

WHAT DOES A GOOD EDI STRATEGY LOOK LIKE?

(in response to the FST event of 5th November 2020)

Dear God I hate those bloody equality forms.

I don't know why I'm supposed to tell them that I'm transgender and white European and over 65 years old and bisexual and feel vaguely resentful at the feeling that I ought to fill the damn thing in though I have no idea what is the point of it all...

And it was so lovely to begin by listening to Nazli Tabatabai-Khatambaksh saying that these forms could matter, and people could read them because they really mattered, and people could use the information inside them to help build equality and access and justice..

That was a weirdly unexpected vision of Utopia to start my day with.

Thank you, Nazli: especially when you went on to say that a plan for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (is that what the French Revolution was really about?) was a plan that should be at the centre of everything.

Because you can't have well-being without it..

And I carried that revolutionary thought in my happy head as I rushed off back to my script development/rehearsal week that was happening in a theatre and so right now is the most precious time imaginable.

We were working on our "The Not So Ugly Duckling" which I've co-written with Maria MacDonell and which we're going to perform together.

Maria is a wonderful actor who hasn't performed since 1986 because she's been working as a mother of five children and a full time carer, among a lot of other things; and I haven't performed since 1966 because that was when I came to understand I wasn't really a boy even though I was supposed to be and had all the right genital equipment. And I so loved playing girl's parts; and I was so frightened and ashamed.

We're working with the wonderful Ian Cameron and that means the average age in the Netherbow Theatre is 67. And that must be one reason we're all feeling extra special relaxed and happy because we can actually all feel OK about being old.

And we don't have to feel a bit embarrassed because we're all quite daunted at the thought of standing on a bench...

One reason we all formed the company because me and Maria know perfectly well that the way things stand not all the equality

forms in the universe are going to mean we get gainful employment as performers in the theatre sector.

And that means, I realise as I get back to the recording of the event one week later, that means we're actually doing this EDI stuff for ourselves. How very grown up...

I do know what you mean, Jo Verrent, we have to be prepared to be comfortable with being uncomfortable, and you are quite right. But I still don't want to be made uncomfortable for being different.

Because that's what always happens, and you're right too, Robert Softley, you're so right to say this is difficult. Difficult because it's difficult.

And all of a sudden I find myself invaded with such a painful memory of another time I did my bit for EDI, way back in 2009 before it even existed, I think, when I wrote and performed a play in the Tron that celebrated being trans and affirmed our human rights.

There were hundreds of furious protesters in the street outside right through the run, and hundreds of thousands of people on the internet telling everyone how stupid I was, and how grotesque I was, and what a ridiculous idea it was, and the tabloid press saying the same things in big headlines.

And I did feel that. All of it.

And not a single theatre professional came to my public defence.

So solidarity would help...

And you're right, Annie George, there is a lot of hurt in there and we do need to acknowledge it.

I've come to understand that when people reject me they are rejecting a beautiful part of themselves, and so are hurting too.

Everyone hurts.

And you're so right, Nazli, we are lucky to work in a sector in which our people are our greatest asset.

So why do we allow ourselves to be treated so badly?

Why do we put up with acting being such a destructively precarious and underpaid profession? Why don't we really and truly value our back stage staff?

Why do we just let it become more and more impossible to make a living as a designer, a director, or a writer?

Why don't we look after ourselves?

And I'm slipping back into familiar patterns of victimhood and impotent rage when dear Robert Softley rescues me, yet again, with his zest for life and grounded common sense:

Because, yes, we have moved on with this, we are getting somewhere, and it's always better to do something than do nothing.

And if we screw up, we can talk about it and learn from it, and do better...

And I'm cheered by the fact that Brenna Hobson from our national theatre, can articulate so clearly that this moment we are living through is also an opportunity to make things better and that although it feels scary to implement change, a far worse danger would be to do nothing.

I'm inspired by Nazli's vision of "radical diplomatic empathy" in which we are all accountable to each other. And by Fiona Gibson's wise call for a "culture of thought and kindness".

And that reminds me of something I wrote once, a long time ago, in DREAMING, my play for puppets (1994; number 32 in my personal list of mostly forgotten plays):

"Remember kindness. It's kindness that banishes all fear...."

Jo Clifford (she/her; they/them) . 13th November 2020.