

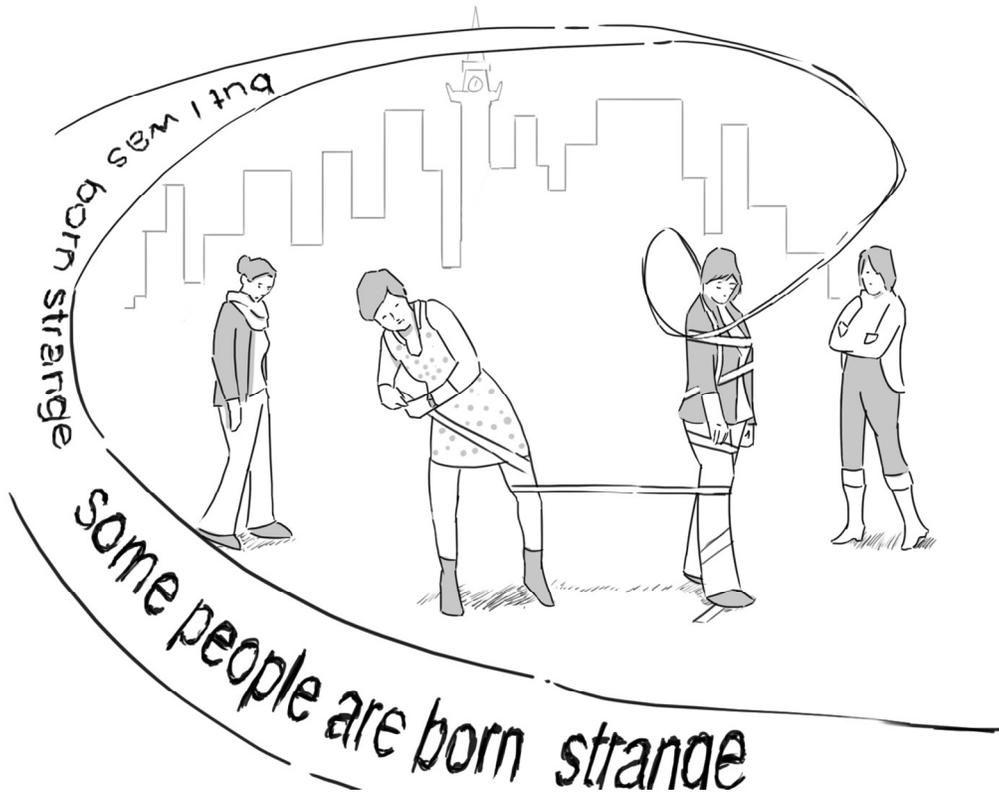
Qualitative Inquiry

'Some people are born strange': A Brechtian theatre pedagogy as philosophical ethnography

Journal:	<i>Qualitative Inquiry</i>
Manuscript ID	QI-16-039
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Date Submitted by the Author:	03-Feb-2016
Complete List of Authors:	Frimberger, Katja; University of Glasgow, School of Education
Keywords:	Brechtian theatre pedagogy, drama-based research, philosophical ethnography, rhizomatic validity
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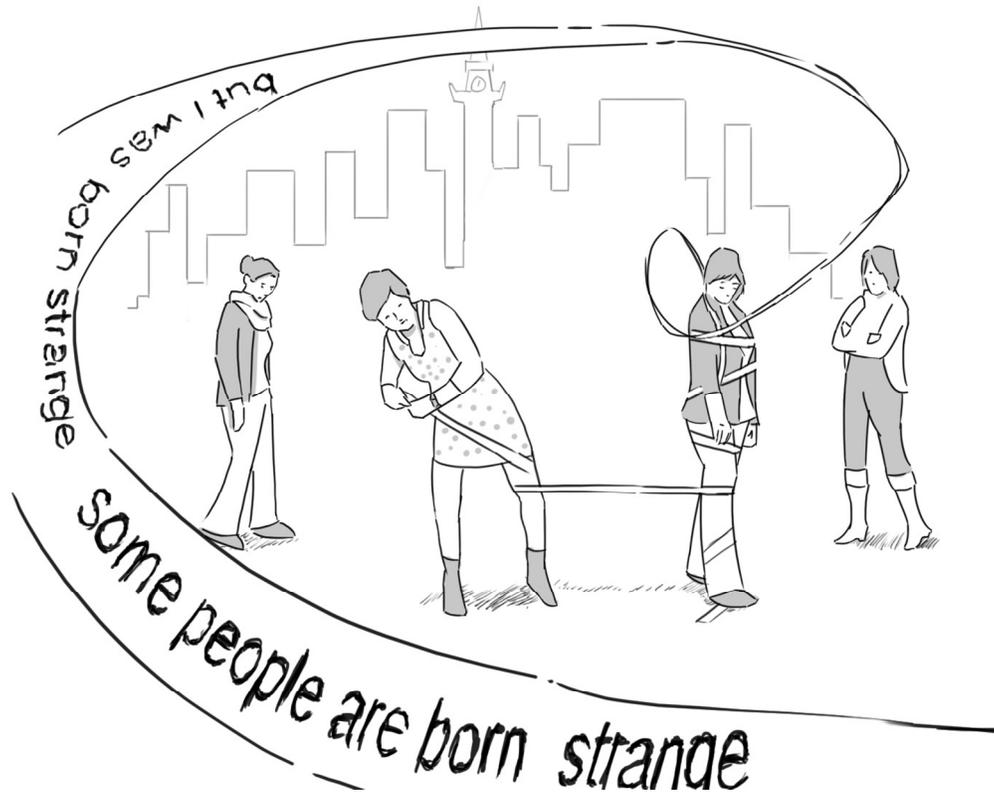
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Drama-based experimentation
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Re-entangling Jamal's account in a body sculpture
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Review

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My sticky tape gesture
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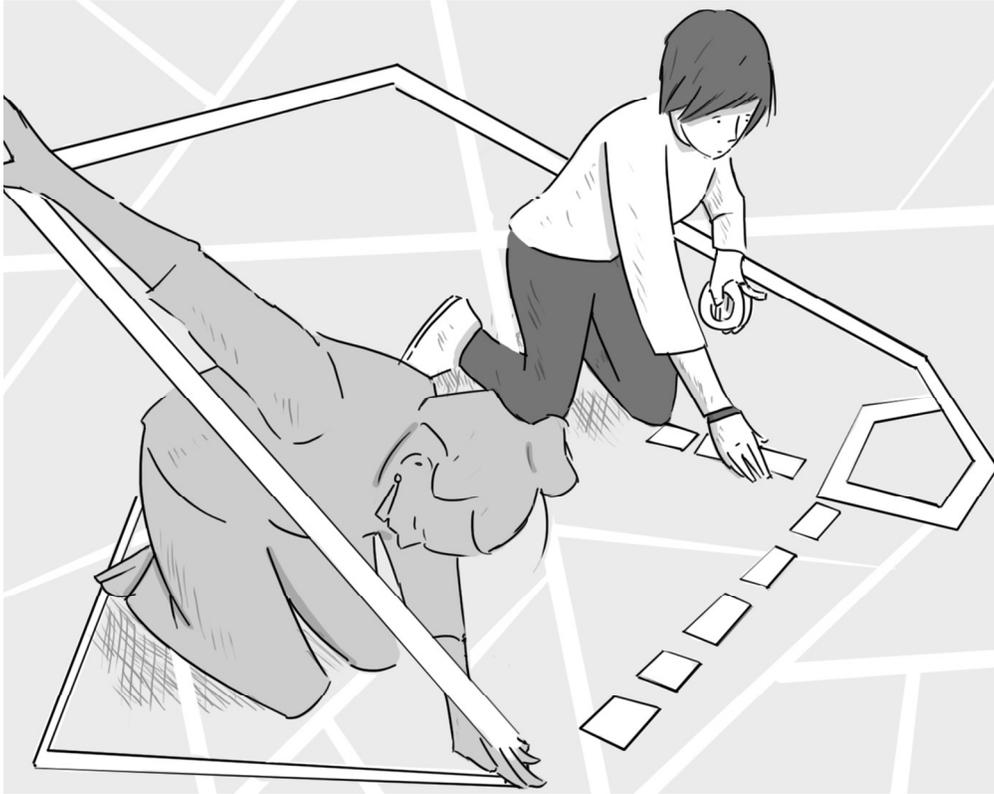
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Reciting my line
116x92mm (300 x 300 DPI)

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Marta continues the sculpture
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Karolina kneels and sings
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Jamal takes his place in the sculpture
116x92mm (300 x 300 DPI)

Review

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Katja Frimberger is Research Associate on the multi-sited, AHRC/UK-funded project '*Researching Multilingually at the Borders of Language, the Body, Law and the State*', where she explores the role of arts-based pedagogy in post-methods research.

Keywords: Brechtian theatre pedagogy, philosophical ethnography, drama-based research, rhizomatic validity

Title:

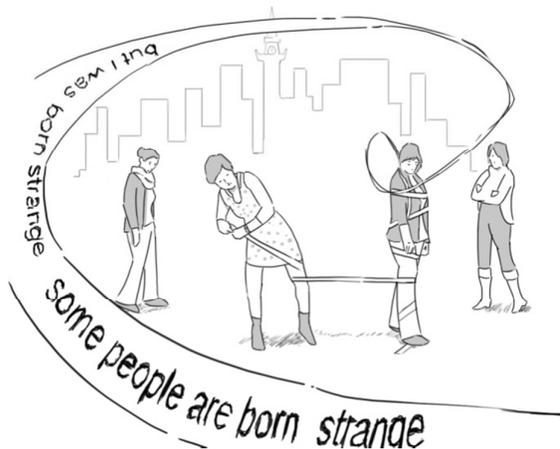
'Some people are born strange': A Brechtian theatre pedagogy as philosophical ethnography

Abstract

The article explores the role of a Brechtian theatre pedagogy as 'philosophical ethnography' (Lather 2009a,b) in four investigative drama-based workshops, which took international students' intercultural 'strangeness' experiences as the starting point for aesthetic experimentation. It is argued that a Brechtian theatre pedagogy allows for a productive rather than representational orientation in research, which is underpinned by a love for the aesthetic 're-entanglement' of (dis-embodied) language and ethical concerns about mimetic representational acts. In order to show how a Brechtian research pedagogy functioned as philosophical ethnography, the article maps the aesthetic transformation of participant Jamal's verbatim account in the drama workshops - from (a) its emergence in a post-creative-writing-discussion in workshop 2; to (b) its enactment as a body sculpture in workshop 3; and (c) to its translation into a rehearsal piece in workshop 4.

Introduction

(insert image 1/Title: Drama-based experimentation)



This sketch, provided by artist Simon Bishopp, is based on video footage taken during my research workshops, which worked from international students' intercultural 'strangeness' experiences through a drama-based approach.

1 Simon's sketch, more obviously than a photograph, inhabits a place *between* reality and fiction. Its
2 representation is not purely mimetic but 'references' and thus helps to 'map' the embodied acts of
3 meaning-making that took place in the drama workshops. Participant-performers Marta and Amy
4 built a body sculpture themed 'strangeness', using sticky tape and bodily expression only. Sonja and
5 Aleksandra engaged with the frozen human sculpture 'dramatically': they studied its shape, walked
6 around it and recited aloud participant Jamal's verbatim account, which had occurred in the previous
7 workshop:
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18 'Either I am a strange person, I don't know but I was born strange. Some people are born strange (...)'
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22 The following article maps (some of) these performative acts of collective, aesthetic re-
23 entanglement. Jamal's verbatim account is one node on this map. Other material agents -
24 participant-performers bodies, the sticky tape, my researcher subjectivity when 'reading' the
25 performative encounter, Simon's post-workshop sketches - are other nodes. By honing in on the
26 aesthetic transformation of Jamal's verbatim account throughout the workshops, research is
27 asserted as an act of ongoing 'production' rather than static 'representation' of knowledge. A
28 Brechtian theatre pedagogy aids such performative framing and connects to the ontological turn in
29 critical social science research.
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42 **The ontological turn in social science research**

43 New materialists (e.g. McLure, 2013; Law, 2004, 2009; Lather, 2013, 2009a, 2009b; Lenz Taguchi,
44 2013; Martin & Kamberelis, 2013; St Pierre 2013; St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000) formulate a re-newed
45 critique of humanist approaches to qualitative research that builds on postmodern and
46 poststructural thinkers such as Deleuze (2004), Deleuze & Guattari (1987), Derrida (1978) and
47 Foucault (1989). They problematise the representational logic of positivist research orientations and
48 assert instead a logic of connection, which is rooted in more situated understandings of human
49 interaction *in* and *with* the material world (Martin & Kamberelis, 2013).
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1 Conventional forms of analysis frequently find the bodily entanglement of language
2 troublesome or trivial, focusing instead on the ideational and cultural aspects of
3 utterances (spoken or written). (...) Qualitative method wants its participants, both
4 researchers and 'subjects' to be angels (...). Speakers need no bodies, no
5 unconscious, no social fabrication or historical entanglements in order to function
6 as the mere emitters of signals or carriers of linguistic universals. (McLure, 2013, p.
7 664)

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16 Traditional forms of data collection and analysis often treat language as dis-connected from, yet
17 representative of, the material world. Such focus on linguistic universals, however, does not take
18 into account language's fundamental interdependency with other material factors. St Pierre &
19 Lather (2013) suggest that we need to think researcher subjectivity from a position of material
20 'entanglement' (p. 630) rather than from a 'dis-entangled' stance of neutral observation; a position
21 that precludes conventional research designs. 'Language' and with that participants' and researchers'
22 'voices' can hereby not be essentialised and taken as representative of a primary reality. Instead, St.
23 Pierre (2013) reminds us that 'language and reality exist together on the surface' (p. 649) and
24 produce reality interdependently. Given the difficulty to work towards an ontological
25 representational practice where language, materiality and subjectivity are all considered constitutive
26 of each other, St Pierre (2013) cautions not to disregard the linguistic too easily but to struggle with
27 such 'aesthetic of depthlessness' (p. 649f). Alternative research practices might then be shaped
28 from within this struggle to de-centre the human subject (and her language) as the only agent of
29 knowledge production (Lather, 1993; Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010; Lenz Taguchi, 2013).

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49 In poststructuralist terms, the 'crisis of representation' is not the end of
50 representation, but the end of pure presence. Derrida's point regarding the
51 'inescapability of representation' (Arac, quoted in McGowan 1991, p. 26) shifts
52 responsibility from representing things in themselves to representing the web of
53 'structure, sign and play' of social relations (Derrida 1978). (Lather, 1993, p. 675)

1 A refusal to regard 'language' and 'voice' as merely second-order representations of primary reality is
2 not a call for the end of representation. It is a call for 'a politics of the real' (Law, 2009, p. 243), which
3 makes transparent the meaning-making processes and thus power dynamics underlying our acts of
4 representing the world through our practices of inquiry. It is also a reminder to consider language as
5 first-order materiality and welcome the potential for deconstructive play and reflection this entails.
6 This involves, for example, attention to where taken for granted communication processes in
7 research might be *interrupted*. Discursive interruptions can manifest as silences, sickness, other non-
8 verbal or verbal expressions which can cause a linearly conceived research to 'stutter' and 'falter'
9 (McLure, 2013, p. 663). Interruptions assert the performative dimensions of research communication
10 by bringing embodied expressions to the fore, which can't be easily collected and coded as neutral,
11 dis-embodied, linguistic utterance. These trans-lingual manifestations (Canagarajah, 2013), by nature
12 of their undeniable, first-order entanglement, draw attention to the 'hinterland of material practices'
13 (Law, 2009, p. 241) that caused the interruption and slowed down our 'rage for meaning' (McLure,
14 2013, 663).

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33 'How are we in entanglement? How might we become in becoming?' (St. Pierre &
34 Lather, 2013, p. 631)

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39 Such experience of material interruption of taken-for-granted communication flows in the research
40 process, leads us to reflect on how research might be thought from an ontological position of
41 entanglement. Drawing on post-structural and postmodern thinkers (Deleuze, 2004; Deleuze &
42 Guattari, 1987; Derrida, 1978), new materialists think of interruptions as the key for putting a
43 poststructuralist research practice to work, because they force us to re-orient our practices of inquiry
44 towards an 'aesthetic of depthlessness' (St Pierre, 2013). Interruptions can open spaces for an
45 'ontology of becoming' - where we question the ways things (including ourselves) *are* in research,
46 and making us think of the ways things might *become* (Martin & Kamberelis, 2013). In other words, a
47 stuttering research process can enable reflection on the validity of our methods and the realities and
48 knowledge practices these, sometimes inadvertently, strengthen or weaken (Law, 2009). The term
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1 'validity', although commonly associated with positivist approaches to research, is not dismissed by
2 new materialists but re-inscribed to concur with a performative view on knowledge (Lenz Taguchi,
3 2013; St Pierre & Pillow, 2000; St Pierre, 2013; Lather 1993). Validity, so Lather (1993; 2013) explains,
4 is not about 'epistemological guarantees' but about the invention of creative counter-practices which
5 can work from *within* entanglement and thus rupture existing, hegemonic discourses.
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13 Structured by relations of difference and ontological troubles, across a variety of
14 angles and different registers, we "imagine forward" (Gaventa, 2006) out of
15 troubling a scientificity that claims that objectivity is not political, empiricism is
16 not interpretive, chance can be tamed via mathematization, and progress equals
17 greater governmentality. (Lather, 2013, p. 634)
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25 Post-humanist research asserts the anti-hierarchical, proliferating structure of knowledge in which
26 human agents and matter produce meaning in 'intra-action' (Barad, 2003). 'Valid' research methods
27 then need to take into account the 'rhizomatic' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) materiality of knowledge,
28 which can't be conceived as a linear, stable entity that can be easily represented in language as
29 second-order materiality.
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38 Rhizomes are ever-growing horizontal networks of connections among
39 heterogeneous nodes of discursive and material force. (Martin & Kamberelis, 2013,
40 p. 670)
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46 A rhizomatic view instead regards acts of knowledge production as marked by a logic of connection
47 and overlap, ruptures, multiplicity and heterogeneity (Martin & Kamberelis, 2013) - in other words a
48 logic that counters linear, representational research activities.
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54 The practical politics of putting deconstruction to work entails a sort of getting lost
55 as an ethical relationality of non-authoritarian authority. (...) what I am urging is
56 that qualitative research resist the siren call to socially useful research that
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1 positions it within repositivization and, instead, work towards embracing
2 constitutive unknowingness, generative undecidability, and what it means to
3 document becoming. (Lather, 2009b, p. 354)
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8 Lather (2009a; 2009b) encourages us to embrace the epistemological uncertainty of orienting our
9 practices of inquiry towards a rhizomatic validity (Lather, 1993) that 'works against the constraints of
10 authority, regularity, and common sense, and opens up thought to creative constructions' (p. 680).
11 She guards against a perspectivism, which merely institutionalises reflexive practices in an act of re-
12 scientification and suggests that critical social science research should be more akin to an
13 'investigative workshop' rather than a 'potential hard science' (Lather, 2009b, p. 349). Putting
14 deconstruction to work then does not simply mean a methodological enablement of multiple
15 perspectives and reflexive practices, which can easily flow within conventional, linear forms of data
16 collection, coding and analysis. A 'philosophical ethnography' (Lather 2009a,b) creatively works from
17 within the mess of unknowability and encourages an orientation towards knowledge production that
18 is creatively 'becoming'.
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35 **Brechtian theatre pedagogy**

36 Following from such productive orientation in social science research, I saw a particular potential in
37 experimenting with Bertolt Brecht's (Brecht & Willett, 1964) theatre techniques in my investigate
38 research workshops. I recognised an important parallel connection to the way critical social science
39 researchers marry questions of ethics and epistemology and seek to put deconstruction to work
40 through alternative practices of inquiry, which (aesthetically) acknowledge the entanglement of the
41 material world.
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49 Whilst exiled from Nazi Germany for 15 years, Brecht continued his artistic and intellectual work,
50 and critique of fascism, by laying the ground for a new modern theatre. He called it the 'epic' or
51 'dialectic' theatre (Mumford, 2009, p. 167). Brecht, not unlike new materialists (Law, 2004, 2009;
52 Lather, 2009a,b; McLure, 2013; St. Pierre, 2013), advocated for a clear linkage between theatre's
53 representational activity and its social and political responsibility. Brecht was hereby critical of the
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1 classic Aristotelian theatre for the same reason neo-materialist scholars query conventional social
2 science methods. Aristotelian theatre and positivist social science research both view the world
3 mimetically: they assume an originary reality which can be known and represented through
4 traditional theatrical conventions (acting, costumes, sets, music) or, to that effect, the agreed-upon
5 language of qualitative research. Brecht criticised that classical theatrical conventions didn't
6 question the power-dynamics underlying these seemingly 'neutral' acts of representing the world on
7 stage.
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17 The crux of the matter is that true realism has to do more than just make reality
18 recognisable in the theatre. One has to be able to see through it too. One has to be
19 able to see the laws that decide how the process of life develop.

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22 (Brecht, 1965, p. 27)
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25 Brecht postulated a crisis of representation in the theatre and asserted that there is no such thing as
26 a neutral act of seeing or representing in the first place. He wanted the theatre, as a medium that
27 cannot escape representation, to work the tension between theatre's social responsibility and the
28 impossibility of representing the world as if one's act of doing so did not shape that world in the first
29 place. In the vein of a 'philosophical ethnography' (Lather, 2009a,b), Brecht's theatre aesthetic
30 worked creatively from within the crisis of Aristotelian representation and *interrupted* it. He called
31 these artistic, interruptive devices the 'Verfremdungseffekt' (Brecht & Willett, 1964). The
32 estrangement effect was applied to all theatrical conventions - acting and narrative style, stage and
33 musical arrangements. An actor might suddenly burst into reflective song in the middle of dialogue.
34 The audience might be directly addressed with a social commentary on the character's underlying
35 motivation for action. Storylines were deliberately juxtaposed rather than linearly arranged.
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50 Individuals remain individual, but become a social phenomenon; their passions and
51 also their fates become a social concern. The individual's position in society loses
52 its God-given quality and becomes the centre of attention. The estrangement effect
53 is a social measure. (Brecht, 1965, p. 104)
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1 Brechtian 'breaks', now of course all too common theatre devices, startled the audience out of a
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3 mode of viewing as consumption into a mode of critical reflection on the representations on stage
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5 (e.g. class behaviour, gender roles) and what these revealed about present societal arrangements.
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7 The estrangement effect opened a space for questioning everyday representations of the individual,
8
9 for example, concerning his/her role and capacity for action in society more widely. Brecht's play *Der*
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11 *Gute Mensch von Sezuan/The Good Person of Szechwan* (Brecht, 1955) tells the story of Shan Te, a
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13 female prostitute. In her efforts to be a 'good person' in accordance with the moral code passed on
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15 to her by the gods, she is forced to invent a male alter ego *Shui Ta*. Only through living her life in split
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17 character is she able to avert her own downfall, caused by the aggressive exploitation of her
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19 goodness through neighbours and so called friends. By means of an 'aesthetic of heterogeneity'
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21 (Jameson, 1998, p. 79), as suggested in the split character of Shan Te/Shui Ta, Brecht aesthetically
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23 problematised the ways society sanctions (seemingly) universal moral aims, which can only be
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25 sustained through the individual's (here: the woman Shan Te's) ethical degradation.
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29 The epic theatre did not represent reality in way of a universally consumable, self-standing aesthetic
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31 whole, which functioned outside of ethical considerations. Instead, Brecht worked from an
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33 aesthetic-ethics nexus (Otty, 1995; Franks & Jones, 1999), which produced an aesthetic of
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35 interruption. He saw such estranged aesthetic experimentation as crucial 'to the pleasurable and
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37 historically specific mastery [as opposed to the mere reproduction] of contradictory social reality'
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39 (Mumford, 2009, p. 175). Brechtian representational practice was shaped through the fruitful
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41 tension between a simultaneous commitment to (representational) estrangement, unknowability
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43 *and* concrete social justice concerns. This didn't mean that the enjoyment of theatrical
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45 representation was denied to the audience or executed in an overly didactic way. Brechtian theatre
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47 practice worked in a mode of deconstruction that was always playful (Brecht & Willett, 1964, p. 64-
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49 66) and full of what Lather (2009b) calls 'jouissance' (p. 227).
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54 A theatre that can't be laughed in is a theatre to be laughed at. Humourless people
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56 are ridiculous. (Brecht, 1965, p. 95)
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1 Concern with reality [in the theatre] sets the imagination off on the right
2 pleasurable road. Gaiety and seriousness revive in criticism, which is of a creative
3 kind. (Brecht, 1965, p. 105).
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7 Pleasure was not seen as a random by-product of theatre's representational practice. It was at the
8 heart of the work of deconstruction in the theatre and functioned as a 'deliberative' (and joyful)
9 counter-practice (Lather, 2009a, p. 227). Such counter-practice also involved the multiplying and
10 changing of the means of production. Brecht believed that theatre's main potential for social change
11 lay in amateur theatre projects and outside of the main theatre institution. In seeming contrast,
12 Brecht mostly worked within the theatre institution himself, especially after returning from exile to
13 be given his own theatre (the Berliner Ensemble) in the newly found GDR in 1949. In the early 1920's
14 and 1930's he had, however, developed a series of short, experimental plays, especially designed for
15 community theatre context (e.g. workers' groups). He called these the Lehrstücke/the learning plays
16 (Brecht, Müller & Manheim, 1977).
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29 They were meant not so much for the spectator as for those engaged in the
30 performance. It was, so to speak, art for the producer, not art for the consumer.
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32 (Brecht & Willet, 1964, p. 80)
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36 The learning plays took participants' social realities as the starting point for an inquiry into the roles
37 and relationships presented in the text.
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40 (...). Lehrtheater breaks with the bourgeois theatre and provides a new
41 revolutionary praxis. (...) It allows the text to be tried out in practice and changed
42 by those who are undergoing the learning experience. (Wright, 1989, p. 13)
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48 Through the application of estrangement effects to the text, participants were enabled to
49 interrogate the text's construction and discuss its underlying assumptions in the light of their own
50 life experiences. There are a range of scholars who work in a Brechtian tradition to critical social
51 science research. Conrad (2014; 2004) and Salzar (1991) for example use Brechtian-infused popular
52 and applied theatre approaches as ways to collaboratively reflect and represent young people's at-
53 risk' behaviour (in Canadian rural communities, in prison facilities) and reframe the label 'at-risk',
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1 which society commonly assigns to such groups. Dennis (2009) uses Boal's (1979) Theatre of the
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3 Oppressed techniques, which combines popular education approaches (Freire, 1973; 1995) and
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5 Brecht's Lehrtheater approach (Brecht, Müller & Manheim, 1977). In a mode of aesthetic
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7 experimentation and reflection, Dennis (2009) explores the complex processes of integration of
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9 English language learners in a Midwestern US high school, with teachers and learners. Denzin (2003)
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11 developed performance ethnography as a critical qualitative research method. It engages with
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13 participants' ordinary life experiences in a reflexive manner by making the researcher into a
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15 'montage maker' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), in the vein of a Brechtian estrangement aesthetic.
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17 Performance texts are created out of participants' present experiences and hopes for the future,
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19 which provoke the audience's active engagement with people's contested social reality. My research
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21 builds on these Brechtian-infused approaches which work from an ethics-epistemology nexus.
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23 Particular attention is however directed to new materialists' ontological challenge. How does a
24
25 Brechtian theatre pedagogy help to think materialists' ontological concern for an 'aesthetic of
26
27 depthlessness' (St. Pierre, 2013), in which 'language' and 'voice' are not representative of reality but
28
29 just one among many other material meaning-making agents?
30
31

32 33 34 **The workshops**

35
36 My research explored international students' intercultural 'strangeness' experiences through a series
37
38 of 4 four-hour drama-based workshops. My research focus was ontological. Aiming to put
39
40 deconstruction to work, I sought to explore how a drama-based approach can build trans-lingual
41
42 (Canagarajah, 2013) communication spaces in research which embrace 'constitutive unknowingness,
43
44 generative undecidability and [work towards] what it means to document becoming' (Lather, 2009b,
45
46 p. 354). The research encouraged participant narratives through an arts-based approach, which
47
48 didn't aim to elicit 'factual' data for thematic analysis or representation. My focus was instead
49
50 productive, aiming to generate playful research encounters and embodied acts of meaning-making.
51
52 My research activities were designed to work creatively and collaboratively from the crisis of
53
54 representation in a mode of an 'investigative workshop' (Lather, 2009a). The Brechtian framing of
55
56 the research sought to value the estrangement at the heart of a materially entangled research as
57
58 creative potentiality.
59
60

1 I chose the term 'strangeness' in order to convey to research participants my ontological focus on
2 collective engagement, in which the subjective, visceral and materially entangled dimensions of our
3 intercultural lives might act as the starting point for aesthetic experimentation. This emphasis on
4 'strangeness' was underpinned by my aim to orient my research towards 'a philosophical
5 ethnography' (Lather, 2009a), which embraces the productive nature of knowledge in a language
6 that is always slipping away (St. Pierre, 2013). In other words, strangeness was conceived as an
7 ongoing creative practice.
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16 A group of 10 international students took part in my workshops over a 4-week period, in November
17 2010, at the School of Education, the University of Glasgow (Scotland, UK). This was an elite and
18 intelligent group of international MA and PhD students (EU and non-EU) who had the privilege of
19 higher education and possessed a wide range of critical and analytical skills. My participants were a
20 self-selected group from across humanities and social science disciplines (film studies, education,
21 political science). They were between 25 and 52 years old and all women, with the exception of one
22 man called Jamal, a Pakistani participant with an eager interest in arts-based methods. There was a
23 diverse range of nationalities present (Canadian, Chinese, Columbian, Greek, Pakistani, Polish,
24 Russian, Saudi-Arabian) and all participants were (at least) bi-lingual. Their reasons for participating
25 in my research were varied. Some came with a methodological curiosity and wanted to learn more
26 about drama-based research. Others were keen to socialise with other internationals and share
27 their intercultural 'strangeness' experiences in a creative environment. Although most participants
28 pursued their own academic research projects, they were unfamiliar with the format of the drama-
29 based research workshop.
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47 *Workshop structure*

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49 Workshop 1 thus prepared participants for the 'playful' discursive structures that were at the core of
50 my Brechtian research pedagogy. I introduced a range of simple games and crafts as a way to build
51 our research relationships and 'achieve flexibility, resonance with other practitioners and an
52 attunement of the senses' (Grasseni, 2004, p. 53, quoted in Pink, 2009, p. 71). This also included an
53 attunement with meaning-making processes in research that didn't rely on language as second-order
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1 materiality. Games such as modelling your partner's life in clay, an alternative version of speed dating
2 which involved singing your favourite childhood lullaby and describing your dream profession as a
3 child, exploited language as first-order materiality for jouissance. Workshop 2 continued these
4 playful modes of deconstruction through improvisational drama exercises, based on Spolin's (1999)
5 'seven aspects of spontaneity' (p. 4), which combined coordinated movement, music as well
6 observation exercises.
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16 Before the start of the workshops, participants were asked to take a picture of something that
17 occurred 'strange' to them when they first arrived in Glasgow. These images were taken as stimuli for
18 a creative writing exercise in session 2. In a Brechtian vein, these pictures were a springboard for
19 'complex seeing' (Brecht & Willett, 1964, p. 44) and aesthetic experimentation *between* reality and
20 fiction. The pictures were *not* a way to elicit factual data in an attempt to re-scientificy my research
21 (Lather, 2009a) and make an inventory of what is strange out there in the world.
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31 There is nothing in a data set to be 'found', instead findings are produced through
32 mapping activity - drawing lines that connect the multiple acts, actions, activities,
33 events, and artifacts that constitute the data set. (Martin & Kamberelis, 2013, p.
34 676)
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41 Instead, the act of creative writing is just one node in the map of the many individual and collective
42 performative acts of making and re-making meaning throughout the workshops. The differentiation
43 between 'mapping' and 'tracing' is important here. The act of tracing implies a mimetic act of tracing
44 an assumed stable world, whereas the act of mapping allows for this world to 'become' through our
45 creative research practice (Martin & Kameberelis, 2013).
46
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52 Mapping charts open systems that are contingent, unpredictable and
53 productive. The map has to do with performance, whereas tracing
54 always involves an alleged 'competence'. (Deleuze & Guattari 1987,
55 p. 12-13, quoted in Martin & Kamberelis, 2013, p. 670).
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3 By focusing on participant Jamal's verbatim account, which occurred in the post-creative writing
4 discussion, I hone in on a node on the research map and discuss how it changed and shaped in intra-
5 action with other nodes (bodies, tape, my researcher subjectivity). I haven't chosen Jamal's account
6 because it was the most 'meaningful' piece of data about strangeness experience. I chose it because
7 Jamal's words 'glowed' (McLure, 2013) at me. In their poetic nature, his words defied my easy
8 categorisations and interpretive acts.
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17 We are obliged to acknowledge that data have their way of making themselves
18 intelligible to us (...) The glow appears around singular points - "bottlenecks, knots
19 and foyers" (Deleuze, 2004, p. 63). It involves a loss of mastery of language (and
20 ultimately over ourselves). (McLure, 2013, p. 660ff)
21
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27 I think that strangeness makes you describe things. It makes you describe things. I
28 feel something is strange, therefore I describe, I describe. (Jamal)
29
30
31

32
33 As Jamal observes himself, strangeness (in my case, the 'glowing' strangeness of his account) can
34 evoke continuous acts of philosophising. His account had its way of making itself intelligible to me. It
35 triggered my playful reading between its metaphoric gaps as well as called for further 'strangeness
36 practice' through creative explorations in the subsequent workshops.
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44 Either I am a strange person I don't know but I was born strange.
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46 Some people are born strange, if you see some people within your own culture and they
47 are quite estranged from that culture. Either they are very creative or they are not acting
48 according to the tradition of that culture. They are quite strange. I gave the example of my
49 cousin. He was quite strange. He was born strange, believe me.
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54 I noticed there are some people and they are quite strange and they can bring change.
55

56 (Jamal)
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1
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3 *Jamal*

4
5 When Jamal joined my research he expressed a keen interest in arts-based methods. He founded a
6
7 range of schools for girls in the Pashtun tribal areas on the Pakistani/Afghani border. He worked as a
8
9 police officer in Pakistan but left his job to learn more about pedagogy and came to Glasgow
10
11 (Scotland, UK) to undertake a Masters in Education. When I met him first he told me about
12
13 the difficulties he faced in his region for promoting equal access to education. He also shared his
14
15 disappointment with his course in the UK. He expected to learn more practically about 'good'
16
17 pedagogy and creative methods, and felt instead left alone with his questions and learning
18
19 needs. He joined the workshops to learn more about drama-based research and see how it might
20
21 become useful for his own context of work. In his creative writing piece, Jamal critically reflected on
22
23 the material, emotional and psychological 'needs' in his home country and the ways he might help in
24
25 addressing these. He shared his piece in the group and his subsequent account emerged as part of
26
27 the group discussion.
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32
33 *I am reading Jamal's account*

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35 In Jamal's spoken account, which followed the sharing of his creative writing piece, the proposed
36
37 characteristic that 'some people are born strange' appears a positive and even progressive trait, not
38
39 a 'flaw' or 'lack' of personality. Jamal's strangers display aspirations for change. They are described
40
41 as subtle, 'creative' rebels who are not understood within their own society. Being born strange
42
43 seems to equip these 'outsiders' with an innate instinct for change and thinking against the
44
45 grain of cultural traditions. This almost missionary appeal of these 'natural born strangers'
46
47 however does not depict a figure of an over-zealous 'saviour-type'. Jamal plays with the term
48
49 'strange' and thus averts the emergence of a 'stranger figure', which can be described, categorised
50
51 and know in definite terms and explanatory models. Jamal plays poetically with the absurdity of
52
53 the fact that somebody could have been 'born strange'. His repeated labelling of what
54
55 constitutes stranger-ness might also (satirically) reference an 'institutional reply' to forms of
56
57 'resistance', involving the strategic labelling and social marginalisation of those acting against
58
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60

1 received tradition. Highlighting the creativity and productive stance of the stranger, Jamal subtly
2 criticises a monolithic conception of culture which seeks to preserve the status quo.
3
4
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6

7 The strangeness of Jamal's strangers does not lie in set traits, definable gestures or set agendas.
8
9 Instead, the 'disposition' for strangeness emerges through active acts of (self-) questioning and
10 critical-creative engagement with one's environment. This process-based aspect of being a
11 stranger then defies the emergence of a 'stranger figure' or 'stranger fetishism' (Ahmed, 2000). It
12 'prevents (stranger) identity from being assured as the ontological given of the subject' (ibid, p. 125).
13
14 'Some people are born strange', which initially suggests ontological given-ness, simultaneously
15 enacts its rupture. The playful estrangement and metaphoric gaps, which occur when juxtaposing
16 the idea of 'innate strangeness' versus its 'creation through practice', is heightened when Jamal puts
17 himself in relation to this paradox:
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28 Either I am a strange person, I don't know, but I was born strange. Some people are born strange. (Jamal)
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32 By drawing attention to his own 'disposition' for strangeness, he dissolves an entirely
33 dichotomous perception of stranger-ness – for example as 'romantic fascination or felt threat - by
34 returning everyone [including himself] to his or her otherness or foreign status' (Kristeva, 1991, p.
35 147).
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43 Either they are very creative or they are not acting according to the tradition of that culture. They are
44 quite strange. (Jamal)
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49 Jamal's account, not unlike a Brechtian estrangement device, playfully draws my attention to the
50 ontological politics (Law, 2004, p. 143) around the act of creating knowledge about the stranger.
51
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55 How can we understand the relationship between identity and strangeness
56 in lived embodiment without creating a new 'community of strangers'? I
57 suggest that we can only avoid stranger fetishism, that is, avoiding welcoming
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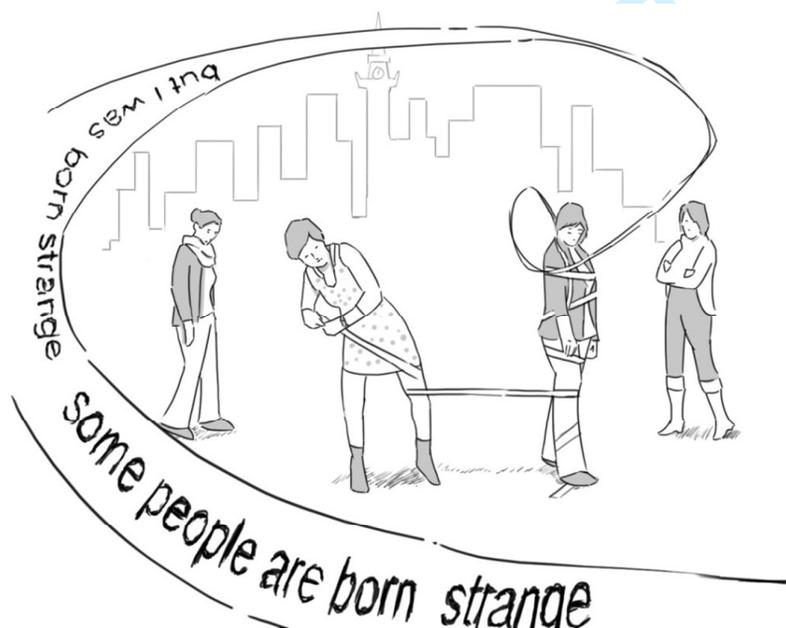
1 or expelling the stranger as a figure which has linguistic and bodily integrity,
2
3 by examining the social relationships that are concealed by this very
4
5 fetishism. (Ahmed, 2000, p. 6)
6
7

8 Jamal's stranger account, like Ahmed suggests, acts in a playful mode of deconstruction, which
9
10 defies stranger fetishism, but still playfully philosophises around the *possible* relationship between
11
12 identity and stranger-ness.
13

14 Through the process of attuning our senses in the drama-based games and writing creatively about
15
16 *strangeness*, Jamal's account emerged as a piece of *philosophising*. His account does not stand as a
17
18 meaningful piece of data in and of itself but is constituted by the multiple modes of creative
19
20 engagement that preceded and will follow it. This of course also includes my continuous acts of
21
22 reading and re-reading Jamal's account in aesthetic transformation.
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28 *Re-entangling Jamal's account*

29
30 (insert image 2/Title: Re-entangling Jamal's account in a body sculpture)
31



1 *The School of Education's gym. A grey, Saturday morning in November in Glasgow, Scotland. Amy*
2 *and Marta volunteer to create a spontaneous sculpture. Amy takes the roll of sticky tape, marks a*
3 *space on the ground, entangles herself into the tape, and freezes her movements into a sculpture.*
4 *The white tape is the connecting element. Marta takes the tape out of Amy's hand and composes*
5 *herself into the sticky body sculpture. I hand out Jamal's account to Aleksandra and Sonja. They*
6 *rehearse the text, read it aloud, then in turns whilst walking around the sculpture. The two women*
7 *'encircle' the two female bodies entangled in white tape whilst reading Jamal's account aloud.*

17
18 **Aleksandra:** Either I am a strange person I don't know but I was born strange.

19
20 **Sonja:** Some people are born strange, if you see some people within your own culture and they
21 are quite estranged from that culture.

22
23 **Aleksandra:** Either they are very creative or they are not acting
24 according to the tradition of that culture.

25
26 **Sonja:** They are quite strange.

27
28 **Aleksandra:** I gave the example of my
29 cousin.

30
31 **Sonja:** He was quite strange.

32
33 **Aleksandra:** He was born strange, believe me.

34
35 **Sonja:** I noticed there are some people and they are quite strange and they can bring change.

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42 *I am the audience now (first in the gym, later re-watching the footage). I associate oppressive*
43 *gestures: encircling, gazing and explaining strangeness. Aleksandra's and Sonja's reading and*
44 *walking, together with Amy's and Marta's silently posing bodies in the middle, perform the pose*
45 *of the expert: they gaze, measure, comment, explain strangeness, thus turning the sculpture into a*
46 *commodity. Stranger-ness, in the embodiment of the sculpture, can be known and 'judged'. Stranger*
47 *identity, through the aesthetic interplay of the silent, taped bodies and Jamal's read-aloud stranger*
48 *account, is performed (and read by me) as 'ontologically given' (Ahmed, 2000). The poetic elusiveness*
49 *of language which guided my initial 'reading' of 'Some people are born strange' has transformed into*
50 *my 'bodily felt' reading of the sculpture as a 'stranger fetish' (ibid).*
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3 The silent posing of Amy's and Marta's bodies, taped-up in the middle of the room, and Aleksandra's
4 and Sonja's bodies in movement - walking-encircling-gazing - all acted as material agents and
5 separate aesthetic elements which produced meaning. Each element 'quoted' the other but was not
6 fully absorbed in it. In the vein of a Brechtian 'tableaux aesthetic' or 'separation principle' (Mumford,
7 2009, p. 85), the materiality of the frozen and moving bodies, the materiality of the tape, the
8 materiality of Jamal's words (uttered by other bodies), and my reading of it all, worked in aesthetic
9 juxtaposition, rather than in a linear, easily consumable 'Gesamtkunstwerk' (Brecht & Willett,
10 1964). Through participants' estranged aesthetic acts, 'meaning' is revealed as being of a rhizomatic
11 nature. It is 'entangled' (but not fully absorbed) in all the material agents present, all central to the
12 production of knowledge between the 'metaphoric gaps' (Carney, 2005) of the creative research
13 activity. This also included the opening of a space for reflection around my own positioning as
14 researcher.

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31 What is my goal as researcher: empathy? emancipation? advocacy? learning
32 from/working with/standing with? (Lather, 1993, p. 685)

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36
37 Aware of my changed researcher subjectivity when 'reading' the performative emergence of the
38 collective body sculpture, I decided to emplace myself more consciously within the performance and
39 to further de-centre my researcher subjectivity. I joined all subsequent rehearsal activities and
40 inhabited a direct 'outsider' position only when watching the filmed footage after the workshops had
41 ended. As a group, we continued to experiment with the creation of the *sticky body sculpture*,
42 combining the act of reading out Jamal's lines and the act of sculpting strangeness. We walked
43 through the room, each learning one line from Jamal's account, and practicing its delivery using
44 various, Brecht-infused rehearsal exercises.

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56 In order to disrupt familiar customs and habitual ways of performing,
57 Brecht sometimes used somatic exercises that played with spatial and
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(insert image 4/ Title: My sticky tape gesture)



How does the sticky surface feel on my cheek? Sticking a straight line of tape on the ground I feel the non-sticky surface with my flat hand and smooth out the tape against the floor. I listen to the sound the tape makes when unrolling it with increasing speed, and then abruptly stop.

Marking out a triangle with the tape on the floor, I decidedly kneel within it and recite my line:

Either they are very creative or they are not acting according to the tradition of their culture.

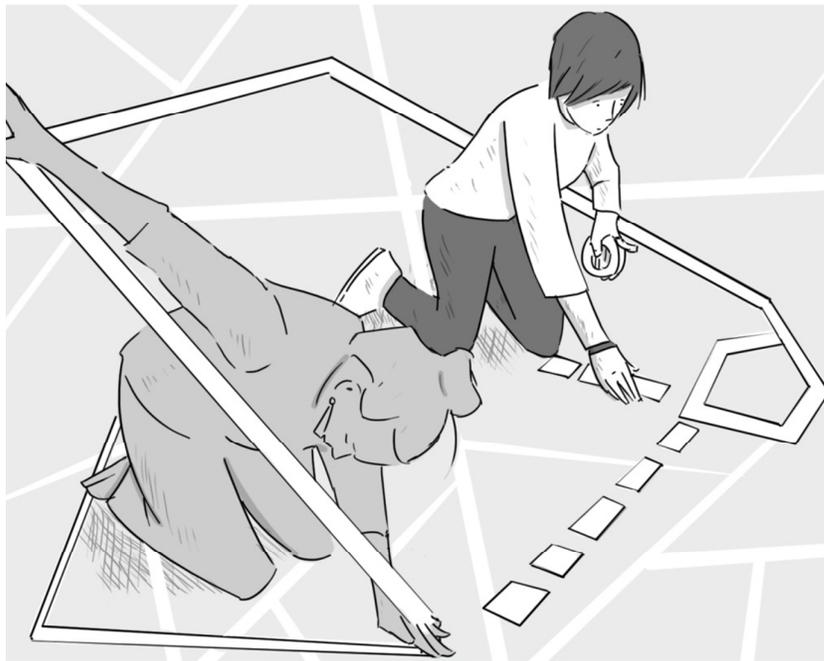
(insert image 5/ Title: Reciting my line)



My sight is limited. I can't see Marta when she enters the space, but feel how she takes the role out of my hand and walks away to my left. I can't visually make out her actions but hear the sound of tape being unrolled and torn rapidly.

Amy volunteered to step behind the camera to film our performance. I watch the footage after the workshop. Amy's visual framing and Simon's drawings as a response to her framing, aid the mapping of our collective acts of re-entangling Jamal's account.

(insert image 6/ Title: Marta continues the sculpture)



To my left, still out of sight, Marta marks out space. She creates a small sticky tape space. It looks like a house with an open roof on one side. Marta adds two intermittent lines which emanate from the house. One of the fragmented lines points in my direction. Marta, stands back from her tape trail on the floor. She sings her sentence. Her arms hang loosely on her side.

They are quite strange.

She unrolls the tape further and sings:

I gave the example of my cousin.

Marta pauses, then speaks her last sentence:

He was quite strange.

She freezes.

1 *I am watching the footage. There are footsteps off-camera. Who is ready to enter the scene?*
2
3
4

5 There was no set sequence to our devised sculpture. The emergence of the scene
6
7 depended entirely on people's active participation in it.
8
9

10
11 (...)
12
13

14
15 Karolina enters the frame. She stretches the tape in Marta's hand all the way down to the floor. Her
16
17 movements are slow and gentle.
18
19

20
21 She kneels in Marta's house-shape and sings her lines.
22
23

24
25
26 And there are some people who are quite strange, and they can bring change.
27
28
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30 (insert figure 7/ Title: Karolina kneels and sings)
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32



1 Karolina looks around nervously as if seeking affirmation. A moment of silence follows. Nobody
2 enters the rehearsal space. Karolina's uncertainty 'hangs in the air'. Does she wonder if her
3 performance was 'good enough', 'appropriate' for my research or 'aesthetically correct'? Does
4 she wonder why I am insisting on calling these strange aesthetic experiments *research*? Participants
5 in a participatory drama workshop take a risk. They take responsible for their own creative acts even
6 if unsure of its (aesthetic, ethical) consequence. It is a 'vulnerable' stance, as there is no guarantee
7 that their acts of meaning-making won't be channelled into out-of-context representations that
8 deny the map of our collective knowledge production? Without the participant-performers' trust
9 and openness to the expressive potential of their bodies, and my ethical commitment to
10 unknowingness and our material entanglement, there can be no philosophical ethnography brought
11 into being.
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26 (...)

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31 *Jamal breaks Karolina's silence and enters the space. He continues our sticky-tape philosophising.*
32
33 *He takes the tape role from Marta and re-establishes a connection by putting his hand on her*
34 *hand. Jamal carefully positions himself in the space, freezes and, in a mix of singing and*
35 *speaking, recites his lines:*
36
37
38

39
40
41 *Some people are born strange. When you see some people in their own culture, and they are*
42 *quite estranged from that culture.*
43
44
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46
47 He pauses.

48
49 (...)

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2
3 (insert figure 8/Title: Jamal takes his place in the sculpture)
4
5



28
29 *How does Jamal feel when re-visiting his own account performatively, to be in the middle of its re-*
30 *entanglement, to hear his own words (and not just his own anymore) being sung back to him in the*
31 *strange, estranged space of this sticky strangeness sculpture?*
32

33
34
35 (...)

36
37 *The camera is shaking. Amy prepares her arrival in the scene by framing a slightly wider shot. She*
38 *performs a 'double' aesthetic framing. On a technical level, she directs the camera frame so it can*
39 *record her second, embodied, aesthetic framing as part of our collective re-entanglement of*
40 *Jamal's account.*
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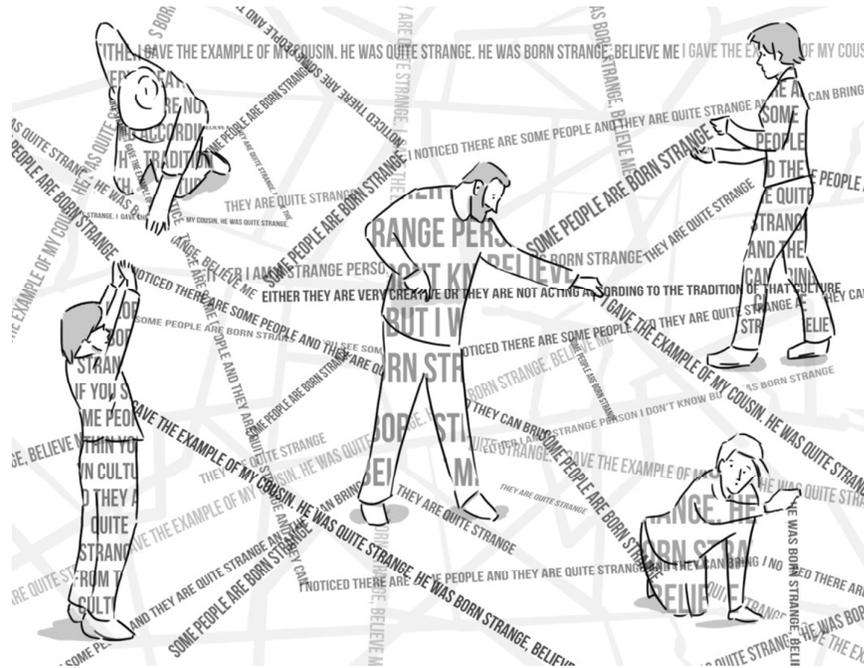
46
47
48 Amy takes the tape role and continues Jamal's tape movement upwards, her arms stretching into
49 the air. She sings:

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55 Either I am a strange person I don't know but I was born strange.

56
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58
59 (...)
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We stand for a moment in this collective image, taped up, connected - 'heterogeneous nodes of discursive and material force' (Martin & Kamberelis, 2013, p. 670). We recite our lines again, this time chronologically, the way Jamal 'uttered' them originally, two workshops ago.

(insert figure 9/ Title: Acts of knowledge production in the body sculpture)



Amy: Either I am a strange person I don't know but I was born strange.

Jamal: Some people are born strange, if you see some people within your own culture and they are quite estranged from that culture.

Katja: Either they are very creative or they are not acting according to the tradition of that culture.

Marta: They are quite strange. I gave the example of my cousin. He was quite strange. He was born strange, believe me.

Karolina: I noticed there are some people and they are quite strange and they can bring change.

Here we stand. Silence.

(...)

Amy goes to switch off the camera. The screen goes to black.

1 My reading of Jamal's account has been turned back on itself in vibrating immobility (McLure, 2013,
2 p. 663). In this last move of mapping the aesthetic transformation of Jamal's account, my body has
3 become part of the sticky image. My researcher subjectivity is 'in transposition' (Braidotti, 2006, p. 5,
4 quoted in Lenz Taguchi 2013, 713), (quite literally) entangled in a five body-sticky-strangeness-body-
5 sculpture in a Glasgow gym hall on a Saturday morning in November. My line of sight is turned back
6 on myself as I sing my lines and trust they will resonate with the other bodies standing, 'sticking
7 together' meaning, 'taped-up' in strangeness production. Our collective sculpture, as a node on the
8 rhizomatic map of knowledge production, attests to the mess of unknowability and the stickiness of
9 making meaning in entanglement. Strangeness has become our ongoing research practice; one
10 which involved 'all kinds of matter in the event' (Barad, 2007, p. 185, quoted in Lenz Taguchi, 2013,
11 p. 713).

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27 Some people are born strange.

28 29 30 31 **Acknowledgement**

32
33 Thank you to artist Simon Bishopp for helping to map our creative acts in the workshops through his
34 drawings, which are based on the original film footage.

35 36 37 38 39 **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

40
41 The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship,
42 and/or publication of this article.

43 44 45 46 47 **Funding**

48
49 The author thanks the School of Education/University of Glasgow (Scotland, UK) for the PhD
50 scholarship that made this research possible.
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