



STATE THEATRE
COMPANY SOUTH AUSTRALIA

21 AUG — 5 SEP
DUNSTAN PLAYHOUSE



COMMENTARY

By Ash Flanders

STUDY GUIDE

Ngadlu tampinhi Kurna
miyurna yaitya yarta-mathanya
Wama Tarntanyaku.
Parnaku yaitya, parnaku tapa
purruna, parnaku yarta ngadlu
tampinhi. Yalaka Kurna Miyurna
itu yaitya, tapa purruna, yarta kuma
puru martinhi, puru warri-apinhi,
puru tangka martulayinhi. Ngadlu
tampinhi purkarna pukinangku,
yalaka, tarrkarritya.

We acknowledge the Kurna
people as the traditional custodians
of the Adelaide Plains.

We recognise and respect their
cultural heritage, beliefs and
relationship with the land.

We acknowledge that they are
of continuing importance to the
Kurna people living today and
pay respects to Elders past,
present and future.

COMMENTARY

By Ash Flanders

SYNOPSIS

Ash Flanders' **Commentary** is a sharp, provocative play that interrogates the ethics of artmaking, accountability, and memory in an era of public reckoning. The story centres on Nick, played by Gyton Grantley (*Underbelly*, *House Husbands*), a once-promising filmmaker turned university lecturer, whose controversial debut feature *Low* is being resurrected for a retrospective screening at the local International Film Festival. The film, co-created with his former best friend Hamish (now disgraced and presumed dead), is dogged by allegations of abuse and exploitation linked to its production and content.

As Nick prepares a director's commentary and public appearance, the past begins to resurface through a chorus of women — his student and lover Gen, his wife Mish, former muse Saskia, and a teenage girl named Frankie. Frankie's re-emergence catalyses a chain of revelations, betrayals, and reckonings that culminate in Nick's fall from professional and personal grace. The play's narrative cleverly mirrors the fragmented form of a DVD commentary track — non-linear, reflexive, full of contradiction, omission, and performance.

SPACE THEATRE
21 August - 5 September 2026

SCHOOL PERFORMANCES
27 August 11am

RUNNING TIME
Approximately 90 minutes no interval

Ages 16+, Year 11 – 12

Contains adult themes. Contains frequent coarse language, issues of consent, violent and sexual references, with sexual language and implied sexual action.

Please see the 'What to Expect' notes for more detail on content.

Resource created by Fiona Lukac for State Educate ©.

EXPLORE

Look out for these icons to learn more.



Activity



Reading



Video

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Petra Kalive and Ash Flanders Photo: Matt Byrne

CAST & CREATIVE TEAM

Writer
Designer
Set & Costume Designer
Composer/Sound & Video Designer
Lighting Designer & Projection Consultant
Content Creator
Assistant Director

Ash Flanders
Petra Kalive
Matilda Woodroofe
Dan Thorpe
Nic Mollison
Matt Byrne
Valerie Berry

Nick
Anna/Mish
Saskia/Clea
Genevieve/Frankie

Gyton Grantley
Anna Steen
Kate Cheel
Shardae Santos

Set made by State Theatre Company South Australia Workshop.
Costumes made by State Theatre Company South Australia Wardrobe.

MEET THE WRITER

ASH FLANDERS

QUESTIONS ASKED INCLUDE

What was your inspiration to write this play?

Where did the character of Nick come from and why is it important for audiences to see nuanced characters?

How do you create strong women when the play revolves around Nick?

Can you talk to wthe podcast element? Why did you include this?

What do you hope younger audiences take away from the play?



WATCH THIS



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oeHeB1cvohA>



WRITERS NOTE

Whenever I'm asked to describe this play, the first word out of my mouth is 'vicious.' This isn't because I don't love these characters and hope you'll find them familiar and loveable and heartbreaking and funny – it's just simply the meanest thing I've written to date. I'll hear certain lines and think, "What sort of vicious person wrote that?"

Commentary is a thorny work that poses difficult, pertinent, unanswerable questions about culpability, complicity and power structures in the arts. In fact, the questions are so pointed that another theatre company explicitly said they were "too scared to ask those sorts of things here." They sprung from the specific times we're living in right now, a time where we expect artists to be morally righteous and spotlessly ethical. Things we never expect of – oh, I don't know – political leaders, corporations, or even family members.

This is because artists define us. Through some magic they know who we are before we do. Great artists reach us, touching parts we keep hidden, parts unknown, making us feel understood and less alone. We identify with them, atomising ourselves into fandoms, tribes that represent things and values far beyond them. If someone says they're a fan of Beyonce or Bertolucci or Bill Henson it comes with a host of other associations.

But the truth is, whether that person loves the art or not, they'd likely think twice before mentioning those last two in public. It may have nothing to do with the actual art – but it has everything to do with being in public.

So much of our lives are public now. With the rise of social media, we're keenly aware that the 'self' is a social construct – a thing we perform. Sure, you might never use the term 'personal brand' (does anyone really?) but you definitely only share a version of yourself fit for public consumption. It may be funny, it may be attractive, political, empathic or chaotic – but it's a version that stands for the right things.

Commentary presents you with characters navigating the modern conundrum of how to align these perfected selves in a far from perfect real world. How do they combine these disparate images – who they think they are, who they want to be, who others see them as – into something cohesive?

And where to put the other stuff? The parts that don't easily align or fit an agreed upon narrative. Where do we hide our monstrous selves? Because if they're discovered, what will people think?

In that way, this is not a play about artists at all. It's a play about you. The audience. An audience suddenly aware that people are watching you watching. That now you're just as culpable, your brother's keeper. So who's really on display? Who is holding the camera?

Suddenly we're all the woman in the window. In one way we're staring at our own reflection, making sure we still recognise the face staring back at us. But we're also looking out for the bigger threat – you – those faces we imagine in the dark, judging us.

And we have to be on our guard, because if I know one thing, it's this:

Audiences can be vicious.

SCRIPT EXCERPT

NICK VOICEOVER: testing, testing, 1 2 3

God.

My students call this “screaming into the void”. It used to be only crazy people did that – now it’s all we do. Talk to imaginary friends in the dark.

The image is clear now – a young woman inside her bedroom, brushing her hair. At some point another figure enters the stage in front of the glass, wearing headphones. Perhaps they sweep the stage, or they’re putting on safety gear.

I’m Nicholas Atkinson. Hello. You can call me Nick, not that I’ll hear you. You could also call me a film-maker but the truth is I haven’t held a camera in over fifteen years. And the reason I’m talking to you – to myself, really – can all be traced back to a meeting.

The young woman turns and the camera ducks down out of her gaze.

Clea was a programmer at AFF. That’s the Adelaide Film Festival. A bit like Cannes, but more like Can’t. It’s the type of festival that has a ‘Go South’ program all about homegrown talent – most of which never gets out.

And that’s exactly what she was offering me. It’s the reason you’re listening to this.

They wanted to finally screen ‘Low’.

The camera slowly rises to view her again, slowly zooming in on her. By the end of the monologue the image is pixelated and low quality. We’re far too close.

It had never occurred to me that an offer like this could come. And if you’d asked me how the scene would go I’d have sworn black and blue I’d turn it down. Why show it when no one could ever see it clearly now? What would be the point?

But twenty years. It’s a long time to hate the one thing you’re proud of.

Clea wanted me to do panels but I turned her down. Because, if you still haven’t got the idea, I don’t want to hear from you. The movie does the talking. I just want to sit in the dark. So she whittled me down to something more controllable – a director’s commentary. A way to ‘focus the conversation’ as she put it. And then she shook my hand and said the contract would be emailed immediately.

We agreed we’d keep his name out of it.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE FROM PETRA KALIVE

We all know men like Nick Atkinson. Perhaps we've loved one. Perhaps we've been one. Charismatic, handsome, brilliantly opinionated and deliciously arrogant in a way that reads as conviction rather than hubris. Men who command a room with the effortless gravity of someone who believes, or needs you to believe, that they have something worth saying. They are messy and vulnerable and impossible not to want to help. It's not their fault. Well, not according to them. They've been dealt unfair hands. Life has conspired against them. And underneath it all, that conspiracy has calcified into anger, into a desperate clinging to a narrative in which they are the protagonist – wounded, misunderstood, ultimately righteous.

Ash Flanders gives us one such man, and then, with surgical precision, dismantles the escape routes Nick builds for himself.

Commentary is a play about the stories we construct to survive ourselves. Nick Atkinson, filmmaker turned university lecturer, is offered a retrospective screening of *Low*, the only film he ever made that mattered, a film buried for 20 years after his collaborator, Hamish, was found photographing a teenage girl through her bedroom window. Nick has spent two decades crafting his version of events: he was the responsible one, the talented one, the victim of someone else's pathology. The festival offers him a director's commentary, a literal framing device through which he can control the narrative, and he accepts, believing he can finally tell his story on his terms.

What unfolds is the slow erosion of that belief.

The genius of Flanders' construction lies in its formal architecture. The play is, itself, a commentary track, Nick's voiceover threading through every scene, shaping our perception, guiding our sympathies. We are positioned as his audience, his imaginary friends in the dark. And like any commentary track, it promises to take you into its confidence, to reveal hidden truths to you and take you behind the curtain. But what it actually offers is more narrative, another way for the storyteller to control your experience.

Throughout *Commentary*, the visuals intrude and destabilise Nick's narrative. Each one is a rupture, insisting on a reality that his commentary cannot contain.

But Nick is not a villain. He is something more unsettling: a man of genuine feeling and genuine mediocrity, haunted by the knowledge of his own limitation. There is a Salieri quality to him, and Flanders knows it. Nick can recognise genius. He partnered with it, nurtured it, resented it, and ultimately destroyed it. Hamish

had something Nick could never possess: an instinctive, raw, self-destructive authenticity that was artistically brilliant. Nick had competence. Nick had drive. But the thing that made *Low* extraordinary was never Nick's alone and he knows it – has always known it – and that knowledge poisons every relationship, every creative impulse, every attempt at reinvention.

This is the engine of the play: the inescapability of a truth you cannot afford to acknowledge. Nick cannot admit that he was only ever half of something good. And so, he spins. He re-frames. He finds new mediums, the commentary, the interview, the podcast, the rebranded script, and tells the story again, differently, always with himself at the centre, always in control.

Except he is not in control. He never was. And the play's most piercing insight may be that no one is. Memory is unstable. Time distorts. The people who lived through an event carry mutually incompatible versions of it, and each version feels, to its holder, like truth. Commentary is not interested in solutions. It is interested in the gravitational pull that narrative exerts on fact, and in the way fear and shame warp memory.

But, the final scene, set many months later, is the play's cruellest stroke. Nick has not fallen. He has adapted. This is what makes *Commentary* essential, contemporary and so very uncomfortable: it refuses the catharsis of comeuppance. Nick is not punished in any satisfying way. He is, instead, pleasantly repositioned by the machinery of contemporary media.

What remains is the commentary. The story told over the silence, the voice imposed on the void. And the void, as Nick himself observes, is where we all scream now.

It's a leap of faith to hand your work to a director, so big thanks to Ash for trusting me. I have been so lucky to work with actors up to the challenge of enormous subtlety and moral complexity – they have been extraordinary and so funny. And the team at State Theatre Company South Australia have gone above and beyond yet again to realise this piece.

I now ask of you, the audience, a willingness to sit with discomfort, to resist the easy verdict, to interrogate your own appetite for the very commentary the play implicates. It demands, in short, that we watch. Not be told what to think. And then decide what we've seen.

Petra Kalive

SCRIPT EXCERPT

NICK: Frankie, that's – wait, is this why you wanted to meet me? To blame me for his death? Because it's got nothing to do with me. He was f***ed up long before I met him.

FRANKIE: That's not why I'm here.

NICK: So what is it?

FRANKIE: Well, he's dead. I want you to quit the festival.

NICK: It's too late.

FRANKIE: That film ruined my Dad's life.

NICK: It ruined both our lives.

FRANKIE: But you're still here!

I've heard about you my whole life. You knew a version of my Dad I never got to meet. One who could actually do things. I got the version that killed himself cos you said he was a predator.

NICK: Frankie, I never said that.

FRANKIE: So what did you say?

NICK: Nothing. I never wanted it to be about him.

FRANKIE: So how come it always is?

NICK: Because he makes it about him. Like he did that night – and every night since by the sounds of it.

Frankie, I'm very sorry but your Dad is the reason the one good thing I made never got to see the light of day. The one good thing. He took that from me. Just like he took from you and your mother. That's who he is. It's what addicts do. They take. Everything except blame.

And tell me, did he ever – even once – say sorry? Did he?

I didn't think so.

Frankie pulls out a folder of documents and places it on the table.

What's this?

FRANKIE: Police records, statements, everything they would've needed if he'd actually been given a trial. If you and your Dad hadn't forced him to settle. If you ever wondered what he was doing for the last two decades it was this.

NICK: What am I supposed to do with this?

FRANKIE: Just read it.

NICK: Why?

FRANKIE: So you can say what really happened.

NICK: I've told you, I'm not talking about him.

FRANKIE: You already are. That's all anyone is going to talk about. So make it right.

THE CAST Q&A



WATCH THIS

Gyton Grantley



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vAc_Vaa53E

Shardae Santos



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8eKA27c4Qno>

QUESTIONS FOR THE CAST INCLUDE:

Tell us about your character?

How do you go about portraying the nuances of your character? What are the motivations of the characters?

What are the relationships the characters have with Nick?

What is it like working with intimacy choreographers and why is it important?

What should audiences take away from the show?

Do you think Nick accepts responsibility?

What are the characters doing now?

Kate Cheel



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zflHWUmO5HI>

Anna Steen



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-wbl8rSR5YE>



SCRIPT EXCERPT

GEN: To build a career. It's not like the old days, I can't just make a movie with my friend and hope for the best.

NICK: I wouldn't recommend that either. It doesn't go well.

GEN: Still gets you screened decades later.

NICK: If I say yes.

GEN: Must be nice to have that power. That it's always up to you.

NICK: Don't start this. You always pick a fight before I leave.

GEN: Sorry, but honouring a film about paedophilia made by a paedophile – half-made by a paedophile – kinda seems like a shitty idea.

NICK: Wait, why is it a film about paedophilia?

GEN: Saskia's underage in the movie.

NICK: Yeah, but she's not touched or – Wait, have you seen it?

GEN: Everyone in class has.

NICK: Really? Why?

GEN: Maybe because you talk about it constantly.

NICK: I do not.

GEN: You have to be joking.

NICK: Maybe as a warning to choose your collaborators carefully.

GEN: Or why films are terrible now, why we're all weak and afraid to say anything, why film is dying, why audiences have too much power. It's your example for everything, of course we want to see it.

NICK: Does everyone think it's paedophilic?

GEN: The girls definitely do.

NICK: But he never touches her.

GEN: He just stalks her.

NICK: After she humiliates him. Which she gets away with because she's rich. It's about class. It's about obsession.

GEN: Yeah, a grown man obsessed with a teenage girl.

NICK: He's playing a seventeen year old.

GEN: Hamish never looks seventeen.

NICK: We tell you he's seventeen. We made that explicit.

GEN: But we have eyes. No seventeen year old looks like Hamish did then.

NICK: He looked like a gangly kid.

GEN: Saskia looked like a kid. He looked like what he was. A junkie in his twenties. Mid twenties.

NICK: Twenty three.

GEN: Yeah, mid-twenties. Almost ten years difference.

NICK: There's more of an age gap between us.

GEN: I'm not underage. You ever ask if she felt safe?

NICK: We didn't talk like that then. We did this weird thing where we made a movie instead.

CHARACTERS/ROLES

NICK

Nick is a filmmaker turned university lecturer. He is in his mid 40's, married to Mish.

His controversial debut feature, *Low*, is being resurrected for a retrospective screening at the Adelaide Film Festival. *Low* was co-created with his former best friend Hamish, who is now disgraced and presumed dead. The film remains dogged by allegations of abuse and exploitation. He agrees to a directors commentary.

He hasn't made a film in 20 years but is still proud of this one success. Nick is hesitant to do the panels, after all - the film should speak for itself. A searing comment on class. As new information emerges, his certainty is increasingly challenged. Rather than reflecting critically on his own role, Nick becomes more defensive and inward-looking, revealing a man whose sense of self is deeply entwined with his past success and the story he has told himself about it. Nick embodies a contemporary figure whose assumptions, privilege and understanding of accountability are placed under intense pressure. His journey explores the complexities of responsibility, complicity, memory and reputation, asking whether it is possible to separate an artist from their work—or an individual from the culture that enabled them.

MISH

Designer, TV Production, married to Nick, in her late 30's. Works on a successful series where she is on set for lengthy periods of time. She is professional, successful and independent in her career. She loves Nick, they both work in the same industry, she likes the film he made, *Low*, and she believes in his talent. As the film opening gets nearer she tries reaching out to Nick to keep him even, she can see his changing state and as Nick spirals she tries to help him but finds he pushes her away.

ANNA WHITEHEAD

Anna is a journalist. She is a professional interested in the truth. Trained in journalism and investigative questioning she is now reporting for the social pages. Contending with having to write headlines that gather 'clicks' She interviews Nick and discovers that behind the 'showbiz' interview, there is a deeper, real story, there is a truth that she wants to seek out. She is a pragmatist that recognises that journalism is no longer what it was. That social media and 'comments' become the content. It is this that she is grappling with while she interviews Nick, trying to find 'the story.'

GENEVIEVE

Genevieve is a young student, in her 20's. She is studying film, and also in a relationship with her university lecturer, Nick. She is self assured, confident and is not powerless within the relationship. She lives independently, has her own place, and is from a similar class to Nick. She is politically aware and engaged with contemporary social issues, challenging Nick about the controversies surrounding his one notable film success. At the same time she admires Nick as a film maker, finds a certain charm about him and is intrigued by the tension that exists in the relationship. There is a mutual benefit to the relationship as she seeks a letter of recommendation for an internship at an American production company.

SASKIA

Saskia is an actor now living in America. She got her big break as a fourteen year old in Nick's film, *Low*. Nick 'discovered' her. She currently appears in tv detective series that provide her with employment but she wants more. We feel that Saskia is very aware of the world she is living in, the pressure to maintain a certain physical appearance and to continually be looking for work. She is interested in reconnecting with Nick after hearing that he is to do a 'Directors Commentary' on the screening of *Low*.

FRANKIE

Frankie is Hamish's fourteen year old daughter. She arranges to meet with Nick, to find out what he knows about Hamish. She is young, vulnerable, still at high school and wants to do right by her father, Hamish.

CLEA

Clea is a young programmer working at the Adelaide Film Festival. She has programmed *Low*, a film that she admired once long ago, she had the promotional image/poster up on her wall. She also had a romantic connection with Nick, as a young film student. As an up and coming programmer she makes the decision to distance herself from Nick as the controversy around the screening escalates.

HAMISH

Hamish is Nick's co creator. The writer, actor and the one who has the talent. He disappears after Berlin, and goes off the rails, an addict, a mess. Confused but also gifted. Hamish needed the financial support and connections that Nick had. He takes no responsibility for the actions he took in Berlin, and disappears for twenty years.

SCRIPT EXCERPT

GEN: In a pub? Classy.
Relax.

Gen puts her hand on Nick's leg moving it toward Nick's crotch. He pulls back, startled.

NICK: Don't –

GEN: What?

NICK: Don't get sloppy.

GEN: You're the one who stayed over. You're the one who asked me to wait with you. I'm skipping a lecture for this shit.

NICK: I know, I'm –

GEN: I'm not the one getting sloppy.

NICK: I know. I'm sorry.

GEN: Don't ever say that shit to me. Ok? I'm not some dumb girl you f**k.

Script Analysis

Character Analysis - The relationship

We can see in the above excerpt a shift in power and status. The dialogue reveals the imbalance in Nick and Gen's relationship. Although Nick initially appears to hold the power as the older university lecturer, Gen quickly challenges this dynamic. Her direct language and refusal to accept Nick's apology demonstrate her confidence and self-awareness. Her statement that she is not "some dumb girl," tells us, and Nick that she is rejecting his patronising tone. Gen absolutely believes she is to be treated as an equal.

Nick's responses are brief, hesitant and defensive. His apologies suggest that he is uncomfortable, knowing that he has crossed ethical boundaries.

Status and Power

The scene also demonstrates a shift in the status of the relationship. Initially, we see Nick trying to establish boundaries by telling Gen not to "get sloppy," implying authority and control. However, Gen immediately overturns this by reminding him that he chose to stay with her and asked for her support. Her dialogue exposes the hypocrisy of Nick's behaviour, forcing him into a lower-status position.

WHAT NEXT?

What does Genevieve get out of the relationship with Nick? What else does this excerpt tell us about the relationship?

What is Frankie's motivation?

What do other characters say about Nick?
Is this how Nick sees himself?

What would your commentary be?

Is Saskia motivated to help Nick? Why would she be?

SCRIPT EXCERPT

FRANKIE: Hi.

NICK: Why? Why did you do it?

FRANKIE: I'm sorry.

NICK: Why lie to me?

FRANKIE: We didn't think anyone would –

NICK: Find out?

FRANKIE: They'd never found him before.

NICK: No one was looking for him before!

FRANKIE: He's under a different name.

NICK: You know that all those records, even changing your name, are public, don't you? You can't just pick a new name and start again, he's not in witness protection.

Five years. Drug possession, theft, possession of a prohibited weapon.

FRANKIE: It's not what it –

NICK: Don't. Don't even bother. I should've known. It's never what it looks like with him. How could you have me go out there and say he was innocent?

FRANKIE: He was innocent of that. They knew each other.

NICK: You think any of that matters now? What happened twenty years ago? You had me defend him in the press and burned my life to the ground.

Why? That's all I want to know. Why did you do it?

....

NICK: Because you're actually who people thought I was. He was the genius and I was just... taking orders. Never mind that he was an addict, a mess, that he could hardly keep his eyes open during the shoot.

He just had that thing. He looked like a tortured artist and had a sob story to boot. I'm sure it was how he got his scholarship to begin with. He wouldn't have even written Low if I hadn't forced it out of him. That was Hamish's gift. People always wanted to help him.

And me...

I looked like what I was – a rich kid who got things done. I saw how people looked at us. Even in Berlin. Strangers. I was the wallet. He was the talent. We never talked about it but he knew it. And when everything went to shit I thought I'd finally get to prove myself. Prove them wrong.

But I didn't have it on my own, only with him. I wanted it just as bad – more even, much much more than him – but I didn't have it. He had the key to whatever was good in me.

Maybe I had his key too, I dunno.

I don't think so.



Set Design by Matilda Woodroffe.



SCRIPT EXCERPT

SASKIA: Nick, is that you? Sorry, they set this all up and I'm a mess. Hold on, let me get my glasses! There you are. My god, look at you! You haven't changed at all.

NICK: You might need better glasses.

SASKIA: Oh, f**k off.

NICK: Wow, that accent's even rougher than I remember.

SASKIA: It only gets used when I call home. Sorry. It'll settle down soon.

NICK: How are you?

SASKIA: F***ing exhausted.

NICK: Is this not a good time? I can / do another –

SASKIA: No, it's fine. They've got us doing night shoots all week and it's our first time with this director and the chick has no idea how to light me. No one's face holds up well at 2am in HD.

NICK: You look fantastic.

SASKIA: Between her and the f***ing intimacy co-ordinator I've just about had it.

NICK: A sex scene?

SASKIA: Believe it or not, I still get them, Nick. But this is just for a kiss.

NICK: Lucky guy.

SASKIA: Girl, actually. My character's undercover and – you know what, who cares? It's just something the network cooked up to get the fans jerking off again



DESIGN ELEMENTS

MATILDA WOODROOFE SET & COSTUME DESIGNER

Commentary: is a play about Nick, film maker turned university lecturer and director of *Low*, an award winning film from twenty years ago.

The play inhabits a space where theatre, film and podcast converge. It becomes a performance arena in which Nick simultaneously narrates, defends and is forced to confront his own version of events. The design weaves projected footage from twenty years earlier, live video feeds and Zoom conversations, allowing past and present to exist side by side.

This layering of media mirrors one of the play's central themes with perspective and interpretation. As Nick provides a commentary on his film, the production invites the audience to comment on Nick's commentary,

continually questioning who controls the narrative and whose version of events can be trusted.

Although as an audience we are immersed in Nick's world as it gradually unravels, the staging ultimately places the women in positions of control. They shape the theatrical language of the production and become the final arbiters of the story, challenging Nick's authority as narrator and reclaiming the commentary from the man who has spent decades trying to define it.

The design draws inspiration from both podcast studios and film sets, creating a simple but flexible performance space that accommodates the play's various locations—from Gen's apartment and the pub to the Palace Nova and online Zoom conversations. A key reveal is that Nick has been recording throughout the play, so it was





essential that the set needed to function simultaneously as a recording studio and a theatrical world in which memory, performance and reality coexist.

A central question underpinning the design is: What is truth, and what is a constructed version of truth? As Nick continually reframes the past, the production explores how film, media and storytelling can manipulate our perception of reality.

This concept is realised through a highly stylised design incorporating sheer curtains, platforms, live video feeds, projections and screens. The opening scene unfolds behind translucent curtains, creating the sense that the audience is witnessing something private or hidden. Throughout the production, live camera feeds represent the present, while projected film footage evokes the past—images that Nick insists “speak for themselves,” even as their meaning is increasingly questioned.

The playing space is framed by a suspended light box and sheer drapery reminiscent of a film studio. Within this frame, a single space transforms into a bedroom, recording studio and other intimate locations, introducing moments of domesticity into an otherwise sterile, masculine environment.

Furniture and props are deliberately minimal at the outset. As Nick’s carefully constructed narrative begins to unravel, the stage gradually becomes more fragmented and chaotic, visually reflecting his deteriorating sense of control. The performance space itself expands beyond its original frame, bringing the action closer to the audience and heightening the growing sense of unease.

The climactic glass smash marks the moment where psychological tension becomes physical. Designed using carefully engineered Perspex, the effect delivers the immediacy and realism of a film stunt while remaining safely theatrical. It serves as a visceral culmination of the production’s visual language, reinforcing the collapse of Nick’s authority and the shifting power towards the women who ultimately reclaim the narrative.

SET DESIGN and STAGE MANAGEMENT



WHAT NEXT?

Present your own design concept using one production element, ie lighting, multimedia, sound, costume or set? What might this look like as film?

QUESTIONS ASKED INCLUDE:

What is your first step in creating a design?

Can you tell me some of the challenges in this play?

Talk through the processes involved in realising elements of the play that involve risk, ie broken glass.

How does a Stage Manager ensure the safety of everyone on set?

What do we take away from the multi media elements? What is the writer saying with each element?

Discuss the dangerous elements in the production. How might you address these?



WATCH



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMfB0uKCvmg>



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K02R0f71Jmk>



COMMENTARY

COMMENTARY



GEN



GEN

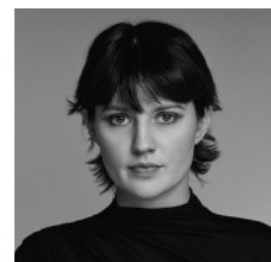


GEN/ FRANKIE
Shardae Santos

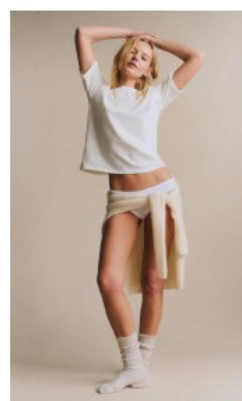
Gen, early 20's, ambitious film student and Nick's lover

Costume:

- Oversized t-shirt
- Show bra
- Show underwear
- Sheer black stockings
- Knee high boots
- Black denim mini skirt
- Black off shoulder top



GEN/ FRANKIE
Shardae Santos



A photograph of Petra Kalive, a woman with short reddish-brown hair and glasses, wearing a black V-neck top and black trousers. She is sitting in a black office chair, smiling at the camera with her hands clasped in her lap. In the background, two other people are seated at tables in a rehearsal space. A black audio mixer is visible on a stand to the left.

AN INTERVIEW WITH PETRA KALIVE

Petra Kalive. Photo Matt Byrne

WATCH THIS



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rxAP7A8Y1rE>

QUESTIONS ASKED INCLUDE

What drew you to this play?

What was your directorial vision for the play?

Can you talk about the importance of an intimacy coordinator and stunt choreography?

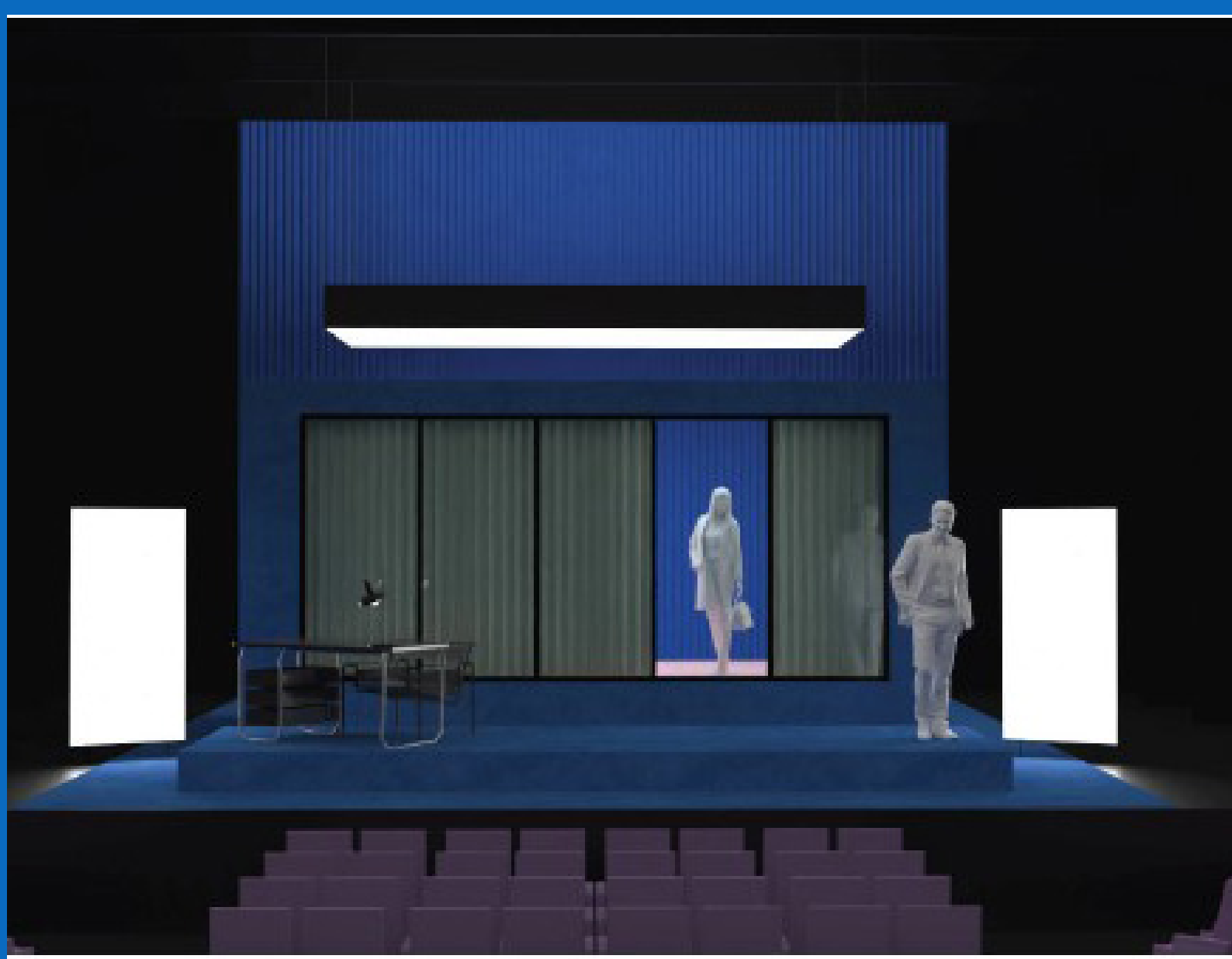
What do you hope younger audiences take away from the play?

DRAMATIC STYLES FOR COMMENTARY

Commentary is a contemporary play built on lies, yet ultimately a work in which we are playing for truth. Its language, themes, characterisation, and dramatic action are centred on the Theatre of Realism, framed by Brechtian techniques. The aim is to invite the audience to suspend disbelief in one breath and remind them they are watching a constructed performance in the next. The layers of staging, live feed, screens and images remind us of this.

In terms of performance style, **Commentary** operates within realism or naturalism. We have naturalistic dialogue and realistic settings, however, we also work performatively with screens, which demands a different acting approach (more traditionally naturalistic) and recorded voiceovers. Each of these elements carries its own distinct dramatic impact and stylistic register.

From a style and form perspective, the play is ultimately a tragedy, yet like all human dramas, it is laced with comedy.



SCRIPT EXCERPT

SASKIA: You heard from Hamish at all?

NICK: No. You?

SASKIA: I never heard from him again. Wait, no. I got a bunch of emails for a while. Photos.

NICK: Same.

SASKIA: I have one framed in my house.

NICK: Really? Why?

SASKIA: It's the three of us that night in Berlin. Isn't that what he sent you? Photos of us?

NICK: No, I just got – Wow, I'm in your house.

SASKIA: In the formal living room where sticky hands can't reach.

NICK: I feel honoured. I'm glad. I was worried that maybe something had happened.

SASKIA: What do you mean?

NICK: With him.

SASKIA: Ah, the other sticky hands.

NICK: Nothing did, right?

SASKIA: God no! No, I think he knew I wasn't to be f***ed with. Besides, you protected me.

NICK: I did?

SASKIA: You were the least... what does my daughter say? – Least problematic on set. Well, except for this!

She points to a scar on her arm. It's not small.

NICK: What's that?

SASKIA: My memento! From the final scene.

NICK: The window?

SASKIA: Yes, the window! Don't you remember how bad the cut was?

NICK: I think I've blocked that whole experience out.

SASKIA: We had to wrap paper towel on my arm to keep shooting. You had someone gaffa them onto me and we covered it up with the coat. I should have gotten stitches. I can't believe you don't remember.

NICK: I was focussed on Hamish at that point. He was a mess.

SASKIA: Perfect for the role, though. He apologised to me afterwards.

NICK: Good.

SASKIA: Well, what he actually said was – It doesn't matter.

NICK: What?

SASKIA: No, I've just always wondered if it was true.

NICK: What?

SASKIA: He said you told him to jump through the glass.

And you told me he improvised that and that's why we didn't have the safety glass.

NICK: Oh.

SASKIA: I'm not mad or anything. The shot looked great, I could never have given you that reaction if I knew what was coming.

NICK: Yeah.

SASKIA: But... for safety. Even his.

NICK: I honestly don't – I probably said it would have been great if we could – but no, I never thought he'd do it. I never said he had to.

Beat.

SASKIA: Well, hey, thank god he did. We got the shot.

NICK: We got the poster!



THEMES & CONCEPTS

IN COMMENTARY

TRUTH AND MEMORY

At the heart of the work is the question: Whose version of events do we trust? Can we trust? Who controls the conversation?

Ash Flanders writes about Nick's commentary on his film '*Low*' as he attempts to reshape the history of the work. He remembers the work as a work of art that speaks to young men and is a comment on the class system. This is not the memory of Saskia, or increasingly of those that recall the behaviour of Hamish after the movie. This demonstrates that memory and truth is selective, and for Nick it serves as a mechanism to protect himself. Retelling of truth is an act of interpretation that can become obscured or redefined by personal narrative. Frankie's truth and narrative is also altered through her meeting with Nick. She approaches him with her truth as she understands it from Hamish, and slowly this is unravelled as she realizes that he is also using her as he tries to rebuild himself.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND COMPLICITY

The play examines the complex question of complicity. Nick repeatedly denies responsibility, yet as an audience we are invited to consider the ways in which silence, inaction, self-interest or the desire to protect one's career can make someone morally accountable. Nick failed to speak out against Hamish or to protect the young girl – does this make him accountable? Does he have a moral responsibility to speak out?

POWER, CHARISMA AND CONSENT

Throughout *Commentary*, Nick occupies positions of authority and influence—first as a filmmaker, and later as a university lecturer whose reputation rests on directing an award-winning film. The play explores how these positions shape his relationships and raises questions about whether genuine consent can exist when there is an imbalance of power.

During the filming of *Low*, fifteen-year-old Saskia is injured while performing a scene with an older actor. The incident becomes a lasting reminder of the ways artistic ambition and the pursuit of “getting the shot” can take precedence over the wellbeing of performers. The play encourages audiences to question whether Saskia was given the opportunity to fully understand the risks involved, and whether artistic achievement can be separated from the ethical responsibilities owed to those creating the work.

Later, Nick enters into a relationship with Genevieve, one of his university students. Genevieve appears confident, articulate and in control, resisting the suggestion that she is simply influenced by Nick's age, status or charisma. Even when a relationship appears consensual, how might professional authority, experience and influence shape the choices that are available?

Rather than providing definitive answers, *Commentary* invites audiences to examine the relationship between power, consent and accountability. It asks whether charisma and authority can influence consent, and challenges us to consider where ethical responsibility lies when personal and professional boundaries become blurred. Can charisma be separated from power?



MEDIA, REPRESENTATION AND CONTENT

Rather than depicting the public backlash as a permanent and fixed consequence **Commentary** reflects our contemporary appetite for reinvention. The current and ever-changing landscape of social media news cycles allows us to successfully change and adapt our narrative to new platforms and audiences. Modern media appears to reward those who tell the most compelling story. Anna Whitehead, the journalist who interviews Nick, tells him clearly that it is about grabbing the attention of the audience and letting them know what they should think. It is about creating the content for them.

ANNA: They don't want to watch the movie. They want to hear someone tell them what to think about the movie. I have two choices with pretty much every article. 'Stuns' or 'shocks.' That's it. We tell them if they're for it or against it.

The interview between Nick and Anna highlights how she has also been forced into this world where content is what drives a story, not the truth. Nick is also consumed by the idea that his truth is the reality. Arguing that the role of film makers, artists and journalists is not endorsement.

NICK: I'm sure I don't have to tell you that depiction is not endorsement. If it was, you'd have to lock up every filmmaker, every visual artist, every journalist.

GUILT, DENIAL, SELF DECEPTION

Nick's behaviour can be understood through the tension between what he knows, and what he is willing to acknowledge. He doesn't really see himself as the villain, he thinks he is progressing and creates explanations to allow him to live with his decisions. It is not necessarily about deceiving others, but about protecting himself.

The play asks whether we can genuinely believe the stories we construct to justify our actions.

TRAUMA AND CONSEQUENCES

The events surrounding Low, and framing the conversation currently, happened twenty years ago, and yet they are still having an impact on the lives of those involved.

Saskia's physical injury becomes a tangible reminder of the past, it raises ethical questions about the choices of Nick and Hamish, and where the line is drawn between art and individual safety.

The consequences of Hamish's choices, all informed by a trauma we only have an allusion to, impact everyone around him, not just Nick but Frankie also.

Do Nick and Hamish really suffer consequences from their actions?



WHAT NEXT?

Do you think you can separate the truth from the person telling the story?

Explore the theme of denial and self deception?
Why might we do this? Is Nick deliberately lying?
Who can challenge this?

Why are we often willing to believe charismatic people? Is charisma a form of power?
Can art be successful if there was harm caused in the making of it?

SCRIPT EXCERPT

GEN: I thought you were just going to the bathroom.

NICK: What?

GEN: It's not even midday.

NICK: Did you see him?

GEN: No, but I doubt he still looks like this.

She shows Nick an image on her phone.

NICK: Where'd you find that?

GEN: That thread about boycotting the festival.

NICK: F**k. How many likes?

GEN: Who cares? No one's on X anymore. I had to download the app just to look for you.

NICK: How many likes?

GEN: There's four whole people actually engaging. (laughs) And now they're fighting with each other.

NICK: About what?

GEN: What hashtag to use.

NICK: And likes?

GEN: Ugh. (she scrolls up, it's clearly a long thread) Eighty-seven.

NICK: Christ.

GEN: You're embarrassing yourself. Aren't you the one always telling us to have thick skin? If it catches on, Clea will deal with it. That's literally her job.

NICK: This was a mistake.

GEN: It's too late now, they're selling tickets.

NICK: No, this. Meeting him. He won't come.

GEN: He's half an hour late, it happens.

NICK: It's a test. He'll be out there somewhere watching this whole scene.

GEN: He's probably high and forgot all about it.



Gyton Grantley in rehearsal: photo by Matt Byrne



Shardae Santos and Anna Steen in rehearsal : photo by Matt Byrne

INTERESTING POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

ETHICAL SPECTATORSHIP

Commentary is making the audience part of the process it is examining. We are positioned as the listeners of Nick's commentary, listening in to the podcast, hearing it from Nick's perspective until we slowly start to realise there is more to this. We are asked whether we also buy in to the confident story teller and our human desire to have clarity around moral judgements. It is rarely that simple.

Ultimately we have to ask 'When someone tells us a compelling story, how much are we willing to believe - and how much responsibility do we have to look beyond the version we are given?'

THE ORIGINAL FILM

What is *Low*?

The original film of the play is an award winning film that Nick made when he was nineteen with Hamish, who is unseen. Nick believes it is a searing 'in your face' look at underprivileged young men and the rage toward the middle classes. It won a silver bear award, a Berlin award for film making. After the film's success Hamish was found peering

through the window of a teenage girl, eerily similar to the climactic end to the film. As a result of Hamish's 'issues, including addiction, possession and theft, the film has been buried, until now. Nick is invited to do a commentary on the film as part of the Adelaide Film Festival.

PODCASTS

What is a podcast?

It is an audio program, usually released episodically, in which hosts use recorded conversations, interviews and narration to tell stories or explore ideas. The podcast creates an intimate sense of connection between the host (in this case Nick) and the audience. We are hearing Nick as the controller of information, he is constructing the truth around the play that we are also watching play out. We are initially Nick's listeners, but through the visual medium of the play we begin to question and interrogate.

<https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2023/jun/03/20-years-of-podcasting>



CANCEL CULTURE

We live in a world where 'cancel culture' is real. But what is it? How does it happen? And who decides?

It usually happens through public criticism, social media and/or boycotting. It holds public figures, artists and organisations accountable through collective public criticism and withdrawal of funding, or other means of support.

In **Commentary**, this idea is particularly relevant to Nick's reputation and the resurrection of **Low**. The play asks whether someone who has been associated with troubling or unethical behaviour should be permanently defined by their past, and whether public exposure necessarily produces genuine accountability. Nick's podcast and commentary aims this behaviour at Hamish, but does this deflection really hold up today?



Kate Cheel, Anna Steen, Gyton Grantley and Shardae Santos: Photo Claudio Raschella

SCRIPT EXCERPTS

NICK: You don't need me. I can't do anything for you. If anything I'm a dead f**king weight. So what is it? Morbid curiosity? You want to see the car crash close up? I just burned my last chance at a career / so what –

GEN: And I respect that.

NICK: Really?

GEN: Yes, just like I respected you standing up and telling the truth about Hamish.

NICK: What happened to believing all women?

GEN: What happened to not treating me like I'm your enemy? Look around, I'm the only person still here.

NICK: And you're already looking for the exit. I can see it.

GEN: You're paranoid. I'm going.

She turns to leave but Nick grabs her arm forcefully.

NICK: You're not f**king going anywhere!!!

Beat. She looks at him directly and speaks calmly. It's the most adult we've seen her.

GEN: Relax. I'll sneak out the back. They won't see me.

She looks down at his hand on her arm. He lets it go.

NICK: I don't want you to go. I'm sorry. I'm sorry, ok? You're right, I'm out of my mind, I'm losing it.

GEN: Yeah, you are.

NICK: It's this f**king film! F**king Hamish. It's like...

It's like he's taking me over. And I was always the one who was... In control.

Gen laughs.

GEN: In control? You're a mess. You were a mess way before all this. Before I came along.

That's what I liked.

A beat.

What do you want?

FURTHER ACTIVITIES



WRITTEN RESPONSE

The play intertwines the past and the present through the podcast, the film and the current media context.

Write an article that reveals Nick's complicity in Saskia's filming injury. Do you think it will 'shock' or 'stun' in today's society? Are there repercussions for this?

How would Saskia's podcast be different?



DISCUSSION & WRITTEN ACTIVITY



Discuss why the theme of Truth and Narrative is important in today's society?

Where do we see these themes of truth, false narratives and content being played out?

Provide example of this from content you have seen recently.

Why do we not challenge these?

What narrative could be told from the perspective of Genevieve and Clea?

Discuss your favourite moments in the play. Why?



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