

The particularly implicated spectator

Authenticity, Theatricality and Self-Recognition

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The particularly implicated spectator:

To hold as twere a mirror up to nature

Rosie Kay's *5 Soldiers*



Donmar's *The Tempest*



5 Soldiers

- Telephone interviews and focus group.
- Qualitative, conversation based.
- Serving officers (6 participants. 5 male, 1 female).
- Veteran soldiers (3 participants, all male).
- Total 9.

The Tempest

- Pre and post performance focus groups.
- Qualitative, conversation based.
- No recordings permitted, pen and paper exercises and note taker.
- General, closed prison population (11 participants).
- Closed prison, drama group (5 participants).
- Open prison, drama group (2 participants).
- Total 18. All female.

Methods

- Largely closed communities, separate from wider population.
- Distinct cultures, languages, customs; alien to anybody from the outside.
- Architectural, security and atmospheric similarities between the built environments.
- Communities in which gender, gender identity and the performance of gender are hypervisible.
- Widely known through representations (*Prisoner Cell Block H*, *Orange is the New Black*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Full Metal Jacket* etc).
- Known through representations, but not known as audiences or consumers of these representations.

Prison and the Military: Very particular communities

- 10-30% of military veterans suffer some form of PTSD.
- All veterans participating in this research self-described as suffering from physical and/or mental health difficulties resulting from their service.
- 4-5% of UK prison population are military veterans.
- +50% of women prisoners have been victims of sexual and domestic violence.
- 53% of women prisoners have had experienced trauma.
- Women in prisons increasingly recognised as being ‘victims of their past experiences.’

Prison and the Military: Communities with lived experience of trauma

5 Soldiers

- Choreographer Rosie Kay military field research.
- Two weeks' full battle fatigue training with the 4th Battalion The Rifles.
- Secondment at the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre, Headley Court, England.
- Dancer undertook military drill training.

The Tempest

- Donmar Theatre worked with YSJ Prison Partnership Project.
- Creative collaboration with women prisoners in an open prison setting exploring *The Tempest*.
- Cast conducted extensive research into the narratives of women offenders.
- Cast members included women post-release (via Clean Break Theatre).

Prison and the Military: Creative R&D into Communities

- Authenticity as ‘a form of truth within the performing arts event.’
- ‘The greater the authenticity of a performance perceived by audience members, the greater their enjoyment of the experience.’ (Radbourne, Johanson and Glow 2010, 362)

Authenticity

5 Soldiers

Satisfying need for authenticity earned the audience's attention:

If you had made it silly I would have walked after ten minutes, and you know when you're taking the piss out of us and that's the difference, I didn't feel that, I actually felt this is really good. When we finished it was like, yes I get that. (Veteran A)

Authenticity

5 Soldiers

Attention to detail communicated that the productions had done their research and respected their subject. Satisfied a sense of insider knowledge.

- The performance felt ‘real to life’.
- ‘It did show what it’s like when you go out on patrol.’
- Presented ‘what soldiers go through and what they’re like.’

The Tempest

- ‘It was nice to know that professional actors think about real lives in prison.’
- ‘The goodbyes – I’ve lived that time and time again – a tinny atmops here – an acute sound the goodbyes.’
- Reminded ‘me when I first come into prison.’

Authenticity

5 Soldiers

Choreography, scenography, language and music made the experiences theatrical, different, a spectacle, even beautiful.

- Contemporary dance, abstracted movement.
- Minimal to zero language.
- No guns or shots or explosions.
- Violence and injury portrayed through dance.
- The workings always visible, no pretence at illusion.

The Tempest

- Shakespearian language and plotting.
- Insertion of meta-theatrical forms such as song and dance.
- Meta-theatrical props, such as wigs made from tampons and lifejackets made prison refuse sacks.

Theatricality

The Tempest

- ‘The music.’
- ‘Feel good, feel at ease.’
- ‘You let go of bad feelings in yourself.’
- ‘Open up your feelings.’
- ‘Feel free as a bird!’ (WP 10)

Such moments of beauty act
‘like small tears in the surface
of the world that pull us through
to some vaster space’
(Scarry 2006, 112).



Theatricality & Beauty

The Tempest

- ‘Prospero’s loss of standing.’
- ‘Life gone; friends gone; knowledge gone; lifestyle gone; job gone. Outcast.’
- ‘It’s like a revolving door. We’re just a big rubbish heap of women in prison, we’re a lot of wounded people. A lot of sad, shocking stories behind a lot of them.’ (WP 2)



It is me, and more than me

‘The traumatic event inhibits the very possibility of witnessing owing to its inassimilable and sudden psychic violence’

Simultaneous ‘impossibility of telling’ and ‘impossibility of silence’ (Harpin 2011: 105)

Witnessing & Trauma

5 Soldiers

‘I think at the end of it where the lad got injured, I think that to me brought home... I was at Headley Court for a long time, a rehabilitation center, and I saw lads coming through which... yes.’
(Veteran B)



Self-Recognition

The Tempest

- ‘The beginning in the cell.’
- ‘First time coming to prison. Very emotional.’
- ‘The banging on the railing and the shouting through the windows.’
- ‘Being around hundred of women [...] a all woman cast, just like prison is.’
- ‘Brang a lot of memories back from drinking and leaving my kids and me being alone.’ (WP 6.)



Self-Recognition

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- **Authenticity** indicated care and respect. Earned an audience.
 - **Theatricality** provided beauty and eloquence. Made lived experience articulate.

I will watch this

I can see myself in this

It is me, and more than me

An Articulate Witness
