



EACH PIECE



“This production [...] focused on relationships and how individuals and their families cope with the increasingly cruel symptoms of dementia as it continues to take away ‘each piece’ of the person they are or know and love.”

Type of output:
Performance
(Play-text and
Performance)

by
Steve Gilroy

Cover:
Kit with Leaves.
Photo credit: Steve Gilroy

Left:
Lucy Nichol,
Writer/Author,
2017.

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SUMMARY

Each Piece is a verbatim theatre enquiry into the lives of people living with dementia, their carers and their families. The body of work was developed in collaboration with Age UK, Newcastle University's Institute for Ageing and Sunderland City Hospitals. The research culminated in the production of a documentary theatre play-text and a professional staged 'script in hand' production at Live Theatre, Newcastle upon Tyne in 2017.

Conceived as a longitudinal process-led work, *Each Piece* developed verbatim theatre as a genre. Rather than offering a snapshot of a specific event or moment, *Each Piece* was designed to evolve as a work through time, by conducting interviews over a number of years, updating the work to reflect the lives of the people the play represents as they evolved, and in many cases, declined. The structure of the text and production are formed in a way that is analogous with the erosion and fragmentation of memory.

Based in Sunderland, one of the 20% most-deprived unitary authorities in England, *Each Piece* offered medical professionals, and others involved in the process of diagnosing dementia, acute insight into the personal and

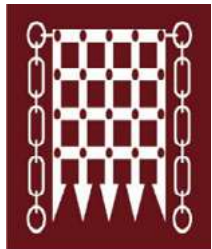


Right:
Each Piece,
Live Theatre, 2017.

domestic lived experience of patients following their initial diagnosis.

By tracing the journeys of the participants/contributors, the project revealed the potentially corrosive impact of a dementia diagnosis on wider extended family structures and entrenched inequalities in the provision of care. Examples in the play include: the breakdown of family relationships due to lack of understanding and acceptance of the syndrome; inability to fulfil domestic and work roles; and a lack of support or services for the poorest and most vulnerable in the community.

Following the performances at Live Theatre, Professor Dame Louise Robinson, Director of Newcastle University Institute for Ageing and Professor of Primary Care and Ageing, cited the play to highlight inequalities of care to the 'Westminster Policy Health Forum on Dementia Care' chaired by Baroness Sally Greengross in January 2017.



**WESTMINSTER
HEALTH FORUM**

Right:
Each Piece,
Live Theatre, 2017.



“And the thing that it really brought home to me [...] was the strong message about the inequalities in care, which appear to be growing, the inadequacies in care, which are persisting and . . . nobody seems to be taking responsibility for this at a systems level. So, how can we bring this into reality? I think we’ve got to listen to the people with dementia and their families first and I certainly hope that there’s a way I can promote Steve Gilroy’s work more widely than the north-east.”

Professor Dame Louise Robinson,

Director, Newcastle University Institute for Ageing,
speaking at the Westminster Policy Health Forum,
Dementia Care chaired by Baroness Sally Greengross.
January 2017.

RESEARCH CHALLENGE

The research was an exploration of how the diagnosis of dementia and the early experiences of the syndrome impacted those diagnosed, as well as their families and carers. The aim was to provide insights for medical and other professionals into domestic and personal experiences of those going through an often lengthy process of diagnosis.

Instead of offering a single report through direct address to an audience, the project sought to explore how capturing more complex conversations might offer a deeper and more nuanced engagement with the challenges faced by the participants. Alongside the widespread ignorance of dementia as a syndrome, the project also revealed levels of stigma associated with the syndrome; stress within family relationships due to denial; and inadequacies and inequalities in care.

The structure and form of the work aimed to explore how the text might mirror the experience of dementia through the interruption of narrative, fragmentation of structure and character, and a re-imagining of memory and identity. The text and musical score combined to piece together and recreate what may have been lost.



Right:
Ivor and Valerie Bird.

CONTEXT

A number of Gilroy's documentary theatre projects relate to human conflict and trauma and these include: the impact of the Iraq and Afghan wars on the domestic world of working class families from North East England (*Motherland*, 2009), disenfranchised olive farmers living in the Palestinian West Bank (*Facts on the Ground*, 2010), impoverishment caused by the European debt crisis (*States of Descent*, 2013), the communities of Oklahoma City living with the legacy of the bombing in 1995 (*In the Middle of the West*, 2015) and, for this project, an exploration of the experiences of those living with dementia.

Gilroy starts from the proposition, as advanced by Reinelt 2009 and Hammond and Steward 2008, that verbatim/documentary theatre partly derives its effectiveness in exploring its themes from a failure by print and broadcast media to fully interrogate complicated public issues and events. The research process of *Each Piece* extended Gilroy's existing documentary methodologies (e.g. *Motherland*, 2008; *The Prize*, 2012) by facilitating discussion between participants, revealing the more complex dynamics of inter-personal relationships.

Below:
Each Piece,
Live Theatre, 2017.



Scholarship has addressed the ethical tensions within documentary theatre between a commitment to realising a successful theatrical/dramatic form and the duty to present the truthfulness of testimonies used (Peters, 2018; Taylor, 2013; Jeffers, 2006; Duggan, 2013). In response to such difficulties, and ongoing debates around the ethics of verbatim approaches, Gilroy has developed a process of consultation and negotiation which offers contributors control over the representation of their testimonies, thus extending the role of participants into co-creators and co-authors of the theatrical construction.

Right:
Each Piece,
Live Theatre, 2017.



METHODS AND PROCESSES

“This production [...] focused on relationships and how individuals and their families cope with the increasingly cruel symptoms of dementia as it continues to take away ‘each piece’ of the person they are or know and love.”

Lucy Nichol,
Writer/Author,
2017.

Right:
Each Piece,
Live Theatre, 2017.



The two year research process began in January 2015 and included interviews with research scientists from the Newcastle University Institute for Ageing, clinicians from Sunderland Royal Hospital and workers from Dementia support agencies in Sunderland. Then between January and July 2016, Gilroy became resident artist-researcher at the Essence Centre (Age UK, Sunderland) and interviewed clients of the service (and their partners/spouses) who had recently received a dementia diagnosis.

The interview process involved attempts to reduce the presence of the interviewer by adopting active listening techniques – making space – receding and witnessing. Gilroy worked to facilitate dialogues between the participants allowing them to determine the direction of the discussion.

The decision was made to cast actors who were familiar with Gilroy's method (Helen Embleton; Motherland, The Prize and Chris Connell; The Prize) alongside popular and well-known actors from the North East region (Laura Norton, Pete Peverley and Jess Johnson). With a limited two week rehearsal period for the first 'script in hand' iteration of the project, it was crucial to include actors who had experience of the process and methods.

The inclusion of known actors helped to foreground the importance of the work to the audience and demonstrate a commitment to an issue of major social significance.

The acting process was 'outside in', exacting imitation of voice followed by interpretation and analysis of the characters' psychology. The actors analysed the individual characteristics and internal impulses encoded into the voice, for example, the indication of physical demeanour, energy or movement of the subject. This is followed by a vocal, physical distillation and honing of character.

The main focus was on the experience of three couples as they dealt with emergent symptoms of dementia, and their struggle to obtain definitive diagnoses. The vocal interplay between the couples is transformed through the effects of dementia; the growing absence of one, leads to the other compensating for that absence by projecting shared memory onto the other, which made the focus on dialogue as opposed to monologue increasingly important in representing the actuality of experience.

Gilroy worked closely with collaborator composer and musician Richard Dawson, whose fragmented and increasingly discordant musical score echoed the changing nature of memory and self experienced by those with dementia.

Right:
Composer, Richard Dawson.



DISSEMINATION

“This was an excellent piece of theatre. I work as a psychiatrist for the Alzheimer’s Society. Tonight’s experience was an opportunity to reconnect to the emotional component of my work, something the work environment does not allow. All psychiatrists working with memory services should get this experience.”

Anonymous Audience member,
Each Piece.

Professor Dame Louise Robinson, Director of Newcastle University Institute for Ageing and Professor of Primary Care and Ageing, cited the play extensively in her presentation to highlight inequalities of care to the ‘Westminster Policy Health Forum on Dementia Care’ chaired by Baroness Sally Greengross in January 2017.
http://www.westminsterforumprojects.co.uk/forums/sample/Dementia_Care_Jan17_Example_Pages.pdf



Performance (professional ‘script in hand’ production): Gilroy, S. *Each Piece*, Main House, Live Theatre, Newcastle upon Tyne, 27th - 28th January 2017.

<https://vimeo.com/269507267> (password: eachpiece)

Panel discussion: Chair - Steve Gilroy, members - Dr Uma Nath, consultant neurologist at City Hospitals Sunderland, Anthony Gonzalez, Director, Essence Centre, Age UK, Sunderland, 27th January 2017.

Paper: Gilroy, S. and Stockwell, R. Encountering echoes: Investigating dementia through verbatim theatre and performance, Conference of the British Society of Gerontology, Newcastle University, July 3rd 2015.
<https://conferences.ncl.ac.uk/bsg2015/>

“Writer and director Steve Gilroy has created an impressive show that should continue beyond this weekend. It is clear that it should tour and raise the profile of the issues featured.”

Professor Dame Louise Robinson,
2017.



North East Theatre Guide

<http://nomorepanicbutton.blogspot.co.uk/2017/01/review-each-piece-at-newcastle-live.html>

<http://cms.live.org.uk/about-us/news/cast-announced-for-dementia-drama>

<http://www.chroniclive.co.uk/whats-on/theatre-news/people-living-dementia-told-stories-12508016>

<https://theskyisfallingin.blog/2017/01/28/review-each-piece-live-theatre/>

<https://www.livingnorth.com/northeast/arts-whats/word-word>

Play-text:

Gilroy, S. (2017). *Each Piece*.

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/mk5nix17jp6vx25/AADBPi3ZIXyOY1qq1XMih2bMa?dl=0>

Right:
Theatre programme.

Each Piece

Presented by Northumbria University in partnership with Live Theatre



EACH PIECE

Presented by Northumbria University in partnership with Live Theatre

Written and Directed by Steve Gilroy

Music by Richard Dawson

"You know, the next time we meet? I won't know you ... I won't even remember saying this."

The diagnosis of dementia changes everything forever. *Each Piece* reveals the experiences of those whose lives are dramatically impacted by dementia; a husband, wife or partner is now the carer, members of the family can't come to terms with what's happened and no one knows how long this journey will last.

Award winning playwright Steve Gilroy (*Motherland*, *The Prize*) teams up with singer songwriter Richard Dawson to present *Each Piece*. This work-in-progress verbatim play is based on interviews with those living with dementia and their carers, supported by The Essence Service who help people in Sunderland with dementia to ensure they can have the best quality of life for as long as possible.

POST SHOW TALKS

FRI 27 & SAT 28 JAN

FREE, booking essential. Suitable for Artsmark visits

Find out more and book.

REFERENCES

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