

ONE HOUR TEN

“Grief makes one hour ten” Shakespeare (*Richard II*, I.iii)

Shakespeare leaves many characters on the cliff edge of grief. What does it look like to take care of them here, after?

Through the imagined context of group counselling sessions a selection of Shakespeare’s grief-laden characters come together – across time, across plays – exchanging experiences, cultures, struggles and rituals to explore how we shape grief into something we live with, not necessarily something to cure.

Exploring grief as a shared experience, and theatre as a communal act of reconstruction we will create a brand new piece of profoundly inventive and emotionally compelling theatre. We will think expansively on the idea of grief, and the way it crops up beyond a death experience. *One Hour Ten* will be delivered through an innovative process that is authentically committed to co-creation.

Process

Character selection

There are a number of Shakespearean characters that are left with unresolved grief e.g. the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, Horatio in *Hamlet*, Kent in *King Lear*. There are also griefs referenced and not tended to such as Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice*, Hermione in *The Winter’s Tale*. The selection of five or six characters will happen through conversations with the writers.

Character biographies

Working with three to five writers, each is invited to construct detailed character dossiers. This will draw significantly on textual evidence but not without imaginative license. For example, it is a textual fact that the Nurse (in R&J) has lost her own daughter. It is a textual possibility that the Nurse’s name is Angelica and could be a Catholic. Expanding creatively beyond this, what are the Nurse’s secret desires, political affiliations, everyday encounters?

Improvisation

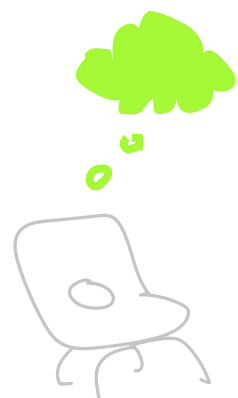
The actors will have the opportunity to study their character’s biography and explore them in solo improvisations. This will build to carefully curated workshop sessions that are centred around group improvisations as the actors/characters meet and explore the landscape together.

Reconstruction

The workshop material will be documented and discussed as a company. Likely this will be used to co-author scripts or fragments of text. We will go through a process of reconstructing (i) the richest moments from the improvisations (ii) relevant moments from the plays. Audiences will begin to be invited into the process.

Development to Performance

We will follow the co-creation process wherever the experiment takes us.



There is the potential to explore an episodic form but the ultimate vision is for a completed text for a performance run.

Further thoughts

Tone

Whilst the project lends itself to difficult themes there is an invitation to find joy and humour in the spirit of community and healing.

Truth/Fiction/Temporality

The sense of distance and reconstruction is important to underline that we are creating a work of fiction. It is not actual group therapy, nor is it a documentary. Of course, theatre is a collision of imagination and reality, so there will be great care taken in the setting up of the spaces that extends from the company to the audiences.

The idea of the 're-do' plays a role in some therapy practice, and is an essential component of theatre. The 're-do' is essentially a temporal clash of past and present, and it is in that interval that we open up a sense of possibility, of a different future, an alternative outcome, a new ritual. There is a lot to explore in terms of the 're-do' – for example, do the actors de-role on stage, do we explore live what it means to 'live in a character', are the actors seeking release from their characters as a metaphor of grief etc etc...

Inspiration

Perhaps it was growing up in a house – well, 13 different houses – where unprocessed grief echoed from wall to wall that draws me to Shakespeare's thesis of grief that runs unapologetically through the canon. I return to it again and again and that act of return is centred in *One Hour Ten*..

Since the CoVid-19 pandemic new community strategies to support people grieving have continued to develop, such as grief cafes. The idea of public grief, public memorial, and community support took new iterations and the opportunities to explore the culture(s) of grief has become more prominent. This also connects us to Shakespeare, the conditions of the plague and, of course, the death of his son.

Influences

The process is influenced by the practices of Katie Mitchell (character bibles); Mike Leigh (improvisations); Milo Rau and Lola Arias (reconstruction, memory, social groups)

Audiences

- Those drawn to themes of grief, ritual and healing
- Shakespeare enthusiasts interested in new dramaturgical territory
- Fans of process-driven, actor-led work
- People interested in the work of Katie Mitchell, Mike Leigh, Milo Rau and Lola Arias,

Verve is a brand new company founded by Rachel Valentine Smith and *One Hour Ten* is one of Verve's flagship projects. Verve is committed to process driven ideas through courage, community and generosity.

