



Drama (Advanced Higher): assignment

Candidate evidence

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candidate evidence – please store securely**

Candidate 1 evidence

Advanced Higher Assignment

The wonderful play of 'Things I Know To Be True' co-directed by Geordie Brookman and Scott Graham is a play I have closely been studying. Within this essay I will be discussing the extent to which I believe the directors have given priority and status to the acting within this play. In BWW interview with Geordie 2016 he said "It's a small-scale play in that it's just about one family, but the emotional landscape is epic". This suggests that in order for something so simple to hold such a purpose means there must have been given priority to the actors to portray such incredible complex characters and explore important issues.

Scott Graham and Geordie Brookman co-directed this play together through Frackle Assembly and State Theatre Company South Australia. With having two different directors this means different views, backgrounds and experiences they can use to come together and create something so incredibly and beautifully done like 'Things I Know To Be True'. Scott in BWW podcast interview 2016 said "I've got a history of work with movement, Geordie has a gorgeous understanding of text and relationships with actors" (Scott, BWW interview, 2016). Their two different specialities allow them to create a synergy that benefits the quality of the actors performance. With Scott having insightful understanding on movement and Geordie with text and relationships this allows them to bring both aspects together to really elevate a piece of theatre which is exactly what they have done through the directing process of 'Things I Know To Be True'. The thought and quality behind a performance is so incredibly important as it is they be deeply connect with the audience in order to make them feel affected by your piece of theatre. Character is what is so important as that is what connects through the acting to the audience. Therefore by focusing on ~~intepetty~~ ~~the text in a very way~~ ~~experine thy~~ ~~with movement~~ and giving priority to the quality of the acting is what makes a performance so incredible like this one that I have studied.

Within the beginning of the play is Rosie's monologue. She is the youngest child out of her family. She is youthful, oblivious and on her journey of growing up. This monologue is where she speaks about her trip away from home and how it resulted in an achy headache. This scene involves a large amount of beautifully and skillfully done physical theatre. We can see Scott's influence throughout this scene as he has chosen to express his knowledge of this style throughout this emotionally intense scene with the character of Rosie. It starts with only Rosie on the stage with a spotlight on her to bring all focus on this moment for her character. Priority has clearly been given to the acting here as her open body language and big gestures perfectly captivate how the character felt excited to see the world yet was so oblivious to the problems she soon might face. When showing her experience with Emmanuel (man who breaks her heart) Scott used physical theatre by wrapping a man's hands from behind her around her waist and on her arms. This made me feel the intimacy and love Rosie felt within these moments with the man. It also made me feel slightly uncomfortable too which made sense when we find out he broke her heart. Physical theatre was used yet again when the members of her family, Ben, Fran, Bob, Pip & Mark, all use strength and focus to pick her up above their heads. This made me feel connected to Rosie as I could really feel how high on life she felt and how it all seemed like a dream. Her being physically elevated in the air created imagery that she had her hands in the clouds.

Within the company of Frantic Assembly they use many different warm-up strategies before they begin rehearsing their pieces. The cast of 'Things I Know To Be True' used the warm-up of 'keepy-ups' by gently throwing the ball to one another with the aim to not drop it and catch it. They used their whole cast that was in the rehearsal to make it more complex and really warm them up. This warm-up "Encourages a bit of focus" (Frantic, 2016) which is essential for playing a character and reaching their full potential. This warm-up got them stretched and ready to go which is essential given that Frantic have used a large amount of physical theatre.

Priority was clearly given to the ~~status~~ acting within the skilfully put together scene of Mark coming out as transgender. Within this scene he begins to deliver a monologue about how unhappy he is with himself, and that is because he is a trans woman. Scott and Geordie found it incredibly important that if they were going to explore the topic of LGBT then they needed to do it right.

"To make sure we are always addressing the issues in a sensitive way" (Scott Graham, 2016, Frankie Assembly). This shows that when directing Mark it had to be an accurate representation and to also give a voice to members of the LGBT which is essential when exploring such an important theme. This is as there is already a lack of LGBT representation within our society so to give them a voice within this production is a big and exciting thing to do right. Scott and Graham had Mark Hood alone with a blue jet spotlight. This represented his emotions of feeling isolated and alone whilst struggling with his identity. They directed him to use closed body language and use an anxious tone of voice to suggest how LGBT members may feel when they are coming out ~~to their mothers~~. Priority has been given to the acting as the acting is what is used to represent the purpose of the play, specifically this scene.

This moment is followed up by Mark coming out to his family. He arrives at Bob and Fran's house extremely distressed. With being directed to use an assertive tone of voice and weak eye contact creates a sense that Mark is unhappy with himself which he is. The use of proscenium in this scene has Mark Hood opposite Bob & Fran and Rexie is Hood at the back. This suggests how isolated he feels and how scared he is to come out. Bob soon makes an insensitive joke which as an audience member would make you draw your jaw drop. Bob makes a joke saying that he should go ahead and say what he needs to say as it's just like he wants to be a woman. As an audience member this is a gut wrenching moment as this is exactly what Mark wants to do. Bob saying that represents how unwelcoming and unsupportive people may be. It also shows that you should never joke about anything that is to do with identity. The priority to the acting here was so prominent as it had the exact gasp effect in the audience as Scott and Geordie clearly wanted. Hence why they used these particular particular acting concepts such as focus on proscenium to show emotion and body language to show how the characters were feeling in this moment, specifically Mark.

We see the priority of the acting evident within the argument scene with Fran and Pip. It starts with Pip sitting in the doorway of Fran's house and Fran comes out to find her there. She knows Pip never does that so she knows something is wrong. Pip was sitting for comfort but it resulted in conflict. The tension rises after Pip reveals she is leaving her husband Steve. Fran is angry at Pip for the idea of leaving her family while she really ~~feels~~ ~~has~~ ~~what~~ Fran herself with she had ~~die~~ many years ago as she was/is unhappy too. They take the anger out on each other by using an angry tone of voice with a loud volume and intense eye contact to show their emotion through the acting. "It's an intense experience. I'm not usually easily moved by things but this did. So expect to be deeply affected" (Audience member at Performance of Things I Know To Be True).

This scene was clearly directed to be emotionally intense and make the audience feel the burning tension. It clearly had priority given to the acting at the set and production was very minimal. However they managed to create this harsh and intense moment through solely the acting. The acting was key to portray this strange relationship with the Mother and Daughter, Fran and Pip.

In conclusion I believe that Geordie Brookman and Scott Brogan did indeed give the priority and talent to the acting with Things I Know To Be True. They both use their understanding of different aspects of acting, leading to the relationship and Scott's being movement. They both came together to create this incredible piece.

Drama Advanced Higher Resource Sheet

Candidate Name

Scottish Candidate Number

Question Selected

Analyse the extent to which the director gave priority and status to the acting in one performance.

Scott Graham.

Wonderful play. Interview with BWW 2016, "Geordie" It's a small-scale play in Frankie & State theatre that it's just about one family, company work australis but the emotional landscape is epic.

Geordie Brookman.

co-directed.

"I've got a history of work with movement, Geordie has a gorgeous understanding of text and relationship with actors."

"Hold on to your nerves and keep interrogating what might be the best way possible telling the story of each moment"

† This dynamic benefits the quality of the actors performance, as there is two people from different backgrounds.

Audience: Frankie, October 2017.
"the story is beautifully told".
"It's an intense exp. I'm not usually moved by things so expect to be deeply affected."

Rosie's Monologues

- Physical theatre elevates the acting.
- "Began to ~~escape~~ explore how the stories might escape gravity".
- Can feel the intimacy with ~~entire~~ (physical hooks, hands wrapped)
- Shares experience about heartbreak.
- Entails her to show she feels lifted.
- Spotlight focus on actor.
- Assure the tone, open body lang.

Yes I agree can see...
But I believe it elevates the piece.

"encourage a bit of focus"

Warmup - keeps up - done to get every flaring to be witnessed a reach potential through acting.

Marta coming out

- Accurately representing in a sensitive way.
- LGBT.
- "make sure we are always addressing the issues in a sensitive way"
- Themes/issue are portrayed properly because priority has been given to acting.
- Closed body lang. Anxious tone.
- Rain, blue spotlight adds but priority was acting, short breath = scared.

Pip & Fran

Issues arising for conflict only in conflict.

- wants to leave husband new man.
- minimal rel/name.
- cursing adds to emotion.
- hard hitting & intense.
- priority has been given
- pip like her mum.
- angry tone, fast pace, loud volume.
- Eyes.
- mother & daughter.
- Proximities, facing each other.

Word count:

Candidate 2 evidence

Analyse the extent to which a directorial interpretation created dramatic meaning and impact in one performance.

In 2014 the National theatre performed a production of Medea by Euripides at the Oliver theatre, this production was directed by Carrie Cracknell and adapted from the original text by Ben Power. Carrie Cracknell was well known for her work surrounding a primarily female driven production and had just come off of working on a production of 'A Doll's House', a feminist play that she had adapted. Originally a Greek tragedy story, Medea is about a woman (portrayed by Helen McCrory), a mother, who was to be banished from her home with her two children as her ex-husband marries into the throne and the royal family. Upon hearing her future, she concocts an idea to punish her ex-husband Jason and his wife to be, Creusa, a plan to murder her in efforts to get her revenge. The story brings themes of passion, justice and family. Carrie Cracknell interprets the text in a way where she uses different aspects of the story to create a sense of relatability to Medea, and lasting images to impact the watching audience.

In the original text the children's nurse is a side character, who plays very little importance to the story in its whole, however - in efforts to make Medea more likeable - Carrie Cracknell made the character of the nurse a main character and influence on Medea's actions and choices. The nurse provides Medea with an ally in her home when she has none, through the entire play the nurse supports Medea even when her choices are horrifying and inhumane. In addition, we see that the nurse keeps everything in the home running and even spends more time with the children than Medea, though the character is strong in this sense it truly leaves the audience wondering whether Medea is a good mother, one who can be sympathized with or a mother neglectful of her children. Whilst the character is portrayed by a young actress and is a younger character, it is obvious to the audience that she is wise and older in knowledge, than she seems to be, one of these characteristics being her ease at mothering the children. Cracknell makes the decision to open the play with a description of the past by the nurse and to end in exactly the same way, we learn through her introduction that the nurse has been through it all with Medea, never leaving. Understood through her words the audience hears how she is a "young woman who has just as much to lose as Medea" (Carrie Cracknell), leaving the audience knowing the answer as to why she is by Medea's side.

The addition to the production of a chorus was a choice made by Carrie Cracknell as a way to allow the audience to see the number of people who could look into and down on Medea's life, however when they are introduced they are caring and worrying about Medea. Originally when the chorus enters they are just watching her life and the story unfolds like the audience do, this quickly changes throughout the production as they are fast to target her after the king visits, picking on her and insulting her. Carrie Cracknell attempts to get across that by using an entirely female chorus in her play Medea can connect to these women feel safe. By Cracknell having the chorus target Medea, she cleverly gets the audience to feel sympathy for the poor woman and the horrible situation she is placed in by the king - being forced to leave her home with no place to go to. When the king enters he informs Medea of the news and her banishment, whilst a servant of his throws her items and belongings into the middle of the stage, through the scene Medea changes from her hating personality to grovelling and heartbroken, whilst the chorus shows how heartless they truly are, doing nothing to stop the situation occurring.

Due to all that has occurred this scene becomes a remembered scene in the play due to the sympathy felt for the character in these moments. This entirely changes after the king has left and she states her plan to the chorus for revenge on the king's daughter and Jason, diminishing a large amount of compassion held by the audience for Medea.

Whilst there were many incredibly clever moments in the play Cracknell making the decision to add many moments of dance into the play draws away from the impact that she intended to create. The demented nature of the dancing that chorus performed didn't make me feel uncomfortable or intrigued as to what was happening next, it was humorous to watch and didn't go with the rest of the play. Cracknell claimed that it was based off the theatrical dark nature of contemporary dance, the un-naturalistic aspect of the choreography didn't go with the story or the themes she has attempted to get through to the audience. Whilst I did not enjoy this the choreographer made valid points into why she choreographed the moments the way that she did, Lucy Guerin says "we don't want a translation of text through movement. That's clunky and cliched – hearing text and seeing someone try to mime it with movement." She used her style to add into the darker moments leading up to the end of the play, which would finish with very little humour and a more horrifying stage picture. The largest moment of dance occurred towards the end of the play where Medea takes her children off to be murdered by her, whilst she is off stage the chorus groups together to create an unusual movement scene, the dancing is stiff and does not fit into the section of the play. However, had the choreography been different and more naturalistic, whilst remaining as horrifying as it was, the scene would have been perfect matched with the dark set and the white back light highlighting the forest, and the screams heard from the children as they died.

Carrie Cracknell's main ideas in her production were to create a sense of sympathy from the audience for a woman who was impossible to show compassion or empathy for. Cracknell does this a few ways, she uses Medea's children as a way to show her parental nature and humanity. We see in the set that the children are gifted with area to be childlike and natural, in the area there are trees and swings, alongside the addition of the children riding bikes in circles around the stage. There are clever moments that Cracknell uses to remind the audience after an unflattering moment showing Medea as a creature, where she adds the children in to remind the audience that she is a *mother*, someone who deserves a better life and that her actions are justified. An example of this is just after Medea has poisoned the dress, one child rides his bike through the stage before the next scene occurs. As well as the children, Cracknell also paints the men as the enemy throughout the majority of the play. Before we meet Jason, we hear of him as a horrid man who has abandoned Medea after she had been by her side and even murdered her own brother for him, however this is not actually true as when we meet Jason we understand that he left her because she was not stable, and that he did in fact care about his children. Cracknell attempts to make the audience see Medea as crazy and has voices in her own head, therefore meaning she is capable of feeling compassion for, this aspect doesn't really work. For example, in the scene where Medea is talking to herself about murdering her children as revenge, the audience no longer sees Medea as someone who has mental health issues but as a sociopath with very little morality.

The way that Carrie Cracknell designed the play, really plays into her own interpretation of the text itself, she decided to set the stage with two floors, an open space with a forest at the back and surrounding tables and boxes, and a higher level with an open box for a

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Question Selected

Analyse the extent to which a directorial interpretation created dramatic meaning and impact in one performance.

RELATE TO QUESTION

Intro: date, name, NT- Oliver theatre, director, adapted by Ben Power, primarily female production. About the story, themes -> passion, justice, family, rephrase question, Euripides.

- 1) Nurse: main character, supporter only permeant ally in her home, mother, keeps everything in the house going. CC-> "young woman who has just as much to ~~use~~^{care} as Medea", older characteristics as a younger actors. Closes play.
- 2) Chorus: female driven show, watch the events unfold, Medea is a target. CC-> attempts to get across that, Medea can connect to the women, contrasting to them not caring about her pain, not doing anything to stop it. The success of feminism plays.
- 3) End: holds the bags like her sons are still there, joyful moments in past, breaks down knowing regretting, last stage picture her leaving in pain, end how starts, nurse talking to the audience about light and dark, walks out towards the light @back, trying to find the light in the dark.
- 4) CC-> Medea dress, white plays on her idea of innocence and apologies, when returns into view dress is covered in dirt, blood, long in the woods
- 5) Dancing-> demented, based on the theatrical dark nature of contemporary dance-> Lucy Guerin. "We don't want a translation of text through movement. That's clunky and cliched - hearing text and seeing someone try to mime it with movement."
- 6) HOW TO CREATE SYMPATHY-> kids, men-> enemy, voices in head, CHILDREN- areas to be them, trees, swings and bikes

Word count:

247

Candidate 3 evidence

Analyse the extent to which the director gave priority and status to the acting in one performance.

"Total theatre is a use of the imagination. Actors express the ~~theater's~~ genius of the body. Express the story without a set." Steven Berkoff directed Oedipus in such a way that the responsibility of the play's impact landed almost entirely on the performance of the actors. This led to a production filled with powerful performances, such as Simon Merrels' Oedipus, but also isolated weaker moments such as the entrance of Jocasta, Oedipus' wife and mother. Berkoff links his frequent use of ensembles to the importance of sticking in groups during his adolescence and in his production of Oedipus it is clear that he finds strength in numbers on the stage. The set of the play consists of a painted backdrop and a table, which forces the audience to focus on the performances in front of them. Berkoff's lack of set and props is more than made up for by the action filled stage, as he directed the cast of Oedipus to use stylised and exaggerated voice and movement, as well as mime.

The play opens with Oedipus sat at the centre of a long table that extends to almost the width of the stage. The ensemble of men act as the people of Thebes and move in a stylised slow-motion picnic until one of them lunges towards the table and begins joyously mixing eating. The crowd are initially terrified, but

soon join in. This is until Oedipus speaks, addressing the ensemble as his "children" and freezing the stage picture. By allowing the actors to express the circumstances of the opening scene through only movement, Berkoff is able to engage the audience and convey the tone of the play before the first word has been said. The proxemics on stage indicate the power Oedipus holds over his people as they stay frozen in an image reminiscent of Leonardo da Vinci's 'The Last Supper', a symbol that Berkoff returns to throughout the play.

One of the most impactful moments of the play comes when Creon describes King Laius' death. As he narrates the story a member of the chorus leaps onto the stage and enacts the events through mime. He is able to encapsulate the heat of the sun, the violence of the highwaymen and the movement of horses all through his own body. This scene sees Berkoff's vision of an actor, able to communicate a visceral story through the genius of their body, come to fruition. Berkoff's use of mime is heavily influenced by his time spent at Jacques Lecoq's school in Paris in 1965. Lecoq, ~~himself~~ who himself is a ^{critically} acclaimed theatre practitioner, says, "It is important to be open and not to copy the style of someone else because you will never be as good as he is. Each is better in his own style." Berkoff certainly has his own style, and in this moment his influences merge perfectly with his trust in an actor's ~~ability~~ to storytelling ability.

Another memorable moment occurs with the entrance of Tiresias, the blind prophet. The scene is scored with mysterious plucked strings that combined with the stillness of the ensemble create tension in anticipation ~~on stage~~ for what he has to say. Berkoff uses proxemics to symbolise a change in control as now Tiresias sits in place of Oedipus in the centre as the chorus look at him, fixated by his presence. The lack of ~~it~~ combined with the staging of the cast make it impossible to look away from Tiresias, as he details the prophecy to Oedipus. Berkoff also made the choice to have Tiresias wear a Noh mask, influenced by Japanese theatre. By him being the only one on stage at the time wearing a mask it portrays him as an outsider, enhancing the actors' off-the-wall performance. Berkoff manages to work in so many ideas in this scene without detracting from the priority of ~~his actor~~ the acting.

However, during Jocasta's entrance, Berkoff's ambitions do ~~take away~~ ^{away} from her performance and thus the impact of the scene ~~is~~ feels muddy and confusing. Whereas in previous scenes, the staging has provided the audience with a clear focal point, in this scene there is simply too much going on at once to ~~focus~~ concentrate on a singular performance or interaction. Whilst Jocasta is left isolated at the back, ~~then~~ even though she should be controlling the scene, Creon and Oedipus fight at the front whilst the chorus surround the central table awkwardly. This overloading of

the stage ultimately results in a scene where the status of the individual actors is forgotten, ~~as~~ which must be said is a rare occurrence in the production as a whole.

As the play nears its end, Oedipus pierces his eyes and in doing so blinds himself. Traditionally this moment occurs off-stage, as in Greek tragedy all gruesome things do. However, Berkoff makes the bold decision to direct Simon Merrels to turn his back on the audience, as he guides a long sharp needle towards his eyes in slow motion. After doing so he stumbles, slowly turning around to reveal his face, which is covered by an eye-less 'Noh' mask. Whereas normally the responsibility of the climax's impact on an audience would fall into the hands of a narrator, Berkoff gives priority to his actors and trusts their ability to convey the brutality of this scene through the genius of the human body. This choice in a sense modernises the play, making it more accessible for ~~modern day~~ today's theatre goers, expecting gritty violence from a tragedy.

The play ends after Creon has banished Oedipus from Thebes, and takes his place at the centre of the table. He is joined by the ensemble, who just as at the start of the play, jolt and swing in stylised movement. Although now they are manic with celebration rather than fear or hunger. The scene is accompanied by an eerie, screeching blend

of accordions and strings that grow faster and crescendo as the movement comes to a halt. Creon sits, with his hands held up as claws and an animalistic exaggerated facial expression, conveying emotions of madness and greed. The chorus stand with their limbs stretched out and a look of pure ecstasy across their faces as they have now been "purged" of the city's curse. In a more naturalistic play it would be impossible to reach such a heightened emotion through movement alone and it not feel out of place, but since Berkoff gave priority to the cast's physical storytelling throughout the production it seems in fitting with the rest of the play and acts as a powerful ending. This sequence was most likely influenced by Japanese Kabuki theatre, a form of dance-drama that uses exaggerated movement and ~~set~~ mime to achieve a heightened impact on audiences. Berkoff has used Kabuki-influenced direction throughout his career and ~~once again~~ ^{this time} it helps him to convey meaning to the audience in Oedipus without the use of props or set, giving status to the acting.

Berkoff's trust in his actors led to a production of Oedipus filled with memorable and powerful moments, however, sustaining this level of energy was difficult and at a handful of moments it felt like the direction lost ~~of~~ focus. Overall, Berkoff's influences, ranging from Jacques Lecoq to Kabuki theatre, merged together nicely and emphasised the performances on stage. ~~It~~ Berkoff's decision to surround his actors

with space and a bare set led to the play's powerful performances shining brightly, as well as a few moments that lacked the intended impact. The musical accompaniments that played throughout many scenes were a huge benefit to the play as they emphasised the tension being created by the actors without distracting from the performances. It is fair to say then that Berkoff succeeded in directing a memorable production of a classic text, that ~~is~~ on the whole did not sacrifice his directorial vision of a play that utilises the genius of the human body and gives total priority to the actors.

Drama Advanced Higher Resource Sheet

Candidate Name

Scottish Candidate
Number

Question Selected

Analyse the extent to which the director gave priority and status to the acting in one performance.

- "Total theatre is a use of the imagination. Actors express the genius of the body. Express the story without a set."
- Responsibility of Oedipus' impact is given to the actors.
- Berkoff's use of ensemble is linked to his youth.
- The dramatic techniques make up for the bare set.
- Opening scene: Oedipus is centre stage and chorus moves in slow-motion stylised panic until he speaks.
- Creon's describes Laius' death: a single member of chorus enacts the heat of the sun, the highwaymen, and the horses.
- Tiresias' entrance: plucked strings play as the chorus are completely still and face towards him in the centre.
- Berkoff attended Jaques Lecoq's school in Paris in 1965.
- "It is important to be open and not to copy the style of someone else because you will never be as good as he is. Each is better in his own style."
- Jocasta's entrance lacks impact as the stage is overcrowded.
- Oedipus pierces his eyes on stage, breaking from Greek Tragedy tradition.
- Creon banishes Oedipus from Thebes and takes his place at the centre.
- Berkoff trusted his actors.
- At points, the production lost focus.
- His influences created an impactful production.
- The bare set allowed for the performances to shine.
- The score did not detract from performances.
- Berkoff succeeded in directing a memorable production of a classic text, that did not sacrifice his directorial vision of a play that utilises the genius of the human body and gives total priority to the actors.

Word count:

243

Candidate 4 evidence

AH Drama Assignment write up

Assignment

Steven Berkoff has a distinctive and, to say the least, a highly unique directorial style. Having trained as an actor himself at L'ecole Lecoque in France, his style is rooted heavily in physicality. He subscribes to the ideology that performance is created through physical ensemble work rather than specifically individual or naturalistic performance. His style pertains to the style referred to as 'Total Theatre'. The term, deriving from Richard Wagner's concept of a 'Gesamtkunstwerk' is, as Berkoff describes it, "a use of the imagination. Actors express the genius of the body. Express the story without the set." The physicality of this style of performance is embedded in all of his work and, certainly, the same can be said for his 2011 production of Oedipus. His adaptation of the classic Greek tragedy is a perfect depiction and embodiment of his style of directing. Berkoff attempts to take the famous story which audiences have heard time and time again and bring it to life, rather than simply retell it. He does so, of course, through his unique individualism and through his focus on physicality. There are moments in the production where his vision is executed brilliantly and moments where it is not. What his production is faultless in doing though, is taking such a famous story – with which the audience would, undoubtedly, already be familiar – and adapting it to a different and unique style that offers a new experience to the same story.

I thought the most successful example of the individuality that Berkoff brought to the production was his interpretation of the choral odes. These odes, typically sung in unison by the chorus, are, essentially, periodic interjections from the chorus, through which they poetically reflect on the action that has taken place prior. As they were originally written to be sung, most productions of Oedipus tend to follow this custom. Unsurprisingly, Berkoff chose not to follow customary tradition, instead staging the odes in an incredibly Berkovian fashion.

The first choral ode takes place roughly fifteen minutes into the production. Oedipus exits and the chorus is left alone on stage. They gather in a line behind the table, spanning most of the width of the stage. The lines are delivered with an incredibly slow pace, almost excruciatingly so. This slow, dragged out deliverance of these lines not only reflects the seemingly endless suffering that the people of Thebes are enduring at this point, but also creates a noticeable shift in pace from the rest of the production that has taken place up until this point. This shift creates a genuine sense of time slowing down and sets this section of the performance aside from the rest. This isolation that is created in this moment helps an audience to view this moment as an intervention in the story, rather than a moment that would fall linearly within the rest of the narrative. The words spoken are supposed to come across as an objective narration rather than another piece of the story and the slowed pace of this sequence definitely helps to establish this. It is reinforced in the movement as well, which is also slowed to a significant degree. As well as being slow in pace the movement is enormous. The actors strike exaggeratedly grotesque poses, utilising a heightened level of body-language to convey the emotion and the tone of the text. Their vocal performances also assist in conveying this as the actors made use of exhausted and despaired tones. However, the primary goal and focus of the sequence was to convey meaning and creating a sense of storytelling through physicality and it was certainly achieved. The slowed pace not only created a shift in the pace of the production but also gave the audience time to fully

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appreciate the physical storytelling of the chorus – which certainly would have been more important to Berkoff, who famously strives “to make the actors a fundamental part of their environment, to use every actor on that stage to the maximum of their ability and to express something to the utmost of its potential – sometimes literally, sometimes symbolically.”

Another element of the production in which Berkoff did, in my view, successfully convey his artistic vision was the set design or, more accurately, the lack thereof. The main set consisted, simply, of a black table with a barely visible black bench situated upstage of the table. As the stage was, a lot of the time, quite darkly lit, the table tended to blend in with the black floor and the frequently dark surroundings. Because of this it was nearly unnoticeable and was rarely, if ever, an objective focal point of the scene. As a result of the deliberately minimalistic set design, no focus was ever drawn away from the actors because of the imposition of any elaborate surroundings, it simply blended in with the environment. When the table was used, it was, in fact, demonstrated to serve as a versatile and functional piece of set that never, at any point, took away from the performance. It helped create levels to different scenes and, at one point, near the middle of the performance, it served as a platform for one of the chorus members to physically re-enact a story narrated by Creon. To me, that moment of physical storytelling was one of the most captivating throughout the entire performance and the use of the table acting as a platform only added to the success of that scene, highlighting the physical performance of the actor – rather than drawing focus away from it. Berkoff likely chose to use such a minimalistic set simply because he felt an elaborate set was not needed and, in fact never is, stating “I believe that you don’t need anything more than just utter simplicity and that everything in my art must be created from the body onwards. The body and the voice. Everything else is an imposition and is an interference with the art of the actor.” Admittedly, there was a painted backdrop of a desert which was of course a noticeable piece of set design. However, it served the purpose of establishing a location for the performance – something that isn’t necessarily done so clearly by the text, as well as something which certainly cannot be conveyed by physical performance alone. And so, for that reason, I believe it was a justified piece of set that did not impose on the performance whatsoever.

A clear influence of Berkoff’s is Japanese theatre, particularly Japanese ‘Noh’ theatre. This influence is certainly detectable in this particular production and its presence can be noticed at some successful moments, as well as some less successful ones. One of the less obvious, but actually more successful examples of the influence of Japanese theatre lies within the structure of Berkoff’s ‘Oedipus’ production, which utilises the concept of Jo-Ha-Kyu. The concept, roughly translating to “beginning, break, rapid”, essentially dictates that the action of a story should begin slow, speed up, and then end swiftly. It is slightly different to the typical gradual rise and subsequent fall of any story following a structure which builds to a climax. However, I believe it creates an interesting increase of interest from the audience for the action taking place and it works particularly well in the story of Oedipus, in which he slowly uncovers mysteries as the story progresses.

Another influence from Japanese ‘Noh’ theatre that can be seen in this production and which worked much less effectively than the influence of Jo-Ha-Kyu was the production’s usage of masks. In Noh theatre, there is an integration of elaborate masks and costumes – something which would, to me, have seemed like something Berkoff would have detested. An interesting element of the masks in Noh theatre, is that the actor concealed by it must retain

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an embodiment of whatever grotesque facial expression the mask depicts. As well as this, the actor cannot take the masks off. This, I'm sure would be a very interesting and likely enjoyable experience to watch, when used within the context of Noh theatre. In Berkoff's production of Oedipus, the usage of these masks was a complete contrast to the rest of the performance that was unfortunately detrimental to the effectiveness of the environment which had been created by the focus on physicality. Admittedly, the masks may, for some, have created an interesting break from what may have otherwise been considered a monotonous declamatory performance, however, I felt that they simply undermined what Berkoff's unique vision had worked to create until the point at which the masks were introduced: an atmosphere in which the audience could suspend their disbelief and take the physical indications of the actors as reality within the story – if someone is flapping their arms, the audience is to assume that, for the purposes of the story, they are, in that moment, a bird.

The first moment within the play in which a mask was introduced was upon the entrance of the blind prophet, Tiresias. The actor entered upstage centre, with the chorus divided either side of him. His introduction was a deliberate highlight of the importance of this character and the status that he held. However, this also brought a great deal of attention towards the fact that the actor's face was concealed by a mask which depicted a grossly exaggerated expression of anguish and sorrow, its eyes tightly shut to convey that Tiresias was, indeed, blind. The mask was an unnecessary indication of Tiresias' blindness. It had been established clearly within the dialogue by the point of his introduction and it is referred to several times over after the point of his introduction. This fact, in combination with the understanding that the vast majority of the audience would have understood Tiresias to have been blind before even watching the performance, meant that the actor would not have even

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needed to walk around with his eyes shut, he could simply have adopted a vague directionless gaze and the effect would have done a lot more favours for his character. The mask, because of its inherent contrast to everything Berkoff seems to stand for and because it was introduced in such an emphatic fashion, simply brought the audience back to reality and, for me, made it much more difficult to buy into the authenticity of the mostly physical and suggestive storytelling after the masks were introduced.

Even more distracting and unusual than the mask though, was the fact that the actor playing Tiresias held an enormous stick larger than himself in his hand. Props had been exclusively mimed up until this point and their involvement after this point are extremely rare. Berkoff is even actively outspoken in his disapproval of the usage of props at all, stating that he believes "Each time an actor uses a prop, it takes away from their creativity" and so for him to provide Tiresias' character with not only a mask but a gigantic, unmissable prop – which could have easily been mimed instead – seems unusual and was an unfortunate but by no means entirely detrimental failure in the success of the production in terms of captivating the audience and creating believability and coherency. It is likely that Berkoff designed Tiresias' character in this way to allow him to stand out, rather than to totally assassinate his character. However, it was the case that the result of Tiresias' starkly contrasting character, with his mask and his stick, ended up somewhat undermining the foundation on which the rest of the performance was built by doing exactly what Berkoff so successfully avoided with his minimalistic set design: taking away from the action

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Overall though, Berkoff remained, at almost every moment throughout the production, undyingly faithful to his creative vision. Every minute of the production is noticeably injected with Berkoff's creativity and individuality; in all aspects – set, costume, props, and set, lies the essence of Berkoff's imaginative creativity. Whether is be a choice to heighten one aspect of the production to the highest possible extent or – as is the cast with props and set – to reduce it to an undetectable level, every decision has been made with the intent of creating a unique and different style of performance. This creativity is wonderfully successful in such moments as the choral odes, as well as Creon's robotic, sinister dance, taking place at the very end of the production, which perfectly foreshadows Creon's forthcoming heartless and ruthless rule as king. Naturally there were moments which were not as successful in creating a coherent environment in which the audience could exercise their own imagination in wonderous blend of performance and imagination. The most notable example of which was the usage of the Japanese 'Noh' masks. However, despite this minorly compromising creative decision, the production, as a whole, did undoubtedly create this unique environment for the most part of the performance. And, while Berkoff's style is certainly not for everyone, it does, at the very least, provide a breath of fresh air to the eventually repetitive nature of typical Western theatre.

Drama Advanced Higher Resource Sheet

Candidate Name

Scottish Candidate
Number

Question Selected

~~Analyse the extent to which the director gave priority and status to the acting in one performance~~ *Directorial intentions*

Berkoff description

Total style description

"a use of the imagination. Actors express the genius of the body. Express the story without the set."

Oedipus

Audience familiarity

Choral Odes

Typically sung, berkoff different

Exhausted tone, slow

Exaggerated body, slow sets scene apart and draws focus

"to make the actors a fundamental part of their environment, to use every actor on that stage to the maximum of their ability and to express something to the utmost of its potential - sometimes literally, sometimes symbolically."

Success

Table

Blends

Admittance of backdrop

Draws no focus

Multifunctional tool

"I believe that you don't need anything more than just utter simplicity and that everything in my art must be created from the body onwards. The body and the voice. Everything else is an imposition and is an interference with the art of the actor."

Japanese influence

Jo-Ha-Kyu

"beginning, break, rapid"

Noh

Masks, regular integration in Noh, Actor must retain, cannot take off

Usage in Berkoff

Concede it's different

Tiresias' entrance

Undermining, destroys what's been created, conceals weak character, off-puttingly grotesque

Prop

"each time an actor uses a prop, it takes away from their creativity."

Character undermines foundations

Overall faithful

Every minute injected, list, lies essence of Berkoff's imagination

Creatively decorated

Heart of production: physicality

Very essence through brings to life

Successes, Fail

Successful follow through, not for everyone, enjoyability dependent on engagement, allows blend of performance and imagination, breath

word count: 232