



Student as Producer- Final Project Report

“Attempts on Her Life”

Overall, this project met its main aims of innovation and interdisciplinarity throughout the process of creation and the final performance. The production team worked together from different disciplines such as Theatre, History of Art and English Literature and brought their own areas of interest into developing the script “Attempts on Her Life”. During rehearsals we explored a wide range of theatre and performance art techniques alongside the text. The final performance looked at the fluidity of identity in the modern world.

We auditioned the show we looked for actors who were comfortable with exploring movement work alongside text. There was an initial audition which consisted of reading extracts from the text and then a workshop based recall audition. Although we were very pleased with the final cast, it was difficult to market the auditions beyond the traditional English and Theatre Students. It was nice to have students from History of Art and French in the cast but we still felt there could have been a wider range of interdisciplinary students. This is clearly still an area to improve in Warwick Drama as a whole but something I will tackle in future projects.

The first part of the rehearsal process began with blocking each individual scene- this heavily involved the cast as we read through each individual scene and asked them to interpret and give suggestions about how the scene would be staged. This was a successful part of the project as it allowed a maximum input of interpretations for the ambiguous script- when we came to direct it the director (Sam George) took on board different points of view of what the scene was to help convey the ambiguity of Anne’s identity. This part of the rehearsal process also involved introducing different performance artists such as Marina Abramovic and Spartacus Chetwynd. We used Marina Abramovic’s ideas of stripping back performance- we blocked one of the scenes asking the actors to portray dialogue and emotion with just eye movement, movement and gestures. Spartacus Chetwynd’s technique was used in a design element from Ella Tebay when the actors created a puppet on stage similar to the one Chetwynd used in her Turner Prize performance.

The design elements included using sound to portray the change in scenes, we wanted to split them to further develop the idea of Anne’s change in identity. The mannequin was one of the most effective design elements of the show, it represented Anne’s absence of identity and was painted throughout the performance by each actor throughout each scene- projecting the scene’s exploration of her identity onto the mannequin.

The final performance just further demonstrated many of the ideas we had developed throughout the process. The play, a fragmented text to begin with, was challenging for audiences to impose a clear interpretation on, with English and Theatre student Josie Davies remarking that she was left unclear as to whether the production was interpreting Anne's identity as singular or as 17 different Annes. However, the ambiguity in the performance was a device that we felt was extremely important, with Pete O'Brien complimenting how the performance avoided imposing an overly prescriptive concept onto the text. Broadly, from a conceptual perspective, we felt that the final performance was successful, precisely due to this stylistic and theoretical fragmentation. Although we did not necessarily manage to achieve 17 different styles of the 17 different scenes, the jarring differences between the meaning of the scenes, particularly the more challenging scenes such as 'The New Anny', created an unsettling and thought-provoking production.

We felt that our focus on interdisciplinarity was a vital influence on the final production, as many of the most interesting sections of the performance were derived from starting points such as the Spartacus Chetwynd influence on 'Faith In Ourselves', or the art influence on the central focal point of the mannequin. In some cases, the influences could have been foregrounded further; it would have been interesting to examine 'Untitled (100 words)' in relation to debates over contemporary art, postmodern art and the work of Sarah Kane. However, the vast majority of the problems came from our limited technical skills, as the sound design was interesting, but would have been far more effective with a dedicated sound engineer. Furthermore, being able to use either Humanities Studio or the Avon Studio would have allowed us to improve the audience's sight-lines significantly, whereas the second performance of our show, being more popular, made it hard for audiences members at the back to see.

Tommy Loftus

