on social networks directly linked to subsequent suicides like *The Daily Telegraph's* report examined above on the suicide of a thirteen-year-old girl in 2007 (Elsworth, 2007). Particular body ideals promoted through images manipulated in print media, advertising, on television and the internet, often encourage dissatisfaction with an individual's body image and negatively affect self-esteem. Factions of society who 'buy in' to these ideals by

rejecting others who do not conform exert peer pressure and bullying and perpetuate these superficial values.

Throughout the week, we unpacked each scene's content, action, language, and purpose, all the while discussing how each element related to society and, specifically, to our own experiences. We broke the script down into micro scenes dictated by subtle or overt changes of tactic, topic or action. For example in the second scene, Tom and Carter enjoy a competitive office game. When they are interrupted by Jeannie, we labelled her entrance as a beat change and a micro scene within the larger scene. A new energy is required for each of these micro scenes to change the direction of the scene and important to map the course of the narrative.

Week 3

This week entailed going back over each scene on the floor, developing blocking, and using fairly broad-strokes to 'paint' the shape of the action. The week culminated in a moved reading where the actors performed the play with scripts in hand, incorporating the blocking and discoveries we had made through the analysis process. Crew members not involved in the day-to-day rehearsals attended the run not merely to witness the progress thus far, but also to inform their respective development of ideas and provide feedback on the readability of the satirical tone we were cultivating.

The end of the week became the deadline for memorising all lines in order to take the next step of building the connection between characters and their physical action. By considering the script in terms of satire, I resolved to develop the characters in the play as not merely realistic interpretations of everyday people, whose ideas and prejudices, while not very nice, had the potential to appear understandable, but as ridiculous, undesirable incarnations of societal aspects requiring criticism. I imagined extending and exaggerating the characterisations in the direction of parody or grotesqueness with Carter and Jeannie representing magnified elements of society that I believed the play condemns. If the words were cruel in the text, then the thoughts, ideas and actions of the characters should reflect that cruelty. It was not enough to have Carter say something vile, for I wanted him to follow

the idea behind the line to its unnatural and physical conclusion. For example, when Carter talks about the sexual potential of Jeannie's body, I asked for a characterisation to extend a physical gesture that grotesquely described his intentions- the actor playing Carter (MA2) came up with a gesture that bent an invisible Jeannie over, parted her buttocks, moistened his fingers, and went to insert. The overall result made many, myself included, squirm and feel revulsion for the gesture and character. I repeated this process with the actor (MA2) every time a line of text expressed Carter's judgemental or misogynist attitudes. By in-depth analysis of a line of text, it is possible to find what might be the deep-rooted idea that drives a character to say these things. Bearing that in mind, I asked the actors to physicalize the text and become conscious of how not just the line, but also the thought becomes manifest in the body. I then asked the actors to extend and push the boundaries of each gesture beyond natural or realistic confines. I needed to find ways to make the characters more than realistic: they needed a sense of parody, to be extended as caricatures while still being convincing and identifiable as real in the sense that they could exist in the world of the play and, by extension, be recognizable in the real world.

My actor playing Jeannie (FA2) comments on the grotesque imagery used to emphasise the absurd elements in the script, stating that they did not necessarily add a deeper understanding than what we discussed in rehearsal, "however having them there was a good reminder" (Appendix F: FA2, ques. 5, p138). Further to that I believe if the actors found prompts in these moments, so too did the audience who were not privy to the rehearsal room and perhaps needed them more. By grotesquely emphasising the absurd elements in the words and behaviour of Jeannie and Carter, we threw the satiric mirror firmly in front of their intolerant conduct and away from Helen's appearance.

Early in the rehearsal experience for the actor playing Helen in a previous production (PFA1) she "recognized the shallowness of it all and all you can do really is laugh at how absurd they [the characters] are in their interactions" (Appendix E: PFA1, ques. 3, p. 134). It is this absurd exchange between the characters I strove to explore in Artaud's and Brook's respective experimentations with non-verbal communication. Grotesque and exaggerated

gestures made explicit the character's internal thoughts. In a bid to comment on ridiculous corporate team building, I asked the actors to greet each other in the workplace with a Virtucom call and response gesture beginning as a 'V' and answered with a 'C'. Through rehearsal, these gestures often became rude and even sexual, depending on the internal thought with which the actor endowed the gesture, for example 'V' escalated to 'vagina' or the two finger gesticulation and 'C' intensified to 'cocksucker' or a masturbation motion.

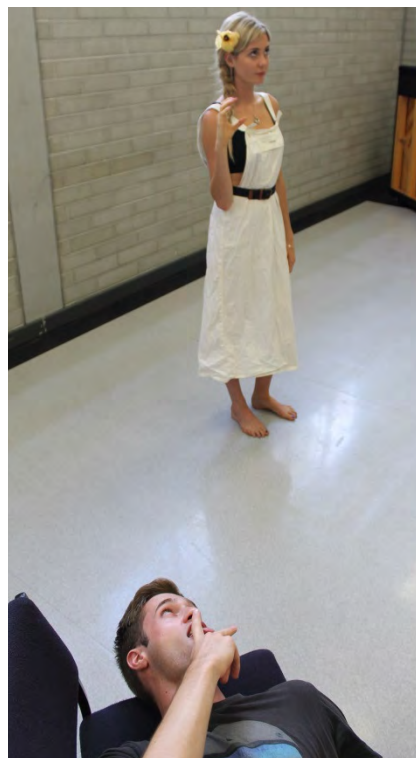


Figure 11: FA2 and MA2 rehearsing the 'V' and 'C' Virtucom call and response greeting gestures

My intention for mixing grotesque representations of absurd moments with otherwise naturalistic performances was to jar spectators' acceptance of these behaviours as normal. While not always easy for the actors to embrace or audience members to readily grasp, my actor playing Carter (MA2) succinctly notes "the goal was to be in between both, I can understand this because sometimes life seems so absurd" (Appendix G: MA2, ques. 12, p. 142).

Week 4

At this stage in the process, we had a clear idea of the shape of the performance and the relationships between characters and their lives. With scripts out of hands, we were now able to cultivate, in detail, specific moments. I asked each actor to come in individually to work on monologues and advance their character choices. The actors went through each solo piece of text, punctuation mark to punctuation mark, through a series of physical exercises initiated by breath and involving changes in direction or position. These methodical tasks cannot help but separate each idea giving great insight into the pace of the characters' thought processes and changes while also informing possibilities for the speed of delivery.

Later in the week, we further detailed the scenes between Tom and Helen separate from the rest of the play. We mapped their relationship from beginning to end and solidified choices of thought and action. Fostering an intense, passionate love affair between these two characters was integral for our plan to ensure a greater level of tragedy when the relationship fails. The believability of a physical relationship between Tom and Helen, while always a fundamental necessity for the story, became paramount in defining the value of their relationship and the cost of its loss to both of them. In other words, the more the relationship means to them, the more that is at stake and the greater the tragedy and the poignancy derived through a contrast with the play's satirical messages.

I allowed each actor to respond to every line of their scene partner's chunks of text and monologues. We found this type of active listening extremely productive in developing inner monologue (a character's thought) which increased each actor's understanding of his/her character's emotional state as well as gaining a deeper sense of the notions driving their next piece of dialogue. It also increased their investment and engagement with the text, raising the stakes for their characters.



Figure 12: Helen and Tom's believable passion came from a strong engagement with the text.

We completed the week with our first run without scripts, fondly referred to as a 'stumble through'. The show began to take shape; the actors forged their connection with the script, their character, and each other while also freeing up their bodies to extend the physical possibilities for bolder choices. This run illuminated moments requiring more detail and the possible logistics to consider for scene transitions.

Week 5

Throughout this week, we continued to add detail to each scene, moment by moment and began to choreograph transitions between scenes including where we might insert the Virtucom video. Towards the end of the week, we completed a run of the play with scene transitions, focusing on line accuracy. We continued detailing each scene finding deeper connections and opportunities for comic moments with both physical action/reaction and timing. Our subsequent line run where we 'walked through' (not at performance energy level) the entire show ensuring cues, lines, transitions were present and correct, affirming we were on track for a provocative and entertaining show as it allowed us to see the overall rhythm of the piece and the contrasting natures of the characters.

The week closed with shoot day for our Virtucom video. Luckily, the stage crew were amenable and adequately skilled to attempt filming the commercial. Even more fortunate,

our sound designer is an experienced filmmaker and editor. All credit for the quality of this short production goes to his camera work and postproduction brilliance. The set designer dressed the film set with posters, logos, and props we would later incorporate on stage. Corporate videos attempt to be a slick and shiny presentation that elicit excitement for the company and its product with enticing 'corporate speak' and a 'catchy' sales pitch. Often they are advertising unnecessary luxury goods or services for the public or within a company. The satirical comedy television series about the corporate world in *Better off Ted* provided great inspiration. In one episode, a rumour about a new product, that does not actually exist, circulates through the company. The office managers, fearing exposure of their ignorance, perpetuate the myth of this product, eventually forcing them to create a presentation of introduction for this 'revolutionary' new business product.

Advertising companies are keenly aware slogans and logos create subliminal messages and use them to great advantage. It was our intention to harness this thinking for our pseudo company and yet condemn the manipulative nature of media and the corporate world. To view our completed corporate video please click on the link below or alternatively view on accompanying file titled Virtucom TVC:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sc/k39pwjum7haejrh/AACBaDMawoteCwkbEgpilila>

Week 6

The following week entailed final confirmation of props and costumes. Our 'poor theatre' ethos allowed the performers to establish time and place for the audience as much as possible and only utilized the essential items named in the script with the exception of technological devices such as tablets and Bluetooth devices specifically for Carter to represent his dependence on them. We continued to run the whole show and smooth out scene transitions.

Tech/dress rehearsal week

This week began with 'fix ups' where we went back into the studio to revise specific moments and solved any glaring blocking or pace issues, ready for our first run in the venue.

Due to limited rehearsal time, our first time in the venue needed to allow for planning technical involvement.

Technological inclusions were integral to realising our satirical comment on the corporate, material and mass media-influenced world reflected in the play. Our budget did not quite stretch to the banks of large screens simultaneously playing the Virtucom video in numerous locations around the venue while the audience entered as I initially envisaged. As a compromise, our grand statement for an intrusive, all consuming, technologically fuelled, commercially indoctrinated society became a slightly pared back statement involving a hand held projector, two laptops, and the venue's large ceiling projector thrown on the back wall. Unfortunately, our first attempts at incorporating technical components were anything but smooth sailing. Faulty cables to the projectors and a defective lighting desk delayed progress for our first technical rehearsal in the venue. We quickly realised the lead to the hand held projector was damaged yet easily remedied, but the problem proved slightly more complicated. Initially, we assumed a damaged lead prevented the operation of the ceiling projector, so we replaced it but to no avail. The venue eventually deemed it necessary to enlist the skills of an expert and by the third performance; we had a working ceiling projector. In the interim, we tried using the hand held projector on the back wall but could find no solution for the sound to play at the same time. All efforts to synchronise sound from the sound desk proved futile and, in the end, we compromised by projecting the infomercial at the ticket desk, on the laptops as the audience entered and then only the sound was repeated when they were seated.

Our early set design assumed the stage possessed at least one entrance from backstage; however, on a preliminary visit to the venue, we found there was no viable, physical exit off stage at all. As a result, we needed to accommodate entrances and exits on stage with a path down the side of the audience to a door back stage. In response to our wish to cover the venue's colourful artwork, which was distracting for our show, the venue kindly offered a fabric backdrop. However, the lighting designer deemed this cover was too difficult to light and another solution was required. As we needed to bump in each night within thirty minutes, four large black flats, simply braced to the wall became the most efficient solution. This process and a further two flats, required to create onstage entrance/exits and the side

path off stage, meant the dimensions of our playing space were dramatically reduced. We modified the set design, eliminating anything extraneous to the floor space. Gone was our actor-operated moveable frame that was to transform the space, effortlessly morphing into different shapes to accommodate the needs of each scene. Instead we compromised with a static back wall and side flats with actor manipulated furniture transforming into set requirements for each scene. For example, the food hall counter in scene one, moved and turned to become Tom's desk in scene two, in scene three the actors flipped it over to represent the restaurant table, then back again as Tom's desk in scene four. It was removed in scene five (flipped on its end to hide behind a flat), returning as Tom's desk in scene six and finally laid down in scene seven to form a sand dune. In the same way, the couch in Tom's office moved and transformed into a restaurant booth and Helen's sofa or upended to hide behind a side flat. The underlying idea was to create a seamless flow from scene to scene and subliminally suggest everything is made of the same substance, moulded and remoulded for different purposes depending on the context and perception of the scene.

Influenced by our time in the venue, we were able to take the location problems back in to the studio and run the show addressing modification where necessary. We now had a concrete idea how to solve challenges such as the couch and its navigation. We also confirmed the operation of the follow spot and the minimum crew required to run the show. We then ran the show in the studio incorporating the information gained from the venue limitations.

Performance week

The projector issues proved unresolved come opening night, forcing us to entertain further compromises for our multi-media plan. The hand held projector was serviceable in screening behind the ticketing counter but did not compensate for the ceiling projector when we attempted to use it for the back wall. While we could almost get away with the projector and stand we rigged up, we could not resolve the sound issues. Our last resort, meant that we played the video during ticket sales, on laptops on the bar as audience went to their seats and then just played the audio once audience were seated before the front of house announcement which did not quite make the impact we aimed for but, even so,

comments after the show suggested the concept was received nonetheless. All these issues were resolved by second week and we achieved, to some degree, the all-pervasive media saturated environment we intended. Four screens played the video on a loop while the audience arrived and were seated, then after house lights came down we played the entire commercial once more on the back wall.

Due to only four performances there was not the progression you might expect from a longer running show, however, each appearance delivered the exaggerated characterisations and abstracted designs we developed throughout our process and the goal of emphasising the satire achieved. Audiences were engaged, entertained, emotionally invested and perhaps, because of the invitation to cast their vote, eager to discuss their thoughts and provide feedback.

Gauging the effects of the satirical approach

I found through staging this production of *Fat Pig* that conveying satire is not an easy task. As Matz notes there will always be those who will never perceive it but I believe, through our considered approach, we were able to emphasise and guide a majority of our audiences toward a clearer view of the satirical messages in the play. Our simplistic voting system, while I concede was not scientific, did provide a measurable indication of how the characters in the play were received.

After playing Carter an observed actor expressed his surprise “that coming out of productions often people would say they preferred Carter to Tom” (Appendix C: OMA2, 8:13, p. 106), finding truth and humour in what they described as ‘honesty’. By exaggerating Carter’s justifications for his opinions in our production and combined with his grotesquely cruel gestures, there seemed less acceptance of his behaviour. Tom’s compliance with Carter’s ideology gained him little sympathy either and the final vote tally indicates preference for neither character. A number of audience members I spoke to after the observed production revealed sympathy for Jeannie that justified her behaviour and implied she was as much a victim as Helen. The votes after our production suggest Jeannie was much more complicit and the maker of much of the tragedy around her.

Over the four performances 187 people attended our show and 185 votes were cast, making 189 in total as four votes were for multiple characters. The final count indicated 63 separate votes for Carter, 61 for Tom and 57 for Jeannie, four votes suggested an inability to choose just one character, two votes were for all characters, one was for the trio, Tom, Jeannie and Carter and one vote was for both Jeannie and Carter- bringing Carter’s total to 67, Tom’s to 62, Jeannie’s to 60 and Helen received two votes through these multiple votes.

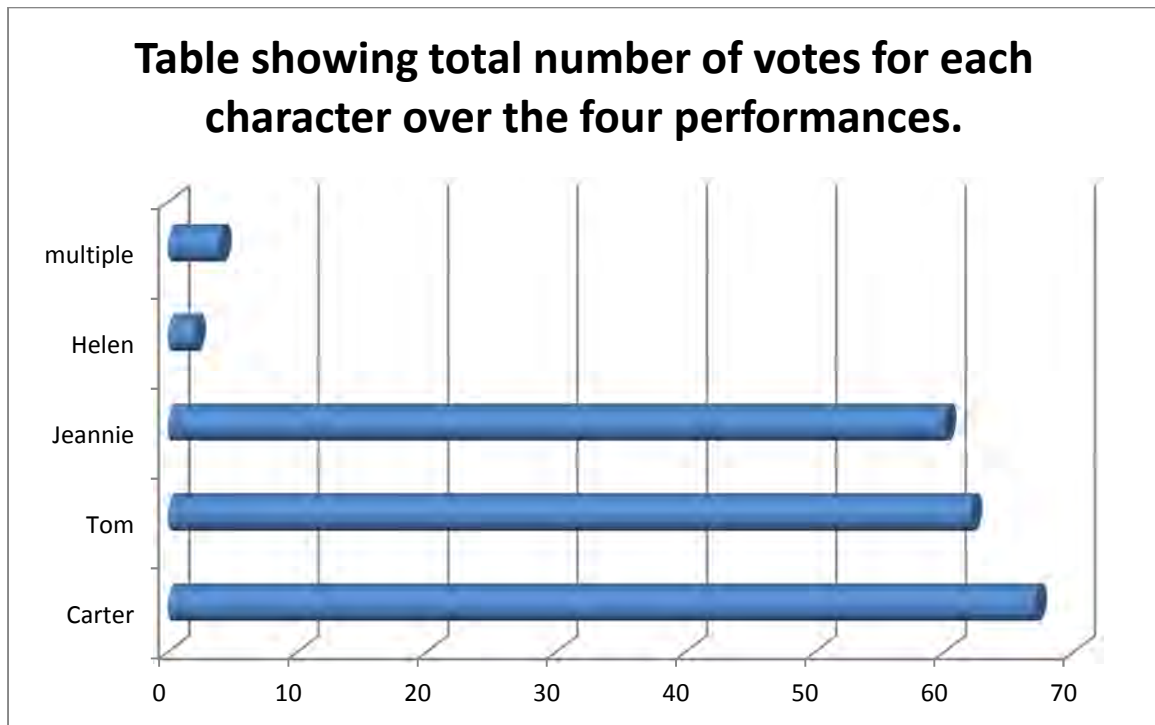


Figure 13: Tally of Audience Voting Trends

These results suggest the audiences attending our shows were able to relate, in nearly all cases, the play's title to behaviour exhibited by characters in the play and not their appearance.

Please see below figure of voting slip, the foyer poster was identical but with the addition of a header containing the university logo.



Figure 14: Audience voting slip given inside the program at the beginning of the show

Each and every possible aspect of our production was considered in terms of satire including small details like the tin used to collect audience votes in. It was kept hidden prior to the performance to ensure it did not influence any literal connotations of the play's title and appeared at the exit as the house lights came up. The tin was a large cylindrical money box labelled with the sign "who is the real fat pig?" and covered with a soft flying pig hat; a nod to the tumultuous journey it had taken to get the production up and running with the ironic cliché of pigs' inability to fly.



Figure 15: The end of show flying pig voting tin

The experiences of those involved in the observed production indicated a strong sense that the play was about the marginalisation of fat people whereas participants in my production, evidenced by the actor playing Jeannie (FA2), when asked what elements of society she thought the play was commenting on, responded with “[s]ocietal judgement . . . societal pressures to fit into a ‘box’ or ‘system’ or ‘belief structure’” (Appendix F: FA2, ques. 4, p. 134). I suggest this is partly due to a constant iteration in rehearsal that the piggish behaviour exhibited by Jeannie and Carter is a rotten core of the society depicted in, and the satiric point of, the play.

Although the ironic vein of the play was evident to our stage manager (SM) from the first read, her understanding of the satire arose initially “from the way it was written but then also from the way it was played” (Appendix I: SM, ques. 7, p. 141). Our stage manager also noted her “affection for Helen and dislike of the others increased as their characters developed” (Appendix I: SM, ques. 11, p. 143). This suggests we achieved a stronger satiric impact through the exaggerated performance. The graphic designer (GD) supports this claim with his comment “I think the director's attempts to frame the drama as a satire rather than a 'slice of life' were successful” (Appendix H: GD ques. 12, p. 140). By utilising non-realistic elements to stress the more absurd features we were able to shift the

reception from a literal interpretation and further express the failings of society satirized in the play.

Conclusion

This research has taken me down many winding paths akin to the giant, Pentragruel, embarking on a long sea voyage searching for the Oracle depicted in Rabelais' satiric tale. Preparing, then 'casting off' toward the creative unknown in my practice, taking on board fresh 'supplies' of additional information at various ports and at some moments, drifting on calm seas of reflection with little more than a gentle breeze ruffling the edges of the main sail as fresh horizons come into view.

Analysing the writing style of LaBute provided many initial 'ports of call' to unlock a 'map' of inquiry. Realist and absurd literary elements directed me toward two distinct performative genres (realism and Theatre of the Absurd) and further investigation into the origins of satire 'blew my sails' toward carnivalesque traditions and grotesque imagery found in Rabelais' epic novels. The Menippean satire Bakhtin discusses in his book on Dostoevsky is similar to this regenerative, open-ended, character liberating, and festive satire evident in his analysis of the Rabelaisian satire. Correlations between the realistic style of Swift's satire with LaBute's and their mutual dislike of seeing man absurd (as opposed to Rabelais's enjoyment of man's absurdity) aided my understanding of the naturalistic appearance of many examples of modern satire. *Fat Pig*, in many ways, falls into the tragic satire described as satiric realism by Matz (2010) where the comedy is almost an anti-comedy; audience laughter comes from incredulity at the characters' words and actions. LaBute's characters are confined by their circumstance and the realistic nature of their interaction defies any suggestion of the fantastic found in Menippean satire. However, Matz's observations suggest, without a sense of parody, satire in satirical realism can fail to reveal its import. Drawing from Bakhtin's theories on Menippean, grotesque and carnival traditions of satire in the staging, design and festive framing of my production, the satiric notions in the play became distinct. Using grotesque imagery to parody some of the characters further highlighted the ridiculous behaviours being satirized. The unconventional theatre setting in

the back room of a public bar within the context of a festival environment combined with the voting process to allow the audience greater participation and imbued the whole production with a positive, regenerative element more in keeping with carnivalesque customs. In this way, the audience is part of the show, another character, so to speak, who is 'reborn' with a clearer perspective on the real world and are invited to rethink their own intolerances and rail against the elements of society that led to the tragic course of events they just witnessed.

Articulating my directorial approach and my role in society as an artist found anchorage with Bakhtin's philosophies on the creative process and inspiration from a similar ethos evident in Lepage's approach. Consideration of the audiences' cultural context developed ideas for recognizable symbols that targeted specific societal parallels. Incorporating media elements provided further commentary on contemporary Western society saturated with idealistic mass media influences. The prolific nature of bullying in this appearance-obsessed culture and the devastating effect imposed on marginalised individuals provide reason for great care to clarify the condemnation of this behaviour in the play. In general, comments and critiques of previous productions, including the production I observed (even when the director clearly understood the play's satirical dictum) position Jeannie and Carter's meanness as justifiable, Tom as explicably weak, and Helen understandably is the fat pig, especially if the actor playing her was larger. For comparative purposes, I did not change the text or structure of the script (with the exception of localising the setting similar to the Eastern state adaptation of the observed production), the differences instead came from subtle tweaking and minor additions initiated from the text. For example, grotesque, non-verbal gestures developed parodic caricatures representative of societal flaws; absurd, unnatural lighting choices highlighted vile behaviour; ironic music and sound scape emphasised the character's ridiculous conduct; and easily recognizable satiric cartoon images in the marketing materials encouraged immediate and tangible non-literal interpretations of the play's title. The subsequent feedback and voting results indicate a more widespread appreciation of the play as a satire targeting cruel, intolerant conduct and the negative effect it inflicts on society. I surmise from the results of this research project that, without addressing the topic in the rehearsal room, impregnating satiric elements in all aspects of design, performance and marketing, it is increasingly difficult to convey

contemporary realistic styles of satire and consideration within a society where abhorrent societal failings may be accepted as normalized.

I found a distinct correlation between audience reception of the satire in my production and the emphasis I, as the director, placed on the approach, design, rehearsal, marketing, staging, and performance of the production. In a conversation with the observed director after attending our show she remarked that one thing she always strove for was to never miss a joke and our show made her question how she had overlooked so many. This suggests that although our characterisations were more grotesque and unlikeable the comedy was equally emphasised which heightened the mockery of the societal failings depicted and engaged our audiences through laughter, additionally providing greater impact for the narrative's final tragedy. The origins of satire in carnivalesque festival traditions directed a performative style for our production toward the grotesque body, unlocking imagery that allowed us to highlight the savagery of the satire in the text. Critical reviews of previous productions guided me to an understanding of the literal connotations and pitfalls associated with presenting the show within a too realistic or naturalistic framing. Exposing the literary elements inherent in LaBute's writing revealed absurdity beneath the appearance of realism providing great scope to investigate social contextualisation of the satirical points raised and a firm foundation for the trajectory of the production. This research journey provided time for detailed research into the satirical comment, social context and literary elements of the play that allowed me the luxury of unpacking difficult, complex issues and devising a strategy to find ways to parody an otherwise realistic text.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview with OD

Written questions and responses received 29 July 2013

1. The quality of the writing drew me firstly - both thematically and also the strength of the written characters and humour. I felt that the humour was a real pathway into the themes for the audience. I also responded to the unexpected playing out of the plot. It was not where I was expecting it to end. Nor did it follow a theatrical arc that I expected. The climax was in an earlier scene and then it sort of looped out. And I really responded to the themes. And I couldn't think of any woman I knew who would not connect with it thematically in some way.
2. I really laughed when I first read it. I really responded to the intelligence of the writing. And I really responded to the idea that if you don't stand up for what you think is important, you will lose that.
3. It was important to put it on for many reasons. We always look for quality scripts that we think audiences will respond to, that we think major theatre companies will not do and that Perth audiences deserve to see. It felt like a time to do a play that talks about tolerance of difference. It felt like the mix we look for – **important themes covered with humour and very real characters whose human imperfections made us cringe with recognition.** Also we had seen OFA1 and loved her work and even though she is technically not overweight enough we thought she would make a wonderful Helen. We had wanted to do the play for a long time but couldn't think of the right person to play that crucial role.
4. The most important theme for me was that at some point you need to decide to take a stand and speak out for what you believe in. If we all did this more often so many cruelties would be checked. This can be a tiny thing in a schoolyard or an international incident. I felt we all had times in our lives where we were ashamed of what we did not speak up about. If we could see that played out in front of us, it may motivate us to do better next time. So I wanted to emphasise Tom's pretty pathetic indecisive dithering.
I also believe what it said about judging people on what they looked like before you give them a chance was really important to highlight (obviously fatness being the thing here). I loved that the people who were meant to be 'beautiful' were behaving in such an ugly way and I really wanted to not pull back on that unkindness. I wanted to let us see that cruelty.
5. Sort of answered that above. It was important we see Tom dither. Not commit. Not decide. Until scene 6 where you think he may at last do the right thing, only to be disappointed in the next scene. **It was also important that Carter and Jeannie not play sarcasm or irony on their lines about size or Helen.** This was initially surprisingly difficult for OMA2 (please don't tell him I said this). He kept playing his lines as a

joke. I thought it was really important that he was not joking. That he discussed women's bodies as though he was a horse person discussing a good horse.

6. Given it was a very small stage I wanted every scene to be in the same place. We couldn't afford to have one corner as Tom's office, another as Helen's room etc. I wanted the set to be manipulated by the characters so that they were literally shaping their own worlds. This reflected what they did within scenes. They lived in a world of their own making.

We wanted Helen's room to be the only place with any softness or gentleness about it. We wanted her in colours. So she stood out in every way. We see why Tom is attracted to her – she is so different to everything and everyone else in his world.

7. Again sort of answered this above. I really wanted to see the people change the world, to shape it, to create it. This, I hoped, would reflect the theme that we allow our world to be what it is according to what we stay silent and witness. And we hoped that the sharp set lines of the corporate world/city food hall/trendy restaurant would reflect the sharpness of the world Carter, Jeannie and Tom inhabited and played in.
8. I was really insistent that we not have on any of the material OFA1's face with Fat Pig above it or over it. It felt like I was calling her that which, of course, was exactly the opposite of why we were doing the play. The push out nose that you could make into a mask seemed to support the themes about judging on appearance etc. It also left a heart shaped hole in the flyer which felt like an appropriate reflection of the ending. The pink colours felt right for that very female body conscious world.
9. We saw OFA1 and realised she would be great. I called her, in one of the most dreaded phone calls I have ever had to make. She was great. We decided on OFA2 because we thought she would be funny in the role and was also a perfect visual contrast – she is so angular. OMA2 and OMA1 we knew had the intelligence and sensitivity to get what the play was about.
10. Helen had to be comfortable in her own body. Able to play being confident about herself and to be flirtatious. She had to be the anti-victim. We knew OFA1 could do this. Carter and Jeannie had to be able to play the horribleness straight. Not to shy away from it. Find the honesty. Tom had to be able to fall in love. If we didn't believe the love story the play didn't make sense. He also had to be weak as well as strong.
11. I always work things out on the floor. We stop to chat and analyse but mostly we work through trying different things and always, always coming back to the words on the page.
12. For the first couple of weeks I was really careful to schedule things so that OFA1 was not in the room when the other characters were being nasty. Obviously for OFA1's sake, but also for OMA2 and OFA2. It is not easy to say those things and I didn't want them staring her in the face while trying to find the truth for their characters. OFA1 was a gift as her attitude and humour are incredible. She really seemed to me to be ok the whole way through the process.

13. Mostly I think the production realised my interpretation. We had a frustrating production week with one of the actor's in particular not strong enough on his lines. This meant that in that week when I would normally be really shaping scenes and nailing the rhythms I didn't get to do this. It also meant that OFA2 who really refines things on the floor didn't get to do that with her character. And I think she really hit her stride better in the second week because of this. However, this aside I felt like thematically we nailed it.
14. I was really hoping the audience would take away a need to think and discuss the core issues. How name calling and all that lies behind this behaviour is not ok. How body image is huge issue for some people and has a major effect on their lives. How we need to speak out for what we believe is important. We need to take a stand at some point.

Appendix B: Interview with OFA2

Written questions and responses received 23 October 2013

Did you have any previous knowledge of *Fat Pig* or Neil LaBute before becoming involved in this production? What were your impressions?

*Not a lot, I had read *The Shape of Things* and parts of others. I had also heard people talk about how much they loved LaBute but not a lot personally.*

What was your initial response to the script?

I found it very easy to read but I was unsure how interesting it would be. I'm used to doing work that is unconventional in form and this play was much more traditional theatrical style than the work I have been doing lately.

Could you briefly explain what your audition process was like?

There was no audition. OD approached me and offered me the part if I was interested. I read the play and liked it (although not the work I'm usually drawn to) but I was really interested in working with OD again and was very confident that she would create something really good.

What were your initial thoughts about the characters in the play?

Initially I think I thought of Jeanie and Carter quite stereotypical and Helen almost too "nice" and cool. The difference in them seemed very extreme to me in the first read. Tom seemed like the typical "everyman".

Neil LaBute is notorious for writing unlikable characters, was audience response to your character a consideration when accepting the role?

No not really, it did cross my mind that people may not like the character/me but that isn't something that I would consider. What I found more difficult were my own feelings toward the character of Jeanie. I found it very challenging, she says things that I felt very uncomfortable saying. Not so much the cruel insults, that stuff is fun, but the desperate attempts to flirt with Tom and the times where she quite pathetically puts herself out there. Her inability to self-censor and say such embarrassing things I found challenging. I also found some of the relentlessness in the way she pursued Tom uncomfortable and difficult to find light and shade in. Some of those moments I found difficult to make real and that was a challenge.

As an actor, how did you see the function and purpose of your character?

Generally I saw my character as a counter point to Helen. But I think that's too limiting as an actor to just think about so in a way I had to not concern myself with that and focus on trying to create the character without Helen in mind. No matter what I did this difference was going to be clear and obvious so there was no need to try and highlight it.

What ideas and themes did you find to be most important in the text?

Wow, that's difficult to answer. I don't like to decide what the important themes are. In fact while aspects of the show, any show, may resonate strongly with me I try to just focus on the world. To be honest at different times, even night to night the message would change for me and I would take away something different.

In what ways did you plan to express these in your performance?

I really didn't plan to express the themes. I feel my job as an actor is to give life to the character, connect with the other characters and be in the world. I don't want to make a decision about what the show is about because it's so changeable plus I feel it's more the director's job. If it was something OD really wanted us to go in with in our minds, considering it and letting it affect our performances then I would but I really just focussed on Jeanie.

In what ways did marketing, technical and aesthetic design concepts support your character's objectives?

I'm not sure it did. I was aware of the ways it was marketed and that wasn't different to how I was thinking about the character. I guess the modern look of the office and slick look of the character gave me in idea of the type of office worker Jeanie is. OSC was clear from the start that Jeanie would be well put together, smooth hair, tight clothes. This influenced how I thought of her, the kind of person she is; the kind of girl, I've known a few, who work in an office and are very focussed on "getting a man". Their look, diet, lifestyle is focussed around this goal and they have a sense of entitlement about it, putting in the time, doing the right things, playing the game. This gave me a focus.

In your opinion, what message do you think Neil LaBute was trying to give his audiences with this play?

I think he was trying to challenge how people respond and deal with difference, particularly overweight people.

How successful do you think the play is at sending this message?

Pretty successful. I know speaking to audience members, a lot of people felt very uncomfortable and questioned some of the choices they had made or things they had said. But many people took different things from it. Like people often can't change, it's easier to be with similar people to yourself/social group, some people took that Tom was a victim some felt he was a coward, some people thought it was no wonder he couldn't stay with

Helen when she went on about her weight so much. I think all are valid responses and probably different to what LaBute had intended. I love that.

How appropriate or necessary do you feel the issues in this play are for contemporary Australian audiences?

Body image is something that people think about, judge. Although it's not like it isn't discussed a lot in the media and other films, TV shows. I'm kind of in 2 minds about the weight thing. I feel there is a negative language used toward thin people that I could find offensive. I resent a bit the term "real women" when describing larger people, implying I'm not a real woman and there is a lot of commentary about real men prefer curves, hips, something to hold etc. This might be controversial and not very PC but I think it's ok to want to loose (sic) weight or prefer thin people but I don't we're allowed to say that.

Do you think audiences were able to relate to your character, if so, on what level? If not, why do you think that is?

Yes in some ways, that situation when a guy isn't being straight with and double talks and you can't figure out what he wants or what's happening in the relationship. I'm not sure anyone was able to relate to her ways of dealing with things. She is quite unpleasant and so perhaps it might be difficult to admit to that aspect of yourself. Many people saw someone they know or have worked with in her.

Did you employ a particular approach to text analysis or the rehearsal process as a means to understanding your character?

I didn't use a particular approach, just trying to make sense of the text, find ways of making it real and ok for me and listening to OD and trusting her vision.

How did you as an actor deal with the more sensitive issues raised in the script? What guidelines did your director put in place for you to approach and deal with these considerations?

No guidelines were put in place. I think OD just set up a trusting, respectful environment to rehearse in. Everyone involved in the show are mature and respectful enough to trust not to be insensitive, I think.

Did audience response and feedback about your character or the production support your own interpretation of your role and the play?

Yes and I really like the fact that people took away so many interpretations of the message. But in some ways I was a little disappointed that the main comment about my character was "you were such a bitch". I felt that there was so much more to Jeanie, like desperation, loneliness, a desire to be wanted, and sadness. There were a few people who saw those things but on the whole people seemed to feedback the bitch thing.

The play is definitely thought provoking; in what ways were your thoughts informed or ignited by this experience?

It has made me think a lot about the language people use in private and how shocking it is when it has an audience. I've noted since starting this how many conversations I have that if you put on a stage people would be outraged and offended but when it's in private it seems ok.

Appendix C: Interview with OMA2

Transcribed audio from face-to-face interview, 8 November 2013

HG: Hello OMA2

OMA2: Hello

HG: as an extensively renowned actor, writer, director in your own right, I'm interviewing you specifically for the role you played in OD's production of *Fat Pig* at the OV 2013. We'll get through these questions as quick as possible; oh I've got the wrong questions up (laugh)

OMA2: (laugh) go for it

HG: Here we go. Did you have any previous knowledge of Neil LaBute or *Fat Pig* before becoming involved in this production?

OMA2: yeeees, yes, Neil LaBute yes, *Fat Pig* I'd read just out of my own interest maybe a couple of years before I'd read it in 2011 or 10 essentially I read *Fat Pig*, when was it written? 05?

HG: yeah, yeah

OMA2: yeah, 05 so I'd read it in 2011, and I'd actually stored away one of Carter's monologues as a potential audition piece so

HG: cool

1:38

OMA2: never used it but I had it kind of on-on file and obviously I yeah, I'd-yeah I'd been aware of LaBute's- a few of LaBute's other work like *Six Feet* and *The Shape of Things* and before I began this production I'd read *Reasons to be Pretty* which is the kind of the third play in the trilogy, the vanity trilogy beginning with *The Shape of Things*, *Fat Pig* in the middle and then *Reasons to be Pretty* at the end

2:06

HG: yeah, right so obviously you liked the writing?

OMA2: yeah, well, I mean yeah, I think LaBute isn't afraid to make his audiences uncomfortable and um ahh what is it? *Distance From Here*, I'd read that as well, that awful scene where the bag gets thrown into the penguin enclosure

2:20

HG: yeah, the baby

OMA2: yeah, so I-I am quite fond of LaBute, yeah, his characters are kind of, charmingly unlikeable a lot of the time (laugh) you know

HG: (laugh) that's a great turn of phrase

OMA2: they're kind of fun to be in their presence and kind of just a bit cringe worthy as well

2:47

HG: yeah, right, so what um were your initial responses to the um *Fat Pig* specifically then?

OMA2: um, I think, obesity an- and weight has kind of, it's almost like -it's almost like the one thing we're still almost allowed to laugh at, I think, like I remember listening to a Ricky Gervase podcast where he-he, you know and he-he recognises that he is slightly overweight himself but there's this whole bit where they're talking about ahh, fat people, an-and you know it's not that hard, just don't fucking eat you know eeerrrh

HG: mmm

3:34

OMA2: you can't get away with that with almost any other part of the culture these days certainly can't do that about race certainly can't do that about gender or sexuality certainly, you know like as a rule but I think there's still education to be had about obesity potential, like seen as a disease rather than, it's not as simple as don't eat food, exercise and you will lose weight

HG: mmm

4:03

OMA2: um, yeah you know, so-so I-I think LaBute kind of tapped into obviously it kind of goes hand in hand kind of with this image saturated culture we kind of have where we're we're absolutely obsessed, at least the Western world, I'd like to think it's probably global, a global kind of thing these days, everyone's obsessed with what we look like and I think that's what LaBute kind of umm, puts his-put us under the microscope an-and calls us out with our hypocrisies

4:39

HG: m, cool, great statement, um stylistically then, where would you put, how would you categorise *Fat Pig* or LaBute's writing in general?

OMA2: (pause) trying to think of elements of style (laugh)

HG: (laugh)

5:06

OMA2: well I mean yeah, I think I agree with you I'd-I'd call it, it is a social satire, I mean satire can't be anything other than social surely, but yeah, I-I'd call it- I would call it a satire, satire, yeah but quite a um I think it's understated in its satire, an understated satire

5:30

HG: (laugh)

OMA2: (laugh) and ah, how's that? How'm I doing?

HG: an understated social satire

OMA2: (laugh) yeah, an understated social satire

HG: (laugh) say that with a lisp

OMA2: yeah, tell me about it

5:38

HG: cool, something a little bit different now. What-Can you explain what your audition process was like with OD?

OMA2: ahhh, I didn't audition, she initially offered me the role of Tom

HG: mm

OMA2: and because ahh straight after Fat Pig I was going into Great White, which I'd, written and directed and potentially act in,

(room interruption) 6:11

OMA2: I decided to, I decided the role of Tom was just too much for me to kinda take on at that point

HG: mm

OMA2: and I think I'd always had, I'm sure just like any male actor, had a um, chance to play someone unlikeable, potentially as Carter, at least off the page represented a bit of a challenge and I kind of wanted to take it so, I kind of talked to OD and I said look, I can be involved if I can take on the smaller role in terms of line learning

6:42

HG: mm hmm

OMA2: still a crucial role and she was, yeah, she was happy to kind and facilitate that, so

HG: I think you did a great job of Carter

OMA2: oh, thanks

HG: yeah, you were just so, you were enjoying the sliminess by the, I mean throughout the season

OMA2: yeah, cool

HG: it was good

OMA2: thanks

HG: (laugh) I really enjoyed not liking you (laugh)

7:06

OMA2: (laugh)

HG: um what were your initial thoughts, well about the character; did you have specific ideas about the characters? Did that remain the same throughout the process? Or did your perception of the characters change?

OMA2: of the characters or character or Carter?

7:28

HG: well Carter specifically

OMA2: yeah

HG: but in general, did any of your ideas shift?

OMA2: umm, I'm sure they did, I'm trying to, I'm just trying to remember what I went in there with. I was ahh always conscious of the fact that audiences weren't-weren't gonna like him, like they weren't gonna like a lot of the characters in the play and I think it was a surprise to me that coming out of productions often people would say they preferred Carter to Tom just because Tom was so kind of ineffectual or has a foot in both ponds and that-ah-that began to really frustrate audiences and I think what audiences ah, the redeeming feature of Carter was his honesty, you know he is honest to an extent

HG: mmhmm

8:18

OMA2: even if he's lying to himself about certain things so I was interested in, I think something that evolved over the course of it is that, um OD and certainly something I played with was that Carter is kind of in love with Jeannie um, in the first scene that he is involved in, Jeannie shuts him down at one point and it says that he blushes and I think that's as, that's as good a clue as LaBute can give to is that he is actually kind of always probably had a

thing for Jeannie but he's never been able to perhaps compete on the same level as Tom maybe, I'm not too sure,

HG: mmm

8:58

OMA2: so I kind of played around with that and it still remained ambiguous it's not like it defined the performance but there was, I think his chauvinism was often a cover for that very um genuine need to be loved by this girl who he worked with and has probably worked with for a number of years, so I think that, that's something that kind of evolved over the course of the performance and then I began to trust more and more and more

9:32

HG: that's good I love the chemistry that built up between you and Jeannie in the play, that was good, um, pretty much covered that, ah, what um, what ideas and scenes and stuff did you think were important in the script?

OMA2: umm (pause) maybe the question, does love have limits? Like and to what extent does love, is love contained by superficiality for instance or the perception of others um, certainly with Tom's dilemma, I don't think there's any doubt that he does fall in love with this girl but it's poisoned by the he can't reconcile with himself how others see him beside her which, yeah, this idea of love being something that is between, so i think maybe the question of LaBute poses that we often think of love or falling in love as kind of you're locked in to this thing with another person without any idea of what's going on around you is kind of a molecular relationship

HG: mm

11:12

OMA2: whereas maybe, maybe it's completely dependent on peers, accepting that and-and giving their good will to whatever that, that love affair. Um, scenes (pause)

HG: Wha-did that-did that come out more for you in your discovery of the Jeannie-Carter relationship, like did that-that cement it?

11:52

OMA2: uuuhhhh, yeah, I would have thought so, yeah, its funny cause every-everyone in the play is kind of, you know, I was talking about Carter being in love with Jeannie before and I think there is a truth to that and there's also the fact that I think-I got the sense that Carter is, Carter needs Tom more than Tom needs Carter, that's what I kind of began to find

HG: mmhmm

OMA2: well, w-w-what with I think a lot of Carter's playing the prank and these kind of maybe subconscious attempts to sabotage the love affair was maybe out of a desperate need to keep his best friend his best friend and not lose his best friend an' there's kind of I think every character needed Tom more than Tom needed them ahh, which maybe-maybe LaBute's exploring umm, yeah he is exploring. . (laughs) ah falling apart here, see this is why I was nervous ummm

HG: do you think that has something to do with the fact that Tom is prepared to give up the one thing he actually need in his life, because other people need him more, they need him to be a particular way?

13:06

OMA2: yeah, maybe, a sense of responsibility to others, yeah, maybe, potentially, I mean if Tom was to live for himself and by i-it would, (pause) two people kind of get left on the outside, oh, I'm not sure, getting lost here, not sure what hole I dug myself here (laugh)

HG: (laugh)

OMA2: but yeah, other themes and ideas, ahh, (blows through lips) umm

HG: what did you think, going along from that but aside from that um, did you think Carter's obje-objectives were in the play, I mean you already said that Carter's need for Tom was greater than Tom's need for him?

14:00

OMA2: umm

HG: do you think his overall objective was to sabotage the relationship to keep him as a friend?

OMA2: umm I would, I mean it depends on what level we're thinking, I mean, I think there's something about Carter that desperately wants to be loved and I think that probably goes for a lot of, lot of the characters really I think Carter, but he-he had, he mentions in that monologue that his dad was never around and that obviously he had, after that incident in the supermarket I got the feeling, I interpreted they didn't speak very often after that. I think that for him it was easier to keep people at bay through jokes and through fun-loving destructive behaviour than it was to actually let people in and there are moments when he lets people in, that moment when he *is* telling Tom about it in that story he says, hey I've been there, my mum was fat. I think we get the feeling it's the first time he's spoken to that, spoken about that event in years, or if not ever, I mean that's the stakes, maybe he's never told anyone that , I think he just, yeah so I would say (pause) the other day, I mean it sounds really simple but yeah, I think he wants to keep a friendship and he does that first by umm (blows through lips) by almost preventing Tom and Jeannie from being together, almost

HG: mm

15:52

OMA2: and then, obviously by trying to sever the very real love Tom has for Helen

HG: mm, yeah, I mean if Tom chose Helen over Carter then that would prove that Tom is so much different

OMA2: yeah, I think he did-Carter does have the best intentions and whether we want to admit to it or not there is a kind of a truth to what he said, yeah, he makes it, he does make some really good arguments for the fact of you know 'run with your own kind' and you know maybe love really is a weight- a balancing scale, maybe it doesn't work if you know like, maybe it does need to be, to be of-of equal grounding and the research suggests that that's the case, evolutionary I think/ I think maybe . . .

16:49

HG: can that balance/ be based on just a judgement of appearances because in all other respects, Tom and Helen are equal mentally and emotionally and

OMA2: mm hmm

HG: all that, it's just the physical appearance that is uneven?

OMA2: then maybe it's a case of errr if love was like a machine and you know you need every single part of that machine to kind of working in order for the thing to drive for instance, if it's a car and it doesn't have, like if-if, go with me on this analogy, because like (laugh)

HG: (laugh)

OMA2: if the appearance was the key to the car, it doesn't matter if everything else is working, if you don't have the key to that-th-the car, potentially i-it's never going to drive, maybe we do need to match up on to some extent on every single level for something to work and it's not enough for four of the five things to kind of be completely aligned if there's one thing that is missing and if one thing is missing it sort of destroys the whole thing

17:58

HG: do you think Carter would have the same opinion of say a fat businessman with a young, beautiful starlet wife?

OMA2: no, I wouldn't have thought so, no

HG: no?

OMA2: no

HG: so inequality only goes the other way, like the imbalance of?

OMA2: errr, I think it's, I think it, I mean, (blow through lips) I would say more so I mean because he's a product of our time, or everyone's or i-don-I yeah, I think, I think, I think there is some people like society that does have a different perception of a fat man with a, beside a fat woman, I think, especially in regards to relationships I think, I mean, I'm speaking on behalf of Carter here

19:06

HG: yep

OMA2: and I think (pause) maybe it goes hand in hand with this idea (interruption, "hi Penny) that I think men as far as I know are a more visual specimen than women maybe that's got something to do with it

19:44

HG: mmhmm

OMA2: umm, certainly in the, I think from-from the thing I'm recalling when they are having sex for instance, men find more satisfaction out of . . .do you know where I'm going with this?

HG: yeah, you can just say it

OMA2: well no, but yeah, I think men are hard wired to actually have, to get more excited by visual stimulation where-whereas a woman would kind of , you know, like, its more sensual

HG: touch

OMA2: yeah, yeah, it's more kind of evenly-yeah, it's-it's more touch and sound, yeah, I think, I think that it is different so, at least that's, I think that's what the research suggests but I also don't have that in front of me

HG: (laughs) we'll just go off your research, your /real life research is good

OMA2: mm, mm general, / yeah, yeah

HG: do you think that that sort of, just because that is the status quo, do you think that it should necessarily be upheld or?

OMA2: no, it should be challenged all the time

HG: do you think that's the status quo LaBute is challenging?

(pause)

HG: for example say, if Tom was the fat one and it was the other way round and Helen worked with Carter and whatever and Helen fell for a guy, Tom who was larger than life, would there be a story, would there be anything there?

OMA2: (pause) I think it becomes less unusual

HG: mm

22:01

OMA2: am I wrong? So I don't think the story would be as potent

HG: mmhmm

OMA2: (pause) ummm (pause) I mean god, maybe, maybe it's so kind of, and I'm just trying to like, it's difficult, it's a difficult kind of equation to kind of come to terms with but maybe it is harder because the play is about love and sex root- you know, like everything's about sex after, ya just kinda and just looking at it maybe it's because women have to carry the child, that's not, that's not a responsibility that men have, they're there for the child but they don't carry the child, so there's something about this that ah, ah, having a healthy fuck, forgive me for saying it but, like for the child to have a healthy vessel which might make it more kind of confronting for an audience to see this love affair played out with a large woman who is healthy like, you know mentally dadada, but if you're overweight by that amount, no one can actually mount an argument saying they're healthy, healthy or they're at their optimum health and maybe that's why it is so, it is-it is confronting being in that theatre confronted with that kind of relationship

23:44

HG: yeah sure

OMA2: what do you think, does that make, does that, is it the same, does it, like for a man who is overweight because he doesn't have the responsibility of carrying the child, maybe it is easier to kind of

HG: yeah, I think these are all, and they are very complex ideas that I think LaBute is challenging and the sorts of conversations he's trying to provoke

OMA2: yeah, yeah

HG: and I think it's supposed to be that difficult, I don't think it's supposed to be that straight forward

OMA2: yeah

HG: like these relationships, they're not supposed to be straight forward, they're complex, I think the characters are written that way, umm, we spoke about that too, umm, you said something earlier about preferring Carter to Tom

OMA2: (laugh)

HG: (laugh) which I think is wonderful, um, um, why do you think that was, I mean, oh, you said that was because of his honesty, do you have anything more to say about that?

OMA2: Tom's the every man, I think we experience the play through Tom more than any other character I would have thought, it's always easier to enjoy a character that is (pause) more different than us because it's not as confronting. Do you, do you know what I mean? because Carter is, he is a bit eccentric um, it's easier to kind of distance yourself from them whereas Tom I think represents more, more people whether they like to admit it are more like Tom than Carter and so, when we see characters that represent ourselves, well, you know, it's like looking at yourself in the mirror and it does become more confronting and that's why some audiences, despite Carter's complete um, some of the abdominal things that he says, it's easier to take because it's reflection and we go haha, but it's not me, you know

26:08

HG: mm yeah

OMA2: you know, so maybe that's why maybe some audiences you know like

HG: like a bad boy (laugh)

OMA2: well, yeah, yeah, maybe, maybe, well there's something, there is something completely refreshing by what he says because we don't get that, well at least I don't in the circles that I, so there is something kind of exciting about being in the company of Carter because you never know what's gonna come out of his mouth once he's set himself, once LaBute's kinda set up this character, he'll just say what he thinks

HG: mm mm

OMA2: there's something thrilling about being in a room with him

HG: (laugh)

OMA2: especially when you have the safety of being in the audience

26:45

HG: yeah, yes, yep

OMA2: yep

HG: poor Tom, I don't think he quite knew (laugh)

OMA2: (laugh)

HG: um, so how did, oh, do you think, did you or OD guide you in any particular approach to how you analysed the script or-or your process to understanding the characters?

OMA2: uuummm, she sort of left me to my own devices for the most part, umm, you know we did all the usual things like break it into beats and that sort of thing but OD was good in that she kind of let us run free for a little bit, and then I mean like she didn't have this enormous process she imposed on the production which I always find really welcome. Um, ah, I think, it was interesting in conversation with OD about ah, my character in particular just because I think OD really, OD wanted to focus on his ah, ah, let's say flaws. Where I was more, I was, of the belief I was, they're there in the script

28:08

HG: mmm

OMA2: and the job for whoever is playing Carter is to focus on the redeeming features so that the character becomes so much more, that challenges the audience, I remember trying to play around with this idea that the audience should almost fall in love with Carter, that should have been an actor's objective, to get the audience to fall in love because then the character ah, becomes that much more, then the audience has to deal with that character rather than judge the character, does that make sense?

28:41

HG: mm hmmm

OMA2: so, there were a few things I kind of I slightly disagreed with, for instance, in what Carter OMA2re, I was always of the opinion that he should have been the best dressed person in the room

HG: mm

OMA2: because, if, in particular, the women in the audience are kind of always going oh, I could so see myself falling in love with this guy because I know he's really well dressed and, he's quite, I don't know do you know what I mean, whereas if he is a little bit of a dork, again, we kind of, we. . . the audience get a chance to judge-judge him, um, yeeah, do you think so, would you agree?

29:32

HG: yeah, I happen to agree, Carter should, he needs to have that completely flawless appearance because he is so flawed

OMA2: yeah, that's right, yeah, I think so, I think so

HG: yeah, mm. um, ah, how did you as an actor deal with the sensitive issues that were in- in the text, like how did that work in rehearsal and stuff? Did you feel like there was a line you couldn't cross or a taboo?

OMA2: in regards to OFA1?

HG: OFA1 and talking about the characters and having to define differences from 'this is me, this is Carter', that sort of thing?

OMA2: oohh, I just went in with the assumption that if you don't make it an issue, it won't be an issue, I mean it's in the script, that's what we're there to do, better to tell the story, so I didn't-I didn't find myself kind of, I don't think I found myself kind of checking, I just assumed that everyone knows that I'm there to play someone who will judge peoples- . . . we never had a conversation about that

30:49

HG: oh, ok

OMA2: yeah

HG: cool

OMA2: which I think says something about the professionalism of the room, we came in a professional attitude, there to put on a play, I think everyone knew what they were getting into

HG: well, being in that room with you guys, like the-the security and trust felt really comfortable

OMA2: yeah, yeah, it was never an issue, I mean and maybe that's because i- I probably just always got the sense intuitively that OFA1 was, she's quite, ah, comfortable with her weight and you know, I never , it never even, it never was- it never, I think-I think I'm being honest here when I say that it never actually came up, at least, it never um came up with me, maybe OMA1 has a different take on it because he was in far more scenes

HG: mmhm

OMA2: I was only in I think the one scene with OFA1

HG: mm

OMA2: in the restaurant, otherwise yeah, it wasn't, it certainly wasn't mentioned in the first read

HG: no, that's good, yep, I mean, I think it came across in the rehearsals and performances that I saw, a definite sense of cohesiveness and trust

32:17

OMA2: yeah

HG: amongst all of you so, I think OD did a beautiful job, the energy that was in the room, it was lovely. Um, alright, did audience responses and feedback of performances support your interpretation of the play or did you get some doozies that sort of went 'What?'

OMA2: . . . maybe it's just a Perth audience thing but I think the unfinished nature almost or the . . . let's call it the anti-climactic nature of the end of the play which I think is what-what it is there isn't an annoyance fight, there isn't an annoyance, there's kind of an acceptance from Helen with Tom, that it isn't going to work that I think jarred with some audience, it kind of left, it left them feeling not knowing how to interpret the play which I think is LaBute's kind of, I think it's a strong choice because to attempt to finish the play in any number of other ways would, I think would cheat them is the issue, I think. Um, I don't think Perth, I think Perth audiences aren't . . . the theatrical diet in Perth is a, is, is more geared towards- like if these characters in Fat Pig are kind of, I think they're more complex than sort of flawed and require more from an audience than usually gets dished up

34:20

HG: mm

OMA2: I think Perth audiences like nice, sweet characters, you know that are kind of charming and fairy-tale-like and LaBute gives us their warts and intricacies and kind of ugly scabs and flaws and stuff (laugh) so I think, I think that in itself made it an unusual experience for some audiences and that sort of manifested itself into nervous laughter, um being on stage at certain moments especially when there were, you could tell there were overweight people in the audience, that was unusual for me in particular when I had to come out with lines and I felt. . .often in that first scene when I-when Carter first-first kind of reveals himself as someone who, let's say a truth teller (giggle) or someone who doesn't check himself um, 'that's what happens when chicks don't get out in winter and they bloat up' either they-the audience don't see that coming, at least Perth audiences don't see that coming and it would always take the audience a while to understand that this wasn't a play that was going to censor itself in regards to political correctness you know it was gonna just present characters in all of their, characters that say what maybe a lot of people are thinking, which made it unusual. I mean I look at it and I go ooh, I don't think, I think audiences didn't laugh at the stuff I found funny and laughed at the stuff I didn't find funny

36:08

HG: mmm

OMA2: because they could or ah. . . (laugh)

HG: (laugh)

OMA2: I don't know, it's just one of those things, it-it's one of those unusual plays we'll never quite know, it's almost like the audience is like the fifth character

HG: mm

OMA2: because often you would have moments where a character would say something and the audience would impulsively laugh not necessarily because it's funny but because it's true and then checked themselves because they realize they're in public and they've just revealed something of themselves in response to something, let's say Carter has said (laugh)

HG: mmhmmm

OMA2: and felt judged so they became like a, the audience is always an organism in the thing, but I think the audience was, the audience was conscious of their participation in *Fat Pig*, maybe more so than other productions

37:08

HG: (clears throat) do you think that the marketing and the whole, the-the flyers and all that sort of stuff, do you think that supported the idea of the play, do you think it guided the audience to think a particular way before they came or?

OMA2: I don't think they got it right, I don't think the marketing was a great representation of the production, I don't think personally. I think a play about, what was it? It was a pig nose wasn't it?

HG: mmhm

OMA2: I think we wanted a human face, you know to be the face of the marketing just because (pause) I don't know if it sugar-coated it but it kind of . . . I think having OFA1 on the, the, fronting the posters would, would've, would have, that would have kind of captured the tension in the play to begin with because on a poster it's very unusual to have someone who is overweight on the-on the-poster and I think the pig nose was kinda hedging, neither here nor there, I'm allowed to say that aren't i?

39:05

HG: of course, absolutely, its completely anonymous

OMA2: yeah, yeah, I think so

HG: I think your honesty, I think it's fantastic, I'm so appreciating it

OMA2: I think so, yeah, I mean if you looked at the branding, you wouldn't actually know that this was a play about people-marketing that this is a play about people, and it could have been a fairy-tale for instance and I don't think that's what LaBute's play is wanting . . .

HG: (giggle) thank you for that, um, so, the play is obviously and arguably very thought-provoking um, were your thoughts informed, changed, ignited by the experience? Did it leave you with any lasting ideas?

OMA2: (pause) well what it left me with was, if I was in Tom's situation I mean it's just, I wouldn't know what to do either, you be the judge, I think audiences easily judge Tom and have the advantage of being the expert and not being catapulted into that scenario themselves cause, it's easy to go, he was just awful, why didn't he just love her, but dadada. I'm ah, I'm thinking about and I've had the thought myself in some relationships I've been in and I've been on both sides of it. I know the anxiety I've felt when I've been with someone or sleeping with someone I knew, not believed but knew to be more attractive than me as like an, yeah, it's an awful experience actually, funnily enough, at least it was for me. That happened when I was a bit younger though so, maybe, I've also, I also think I've been on the other side of it as well, interestingly enough, where, I've only actually, it's funny, I've only actually had peace in a relationship and I'm not in a relationship at the moment, so you know it's never all just, but when I've

HG: take note, take note (laugh)

OMA2: (laugh) no, when I've felt that there's kind of a sense of being like Carter says, of running with your own kind (laughs) you know what I mean?

HG: yep

OMA2: yeah and I'm, I'm, I'm wary of, I have friends who are trying to pick up the most beautiful girl they can, which is great but after having been with someone I think was extraordinarily beautiful an-and-and it only really creeps up on you as you get further in but there's a kind of, it loses its sheen quite quickly and you feel inadequate

42:42

HG: mmhmm

OMA2: I don't know, I forgot what the question was (laughs) what was the question?

HG: (laughs) were your thoughts ignited or changed from the experience, if in fact they were at all

OMA2: (pause)

HG: well do you think that, what I'm really asking is, do you think that um the pressure that Tom felt like he was under from people like Jeannie and Carter do you think there's any room for that mindset to change or do you think that's how it should be?

OMA2: I think it would be ambitious, I mean we're a social species, I don't think, do you know what I mean

HG: yep

OMA2: like I think it's pretty easy, it's pretty romantic to say oh, you love someone, no one else should matter, it's just complete bullshit, well at least it is in my own experience. I think Tom's um, anyone who wants to judge Tom after seeing the play and can look me in the eye (laughs)

HG: (laughs)

OMA2: for longer than, you know and say it shouldn't have mattered what his friends thought, I'd be going, that's a bit, that's a bit romantic (giggle) I abs-I mean I care what other people think of me and I imagine you care what other people think of you I think everyone thinks what other people care of them and if they don't there's something almost psychopathic about them do you know, do you know what I mean? There is something almost psychopathic about I don't care, I don't care what you think about me. It's almost, it's almost like, err, err a defensive against empathy I guess, I don't know, I don't know

HG: mmm

OMA2: if you don't care what other people think well then, it is pretty destructive kind of, yeah, it doesn't, it just doesn't work for me

HG: and your behaviour could go there

OMA2: that's right, that's right so, maybe it reinforced that for me or was a nice reminder that you need to pick and choose, I think the play kind of allows you when that's important and when it isn't or when it can't be helped maybe

45:13

HG: hmm mm (giggle)

OMA2: and to be at peace with that and not to be hard on yourself for , not to be hard on yourself for, its completely natural to-to care what other people think of you I think. I don't know maybe this kind of American thing of do what you want, don't care about losing, don't let the people knock you back, I don't know, it looks good in books, like you know, a motivational poster on the wall, but come on

HG: hmm

OMA2: really? I think it's more complicated than that so maybe LaBute's play just brings into focus, it's far more complicated than a hallmark card

HG: on that note, that was fantastic, thank you OMA2, that was awesome

OMA2: oh cool

End of recording

Appendix D: Interview with OSC

Transcribed from phone interview 31 July 2013

HG: We are recording (giggle). Hello OSC

OSC: Hello

HG: So you're a WAAPA graduate, huh?

OSC: yeah, yeah, 2009

HG: yeah, you've done so much in the last three years, you are such an incredibly impressive young woman (giggle)/ it's just amazing

OSC: (giggle)/ ahh well, glad you think so. You kind of just have to gave a bit of, it's better that I gain momentum, it's kind of hard to let it go after that, really.

HG: yeah well look, I mean in three years you've just been wow, you are a rolling stone that collects no moss (giggle)

OSC: (laugh)

HG: I mean everything I've seen that I've absolutely loved recently has been all your stuff; I didn't even know a couple of them so

OSC: oh really

HG: I see you've done a LaBute play before huh?

OSC: yeah, the first one I did was.....the other one I should/ say

HG: The Shape of Things

OSC: The Shape of Things, yeah um

HG: and you won an, the equity award for that didn't you?

OSC: mmm, yeah, yeah

HG: congratulations, that's awesome

OSC: yeah, it was a good way to introduce myself to the community and in Perth

HG: (laugh) just a little bit good, well done, that's awesome

OSC: yeah I mean that, that was the first I'd heard of his writing to be honest I remember reading *The Shape of Things*, and I was in bed reading it and I got to the end, and I was like, so blown away by it that I had to wake up my partner and I was like "you've gotta read this right now" (laughs)

HG: (laugh) that's brilliant so, yeah, yeah, he's an amazing writer, I think so anyway

OSC: yeah, so when it came to *Fat Pig*, I didn't even read the script before I said yes to it, actually, which is what I normally do, I knew it was OD and I knew it was Neil LaBute so I was like, "I'm in" (laugh)

HG: Oh wow that's awesome, I just love what you came with too I mean it was just so in ... ingenuous the way you had everything move together and fit together, it was lovely

OSC: ahh well I can't take all the credit for that it was actually one of the things OD um approached me with on the first meeting that she wanted some kind of um box that pulled apart or some sort of transformative thing as opposed to kind of have, well you can't have real sets in the OV, it's just too small you know

HG: yep

OSC: so, if you've got lots of different scenes you've gotta find a way to extract them, and not, you know break up the flow with lots of blackout scene changes you know, you have to try and make a picture of them

HG: yeah absolutely, I think you did that really well too, it looked sort of like a dance move . . . so everything flowed together/ it was beautiful

OSC: yeah, yeah/ it's one of those things that like started off as like a practical consideration, but, when you're in rehearsal you start to find little ties into the script how it's useful like the way um Tom sort of ties himself in knots and boxes himself in with his lies and half-truths and his you know framing of particular events and things and then you sort of find that sort of what we do with the set too, we sort of hem him in

HG: yeah

OSC: things change they get manipulated to suit spaces and nothings quite fixed, (breath) but I can't say that's what we really intended to do at the beginning that was more of a sort of a happy accident later on

HG: mmm because that's where the best creative impulses come from right (giggle)

OSC: mm or maybe things I guess, maybe it's more that you have a subconscious sense of what will work and it's only when you spend a lot of time with the script you realize, that, you can sort of consciously, analyse that instinct to begin with

HG: mm, What did you actually think of Fat Pig when you finally got round to reading it?

OSC: (big breath in) Uumm, it was a little depress. . oh I guess, you never really like his characters straight away (laughs)

HG: (laugh)

OSC: he's good at writing human weakness and human flaws and things like that, and . . . sort of knowing, knowing that kind of, that's what he does like The Shape of Things was like that I was kind of waiting for, the other shoe to drop, like I was waiting for, things to go horribly wrong but at the same time just hoping, really hoping that Tom wasn't gonna go where he did

HG: Awww (laugh)

OSC: (laugh) yeah, I'm very optimistic when I read scripts, I just want a happy ending at the end

HG: mmm, it's a funny script because every time I read it, every time I see it, I still hope that he will, like change his mind (giggle)/ at that last bit

OSC: yeah (giggle)/ an, and the ending just leaves you hanging, you feel like you've been broken up with

HG: yeah

OSC: there, there's no closure in a way, it just kinda stops um which, I, I sort of quite like

HG: mmm

OSC: um and there's a nice kind of balance between ahh just enjoying the comedy of it and these characters they're almost sort of caricatures in some way so

HG: mmm

OSC: sort of enjoy um, seeing their discomfort (pause)

HG: There is sort /of a delicious . . .

OSC: but at the same time/ he is talking about something that, that's really quite important and let's face it Australia's getting you know on average getting pretty big these days, like obesity is an issue

HG: so, do you, do you think that, that Helen loses some of the sympathy she might otherwise have

OSC:umm, sorry can you say that again

HG: do you think that, because you know err, Australia's getting bigger and common like people's perception of being large is like lots of health problems associated with that,

OSC: mmm

HG: because of that Helen doesn't get quite as much sympathy as she would otherwise?

OSC: yeah, I mean we're introduced to her, she is actually the opening, I said I didn't like all the characters but she is the one sort of relatable, honest person in there that you'd really want to like um but its face value you perceive overweight people as um having some sort of emotional imbalance really, like that's, I mean that's personally how I sort of feel about it, like if someone's not looking after their health then what sort of self-respect do they have, it's a very judgemental point of view I know but that's kind of my instinct, I mean we are, it's all about health you know and we're very superficial as a culture and doing this play sort of really did make me admit to myself that I do judge people an awful lot on their size

HG: mmm,

OSC: and make assumptions about their mental stability I should say based on their size

HG: and do you, have you changed making those assumptions, have they altered in any way?

OSC: I'm more aware of it

HG: yeah (laugh)

OSC: definitely, just because, just because someone's big doesn't mean they have body issues or are insecure or um, you know that, that kind of thing

HG: mmm

OSC: umm, but also I guess working in the theatre you circulate with lots of um well actors um, where it's all about body image, it's still a very image conscious industry so I have to say in day to day life I don't come across many obese people, mostly actors I dress are you know what 8 to 12 in size

HG: mmm, do you think that um, Helen needs to be particularly large, or do you think, like how, how far do you think the tolerances of society go, like do you think Helen could be like from a size 14 or 16?

OSC: ahh, I do think with our production, like OFA1 should have been bigger umm,

HG: mmm, mm

OSC: that was almost a little bit awkward like because we're talking about her being morbidly obese but she's not (laugh) at all, like she's, and she's very attractive as well she's

sort of um, she has a sort of sensual femininity which makes it very easy for the attraction and that flirtatiousness between her and Tom but it sort of makes the disgust of the other characters a little unbelievable I guess, I mean I've seen other productions where that actress was you know twice her size and I think that, would be more interesting

HG: yeah, do you think that that might be is part of the comment LaBute is making, that it's not really about the size of the girl it's about the small-mindedness of the person?

OSC: mm, possibly and I guess you know that's everyone has their own cut off point of what they think is voluptuous, big boned you know all those sort of positive, until they start saying fat pig like you know is size 18 ok, is size 26 ok

HG: yeah

OSC: and I don't think um yeah I don't think like LaBute's trying to say you have to be an obese person I think it could just be someone who's not like Jeannie you know the point is that they're not a super model, it's not all about being stick thin

HG: mmm

OSC: umm but as a production, as a costume designer I spend a lot of time worrying about is this, is this costume actually, slimming her down when I want to add more volume to her

HG: (laugh)

OSC: (laugh)

HG: yes, she did look absolutely gorgeous throughout the production, OFA1 looked beautiful

OSC: mm, mm, because she is a confident character as well, like she, she does dress well and she's proud of who she is and that kind of stuff and it's not like she's hiding behind ummm you know moo-moos or anything like that

HG: mmm

OSC: she's working with her assets I think but in doing that, that kind of confidence just umm I don't know she looked in some ways a lot more, feminine and attractive than Jeannie did who was like very structured and um narrow and angular in how we dressed her

HG: mm, that's a really beautiful comment, yeah but I think that's the, the beauty in that contrast between the two women like

OSC: mmm

HG: the inner beauty far outshines the, the outer ensemble at that point doesn't it?

OSC: mmm

HG: umm, what sort of definition would you give the style of the play and did your design match or contrast with it?

OSC: ummm, oh that's such a really good question, I think, as a contemporary American piece, umm (pause) I guess I wanted to match it in having textures and furnishings that felt modern and um commercial, he does write in a way that would translate quite well to film I think but I didn't really want to put that into the set design so perhaps our version was a little bit more stripped back, a little bit more abstract

HG: mmm

OSC: and minimal I guess in a way, umm in terms of the feel of it, it was corporate is a good word for it I think to describe the design we were going for

HG: yeah

OSC: it was little bit banal, like the things we actually put on stage were mostly from Ikea this kind of cookie cutter umm furniture reproduction thing oh we played around with it a little bit but just this idea that this very sort of narrow form of what's visually acceptable in that kind of corporate arena, it's kind of their mentality as well

HG: mm

OSC: umm I did see a few images online of other productions of various scales and things but none of them really felt right, they were a little bit more literal in creating the sense of place which wasn't gonna work for the space, we had to do something I guess that was more experimental than was intended in the original production

HG: hmm mm, yeah I absolutely love what you did with that, those spaces yeah, and I think it served the play really well, because you did have all these different scenes to flow into it was just, it was really seamless

OSC: mm hmm it was awfully good with the L shaped seating and that was something else that OD was really clear on from our first meeting

HG: mm hmm

OSC: and what's nice about that as well is to see the reaction of the other leg of the audience

HG: mm hmm

OSC: and it's the uncomf . . ., all those jokes in there where i-if someone's making a fat joke and, and you wanna laugh at it or cringe and you're not quite sure

HG: (knowing smirk)

OSC: that's always sort of uncomfortable, do I enjoy this obscenity or should I be cut-cutting it and you can see that the (inaudible) where you're standing are sort of feeling what you're feeling as well so you can gauge your reactions on what they're doing too

HG: mm hmm

OSC: like you're self-conscious when you watch it which is good

HG: yeah, yeah, I think it's a good way to do those uncomfortable plays where the audience have a sense of each other throughout

OSC: mm

HG: yeah because yeah, they start thinking about what their judgements are, what their opinions are and they're looking at the person across and going "ahh do they think the same" or "ooh they just caught me thinking that" (laughs)

OSC: mm

HG: (clears throat) di-as far as the marketing and the technical and aesthetic design concepts umm, did they um support your objectives and the productions objectives as a whole do you think?

OSC: ahh, the marketing was pretty clean actually so I liked that it came out the week before we put together our colour palette but just the kind of graphic nature of it was um pretty good I think, the block colours we kind of used in the poster as well that kind of trendry (*sic*) through later. I can't say the marketing really influence where I design um, but it didn't jar for me

HG: ahh good, so yeah I-I was just wondering if you felt it was supportive of what you were trying to achieve

OSC: mm

HG: I mean . . .

OSC: I wouldn't say it complimented it exactly they weren't tied in you know to belong together but I didn't think it gave a false impression of the kind of production we were putting on

HG: yeah no, I think it, it-it all showed that everyone seemed to be on a similar page /with what you were trying to achieve

OSC: yeah, I guess you know it was clean/ it was modern, it looked a little playful an-and we sort of you know it was just sort of left at that, which-it was good

15:16

HG: mm hmm what do you think Neil LaBute was trying to say with the play?

OSC: um ahh he doesn't strike me as the kind of writer who is trying to get everyone to leave with a really strong moral message to take away like don't be mean to fat people or anything like that

HG: (laugh)

OSC: (laugh) I think it's more about just, just testing us-is that-it's really about that moment for me when do we laugh and when do we cringe, what kind of judgements are we willing to accept and when does it cross the line before we think we've become ahh sort of grotesque in our-our judgements and cruel, we think we're being um frank about something. I mean even when we were discussing the play even using the word fat felt really confrontational at first

HG: mm hmm

OSC: and yeah, we're talking about someone we're trying to make fat with that actor in the room and you wouldn't, it felt horribly insensitive to even to sort of, like the fact you'll be playing a fat person because you are . . . big boned like there was a dot, dot, dot, /what do we do with this

HG: mm, yeah/ there's a really sensitive line that you have to step on there. H-m-a-I mean as far as I can work out from the other actors that I've spoken to and stuff , OD handled that really well, what do you think she did make to ensure that there was this environment where it was ok and comfortable?

OSC: ahh I can't say I'm the best to speak to about that because I wasn't really in the rehearsal room with those discussions going on

HG: mm hmm

OSC: umm I do think they talked about differences in perfections of-of beauty and certainly with um OFA2's character being ahh sort of a, you know super very sort of an angular, super skinny there was more of a contrast between it

HG: mm hmm

OSC: umm I think OFA1 had a very good attitude going into it, at least she as-as a person doesn't seem to be hung up on her body issues she kind of has that same kind of confidence in the way Helen does

17:44

HG: mmm

OSC: whether that was a mask or that was her a genuine feeling I don't know but I think everyone was just very professional about it, certainly during fittings or anything there weren't any conflicts (giggle)

HG: (giggle) did you find that you had to have umm private conversations with OD to start with or . . . ?

18:04

OSC: mm yeah, I mean when we're putting the costumes together we just you know we go through the script, we talk about what we want out of the scene in terms of ahh costume like did we wanna make her look bigger than she really is, is that through volume of clothes or extra layers or things that are too tight so there's bulging flesh that kind of stuff then once the- once the actor is involved it's more like do you feel comfortable wearing this do you think the character would wear this,

HG: mm

OSC: so we sort of give a loose parameter of colours and things like that and then I probably brought in maybe I don't know like eight outfits for OFA1 to try on in the end

HG: oh

OSC: um so they were all ones that I was happy with and then OFA1 picked out the ones she thought were most um appropriate I guess, how she saw the character

19:00

HG: mm, well I think it was a great collaboration because she did, she looked fantastic um (pause) sorry, I'm just seeing, I think we've covered most of the questions I had and you've given me some wonderful, wonderful responses, thank you, I'll just quickly make sure that we um

OSC: look if you have anything else, you can feel free to call

HG: ok

OSC: and ask me something or if you want me to elaborate on a point, I really don't mind I've had to do lots of 'thesisy' things so I sympathise with the process (laugh)

HG: (laugh) thank you, thank you so much, um just, just a couple more questions left, did you get to um speak to anyone who came to watch it, did they give you much feedback about the production and did it support your own design interpretation?

OSC: ahhh, I didn't actually go out of my way to get feedback, I mean I went opening night and I guess I just like to enjoy the achievement of having something up

HG: mm hmm

OSC: um I don't go out of my way to look for feedback after the event cause I often find that I'm my worst enemy when it comes to critiquing what could have been done better (laugh)

HG: (laugh) ahh, a perfectionist

OSC: (laugh) yeah, yeah

HG: that's wonderful

OSC: I guess I talked to people about what they felt about the script and actually one night I went um a friend that I brought has, you know she's had body issues in the past and for her she-she'd already read it, she'd read the play before she really wanted to see it but I was really nervous about her reaction and one of the things she said when we got in there, she said "oh great, she's the same size that I am" and I was really worried that she would take the criticism and insults that are in the play personally um, but she didn't and she really loved the production and it was a sense of relief it's-it's such a personal thing for-for people I guess

HG: yeah

21:18

OSC: the feel of the feedback I got that people could relate to it on a very personal level I guess if anything the feedback I got was about people's own opinions on body image and self-esteem more so than about the um intellectual aspects of the production or the particular design choices most conversations were a lot more personal

HG: ohh well that's great, that's what you want them to be thinking about really at the end of the day, if you've supported a production so much its almost become invisible

OSC: ohh yeah, I guess it's a worry when you leave a production and people talk about how great the lighting fade outs were (laugh)

HG: (laugh)

OSC: well, it generates a lot of discussion I guess

HG: yeah um, do you think that the um, with those sorts of responses people were responding to the satirical nature of the script or just the realistic storytelling of the script?

OSC: umm, well it's all very sort of exaggerated in a way um I don't know, different responses I guess, it is very dry in places, like dry, dry humour sort of especially Carter and things like that but

HG: mmm

OSC: yeah, but I couldn't say, it has been a while so it's evaporated from my head already

HG: thank you I appreciate you thinking this much on it

OSC: yeah, yeah, humour is a great way to talk about awkward things, comedians have been doing it for centuries and works really well (laugh)

HG: (laugh)

OSC: yeah get taboo subjects, introduce them through humour get them a little bit more people comfortable talking about it and then after a while the good stuff the really you know heavy conversations sort of evolve out of that starting point

HG: oh thank you so much, that was fantastic you have given me some wonderful, wonderful responses thank you

OSC: great, ok, well, all the best with it and like I said if you have any more questions give me a call,

HG: you're the loveliest you know, I hope to bump into you on the circuit,

OSC: (laugh)

HG: (laugh) all the best with your next production, take care and talk soon

OSC: ok, thank you, bye

23:47

Appendix E: Interview with PFA1

Written questions and responses received 23 October 2013

Hi!!

So I have no idea if you even need this anymore..... But I finally remembered/ did it. I'm so sorry I was such a pain to get this from.

I did it sitting at a cafe so please excuse the fact that I did it in notes on my iPad and are copying them below.....

- initial response to script

I thought it was depressingly funny. And heartbreaking. And it made me a little angry at well, probably because it was so recognisable..... I really loved it.

-audition process

I had to learn a monologue and the opening scene where Tom comes into the food court. We simply went through the scene and then played around with it a bit. The audition was actually very fun and relaxed and even if I never got the part I would have been really happy with it

-initial thoughts about characters

It was a very love /hate thing. Tom infuriated me. I found I had to avoid watching the other scenes because it made me hate him --and Helen never saw that side of him so I statutes avoiding it as well. The other two were very funny because I know people just like that - the girls obsessed with getting that one boy. The boy obsessed with looks and looks alone. I recognized the shallowness of it all and all you can do really is laugh at how absurd they are in their interactions.

- unlikable character

Lucky for me you are meant to love Helen. You fall in love with her more each scene along with Tom which is why your heart breaks with hers at the end. I had people after shows coming over and thanking me crying. I had some girls who couldn't even look at me after because they were so upset. My fellow cast mate Chris who played Tom got hit by an old lady, she the[n] Proceeded to abuse the rest of the cast and then turned to me smiled and simply said. **"you were just lovely dear - you don't need these arseholes"** It was brilliant.

-Function and purpose of character

Hmmmmmm. Helen is the best out of them all, a more rounded, compassionate and thoughtful human being that you can't help to be drawn to. I think my function as a character was to let the audience see and witness the humiliation and determination to **overcome other people's prejudices** that Helen goes through. She gives the audience the emotional scope. If they audience aren't with Helen then we have failed. She anchors the piece and we juste (sic) the others accordingly.... I hope that makes sense

- ideas and themes

Love, lies, acceptance, image. I think the lies we tell each other and ourselves was a huge one. **Our perceived ideas of the world being changed by others opinions.** I think the play is about the constancy struggle we have to become the best human we can be and to let someone in enough to have that with you.

- express in performance

I had to simply find the truth of each moment and scene. Give over completely to the other actors and find the light and shade. Helen when she starts out with Tom is hopeful... She has no idea how she will be crushed. You have to ply it for the love story/ the comedy first and let the tracery come from the loss of that.

- marketing

There were a lot of interview done about body image etc. and I simply think the name of the play itself intrigued people and made them want to come.

- Neil giving audience

- a big slap in the face! To find ourselves laughing at the awful things going on and only realizing it once you then witness the pain it causes others. Just as you are laughing the hardest he whips out the knife and digs it in.

- successful in message

I think Neil was very successful in making audiences think about their own perceptions of beauty and love and who deserves what in this world. We see people as images and not as humans so often that we forget to connect with people no matter what their physical aesthetic

Australian Audiences

- I think it is very important to audiences in Australia. We are a country of consumption. We are image driven and we punish one who don't fit into the normal mould but we don't make it easy for people to fit that mould..... I think the play is for anyone who has ever felt on the outside/judged for any reason.

Audience relate to character

- absolutely. They were always on my side.

approach to text

- the biggest thing with his work is the rhythm which we had to nut out early on so we didn't have to think about it anymore. Otherwise we simply rehearsed to find the truth of each scene...

Sensitive issues

- I was actually fine with everything funnily enough..... But it does change you. I think it hit me more afterwards to be honest. Breaking up with someone so brutally every night for a month is hard on your emotions... Not to mention the hotdogs on my cholesterol. Ha!

- audience feedback

As I mentioned above - people got really involved. I am still approached now 3 years later by people saying how much that show affected them.

- Satirical element

I think the fact that the play swing so far from comedy to tragedy is what affected people so much. No one wants to be told for two hours that they are a shit person. Neil is subtle and lets you lay at others before you even realise what is happening

last question

Every play you do changes you and is one was no exception. It made me more aware not only how I judge others but myself.....

Appendix F: Questionnaire responses from FA2

Received 7 April 2014

Wrap up of Fringe Festival 2014 production, *Fat Pig*

Thank you for participating in this project; in lieu of rehearsal journals I have formulated a quick questionnaire, I would greatly appreciate your responses. Please be aware it would be great but you do not need to answer all the questions, just the ones that resonate most with you and your experience.

In appreciation and best wishes

Hermione

1. What were your initial thoughts/responses to the script of *Fat Pig*?

I absolutely loved the script when I first read it. I thought it was sassy and modern. I loved the characters and their rawness.

I thought the script was quick paced and witty. I also thought it would require a lot of attention and timing to pull off the cut offs and conversational flow intended in the piece.

2. What were your initial thoughts/responses to the characters in *Fat Pig*?

I initially thought the characters were extremely raw.

I loved them for all their differences. The dynamic created by the four is perfect and extremely entertaining.

They are all so unique.

3. Did you find the text to be an accurate depiction of 'real life'?

I'm sure the script is accurate to real life in some parts of the world. In my current environment there script is well off every day conversation. However this crass language is definitely present in some environments back in Sydney that I have experienced. The bullying nature evident in the script is also very prevalent.

4. What elements of society do you think were being commented on in the script?

Societal judgement and insecurity.

Societal pressures to fit into a 'box' or 'system' or 'belief structure'

Societies [*sic*] culture of 'physical beauty' versus 'inner beauty'

5. Did the rehearsal process allow you to make a clear distinction between the characters in the play and the actors playing them?

6. Did the creation of 'Virtucom' and its commercial assist your understanding of the world of the play?

Yes definitely. It aided the theme of falsity evident in the play. It gave a great context to set our business.

7. Did the absurd elements in the staging of this production support, develop or negate your thoughts on the overall themes and comments made in the play?

I felt that the script did a satisfactory job in itself of showing the themes and comments. At times I didn't think the absurd elements were further developing my understanding of the themes, however having them there was a good reminder.

8. Aside from venue and Fringe limitations, what were the most personally challenging aspects of the rehearsal process and performance?

The most personally challenging aspects of the rehearsal process was developing relationship between characters. I wanted to fully create believable relationships on stage. I felt this was the most difficult as at times i feel i wa[s]n't truly listening to my fellow actor therefore creating a false relationship.

9. What was the most personally rewarding aspect of the rehearsal process and performance?

The most personally rewarding aspect of the process was developing a relationship with my cast and crew. Putting on the final performance was extremely satisfying as the hard work was put on the floor and were were (*sic*) able to entertain our audience and communicate an extremely important message to our audience and society.

10. What was your overall impression of the production in relation to audience response and feedback?

I had a varied response from different viewers. Some loved the absurd nature and some would have preferred less of the absurd and large character expression.

I feel that for what the production was aiming to do- it did an excellent job and reached all of its goals.

Feedback was interesting when people were discussing 'who the fat pig was' and I thought this was an excellent board for discussion and debate.

Appendix G: Questionnaire responses from MA2

Received 18 April 2014

Wrap up of Fringe Festival 2014 production, *Fat Pig*

Thank you for participating in this project; in lieu of rehearsal journals I have formulated a quick questionnaire, I would greatly appreciate your responses. Please be aware it would be great but you do not need to answer all the questions, just the ones that resonate most with you and your experience.

In appreciation and best wishes

Hermione

1. What were your initial thoughts/responses to the script of *Fat Pig*?

I saw it as a great representation to the inner monologue of the general population of people who don't have much to do with overweight people.

Although confronting with its language and shallow nature, I believe it is not that far from the truth of what many people think.

2. What were your initial thoughts/responses to the characters in *Fat Pig*?

They are extreme versions of reality.

3. Did you find the text to be an accurate depiction of 'real life'?

No, not generally. Being rude towards fat people in my experience is par'd (*sic*) with racism. However inappropriate it is, people still joke about it in small circles.

4. What elements of society do you think were being commented on in the script?

Our obsession with beauty and consumer goods.

5. Did the rehearsal process allow you to make a clear distinction between the characters in the play and the actors playing them?

Yes

6. Did the creation of 'Virtucom' and its commercial assist your understanding of the world of the play?

Not consciously

7. At what point did the satirical nature of the script become most evident to you? When and why?

On the first read. Neil LaBute's style of writing. And the fact that without satire the play would just be an awful depiction of people bullying each other.

8. Did the absurd elements in the staging of this production support, develop or negate your thoughts on the overall themes and comments made in the play?

I feel there was confusion between the absurd and the naturalistic. If one was more evident it would be easier to comment.

9. Aside from venue and Fringe limitations, what were the most personally challenging aspects of the rehearsal process and performance?

Being an actor in training.

10. What was the most personally rewarding aspect of the rehearsal process and performance?

Telling a story by a fantastic playwright to an audience in a pub.

11. Did your thoughts or responses to the play change or shift throughout the process?

No

12. What was your overall impression of the production in relation to audience response and feedback?

Feedback from friends and family asked if it was supposed to be absurd or naturalism. As I said earlier, I don't feel like either was being hit clearly. If the goal was to be in between both, I can understand this because sometimes life seems so absurd. However this is difficult to explain to audience members who are not my peers at drama school.

Appendix H: Questionnaire responses from GD

Received 3 May 2014

Thank you for participating in this project; in lieu of rehearsal journals I have formulated a quick questionnaire, I would greatly appreciate your responses. You do not need to answer all questions, just those that resonate most with you.

1. What were your initial thoughts/responses to the script of Fat Pig?

I thought it was remarkable, true and harsh. I looked forward to participating, especially knowing I'd get to be in the audience.

2. What were your initial thoughts/responses to the characters in Fat Pig?

I immediately liked Helen, who initially appears to be the most confident and fully developed person. Her physicality immediately evokes a back-story -- you KNOW she must have had it rough as a teenager, which makes her confidence all the more appealing. The loss of this confidence is actually kind of devastating.

Everyone else seemed pale in comparison, and Tom's unwillingness to stand by his feelings is kind of disgraceful. In contrast, Carter and Jeannie's unapologetic superficiality was at least consistent; they know they're shallow and they don't care.

3. Did you find the text to be an accurate depiction of 'real life'?

I'm not sure there are too many people like Tom who would actually take the chances that he initially does... Most people probably get from his starting point to his end point without actually initiating a relationship that was so destructive.

4. What elements of society do you think were being commented on in the script?

All of it, presuming you mean 'our' society... Westernised, consumerist etc. We are all guilty of physical prejudice when it comes to who we want to be intimate with, and to varying extents, who we're prepared to be seen with - especially at the start of a relationship. Everyone participates; everyone judges and in turn is judged.

6. Did the creation of 'Virtucom' and its commercial assist your understanding of the world of the play?

I think it made the satirical nature of the play more explicit, but I understood the world of the play to be essentially the same as the 'real' world.

7. At what point did the satirical nature of the script become most evident to you? When and why?

The unrelenting honest (if self-deluded) tirades from Carter and Jeannie. They said the unspeakable, highlighting the moral difference between the implicitly accepted process of 'natural selection' as a form of social exclusion and the socially unacceptable behaviour of openly despising people based on appearance.

10. What was the most personally rewarding aspect of the rehearsal process and performance?

The applause at the end of the opening night.

11. Did your thoughts or responses to the play change or shift throughout the process?

Not really. I wondered how much the issues discussed affected my life, both in the past and at present, so it's probably more accurate to say the play changed or shifted *MY* thoughts and responses. Yay for satire!

12. What was your overall impression of the production in relation to audience response and feedback?

I was happy with audience reactions: for the most part, I think the director's attempts to frame the drama as a satire rather than a 'slice of life' were successful. Conversely, I started to resent the 'beautiful people' in the cast.

While initially amazed at MA1 emotional range and understanding of Tom, I was later disappointed at the easy sense of entitlement and remoteness from production crew displayed by the offstage Tom, Jeannie and Carter.

Probably testament to their talent and training as actors that they seemed capable and believable of deeper emotions, but still strangely disappointing. I think there was more to learn from this play than lines.

There you go.... \$0.02

Appendix I: Questionnaire responses from SM

Wrap up of Fat Pig received 7 April 2014

Thank you for participating in this project; in lieu of rehearsal journals I have formulated a quick questionnaire, I would greatly appreciate your responses. You do not need to answer all questions, just those that resonate most with you.

1. What were your initial thoughts/responses to the script of Fat Pig?

I liked the script and that it had a message. It wasn't just a theatre piece to amuse it's audience, it had strong themes and was about getting a message across also.

2. What were your initial thoughts/responses to the characters in Fat Pig?

I found Helen endearing from the start and relatable – she was a very real character. I had a strong dislike for the male characters in the script.

3. Did you find the text to be an accurate depiction of 'real life'?

4. What elements of society do you think were being commented on in the script?

5. Did the rehearsal process allow you to make a clear distinction between the characters in the play and the actors playing them?

Yes, the characters were all well developed and very individual; however I think each actor brought bits of themselves to their role, something that was both them and their character.

6. Did the creation of 'Virtucom' and its commercial assist your understanding of the world of the play?

The commercial added a different element to the play and helped to build up the company background depicted in the play and what sort of company and class the characters were from.

7. At what point did the satirical nature of the script become most evident to you? When and why?

From their first read and run through from the way it was written but then also from the way it was played.

8. Did the absurd elements in the staging of this production support, develop or negate your thoughts on the overall themes and comments made in the play?

9. Aside from venue and Fringe limitations, what were the most personally challenging aspects of the rehearsal process and performance?

The biggest challenge for me was not show related but due to the lack of time I had to invest (too many projects/jobs and responsibilities that I took on all at the same time). It was also good that the project came under a WAAPA project banner or getting myself and the set and props to and from the venue would have been increasingly difficult under the circumstances.

10. What was the most personally rewarding aspect of the rehearsal process and performance?

For me, the most rewarding part of a production is when an audience engages and responds to the play and the sense of accomplishment that comes from that, knowing you played a part in getting the show up and running.

11. Did your thoughts or responses to the play change or shift throughout the process?

Not overly. But my affection for Helen and dislike of the others increased as their characters developed.

12. What was your overall impression of the production in relation to audience response and feedback?

I think it was a successful production, which received good audience response and participation. It was well received and provoked people's thoughts, made them laugh and at times made them uncomfortable – which I think, if played the way it was intended, is the point of the play

Appendix J: Framing statement issued to assessors attending the performance

The Absurd Reality of Satire in Neil LaBute's *Fat Pig*: A practice-led exploration in theatre direction.

Glossy magazines and airbrushed images of impossibly thin, perfect people influence the psyche of entire generations and now with the internet and social media the reach of these ideals is limitless. At its worst, dissatisfactions with self-image do not alone come from these visual and virtual impositions of perceived beauty but from a projection of social normativity that tears at the heart of 'difference', alienating the subject that cannot or will not conform to these ideals. My journey with Neil LaBute's play *Fat Pig* began some time ago and my passion was ignited immediately. Perhaps this interest is partly to do with the fact that I was bullied as a child about my appearance. However, through the research journey I have grown to enjoy the discourse that comes with tackling personal motivations with developing a critical awareness around the way theatre and art can be tools for social enquiry. Myths and ideals surrounding beauty and consumerism and the deliberate exclusion of those individuals who skirt the fringes of normativity are at the core of this satirical script. This play, through its ironic twists and turns shows the difficulties of standing up for what you believe in, why it can be so difficult and how terribly sad it is when you don't.

This production is the practical portion of my practice led Masters by Research Degree, Directing Stream at WAAPA. Through my experience and research, I have explored ways that theatrically emphasize the irony in the text. Initially my research was inspired by the many responses to previous productions that in my opinion misinterpreted who was being ridiculed by LaBute – that LaBute's objective for societal ridicule was not Helen, wrongly identified as the central character, but the people surrounding her, who are being judged. Some even saw the text as depicting real life and that Helen deserved the ridicule. While it is apparent people do behave cruelly like the characters in the play, I believe LaBute's intention is to draw attention and to condemn these behaviours. My research has led me to ask why the satirical content has been misconstrued and how as a director I could find a way to flesh out the ironic underpinnings of the text.

The satire in this play is not unique in its misinterpretations, in fact, there has almost always been a need to defend satire and satirists and even more so when a piece, such as *Fat Pig* falls in to a category that has been described as "satirical realism" (Aaron Matz, 2010). Satirical

realism, described as a genre that blurs the line between satire and realism, deliberately and quite covertly makes it difficult to immediately identify a particular work's intent to mock. In this practice led research project, I have taken a three pronged approach involving research *for, into* and *through* practice relating to theatre directing and satire in the theatre (Webb, 2008).

Mass consumerism, ubiquitous mass (and new) media and globalization contribute to a smaller, fluid world with what, on one hand, appears to be a connected global community and, yet, overwhelmingly on the other hand, inspires divisive inequity; between the haves of a great deal and the have-nots of very, very little, and between the beautiful and the ugly of human behavior. I strongly believe theatre can be a powerful vehicle for social inquiry and perceptual change. I also believe satire can be an effective tool that not only comments on, but can also denounce, unwanted societal traits.

As a director, I have considered at great length what I can do to emphasize and convey satirical comments inherent in the text in both content and form. I have discovered that parody and irony go hand in hand and identifying the absurd or grotesque elements of characters and text can give an indication that not all is what it seems, and that what is marked as absurd is undesirable. I have played with theatrical techniques including acting style, sound, lighting and staging that emphasize moments of absurdity and in particular to highlight moments that I find deeply ironic. I argue that these choices not only aid in the development of the work as a satire but also perhaps highlight a brief homage to Absurdism inherent in the writing of LaBute.

Webb, J. (2008). Creative work as/and practice: The new paradigm, from

<http://www.writingnetwork.edu.au/content/brief-notes-practice-led-research-0>

Appendix K: Poster of *Fat Pig* fringe festival production 2014

