

Drama Education, the Body and Representation (or, the mystery of the missing bodies)

1. Introduction: the body as a form of representation

In this paper, I am concerned to explore ways in which bodies make meanings in the world, how meanings are represented *in* and *by* bodies, and wish to pursue some of the implications for drama education of considering the body as a form of representation. There are several reasons for choosing bodies as the object of study and argument. In the first place, dramatic texts and activities in classrooms are made-up *of* and *by* the bodies of students who animate and populate the drama. To create these texts, students draw from and combine the resources held within their bodies as individuals, and between them as social beings. In very particular ways, their bodies carry biological, social and cultural histories, and which give insight and evidence of the internal and invisible domains of the psyche, or states of mind. A second reason (leading, incidentally, to the subtitle of this paper) is because the body as an object of study does not currently appear in description, analysis or theory of educational drama. But elsewhere, there is growing interest in writing about the body within the broad field of critical cultural studies, which could be relevant and applicable to the ways we might think about drama education.

The interest here is focused on ways in which the human body *as a form of representation* can be described and analysed in dramatic activity. In drama lessons, the resources used to construct an improvised drama text are held in the body. Bodies, holding and representing patterns of speech and behaviour, make up the text itself through interaction in space and time. In improvised drama, students select roles and shape the interaction into scenes. Why do particular students select specific roles? How does the selection process relate to their experience of everyday life? Where do they gather their resources from to give meanings to these embodied roles through patterns of speech and behaviour, in sets of gestures, postures and so forth? What do they learn from this adoption of role and the shaping of interaction? How do we, as drama teachers, gather insights into this learning process? In short, what do we refer to as *evidence* of learning?

In answering the list of questions above, I will be adopting a particular framework of ideas drawn from three perspectives in the field of critical cultural studies. In using the term the *body as a form of representation*, I have already revealed something of my

perspective. In the first place, when we talk or write of the material body, we have to have the words and concepts to describe what we see. Material bodies, from the position adopted here, are simultaneously biological, social, cultural and thinking beings—beings who are not only, or simply, situated in time and space, but who create history and geography by the presence, co-presence and action of their bodies. This perspective is primarily (but not exclusively) drawn from the philosophical work of Judith Butler (1990a, 1990b & 1993), a contemporary, feminist, rhetorician living and working in the US. To speak of the body as a form of *representation*, is to invoke two separate but connected senses associated with the term: the sense in which the body can be treated as a *sign*, a *figure*, someone or something that signifies, or represents, someone or something else; and, a second sense in which *to represent* can mean to advocate, speak on behalf of, or, to take another's part—in other words, to take a position which is motivated and interested in supporting a particular point of view. In combining both senses of the term and adding it to our definition of bodies (constituted in history, and constitutive of history) we can arrive at an approach to bodies which sees them as *motivated signs* who create texts and generate meanings in social and cultural encounters. These texts have varied meanings according to differences in the bodies of the actors involved (for instance, in terms of gender, nationality, colour of skin, social position, cultural affiliation and so forth) and differences in the location, both geographical and historical. This aspect of my framework is elaborated from the study of the making of meanings in social contexts, the field of social semiotics, and draws primarily from the work of Gunther Kress (1993, 1995a & 1995b) for general theoretical principles, and the work of Terry Threadgold (1993) in the application of social semiotics to drama and bodies. The third set of ideas I draw on to elaborate a framework is drawn from an approach to drama, theatre and education developed from the work of Augusto Boal (1979 & 1994) in which the dramatic and theatrical application of the body is seen as the pre-eminent 'tool' and medium which transforms corporeal experience into a form of representation. In improvised drama, the body acts as a form of representation and allows the possibility of transforming everyday spaces (everyday classrooms, for instance) into theatrical spaces.

To summarise, the three perspectives that I am combining into a framework to explore the notion of the body as a form of representation in drama education give ways of accounting for the body, firstly, as a material presence and active entity in the world, secondly, the body as a mode of making meanings in culture and, finally, the application

of the body as a form of representation in the field of drama education. In combination, they form the basis of a framework for analysis, or, a methodology, which allows the interpretation, or ‘reading’ of the body as a form of material evidence—a form of evidence which is fundamentally and characteristically formed in social and cultural spheres. Whereas it might appear to be a somewhat generalised theoretical approach (it could be observed that all theories tend towards generalisations), it is my concern to formulate a perspective on drama education which is flexible enough to account for the diversity of our students and the particularity of dramatic activities in different educational locations, but which situates these firmly within a wider social and cultural context.

Having sketched the outline of my theoretical framework above, I will next attempt to apply this set of ideas to a specific item of evidence—an excerpt from a soap opera drama (recorded on videotape and transcribed here) performed by a pair of fourteen year-old students at an inner-city comprehensive school in North-West London. The emphasis I have placed on the social and cultural aspects of the performance of bodies in drama education is in response to what I perceive to be individualist and formalist emphases which characterise current approaches to drama education. So, in my analysis of the evidence I will begin with a very brief discussion of how current approaches to drama education might account for the performance of bodies in these scenes. This will be followed with a more elaborated exposition of the three strands of theory sketched above, applied in analysis to certain specific aspects of the ‘performance text’.

2. Evidence: children make soap opera

To set the scene, this video project was set up by a media studies specialist, Julian Sefton-Green, working in collaboration with a drama teacher, Bruce Wooding and his Year 9 group. It was part of a small-scale research project exploring the notion of ‘performance’ and its place in media education (for an account of the project, see Chapter 7, ‘Do I look like a prostitute? Soaps, reality and learning through performance’, in D. Buckingham, J. Grahame & J. Sefton-Green, *Making Media*, 1995, NATE, Sheffield). With guidance from their teacher, the class devised an episode of soap opera through improvisation and rehearsal. Using a basic storyboard they drew up a sequence of scenes to construct the episode. The project carried over a six week period, and I was invited to come on the day of the shoot in week four. After this, Julian

and a small group of students edited the piece and I attended again in the sixth week to join the class for the world premiere viewing of the first episode of *Johnswood Heights*.

The first scene takes place half-way through the episode and the second provides it with a climactic ending. Both involve the same pair of actors, Rukshana and Ataur playing wife and husband—the class referred to the theme of these scenes as “husband abuse”. I have selected these not least for their sensational content, secondly, because the roles and the embodied performance which carries the roles is clearly marked in patterns of speech and behaviour and, finally, because there is evidence of how the rest of the class reacted to the performance on the videotape.

It is worth commenting at this point that the process of writing about bodies always feels odd to me—making a case for considering a particular form of representation (bodies) by transposition to another form of representation (written words) as the interpretative medium. For my purposes here, I shall have to offer excerpts from the transcript in the hope that these marks on the page might evoke a sense of their bodies and how they acted.

Both scenes take place in their ‘home’, drawn simply by the (kitchen) table they sit beside. The first scene opens with the post arriving and R. (Rukshana) orders A. (Ataur) to fetch it. He returns, saying that there is no post, but R. is suspicious and grabs hold of him, extracting a £500 telephone bill from under his tee-shirt.

I.

1. R. sits centre-right behind table, A. sits to stage-left of the table reading a newspaper.
2. A: (*without looking up from paper*) A letter.
3. R: (*miming something with her hands, difficult to tell what the mime represents*) Yeah, go and get it then.
4. R: (*snatches paper and shouts*) GO AND GET IT!
5. R: (*reading the newspaper*) Um...is anything there for me?
6. A: (*sits down again*) No.
7. R: There must be...I mean...it’s a letter isn’t it? (*folds the newspaper*)
8. A: No, nothing.
9. R. gives A. a suspicious look
10. A: [...] and they ran off.
11. R: (*looking hard at A., he looks away*) Oh really! And now I’m deaf am I?
12. R. leans across the table and slaps him in the stomach, A. clutches at it as if winded.
13. R: What’s that then?
14. *Laughter from studio audience*

15. *A. takes letter from under tee-shirt, hands it to R. who scowls at him and opens the letter and looks at it.*
16. R: It's a phone bill. (*she groans, A. looks at R. from under his brows*)
17. R: (*incredulous tone, raised voice*) I can't believe this. (*R. stands, pushing the letter into A.'s face*)
18. R: Nearly 500 quid! What is ...
19. A: I'll pay for it. I'll pay for it.
20. R: Really! I could really [...] you'll pay it up! Who have you been phoning?
21. A: Friends.
22. R: As if you have any friends! Most people you know are nerds like you, all right.
23. *Laughter from studio 'audience'*
24. R: So who have you been phoning? I only called the office [...]
25. R: Most of them are the same number.
26. R: (*looking at bill then leaning over A.*) Look, you have been running this up. Who is it?
27. A: (*looks up sheepishly at R.*) Friends.
28. R: (*over-emphasised and physical sigh, heaving her shoulders, looks menacingly down on A.*) Don't give me that! You say that one more time...
29. *R. rolls up the newspaper and holds it as a weapon to threaten him. A. shuffles away from her to the far edge of the chair.*
30. R: Just give me that one more time.
31. *Laughter from audience.*
32. A: [...]s my friend
33. R: (*picking up bill from table*) I'm going to ring this number up. I'm going to ring this number up... (*clenching teeth and waving the rolled-up newspaper into A.'s face*) and if it's anything I don't like ... like ... I mean ... a girlfriend or something like that.
34. A: (*looking up at R.*) Girlfriend?
35. R: (*with gathering rage*) It is, isn't it! (*thrusts bill at A.*)
36. A: (*pointing at his own chest with both hands*) Who do you think I am?
37. R: A nerd, that's what I think you are. (*waving the newspaper weapon*) You'd do anything to go behind my back to teach me a lesson. Well let me tell you something. If you...if you don't know this, I'm the boss around here. If I ... if I ring this and I find out...
38. A: (*waving right hand dismissively and then folding arms*) All right, all right.
39. R: (*Dropping voice to give impression of real menace*) Don't talk to me like that!
40. *Laughter from audience*
41. R: (*gesticulating with newspaper*) If you know what's good for you you'll say sorry right now or you'll get a good hiding.
42. *Laughter from audience*
43. *A. is twiddling his fingers and rubbing his hands*
44. R: Sorry, go on! (*waving newspaper*)
45. A: (*sitting back with slightly nervous smile*) Sorry.
46. R: (*emphatically placing bill on table*) I'm going to phone it up. Right?!

47. *R. moves behind A. waving the rolled newspaper in his face. A. sits, facing forward.*

II.

1. *A. is sitting in the same chair but a bit further away from the table. R. enters from stage-left, moving behind A. and flings her jacket down on the floor behind the table.*
2. R: How could you do this to me?
3. *R. moves close in to A., between the table and the chair he is sitting on. She bends down to put her face close to his, one hand on the table, the other on the back of A.'s chair*
4. R: How could you do this to me?
5. A: (*head bowed*) Leave me alone.
6. R: Leave me alone! Is that all the thanks I get? (*screwing-up her face in anger*) After I cared for you all these years. I left my ... (*pointing at herself*) I left my home (*pointing offstage-left*) just to marry you.
7. A: (*gestures with right hand, as if to brush her away*) What did I do? (*pointing at himself*) What did I do?
8. R: What did ... (*slapping his back to grab at the back of his tee-shirt which is pulled taut against his neck.*)
9. *A. clutches at the neck of the shirt trying to give himself space to breathe.*
10. R: You know what you did very well.
11. *Audience laughter and murmurs of excitement.*
12. *R. looks around and picks up a piece of wood, a broken chair-leg, from upstage-centre, moves behind and to the left of A., raising arm and screwing-up face in rage and effort, swings a feigned blow to the back of A.'s head. After a beat, A. falls unconscious into a curled heap on the floor to the right of the chair. R. comes down on one knee and leans over him, shouting into his unconscious face.*
13. R: I loved you ... you shouldn't have done this to me. You should have come and told me if there was anything going on between you. I told you. I loved you ... (*pointing off*) I had to hear from someone [...by...] the washing machine ... (*pointing off*) How do you think that makes me feel?
14. R: Bastard!
15. *R. feigns another heavy blow, kicking her foot into the floor to giving sound-effect and extra emphasis*
16. *Audience laughter and growing excitement.*
17. *R. feigns two more blows, evenly measured beats.*
18. R: I loved you.
19. *Focus on the curled body of A.. We see R. move to pick up her jacket and exit left*

3. Critical notes: current approaches to drama education

Analysis of this evidence within conventional, established approaches to drama education might, for the sake of brevity, fall into two broad categories. Although not wishing here to subscribe to the view of a strict dichotomy between the so-called

'process' and 'product' oriented approaches, I shall identify them by their respective emphases—what I have previously referred to as an *individualist* emphasis, on the one hand, and an emphasis on the *formalist* aspects of drama education, on the other.

For those who place more emphasis on the 'process of drama' (approaches developed from Bolton and Heathcote, for instance) the profound universal significance illuminated by this particular domestic scene would be looked for. It might be argued that, even though the enactment presented the opportunity for deeper exploration of the theme, the depiction of domestic violence presented is sensational, superficial and stereotypical, as evidenced by the audience reaction, for instance. The teacher would need to intervene in the drama in order to structure an exploration to give deeper significance to the theme; this being the case, the teacher would not only hold the power to decide what issues would be worth exploring, they are also likely to hold to themselves the choice of strategies and approaches used for the exploration. Great emphasis would be placed on the development of the group and individuals through involvement in the learning process. In this, there is an assumption that there are issues which are of universal value and equal interest to diverse individuals and groups. Furthermore, there is an underlying notion of a universal pattern of development in children and, providing they become committed to the drama, each individual would be able to make their own individual points of contact with universal themes and concepts. In short, there is likely to be little acknowledgement of the fact that individuals, such as Rukshana and Ataur, are positioned differently in relation to any given theme according to their gender, ethnicity, economic position, cultural background and so forth. It is as if the dramatic action animated by these children could exist and be interpreted outside of history and their particular social locations. It is this reference to individual psychology, intellectual and emotional, linked with the concept of the universal which gives rise to the individualist emphasis of this approach to drama education. In relation to my argument, perhaps the most important omission is that the visible and material bodies of diverse students are likely to be passed over in the search for emotional and intellectual contact with the particular and dramatic event. Emotion and intellect are internal and invisible, locked inside us as individuals. How do we know about these things in drama but for the ways the body acts to represent these things externally, demonstrated by the actors and the audience in the above scenes?

From the drama education perspective that places more emphasis on the making, performing and response to dramatic texts (the so-called 'product' oriented approach to

drama, currently associated with Hornbrook) the formal and stylistic aspects of this scene would be highlighted—hence my use of the term 'formalist' to characterise the approach. How much is it like, or not like, a soap opera? How do we respond to soap operas in the world and how does this response relate to the way we respond to the scene that we have produced? Again, from this perspective, little consideration is likely to be given to the fact that diverse groups and individuals are positioned differently in response to various dramatic texts. Moreover, there would be little or no importance attached to diverse learning processes. Here, the bodies of learners are viewed as an instrument, a cipher, the significance of which is subordinated to the meaning of the whole text; little or no account is likely to be given to the relationship between particular bodies and specific subjective positions.

From both perspectives, then, the body is assumed as a given presence. Despite the influence of Artaud and Boal, for instance, in 'physical' approaches to drama and theatre in the wider world, the body as a form of representation is passed over, either in the search for transcendental significance, or in the compulsion to make and criticise dramatic texts as cultural artefacts. The subjective positions represented in the bodies of Rukshana and Aaur (female/male, British/non-British, classmate/student) are not seen as significant in the drama. Who they are when they enter the drama room, who they become in the drama and who they are when they leave their roles and rejoin the flow of school and community life is marked in their bodies as a form of representation. Their roles were not scripted on paper, but 'inscribed' in their bodies and was held, not just as individuals, but between them as social beings.

4. Analysis: a cultural approach to body as a form of representation

You may remember that the three perspectives from the domain of critical cultural studies I want to draw towards the analysis of the bodies and representation in two scenes above include: a philosophical approach to the body (Butler 1990a, 1990b & 1993); social semiotic perspectives on the formation of subjectivity (Kress 1993, 1995a & 1995b); and, a pedagogical approach to drama and theatre (Boal 1979 & 1994). Previously, I have referred to the fundamental social and cultural orientation of their underlying principles. To elaborate this further, they share in common specific, theoretical characteristics: firstly, they all place emphasis on the formation and development of individuals (ontology) in *social*, *cultural* and, therefore, *historical* contexts; secondly, each perspective acknowledges the social fact that there are

differences between social and cultural positions and that these differences are inextricably linked to differences in power and the relative values ascribed to things; thirdly, each perspective is concerned with *signs* and *meanings*, or *semiotic* processes, as fundamental to social and cultural life; finally, and of great importance to those concerned with education, all three perspectives promote the notion that in thought, sign-making and action, social actors bring about *transformations*—that is the possibility and probability of change and development in personal, social and cultural circumstances.

As a combined theoretical framework, they provide a set of tools for analysis, or methodology, which allow us, firstly, to approach an account of the body as a material entity formed in social and cultural history, secondly, a description of the body as a form and system of representation and, finally, the body as a dramatic and theatrical form in individual development, in social learning and in cultural action. In my introduction I outlined a set of questions which drive this research; they were about the resources that young people draw upon in improvised drama to make dramatic texts, and therefore to make meanings in the world. I am looking for the ways in which they use and transform the materials of making meanings through viewing their bodies as forms of representation because these resources are held in, and deployed through the use of their bodies; by seeing bodies as a form of representation, a form of material evidence, we can speculate on how their everyday, embodied roles might intersect and interact with the roles they choose for themselves in improvised drama. My hypothesis is, in short, that these points of interaction and intersection of the everyday and the dramatic, as represented through and by the bodies of students, are the sites to look for evidence of learning.

The next step, then, is to test out and elaborate these tools of analysis through applying them quite specifically to the evidence I have presented. I intend to approach this by taking the ideas of Butler, Kress and Boal in turn, applying them as separate interpretative frameworks through which to view selected aspects of the evidence. There are both advantages and disadvantages to this strategy. A cautious and incremental approach, allowing one to identify and establish basic guiding principles, would seem appropriate to the early stages of formulating a complex theoretical framework. On the other hand, there is the danger of presenting a fragmentary and partial exploration of the main topic (the body as a form of representation) through a lack of sufficient space to develop each layer of analysis, and this may work counter to

developing a cohesive and integrated approach. In consistently emphasising the common social and cultural basis of each perspective, and in wishing to make a virtue of the overlap and intersection between the three frames of reference, I hope to be able to present a coherent review of my approach.

For Judith Butler, with her particular interest in gendered and sexed bodies, the body is a dramatic signifier, becoming visible and material through constant and repeated 'doings'—"performative acts" which are "iterable". She claims that "the body *is* a historical situation...a manner of doing, dramatizing and *reproducing* a historical situation". In this performative sense, that the body is less of a biological object and more of "a doing"; she refers to what Foucault described as a "stylistics of existence" performed by the body which is never "fully self-styled, for living styles have a history and that history conditions and limits possibilities" (1990a: 272-3). According to Butler, the body is a cultural signifier, embodying histories and sets of possibilities (the possibility of transformation, or what we might become). In her particular concern with the corporeal boundaries of sex and gender, Butler (1993) posits the possibility of individuals and groups changing the established and conventional views and boundaries of sex and gender roles through forms of action which raise questions and critique. She looks, for example, towards the 'camp' culture of lesbian and gay communities, which inverts and parodies prevalent practices and attitudes towards sex and gender roles. Although these cultural practices occur on the margins of mainstream culture, their very theatricality ensures a certain visibility and interest from the mainstream which may, in turn, permeate and influence wider cultural spheres. Moving from the extremes to more everyday or mundane social locations, we might look to the ways children act in improvised drama to see how they might adapt, invert, or in other ways transform themselves, opening up possibilities of different ways of acting in the world. This action is, in my view, always bound to be reflexive, possibly critical and perhaps even transgressive or subversive of 'cultural norms'.

From the moment they appear in view there is a history we 'read' from the visible everyday bodies of Aatur and Rukshana: they are boy and girl, fourteen years of age; they are Londoners, English and South Asian; they are classmates, friends, acquaintances or adversaries. What is apparent from their bodies, visible in the colour of their skin, their mannerisms and gestures, what Goffman (1963) terms their "bodily idiom", is that they are first or second generation immigrants. This, for instance, immediately places them in the order of things, making them susceptible, perhaps, to

racial attacks. In the first two lines of dialogue, what we might loosely describe as their 'background', is audible in the forms of their utterance, their verbal idiom. What their bodies look like, the clothes they wear, the patterns of gesture and speech denote, in complex combination, a biological history, a social and cultural history, social and economic position, in both the limited sphere of schooling and in wider society. These aspects of themselves, their identities as Ataur and Rukshana, are not materialised in a single moment, they are acquired through repeated and recursive "doings", or actions, at home, on the streets and in school.

Throughout the first scene, and into the beginning of the second scene, especially if we delete, or 'turn down' the dialogue, we can sustain the view that these are fourteen year-old students are simply 'playing the part' of teenagers. The hiding of the telephone bill under the tee-shirt, the slap in the stomach and the sheepish behaviour of A. (Scene I, lines 6-15) is a sequence of actions and behaviour we can connect more easily with children or adolescents, and less so than with the adult roles they are playing. Laughter from their classmates (Scene I, lines 14, 23 & 31) is provoked by R.'s derision at the thought that A. could have any friends to telephone and by R.'s threatening demands that she should be treated with respect (Scene I, lines 37-39). Even though A. attempts to maintain his sense of integrity against the onslaught, he is finally humiliated in the 'say sorry' routine (Scene I, lines 41-45), again, familiar playground behaviour. This could well indicate that what we are witnessing is a kind of parody of everyday classroom behaviour, a parody at Ataur's expense. Indeed, he is quite passive throughout the two scenes, both in terms of speech and action, and this is likely to be in no small sense connected with his discomfort as the 'fall-guy', or victim figure.

Yet, despite the fact that this sequence of represented, embodied action might be very close to the everyday, reiterated and recursive behaviours of the classroom and playground, from the outset the action has been set in a particular frame and inflected in a particular direction and gathering in momentum throughout the two scenes. The first indicator of this is the spatial arrangement which opens Scene I (line 1), with R. reading a newspaper and A. set away from the table. This establishment of an 'adult' world is verbally reinforced throughout the first scene with constant references to the telephone bill and we begin to witness the emergence of the representation of a difficult marriage between R. and A. and the possibilities of A's infidelity (Scene I, lines 33-37) with its threatened consequences. Seen through this frame, the actions of R. and A. become more ambiguous—not simply classroom or playground behaviour. Even the

inconsistency of R.'s opinion that A. is too much of "a nerd" (Scene I, line 37) to have friends, but that he might have girlfriend, seems a credible contradiction in the context of the resentment and barely suppressed violence of a marital relationship, as it is represented in R.'s aggressive behaviour and A.'s sullen resistance. As scene II gathers pace, especially from A's remonstrance and declaration of innocence, "What did I do?" (Scene II, line 7), the symbolic newspaper 'weapon' is replaced with a chair-leg, the action of their bodies begins to represent something quite other than everyday and mundane behaviour.

Our attention becomes fixed to their bodies when, in the end, they become transformed into dominant and violent wife, cowering and frustrated husband. The pummelling of A. with the stick accompanied by R.'s vehement assertion that she had loved him (scene II, line 13) is an enactment which is drawn from many sources, bearing only an indirect and mediated relationship to their everyday lives. Their everyday clothes, the walls of the drama studio fall into the background and we concentrate on the activity of their bodies evoking the possibility of other selves. Yet, still we might hold onto the sense of their everyday history and measure it against their dramatic roles—their classmates laugh to see a drama in which the girl Rukshana derogates the boy Ataur, the power in her posture, the force of her rhythmically reiterated utterances which, in the end, are punctuated with feigned blows. This is not to make the simple argument that Rukshana, having experience her role as R. will possibly become a husband beater, or that Ataur has learned how better to play the role of victim. Having rehearsed and reiterated this act which departs from, or inverts the stereotype of marital violence, it is possible that they have explored an area at the margins which will subsequently permeate and settle to remain a part of them. At the very least they raise, for themselves and others, questions about the conventions and dynamics of power between partners in a marital relationship.

Another major strand of my perspective is drawn from recent work of Gunther Kress (1995a & 1995b) who writes and teaches about social semiotics, schooling and education. According to Kress, not only do we make systems of signs, or forms of representation, but also our subjective identities are substantially constituted and transformed by our ability to draw on different forms of representation. In this multi-media age, there is a proliferation of interconnected forms of representation. Dependent on our social positions, there is differentiated access to these forms of representation which are used as resources in social life. The ability to deploy resources for

representation, to make meaningful texts, is further differentiated by the relative values placed on words, pictures or gestures, in locations such as schools—institutions which have a major role in determining our viability as social subjects. Furthermore, our relative success as 'meaning-makers' is also affected by our motivation, or *interest*, in carrying meaning. Terry Threadgold (1993) extends the social semiotic approach in application to the body in drama and theatre, placing particular emphasis on dramatic activities, representation and the subjectivity of gender.

The genre that Rukshana and Aatur were working in was the available and popular form of soap opera. To understand the complex, multiple narrative lines of a soap opera, we have to be able to interpret the histories of the characters from their patterns of behaviour and speech, and additionally, to be able to 'read' the significance of the geographical and social location. Drawing on their knowledge of soap opera, Rukshana and Aatur had built their roles and shaped their interaction. The opening of Scene I (lines 1-10) demonstrates their familiarity and proficiency in the form of soap opera, defining the boundaries of the episode with ease and economy. I have already referred to the opening position, which immediately establishes some of the formal markers of the soap opera drama: it is an interior shot of a domestic scene indicated by the central presence of the table. The actors relative positioning around the table, their posture and action when the scene opens, carries many layers of meaning. R.'s positioning in space (behind the table, centre-stage) and her use of gesture in the action of reading the newspaper, marks her superior status to A., sitting stage-left, away from the protective barrier of the table. A. is prone, exposed, on the margins. The first utterance, A.'s "A letter" (Scene I, line 2), marks a significant starting point for dialogue—that something has arrived which the audience cannot see, but which will be important to the ensuing action. The response from R., "Yeah, go and get it then" (Scene I, line 3), reinforces her dominance and gives some signal as to what might follow. The sparsity of the set, the speech genre of their dialogue (Bakhtin, 1986), the issue of a £500 telephone bill positions their action in a specific the social and economic context—simply, they are not rich. The growing sense of threat and barely suppressed violence is achieved through the orchestration of different modes of making meaning: firstly, through verbal dialogue; secondly, in the choreography of gesture and posture in personal space, relative positions and proximity between actor and actor, actors and objects (the table, for instance) and movement across the space of the set; finally, there is the gestural and significant use of objects, important amongst which are the open newspaper (signifying authority), the

rolled newspaper (rising anger leading to threat of violence) and the chair-leg (uncontrollable rage and violence).

Let me examine this a little further by examining some of the main points of the sequence leading up to the final act of violence. R.'s gathering rage is marked by the orchestration of utterance, gesture, proximity to A. and in her movement through space. Firstly, the slap in the stomach (Scene I, line 12) followed "What's that then?" (Scene I, line 13) marks the first stage of the build-up. The heightened form of gesture and utterance is reminiscent of slapstick clowning and elicits laughter from the audience (Scene I, line 14). But this comical ambiguity in the action begins to retreat as R. stands (Scene I, line 17) and pushes the telephone bill into A.'s face, with the lines "I can't believe this" (Scene I, line 17) and "Nearly 500 quid" (Scene I, line 18). Very quickly, the action becomes more threatening as R. leans over A. (Scene I, line 26), gestures her exasperation (Scene I, line 28) and very deliberately rolls the newspaper (Scene I, line 29), making a physical symbol of the violence she is feeling. Throughout the rest of the scene, the waving and thrusting of the rolled newspaper gives accent and emphasis to her utterances, simultaneously acting as a representation of her sustained rage, until it is used as an emphatic full-stop, or closure of the action at the end of the first scene. R. demonstrates the continuity of her rage at the start of the second scene when she enters behind A., throws her jacket on the floor (Scene II, line 1) and utters the line "How could you do this to me?" (Scene II, line 2). On the other hand, A.'s action does not register very much resistance until line 7 of the second scene. The utterance, "What did I do?", is first accompanied with the 'brushing away' gesture and expresses 'leave me alone', but then, as the line is repeated, he points to himself in an espousal of innocence. It is this manifest gesture of resistance which triggers the final act of violence.

It was within the conventions of the genre of soap opera (marital conflict leading to tragic consequences), even in the startling inversion of stereotypical roles (husband-beater, rather than wife-beater). The gestures, patterns of speech, actions, are not to be viewed simply as the everyday actions and speech of fourteen year-old school children, neither would they have been exclusively drawn from television soap opera—some of it was undoubtedly grounded in their wider experience of the world. The themes of sex, money and telephone calls are clearly marked by the performance of these students, carrying heavy symbolic value which sparks Rukshana's 'anger' and results in Aatur's 'death'.

These sets of representational resources, speech, gestures and acts, were gathered from texts in the world and everyday life, and were held as sets of resources in their bodies. They were motivated to select and shape them, their bodies acting as signifiers, constructing a text which had all the recognisable characteristics of the soap opera genre. In this drama room, these things were both allowed and valued. Assuming, however that Aatur and Rukshana are not necessarily destined to become soap opera stars, there remain a number of questions: how much are these acts likely to be valued elsewhere? In what ways do these acts contribute to the formation of their subjective positions? How much will their social positions be affected outside their peer group?

One route to follow, perhaps, to seek some answers to these problems is to return to those who work with forms of drama and theatre. In the introduction to a recently published volume on Boal's work, the editors (Schutzman & Cohen-Cruz eds, 1994: p3) refer to his work on literacy campaigns with Paulo Freire in Peru:

"Invited to participate in a national literacy campaign in Peru in 1973, he developed image theatre, a technique that privileges physical expression over the spoken word. Through a series of workshop-based exercises, the human body is used as an expressive tool to represent, non-verbally, a wide repertoire of feelings, ideas and attitudes. This versatile form reflects Boal's belief in the body as one's most essential tool in transforming physical sensations into a communicable language and altering everyday space into a theatrical arena..."

In the theatrical arena, we can use our whole body to express ourselves, to turn problems around and view them from many angles. Desires can be expressed, situations rehearsed in relative safety. But, as I have already stated, it might be naïve to see Rukshana's performance as a rehearsal for a role in life as a bully, a form of permission allowing her to express violence towards future partners through the action she represents in these scenes. Neither would it be sensible to presume that Aatur was somehow practising to become a more successful victim! One of the most widely applied and accessible aspects of Boal's work, forum theatre (1979), might offer opportunities to construct alternative endings, perhaps a more rational resolution to these scenes—to explore and learn how one might exercise more (social) responsibility in everyday life and avoid violent conflict. At a broader level, another implication which arises out of Boal's work on literacy, is about access to and control of powerful mediated forms in culture (television, for instance), both in terms of 'reading', interpreting and understanding various forms and their significance and influence in

everyday life, as well as allowing access to the processes of production and distribution. They have, after all, made a soap opera to their own specifications. Even though they may have lacked the sophisticated facilities of production, post-production and distribution, it is a recognisable product which demystifies the medium of production and focuses instead on those who animate and populate the texts—the bodies of the performers. Immediately, the audience for this soap opera was the class itself, the teacher and the researchers (and now, in part, you, the readers). After this first production, at the premiere screening of *Johnswood Heights*, the class were most interested in their own performance, and less interested in discussing the wider significance of its meaning, or, how it might be compared and contrasted with other soap opera productions, for instance. This point of interest in their own performance, a reflection which starts with the study of their own bodies as performing entities, as forms of representation, which are dynamic, mutable and dramatic, could provide a useful starting point for examining the ways in which the body as a form of representation carries meaning in wider cultural spheres.

5. Conclusion: questions, interpretations and representation

Plays are made and the making is playing, perhaps. What effect does this playing have on them? What kind of play or playing is this; is it comedy or tragedy? How do we, as drama teachers, value enactments such as these; is it *good* or *real* drama, for instance, superficial and plagiaristic? How much do our unreflexive value-judgements obscure our vision so that we do not really look for, or see, the dramatic statements our students are producing with their bodies? Do these scenes simply reproduce a stereotype of the nagging wife and the hen-pecked husband, as objects of scorn and derision? Or, are these embodied acts subversive, transgressive and critical of the *status quo*? To what extent are they simply experienced as pleasure? What order of play is this, what is raised to the consciousness of these students; do they learn anything?

Problems surface and multiply if we begin to look at the points of possible intersection and rupture between the positions of the student as social actor and the dramatic actor. Whatever the similarities and differences between these positions, I have tried to make the argument that, as unified social actors, they are held together in and by the bodies of the young people we teach. They use their bodies, and the knowledge they hold in their bodies, as a form of representation to make meanings in the world. Altogether, the framework that I have drawn from the work of Butler, Kress and

Boal, promotes the possibility of individual, social and cultural change through action—that is, of transformation—a core principle to all in education. Both in the analysis and production of dramatic activity it is becoming clearer to me that drama educators need ways of understanding the nature of performance and 'performance texts', and that a good place to start is to look closely at bodies.

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