

# The particularly implicated spectator

Authenticity, Theatricality and Self-Recognition

Matthew Reason, York St John University (UK)

---



**The particularly implicated spectator:**

**To hold as twere a mirror up to nature**

---



# 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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**

---

- 
- **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**

---