

Chad Dembski – Adaptation (or why Spike Jones is a millionaire)

While in New York doing a production I decided to see a couple of other shows that I felt would never be seen on a Toronto stage. I went see *Permanent Brain Damage* by Richard Foreman and his experimental performance company Ontological theatre. This very appropriately titled piece had an effect on me that lasts to this day, with bare bulb lighting, strings, random words posted on set, a broken Victorian box set, highly stylized movement style and rambling philosophical monologue about god, death and uncertainty. I had no idea what the hell I had seen but it an effect on me of both witnessing a car crash and what I feel church should have been like for me as a child. It seemed as if a truly insane person was given a reasonable budget to do whatever came into their head, and throw it back at an audience, this was what it felt like to be inspired. I would continue to visit New York city over the next few years to get my “fix” of contemporary performance from such companies as The Wooster Group, Gale Gates et. al, Richard Maxwell, Pina Baush, Robert Wilson, and most recently Radiohole.

In 1998 I decided to begin adapting my own work and started with Shakespeare’s “Measure for Measure”. My first part was doing a twelve person character movement piece called *AuReoLa Part 1*, where four modern songs scored a 20 minute piece that acted as a prologue to the actual play. This lead me to *me@sure 3.1* where I ripped the text and extracted from each scene my own personal favourite lines and used them as basic text. From there my company The Oomph! Group and I added dance, video, puppetry and live song to the piece. This was the beginning of working on pieces that fed me in a new way, I saw new things with every performance, audience reactions were all over the place, critics were confused but sometimes very curious, and most all I had a pride and love for my work that I never felt before.

These days I mostly work as a performer and co-creator of performance projects and have often wondered if I should have stayed with mainstream theatre, or gone into film or given up entirely and joined the normal work force. Still something inside me needs this, to experiment, present pieces in site specific places, play the music a little too loud, jump all over my audience, dance with sarong on like a drugged out Martha Graham dancer, and generally give the audience a unique experience.

“The important thing is the capacity to astonish. Not shock-shock is a worn-out word-but astonish. The world has no grounds for complacency. The Titanic couldn’t sink, but it did. Where you find smugness, you find something worth blasting. I want to blast it.” – Terry Southern