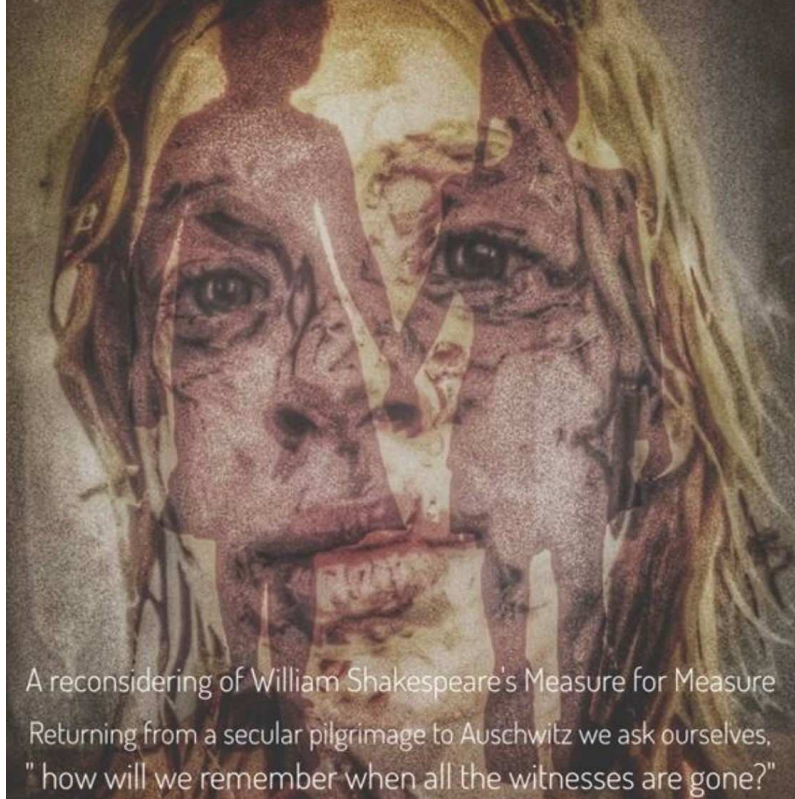


Truth Be Truth To Th' End Of Reck'ning



A reconsidering of William Shakespeare's Measure for Measure
Returning from a secular pilgrimage to Auschwitz we ask ourselves,
"how will we remember when all the witnesses are gone?"

Artist as Witness Catalogue Document By Chloe Dixon

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Artist Statement

I will show up with an understanding of the process and what needs to be done.

I will create material with the witnessing process and bearing testimony to certain events.

I will push myself and my body to their limits to create a fully authentic piece.

I will be kind to myself and my peers throughout this process to ensure we behave in a professional manner.

I will remember the reasons behind why we are creating this piece and the events that took place that we cannot possibly comprehend.

I will remember that we cannot ever recreate events that took place as they will be contaminated by our own memories and events.

Group-work Rules

Working together well as a group is extremely important when creating a group piece with original material. There needs to be a professional and well managed group dynamic. Working with a large group of people can be difficult and there can be a clash of ideas but everyone in the group needs to actively work together and listen to each other's ideas to make sure everyone feels listened to and included. One of the most important things to remember when working with people is to be kind and to also be present and always ready to create new material. To be able to bear witness to a memory and event is important for the group to come to terms with and it's important that members of the company feel comfortable and able to share their material to be able to create pieces of material for the end result. Kindness is key.

Initial Ideas

Our aim for this module was to create a piece of work that came loosely from a stimulus of the holocaust and Shakespeare's Measure For Measure. Through the use of workshops, we have looked at and created images for things we have witnessed or wished we had witnessed. Something that is important to think about when creating a piece about an event that has already happened and that is true to life is that the performance will only ever be a testimony to the event. It is not the original event. For example, a memory of a dream is not the dream, nor is telling someone about the dream the actual dream. Even remembering a dream, the dream will never be the same as when it was first created, there will always be little changes and tweaks. The dream will never be as it was. Using this analogy, we need to remember when creating content for this performance is that we can never take our audiences to that time or event, we will never be able to recount how that event took place. "Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance." (Phelan 1993:146).

To begin to create a fully functioning piece we need to think about the grand scheme of things and the bigger picture for what we want for the piece.

“The purpose of this form of theatre is to give voice to those who have been marginalized, forgotten, or are invisible in the larger society, and to invite audiences to bear witness to issues of suffering, redemption and social justice.” (Sepinuck 2013:14).

Everyone is sat at the back of the space on sofas and chairs, this creates the image of a lounge area in many different scenarios or places. The people sat at the back had an input into what happened in each scene and even though there are times where people are sat not necessarily doing a lot, their presence is still involved. Everyone is utilizing their own knowledge and skills to create and improve scenes. Having an outside input can be really helpful when creating work as the person on the outside can notice things that the performers in that scene maybe didn't. The people sat at the back for our piece can provide that 'outside eye', it's almost like a second audience is watching the piece. There is one audience at the back of the space and one at the front of the space.



Creating Images and Material

We created different images and started to group them together to form some sort of piece and running order. There was a mixture between smaller group pieces and bits where the whole group was involved which created an interesting dynamic. This worked well as there was always some people sitting at the back of the space which created a certain kind of atmosphere. One of the images that I think was extremely powerful was a Laurel and Hardy dance image, it happened twice in the piece and both times juxtapose each other perfectly. The first time it was done as a duet piece with the original music and seemed quite cheerful. The second time it was a whole group piece and it was done a lot slower and without music to the point where it was almost like a march rather than a dance. This could be interpreted as the death march around the time of the Holocaust which adds a layer of power and pain which the audience witnesses and the audience can feel. This can obviously only ever be an interpretation as we did not actually witness these events we can only do this based on what we know and saw at Auschwitz and even then we have contaminated this with our own ideas so the audience will witness something different than the beginning product.

“The work is not an attempt to picture the Holocaust, but tries to show the way the Holocaust is remembered today.” (Roms 1996:62).

One of the things we were extremely focused on was the feeling of utter pain and exhaustion, we wanted to give ourselves the feeling of extreme fatigue before we even started our show. One of the most important things we needed to do to commit ourselves to the performance and to make it completely authentic was to push our bodies to the limits. We needed to make things even harder for ourselves and put a heavier weight on ourselves to give an authentic performance. The more we push ourselves before/at the beginning of the piece, for example, by doing an endless warmup for a long period of time, makes it more painful for us throughout the performance and therefore makes it more painful for the audience to witness.

“Performance honors the idea that a limited number of people in a specific time/space frame can have an experience of value which leaves no visible trace afterward.” (Phelan 1993:149).

Using Text and Music

Using certain kinds of music can really help to give our piece depth and layers, for example, a Jewish folksong could add an element of culture and tradition to the piece. We wanted any music to be live, we wanted a sense of authenticity where there were no speakers being used. We used a mixture of songs that were sung on stage during the piece by different people. One of them was a lullaby sung every time people were lying on the floor in a fetal position, this felt extremely haunting and creepy for the audience to hear. Another piece of music we used was someone singing a very haunting version of Wayfaring Stranger, this song was used more than once in the piece and was particularly powerful when sung at the end of the entire show. In my opinion, the most powerful song in the piece was a Holocaust song called 'A Hill of Little Shoes'. This song added a completely different tone to the piece, it was extremely emotional to listen to and just added so much authenticity and rawness to the piece.

"I live in the shadow
of a hill. A hill of
little shoes. I love but
I shiver with a chill.
I live, I love, but where
are they? Where are their,
lives, their loves? All blown
away. And every little shoe's
a foot that never grew, another
day."

The use of text in the piece was obviously something very important as our piece had strong connections to Shakespeare's Measure for Measure. However, we also used different kinds of text from different people and artists. For example, we used a piece of text from Timberlake Wertenbaker's The Love of the Nightingale. This text was quite hard hitting and though it was from a different play it fit well with the message we were portraying. Along with this we used extracts from Measure for Measure to further get a point across, putting hard-hitting text into already difficult scenes made the piece even harder for the audience to witness. "To these documentations of poetry and literature of testimony and witness, it is possible to add description of the theatre of witness-a form of literature, moreover, which moves the bodies of live actors across a stage in front of an assembled audience." (Maldepe 2000:126).

SCENE TWENTY

The FEMALE CHORUS. PROCNE. PHILOMELE.

HERO. Without the words to demand.

ECHO. Or ask. Plead. Beg for.

JUNE. Without the words to accuse.

HELEN. Without even the words to forgive.

ECHO. The words that help to forget.

HERO. What else was there?

IRIS. To some questions there are no answers. We might ask you now: why does the Vulture eat Prometheus's liver? He brought men intelligence.

ECHO. Why did God want them stupid?

IRIS. We can ask: why did Medea kill her children?

JUNE. Why do countries make war?

HELEN. Why are races exterminated?

HERO. Why do white people cut off the words of blacks?

IRIS. Why do people disappear? The ultimate silence.

ECHO. Not even death recorded.

HELEN. Why are little girls raped and murdered in the car parks of dark cities?

IRIS. What makes the torturer smile?

HERO. We can ask. Words will grope and probably not find. But if you silence the question.

IRIS. Imprison the mind that asks.

ECHO. Cut out its tongue.

HERO. You will have this.

JUNE. We show you a myth.

ECHO. Image. Echo.

HELEN. A child is the future.

HERO. This is what the soldiers did not see.

Using Artists for Inspiration

During the creative process we looked at artists that could inspire us and help us create material for our piece. One of the artists we took a lot of inspiration from was Pina Bausch. We were really interested in using chairs which Bausch uses in some of her work and we also embodied her Café Muller piece as it fitted well with the direction we wanted our piece to go in. The heavy dropping motions and sporadic movement relates to and could convey violence which could be an underlying theme and layer to such a hard-hitting piece. “The term ‘witnessing imagination’ describes a way of seeing violence which produces acknowledgment of and also resistance to the human cost of violence...So if the violence is the attempt to turn a person into a thing, the witnessing imagination attempts to turn this ‘thing’ back into a person.” (Maldepe 2000:129).

Audience Reactions

There were lots of different reactions and thoughts from the audience about our piece. Most reactions were that there were some bits that didn't necessarily fit together with other bits and that some things didn't make sense to them, however, the problem with that is that the audience were trying to rationalize what was happening but within a post dramatic landscape nothing is ever rational so it would not be wise to try and put different scenes together to try and understand it. On the other hand, even though the audience may not have fully understood what they were watching, it was obvious they felt it was extremely powerful to watch and it made them feel emotional. They may have even felt anger because they may not have known why they were emotional but they felt those emotions by watching us perform. In summary, it was an interesting and hard-hitting thing for the audience to watch and they will never fully understand what we mean when we perform because they have not witnessed the things we have.

“The audience becomes not only witness to the testimony, but witness to the witness of the testimony.” (Maldepe 2000:132).

Personal Reflections

In my personal opinion, I think the show went extremely well and we achieved what we set out to achieve. We created an exceptional piece of art about events we have witnessed. I think the message we wanted to give out was received well and we performed to the best of our ability under intense physical stress. I believe given more time we could develop the piece even more, perhaps by adding more Measure for Measure connotations or developing more of the Measure for Measure characters. I also think that more text could have been added, maybe more Measure for Measure text or even more modern pieces of text that could be linked to Measure for Measure in a deeper way, for example, texts from the #MeToo movement. Given more time, we could have pushed the limits to our bodies even more, really testing how far we as individuals could go to make the piece seem even more authentic. I also would have liked to have seen more movement added to the piece to further our exhaustion, maybe a traditional Jewish folk dance could have been added. For me personally, if I had the chance to go through this process again I would contribute ideas more than I did and I would bring along something for the group to progress with further. I would also try to get involved more with the images that were made and I could have brought along some text. All in all, I believe this process of creating material and making a piece went extremely well and I am proud of the performance we created.

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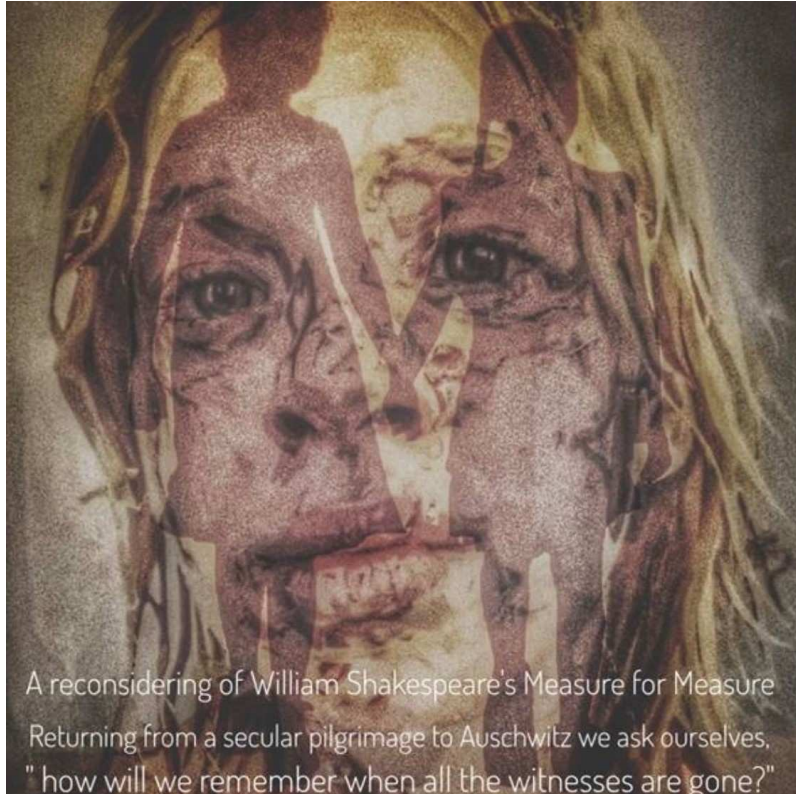
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