

After Thoughts

The work-in-progress sharing at the Siobhan Davies Dance studios was called an event – to foreground that it was about spontaneity, aliveness, site-specific strategies and audience participation. There was a desire to integrate the abstract sculptural qualities and forms in the piece, with emotionally inhabited performance; and to ask the questions: what is presence? And what space is there for the live, emotional body, in an era dominated by the screen?

In *About Us* we explored the mundane and the ordinary; any audience could recognize their own gestures in the movement vocabulary. Several of the personal stories, while unique to the individual artists involved, foregrounded the everyday choices we all make around loss, joy, anger, pleasure, fear; choices which may feel ‘free’ but are in fact often determined by our personal histories, the economic system and by societal expectations.

The repetition of the ingredients of each story through film, soundscapes and live performance – accumulates a collage of images and actions, which celebrate and frame the special quality of each story. There are, at this stage of development, five stories, which are woven with episodes of ensemble movement, which I brought into the studio. In a way these are my own stories drawn from observing people in public and community spaces – the street, the beach, a tennis match, a shop. These were random images and ideas that I collected over a period of time, which I notated through descriptive writing, making drawings or photography. This more communal/choral material, is used in dialogue with the subjective stories captured on film.

The company talked a lot about the intimacy with the audience – how would that work – how would it feel? The close proximity of the traverse seating arrangement allowed the audience to catch a performer’s eye, to even talk to them or touch them; this was responding to the live moment – the audience became part of the live event.

The piece played with perspective – there was no ‘front’ – the live action was designed to be read from any physical and conceptual perspective. The piece as a whole could be described as performance installation – which could work in a gallery, a studio theatre, a warehouse, or even an outdoor public site, such as a park or station; it would be possible for the audience to be mobile or seated. The work is about space and context and raises important questions about the context for this kind of innovative work, which draws on the disciplines, and strategies of postmodern dance, live art, performance art, event art and physical theatre. This crossing of discipline boundaries reflects my own interdisciplinary history; I have always worked with performers who, like myself, want to cross paths with other art forms in the quest to find artistic languages and forms that can explore the important and difficult stories that are ‘about us’.

Jacky Lansley, November 2016