

12-7-2015

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Recommended APA Citation

Mettälä, M. (2015). A Review of Ronald J. Pelias' Performance: An Alphabet of Performative Writing. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(12), 1972-1976. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2015.2406>

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Abstract

This book explores performance in everyday life through performative writing. It offers us an opportunity to examine how people act and react in society based on a constructivist view, which acknowledges multiple realities and truths. The book has several potential audiences as it can serve as a methods book for those who seek to study and write about performative writing as well as to all those who seek to understand human experiences from a different and non-traditional view.

Keywords

Performance, Performative Writing, Research Methods, Theatre

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A Review of Ronald J. Pelias' *Performance: An Alphabet of Performative Writing*

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This book explores performance in everyday life through performative writing. It offers us an opportunity to examine how people act and react in society based on a constructivist view, which acknowledges multiple realities and truths. The book has several potential audiences as it can serve as a methods book for those who seek to study and write about performative writing as well as to all those who seek to understand human experiences from a different and non-traditional view. Keywords: Performance, Performative Writing, Research Methods, Theatre

Last January (2015) at the Qualitative Report Sixth Annual Conference, I came across a book. The cover with its title captured my curiosity it said with big letters *Performance*. I read the back cover which says; “a series of short pieces that approach performance from multiple perspectives and various compositional strategies.” This line caught my attention even more as it resonates so well with my way of being and working as a music teacher and a performing artist. And so I decided to read it.

In the early 60s Erving Goffman suggested that everyday life is like putting on a performance. Whether through our appearance, interactions or dialogues we perform in a way to ourselves and to others of our place within our social group. Meaning, through our performances we seek to emphasize and communicate our identities in society (Goffman, 1990). In *Performance: An Alphabet of Performative Writing*, Ronald J. Pelias lists several points to what performance is, amongst some points he states performance is; nothing more than a struggle for visibility, an act, an identity on parade, articulated choice, an invitation for empathic engagement, and shapes experiences into the knowable and a sense-making (p. 192-194). And so, as performance “is nothing more than an opportunity to look” (p. 191) Pelias offers us an opportunity to examine how people act and react in society with all its intricacies by exploring performances in everyday life and gain insights from various outlooks.

The arts provide means for sharing and representing the deepest forms of human communication, not merely as a monologue but as a manifest through the obedient responses of a material. I believe that artistically crafted forms can convey experiences that are at once moving, touching, and valuable (Eisner, 2002). Art is nature transformed by entering into new relationships where it evokes emotional responses and so a work of art tells something to those who enjoy it about the nature of their own experience of the world (Dewey, 1934/2005). This is precisely what Pelias does in his book, he takes us on a knowledgeable and emotional journey, where the complexities in life are not categorized, divided or translated to numbers but are portrayed simply as lived experiences as we know them through performative writing which is based on a constructivist view and acknowledges multiple realities and truths. Thus, writing a book then is a work of art since writing has a creating process and takes place in a context, it has a structure, a habit, and a discipline just like a musical piece or a performance piece; with the aim to communicate and generate emotional responses by entering a relationship with the audience or the reader. I also agree that when we write we locate ourselves within a huge conversation with everyone else, we are also engaged in the construction of ways in which we are asking to be seen (Freeman, 2015). Something Pelias clearly illustrates as he invites the reader to be part of his creation, and comments “we should be in this together” (p.

21). Thus he approaches the reader from a relational perspective as he also asks the reader to attend not only to what he says, but how he says it (p. 20).

Amongst many interesting and moving pieces there is one I want to highlight where Pelias expresses that the story he is about to tell is in slightly altered form which is not that unusual with performances of personal narratives and auto- ethnographic research. So he examines what is often kept private and how the “self” is often constructed in a positive light, even when revealing its most negative aspects (p. 33). A view which reminds me of John Freeman’s description of how our acts of communications will always be constructed, and how we present/perform versions of our selves; articulating ideas through our experiences which leads to a form of communication that is offered as being genuine and authentic (2015).

The book can be read in sequences as it is organized in an alphabetic order and designed from multiple approaches towards the relational perspective with dialogues, personal narrations and other performances. Some pieces are grouped together under central themes or topics. Though I at first glance could not see a clear structure I soon discovered that there is a flow and a correct rhythm (Chenail, 1995) which makes the reading easy. But also because each piece and theme makes sense as each section is connected to theories and beliefs. There are multiple audiences for this book. Although the author states that it is especially relevant to those who are interested in theatre and performance studies I would say; I cannot find a reason why there shouldn’t be many potential audiences for this book. It can serve as a methods book for those who seek to study and write about performative writing since Pelias has provided a variety of compositional strategies and possibilities. It could also be of interest to all those who seek to understand human experiences from a different and non-traditional perspective.

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Author Note

Matilda Mettälä from Malmö, Sweden, has a background as a performing artist, including a radio hit in the US. She has also been teaching music for 20 years. She earned her Master of Arts degree in Musicology from Lund University, as well as her Master in Science in Education. She runs her own business where she is employing music as a tool for the purpose of developing people and organizations. She believes that the inner resources of human beings may be developed and enriched through the kind of learning which incorporates with the individual's process of change by engaging the whole person and by means of aesthetics. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: Matilda Mettälä at Telephone: +46 704 185999 or E-mail: Matilda.mettala@dimevo.se

Article Citation

Mettälä, M. (2015). A review of Ronald J. Pelias' *Performance: An alphabet of performative writing*. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(12), 1972-1976.
<http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol20/iss12/2>
