

# Re-searching Text and Performance

. . . Towards a methodology of  
practice

# Moving 'Beyond Text'

- The transposing of disability histories into performance is currently being explored as a powerful medium of self-representation for disabled people.
- This provides opportunities not only for stories to be heard but for them to directly permeate the social apartheid which so often relegates disability stories to the realms of tragedy.
- It also moves debates outside of the academy and into the public domain, potentially creating a kind of cultural capital, both economically and artistically for disabled people.

# Expanded Understandings of Text

- The act of performance then, seemingly has scope to go beyond the written text, but also to make significant challenge to the wider ‘text’ of a “*hegemony of disability*” (Oliver 1990: 44). That is to say, the common sense views of disability that over time have become accepted as the ‘norm’ may become dislodged and discredited through direct acts of performance by disabled people.

# Performance and Resistance

*“Debates about theatre and performance turn on how far each is regarded as potentially radical”  
(Govan et al 2007:8)*

- There exists extensive theorisation on the role of theatre and performance in acts of resistance. From the living newspaper theatre of the past to contemporary conceptions of ‘applied theatre’, it is becoming an increasingly accepted position that theatre and performance holds a place in challenging social injustice.

# Performance, Resistance and Disability

*“Disabled performers are often aware of knowledges that have been erected around them: tragic, poor, helpless, heroic, struggling etc. In the laboratory of the performance situation these knowledges can be re-examined, and questioned” (Kuppers 2003: 3).*

- In disability terms the relation between performance and resistance bears a more subtle approach than the direct protests made in previous examples.
- The work of performance scholars and practitioners alike demonstrate the huge complexities of negotiating and reading the interaction between performance, disability and ‘culture’. Be that the hegemonic ‘disabling’ culture or the resistive ‘disability’ culture.

# Methodologies of Text and Performance

- The relationship between text and performance is historically one of translation or transposition; from 'page' to 'stage' as it were.
- However, the field of drama has expanded in opposition to the assumption that a performance is a type of 'text' which requires a literary reading. The work of theatre semioticians; scholars and practitioners of devised work; and the increasing interest in theatre outside of traditional contexts from an applied theatre perspective, all coalesce in a move away from 'text'.

(See Aston and Savona 1991 and Pavis 1982 for work on semiotics; See Govan *et al* 2007 and Oddey 1994 for work on devising and Thompson 2003 and Nicholson 2005 for work on applied theatre)

# Beyond Text?

- Thus, a methodology of collecting oral histories and transposing them into a performance, could actually be seen in performance terms to reinscribe the central position of the 'text' rather than move beyond it.
- Such processes inspire debates on 'authenticity' and 'authorship' and questions concerned with the notion of an 'original' text, to which a performance can appear secondary.

# The Possibilities of Performance

*“Theatre is the research method itself, not the method to be researched” (Thompson 2003: 147)*

- The possibilities of performance in such a methodology are overlooked by reducing it to the dissemination rather than the generation of research.
- A re-searching of performance as a potential research methodology in its own right, arguably creates opportunities to truly move ‘beyond text’.



# Methodologies of Practice

*“By taking performance seriously as a system of learning, storing and transmitting knowledge, performance studies allows us to expand what we understand by ‘knowledge’” (Taylor 2003 / 16)*

- There have been a series of debates from within performance studies contexts which advocate practice-based approaches to research. Seemingly, a field that is concerned with valuing the ephemeral and embodied, is well positioned to explore the place of such practices in knowledge-making.

# Epistemologies of Practice

*“Writing has paradoxically come to stand in for and against embodiment”* (Taylor 2003:16)

- Running alongside calls from performance scholars for practice-based research, is a series of debates wishing to interrogate epistemic assumptions surrounding theory and practice. Such work points to an inherent privileging of ‘meaning based’, theoretical knowledge over ‘embodied’ and practical ways of knowing. In these terms a move ‘beyond text’ would require an epistemological as well as methodological shift.

(See also Gumbrecht 2004)

Ultimately, a re-searching of text and performance and an exploration of practical methodologies would truly move 'beyond text' in a foregrounding of experiential and embodied forms of knowing; offer a means of resistance to dominant discourses of representation; and a challenge the epistemologies that have held such views in place.

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