



Truth Be Truth
Till Th' End of Reck'ning
Charlotte Allmand

"I am just a speck of dust and so is everyone. One day we all will be gone, forgotten and left behind. We will be missed by few near and dear ones for few days, three-four months, one-two years and sooner or later, even they will start living a normal life. The world is not going to stop for us. So, let's not stop for the world. Let's not take the pain every time. Let's start living in the moment."

- Mitali OK

So, will anyone remember us after we have gone...?



Manifesto-

I will make work that is accessible for everyone, work that does not discriminate or separate but that unites. The work will show survival and common humanity. We all share this world therefore we need to make theatre that reflects our existence.

I set out to make work that educates through various means of poignancy, comedy and everything in between. Work that looks both to our past but also to our future, asking what we have learned and how we can respond to these events in the world we live in. The theatre I will produce will not aim to replicate or imitate but will explore mine and my companies place within the circumstance of the work we are making.

There is horror and devastation in the world but there is also beauty. We must show all aspects of life, but above all we must always tell the truth.

What is witnessing...?

Witness-

Verb

1. See (an event, typically a crime or accident) happen
2. Have knowledge of (a development) from observation or experience.
3. Openly profess one's religious faith.

Noun

1. A person who sees an event, typically a crime or accident, take place.
2. Evidence; proof.
3. A line or remnant of an original surface on a workpiece to show how much material has been removed or the shape of the original outline.

This document will not explain the performance or the entirety of the process, it is each of our responsibility to witness. That includes you. We each witness and percieve differently, but I will explain to you my process of learning to witness and how this influenced the creation of the performance.

You need to know that...

- 1) We are dysfunctional
- 2) We are functional in our own ways
- 3) We are the disregarded, dispossessed and unwanted
- 4) We have made a show responding to the Holocaust
- 5) We have made a show about ours and our relatives lives
- 6) We gained inspiration from Measure for Measure by Shakespeare
- 7) We are survivors
- 8) We are affected

“For the dead and the living, we must bear witness”
-Elie Wiesel, Holocaust Survivor

A Secular Pilgrimage...

Nobody can explain what to you what it is you feel when you stand at the entrance to the gas chambers or indeed anywhere at Auschwitz. It was at this moment the reality set in- they were real people, they had lives, families, dreams which were all taken away. There is very little physically left of the people who were taken to Auschwitz only suitcases, glasses and household items, even the hair that was shaved off the corpses is now crumbling to dust. Every inch of their existence is disappearing therefore how can we, having witnessed this, pay testimony to their lives and create a performance?

“Never shall I forget the faces of the little children, whose bodies turned into wreaths of smoke beneath the silent blue sky.”

-Elie Wiesel, Holocaust Survivor



How will we remember when all the witnesses are gone...



Thoughts...

Performances of remembering the events of Auschwitz still happen among "Eastern European Jews and their descendants who still feel and seek a connection" (Gluhovic, M. 2013, pg.22) to their descendants fragmented memory. This can be seen through the notion of post memory, which is a term used to describe "a familial memory of children of Holocaust survivors, the so called "second-generation"" (Gluhovic, M. 2013, pg.176. This powerful creational tool can be used to understand the relations between the cast and the large historical background. However, we did not have this level of personal connection to the events of the holocaust therefore we went on our secular pilgrimage to attempt to understand and witness the atrocities that happened.

I became interested with the notion of "second-generation writers" (Gluhovic, M. 2013, pg.188) which is work by children of the holocaust and how they have grown up in the shadow of these events. What does this make us? How can we write about and create a show responding to events we haven't seen? As we came back into the studio space to work, we started the process of bringing in work of events/moments in time that have been witnessed. These moments, which will be explored more in this document, began to be contaminated with the memories of our pilgrimage. Through discussion we began to realise that our lives have been affected by these large-scale events and how we have changed as a society since then, despite genocides still happening.

"To forget a Holocaust is to kill twice."
-Elie Wiesel, Holocaust Survivor

Warm up...

“Human suffering anywhere concerns men and women everywhere.”
-Elie Wiesel, Holocaust Survivor



Being a company of both theatre makers and dancers we worked to combine both of these disciplines within the work we were creating. During our rehearsal period we spent a large amount of time warming up for the physical and weight-bearing work that we were doing. However, we noticed how this was a reoccurring image and process in which the company became progressively weaker and started to sit out of the warm up due to tiredness. We used this to our advantage compositionally by integrating it into the performance and creating the rule that whenever you felt like you physically couldn't go on you had to sink into the fetal position. On the day of the performances we pushed ourselves even further before the audience entered the space. The warm up began 2 hours before the show, this was to ensure the company were exhausted and sweating to create the atmosphere of extreme fatigue. This was successfully achieved with audience members expressing concern for members of the cast because of how far they pushed themselves.



“I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides.”
-Elie Wiesel, Holocaust Survivor

Running...

Throughout the rehearsal process we began to see how pivotal the moment of running was becoming, It was used a large amount within the warm up section at the start of the performance but it then started to become a compositional tool as well. The running became a repetitive moment with the whole cast performing it as well as myself and other cast members having solo moments. The original act was shown and from this point it was imitated, "the imitation performed the gap between the attempt and the original, even when the original was absent" (Goulish, M. 2000 p.g. 7). Within classical music this action would be defined as an ostinato, which is phrase that is repeated continuously, this is a compositional technique we used in creation.

Fatigue played a large part within this section of the performance. Various levels of contamination were applied to this section because of the surrounding images and technology. As seen in the images below, there were images and found footage from the Yorkshire Film Archive which played behind the action this enabled the audience to infer meaning from this. Physically the actors were all experiencing extreme levels of fatigue, sweating and becoming breathless, each of these elements contributed to the rawness of the performance. This was a large area of performance that I engaged in, I also added an additional context to the running that I gained from our secular pilgrimage to Auschwitz. I was informed of a story of a woman who was on a Death March at the end of the war, she was midway through giving birth when she was shot for falling behind. In this moment of running I was thinking of her struggle for survival as well as my own exhaustion.

"Even in darkness, it is possible to create light."

-Elie Wiesel, Holocaust Survivor



Intimacy...

Throughout the process our group struggled with physical intimacy and trust which became problematic when we came to creating witnessed moments which requires such qualities of performance. We worked hard to deal with this issue, a way of dealing with this was that people formed 'families' in which we interacted. This idea becomes placed in how the show was staged, with the end of the space becoming a 'hostel' style space in which the disregarded, disowned and unwanted co-habit. The contrasting images of intimacy were paramount throughout the performance, from the intense intimacy of kissing to the lone action of being in the fetal position.

Furthermore, our cast was predominantly made up of women which is an interesting political point. Combining our the knowledge gained from the stimulus, Measure for Measure and the pilgrimage to Auschwitz, it became apparent how much women in particular have taken large amounts targeted by men in power. Women are often subjected to the male gaze, this "fetishization of the image is the risk of representational visibility for women" (Phelan.P, 1993. p.g. 6). We were faced with the dilemma as to how we could create physically intimate moments without this 'gaze' being placed upon us. The difference within our work is that, surrounding the images that are physically intimate between the women there were other images which were layered together. These moments become contaminated by other things not only the context we have created the performance within but also the other happenings in the performance space such as singing, images on a visualiser and other actors. This meant that these physically intimate scenes were created in such an intricate way that meant they weren't seen with the male gaze.

Another means of creation we discovered through exploring the notion of intimacy was that of appropriation, where an image is taken by someone else to use in the same or different form. The intimate moment of two women repeatedly kissing was appropriated by two males in the cast, the reading of the image changed drastically, "each attempt seemed like a collection of imperfections" (Goulis, M. 2000 p.g. 6). The image was unveiled by other cast members falling to the fetal position to show the two men kissing. The image began to again become contaminated by the historical context of the Holocaust where homosexual men were targeted and treated horrifically solely because of their sexuality. The "German Criminal Code which banned homosexual contact" (ref) is evidence of the mindset of the Nazi party towards homosexual men. With this in mind, the witnessing of two men kissing at the back of a stage with nobody else knowing is an image that is so poignant and intimate. However, it is also an image that requires a large amount of trust and respect between the actors to create, it only worked because of this factor. If either part had gone into this moment half heartedly the connection would not have worked and the desired effect would not have been portrayed to the audience. This same factor can be said for every moment of intimacy and performance within the show.

"The opposite of love isn't hate, it's indifference"
-Elie Wiesel, Holocaust Survivor



Trust...

Trusting the people you work in a company is a large aspect of being able to make a good show, however a large part of making a piece of work as we have is the ability to trust the process. It is a fundamental part in the creation process, by doing this it ensures that "creative ideas will emerge, performers will support each other and carry the load, and the audience will respond positively to the genuine and honest storytelling" (Sepinuck, T. 2013, p.g. 234). By providing a safe environment for work to be developed it allows all members of the company to feel like they are able to contribute and that they will be supported in doing this. By remaining optimistic and trusting the process we are, as a company, equally responsible for being able to "ride the waves of uncertainty, obstacles, conflict, confusion and doubt" (Sepinuck, T. 2013, p.g. 234). As a company we worked hard to maintain a trust in each other and the process whilst also learning how to create Theatre of Witness for the first time.

"Friendship marks a life even more deeply than love. Love risks degenerating into obsession, friendship is never anything but sharing."

-Elie Wiesel, Holocaust Survivor

Material...

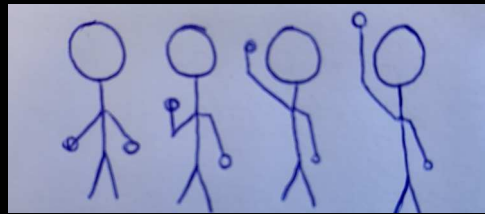
Pan of potatoes
Throwing Verity in a wheelchair
Hair waving at pigeons
Everyone Hair Waving at pigeons
Fireworks and pens being thrown
Walk in square and fall and die
Evolution of growth
Glasses off bumping into chairs
Crying babies
Swapping men into crying babies
Writing on photos and put photos in pocket
Coughing and brushing hair
Throwing money into a wishing well
Give messages to Grandad in hospital
Running in a loop- add fallers
Complete family picture
Man on the moon walking
'Free Nelson Mandela' punch
Childlike bombs falling
Warrington Bomb
MS body action
Grid walking
First Kiss story
Walking in snow to school
Dragging people on feet
Laurel and Hardy double act
Fetal position
Phillip May appropriation
Laurel and Hardy ballroom
Cuddling baby being taken away
Mum and Dad first meeting
Princess Anne and Harry's Mum

Acid war in Africa
Brother running away from car
Trampled on at U2 concert
Ryan's brother and Alcatraz
Harry's miserable spoons of hope
Warming Up
Insult entrance
Scum Manifesto
Chair square
Separation

Each of these pieces of material came from different tasks centred around who had witnessed the events such as ourselves, our parents and things we wished we'd witnessed. Throughout the process we allowed "words to form and be spoken" (Malpede, K. 2000 [p.g.137]) and for this to happen we had to ensure the rehearsal room was a safe environment. This was something we worked hard to achieve, we were handling sensitive material and as a company we were very sensitive in how we handled ourselves at times. This showed me how hard it can be working with a large company on such poignant topic.

Freedom...

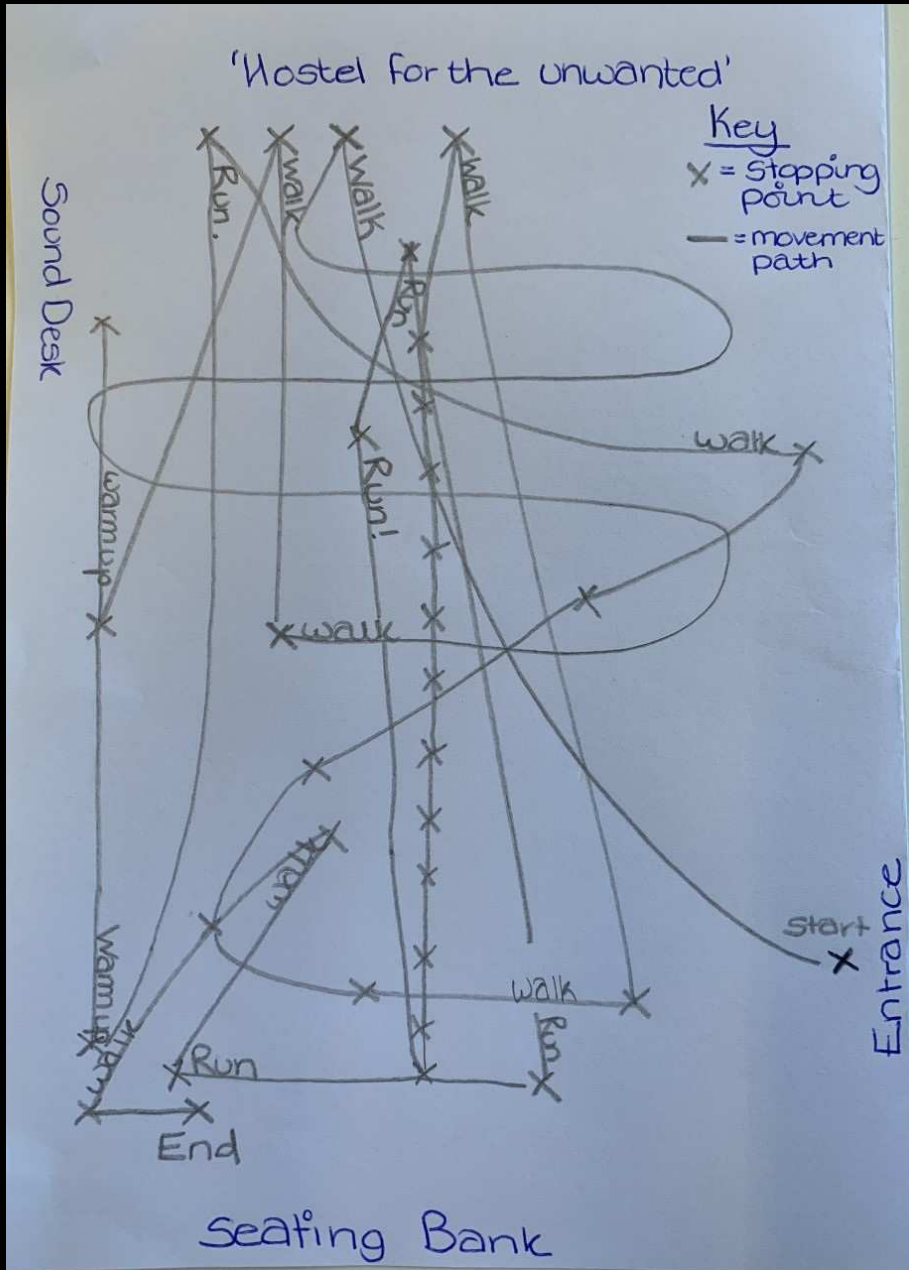
A section of material that I brought to the company of a moment that I wish I had witnessed, was that of Nelson Mandela being freed from prison. The action was that of the 'Raised Fist' which is a symbol of solidarity and support and became associated with black nationalism and resistance against British Rule by the Irish Republic. Creating this movement sequence I was extremely cautious of cultural appropriation, however I looked at my stance in the world as a white female and I can stand as an ally other minorities but as a woman this action can be appropriated as an action of solidarity. The notion that everything is political becomes true here when a simple hand movement has become contaminated by so many cultural and political issues that are happening in the world we live in.



"The space where the individual exists within the communal, where the political impacts upon the human is, after all, the social world in which we live" (Malpede,G. 2000 p.g. 122)



My Journey Score...



Throughout the performance we each took a different journey through the space. We moved as individuals but occasionally came into contact with others, at these moments in time verbal interaction happened. Moments of uniformed action featured within the work this broke up the nature of small group action. These moments were contaminated by the thought of how people were thrown together through the atrocities that happen across the world, and for 6 million Jewish people this ended in death. Our final position in the performance was appropriated from an image of people electrocuted to death in the barbed wire, this poignant moment showed everyone as equals but left the audience thinking about what they had witnessed.

"The clouds always move. I can see the depth of the sky, and feel the earth, it's curve and weight. And I alone - a speck upon a ball - at this moment feel I will fall, upward, escaping through the clouds and into space, which, I have been told, is infinite." (Goulish, M, 2000 pg. 12-13)

Elie Weisel...

During the reflective period after the performances, the words and story of Elie Wiesel became poignant. Wiesel who was deported by the Nazi's to Auschwitz faced life changing events with his mother and younger sister being killed. Since the liberation, he has written about his experiences in the death camps, which is where a large amount of the quotes have come from. Wiesel is a first generation writer, who has witnessed such atrocities and through his work enables society to understand and witness what him and so many others experienced, it is now our duty to bear witness.

“For the survivor who chooses to testify, it is clear: his duty is to bear witness for the dead and for the living. He has no right to deprive future generations of a past that belongs to our collective memory. To forget would be not only dangerous but offensive; to forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time.”

-Elie Wiesel, Holocaust Survivor



What have I learnt...

Learning how to create 'Theatre of Witness' has been a tough journey as an artist and as a company however we came out of the process with a deeper understanding of what it is to witness. I was incredibly aware of not imitating or recreating the atrocities that happened to millions of people across the world. Understanding how I as a white woman could place myself into the work in which I was not directly involved in was something that took time to process. By realising that I was showing something that I had witnessed, and it was down to the contamination that the audience and the context put on the performance, I was able to place myself in the work. The largest learning moment for me was "learning to see oneself not only in others, but as "the other"" (Seppinuck, T. 2013 pg. 235) this enabled not only myself but the audience to connect on a deeper level with what was shown to them through the work.

By creating work from events that we both have and have not witnessed, we as theatre makers enable audiences to learn and connect with issues that they may have not previously. It is our responsibility to make the change in the world that we want to see.



The following pages contain photographic documentation of the performance
'Truth Be Truth, Till Th' End of Reck'ning'

"The audience becomes not only witness to the testimony, but witness to
the witness of the testimony." (Malpede, K. 2000 p.g. 132)

If you did not witness the performance you are now witnessing third hand, you are
still as responsible for bringing change as people who did witness first hand.









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Photos By Kiran Tanna

“We learn to perform our memory.
We learn to perform our forgetting.”

(Goulsh, M 2000 p.g. 6)