

[rotazaza]

Rotozaza (core members Anton Hampton and Silvia Mercuriali) have quietly established themselves as one of UK's most consistently surprising, innovative and internationally-minded performance groups. From their early site-specific work in Milan and Paris through to a more recent focus on unrehearsed 'guest' performers, their two aims have always been the same: to identify and celebrate what can only be done live, and to foster international links through an exciting practice which isn't afraid to operate in foreign languages and cultures. Their work is as challenging as it is humorous, and often marked by key revelations which totally change an audience's perspective on the event they witness.



Etiquette and **Five in the Morning** present two extraordinary twists on a setup Rotozaza have been exploring for over 8 years with a number of different works: selected performers, different every night, who agree to take instructions - live and unrehearsed.

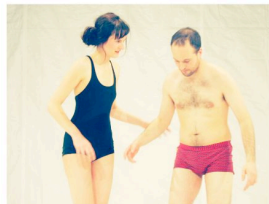
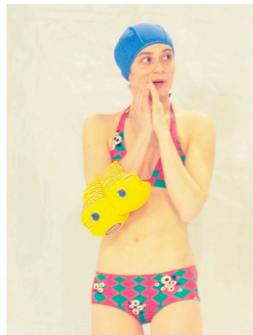
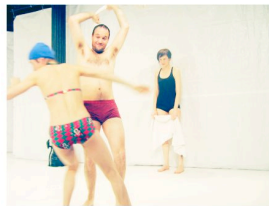
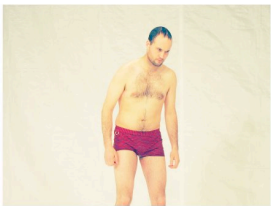
This began in Paris, 1999, as a simple solution to the problem of getting a friend and non-performer, Henri Taib, to be on stage in front of an audience 'as himself' and free from the perceived responsibilities of a performer. The following years gave rise to an exhaustive and colourful exploration of the potential behind this strategy, with the shows assuming many different forms and involving collaborations with artists of varied disciplines and nationalities. The shows - including **ROMCOM** and **DOUBLETHINK** - were presented in a total of twelve countries worldwide in English, Italian, German, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch.

CONTENTS -

Five in the Morning takes a daring step beyond what many would consider an already risky practice. The 'guest performers' are presented as *"three shivering swimmers, red-faced and half-smiling in tight suits, [who] await their orders from chillingly calm disembodied voices. At its core, the play is about how we construct our own personas, piecing together a narrative that we play in our own minds. Explaining more would give away some of the surprises, which are essential to the delight of the show."* - *New York Times*
Fresh from a highly successful run at PS122 in New York, 5am is Rotozaza's most accomplished stage work to date. >> [pages 2,3,4](#)

With **Etiquette**, Rotozaza have attained their long-held dream of creating an entirely pre-recorded and infinitely portable piece of live theatre, available for translation into any language. In a deft and generous move, they invite their audience to experience for themselves the thrill of being 'on stage' with no preparation. >> [page 5](#)

Rotozaza's theatre practice is perfect for further 'wraparound' activity such as **workshops** and seminars. >> [More info on this, touring costs, language matters and contact details on the back page.](#)



FIVE IN THE MORNING AT PS 122, NEW YORK CITY, APRIL 2007 - photos by Karl Allen

Created by Ant Hampton, Silvia Mercuriali, Greg McLaren and Melanie Wilson

FIVE IN THE MORNING



This is Aquaworld, an enormous indoor leisure-pool complex. No, this is the theatre, the same one you paid to enter. We have learnt to be selective with the truth. Lying is a strong word.

"IT'S very difficult to talk about Rotozaza's new show, Five in the Morning. Almost impossible in fact. As usual, Mercuriali and Hampton - the company's mischievous founders - are intent on playing games with their audience..." - The Scotsman
"Vulnerable and emotionally naked in their swimsuits ... Rotozaza capture all the weirdness of the unconscious world - there is no doubting the talent or ambition of a company who can so intriguingly prod at our unconscious." - The Guardian

For the last few years our work has centered around a unique strategy of giving instructions to unrehearsed guest performers, different every night. We found that any audience could understand the basic truth behind the event before them: that the performer is on the same level as they are, discovering everything at the same time. We saw how this transformed an audience from traditional 'spectator' mode to something more present, more bound up with the moment, and with 5am we wanted to play with that divide by charming and jarring the audience into seeing things from fundamentally different perspectives.

Initially, the perspective is that the performers are unrehearsed 'guests'. Their constrained, self-conscious behavior is hilarious, and we (the audience) imagine ourselves in their position. At about 25 minutes into the piece, 'tall one', as she is referred to, is repeating a text she is told to learn: a series of questions and instructions to which 'short one' must respond. Meanwhile, the male performer mops the stage - he has been given a job in 'Aquaworld'. As a chlorine smell fills the room, and as we begin to wonder where this scene is going, 'tall one' suddenly manages to speak in perfect synchronicity with the recorded voice and begins walking slowly towards the audience, as if transfixed. The two voices are identical.

The perspective has to change: it's all too perfect; these are actors; it's not what we thought. And yet faced with what happens next - a teeth-grinding, awkward scene involving an attempt to 'form a human tower' - we revert to empathizing. And then back again, deep into fiction: the male actor has a breakdown, triggered by his own voice. With the smell of chlorine still in the air, Aquaworld becomes more tangible, like a real predicament. Slowly, meaning falls into place. The voices are theirs; they're telling themselves what to do, in front of an audience - or at least, the idea of one. They need the idea of empathy. The audience, so present in the room, realise they're merely the 'idea of being watched'.

We've long been interested in the idea of a constructed persona - a version of ourselves made to present to others. To construct anything, you need a place: Aquaworld is maintained at body temperature; it's safe and proposes fun-for-all, bright lights, benign / fake nature and clear rules. Despite being a rip-off from the world we know, rather than the expression of individuality we probably aspire to, the security of this inner 'place-persona' is just what the contemporary urban mind needs to cradle an awkward and inefficient relationship with itself and others; a clumsiness expressed here through the guests' efforts to do what they're told.

If DOUBLETHINK and our other recent work explored what happens when you take away responsibility from an actor, FIVE IN THE MORNING turns this around and asks what exactly that job is, what pretending can mean and the different kinds of it we need - both in the theatre, and in ourselves.

Disembodied Voices and Names That Go Unspoken

Five in the Morning
P.S. 122

Standing in front of a blank slate of white walls, three shivering swimmers, red-faced and half-smiling in tight suits, await their orders from a series of chillingly calm disembodied voices. "Show your thoughts!" "Bite your lip!" "Die!" Like obedient children, they do as they are told.

THEATER REVIEW

JASON ZINOMAN

Welcome to Aquaworld, a theme park where the temperature is always perfect and the beaches have no sand. You may think you've seen this place before in science fiction films or dystopian short stories by George Saunders, but don't be too sure. All is not what it seems in "Five in the Morning," a cerebral new brainteaser by the innovative London theater company Rotozaza that keeps you guessing throughout its taut, suspenseful 70 minutes. Are those scripted actors, or unrehearsed guests? Is Aquaworld a dream, or a voyage through a cracked subconscious? Are the swimmers merely puppets — and, if so, who pulls the strings?

In the last few years, Rotozaza, which is making its American debut at P.S. 122, has earned notice in alternative theater circles with an experimental style that employs unscripted performers willing to follow instructions. A similar tactic was employed in last year's puzzle play "An Oak Tree," an English import, by Tim Crouch, analyzing issues of free will and power, but with less depth.

Staged by Ant Hampton with the subtlety and sure-handedness of a seasoned magician, the play — written by Mr. Hampton, Silvia Mercuriali, Greg McLaren and Melanie Wilson — begins like a simple game of Simon Says ("Open your eyes," "Touch her") before a slight story starts to emerge. A surprisingly sweet romance develops between a man (Mr. McLaren) and the taller woman (Ms. Wilson). (No character names are given.) "Ask him if you can climb into his arms," a voice instructs her. And she does. While everything seems rigidly controlled, moments of spontaneity — a smile, a roll of the eyes — occasionally break through, creating an almost transgressive tension that is oddly exciting.

What saves "Five in the Morning" from being an abstract exercise is that it's rooted in these characters — trapped, struggling neurotics brought to life with tenderness. The face of the pixieish Ms. Mercuriali, who plays the smaller woman, is a mask of anxiety. She stares into the audience yearningly, but it's unclear if she can really see us. As the play progresses, the artifice of the theater becomes increasingly clear. Even the audience is occasionally drowned out by a laugh track.

At its core, the play is about how we construct our own personas, piecing together a narrative that we play in our own minds. Explaining more would give away some of the surprises, which are essential to the delight of the show. As with a great suspense film, watching this unusually daring show provides the gradual recognition of being manipulated — and enjoying every second of it.

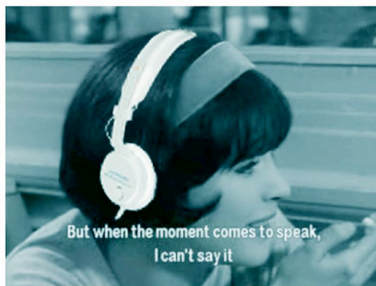
The New York Times

SATURDAY, APRIL 7, 2007



etiquette

rotozaza's etiquette is a half-hour experience for two people in a public space. There is no-one watching - other people in the café or bar are not really aware of it. You wear headphones which tell you what to say to each other, or to use one of the objects positioned to the side. There is a kind of magic involved - for it to work you just need to listen and respond accordingly. Best done with someone you know, someone to share this with.



Etiquette exposes human communication at both its rawest and most delicate and explores the difficulty of turning our thoughts into words we can trust. A young girl and a philosopher lead the participants into several micro-situations, many of them borrowed from film and theatre, where the 'bubble' shared between two people splits and reforms incessantly.

Much of Rotozaza's recent work involves instructions given live to unrehearsed and often non-professional actors. These 'guests' often describe the strange thrill involved in handing themselves over and simply doing what they're told; to relinquish responsibility and to allow a different kind of performance to emerge. Now, in a deft and generous move, Rotozaza invite their audience to experience this for themselves, whilst at the same enjoying a 'show'... and so, somewhat magically, to be both performer and audience.

Conversation (which in some way involves an implicit agreement to continuously swap those roles) becomes both device and subject matter. A system of synchronised audio over two headphones allows for two very different experiences and perspectives to criss-cross: at one moment you may be far from each other, in separate worlds, the next joined together in a kind of 'engineered' dialogue. (Etiquette offers the fantasy of speaking with someone without having to plan what you say; that the responses become unpredictable only increases tension and means that to do this with someone you know is particularly interesting - you can't play your 'usual tricks'.)

All this is achieved with an extreme of Rotozaza's usual economy of means: two stereo headphones and a few small objects. With ETIQUETTE, Rotozaza have attained their long-held dream of creating an entirely pre-recorded and infinitely portable piece of live theatre, available for translation into any language.

Ant Hampton and Silvia Mercuriali ([Rotozaza](#)) have created Etiquette in collaboration with Paul Bennun, founder and director of [Somethin' Else](#). Paul holds internationally recognised awards, co-authored the British Government's recent report on the future of digital music, and has worked with Artangel, John Berger and Theatre de Complicité.

ETIQUETTE CAN BE TAKEN ABSOLUTELY ANYWHERE. CO-PRODUCING FOREIGN LANGUAGE VERSIONS IS A SIMPLE PROCESS :

The piece was designed with this process in mind; we are experienced in the necessary work and can talk you through it.

1. Translation (the language is simple)
2. Basic voice recording
3. Editing - simply line up the new version with the English version
4. Finalisation, done by Rotozaza
 - * Steps 1-3 usually undertaken by the host venue / organisation.

Subsequent presentations of any translated version of Etiquette would always be credited as *A co-production with [host venue / organisation]*

Current versions are: English, Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, Dutch.

FAQ'S -

HOW DOES IT WORK? - We use DVD 5.1 to create two synchronised stereo tracks - ie. four separate channels from one disc. The audio then goes to two separate headphone amplifiers, each with multiple outputs.

YOU SAY IT'S FOR TWO PEOPLE AND NO AUDIENCE. SOUNDS LIKE A PROMOTER'S NIGHTMARE... - The advantage with the system is that we can run up to 4 tables off one DVD. Even with only three tables, that would mean 12 people an hour - 120 over a 10 hour day! In a festival context this is not out of the question. However it also works well as a more long-term installation: time and again, we have seen how Etiquette becomes popular via word of mouth.

WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS? - Table, chairs, power supply and a system for emptying and re-filling a glass of water. In terms of a space, any relatively quiet public place such as a café, foyer etc. People talking and occasionally moving about is good. Music can be a problem.

WHY A PUBLIC SPACE? - Part of the thrill is the sense of this private experience contrasting with the public surroundings - a kind of bubble created between two people, as in conversation. However, it's not designed to be watched, and remains largely inconspicuous from outside.

WORKSHOP / SEMINAR



At the heart of our work is a fascination with people coping with tasks, live and unrehearsed. The TOCAR (Theatre of Command and Response) workshop offers participants the chance to explore both the different ways of implementing this strategy and the many issues it raises. Usually 1-2 days and involving between 15 and 25 participants, it can be tailored to fit a variety of needs.

We begin on a minimal level - one person telling another what to do, either out loud or whispered - before bringing in examples of similar relationships in theatre history (eg. Hamm and Clov in Beckett's Endgame) and finally introducing the use of recordable media; tape recorders, headphones etc. The technology used in the workshop is very simple, and we bring everything ourselves, except for a basic sound system.

Participants are encouraged to use the strategies we explore in their own ways, and often find it directly inspiring and use-able. There is a side to the practice which seems to go to the heart of what theatre is; sharing it in this way has proved fascinating and accessible for people of all backgrounds, languages and disciplines.

We also give talks or seminars on our work, and they can also be tailored to suit different contexts.

COSTS

Five in the Morning involves four people traveling, and the set usually conforms to standard airline baggage restrictions, meaning costs are low.

Etiquette is particularly cost effective in this respect. Please contact Emma or Alice (see below) for full costings. The only requirement that sometimes requires hiring is a rubber 'dance' floor for **Five in the Morning**. However theatres are often already equipped with these, and depending on the existing floor surface it may not even be necessary. For both productions, we are open to working with prospective partners to reach an agreement which is feasible on both sides.

nb. - We are able to offer Etiquette at a reduced rate when booked together with Five in the Morning. However, both are available seperately.

LANGUAGE

Five in the Morning - We are currently looking for possible co-producers for a foreign-language premiere of Five in the Morning which will employ an innovative use of 'sur-titles'. Rather than being an external addition, we have written them in as an inherent part of 'Aquaworld' alongside the pre-recorded voices - another element to the 'agency' which will be played with, referenced and transformed during the show. We are excited and open to discussing these possibilities, so do get in touch.

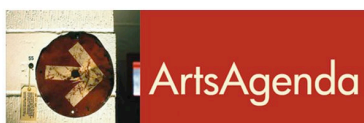
Etiquette - CURRENTLY EXISTS IN ENGLISH, SPANISH, FRENCH, GERMAN, DUTCH AND PORTUGUESE. Co-producing any foreign language version is a simple process which we have experience with already: see the separate ETIQUETTE page for more info.

Workshop - We speak fluent English, French, Italian and Spanish. We have also led successful workshops with simultaneous interpretation, organised with the British Council.

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