

William Stanton and Katie O'Reilly - Responses

William and Kaite present us with two very different approaches to creating work and talking about the work that they create. As a practitioner who has worked for a political theatre company for a number of years their experiences and practise highlighted for me some of the challenges of writing political, post-colonial work, and the location of the 'I' within it.

Both William and Kaite actively pursue narratives that take them beyond their own experience and cultural reference points. William goes on a journey following unexpected voices, who say things in a new *way* he describes a starting point as there being something in the *way something was said*. It is not what is being said, but the way in which it is said, the emphasis given by the speaker, which is strange and different. Kaite described 'telling stories told to me' - 'would they be the histories we expect?' – a similar discovery of a counter-histories to those we have received.

I wondered whether this spark takes place in different parts of an individual writer's self – William describes an intellectual curiosity, Kaite describes an urgency born of rage – or whether that is simply an indication of the situation in which the idea is born? The cerebral and the emotional as starting points perhaps? Or is it within or without the self?

The platform highlighted different processes in play development. There is no 'theory' behind the way that the writing happens, and both writers acknowledge that no two plays are the same in terms of process: whilst there is an element of 'know thyself' in terms of the writers' own approach to their craft, every new creative venture will question and shift the process that is employed in the making of the work.

When a writer is exploring these new stories, often different from their own, where does the personal 'I' come into it? What is the responsibility of the writer when *telling stories told to them*? Where is the writers' *own* voice? Even pieces of so-called verbatim theatre, are fictions: they have been edited, constructed, *dramatised* by someone. Kaite talks about the responsibility of editing the voices of others and creating a dramatic text from their stories: if it had been up to her it would have ended differently.

I am reminded of discussions, which came up during The Red Room's development of *Hoxton Story*, a site-specific theatre piece exploring the effects of regeneration on the community in Hoxton, East London. The piece was drawn from verbatim text, but fictionalised. The performance contained verbatim text performed by actors, fictionalised text inspired by interviewees and filmed interviews with local inhabitants. These collided in performance, as did actors with the inhabitants of Hoxton, as audiences were taken on a journey around the East London district. In this case we chose a narrative of Hoxton, which questioned the supposed 'beneficial' effects of regeneration on local communities and whilst *Hoxton Story* wore its fiction on its sleeve clearly, its interaction with the local community in text and performance demanded, as do the two playwrights in this platform, that an audience select a different point of reference and view their heroes and villains in a different way.

Sarah Dickenson