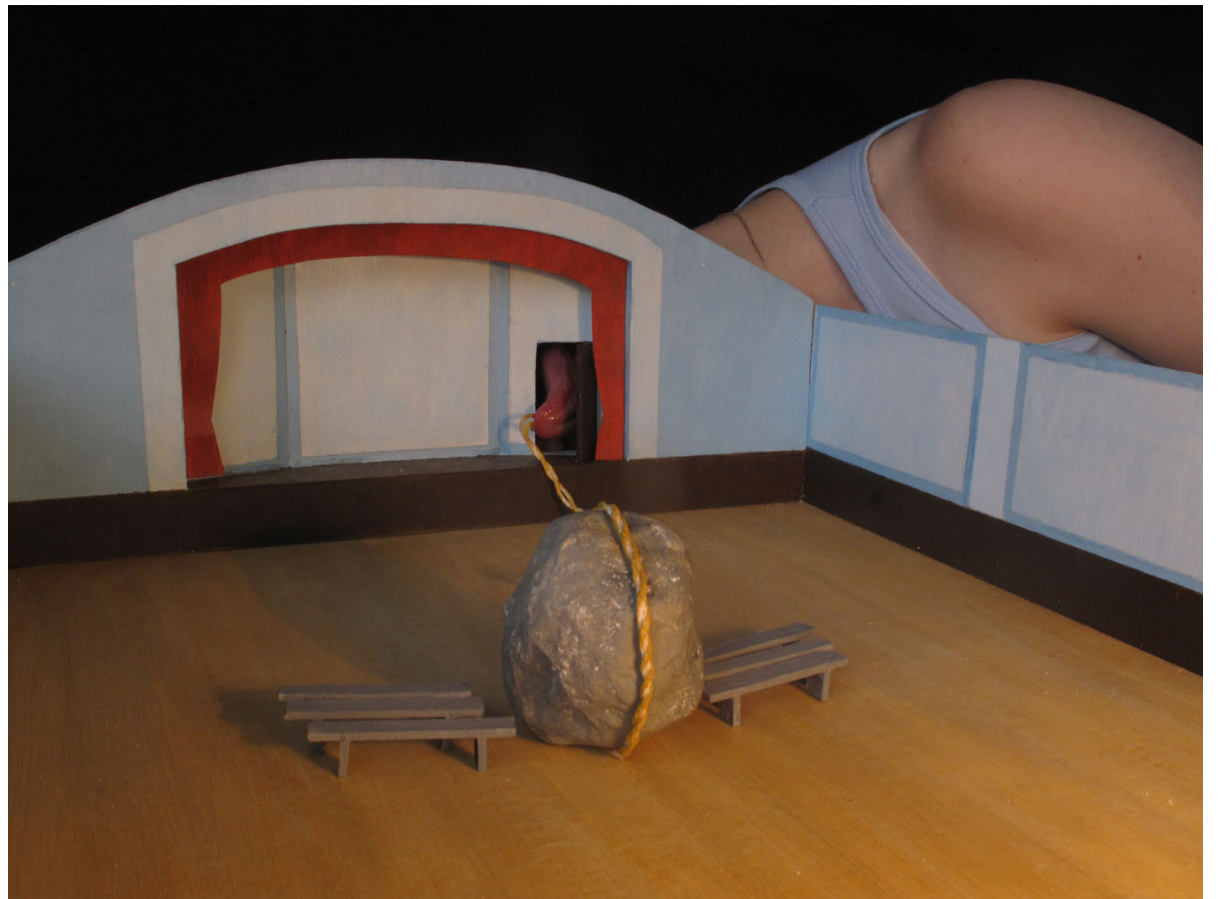


## ***The Ineluctable Weight of Living\****

A fictional text informed by preliminary conversations with Shelly Nadashi regarding her performance and exhibition for New Work Scotland Programme 2010



Shelly Nadashi, Model of the Thomas Morton Hall, Edinburgh for her forthcoming performance, 50 x 40 cms, 2010

You are asked to wear a headset by the usherette at the entrance and so you do. It's uncomfortable, but once in place you hear a series of instructions. It is the voice of a young woman, calm and poised, with little modulation. It echoes:

*Enter the auditorium and find your seat. B12. The lights are still up so find a restful position, perhaps sitting back into the chair? Let your eyes turn vacantly towards the high plaster moldings of the ceiling.*

*Now turn to look left.*

*There is a vacant seat beside you. B13.*

*Look right.*

*You are at the end of the row. You catch sight of a great boulder sitting oddly, in front of the stage, on the floor of the auditorium, lifeless. The orderly rows, including your own, now broken, awkwardly surround it. You imagine its overpowering heaviness.*

*Place your damp coat on the back of the empty seat. It has been raining outside.*

*Turn to look ahead.*

*The sky blue decor seamlessly travels from the ceiling and the walls to envelop the stage. With the curtains drawn open, the stage lies empty, the heavy prop expelled.*

*[click] [jump] You can hear the edit of the instructions, it breaks and starts, the voice warps; parts of the tape are scratched.*

*You can hear what you now read being typed.*

*You hear someone speaks, but the words come from another, and as someone now walks onstage, the sounds of their footsteps are traced by another. [tap] [tap] the amplified hollow sound of an old leather hatbox being drummed at the back of the room.*

*The rock speaks but its voice comes from the figure who is now onstage. Eyes fix on the rock. Sit forward. Bend your knees: they awkwardly press against the chair in front. You watch and listen as the figure and the rock present simultaneously. They are two and yet you hear them as one. Questioning yourself you ask; is your double not the subject you find in the mirror?*

Rock: "I've been struggling to sleep again."

*For a while now you have been afflicted with the same fate. Remember how thoughts running wild in your mind have kept you awake, night after night? You have kept this to yourself as no one wants to hear of your problems, they have enough of their own.*

*The lights now dim as the rock continues to speak. Its voice faltering, its tone unsure.*

Rock: "I have been struggling into existence for some time. It's all rapidly becoming too much, all of this holding on the difference."

*Now, look at your coat hanging on the back of the chair. Wet, it holds the shape of your tired body. A still object with no complaint of the dampness you feel in your bones, not at all eased by the stiffness of the aged chair. It does not say, "I am tired and cold, I want to go home."*

*It exists, you can see it, yet it is not aware of this. Imagine what it would be like if you couldn't say anything, absolutely nothing. And now wonder; what's the use of existing if you aren't aware of your own existence?*

*Perhaps there is a way. Since you can say "I", say it for the coat. Look at the coat, still nothing but it – useless. The coat is still there, indifferent, and you remain you.*

*As the coat lies still, the rock continues. It speaks of life's dramatic moments. You wonder, is it unrest that makes it able to say "I"? Maybe yes, maybe no, maybe not at all.*

Rock: "I'm afraid I can't say anything different. Having been disturbed by all that has been going on around me I find myself full of dread. I have been watching you. I have been watching myself too. It seems to me that I ought to be happy but I am not."

*The rock bellows a great sigh. Becoming frantic with malcontent, it trembles back and forth, churning the worn red carpet underneath into ripples of aged skin. All its loneliness. Its melodrama. It's yours.*

*Ask the rock if it is ill.*

*It doesn't answer you, it's not watching you. Its eyes are full with tears.*

Rock: "The story I have lived, I want to tell you. Happy or sad. I am not the sort of person who likes to attract attention, but I want to make sense of it."

*The figure on stage has gone but the rock still speaks, rambling on for its own pleasure. What mastery of transformation! Denying all resistance you now feel completely compelled by the rock's quest; you see his tears dry and a faint smile light up his face. With the figure absent, the rock is liberated. Delivered now, offspring of the stage, he speaks freely, piecing together his personal memories.*

*You are the audience, you are a living object, you are the figure on stage, and you are part of his ceremony. His narrative is not resolved by endings – your participation and speculation is needed, incomplete without the act of reception.*

*After he stops talking, he begins to lose his characteristics one by one. Now slipping out of existence you realise he has died. You stand, pick up your coat and leave.*

\* Italo Calvino, Six Memos for the Next Millennium, 1988

At The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures, 1985-86, Italo Calvino spoke of Milan Kundera's 1984 novel 'The Unbearable Lightness of Being' as 'in reality a better confirmation of the Ineluctable Weight of Living'. He proposed that everything we choose and value in life for its lightness soon reveals its true, unbearable weight. He further claimed that everything can be transformed into something else, and knowledge of the world means dissolving the solidity of the world; that a single common substance, if stirred by profound emotion, may be changed into what most differs from it.