Top Class Theatre Studies

Thomas Vulcan monologue transcript

*The Encounter* by Complicite / Simon McBurney, inspired by the novel Amazon Beaming by Petru Popescu.

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Monologue script from pp.43-46

[sound of heavy breathing]

LOREN

We walk. What’s happening? Where are we going? I strain my ears, hoping against hope for the sound of a plane? I hear nothing. We walk all that day. We stop at sundown, no evening meal. We sleep on the forest floor, nothing to eat the next morning. It’s the same the next day and the next day and the next day.

I’m walking close behind Barnacle. I’m going to beam something. ‘Where are we going?’ I ask him.

BARNACLE (LOREN VO)

*To the beginning.*

LOREN

The beginning?

BARNACLE (LOREN VO)

*The beginning.*

LOREN

And what are we going to find in your GODDAM BEGINNING?? I stop. And then suddenly I realised that his answer might be death. Death was awaiting us in the beginning.

I look at the people. I’m searching for signs of resistance in their eyes, but they drift past me. As if I am invisible.

Day four. Day five. The older people are limping. Women break off branches, grabbing fruit to feed their children who loll vacant eyed over their parents’ shoulders.

This is madness. We drink water incessantly.

I’m going to take leave of Barnacle and his people. I’ll follow them to the next navigable body of water, use a log as a raft. I’ll take my chances. I’ll take my chances.

Days pass. And then, I recognise a human scent, smoke or cooked meat or decomposition. What is it?

Oh my god, a village! A settlement! Maybe they have a plane, or a boat, or a radio!

And suddenly a crowd of tribespeople storms through the trees. Mayoruna – but less gaunt, less emaciated. They rush to surround the newcomers, the children, touching, jumping, the adults smiling and exchanging loud greetings. Barnacle disappears in a circle of women and youngsters – his family. I see Tuti throwing himself on the old man, hugging him. Barnacle swings the boy up onto his shoulders. Why had I never guessed he was Barnacle’s son?

And suddenly we’re eating.

Gobbling, gorging. I feel drunk with food, drunk with momentary survival.

And then – amongst these new people, I see a man, a shaman with a conical hat, looking at me. He’s wearing shorts. A pair of tattered shorts. He’s wearing shorts. I hold my breath. I step closer to him and I say:

Olá. Meu nome é Loren. Fala Português?

I turn away in bitter disappointment. I’m walking away, when over my shoulder, I hear…

He’s speaking to me in Portuguese. He says ‘Welcome, Loren.’ And then again immediately ‘Cambio’. Cambio means ‘over’, in radio parlance. He just greeted me with ‘Welcome, Loren, over.’ I’m about to hug him. I have so many things to say. Listen, I don’t know how long I’ve been with these people… I’ve lost count of days… I had a watch but… I’m waiting for a plane… There’s too much. Just ask something simple.

Is this your village? Está é sua aldeia?

‘Yes, my village, over.’

So these people are relatives of yours? Então essas pessoas são sua família?

‘Yes, my people, over.’

So how come you speak Portguese? Como que você fala Português?

‘Seis anos atrás, homens armandos…’

‘Six years ago, gunmen came. They attacked us, but I got away. I found a place of safety in a mission. I got work for the radio operator and I learned, over.’

What’s your name?

Qual é o seu nome?

‘They call me Over. Over.’

[Interpretation Statement]

‘The Encounter’ demands little re-contextualisation, as the setting and language of sound are integral.

As a director, I applied devisor Simon McBurney’s belief that “we only see things that we want to see”. Thus, I used a sparse, non-naturalistic set to ensure the audience projected their own individual interpretations onto the performance.

I used plastic water bottles to symbolise our will to control the environment. They represented our materialistic and destructive worldview, which I supported by turning water red, signifying blood and violent intrusion.

The lone black post is evocative of both a tree and the London apartment, juxtaposing the sprawling density of the rainforest with the structure of the built world. This sparsity thus emphasised the sound design.

I chose to incorporate a soundtrack and live voice-modulation as McBurney believes that “the physical aspect of listening means you experience directly”. This established an intimate actor-audience relationship.

I composed original pieces for marimba which referenced tribal images, suggesting a time and place to provide an accessible link for the audience.

As an actor, I used ProTools and cardio-directional microphones to experiment with my voice to convey the idea of ‘beaming’.

As a sound designer, I modified recordings of the built world to create a soundscape evocative of a rainforest, such as the busy city street that became the buzz of insects and birds. This alluded to the theme of reality vs fiction, which I supported with my application of metatheatre.

The display of technology highlighted the process of performance making, augmenting the world of the play to underline its implications. I reinforced this didactic experience by modulating my focus from fatigued or within my mind to direct eye contact.

Thus, using Epic conventions, I provoked the audience to consider the intended meaning of change. This is the story of one man’s assumptions about life being challenged.

As such, I deliberately distorted the audience’s sense to question the gap between reality and fiction, challenging their understanding of the real world.