

This is for her

Performance script: Prologue and Part Two (out of three parts)

PROLOGUE

(Darkness. Sound: Low drone, tones of water and glass, voices in the darkness).

I We want her to describe the pain.
 We want to understand why.
 We want to know.
 We *want* to know.
 In the beginning we want to see.
 After a while we are not so interested.
 It's the old discussion of looking or not looking.
 Some say we should look.
 Some say we should look away.
 We need a clean victim.
 We *need* a clean victim.
 We want her to be more precise.
 Please be more precise!

You The cell is very small. The walls are grey. They are made out of
 concrete. There is a window. But it is placed so high up that it is
 impossible to look out. Sometimes dust comes in the window.
 Outside the streets are leading to the city and the tourist
 attractions. Perhaps the pyramids, perhaps the Holiday Inn with
 its bullet holes and bomb craters, perhaps the Great Wall or the
 Wailing Wall. It's incredibly far away.

I ‘We are not saying anything about nationality. Or race. We are not saying anything about outsourced torture. We are just saying that it’s far away from us.

You It is incredibly far away.

I We are just saying that the history is different there.

You The history is so different there.

I And the architecture is different.

You The architecture is very different there with features of French or British colonialism.

I But never Danish.

You No, never Danish.

I There is the victim and there is the perpetrator.

You *This is for her.*

(Sound: Airplane takes off).

PART TWO

Iraq. War on Terror 2001-2013

EPISODE 1: SLEEP DEPRIVATION

(Pitch dark. Two female performers, You and I, sing while walking backwards in a circle. Lights slowly on. Stop in front of the audience where they do a simple, stylized choreography. On the floor is a Coca-Cola can, a cardboard box, and a water bowl).

I and You I love you
 You love me
 We're a happy family
 With a great big hug
 And a kiss from me to you
 Won't you say you love me too

I love you
You love me
We're best friends like friends should be
With a great big hug
And a kiss from me to you
Won't you say you love me too

You "I Love You", by Barney the Dinosaur, is one of the most used songs for torture and interrogations in the US secret military prisons in Iraq. Sleep deprivation has the effect of making your brain and body stop working normally. Your thoughts are slower, and your will breaks down.

I At the beginning there is silence.

You In the future there will be pain.

I Let's begin.

EPISODE 2: PHOTOS FROM ABU GHRAIB

(You and I stand apart in frozen poses. Both have their arms extended out in the empty space as if holding onto another person's body. Sound of buzzing neon light in prison corridors and water dripping).

You In the photograph we see a woman and a man. They have their arms around one another. The man rests one hand on the woman's shoulder. She is shorter than him by a head. They are posing for the camera, smiling and giving a "thumbs-up" sign. The man has turquoise green plastic gloves on. The woman's naked arms and hands are visible. She's wearing a brown T-shirt and khaki-coloured trousers held up by a black belt. She has short hair parted three ways above her smiling eyes. She's leaning in toward the man. They stand in a corridor without windows lit by neon lights. The walls are yellow. The doors diarrhoea-brown. Sandy dust on the floor, a piece of paper, a cardboard box, ventilators in the ceiling. A door to a cell is open. It's the ward for dangerous prisoners. The woman has sneaked over here to be with the man. In front of the man and the woman is a pyramid of seven naked men. There is someone taking a picture. Later the woman says: "At the time I thought, I love this man, I trust this man with my life, OK, then he's saying, well, there's seven of them and it's such an enclosed area and it'll keep them together and contained because they have to concentrate on staying up on the pyramid instead of doing something to us."

I In April 2004 CBS News published the Abu Ghraib photos, showing a series of human rights violations: physical and sexual abuse, torture, rape, sodomy, and murder.

You The Bush administration avoided using the word "torture" and consequently referred to the actions as "abuse" or "humiliation".

I We look at photos of the female prison guards.

You – especially this woman.

I The woman with the man. The woman holding a leash attached to the neck of a prisoner who crawls after her. We read about the female interrogators. We hear the female general explain what happened.

You Where did these women come from? Women are the ones waiting at home. Women are victims.

I Women get raped and murdered and left as widows and mothers without sons.

EPISODE 3: THIS WOMAN

(You stands in front. I moves back into the darkness. Sound of water jets).

You She is born.
She goes to kindergarten.
Water jets in the back yard in summer.
She moves out of the city when she is two years old.
She chases squirrels.
She goes to school.
Most of the time she doesn't speak. It's called selective mutism.
She is afraid of the death penalty.
In school she is compared to a boy. The boy is compared to her.
Shame is used to control people.
When she is fourteen, she has sex on a bathroom floor.
Long road trips through the country.
Long winters. More winters and summers than autumns and springs.
She wants to be a storm chaser. She wants to be in the middle of storms.
She goes to college.

She works in a supermarket.
She marries someone.
Picnic on Sundays.
She makes the sandwiches.
She joins the army.
She goes to war.
She is happier where she is now.
She does not believe in regrets.
She is trying to do the right thing.
Sometimes she does something that she wouldn't have done
before.
Then she feels dizzy.

EPISODE 4: MORE PHOTOGRAPHS

(Sound of neon light. I moves into the frontline. You half-smiles, moves a hip to the side, and holds her arms like a gun).

I In the photograph we see a woman. She half-smiles with a cigarette resting between her lips. Her hip leans out to the one side. She holds her arms like a gun. She points at a prisoner who is forced to masturbate for forty-five minutes. It's a birthday present from the man when she turns twenty-one.

(Sound of thunder. I and You take their belts off).

EPISODE 5: FEMALE INTERROGATION

(Sound of ventilator. You and I stand on a line frontstage).

You In the War on Terror, female interrogators are trained to use their sexuality. The aim is to awaken male prisoners' experience of shame and humiliation. Sometimes the opposite occurs, and feelings develop between the victim and the perpetrator.

Approach him. Shove your breasts in his line of sight. Ask the question again.

- I Hun nærmer sig ham. Presser sine bryster ind i hans synsfelt. Stiller spørgsmålet igen.
- You Tell him to take his clothes off. He has to stand naked in front of you... It's working.
- I Hun siger, at han skal tage tøjet af. Han skal stå nøgen foran hende. Det virker. *(I unbuttons her shirt).*
- You Offer him bacon and eggs several times a day. That's all he gets. Bacon and eggs.
- I Hun tilbyder ham bacon og æg flere gange om dagen. Det er alt hvad han får. Bacon og æg. *(You takes her sleeves down. I takes her sleeves up.)*
- You Dance for him. Make him kneel in front of you.
- I Hun danser for ham. Hun får ham til at knæle for sig.
- You Undress.
- I Hun klæder sig af.
- You Place a pair of used panties over his face.
- I Hun anbringer et par brugte kvindetrusser henover hans ansigt.
- You Show him pictures of naked men.
- I Hun viser ham billeder af nøgne mænd.
- You Say he's hot.
- I Hun siger, han er lækker.

You Sit on his lap.

I Hun sætter sig på hans skød.

You Naked.

I Hun er halvt nøgen.

You Touch yourself.

I Hun rører ved sig selv.

You Wipe menstrual blood on his face.

I Hun tørrer menstruationsblod af i hans ansigt.

(I and You make the I Love You choreography and end in a gun position while sound of ventilators accelerates).

EPISODE 6: PYRAMID OF RESPONSIBILITY

(You stands in front. Low drone sound. I moves back into the darkness).

You We need to take a moment to climb up the pyramid of responsibility. A pyramid is a complex structure. It takes many people to construct a pyramid. At the top of our pyramid in the prison in Abu Ghraib is a woman. She is a general. Chosen to lead fifteen prisons and detention centres in Iraq, including Abu Ghraib. She has no experience leading prisons. She says:

“Prisoners under my watch are treated humanely and fairly. Conditions in the prison are better than many Iraqi homes. The prisoners are treated so well that I am concerned they don’t want to leave.”

Under her watch the number of prisoners rises from 700 to 7,000 in Abu Ghraib. There is no plan for how to release, or reincorporate, these prisoners back into society. Information about the torture leaks out. She is fired from her position. She says that she “didn’t know” about the torture. She says that the soldiers who conducted the torture were sent by the Secretary of Defense. She saw his signature on their papers. He must have known. She didn’t know what was happening. She probably should’ve known, but ... maybe it’s easier to blame her than it is to blame the Secretary of Defense.

Because – we need a face that can take the blame. We need a person who can cover the errors in the system. We need a picture of her in a prison, which she cannot leave, with bombs falling outside and neon lights shining inside. She’s dragging a naked prisoner behind her, who’s bleeding and gasping for breath, Abu, Khalid, Nawaf, Mohamed, Marwan, Ziad, Hani, she goes over the limit of what is humane, because it’s her, and not the system, that is sick.

(You makes a choreography of military gestures).

EPISODE 7: IRAQ

(Sound of neon light. I moves front).

I They are asked to come out of the rooms into the corridor. They are asked to undress and lie on top of each other in a pyramid.

They are asked to remain still. The man and the woman think it is practical: there’s seven of them, and it’s such an enclosed area and it’ll keep them together and contained because they have to concentrate on staying up on the pyramid instead of doing something to the man and the woman. Later the woman says:

“If the media hadn’t exposed the pictures to that extent, then thousands of lives would have been saved. Yeah, I took the photos but I didn’t make it worldwide.”

(I opens the coca cola and drinks it. You goes to the water bowl, takes a glass and drinks it. Puts her hair in the water and swings it back. They sing Down the Drain With Love, a made up song consisting of those five words. They make a sensual, yet ironic, choreography with moving hips and arms).

You She sings and then she remembers how her mother used to say that she couldn’t sing, and then she corrects herself because actually she only said it once and she supposes many mothers have said something like that. But it stuck with her. And then she is thinking – this is so obvious – that people are different and what sticks with one person doesn’t necessarily stick with another one. And that’s the reason that the after-effects of torture are very different from individual to individual.

EPISODE 8: SHE ONCE READ THAT *BEING IN LOVE IS LIKE BEING IN AUSCHWITZ*

(I and You stand in the front line. Sound: drone, desert, built up to storm).

I That’s it. A man and a woman.

You In a hotel room.

I He takes pictures.

You Creates an archive of love-making.

I She always thinks of the other times.

You He only thinks of the now.

I That’s not true though.

You It's just something he says.

I That's it. A man and a woman.

You In a prison.

I They meet in each other's cells.

You That's how they make love.

I He makes her do things.

You He gets her pregnant.

I Then he leaves her.

You And marries someone else.

I This woman.

You Torture Chick. Trailer Trash Torturer.
She always aims to please. She did everything he wanted her to do. She didn't want to lose him.

I At that moment she wasn't herself. At that moment she wasn't the person standing here right now. At that moment she was different.

You She still maintains that she does not regret what she did.

I She says:

You "Sorry? For what I did? All I did was stand in the pictures."

I She gives birth to a boy.

You He looks like the man. The man asks for a DNA test.

I She spends two years in prison. She is convicted for torture and prisoner abuse during the occupation of Iraq.

You We can't believe that this is the girl who had water jets in the back yard. We can't believe that this is the girl who cannot let go of the man she loves. We can't believe that she is the one who wanted to be a storm chaser. We are thinking about a picture of her in a landscape chasing a dark blue storm approaching from the background, firelight as a fallen strip at the bottom of the horizon, tornadoes, thunder storms, lightning, cloud formations, and we are thinking about all the names she has given to them: *(together)* Katrina, Amanda, Laura, Dolly, Sally Berta, Hanna ...

I ... she is all of them. And we hear her say that the screams are chasing her in her sleep and when she is awake, that the sounds and lights cut through reality and take her back to the prison, and we are thinking about a landscape beyond death.

(Intermezzo: blackout and sound of thunder/bombs).

EPISODE 9: QUESTION TIME

(Silence. Lights slowly on).

You What events have left traces in your body?
Are you a racist?
Are you honest?
Have you ever killed someone?
Have you ever killed something?
How did you do it?
If you were to murder a group of people, what would you do?
Do you believe in democracy?
What is pain?
Are you funny?
Are you clever?
Are you pretty?
Are you ready to die?

How would you like to die?
How does electricity work?
Would you like me to touch you?
Are you a violent person?
Am I likeable?
Are you in love?
How long do you think that will last?
Have you ever had your heart broken?
How many times can a person have their heart broken?
What is a good person?
Are you a good person?
Is life better for good people?
If I cried now, what would I cry for?
Name seven kinds of joy.
Name seven kinds of torture.
Is there something after death?

EPISODE 10: SHOW TIME

(Sound: Low drone, tones of water and glass. I and You look at each other).

You This is it. We are in it.

I We know that something has happened to the moral staging of us as a good nation. From being the good ones, we are in all ways with the bad ones. It is us who do these things.

You *Perhaps* we do not do the act, but *perhaps* our soldiers have driven the car with the soldiers who did it. *Perhaps* we collaborate with the intelligence services, which we know do it. *Perhaps* we do it just once in a while.

I We know that there is something eroticised in torture. (You interrupts: Do we?) But we don't talk about it because we need a clean victim who is not complicit. There is no way to stay completely clean.

You We know that there are many relationships between victim and perpetrator. It is certainly not pure hatred. It is also disappointment and loyalty. It is water and a chance to go to the bathroom.

I ~~We know that torture makes people scared shitless. For it to happen again, or happen to someone they know.~~ We know that torture is not about information. It never has been.

You But if the man with information about the bomb sat in this room, should we not torture him? I mean, it always works on TV.

(Blackout).

About *This is for her*

Re-enacting Scenes of Violence

This is for her is a performance about the unmaking and making of the world—a performance about torture and therapy. The performance script has three parts. Importantly, only the prologue and the second part are printed in this issue. For the sake of clarity, I will briefly outline the dramaturgy here. The first part (*Argentina. The Dirty War 1974–83*) is a solo documentary monologue in which I re-enact interviews I made with victims of torture in Argentina in 2017. The second part (*Iraq. War on Terror 2001–2013*) takes us to the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, reflecting on our current complicity in the use of torture in armed conflicts far away. The third part (*Therapy. Homecoming*) brings us back home, discussing the effect of therapy on the victim of torture and the soldier coming home from war.

In the performance I am interested in the arbitrary mirroring that occurs in the retelling of a narrative—the act of testifying—in the torture situation, in the therapy room, and in the performance room. I use different forms of documentary storytelling: retelling of interviews with victims of torture (part one), re-enactment of scenes of violence (part two), and dissemination of theoretical and archival research on torture and therapy (part three). I examine how testimony can be seen as a figure that travels between the people I interviewed, the script, the performance, the audience, and how in each of these instances a new layer of testimony arises.

The performance was part of my PhD project *Thinking with Performance: Research-Based Aesthetics in Times of Conflict and Crisis* in which I used my own performance practice as a starting-point for thinking about the potential of research-based performance (Lebech 2019).

Response to Conflict and Crisis

Making performance about conflict and crisis raises questions about how to artistically represent asymmetric power structures without confirming them. Who has the authority or right to name a crisis? How did I decide to focus on a certain specific crisis rather than another?

My situated position in *This is for her* is complex regarding my choices not least in the second part in which I chose to focus on the pictures from Abu Ghraib and the female prison guard Lynndie England. When I first saw the pictures from Abu Ghraib, I felt (perhaps naively) confronted with an ethical and personal challenge. Ethically, I witnessed how US prison guards were torturing prisoners during The Iraq War. I remembered Jacques Derrida's concept of democratic autoimmunity, which means that democracy always disrupts itself from within (Borradori et al. 2003). In *This is for her* torture is exposed as a side-effect of the War on Terror: In order to protect democracy against terror, democracy uses methods that are non-democratic, such as torture.

On a personal level I felt deeply disturbed by the presence of women in these degrading, violent actions depicted in the pictures.

Democratized Torture

As Judith Butler has argued, photos are channeled through and framed by the Western media and state authorities (Butler 2010). When I selected the Abu Ghraib pictures, I deliberately played with images that “we” know in advance and which are re-enacted—and enacted—in our consciousness. I chose to focus on the images of “us” frozen in acts of violence and the reiteration of these images. Clearly, I myself, was affected by Western media representation and state authorities, which were embedded in the crisis that I was working with. However, I chose this perspective because I felt an urgent need to respond to these pictures, to the relation between gender and torture, and because I felt that I had to respond from my own situated position.

I relied on Butler's call for critical spectatorship, which makes us aware of the blinding frames of war representation (Butler 2010). I think that performance is a way of making visible, of narrating the world differently and of creating a platform for critical voices. This includes a critical glance towards the artist's, the audience's, and the politician's way of looking and reacting. I think it is possible to feel empathy, to take action, *and* to narrate the crisis in a manner which differs from the media or the state power.

Gender: I, She, We

Violence and humiliation are often related to so-called manhood. Being a woman I wanted to examine the female perpetrator. This highlights my extremely subjective investment and situatedness in this project: I was interested in women in war, how they act and why

they act. I presumed that female perpetrators find it humiliating to do sexual acts, while I did not presume that male perpetrators find it humiliating to rape women or men. These unspoken presumptions were interesting to examine, not only to be able to see the differences and similarities between male and female participants in war but also as a way to challenge myself (and hopefully the audience) by illuminating the “feminine” side of war.

In the performance script I constantly shift perspective between an “I” (primarily part one), a “she” (primarily part two), and a “we” (primarily part three) in order to describe the complex relationship between the perpetrator, the victim, and the witness. I question our shared responsibility both in relation to foreign policy about war participation and in relation to the domestic policy about receiving and helping victims of torture. I suggest that this universalising “we” represents the audience and the artist who—*looking in the mirror*—are both predominantly white and belong to a Western privileged class. I hold onto the importance of making us aware of “our” recent acts of violence and to point to globalized power structures in asymmetric warfare. This is reflected in the second part of the performance where I am seeking to make us see ourselves through the circulated Abu Ghraib photos.

Re-enactment of the Abu Ghraib Photos

In the making of the second part I was inspired by Rebecca Schneider’s ground-breaking book *Performing Remains* (2011) in which she demonstrates the entanglement between re-enactments and time through a reading of the Abu Ghraib photos. She argues that the images are not only *records* of wartime, torture, and abuse, but can also be read as durational events that exist both *then and there* and *here and now*. To see the images as *ongoing* live events make it possible to understand them as something that we continue to witness and something that continues to call for account. Schneider writes that if “the photograph takes place [...] the action we take in response is ‘in our hands’” (Schneider 2011, 168). This statement emphasizes that the photos do not only make us complicit spectators but also enable us to act.

In the second part of the performance I use two strategies: on the one hand, we—the other performer and I—perform a score of the perpetrator’s movements based on the circulated photos; on the other, we try to describe the pictures through language, which can be read in the extract printed here. We do not re-enact the poses of the victims. Instead we try to show the complicity of the soldier and the witness both within and outside the frame: that is, to see how I as a citizen, we as citizens, in a country that was an ally during the war in Iraq, are somehow both placed outside the frame condemning torture but also inside the frame witnessing torture. Butler has examined how the frames of human suffering affect our thinking and determine our reactions (Butler 2010). Not to show the victims in the performance is a way of pointing to our complicity and making us see ourselves within the frames of the photos.

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Sofie Volquartz Lebech's contribution has been peer reviewed.