

Mission Statement

Anxiety disorder is considered one of the most common mental illness within the UK for both adults and the younger generations. 'Teenagers are afraid of making mistakes in front of their friends and their teachers. They feel embarrassed, anxious and humiliated. These feelings may cause reticence. When they are anxious, they cannot speak. When they can't speak, they become more anxious.' (Atas, 2015, 962) this cycle feeds itself for those looking for a way out of their yellow expanse in the words of G.E.M Anscombe within *intention* 1957. Our intentions can seem to be constantly battered against the wall of societies presumed anxieties. Anxiety comes in two common forms the mental disorders such as social anxiety disorder and the anxieties/fears of the everyday. The things we all experience and the feelings that persist within as we stare into the abyss of choices presented to us. Our workshop titled *Anxiety* needed exploration of the multiple forms of anxieties, to create theatre that affected an audience, and in particular, the audience alluded to in the quote above, teenagers and young people.

The project itself consist of four parts that are targeted towards a younger demographic with guided elements throughout to control the action. I take this moment to turn your attention toward care, as the first part of my research consisted of exploring the notion and potential contradictions of care and caring gestures.

The victims of our care, the mums we give unwanted flowers too, significant others who receive the often-rushed otherwise un-thoughtful garage shop gifts. The people we find ourselves closest to, to warrant spending the money we make in daily drudgery on. A statement like this, seams confused, by using words like victim we imply a violence has been committed through an otherwise trustworthy action and phrase care in this caring I suggest we have made a victim;

'A person harmed...a person who is tricked or duped... a person who has come to feel helpless and passive in the face of misfortune or ill-treatment.'(Harper, 2010, Dictionary.com, last accessed: 20/05/2018)

When we say a victim of care, I am not refereeing to the often times far too frequent real victims of institutions and systems, who have made people feel marginalised and left too often, to fend for themselves within care, where those people are placed in positions that jeopardise their wellbeing both mentally and physically. No I referee instead to both ourselves as victims of the freedoms we enjoy and our nearest and dearest we try and please with 'gifts', that can perpetuate feelings of dread in their respective owners, with the onus that they too will have to reciprocate the gifting.

Using this notion of gifting, and the anxieties it can induce we decided to present our audience with diaries that are gifted to them with the impetus being that they can return their gifts with added text later. We explored applied theatre practises, existential philosophy and theatres of the absurd to discover what response theatre can have to the anxiety of the everyday. Our first section of the workshop involves a performative element (televised media). We play a filmed, and edited, overtly stylised recording of a news report of a missing person. This was to capture the audience attention by generating a mystery to be solved and a reason to follow the performative element that follows this section. I now turn us back to the critical research.

The concept of giving and receiving both in commercialised goods, ideas, notions, and feelings, cornerstones the response theatre can have to anxiety or for the purpose of this paper, 'The dizziness of choice' (Kierkegaard,1844) we can be faced with in 21st century England. The phrase itself first coined by Soren Kierkegaard in *The Concepts of Anxiety* written originally in 1844 with the first English translation done by Walter Lowrie in *The Concept of Dread 1944*. The issue I have looked at for this research has been the 2015 version edited by Alistar Hannay. Anxiety plagues us now potentially more than ever with our capitalised systems and reification promoting choice. In the text Kierkegaard expressed that 'anxiety can be compared with dizziness. He whose eye happens to look down into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy. But what is the reason? It is just as much his own eye as the abyss, for suppose he had not looked down.'(Hannay,75,2015) as Allan Hugh Cole writes in *Be Not Anxious: Pastoral Care of Disquieted Souls(2008)* 'No one gave more sustained attention to anxiety, including its sources, effects, and solutions, than Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher and theologian who wrote extensively on the subject. He placed anxiety at the very center of human existence, such that one cannot escape its grip entirely. Why? Because anxiety inevitably comes with freedom, and human beings, whom God has created to be free, eventually awake to their freedom and the potentials that come with it.'(Cole, 68, 2008) With this freedom and dizziness we inevitable create our own dreads being faced with the choices both mundane and extraordinary in our everyday. The gifts we choice to give others and the gifts we choice to give ourselves. The choice to have a full English or a cereal bar in the morning. Our abyss is the ads and social connectivity we have in 21st century England. The Facebook and Twitter mediums, that promote us to wish our nearest happy birthdays or the messages not replied to and looming in our message tabs, the stream of never ending updating tweets urging us to respond. 'Social anxiety and the need for social assurance are also associated with problematic use of Facebook to the point where Facebook use can become an addiction...social anxiety generate use of social networking sites, but then problematic addiction to these sites itself causes further forms of anxiety and stress.'(Davey, G. 2016. last accessed 23/05/2018) The stream of our choice seems endless, the dread we face a cause

for our anxieties. Exploring the concepts of anxiety and its place next to theatre, I was inspired by Soren Kierkegaard's rhetoric as well as absurdist plays like Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953). Wanting to demonstrate the need for furthering an understanding of anxiety. This idea of gifting ideas, and feelings, became paramount to our workshops structure, with the concept of gifting with rules, but rules that structured the activity in response to the affective theatre gave us recourse, to create applied theatre for the needs of understanding the complexities of anxiety.

Within the project itself during the performance design phase, we wanted to curate a box like space that had iconographies of both care and gifting (flowers) and the more recently searched items to reduce stress and anxiety from Google, which came to be lavender. The project consists of bringing together the research around anxiety as a condition and anxieties faced by young people in Britain, within both the minutia and the macrocosms of these young people's existence. Hence, the use of recorded media, with this in mind, we took inspiration from the use of applied drama practises with anxiety and in particular an applied drama program in Turkey that was 'conducted with 24, 12th grade students at a high school in Kozan, Turkey. The triangulation of the data was established with pre and post-tests, semi-structured pre and post- interviews, and student diaries. The teacher's reflections strengthened the qualitative aspect of the study. After six weeks of language and drama training, the drama techniques significantly lowered the speaking anxiety of the EFL learners.' (Atas, 2015, 961) using this program as a successful guide to how to do applied theatre correctly when approaching the sensitivity of anxiety we took note of the qualitative research gained by the drama program. Wanting to steer the work we were making towards younger generations this program also established a link for the work we are making and the applied theatre approach we wanted within our workshop itself.

By taking the time to structure our workshop around the real applications of theatre within educational systems, we knew we needed to adhere to the principles set out by the various different forms of applied theatre. 'The terms 'applied drama', 'applied theatre' and 'applied performance' emerged in universities, and gained currency during the 1990s, as students, academics, theatre practitioners and policy-makers used them as a kind of shorthand to describe forms of dramatic activity that are specifically intended to benefit individuals, communities and societies.' (Nicholson, 2015, 4) this applied theatre approach taken by the team in Turkey was an approach that gave us a means to begin constructing our own secondary qualitative research work, which began with a commissioned production on childhood anxiety and in particular anxieties facing year 7 for a community school in Portchester. In entering, a school during the enrichment hour and bringing a production that attempted to focus attention onto the real sufferers of anxieties with the use of the missing person analogy to frame the performance. We constructed the production itself around

theatre of absurd within the rhythm of the text, also using composed music by YouTube composer Hvetter who allowed us the use of tracks that framed the looping notion of anxiety and the looping notion of being trapped within the confines of an empty box. These performative structures highlighted by our script, pulled along by the initial report of a missing person, and linked to social media and its impact for anxiety; through a digital television, displaying recorded material and animations helped us gather research to bring back to our workshop developmental process.

This performance performed at Portchester Community School in 2018, was also an opportunity to generate research into affective theatre, by gathering data from the students in the form of student diary entries. Which were emailed to us via our teacher liaisons within the school, this gave us invaluable insight into how our performance affected them and their generalised view on anxiety before and after the production. This performance in progress was a fantastic opportunity to seed our workshop making process and further our understanding of anxiety overall within education and for year 7's.

With this said, I would now take a moment to now go back and explore the historical roots/context of anxiety from Kierkegaard through to Freud, and onward, until we get to others figure heads such as Rollo May who influenced the poetry or third section of our workshop progress. He states 'in 1950, anxiety emerged into overt statement in contemporaneous literature. W.H. Auden entitled his poem with the phrase, which he believed, most accurately characterized that period, *The Age of Anxiety*.' (May, 1996, 5) through May's exploration of Kierkegaard's theory's around anxiety we were able to understand the age we may be in, as 'the age of anxiety', this took us to the place of writing feverishly within our workshop. For the second section a moment of calm anxiety where we relied heavily on the recorded voice and poetry, to give rhythms and pace to our performative element. More importantly May, expresses About Auden's poem, 'Though Auden's interpretation...makes it clear that the underlying causes of the anxiety of his characters, as well as of others of that age, must be sought on deeper levels than merely the occasion of war. The four characters in the poem, though different in temperament and in background, have in common certain characteristics of our times: loneliness, the feeling of not being of value as persons, and the experience of not being able to love and be loved despite the common need, the common effort, and the common but temporary respite provided by alcohol. The sources of the anxiety were to be found in certain basic trends in our culture, one of which, for Auden, was the pressure toward conformity which occurs in a world where commercial and mechanical values are apotheosized:' (May, 1996, 5). This apotheosized commercialism can lead to negativity for our everyday anxieties something we wanted to capture with our poetry within the *Anxiety* workshop. The thoughts expressed by May in relation to the characters within Auden's poems, character who in his words

express 'Loneliness and feelings of not being of value', cemented themselves as key points, the children who experienced the 2018 in school production of *Anxiety*, wrote back about their own self-worth within today's modern environment. Which was an element of anxiety we felt could be captured within our Workshops poetry, and echo of the feelings expressed by the students. .

Though we have entered the age of the century of fear according to 'Albert Camus (who) designated this age as "the century of fear," in comparison with the seventeenth century as the age of mathematics, the eighteenth as the age of the physical sciences, and the nineteenth as that of biology. Camus realized that these characterizations were not logically parallel, that fear is not a science, but that "science must be somewhat involved, since its latest theoretical advances have brought it to the point of negating itself while its perfected technology threatens the globe itself with destruction.' (May, 1996, 7) Within our workshop, we wanted to make the understanding of anxiety paramount as well as the effects empathy lead theatre can have in creating work for younger people within this age of fear and anxieties that are constantly berated towards us within our Medias.

Taking us back now to the diaries a pivotal part of the workshop within its feedback loop. To construct this theatre as a means of cathartic writing and viewing of real feelings as gifted. We wanted to, as mentioned previously give a symbolic diary to our audience, something they might hate, might cherish but something, which was theirs. Which allows them (the audience) to secret away their thoughts both within the workshop confines and beyond, with the option of returning their gifted diaries to us, to display in the digital, on a dedicated online museum of cathartic anxiety scribbles. 'One of the themes that is shared by different aspects of applied drama/theatre/performance is, as Judith Ackroyd pointed out, a focus on its intentionality, specifically an aspiration to use drama to improve the lives of individuals and create better societies. Ackroyd's (2000) was one of the first to suggest that applied theatre is an 'umbrella term' used to describe many different forms of educational and community based theatre- including theatre education, reminiscence theatre, theatre for development, theatre in hospitals- each of which has its own theories, debates and highly specialised practices which are often rather different from each other. She includes both process-oriented and performative practices in her description of applied theatre, and helpfully sums up the common beliefs of many different practitioners in the field...'

(Nicholson, 4, 2015) By broadening our workshop to work outside the timeframe of the workshops limited 60 minute run time, allows the young people within our audience to have the time to think and reflect about their anxieties and a means and reason to express it within the pages of their book (A Anxiety diary).

As we know, 'Anxiety is a state of panic-stricken suspension and inactivity; at once attracted and repelled, the individual is 'frozen', as if on the edge of an abyss, fearful of the next moment as of the end of time itself. Nevertheless, there is less of the ideal in anxiety which is 'felt; in the stomach, as nausea, an inner emptying, as if the insides of the body were in the process of dissolving. Anxiety is a visceral dizziness, whereas doubt, which is 'located; in the head, is a kind of ideal vertigo. It is disorientating in, or of, space and time; feeling of being 'lost' and simultaneously moving in all directions.' (Ferguson, 1995, 135) this confusion of anxiety is something we wanted to capture, without being off putting hence the initial attraction to theatre of the absurd which we used as our lens for writing the scripted material during the first section of the workshop. Whereas applied theatre has a place to enabling young people, and adults a way of expressing their inner feelings. To read back their thoughts in different mind frames and reflect on themselves, within their own boxes during our workshop.

Our Workshops aim is to create an awareness for the box, both metaphorically within someone's mind surrounding their anxiety, and physically. The box's we place ourselves in and only peer over the edge to witness an abyss of choices and freedoms. We do not want to point to a cure for anxiety but merely a change in perception around it. To draw attention to the boxes and medias that shape us reflecting on conversation held before the space, and help our audience through this awareness and if not a change, then at least a book/diary for them to write in, and draw on.

Evaluating, projecting and reflecting on '*Anxiety*' our performance workshop. With its future designed to be set after our already created 60-minute text based performance. Within our workshops evaluation I come to realise we need to rethink the naming conventions of our characters to homogenise and perhaps nail down on the elements that were working. Fundamentally, we aim to create a workshop that draws attention to the anxieties of the everyday. Making participants aware of time, and the pace at which modern society operates by slowing the action down whilst still holding suspenseful mystery's to attempt to make our audience constantly think about the production of anxiety itself, like previously mentioned taking our cues from the suspenseful action of Samuel Becket's, *Waiting for Godot* (1953) and Jean Paul Sartre, *No Exit* (1944). Our process during the workshop funnelled participants from the performative foyer through to the theatre environment. 'The foyer is not neutral' (Barker, 9, 2005) we wanted to make sure we created reflective environments in which our participants are constantly confronted with reflections of anxiety and faced with it during the workshops distinct moments.

With my future research now turning its attention toward how theatre responds to anxiety, whether by tackling mental health in applied practises or reproductions of old plays that shine a light onto

mental health. I want to tackle these difficult sociological issues faced by people creating theatre and art around mental health and how to respond both sensitively and walk the line of creating beneficial performative material.

Reflecting on our practise, I feel we managed to curate an interdigital experience that used disconnection and reflective practises to make participants aware of anxiety without pointing to any one cure. With a need to tighten the focus and sure up the narrative of the workshop. I have a clear line of how to improve the performance through basic dramaturgical practises taking my applied drama cues from Norah Wilson and her methods for teaching drama alongside performance specialists such as Pam Schweitzer and her approach to using real memory to create applied theatre and workshop environments.

By attempting to bridge our performance into the digital realm to draw attention to the social spaces that can be a cause of harm and reinforcement to inducing anxiety in young people, but also a capable tool at enabling people to reach out beyond their linear spaces. I feel we wanted to make the workshop longer lasting, something that can be accessible outside its limited scope, with the diary acting as a constant tool in reaching out and reaching back. The workshop titled 'Anxiety' looks at bringing these disparate parts together to build upon each other. To end this evaluation and mission statement I want to turn our attention toward Howard Bakers, Book, *Death, the One and the Art of Theatre (2005)* in his many musings I want to finish with a quote 'The theatre purports to give pleasure to the many. The art of theatre lends anxiety to the few. Which is the greater gift?' (Barker, 1, 2005) The gift we gave to our audience, led by mysteries in text, imagery and musical composition I feel created an awareness for anxiety. With a more focused approach we can heighten this further in the future.

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