THE MORTALITY MACHINE – DESIGN SPECIFICATIONS
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The Concept in 30 Words or Less
Five people died in a medical experiment; authorities sealed the laboratory. Years later, their relatives investigate. Using dance to represent the supernatural, they learn secrets about life and death.

How To Use This Document
Design Specifications outline essential characteristics of the experience, list requirements for a comprehensive *Design Document*, and offer guidance for other design elements (such as choreography or set design). The principle creators use the Design Specifications as a primary reference for their work on an experience. For the purposes of funding, investors and participants in crowdfunding campaigns also have access to this document.

NOTE: This document contains detailed information about The Mortality Machine. Individuals who wish to participate in the experience without prior knowledge to the plot and secrets should not read this document.

Purpose
After going through the experience of The Mortality Machine, our participants will have meaningfully examined their own fear of death, and come to a new understanding of what they want the afterlife to be.

Themes
Death is a point of no return. The only way to regain that which was lost is to go past that point. You can surrender to oblivion or struggle to return to your world, but what is gone is gone and you can't bring it back.

Overview of the Experience
Participants play characters developed spontaneously through suggested setting material and personal experiences; they are cast relying on pre-existing relationships and given new names, occupations and hometowns to help promote *assumption of role* (see Workshop Requirements). The roleplay element, however, is primarily additive, not transformative: while given a core around which to build a character (an individual who lost a loved one in a medical experiment several years ago), they're expected to flesh out their persona through either improvisation or use/rejection of personal experience. All characters will be related to one of the five victims, and also to other participants' characters. They will have a brief orientation where they're given a few details about the situation, and then introduced to the experimentation room.

The experimentation room is where their loved ones died, and it has been sealed off for several years, and is about to be opened to the families of the deceased after a long legal battle. Near the beginning of the experience, the lawyer (working name "the Barrister") will open the

laboratory and allow the participants to explore (Event I). In the experimentation room, they'll find both medical equipment (including the eponymous Mortality Machine) and ephemera that can explain some details of what happened: the deceased were all involved in an experiment that involved medical death to induce a near-death experience. Two cast members will assist with this: the Barrister and one cast member posing as a participant ("the Ringer"). During this stage, the Ringer models good roleplay behavior, and helps them discover key pieces of information, particularly about how to use the Mortality Machine.

A key element of this experience is that the participants have the opportunity and motivation to roleplay, and develop a personal connection to the experience. Each participant will have a relatively simple "character," but these characters will be designed with strong and intersectional motivations that should produce conflict. As the participants *explore* the space and *investigate* the mystery, they will have the opportunity develop these conflicts. These conflicts center around whether the participants should delve into risky behavior and investigate further, or move on from their loved one's death.

At some point, the Mortality Machine will be used to simulate a near death experience (Event 2). This will either be a participant who figures out how to do so, or facilitated by the Ringer. Doing so reveals the secret passage to the Underworld, and heralds the entry of the Psychopomp (a cast member who controls access to the passage). The participants will have ways of entering the passage one at a time, or permanently opening the door to the Underworld (this is one of two instances that lead to Event 3). In the Underworld, the participants encounter three of the victims, who are engaged in strange movements and unable to directly interact with the participants. However, if the participants pay attention to physical cues and engage with dance movements directly, they can gain the ability to communicate with the departed. Should they return the victim to a state where they can speak and act, they may escort them back to the laboratory (this is the other instance that leads to Event 3).

This stage focuses on the supernatural, and rewards those who took risks in the first stage. By this point, the participants should have had a chance to establish their personas, and now can engage directly with the strange phenomenon the experience presents. As participants *seek understanding* and *learn to control* the environment, they'll likely move beyond the conflicts that were set up in the first stage. Event 3 is a consequence for this: if they abandon the conflict of risky learning versus moving on in favor of the risk, then Event 3 occurs.

Event 3 involves the simple locking of the laboratory door, and the introduction of a timing element (a clock moving backwards, accompanied by an increasing "ticking" sound. There should also be a shift in lighting to denote that "something is different." At this point the participants cannot escape (in role) the situation until they resolve the conflicts in some manner. While the experience will suggest there are four ways each individual can choose to resolve the conflict, this stage is largely undefined to offer maximum agency to the participants.

While the cast members will assist in the participants finding their own resolution, there are four general states the design will suggest, based on where the participants are at the final cue (Event 4):

- Escape: The participants, in role, manage to escape the situation, but do not resolve their personal issues. Generally, this involves them being in the laboratory room at the end of the event, without their deceased loved one.
- Learned: The participants, in role, manage to escape, but learn something about death and mortality. Their loved one is there to say goodbye to them in the laboratory, before they disappear forever.
- Sacrifice: The participant makes a willful choice to remain in the underworld, and their loved one can depart. The participant exits by an alternate route.
- Trapped: The participant does not make a willful choice to remain, but ends the game in the Underworld. Both them and their loved one remain dead.

Again, participants should be given the freedom to explore alternate options "on the fly." The important element is that there's a limited timeframe to make a decision, and that the participants are fully aware of that pressure. This situation should return to the interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict introduced in Stage 1.

Pacing

This experience should be roughly two hours, and pacing is controlled by four events, which are defined to suggest a three-act structure.

- Event 1: The Barrister opens the lab.
- Event 2: The first use of the Mortality Machine and the introduction of the supernatural. If a participant is not close to figuring out how to use the machine by the 30 minute mark, then the Ringer will do so.
- Event 3: The lab door is supernaturally sealed. This should occur when the participants provoke a drastic change in cosmology, either opening the portal without the need for the psychopomp or bring a dead loved one back to the laboratory.
- Event 4: The final cue, which signals the end of the experience. This event is either 45 minutes after Event 3, or two hours after Event 1, whichever occurs first.
- Ending: There has to be some sort of *opportunity* for closure and release from active listening built in

Content Warnings

- Medical procedures
- Death and grieving
- Partial nudity
- Mild sexuality
- Profanity

Design Elements

NOTE: All design elements have a common requirement – between Event 1 and Event 4, the only permissible breaks in the 360-design are for safety related purposes.

Narrative
- The experience must scale for 12 to 20 participants
- The narrative must be told primarily through cast member interactions. Each cast member must have a fully developed character, know the story, and be prepared to improvise
- Individually, the participants should each receive a character with 3 connections to other characters, a lost loved one, and an assumed name and hometown
- Each character will have a personalized motive for investigation, putting them at odds with others
- Each character can be no more than 100 words and must fit on the back of an ID card
    - For reference, this section, excluding this bullet, is 100 words.

Persona
- Each character is built around six elements
    - A name (1), which will be selected to ensure inclusivity regarding gender and race (2 - 4 words)
    - A hometown (2) and occupation (3), to provide a different context for the character and to allow a "buffer" for personal interactions (5 - 7 word)
    - A set of pre-defined relationships (4) to promote roleplay (21 - 50 words)
    - A motivation (5) to provide impetus for action (30 - 40 words)
    - A suggestion for roleplay, phrased as a question with two options ("Do you do this or do that?") (10 - 20 words)
- Characters will appear in setting materials with "transitory" mentions related to their motive for entering the laboratory
    - These will reference specific moments in time that could inform roleplay of high-involvement participants, but are not required to take part in *The Mortality Machine*
    - The intention is that those experienced with live-action roleplay can use additional materials, available online, to have a familiar experience, while maintaining "off-the-street accessibility"
    - The existence of additional materials, even if not read, reinforces the assumption of role aspect of live action-roleplay
- Characters will be assigned on the spot by the Barrister. The Barrister should assign characters:
    - Based on perceived experience level with the proposition of live-action roleplay. They should ask a question to the group about "who is ready to be someone else" and gauge characters appropriately
    - Based on pre-existing relationships: if participants appear to already know each other, cast them as related characters

- Based on observed accessibility issues: some characters will be designed to provide accessibility
- Characters will only provide a basic framework for a persona. During the workshop, the Barrister will suggest that participants improvise the specifics of their character using either their personal experiences, or departures from their personal experiences, or just imagination.
- A list of characters will be made available on the website, with links to their full descriptions.

Choreography
- The choreography will be considered part of the world, and never explained. The participants will have to figure out what it represents, and its representation of death is WYSIWYG
- Choreography is used to introduce the supernatural elements; i.e. the presence of the dead. Dance and choreographed movement should be used in a manner similar to singing in a musical: it represents a heightened state of reality
- All choreography must be interactive, meaning that it responds and changes based on participant action. Generally, it must be improvised, and include invitations to participate
- If all the dead individuals "activate" then there may be an opportunity for a climatic "dance of joy" which will involve the majority of the participants.
- Choreography must be designed with the following considerations:
    - It should be possible to participate fully in the *The Mortality Machine* and never physically interact with the choreography (however, in a group of 12 - 20 people we can expect that a number of people will do so)
    - The choreography should be interesting to watch as a spectator, if one chooses
    - The interactive elements should consider individuals of limited mobility, and include options for individuals who cannot walk, have difficulty standing for long durations, or have limited use of limbs. There should be options, not limitations for all interactive movements

Scenic
- ***The primary scenic requirement is that it maintains the 360-illusion***
- There are four spaces required, three of which must accommodate 20 people (if only for short periods)
    - The antechamber is where the Barrister will administer the Workshop
    - The laboratory is the site of the Mortality Machine and the Doctor's notes (see below)
    - The passage is where the participants transition between the Mortal Realm and the Underworld
    - The Underworld is the realm of the dead, and it should strongly resemble the medical laboratory

Props

- The primary prop is the Mortality Machine, which should include elements that resemble and EKG, defibrillator, and IV. The requirements include:
    - Electrodes to attach to the chest and neck and "monitor" pulse. These can be non-functional
    - An EKG that shows a pulse, and can be set to flatline at a press of a button
    - A fake needle for the IV
    - A button that will drain the IV bag
    - A set fake defibrillator paddle that makes a "shock" noise
- In addition, this experience requires a great deal of ephemera, such as doctor's notes, personal journals, etc, that can be found scattered around the room. These form the clues as to what happened during the experiment
- A clock (with a narrative time motif element) will be present in both the Laboratory and the underworld. When Event 3 occurs, the clock should reset to 12:45 AM, and start ticking *backward* to introduce urgency
- We will need an easy to produce ID card for people, to take home with them as a souvenir.

Lighting
- Lighting should change subtly after Event 2, and dramatically after Event 3
- Generally, the space should be well-lit, with limited areas and durations of darkness for accessibility concerns
- Use of strobes will be avoided
- Areas with ephemera will include reading lights

Sound
- Sound design occurs primarily in the Underworld to suggest a cave-like appearance.
- After Event 3, a "ticking" should be constantly heard
- It is possible to score the laboratory, if we make it come out of a radio that keeps turning on or some other diegetic feature
    - This feature should be optional if Front of House is notified that it would impede a participant's ability to have conversations
- The sound should at no point interfere with the ability to have a conversation, and except for brief durations, impede the ability to speak at a whisper

General Tech
- It is possible that Front of House/Tech might have to leave the tech booth at various times. There has to be an internal signal to performers when this happens, and a method for preventing the next "cue" from occurring
- Front of House/Tech will primarily be Front of House until the Barrister starts talking, and then Tech until the participants exit
- The Barrister will attempt to handle all safety issues in role. If this isn't possible, the Barrister and, if necessary, participants, will exit using the Look Down. Front of House/Tech will be the primary safety representative out of role

Understudies/Swing
- One performer, Swing, will understudy the other four dance roles
- The Barrister will understudy the Swing role
- The Front of House/Tech will understudy the Barrister role
- The narrative design will include ambiguity as to whether the Swing role is present in the experience, making that role's appearance optional
- Should Front of House/Tech be called away for an extended period, Swing will accomplish Front of House/Tech duties

Accessibility
- Participants must be made aware that the location is in a basement, which is not wheelchair accessible
    - If individuals can negotiate the stairs, then *Sinking Ship Creations* will accommodate moving the wheelchair down the stairs and around in the space
    - We will develop specific contingencies for use of wheelchairs during the experience
- Lighting and sound will be designed with accessibility in mind. See those sections, respectively
- Interactive choreography will consider mobility limitations of participants
- Reading materials will be in large font, and the barrister will read the character to the individual if necessary
- Pitchers of tap water will be provided by the Barrister from the sink upon entry
- Chairs will be provided. As there will be fewer chairs than people, the Barrister will be responsible for identifying people who cannot stand for extended durations, and making sure they have seats available
- The Look Down is provided for individuals who have to leave the area. The Barrister and Front of House/Tech will handle safety issues
- *Sinking Ship Creations* will accommodate service animals but not emotional support animals. In order to ensure feasibility, the handler must contact *Sinking Ship Creations* some period in advance (to be determined)
- An accessibility section of the design document will include a pre-event handout for people who contact *Sinking Ship Creations* with concerns. *Sinking Ship Creations* will make every effort to accomodate all individuals, within budgetary constraints

Workshop
- The workshop must be no more than 15 minutes, and administered by the Barrister. It should include:
    - Safety requirements
    - Introduction of roleplay elements (including character assignments)
    - The introduction to the world of The Mortality Machine
- Safety Requirements include:
    - This element should be entirely out of role

- There should be an opportunity to identify accessibility needs and explain exemptions
- We should state that by the time we enter, we will be entirely in role, and only two mechanics are considered out of role, and should be used when in distress
- The two mechanics we intend to use are the OK Check In and the Look Down
- Participants may leave at any time, but at some point the door will be simulated locked. We should be able to demo what that look likes. Participants should know not to force doors
- None of the characters are violent people. No kicking, punching, grappling or causing injury, and no simulation thereof
- Stress the 360-design, and that's why we can't simulate violence. Everything in there is as realistic as possible, and we don't want to really injure you
- Explain, demo, and practice gaining non-verbal consent for physical touch. Define the "no touch areas"
- Discuss the strange movements that one might see and invite them to participate. Make sure they're prepared to be touched on the wrists, shoulders, or waist by the cast members. Show them how to break contact
- The barrister explains the final cue (two sounds, one minute apart)
- Introduction to roleplay elements include:
  - The barrister must give explicit "permission" to roleplay or make "mistakes"... there is no wrong way to do this.
  - There must be an opportunity for a debrief.
  - At some point during this element, the Barrister and the participants should transition to roleplay.
  - The Barrister should ask the participants questions to identify roles. See "Characters"
  - The Barrister hands out ID cards with characters on it, and gives them an opportunity to read them
    - If anyone is visually impaired, then the Barrister will read them their character information
  - The Barrister will use four questions, each related to the different stages of grief (except Acceptance, which comes at the end) to flesh out the characters
    - This might be done through the use of an "intake form at the beginning."
  - The Barrister demonstrates how to introduce themselves to each other (this is to enforce assumption of role). Everyone will then take a moment to introduce themselves.
  - The Barrister explains all these characters have lost loved ones. The barrister reminds them of the final cue.
- Introduction to the world of The Mortality Machine includes:
  - At this point, the Barrister and all participants must be completely in-role
  - The Barrister delivers essential information
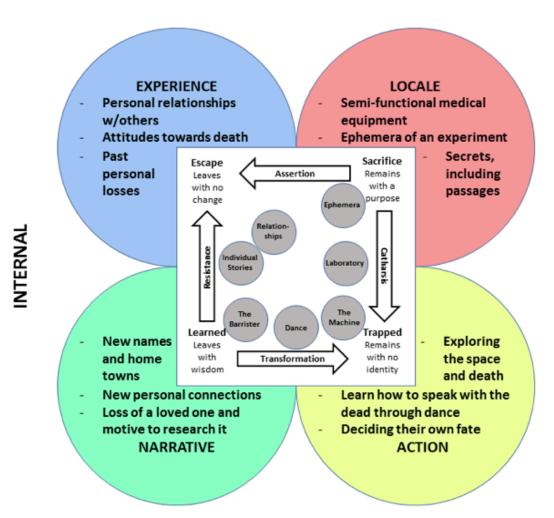 - The Barrister opens the door.

Structure

This experience is based around four design pillars:
- The personal **experience** of the participants, which includes their attitudes and perspectives. This pillar is internal (focused on the individual) and grounded (focused on what the person considers real in their day-to-day life). Experience elements include the participants personal relationships with other participants they already know, their attitudes towards death in general, and any past personal losses.
- The physical **locale**, including props, scenic design, and any element they can see, hear, smell, touch or feel. This pillar is external (focused on all participants as a whole) and grounded. Locale elements include the semi-functional medical equipment (including the Mortality Machine), the ephemera they can investigate for clues, and technical elements and surprises, such as the secret passage.
- The **narrative** arc provides the necessary elements for the participants to improvise and create their own storylines. This pillar is internal and extraordinary (outside the realm of experience that participants would expect to encounter in their day-to-day life). Narrative elements include the new names and hometowns, the personal connections towards the other characters, and how each individual feels about their loss (and what has motivated them to be there today).
- The **action** that the participants pursue is the motor that allows them to change the environment and makes their stories interesting. This pillar is external and extraordinary. Action elements include exploring the space (including the Underworld), learning how to use physical motion to communicate with the dead, and gaining enough information to make an informed decision about their fate.

These pillars form an experiential sandbox around the participants, and their actions move them within it along two axis. Along the Experiential axis (between a Grounded and Extraordinary Experience), the participants can either resist the heightened state of reality, and reinforce their mundane experiences, or move towards a cathartic experience where they purge elements of their mundane lives. Along the Perspective axis (between Internal and External), they can either transform their attitudes about the world through acceptance of the external phenomenon, or assert their pre-existing beliefs. The experience is designed to place key elements and outcomes along these axes.

GROUNDED

EXPERIENCE
- **Personal relationships w/others**
- **Attitudes towards death**
- **Past personal losses**

LOCALE
- **Semi-functional medical equipment**
- **Ephemera of an experiment**
- **Secrets, including passages**

INTERNAL

EXTERNAL

Escape
Leaves with no change

Assertion

Sacrifice
Remains with a purpose

Ephemera

Relation-ships

Resistance

Individual Stories

Laboratory

Catharsis

The Barrister

Dance

The Machine

Learned
Leaves with wisdom

Transformation

Trapped
Remains with no identity

- **New names and home towns**
- **New personal connections**
- **Loss of a loved one and motive to research it**
NARRATIVE

- **Exploring the space and death**
- **Learn how to speak with the dead through dance**
- **Deciding their own fate**
ACTION

EXTRAORDINARY