

The Puppet Question revisited: movements, models and manipulations

by

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Introduction

This paper is a response to a previous paper - *The Puppet Question: Integration of Disabled People into the Performing Arts Industries* - initially presented at the 2nd Fest der Sinne European Festival of Performance for Disabled People in Lingen in 2000. In that paper, I explored how the Social Model of Disability had been a starting point for the design of a university course, Solid Foundations, which was being delivered at the Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts (LIPA); and how this contrasted with the Medical Model of Disability, which identified disability as being a medical problem of the individual concerned. It was envisaged at the time that conceiving of disability 'socially' instead of 'medically' would offer new routes to the integration of disabled artists in the performing arts education and training industry and new languages of the aesthetics of disability.

Eight years on, the course at LIPA has been discontinued and the simple polarities offered by the social and medical models of disability have themselves become increasingly messy: the comforting models they offer have become subject to greater scrutiny, particularly as a result of the work post modern theorists and writers of disability politics and aesthetics. The certainties of the social and medical models are less secure and less comforting than perhaps they were eight years ago.

This paper, in calling on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, points to ways in which Deleuzian concepts of creativity (heterogeneity, interconnectedness and productivity) can transform a theoretical approach to the cultural politics of disability arts. In building on the work of Goodley (2008) and Boje and Dennehy (2003) this paper will discuss routes to new models of disability arts, new potential flows of thinking which bypass the blocks that the old binary model of medical and social models pose. It is structured around four contributions to the Fest der Sinne conference: firstly, an opening provocation I gave at the opening plenary session; secondly, a review of some constant themes which emerged from watching and discussing performances held within the conference; thirdly, details of a practical text workshop I gave to seven volunteer students, and finally a closing series of observations and conclusions I gave on the last morning of the conference.

I will demonstrate that whilst disabled artists are implicated in performative agendas of cultural transmission in their desire to be integrated into mainstream cultures, their molecular nature means that they resemble agents of complexity capable of influencing a systems behaviour at a much more significant and strategic level and thus are capable of enacting and formulating an alternative discourse which may counteract the effects the dominant discourse of performativity. Furthermore I will argue that learning moments in space between disabled artists and non-disabled people paradoxically have maximum long term effect and affect because of the very nature of their short livedness. I will suggest that the most effective disability pedagogical text is one which approaches, savours and revels in the creative moment; a singularity in space and time which resists measurement, definition and quantification of any kind: in Deleuzian terms, a plateau, reached when:

'circumstances combine to bring an activity to a pitch of intensity that is not automatically displaced in a climax. The heightening of energies is sustained long enough to leave a kind of afterimage of its dynamism that can be reactivated or injected into other activities, creating a fabric of intensive states between which any number of connecting routes could exist.'

(Deleuze and Guattari, 2004: xiv).

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The sustainability of disabled arts practice thus may not reside in the long term integration of practice within large organisations but in the multifaceted, multifarious and heterogenous approaches of disabled artists working in small, momentary, unobserved and unmeasured events which resist classification, objectification and measurement: moments neither of integration, assimilation but of separation and of juxtaposition.

I. The Puppet Question: an opening provocation

Integration of disabled people into the performing arts continues to be a hot topic these days. It's like a badge of courage we might have won at school, something our mothers proudly stitched onto our jackets, wearing it over our hearts to show our professional and political credentials.

Many arts projects view the prospect of complete integration up as a kind of holy grail of achievement, distinguishing them from other projects using the language of segregation, inclusion, participation and joining in. In this provocation, I would like to consider those assertions closely and to see whether the badge of courage we think is stitched onto our jackets is more like those temporary children's tattoos which wash off in the rain.

I want to discuss with you the differences between integrated performance and assimilated performance. And I want to ask whether our desire to get people to join us and join in to our artistic endeavours is getting in the way of the more radical desire to join up a disability arts aesthetics to a wider critical pedagogy discourse. A discourse which relocates and nurtures the power of production in the hearts of those who are more frequently on the receiving end of the powers of cultural producers (artists and educators) who have their own artistic vision and agendas to promote: however benign and well intended those visions might be.

This will involve revisiting the puppet question, a proposal I developed here in 2000 which asks of performances, performers and audiences:

Who in this performance could be replaced by puppets?

But first, a small piece of history.

Disability Arts: movements and models

In the UK, the Disability Arts Movement developed through the 1970s and 1980s and as in other young cultures such as Women's Theatre, Gay Theatre and Black Theatre, considerable debate has taken place within the movement in order to define its identity, purpose and role within the context of mainstream arts and popular culture. Paul Darke (2003) suggests that

Disability Art used art to identify and reveal how 'cultural forms and practices do not simply reflect an already given social world but, rather, play a constitutive role in the construction of that world' (Bowler, 1994). In this respect Disability Art saw, from its inception, the art world and the art establishment, through its exclusion of disabled people, as playing an important role in society's, and its constituent cultures, broader exclusion of disabled people and its continuing denial of disability as a social issue.

Darke also held up ambitious hopes for the movement:

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Disability Art is about the nature of the barbarism of contemporary culture in relation to itself through exploration of the construction of otherness and disability. As most non-disability canonical art practice was, and still is, structured around the culturally hegemonic of normality (the Medical Model of life, let alone disability), Disability Art is nothing other than a threat to the core values of the aesthetic values of contemporary cultures (art or any other). Thus, Disability Art is, perhaps, the last great revolutionary art at humanities disposal that is solely humanitarian and non-ideological in intent.

This last sentence is quite some claim which might bear some further interrogation at some point. At the very least it provides us with a series of questions through which to assess art work in this festival and beyond: is what we are seeing a threat to our existing aesthetic values? Or does it reinforce those values through respectful attempts to emulate them? Are we witnessing examples of revolutionary art? Or have the artistic revolutionaries become discredited forces, lured away from the task in hand by government funding or record contracts or 15 minutes of fame on national TV?

However, in what is almost a casual aside, his reference to the medical model of *life* inadvertently asks artists to consider, integration into what? Integration into a dance industry which damages young bodies in the pursuit of some highly contorted and physically stressful dance practice – ballet for example? Integration into a music industry whose dependence on drug and alcohol abuse is almost an occupational hazard? Or integration into an acting industry whose employees are out of work 85% of the time and who are consequently prone to periods of depression, nervous exhaustion or psychological neurosis? In some sense, integration into contemporary performing arts is an integration **towards** disability and impairment as opposed to the expressive and creative experiences it might be.

Darke thus summons up two of the most powerful models of representation of disability in recent years: the social and medical models of disability which see impairment, exclusion and starkly different terms. According to Goodley (2007), the Social Model was described in 1976 by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation which proposed the following definitions:

Impairment - lacking part of or all of a limb, or having a defective limb organism or mechanism of the body (and which now may also be taken to mean defective or absent biochemical or genetic factors)

Disability - the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from mainstream social activities).

The Medical Model of Disability however identifies disability as being a individualised medical problem based on impairment, deficit and dysfunction. This model depoliticises disability and extracts it from wider socio-economic, political and cultural contexts. In this extraction from context (and to rewrite and to elaborate upon Goodley, 2007) the medical model means that performance environments, artistic content, performer identities are all at odds with the specificities of disabled artists. Theatres continue to exclude by virtue of their physical and sometimes geographical inaccessibility. Curricula of artists training courses promote standards that some with (or without) impairments will never reach. Curricula content say nothings of the

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history of exclusion experienced by disabled people. Artists are assessed in ways that celebrate achievement over contribution and difference. And at the most ordinary level, disabled performers continue to be singled out for the specialised attention of specialness, are segregated from non-disabled peers through the presence of non-disabled adult supporters and remain unrepresented in images of schooling and educational attainment.

There are three further consequences of the Medical Model on the involvement of disabled people in the Performing Arts.

Firstly, it generates a culture of dependency in which relationships between disabled and non-disabled people are often seen as a kind of master - servant relationship in which the masters - non-disabled people - may sometimes masquerade as servants and vica versa: in short, relationships which are not only defined by an imbalance of power and control but relationships where the locus of power is neither easily identifiable nor controllable. In some examples we've seen, the 'master' is not necessarily the simultaneous presence of another human being on stage: it can be the disembodied presence of a plaintiff voice in a song or the digital imperative of a 4:4 rhythm generated by a computer programme: the performer becoming what you might call becoming, thanks to that old Grace Jones track, a slave to the rhythm. The masters of the action on stage come in all shapes, sizes, sounds, pictures and media.

Secondly, the Medical Model generates the notion of a Hierarchy of Disability. In this Hierarchy, disabled people with hidden impairments such as dyslexia may be disinclined either to see themselves as disabled or, more dramatically, see themselves higher up a scale of social value due to their perceived lower degree of impairment. It also leads to conversations which uses the assessment of the degree of impairment as a means to assess the aesthetic quality of the work in question. Here, we say things like '*Wasn't that work fantastic bearing in mind they are . . .*' where the dot dot dots of the punctuation can be joined up by using such terms such as *learning difficulty* or *deaf* or *blind*. The hierarchy of disability also leads to the possibility that the value of a piece of work can plunge rapidly - much like the share values on stock exchanges across the world at the moment - if we learn that rather than being performed by a group of disabled people, it was performed by some people who weren't disabled at all. Hierarchy of disability means we are constantly assessing the degree of impairment: not the meaning of the work presented before us.

A third consequence of the power of the medical model can be detected in how audiences are encouraged to respond to the work before them. The medical model leads to the phenomena of disabled people as being described as *tragic but brave*; as having *suffered* with a particular physical or mental impairments; and as people to be either pitied, patronised or demonised. The '*ahhhh*' moment is a frequent manifestation of audiences and can be brought about by the falling cadence of a solitary accordion, the slow fading light of a follow spot or the isolation, centre stage, of a character who's been presented with an external hostile world of attendant characters and impossible plot demands. The techniques of isolation and segregation here are critical in establishing this kind of response from audiences who might find themselves whispering to their partner, *There but for the Grace of God* reflecting perhaps a sense that there is more at stake emotionally for certain audience members in this moment of performance by disabled people than there is in performances by non-disabled people. Perhaps the histories of conflict with the medical authorities, with the social services and with the wider, dominant

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expressions of normality that disabled people and their families share means that the expression of audience responses to disabled performers is always likely to carry extra layers of implication and momentousness.

It is interesting that the evaluation forms for example we are asked to complete after watching the performances¹ focuses our attention on what is 'special' about the performances and the festival as a whole. The question *What were the moving or emotional moments for you?* suggests that the type of audience response we are seeking has to be especially moving or emotional, perhaps at the expense of engaging the intellect. The medical model highlights the manipulative, emotional power of theatre and art, perhaps to the disservice of both performers and audience.

Modelling a disability aesthetic: the ebb and flow of integrative practice

The use of medical and social models of disability have starkly different consequences on how an agenda of integrative practice is developed and constructed. I have two proposals to discuss and explore through practice which attempt to develop a disability aesthetic from a social model of disability perspective.

Firstly, that in assessing what levels of integration have been achieved within a production, I suggest we look for a number of signs which revolve around questions of gaze and power:

Where are we being asked to look?

Who are we being asked to look at?

Who are we being asked to listen to?

How are we being asked to look and are we being asked to look at everyone through the same conventions? Or are some conventions being allowed for some performers but not others?

Who are the protagonists in the piece?

Who drives the action, who tells the story?

To whom does the story happen or who are the recipients of the story?

Who could be almost passive observers watching the action pass them by?

Answers to these questions combine to address my earlier question, the Puppet Question: who in the performance could be replaced by puppets?

I suggest that any performer:

we're being asked to look away from,
whose presence we're not being asked to consider,
who is not a protagonist,
who does not initiate or tell the story or a significant active agent in that story,
who is not in control,
or who could be replaced by a puppet:

¹ entitled *Na, wie wars? Fragebogen zum Fest der Sinne*

is not part of an integrated performance but an assimilated performance which is addressing agendas of funding or social conscience, and not the agendas of establishing the cultural presence of disabled people or a disability arts aesthetic.

I also suggest that in our intentions to develop an disability arts aesthetic, we can inadvertently reinforce the cultural absence of disabled people and this is something we need to be careful about as integration is often masking a process of assimilation. That is, a process which encourages students to accept the values of the dominant culture, a process which is disinclined to challenge the values of that culture; and as a result minimizes the voice and presence of the disabled artist in the creative and production process.

I will now present a review of some aspects of some of the performances of the Festival. This does not set out to be a comprehensive, authoritative review of all performances and does not attempt to evaluate performances or audiences responses in any strict quantitative fashion but rather attempts to draw out common themes which were present in the productions I witnessed and which were alluded to by other audience and conference attendees in various fora throughout the festival.

II Emergent issues from festival productions

One common question which has constantly emerged from presentations throughout the conference has been the issue of how decisions were made which led to the manifestation of a particular performance. It has been noticeable that after so many performances, directors have been unwilling or unavailable to discuss the directorial choices they have made. Without knowing whether and how participating groups had contributed to the overall aesthetic of the production, we are left to our own interpretational devices or, where possible, rely on the programme notes which are provided to lesser or greater degrees.

In the production *Jukums* by the Nest of Hope company from Latvia for example, an interesting contradiction emerges from the performance. Whilst on the one hand, many audience members complement the performance for its use of light, props, costumes and clear engagement by all the cast members in telling the story, the end of that story does have some disturbing implications which need the interaction between director, cast and audiences to discuss and consider.

According to the programme notes, *Jukums* is

The story about a boy who is different from other boys in his ages, He is not able to do his homeworks and be useful for his father on the field. His best friends are birds and butterflies. Finally his father finds a job that he is able to do - to stand in the field and scare away the birds. This work is humiliating and very hard for Jukums. The birds feel sorry for him and they take him away from this cruel world to another mysterious place.

Towards the end of the performance, *Jukums* is presented dressed in colourful tatters which prompts an *ahhhh* response by some members of the audience. Whilst adopting the role of a scarecrow he suffers from the rays of the sun (suggested by other actors poking him with sticks and the combination of sticks and a lighting effect lead to a quasi crucifixion picture being briefly established. *Jukums'* music motif - a single keyboard tone becomes multilayered and repetitive, resembling a Philip Glass composition with its semi religious and spiritual overtones.

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The difficulty which arises is in the concept of the mysterious place. Visually, we are led to believe that Jukums is ascending into heaven amongst a flock of birds who closely resemble a host of angels. There's little question that Jukums has died, become an angel and has been taken to heaven by his friends, the birds.

So what does this say about the place for disabled people in this kind of society? That the only way out for them is death? That the world is so cruel to the Jukums in it that there is no alternative except severe separation and segregation?

Whilst this reading of the performance might be a somewhat extreme reading, the point here is that no director was on hand to address the question and respond to the challenge that this reading presents. The company too, were not available for post-show discussions: so the abiding image at the end of the production is of a disabled boy being withdrawn from his society in the most severe way imaginable. It might be argued that the production is reflecting the world as it currently is: but as Mandy Redvers Rowe commented later in the symposium, disabled theatre practitioners have to not only to reflect the world within their theatre but also have to change it. Or as Brecht was alleged to have said:

Art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it.

The director was also visible in their absence at the performance by the Heldertheater from the Netherlands who performed *Dreaming about the Hand that caresses the water* a production in which, according to the programme notes:

Drama, dance and percussion elements are used by the 12 players in a poetic way to illustrate the motives taken from the songs of the Turkish singer Sezen Aksu.... The drama group give the players a platform and an audience so they can show their special qualities.

This production was constructed through the use of many production techniques, only one of which was the energy and vitality of the performers themselves. Moody partial lighting shone onto flats painted in a zebra-motif meant that the performers were difficult to see in the semi-dark; an effect exacerbated by dry ice being pumped onto stage so enveloping the performers in a mist, as well as the gloom. The choreography of the piece was such that performers had been taught straightforward moves which they repeated in unison or performed in simple mirroring exercises. There was little in the way of individual interpretation. Text phrases too were choreographed to be read out, one word at a time and then repeated by the group as a whole. The rhythm of the music too was followed steadily, in a controlled, on-beat fashion although occasional whoops and whistles on stage by the performers indicated some real, genuine anarchistic offbeat responses to the crushing uniformity and symmetry which had been imposed on the group.

The addition of the songs of Sezen Aksu (the Turkish Queen of Pop) added a further level of anonymisation to the process. Songs were played loudly through the PA system and the performers sang in shadow voices, mere echoes of the voice booming through the speaker. This was not karaoke in which the musical track of a song is added to by enthusiastic singers who attempt to sing the words from an autocue but who are able to improvise, ignore or just plainly get it wrong. This element of performance was a kind of reverse dubbing technique in which the offstage voice (usually backgrounded) became foregrounded and in which the onstage live performers (usually foregrounded) became backgrounded. These were

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not just puppets, but shadow puppets - operating in shadows, becoming shadows and occasionally offering shadowed, echoed gestures to other puppets on stage.

However, once the performance is completed and the performers move off stage, their real breath and life becomes evident: there is much rampant noise and letting off high spirits by them, a sign of their outward breathes in a relieving contrast to much of the controlled, held breath that was exhibited during most of the performance. They party, off stage, loud and long and we sense from aware the achievement they feel they have attained.

Nevertheless, *Whose work is being presented here?* became an ever pressing question as the performance continued: and the heavily directed quality suggested an auteur director at work: a director who had his or her own clear vision which was to be enacted out by a group of performers who were apparently happy with that process - or certainly were not given any space to offer any critique of the process they were going through. But it also has to be noted that perhaps this question is irrelevant: audience members responded positively and enthusiastically to the production - as they did in many of the events of the festival so perhaps this critique is missing the point in quite some significant fashion.

However, if we are to take audience response as a marker of quality then this too leads us into some difficult waters because one thing that these audience responses clearly show too is that at these performances, the notion of the audience is a suspect term too. In many audiences at the festival, we did not encounter just one homogenous audience but often many smaller clusters of audiences who happened to be attending the same event. The concept of 'The Audience' fragments into 'the cluster-audiences' at these performances - and these audiences displayed very different characteristics.

Whilst I am unaware of whether there has been any substantial audience analysis at the festival, what became clear was the complexity of audiences' responses. In *Dreaming about the Hand that caresses the water for example*, applause would start in a small sector of the Audience and ripple across the audiences: often in response to an action which appeared, on the surface of it, to be quite rudimentary: a walk across stage or the speaking names on the beat of a drum for example. In the production of Becket's *End Game* for example by the Danish group Theatergruppe Slutspel, a cluster-audience laughter at some of the slapstick performance at the start of the show served to draw attention away from the performers and onto the cluster-audience itself; roars of laughter from a cluster-audience suggested that this event was quite possibly the funniest thing they had seen in a long time: which may have been true, but wasn't shared by other cluster-audiences around the auditorium or the Audience as a whole. Later, *Hallo!* is shouted out by a single voice from the Audience to the performers: an interesting moment in which Becket almost becomes an opportunity for audience participation - albeit in a microscopic cluster-audience of one, kind of way.

More heightened cluster-audience responses were further in evidence at the performance of *Variété Olé* by the German group, Circus Sonnenstich and it became noticeable how almost every single movement the company carried out was greeted by applause generated from one small cluster-audience which then rippled across the auditorium. The rhythmical nature of this process was noticeable: boy walks onto stage with brush (clap); Balance on gym ball (clap); 3 actors place one leg each on ball (clap); they link arms on the floor (clap); they lay their stomachs on the gym ball (clap).

The desire to award pathos is never far away. Cluster audiences clap throughout but this is not clapping of community and shared experience but experience of a few, knowing, perhaps relieved family members who seem to show no discernment whatsoever about what they are clapping about. Are they clapping because someone has to? Because if no-one clapped, then we'd be sitting here in our audience silence, telling the performers: *actually no, what you're doing is not good enough, we don't value it at all, you've all been wasting your time, it's completely meaningless what you've been showing us?* Perhaps those cluster-audiences are doing the rest of us a favour, hiding and protecting us from our embarrassment of the pathos. One moment highlights the absence of the cluster- or any type of audience: a girl swings two clubs in front of her and another girl behind her speaks phrases in single words behind her. Is this some kind of intended text based artistry? Some attempt at content amongst the walk, balancing and juggling content-free zone of the gymnastic circus antics of the rest of the performance? Interestingly it is met with no applause from any part of the auditorium, not even from a microscopic cluster-audience of one.

But soon enough we're back to a performance in which all performers get a go at skipping around a rope and all cluster audiences get a go at their Pavlovian clapping. Who are the dogs and who are the bells in this scenario? What rewards are being offered up? Recognition exchanged for personal salvation? Are we audiences applauding ourselves? Perhaps though there are stories in these complex simplicities which the director can only be frustrated about that he or she can't tell us about and perhaps the processes behind this work are as interesting as the products of their process are inane. The major point remains the same though: without a forum to address the directors and their companies, we are left with a sense that this work results from the efforts of producers and directors who are disability auteurs: skilled in manipulating enthusiastic groups for their own visions and ends and who speak to audiences for whom any tangible and recordable achievement is good enough.

III.a Using narrative deconstruction techniques within a discourse of resistance

My second proposal for this conference is that the application of story deconstruction processes might assist in re-presenting and recombining narratives of assimilation and integration. A model of narrative deconstruction is offered by Boje and Dennehy (1993) is offered below. It provides a useful counter strategy to the dramaturgy which is so heavily formed by the presence of the disability auteur:

1. **Duality search** make a list of any bipolar terms, any dichotomies that are used in the story, Include the term even if only one side is mentioned. For example, in male centred and or male dominated organisation stories, men are central and women are marginal others. One term mentioned implies its partner.
2. **reinterpret the hierarchy.** A story is one interpretation or hierarchy or an event from one point of view. It usually has some form of hierarchical thinking in place. Explore and reinterpret the hierarchy (e.g. in duality terms how one dominates the other) so you can understand its grip.

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3. **rebel voices.** *Deny the authority of the one voice. Narrative centres marginalise or exclude. To maintain a centre takes enormous energy. What voices are not being expressed in this story? Which voices are subordinate or hierarchical to other voices? (e.g. who speaks for the trees?)*
4. **other side of the story.** *Stories always have two or more sides. What is the other side of the story (*usually marginalised, underrepresented or even silent?) reverse the story, by putting the bottom on top., the marginal in control, or the back stage up front. For example, reverse the male centre, by holding a spotlight on its excesses until it becomes female centre in telling the other side; the point is not to replace one centre with another, but to show how each centre is in a constant state of change and disintegration.*
5. **deny the plot.** *Stories have plots, scripts, scenarios, recipes and morals. Turn these around (move from romantic to tragic or comedic to ironic).*
6. **find the exception..** *stories contain rules, scripts, recipes and prescriptions. State each exception in a way that make its extreme or absurd. Sometimes you have to break the rules to see the logic being scripted in the story.*
7. **trace what is between the lines.** *Trace what is not said. Trace what is the writing on the wall. Fill in the blanks. Storytellers frequently use 'you know that part of the story'. Trace what you are filling in. with what alternate way could you fill it in (e.g. trace to the context, the back stage, the between, the intertext?)*
8. **resituate.** *the point of doing 1 to 7 is to find a new perspective, one that resituates the story beyond its dualisms, excluded voices of singular viewpoint. The idea is to reauthor the story so that the hierarchy is resituated and new balance of views is attained. Restory to remove the dualities and margins. In a resituated story there are no more centres. Restory to script new actions.*

I would now like discuss this model alongside various examples of practical work presented in the conference and explore practically how this model can be used to re-write narratives of exclusion, using a scene from Shakespeare's play, A Winters Tale. Using the above deconstruction techniques we will investigate whether the play might be about a psychological weaknesses which lead to an individual's emotional breakdown, or whether it might alternatively be about the dysfunction-generating consequences of power. Is it about individual deficit or social deficit?

III.b. Practical Deconstruction: outcomes of the workshop process

I was offered the opportunity to work with seven Theater Pedagogik students from the Osnabruck Technische Fachhoch Schule. My workshop intended to explore how the eight elements of Bojeian story deconstruction might be applied to a piece of Shakespearian text in order to see how and whether that text may be re-presented as a text of inclusion, as opposed to the text of exclusion that Shakespeare texts can be portrayed as.

My session begins with a simple name game played in a circle: I name myself, throw a small pocket size German-English dictionary to a workshop participant and suggest

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they repeat the exercise. Before long, all participants have picked up the idea and are beginning to establish the names of the other members of the group. I develop this game eventually by plucking at random a word out of the dictionary, repeating my name then throwing the dictionary to another participant, again suggesting that participants repeat the exercise. I encourage participants to pick any word, quickly, whether this be German or English, comprehensible or incomprehensible. I accelerate the game so that participants eventually build up a chain of six words, five of which are taken from the dictionary, the sixth being their name.

I then request the participants to write the words onto flip charts I have attached to the wall. I encourage them again to write quickly, with little time to consider or reflect on what they are doing. Once up on the wall, I ask members to construct an imaginary story using the six words of another group member, but using additional words as they see fit. Eventually, short stories are generated by each of the group members about the other group members. Given these short stories are based around six random words, the stories themselves display remarkable levels of abstraction, illogic and fantasy. Nevertheless, members construct stories which are intelligible to varying degrees: the point being made here that human's abilities to generate meaning is deeply ingrained in our psyche and that our powers of interpretation and meaning-making are perhaps as essential as our ability to breathe and digest and reproduce.

This idea is further elaborated through the an automatic writing exercise in which I place participants in groups of two or three and ask them to write a composite letter, one word at a time, passing the writing paper back and forth from partner to partner as quickly as possible so as to minimise thinking, blocking and inhibiting time. This generates a variety of letters - identifiable by their starting phrases such as 'Dear John...' and finishing clauses such as 'Yours....' but within which much fantasy, nonsense, non-sequiturs and surprising and shocking juxtapositions are created.

Participants recognise a common trend in this game in which they try and control the narrative development but realise that the presence of an equally strong voice in the writing process means that desires to control the writing come to nothing and that to keep the task moving, they have to succumb to the rules of the game and enjoy the experience. This invariably produces entertaining letters which often have frequent sexual, religious or bodily function motifs emerging from the text. For this group, the exercise was concluded by providing the group with 8 large flip chart sheets in a line and asking them to write one word each on one sheet and then move onto the neighbouring sheet to respond to the written word(s) that have previously been written there. This is continued for several cycles until the papers become full or the energy sags. Once again, the 'letters' are read out and displayed for later discussion and entertainment. Example of these composite letters are shown in Appendix 1.

In the final part of the warm-up phase of the workshop I ask participants to identify a space in the room with which they felt comfortable in. I then ask them to listen to that space - to connect with it both physically and through their other senses - smell, touch, audio, visual or taste. Participants are asked to immerse themselves in the space and listen to the stories that the space suggests to them. This process pays homage to the concept of the *stone tape*, the concept that inanimate objects can record and preserve the presence of living things.³ I then invite participants to share

³ The stone tape hypothesis was proposed in the 1970s as a possible explanation for ghosts. It speculates that inanimate materials can absorb some form of energy from living beings; the hypothesis speculates that this 'recording' happens especially during moments of high stress such as murder, or

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their stories with the group. Some members agree to share, others decide to hold back from that process.

The purpose of these exercises was threefold: firstly for me to assess the skills and confidence in the group itself and to reach a judgement as to what I could expect them to cope with; secondly to demonstrate that human beings have a deep-seated and innate capacity to generate story from the most meagre of sources; and thirdly to begin to use some of the deconstruction techniques that Boje and Dennehy propose, in particular:

Reinterpreting the hierarchy: writing a letter is frequently about trying to present a story from one point of view: introducing a second point of view which distorts and attempts to force its own control on the emerging narrative means that story writers are constantly reassessing and reinterpreting the hierarchy they are trying to establish.

Establishing **rebel voices**: the automatic letter writing exercise - especially in larger groups acts to deny the authority of the one voice.

Denying the plot: these writing exercises are designed to confound plot at all stages of its possible grip.

Tracing what is between the lines: constructing words from six random words encourages participants to trace and generate what is not said by filling in the blanks and imagining possibilities, however ludicrous or far-fetched.

After these warm up exercises, I then present participants with two pages taken from Steve Gooch's Cut Shakespeare version of *The Winters Tale* (attached in the appendix of this paper). Apart from the Gooch technique of presenting his cut version of the play in a mix of bold and ordinary type face in the document, I provided no other contextual or explanatory information about the play. Participants claimed not to know anything about the play at all and a number of them professed difficulties with understanding the language. This prompted a discussion about the status that Shakespeare has within the traditional literature canon and how this compares with the place of Goethe in Germany. Students' alienation from the text thus provided a metaphor of disability within the group: in one sense students could be seen, if viewed through a medical lens, as having a deficit in that they had a lack of intelligence to grasp a text presented to them: in another sense, if viewed through a social lens, the text had the effect of disabling them as there were no immediately apparent mechanisms open to them which would assist them in accessing the text.

However, participants were open to attempting to read the piece and began by identifying particular phrases - whether in bold or in ordinary type - which caught their attention. These phrases were discussed and possible meanings established. I confirmed for participants that there was no right or wrong answers in this process. After some initial caution in the process which I interpreted as participants wanting to know whether they were giving me the right answer or not, they continued to work on the pieces in two groups: one group of three men participants, and one group of four

during important moments of someone's life. This stored energy can be released at any given moment, resulting in a display of the occurred activity. According to this hypothesis ghosts are not spirits at all, simply non-interactive recordings similar to a movie. (Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stone_Tape [accessed, 13 October 2008])

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women participants. The two groups then developed their own interpretation of the texts which they presented back to an invited audience of other students after about 15 minutes preparation.

The men's group presented a non-verbal presentation in which the 'king' - identifiable by his posture and mimed cape - issued control of his kingdom and subjects through the use of visible computer remote control which he wielded at random both at imaginary characters in the play and to the audience in an apparent attempt to control their words and actions. This control was in vain though: as he continued his attempts at control, the two other actors - who take on the role of off-stage, stage managers, steadily removed parts of the set and his costume whilst he was apparently oblivious to their actions. Eventually his set and key costume elements - wooden blocks and scarf - were taken away from him and he was left with nothing apart from the ability to curl up, foetus like, on the stage floor. The presentation ends in silence and finally, on applause, the actor acknowledges the audience and the presence of the two stage managers within it.

The performance was touching and regarded sombrely by the audience. We were left with a picture of a dying, reducing king whose influence and power was steadily declining. We were encouraged to feel pity for him: a far cry from the usual portrayal of Leontes, the king in the ur-text, who is portrayed as a man who suffers from extreme jealousy which leads him to lock up his wife (and thus brings about her eventual 'death') cast his new born daughter into the wilderness and lose his son into the bargain. In this scenario, the text has been decentred from a performance intended for two actors playing within Shakespearian conventions, to a performance for one solitary actor performing to an unseen multitude of other characters off stage as well as two actors playing the roles of two stage managers.

The women's group however produced a piece which was far more pantomimic in character. They produced a script which was performed in a graphic, comic style. A narrator announces characters who gesture or offer a few words at particular moments to reinforce the words of the narrator. They played with theatre conventions of the stage curtain (by using the black out curtains of the rehearsal room in a mock theatrical manner) and stage lighting (by switching the overhead neon lights of the room off abruptly at the end of the presentation). They bow together, as a company at the end of the performance with tongues firmly in cheeks.

The script they produced is as follows.

Schauspielerin:	Es gab einmal einen König. Dieser König hatte eine sehr gute Königin. Doch die Königin gehörte einer feministischen Bewegung an. Immer wieder schrie sie: <i>Erhängt alle Ehemänner!</i> Und ihr Mann, der König sagte: <i>Du bist ein Teil vom Nest voller verräterinnen.</i> Er wart ihr sogar vor, der sahn sie ein Bastard, und nicht von ihm selber. Als eh ihr eines morgens den Hals umdrehte, schrie er: <i>Nimm den Bastard!</i> Der Sohn reif verstört: <i>Ich bin nichts, bei diesem guten Licht!</i>
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Licht aus.

Alle:	Besser!
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In summary, both groups managed to significantly rewrite the Shakespeare text presented to them using the elements of story deconstruction described previously. The text work particularly offered participants to use the eighth element described: **resituation**: i.e the ability to find a new perspective, one that resituates the story beyond its dualisms, excluded voices of singular viewpoint. Participants reauthored the story so that the hierarchy was resituated and new balance of views was attained. They re-storied the text so as to re-present dualities and margins and thus scripted new actions.

Whilst this process took place over only a few hours on a Friday afternoon, it offers a number of possibilities that can be used in further text workshop exercises, particularly with groups of participants who may have felt traditionally excluded from participating in an integrated interpretation of a Shakespeare text.

IV Can you remember October 2000? Some closing conclusions

October 2000 was sometime before the recent Beijing Olympics which started to see the fall of cultural barriers to the peoples and cultures of China; some time before the recent collapses of international stock exchanges and the falling of our exchange rates; and some time before 11 September 2001 and the fall of those iconic towers in New York. Back in October 2000, Mandy Redvers Rowe and I were however in the process of building a higher education course in performing arts for disabled students entitled Sold Foundations. We designed and built a curriculum, we changed an organisation's cultural habits, we recruited students, we started to construct a reputation for high quality innovative higher education for disabled people in the UK.

However, some years after, these attempts at building these new cultural formations came to zero. They too fell into the cultural dust of Higher Education funding, organisational political desires and uninterested personal ambitions which meant that the course was discontinued. We saw our work fall in the fraction of the time it took to build it.

The tidal ebb and flow of cultural realpolitik sometimes washes in great opportunities to us as easily as it washes moments of potential growth and creativity out to sea. Whether the tide is turning to take existing cultural opportunities away from us or towards us is unclear. There are currently no answers, no solid foundations we can be sure of.

However, if there is any opportunity to build on, it will be in the future that the students we have observed this week. In the cultural Olympiad we are preparing for, we now have to pass the baton with care and attention onto those students - but with the knowledge too that they might decide to run a completely different way around the running track. They may even run out of the stadium we have built for ourselves. We should anticipate, welcome and applaud this future shock. But we also have responsibility in this scenario and some future jobs to complete before sitting back to applaud the endeavours of those students.

We need to start dismantling the stadium we have built for ourselves and which lock us into ways of thinking about disability which may have outlived their purpose. The social and medical models of disability are just that: models. They do not represent disability perfectly - these models have their own imperfections, their own impairments and their own access requirements. There may be a third, a fourth, a fifth, any number of ways of conceiving of disability which we can't envisage as we

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continue to inhabit the overpowering stadiums of the social and medical models. As Alfred Korzybski's dictum has it, *the map is not the territory*.

We also need to be instrumental in introducing new students to the job in hand: students who we have not encountered before in positions of power and influence: students for whom disability is more than a subject on a curriculum and is more than occasional opportunities to act or sing or play percussion. We need to recognise that for the foundations of our work to be destabilised, for the dialogues to multiply and for the work at Fest Der Sinne in 2012 to be transformed, that a new cohort of cultural leaders needs to be identified, encouraged and challenged. These cultural leaders will be future directors, musical directors, educators, managers and producers who have themselves direct personal authentic experience of disability and arts and media generation, production and communication and who, like the students we have worked with and admired so much this week, can challenge us, their peers and their audiences.

I would like to invite you current cultural leaders to join us in the search for the new cultural leaders of the future, leaders who, perhaps like our own family teenagers, will look at us askance in four years time and say *what on earth did you do you think you oldies were doing? That's not the way to do it... we're going this way*. And with any luck they will take our hard built work off our shores and out to their own cultural oceans where new opportunities, different challenges and transformed conversations will lead to the Fest Der Sinne becoming a site for the world to visit, wonder at and to marvel at the achievements of all our young people: disabled and nondisabled, together, side by side.

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APPENDIX 1: EXAMPLES OF COMPOSITE LETTERS

Hey Alter,
KRASS, Mann! Wo warst Du als
ich diese gebraucht habe?
Fick deine Mutter!
Echt schade, dass Du so
abgefickt warst, als du
gestern geschlafen hast.
Tschau, Alder
Ciao

Liebe Mutti, ich bin wohl total beschuert,
dass ich dich nicht anrufen habe, denn
keiner hat mir Geld gegeben.
Interessiere dich denn so um die Finanz?
Die spinnen wohl immer noch, die Banker
und Finanzredaktion. Obwohl ich doch alles
für Frieden getan habe.
Liebste Gräße
Susi

Moin du geiler Bock
ach, wie schön, dass du ziemlich
oft und heftig erregt warst!
Ich bekomme nichts.

APPENDIX 2: SCENE FROM SHAKESPEARE'S THE WINTERS TAKE

Steve Gooch, **THE CUT SHAKESPEARE**: *The Winter's Tale*, II, iii

ANTIGONUS La you now, you hear!
When she will take the rein I let her run,
But she'll not stumble.]

90 PAULINA Good my liege, I come –
And I beseech you hear me, who profess
Myself your loyal servant, your physician,
Your most obedient counsellor, yet that dares
Less appear so in comforting your evils,
Than such as most seem yours – I say, I come
From your good queen.

LEONTES Good queen!

PAULINA Good queen, my lord, good queen. I say good queen,
And would by combat make her good, so were I
A man, the worst about you.

100 LEONTES Force her hence.

PAULINA Let him that makes but trifles of his eyes
First hand me. On mine own accord I'll off,
But first I'll do my errand. The good Queen –
For she is good – hath brought you forth a daughter ...
Here 'tis ... commends it to your blessing. (*Lays down the child*)

LEONTES **Out!**
A mankind witch! Hence with her! [Out o' door!
 110 A most intelligencing bawd!

PAULINA Not so.
I am as ignorant in that as you
In so entitling me, and no less honest
Than you are mad -- which is enough, I'll warrant,
~~As this world goes, to pass for honest.~~

LEONTES **Traitors!**
Will you not push her out? — [Give her the bastard.
Thou dotard! Thou art woman-tired, unroosted
By thy Dame Partlet here.] **Take up the bastard,**
Take't up, I say. [Give't to thy crone.

PAULINA For ever
 Unvenerable be thy hands, if thou
 Takest up the princess by that forcèd baseness
 Which he has put upon't!]

LEONTES He dreads his wife!

PAULINA So I would you did. Then 'twere past all doubt
You'd call your children yours.

[illegible]

ANTIGONUS I am none, by this good light.

PAULINA Nor I, nor any
But one that's here, and that's himself – [for he

