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Reviewing Literature on Gender Using Found Poetry and Dramatic Script

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Abstract

In this article, derived from the literature review chapter of her doctoral dissertation, the author presents a variation on what Prendergast (2006) calls found poetry as literature review. Her writing experiment is intended to reflect the dynamism of her “conversations” with the theoretical literature with which she engaged before and during the dissertation project: an intervention in the gender narratives of postgraduate student teachers. She does not, however, see theory as confined to academic literature and her conversations extend into poetry as well. In her conversations, the author engages with a wide range of texts in performance studies and feminist post-structural theory. She also converses with a variety of other texts.

Keywords

Literature Review, Writing Experiment, Performance Studies, Gender, Found Poetry, Teaching

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Reviewing Literature on Gender Using Found Poetry and Dramatic Script

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In this article, derived from the literature review chapter of her doctoral dissertation, the author presents a variation on what Prendergast (2006) calls found poetry as literature review. Her writing experiment is intended to reflect the dynamism of her “conversations” with the theoretical literature with which she engaged before and during the dissertation project: an intervention in the gender narratives of postgraduate student teachers. She does not, however, see theory as confined to academic literature and her conversations extend into poetry as well. In her conversations, the author engages with a wide range of texts in performance studies and feminist post-structural theory. She also converses with a variety of other texts. Keywords: Literature Review, Writing Experiment, Performance Studies, Gender, Found Poetry, Teaching

The writing experiment presented here was derived from the literature review chapter of my doctoral dissertation. The project itself was designed to intervene in the gender narratives of a cohort of postgraduate student teachers in Ireland, and was built around my performance of a play about the marginalisation of women in workplaces (Morrissey, 2012). In this article, I review some of the theoretical texts with which I was engaging prior to and during the project. My review takes the form of a conversation between these various texts using a combination of dramatic script writing and found poetry. The conversational format reflects the way in which I engage with texts and theories; as conversations with distant colleagues (Phillips & Carr, 2010). When I embarked on my dissertation project, I had already been conversing with distant colleagues in performance studies and feminist post-structural theory and I continued to do so as the project progressed. Sometimes serendipitously, other theories and texts presented themselves as interesting or useful along the way. These texts were not confined to academic literature and included poetry which also helps me to “think hard” (St Pierre, 2009, p. 231) about what I am doing/writing. In this article, I review these various texts and theories as a kind of conversation which “in reality” was inseparable from my conversations with pedagogy, research methodology and “life.” The conversational format offers a mode of “capturing” the dynamism of my engagement with theory; opening spaces for readers to engage in that conversation and generate their own meanings. The conversational format also offers an alternative mode of representing a literature review in a qualitative report and, concomitantly, an alternative mode of understanding theory (and of what counts as theory). While the conversation itself troubles taken-for-granted notions of gender and the systems of power in which it is embedded, the format troubles normative modes of representing a literature review; modes in which gender is also enmeshed (this point is developed further in the literature review itself). So, in both content and format, my writing experiment troubles (or intervenes in) taken-for-granted notions of gender. The thrust of my writing experiment is thereby aligned with my research methodology; fulfilling my need to cohere what (and how) I think and do with what (and how) I write about it. It also addresses a broader need to respond to the way gender has been silenced in educational discourse, and in social and political discourse more generally, by its incorporation into “softer” discourses of “equality,” “inclusion” and “diversity” which implicitly endorse the *status quo* (Skelton, 2007). My writing experiment is aimed at teachers, researchers (in education and related fields), teacher/researchers and anyone

else with an interest in gender and power. Staged as a conversation, it invites readers to enter into that conversation and to take its evocations/invocations/provocations with them into their ongoing conversations with theory, gender and life.

Setting the Stage

I am a teacher educator in drama in a Catholic college of education and the liberal arts in Ireland. This means that I teach student teachers (primary) about teaching drama in schools. In Ireland, drama is a subject on the *Primary School Curriculum* (Government of Ireland, 1999). As a teacher – who has also taught at primary level and in adult education – it has never been enough for me to “reproduce the way things are” (Greene, 1995, p. 1). Like Greene, I believe that it is only by troubling the taken-for-granted that we can posit “alternative ways of living and valuing” (p. 23). And, like Greene, I see teachers as important agents of social change. So, as a teacher educator, I seek to trouble the “certainties” by which – and within which – my students and I live. I see (heteronormative) gender – and, concomitantly, the systems of power in which it is entangled – as one such certainty. For as long as I can remember I have been seeking to understand and intervene in the production and reproduction of gender inequities. Indeed, one of my earliest memories relates to an experience of gender inequity. I am four years old. I am sitting on the floor beside my mother who is on the phone to my grandfather (her father). Putting down the phone she explains that my grandfather has bought a new cap and coat for my two year old brother but has not bought anything for me. Clearly bothered by this, my mother hesitates before revealing the reason for my brother’s good fortune: it is because he is a boy!

Perhaps inevitably, my dissertation project is integral to, and consistent with, what has become a lifelong commitment to troubling gender norms. For this project, I set out to intervene in the taken-for-granted notions of gender of a cohort of seventy postgraduate student teachers. The site of my intervention was a drama education course in the first semester of a three semester programme. There were seventy students in the cohort; fifty four were women and sixteen were men. The intervention took place for one hour a week over a ten week period. Throughout the intervention I used drama as a teaching tool and as a means of generating, analysing and representing data (Norris, 2000). In the dissertation text, I use techniques of dramatic script writing to represent not just my literature review (below) but the classroom experience as well. Even though I am a teacher educator in drama, I had not – prior to performing the play on which the intervention centred at a few academic conferences – performed in the theatrical sense for over thirty years; not since I had forgotten my lines as a college student in a performance of Beckett’s *Play*. My experience in drama, however, meant that before embarking on the EdD (Narrative Inquiry) at the University of Bristol (UK), I considered performance primarily in Saldaña’s (2006) terms: as a theatrical production on a stage (or some such designated space), in which a “live” audience played a crucial role:

You do not determine
whether your work
is or is not performance.
That is my job
my privilege
my right
as an audience member (pp. 1093-1094).

I knew from experience, that to perform (drama, music, dance, circus, mime etc. or any combination thereof) for a live audience required weeks, if not months, of preparation and

rehearsal. However, before embarking on the EdD, I had not read (as Saldaña claims he had) Goffman, Turner, Schechner, Conquergood, Pelias, Madison or Denzin (Saldaña, 2006). Nor had I read Butler or Spry (my additions). Indeed, the only writer I had even heard of from Saldaña's list was Goffman (1959), who applies the metaphor of theatrical performance to everyday life, a metaphor with a long history. Indeed, in Renaissance Europe, it was widely accepted that "the world was a great theatre called the *theatrum mundi*" (Schechner, 2006, p. 14); that "everyday life was theatrical" and that "theatre offered a working model of how life was lived" (p. 14).

On the EdD I was to read and to hear, that performance was not just about theatrical performance or the performance of everyday life. I was, as Saldaña (2006) puts it, to:

. . . read and hear that
culture is performed
gender is performed
and that
we live in a performative society. (p. 1094)

I could not just dismiss all of this with Saldaña's "Yeah, right . . ." (p. 1094); not without, as he claimed he had done, doing the reading first. I needed to satisfy myself about what various writers might mean by performing, performance and performativity beyond the limits of my theatrical and everyday understandings of these terms. I was also curious about how the lens of performance studies might enable me to shed some light on gender (my dissertation topic) and on my teaching (my mode of intervening in the students' gender narratives as) as well as on theatrical performance itself (on which the course I was teaching centred). While I was aware that in performance studies, as in poststructural theory, meaning is not seen as fixed, stable or determinable, I was to learn – as Saldaña (2006) indicates in his poem or "rant" (he refers to his text as both) – that performance studies is also a contested field.

Conversing With Distant Colleagues

I wanted to write about performance studies and post-structural theory in a way that would "capture" the dynamism of my conversations with these theoretical ideas and allow space for readers to engage with them as well. When I am thinking with theory, I do not have pages of it in my head, just an idea or two, and I wanted to find a way of representing this (Preston-Dunlop, 1998). I considered writing poetry which, as Prendergast (2006) writes, is "originally an oral art form . . . deeply rooted in the sense of voice" (pp. 370-371). Moreover, as Butler-Kisber (2002) writes, "form mediates understanding" and "Different forms can qualitatively change how we [as writers and as readers] understand phenomena" (p. 230).

In the first instance, I considered writing "found poetry" which, according to Butler-Kisber (2002) "takes the words of others and transforms them into poetic form" (p. 233). According to Prendergast (2006), found poetry has "an established history and practice in literature" (p. 372), with Maya Angelou, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot all having transformed the words of others into poetry. Prendergast herself exemplifies and presents a case for the use of found poetry as literature review. She argues that it "offers an alternative method for understanding and representing key theories and texts" (p. 369), while allowing one to express one's "own view of the thoughts and words of others through the re-creation of their texts" (p. 372). However, I did not want to be restricted to re-creating others' texts and I did not necessarily want to write poetry *per se*. So I decided to combine ideas from written texts by Prendergast (2006), Preston-Dunlop (1998), Spry (2011) and Prendergast and Leggo (2007), to create my own writing experiment.

My Writing Experiment

In my writing experiment (which comprises the rest of this article) I use “techniques” of found poetry, taking words phrases and even whole passages from scholarly writings and reframing them by inserting line breaks, deleting text, reordering text, changing punctuation and emphases and using repetition (Prendergast, 2006). I also combine the words and phrases of distant colleagues with my own. (Poetry excerpts, however, are quoted verbatim.) Like Prendergast and Leggo (2007), I borrow from the conventions of dramatic script writing. So in my writing experiment, I present ideas in dialogic form and include myself as a sort of chorus, summarising and commenting on the dialogue. My intentions are to reflect the dynamism of my conversation with theory and to create space for the reader to enter into that conversation and make her/his own meanings.

A kind of conversation with distant colleagues

Performance: a broad spectrum approach

DOROTHY

Building on the work of Goffman (1959) (in sociology) and Turner (1969, 1974, 1982) (in anthropology), Schechner (2006) posits a “broad spectrum” or “continuum” approach to performance. He believes that any and all human activities can be studied “as” performances, “from ritual, play, sports . . . the performing arts . . . [to] the media and the internet” (p. 2).

RICHARD SCHECHNER

Just about anything can be studied “as” performance.
To say something “is” a performance depends:
on the context in which it is performed;
on the “specific cultural circumstances” (ibid. p. 38).

DOROTHY

When something “is” a performance, it is bracketed off from everyday life; “framed by cultural conventions” (Madison, 2012, p. 170). What Schechner calls “is” performance is called “cultural performance” by others (Turner, 1982; Conquergood, 2006/1991; Madison, 2012). Plays, operas, circus acts, carnivals, parades, religious services, poetry readings, weddings, funerals, graduations, concerts, toasts, jokes and storytelling are examples of what “is” a performance or cultural performance; “self-conscious and symbolic acts . . . presented and communicated within a circumscribed space” (Madison, 2012, p. 170). According to Schechner (2006), everyday social acting (in Goffman’s, 1959, terms) “is” not performance. It can, nonetheless, be studied “as” performance. But . . .

RICHARD SCHECHNER

When everyday activities are broadcast over the internet,
“is” that a performance?

When a politician makes a speech,

“is” that a performance?

“At one end of the spectrum it’s clear what a performance is” (Schechner, 2006, p.40), at the other end, it’s not.

Performances

RICHARD SCHECHNER

“Performances – of art, rituals, or ordinary life – are “restored behaviors,” “twice-behaved behaviors,” performed actions that people train for and rehearse.” (ibid. p. 28). Behaviours can be “recombined in endless variations” (p. 30), in endless contexts, by endless performers in copformance with endless others.

So “every performance is different from every other” (p. 30).

DOROTHY

Behaviours precede, exceed and are separate from the person performing them (Butler, 2007b/1999, 2005; Schechner, 2006); to repeat them is to thus repeat the socially mediated identities of others.

Performing everyday life

RICHARD SCHECHNER

Performances of everyday life comprise: embodied cultural practices, involving “years of training and practice” (p. 28).

Performances of everyday life require: an extended childhood, of learning appropriate cultural behaviours.

The evolution of the term performance

DOROTHY

Conquergood (1998) describes how, in cultural studies, the meaning of the term performance has shifted from a way of describing the world to something that offers “great possibility for changing it” (Madison, 2012, p. 189); from mimesis to poiesis to kinesis. In mimetic modes of performance, experience is merely mirrored or reflected. In poetic modes, the mirroring of experience generates meaning beyond its appearance. Mimesis and poiesis culminate in kinesis, where reflection and meaning create possibilities for intervention and change. However, mimicry is a form of mimesis that can be used to subvert authority and so function as kinesis (ibid.).

Performing gender

DOROTHY

Post-structural feminist Judith Butler posits the notion of gender “as” a performance.

JUDITH BUTLER

The script the actor is given,
the script the actor performs,
is a script that has existed
before the actor’s arrival on the scene.

The actor is required to actualise and reproduce it (Butler, 2007a/1988).

The gender that one does,
the gender that one performs, is
a performance that has been going on
before one’s arrival on the scene.

Gender is performed within pre-existing cultural conventions (ibid.)

“Just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and
just as the play requires both text and interpretation,
so the gendered body acts its part
in a culturally restricted corporeal space” (p. 194).

Gender is interpreted “within the confines of already existing directives” (p. 194).

DOROTHY

For Butler then, as for de Beauvoir, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman [or a man]”
(de Beauvoir, 1973/1949, p. 301).

JUDITH BUTLER

“Gender is the repeated stylisation of the body,
a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame
that congeal over time
to produce the appearance of substance,
of a natural sort of being” (Butler, 2007b/1999, p. 45).

RICHARD SCHECHNER

It is “gender-specific vocal inflections, facial displays,
gestures, walks, and erotic behaviour” (Schechner, 2006, p. 151).

It is the “gender markings of a given society” (p. 151),
its “scents, body shapes . . .adornments, [and] clothing” (p. 151).

JUDITH BUTLER

It is a construction comprised of a set of acts.

It “regularly conceals its own genesis” (Butler, 2007b/1999, p. 190):

“the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders is obscured by the credibility of those productions – and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them” (p. 190).

We “regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right” (p. 190).

DOROTHY

Lesbians, gays, transvestites, transgender people . . .

RICHARD SCHECHNER

“To refuse to perform one’s assigned gender is to rebel against ‘nature’” (Schechner, 2006, p. 152).

JUDITH BUTLER

Compelled to believe in gender as natural,
it forms the basis of our identities. So

we are blind to its institution and inscription
on the surfaces of our bodies; to its fabrication.

We are blind to its production
as the truth effect “of a discourse of primary and stable identity” (Butler, 2007b/1999, p. 186).

We are blind to the mechanisms of power
that produce “men” and “women,” and gender inequities.

DOROTHY

For Butler, the primary site of (heteronormative) gender inscription is bodies. Like Bourdieu (2001), she contends that gender is maintained by its inscription in a system of binary oppositions that privilege the masculine over the feminine. Masculine superiority (aligned with the mind, reason and logic) and feminine inferiority (aligned with the body, sensuality and emotion) are thus ratified, reproduced and regulated. In this way, “male,” “female” and gender inequities are produced as “normal, natural, to the point of being inevitable” (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 8). To construe gender as a performance is, according to Butler (2007b/1999), to open up possibilities for intervention and change (kinesis).

Performativity

JUDITH BUTLER

Gender is performative:

“real only to the extent that it is performed” (Butler, 2007a/1988, p. 194);
 its continuance ensured by its performativity:
 a stylised repetition of acts, culturally validated and sustained (Butler, 2007b/1999).

D. SOYINI MADISON

Performativity is about resistance too.
 It is the repetition of stylised acts inherited from the *status quo*, and
 it is the repetition of subversive stylised acts “inherited by contested identities” (Madison,
 2012, p. 181).

DOROTHY

Denzin distinguishes between performativity and performance.

NORMAN DENZIN

Performativity is the *doing*,
performance the thing done,
 the former preceding the latter (Denzin, 2003, p. 188).

DELLA POLLOCK

But, “I want to claim more power for performance:
 to think about the tension between the thing done and the doing
 as a collision between past and present
 producing the excess of what’s as yet undone,
 what’s yet to be done” (Pollock, 2007, p. 243).

DOROTHY

Conquergood (2006/1991) views identities and cultures as “unfolding performative invention”
 (p. 361). For Langellier performativity is a dynamic and complex process.

KRISTEN LANGELLIER

Performativity comprises dynamic interpenetrations
 of identity, experience, social relations and context.
 It is “contradictory, multiple and complexly interconnected” (Langellier, 1999, p. 129).

DOROTHY

In post-structural theory, all actions, utterances and ideas are understood as performatives and
 so capable of being done differently (Schechner, 2006). Post-structuralism calls every kind of
 hegemony, authority and fixed idea into question. Nonetheless . . .

RICHARD SCHECHNER

In business, in science, in politics,
 performativity is used to control.

Its “techniques” –
simulation especially –
have been eagerly taken
by business, science and the military,
eager to enhance their control over knowledge;
anxious to acquire more power” (ibid. p. 141).

DOROTHY

Lyotard (1984) too uses the term performativity in this way. So, performativity and performance are contested terms. And the anti-authoritarian thrust of performativity, as expounded by post-structural theorists, is at odds with the “uses” to which it has been put by the authoritarian systems that have embraced it.

RICHARD SCHECHNER

“The universities are sites of this contradiction” (Schechner, 2006, p. 141).
While many academics strive
to subvert “the established order of things” (p. 141),
university authorities take steps
to bring university practices “in line
with big business, big science,
and big government” (p. 142).

DOROTHY

Schechner claims that the “revolution in thinking” (p. 149) envisioned by post-structural notions of performativity has remained just that. He contends that it is not widely shared beyond, or even within, academia and that it tends to be confined to discourse; a contention with which I concur.

Performing agency

JUDITH BUTLER

If “every performance is different from every other” (Schechner, 2006, p. 30),
then every performance is a “variation” on a “repetition” (Butler, 2007b/1999, p. 198).

Now, let’s consider drag. The enactment in drag
of a “variation” on a “repetition” (Butler, 2007b/1999, p. 198) reveals
that gender contains within itself
the possibility of resisting itself;
that gender contains within itself
the possibility of “a subversive repetition” (Butler, 2007b/1999, p. 199).

D. SOYINI MADISON

The subversive possibilities of mimicry!

What about the repetition of an inherited subversive act

as a strategy of subversive repetition? (Madison, 2012)

JUDITH BUTLER

The repetition of an inherited subversive act
can be a strategy of subversive repetition. But
 it is only within the terms of existing norms
 that inherited subversive acts are recognisable as subversive.
 To imagine any sort of resistance outside of existing norms
 is to deny being implicated in them
 and so to reaffirm them. (Butler, 2007b/1999, p. 34)

PATTI LATHER

Yes, to enact agency
 is to repeat the familiar
 in such a way that “the repetition
 displaces that which enables it” (Lather, 2007, p. 39).

TAMI SPRY

And, to enact agency
 is to tell one’s own stories
 about the complex intersections between self and others
 in power laden contexts (Spry, 2011, p. 122).

DOROTHY

Butler (2007b/1999) reveals the notion of a fixed (gender) identity as invented and contingent. Butler and Bourdieu (2001) claim that gender, inscribed as it is in bodies and in social structures, forms the basis of identity itself. So, inextricably enmeshed in gender, we cannot trouble it outside the terms of its (our) construction. We can only trouble it in the doing (or performing) of it, in local contexts (Butler, 2007b/1999; Lather, 2007; Spry, 2011).

(Not) speaking gender right

DOROTHY

Within a discourse of heteronormative gender, the myth prevails that women talk a lot. And, within a discourse of heteronormative gender, what women say is devalued.

LIZ LOCHHEAD

“Women
 Rabbit rabbit rabbit women
 Tattle and titter
 Women prattle
 Women wuffle and witter . . .

Bossy Women Gossip

Girlish Women Giggle

Women natter, women nag

Women niggle-niggle-niggle . . .” (Lochhead, 2003/1985, pp. 135-136)

DOROTHY

Men, on the other hand, “talk”: “Think first, Speak later/Men talk” (ibid, p. 136). But, when women’s words are not heard, women are, in effect, silenced. When women know their words will not be heard, they “choose” silence. Their silence thus becomes a performative imperative:

LIZ LOCHHEAD

“A Man likes A Good Listener

Oh yeah

I like A Woman

Who likes me enough

Not to nag and

Not to interrupt ’cause I call that treason

A woman with the Good Grace

To be struck dumb

By me Sweet Reason. Yes –” (p. 136).

DOROTHY

Rich (1980) writes that “In a world where language and naming are power, silence is oppression is violence” (p. 204) and it begets further violence and oppression:

EAVAN BOLAND

“In the ancient, gruesome story, Philomel
was little more than an ordinary girl.

She went away with her sister, Procne. Then
her sister’s husband, Tereus, given to violence,
raped her once

and said he required her silence.
forever. When she whispered *but*
he finished it all and had her tongue cut out” (Boland, 2007, p. 16).

DOROTHY

Olsen (2003/1978), writing about the historical silencing of women writers, also aligns silence with other forms of violence and oppression.

TILLIE OLSEN

Shut up. Shut up.

“Shut up, you’re only a girl” (Olsen, 2003/1973, p. 27).

“Unclean; taboo.
The Devil’s Gateway.
The three steps behind;
the girl babies drowned in the river . . .

. . . burned as witch at the stake.
Stoned to death for adultery.
Beaten, raped. Bartered.
Bought and sold . . .

. . . Isolated.
Cabin’d, cribb’d, confin’d;
the private sphere.
Bound feet: corseted, cosseted, bedecked . . .

. . . Fear of rape, male strength . . .
Fear of expressing capacities.
Soft attractive graces;
the mirror to magnify man . . .

. . . Marriage as property arrangement . . .
. . . *this punitive difference in circumstance,*
in history, between the sexes;
this past, hidden or evident, that . . .

. . . though objectively obsolete . . .
Continues so terribly,
so determiningly
to live on . . .” (pp. 26-27, italics in original)

how much conviction then
“as to the importance of what one has to say,
one’s right to say it . . .” (p. 27)
how much belief in oneself?

“Difficult for any male
not born into a class
that breeds such confidence.
Almost impossible for a girl, a woman” (p. 27).

Shut up. Shut up.
“Shut up, you’re only a girl” (p. 27).

DOROTHY

Olsen insists that the habits of history are not easily broken.

PIERRE BOURDIEU

Cast as symbolic objects, women
exist for and through the gaze of others
engendering a permanent state of insecurity.

Expected to be “feminine,”
smiling, “friendly, attentive, submissive,
demure, restrained, self-effacing” (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 66).

Expected to indulge the
real or supposed expectations of men,
to constitute themselves as dependent.

Cast as symbolic objects, women
engage in practices directed towards the
anticipated evaluation of bodily appearance.

TILLIE OLSEN

To attract,
to be attractive,
to accept,
to defer,
to self-doubt,
to self-censor,
to falsify “one”’s own reality,
range,
vision,
truth,
voice” (Olsen, 2003/1978, p. 44).

DOROTHY

Olsen claims that Anaïs Nin wrote with a “feminine sensibility that would not threaten man” (p. 43); that the “Qualities and complexities” in her diaries were, therefore, “not present in her fiction” (p. 43).

TILLIE OLSEN

“Not to tell one’s truth
or to ‘tell it slant’
robs one of drive, of conviction;
limits potential stature;
results in loss . . .” (Olsen, 2003/1978, p. 44).

DOROTHY

But . . .

DWIGHT CONQUERGOOD

“Subordinate people do not have the privilege of explicitness, the luxury of transparency, the presumptive norms of clear and direct communication, free and open debate on a level playing field that the privileged classes take for granted” (Conquergood, 2002, p. 146).

LISA A. MAZZEI

Oppositional stances
are silenced and reframed;

silently articulated
for fear of repercussions;

heard as a tacit acceptance
of the *status quo* (Mazzei, 2007).

DOROTHY

Women’s silences in public discourse, however, do not necessarily extend to exchanges among women themselves. Writing about serfdom, slavery and caste subordination, Scott (1990) describes how, for fear of negative sanctions, subordinate groups perform critiques of power out of earshot of dominant ones. Dominant groups too, he asserts, have their own “hidden transcripts” which legitimate their power and the actions they take to maintain it.

HELENA FLAM

“We feel angry when
we are confronted with power
that seriously limits our autonomy” (Flam, 2004, p. 173).

We will not show our anger “when
we expect punishment
for its expression” (p. 173).

“Anger is a male privilege” (p. 173)
and instrument of power.
Angry women are sanctioned.

“We do not volunteer any
self-assertive remarks” (p. 173),
“avoid aggressive remarks by others” (p. 173).

We reason that it does not pay
to show what we think and feel;
the constant conflict “will bring us down” (p. 173).

“And this is in the liberal West” (p. 173).

DOROTHY

In the public discourse of “the liberal West,” men’s talk dominates. Women’s talk is suppressed, muted, silenced, rendered deviant and denigrated as private “prattle.” The privileging, in the public sphere, of men’s talk over women’s is consistent with the privileging of the masculine (aligned with the public) over the feminine (aligned with the private) in the binary system on which Western culture is predicated (Bourdieu, 2001). The regulation of speech (and silence) thus plays a vital role in achieving and maintaining discrete gender identities.

Speech and silence are integral components of gender “as” a performance. How they are performed, however, depends on the context of the performance and on the relationship between performer and audience.

When a performance “is” a performance

DOROTHY

Gender “as” a performance is foregrounded in drag. Drag “is” a performance in Schechner’s (2006) terms in that it is framed as such. For Schechner, “The enactment of dramas by actors “is” a theatrical performance” (p. 38).

In the performance of social life, Conquergood (1998) emphasises kinesis as a way of intervening in and transforming culture (Butler’s subversive repetition is an example). Butler (2007a/1988) insists on strict lines between theatrical performance and life. Madison (2012), however, argues that the theatrical performance of ethnography can intervene in social life. She posits the notion of “*a performance of possibilities*” (p. 190, italics in original); an ethnographic theatrical performance contributing “to a more enlightened and involved citizenship that will disturb systems and processes that limit freedoms and possibilities” (p. 191). Brecht (1936), Boal (1979) and Dolan (2005) all take a performance of possibilities stance in relation to theatrical performance more generally. I would argue, however, that all theatrical performance is ethnographic in that it is concerned with lives lived.

BERTOLT BRECHT

In “epic theatre,” the “natural” becomes startling;
the laws of cause and effect are exposed.
“People’s activity is simultaneously so
and capable of being different” (Brecht, 2010/1936, p. 476).

DOROTHY

In Brecht’s epic theatre the spectator is encouraged to think for her/himself, even if in opposition to the character being played.

In Boal’s theatre of the oppressed (the theatrical wing of Freire’s pedagogy), the spectator becomes a “spectator;” a protagonist in the dramatic action.

AUGUSTO BOAL

The spectator “changes the dramatic action, tries out solutions, discusses plans for change –” (Boal, 2000/1979, p. 122)
 “trains himself (*sic*) for real action” (p. 122);

Theatre is not revolutionary.
 It is a rehearsal for revolution.

DOROTHY

Dolan (2005) considers the spectator more in Brecht’s terms than Boal’s. Nonetheless, in some of the performances she describes, the distinction between spectator and actor is not clear cut.

JILL DOLAN

In theatre, the goal is not to represent perfection
 but to represent “moving pictures of social relations” (Dolan, 2005, p. 7)
 that are not just intellectually clear (as Brecht would have them)
 but felt and lived by performers and spectators alike.

In theatre, the goal is not to represent perfection
 but to persuade that beyond the here and now
 of material oppression and unequal power relations
 is a future that might be different:

“a utopia always in process, always only partially grasped” (p. 6),
 a utopia not stabilised “by its own finished perfection” (p. 6).

DOROTHY

Boal sees theatrical performance as a rehearsal for revolution. Dolan sees it as an *affective* rehearsal for revolution. Though not claiming it can change the world, Dolan maintains that theatrical performance can change people (actors and spectators alike); moving them to take the feelings evoked into other sites of public discourse. She acknowledges, however, that the effects may not be immediately apparent, or even immediate; that they may be evolutionary rather than revolutionary.

RICHARD SCHECHNER

It is permitted to perform against the dominant code in the theatre.
 It is not permitted to perform against it in social life.
 To do so is to run the risk of repercussions.

It is permitted to perform drag in the theatre.
 It is not permitted to perform it on the street.
 To do so is to run the risk of ridicule, or worse.

“Much more is permitted onstage than off” (Schechner 2006, p. 153).

DOROTHY

So theatrical performance offers possibilities for showing how gender is embodied, and enmeshed in systems of power, while avoiding ridicule and instant dismissal.

A blurry boundary: teaching “is”/”as” a performance

DOROTHY

Teaching takes place “within a circumscribed space” and is “framed by cultural conventions” (Madison, 2012, p. 170). So, in Schechner’s and Madison’s terms, teaching “is” a performance.

Like acting, teaching is an ephemeral embodied activity enacted by “trained” performers who rely on oral technique, “scripting, improvisation, characterization, stage presence and critical reviews” (Pineau, 2005/1994, p. 15). Prior to each performance, teachers and actors alike engage in a period of preparation and rehearsal. In the theatrical space of the classroom, as in Boal’s theatre of the oppressed, the distinction between spectators and actors is blurred; teacher and students copperform distinct but overlapping roles.

For Felman (2001), good teaching – as good theatre is for Dolan (2005) – is a performance of possibilities, “unsettling, disturbing, and potentially mind-boggling” (p. 145). Felman also emphasises the affective dimension of teaching; its capacity to pop “the emotional cork” (p. 39). For her too, the effects are incremental rather than immediate; evolutionary rather than revolutionary. However . . .

ELYSE LAMM PINEAU

Classroom stages and theatrical stages are not identical (Pineau, 2005).

RICHARD SCHECHNER

Much more is permitted on the theatrical stage.

ELYSE LAMM PINEAU

The script the teacher is given,
the script the teacher performs,
is a script that has existed
before the teacher’s arrival on the scene.
The teacher is required to actualise and reproduce it
within pre-existing conventions and directives (Pineau, 2005/1994).

PARKER PALMER

The script the teacher is given, separates
mind from body, head from heart,
facts from feelings, theory from practice,
the professional from the personal,

and teachers from students (Palmer, 1998).

JYL LYNN FELMAN

The script the teacher is given, relies on
“cerebral binaries” (Felman, 2001, p. 39) to interpret the universe;
“making *contradictory realities* and
the *navigation of multiplicities*” (p. 39, italics in original)
difficult concepts to engage.

DOROTHY

These accounts by Palmer and Felman, though one-dimensional, nonetheless frame the dominant either-or landscape in which I, and they, teach. The lived “reality” of teaching, however, is much more complex. Nonetheless . . .

PAMELA BURNARD & JULIE WHITE

Located outside the field of play,
there are clear expectations about how to teach.
Teaching is socially constructed and regulated

“increasingly through competence standards” (Burnard & White, 2008, p. 674)
devised by governments, in the interests of
“control, efficiency and accountability” (p. 674).

DOROTHY

Burnard and White (2008) see teaching as regulated through performativity in Butler’s terms as well as in Lyotard’s (it is subjected to mechanisms of bureaucratic control). These performative imperatives are, however, interpreted at local level by teachers, institutional managers and college/school communities. Nevertheless, to understand teaching “as” a performance is to understand that teaching behaviours can be “recombined in endless variations” (Schechner, 2006, p. 30). Locating teaching as a performance, Pineau (2005/1994) applies four key terms used by Conquergood (1989) to describe performance research: poetics, play, process and power.

DWIGHT CONQUERGOOD (& ELYSE LAMM PINEAU)

Poetics

Classroom “reality” is
“fabricated, invented, imagined, constructed . . . “made up”” (Conquergood, 1989, p. 83);
teachers and students share, shape and copperform
endless narratives of human experience;
endlessly “reimagining and refashioning” (p. 83)
themselves and their worlds . . .

Play

. . . teachers harness their playful impulses,
becoming pedagogical tricksters;

“breaching norms,” “violating taboos” (p. 83),
unsettling certainties; turning everything upside down;
improvising, innovating, experimenting, questioning,
agitating, and playing with their students . . .

Process

. . . teachers and students
as embodied, kinaesthetic knowers, learning in ways
that elude “disembodied, intellectual reflection” (Pineau, p. 30);
and in the chorus, ensemble, polyphony,
cacophony of voices, knowledge is emergent, contingent,
provisional, dynamic, destabilising . . .

Power

. . . classrooms and bodies
as sites of struggle,
of domination, resistance, appropriation,
“conflict, accommodation, subversion, and contestation” (Conquergood, p. 84);
historically located and politically situated,
in “ongoing ideological enactments” (Pineau, p. 33) . . .

Classroom “reality” is
a liminal space of tenuous identities;
a magical space “of personal and communal transformation” (p. 36).

DOROTHY

Framing teaching in Conquergood’s terms opens spaces for destabilising the performative imperatives regulating it. It also positions teachers and students as cop performers in “always, emergent, contingent, and power-laden contexts” (Spry, 2011, p. 39). It is, nonetheless, difficult to see how isolated destabilising cop performances of teaching and learning can effect “real” or material transformation. For, as Schechner (2006) and Pineau (2005/1994) point out, such isolated instances are easily contained and controlled by the performative imperatives and institutional hierarchies within which they are enacted (and within which gender is inscribed). But, even when Pandora unleashed so much evil into the world, a little bit of hope remained. And, for me, hope lies in the notion of a performance of possibilities; in the possibilities performance offers for engaging and changing people through emotional *and* cognitive engagement, moving them to take the feelings and ideas evoked into other sites of public discourse.

Writing “as” performance

DOROTHY

I understand how embodied performances, whether in the classroom or in the theatre or in any other social arena can be considered “as” performances. But, I have a certain sympathy with Saldaña’s (2006) rant against the notion of written texts as performances. How can you call something a performance “when it has never been/truly performed” (p. 1093)?

D. SOYINI MADISON

In the “masculine order” (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 9) “written expression has held a privileged place over bodily expression” (Madison, 2012, p. 185). Embodied experiences, practices and ways of knowing have been marginalised . . . and obscured.

TOM BARONE & ELIOT W. EISNER

And, in academia, a particular type of written expression has held a privileged place: “scientific,” objective, analytic, abstract, disembodied writing, staking its claims to “truth” on the basis of “verification” in “propositional discourse” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 2).

RICHARD SCHECHNER

Written texts are constructed, made up and invented too. If we consider them “as” performances they become “transformable and pliable . . . systems” (Schechner, 2006, p. 227) capable of being made into new texts.

DOROTHY

So written texts can be rewritten. Academic texts too can be rewritten to include, and validate experiences that have been obscured, like bodily experience, passion, emotion, ambiguity, and interpersonal/personal contingencies. The disembodied authorial voice can become a self-reflexive one, acknowledging the interdependence of knower and known. Moreover, the writing itself can take a variety of forms, generating alternative ways of understanding and thinking about things.

Performative writing

ELYSE LAMM PINEAU

Let’s see if we can apply Conquergood’s (1989) organisational scheme to performative writing.

DELLA POLLOCK

Let me try.

Poetics

Performative writing is:

“fabricated, invented, imagined, constructed . . . ‘made up’” (Conquergood, 1989, p. 83); the writer “a figure of semiosis-in process, a becoming I/we,” who writes “reality” as “always already about to fly off the page into being and becoming” (Pollock, 2007, p. 247).

Play

Performative writers are:

errant and playful tricksters who improvise with apparently fixed forms “violating taboos,” “unsettling certainties” (Conquergood, p. 83),

risking error “in the name of possibility” and “surpassing convention and form on a dare” (Pollock, p. 247).

Process

Performative writing is:

“emergent, temporal, contingent, provisional . . . dynamic . . .” (Conquergood, p. 83).

Substituting the closure of cause and effect with the possibility of “what if?”

opening up spaces “between what is and what might be” (Pollock, p. 247).

Power

Performative writing:

reveals the effects of hegemonic systems of power,

connecting word and body, personal and cultural, writer and reader,

in dialogue, debate . . . and transformation (Spry, 2011).

DOROTHY

I give the last word on performative writing to Spry who is referring to autoethnographic writing, written specifically for the purpose of being performed by the writer.

TAMI SPRY

The writer engages her embodied experiences
to write an autoethnographic text.

The writer/actor embodies/performs that text
to engage her audience in dialogue (Spry, 2011, p. 134).

DOROTHY

Still, like Saldaña, I am reluctant to call any text that I might write (unless for the specific purposes of an embodied performance) a performance text. I am, nonetheless, drawn to the subversive possibilities of what Pollock (1998, 2007), Spry (2011), Madison (1999), Pelias (2005), Denzin (2003, 2006) and others exemplify as, and call, performative writing. And, as a writer, I seek to do what Pollock (and the others) say performative writing does.

In whatever sphere I see – as Conquergood (1989) puts it – “lines drawn, categories, defined, hierarchies erected” (p. 83), I want to move in and constitute myself as “the trickster, the archetypal performer” (p. 83) and turn everything upside down. Unsettling certainties, I want to reveal them as constructed, contingent and nested in the larger binary systems of power and ideology in which gender is inscribed. And, in so doing, I want to open up spaces of possibility “between what is and what might be” (Pollock, 2007, p. 247).

Taking Stock

In this article, the reader may get a glimpse into how my conversations with theory infuse how I *do* teaching and how I *do* writing. In my attempts to “capture” fragments of my ongoing conversations with performance studies, post-structuralism and some literature on silences (with particular reference to the silences of women), I focus, in particular, on those fragments concerned with destabilising taken-for-granted categories of gender. Moreover, my

use of found poetry and dramatic script destabilises normative modes of representing a literature review in qualitative inquiry. They enable the foregrounding of subjective and embodied understandings of theory in a textual form that is both credible and engaging (Saldaña, 2008, 2003). And, offering an alternative way of “understanding key theories and texts” (Prendergast 2006, p. 372) they enable the destabilisation of prevailing claims to knowledge grounded in objectivity and propositional discourse and predicated on the independence of knower and known.

As a teacher/researcher, I am committed to kinesis, which for me, as for Conquergood (1998), is an act of political intervention. Like Conquergood too, I am committed to dialogue. So, for me, there is an ethical imperative to embrace both in my writing. Indeed, I see the act of writing itself as kinesis; as a way of responding to (and intervening in) the hegemonic systems of power in which (as I argue in my writing experiment) gender is embedded. The use of found poetry and dramatic script offers a mode of literature review that contests (and intervenes in) normative constructions of knowledge in academic discourse. And it does so in a way that seeks to connect theory and life, personal and cultural, writer and reader; opening spaces for readers to engage in dialogue with the text and to generate their own meanings. Only you, the reader, are in a position to judge whether or not my writing experiment achieves any of this. And so, I invite you to consider the following questions: What has my text evoked for you? What meanings have you generated as a result of engaging with it? Where has it taken you that you might not otherwise have gone? Where is it taking you now?

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