

DRAMA

Trials Verbatim

Question related to the “reality” in Verbatim.

Verbatim Theatre uses theatre to capture multiple stories behind the reality of an event or situation, through the use of multiple voices in a dynamic and complex way. Through the use of personal testimony an event in itself is captured from the stories of those who experienced them or were in some way affected. Two different harsh realities are explored in the verbatim plays Parramatta Girls and Laramie Project. In Parramatta girls the harsh affect of institutionalization and in Laramie Project, the brutal bashing of Matthew Sheppard are portrayed to their audience.

Verbatim theatre works on the basis of truth and responsibility as writers and theatre workers record and interview real people about their lived experiences. We realised the importance of the truth and reality when constructing our own verbatim piece on the often harshness of ‘Cliques’. This process allowed us to explore the procedure of using other peoples’ experiences and turning it into a play and to give us insight into the tension between maintaining truth while creating a truthful piece that still maintained audience engagement. We found this really difficult and decided in the end to slightly alter the way that lines were said in order to engage our audience of teenagers. So whilst creating an entertaining performance we had to take away from the reality of the performance. Tectonic Theatre Company conducted over 200 interview in order to reinforce the fact they weren’t just telling one story, but everyone’s, in hope of enabling a greater understanding of these events, and in HOPE that it won’t happen again.

Whilst all this is crafted and structured by the playwright, it was only made evident to me the importance of how the story is told through structure as certain aspects came to light, such as Moment: Matthew Sheppard. This scene gave us insight into how confronting it would have been for Reggie to come across him in such a vulnerable and beaten state. This harsh reality is really shown when a student from our school tied himself to a fence and had his shoes taken off him to symbolise the sheer helplessness and vulnerability he had. He stated how “someone could kick me and I wouldn’t be able to do anything about it.” As Matthew Sheppard faced the brutal reality of.

The structure of the performance plays a significant role in portraying the reality of the play. I particularly noticed this when seeing the Riverside performance of The Laramie Project. Direct language and testimony is used as dialogue, however what is said and when it occurs is structured to create particular meanings. Similar to our ‘Cliques’ performance the importance of truth being told through a character is evident through the characterization of the Mormons in Laramie Project. These characters were made to act over the top and were portrayed as cynical and disrespectful of that portrayal. Whilst at this same production by the Riverside Theatre reality was taken away by the fact that in the Moment: Russell Henderson it was staged like a CSI show with the detector circling the person under the spotlight. We didn’t believe this worked this interpretation as it took away from the truth of the event. Another key point is how the people of Laramie would have felt because of this truthful event.

The importance of reality is made clear in the relevance of who and what the play is about. Alana Valentine made point that in fact some verbatim plays have to be considerably ‘massaged’ because of their sensitive content, but it was in fact the point that Neil Armfield made to her about the story being about the Parramatta girls and not the guards that led to her decision of their being invisible. This was shown in that in all the scenes in the play the guards were invisible. As an audience member this gave a huge impact and lots of tension to the scene as our attention was completely on who was being beaten and how intimidating it would have been to experience this.

In Scene 7, Act 1 of Parramatta Girls one of the girls, Maree is forced to rip off her teddy bear’s arm. As an audience member, the use of evoking empathy through the sound of the arm being ripped off

brought about a stronger harshness of the reality and situation at hand. This was furthermore shown in the pain that the characters inflicted on themselves by cutting and scraping themselves against the walls. Through the use of sponges filled with red stage blood the harsh truth behind the confused emotional feelings was shown through the realism in the way the actors went about these scenes. This made me feel sick and quite horrible at the thought of what horrible circumstances would force them to do this!

The current social need to be presented with issues of relevance to our community has allowed for issues such as the abuse and neglect experienced by the Parramatta Girls and the hate crimes of Matthew Sheppard in Laramie Project to be presented as a harsh reality of our society today. The harsh reality of these stories needed to be told and as Alana Valentine stated “I think audiences like that too [real stories]...Because everything is so filtered. People want to hear stories about their lives, their backyard, their country.” The continued relevance of plays such as these is that the audiences are aware that they are witnessing a shared reality, whether local or global. Audiences are given the opportunity to reflect on a play’s content intellectually and to experience the character’s stories emotionally.