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Start Making Sense

Dylan Tighe

He currently feels in despair. Hopeless. No will to live. Sleeping excessively. Withdrawn. Tears and sadness, although the tears have reduced on the Effexor. He feels each day is another one to get through. His concentration is off, and his memory is poor. He is working as an actor, and coping with that.1

Introduction

This chapter looks at some of the aesthetic, ideological and ethical concerns behind RECORD – a multi-platform performance project combining an album release,2 an alternative opera using an exploration of songs from the album as its starting point, and a series of discursive events which were made available as podcasts.3 The project aims to re-conceptualise the concept of ‘mental illness’ through the creation of a music-theatre project across diverse economies of distribution and dissemination. Further iterations have included a radio drama (nominated for a Prix Europa radio prize 2013),4 music video,5 talks,6 essays and a series of solo concert performances under the title RECORD (Remix).7 I will focus primarily on an examination of the alternative opera. I will draw almost exclusively on critical sources which have fed directly into the making of the performance itself in order to demonstrate the symbiotic relationship between theory and process in the construction of the work. The chapter will be divided into two parts – ‘Side A’ and ‘Side B’. The first will outline the rationale behind the project and some of the ideological and artistic concerns guiding its creation. It will also discuss the central role of music in the project. The second takes the form of written responses to questions posed by Anna Harpin and addresses
the following areas: the construction of alternative histories, the relationship between politics and form in the piece, the exploration of identity, and the decisions underpinning the multi-platform structure of the project as a whole. The second section teases out my search for a form which could embody theatrically some of the principles guiding progressive mental health approaches to recovery. It discusses parallels between conservative theatrical forms and conservative paradigms in mental health and outlines how I have attempted to avoid this ideological trap not only in the content of the work, but also through the construction, form and dissemination of the project as a whole. In conclusion I will seek to situate RECORD within a wider movement towards a cultural redefinition and re-conceptualisation of ‘mental illness’ and attempt to evaluate the project’s success in contributing to this process.

Side A

Veins full of lamotrigine
mouth as dry as chalk
I read the list of side-effects
convinced I have them all\(^8\)