

Emerging Fields: Developing a Cultural Disability Studies

Saturday 26th and Sunday 27th May 2007
Liverpool John Moores University

A Free Event Hosted & Funded By
Liverpool John Moores University



Conference Pack

1. Conference Programme
2. Abstracts

Inaugural Conference of the



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1. Conference Programme

Saturday 26th May 2007

9.00-10.00 Registration & Coffee

10.00-11.00 Introduction and welcome by the convenors.

Plenary One: David Bolt "Reflections upon the Journal of Literary Disability"

11.00-11.30 Coffee and biscuits

11.30-1.00 Panel Session 1: Discussing the Divides

1. Eleanor Lisney "*Café philo* in Paris, American Disability studies à *la française*: a personal multi cultural perspective"

2. Irene Rose "Situating Autobiography: Spectacularised Individuality or Community Voice?"

3. David Feeney "Novelties of Lightlessness: Blindness, Beauty, and the Sighted Imagination"

1.00-2.00 Lunch

2.00 - 3.30 Panel Session 2: Representing Disability

1. Pam Thomas "On Disability Arts and Culture"

2. Claire Molloy "Disability imagery and the 'commodification of alienation' in 'shock music' video"

3. Rebecca Mallett "*Hey Timmy, How Many Able-bodied People Does it Take to Screw in a Light Bulb?: The Troublesome Subversion of Disability Stereotypes*"

3.30-4.00 Coffee

4.00 - 5.00 Plenary Two: Professor George McKay "Crippled With Nerves Popular Music and Disability"

5.00-6.00: Official Launch of Journal of Literary Disability
...with refreshments and nibbles.

Sunday 27th May 2007

9.00-10.00 Registration & Coffee

10.00-11.00 Plenary Three: Debbie Jolly "Rethinking Disability Representation in Museums and Galleries"

11.00-11.30 Coffee and biscuits

11.30-12.30 Panel Session 4: Challenging Representations

1. Heather Hollins "Beyond the Glass Case: Museums, Culture and Disabled People"

2. Hannah Macpherson "Articulating blind touch: thinking through the feet"

12.30-1.30 Lunch

1.30-3.00 Panel Session 5: Culture in the Curriculum?

1. Irene Rose and Claire Molloy "Situating Cultural Disability Studies in the Curriculum"

2. Nicole Matthews "Taking the Curriculum into the Community: Reflections of working on the "In the Picture" project with Scope"

3. Colette Conroy - short presentation on a forthcoming issue of Research in Drama Education on Disability

3.00-3.30 Coffee

3.30-4.30 Plenary Four: Lucy Burke "Representing Alzheimers and the production of 'bare lives'"

4.30-5.00 Discussion Forum: Future Directions?

2. Abstracts

Saturday 26th May 2007

Plenary One: **David Bolt "Reflections upon the Journal of Literary Disability"**

There are few literary works that do not portray disability in one way or another. Be it poetry, drama, fiction or film, Classical, Biblical, Medieval, Renaissance, Restoration, Romantic, Victorian, Modernist, Post-War or Post-Modern, literary disability can be found in every genre from every era. Indeed, the reading lists of English departments throughout the world are rich with works that represent disability in one way or another.

The problem is that in the U.K. only a tiny minority of these departments approach literature from a perspective that is appreciative of disability. That is to say, unlike the conceptually comparable constructs of ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality, those of disability are generally rendered beyond the scope of literary studies.

There are, however, more and more scholars contributing to the literary disability movement in the British academy, including Stuart Murray, Lucy Burke, Martin Halliwell, Gavin Miller, and Irene Rose. Their work will be featured in a new publication, the *Journal of Literary Disability*, the first issue of which I will be launching at the Inaugural Conference of the Cultural Disability Studies Research Network, Liverpool John Moores University.

It is the aim of *JLD* to contribute to the modernisation of the taxonomy of approaches to literature by demonstrating the value of readings that are informed by disability studies, as well as by analysing the absence of such readings from so many undergraduate English courses.

Panel Session 1: Discussing the Divides

1. Eleanor Lisney "Café philo in Paris, American Disability studies à la française: a personal multi cultural perspective"

2. Irene Rose "Situating Autobiography: Spectacularised Individuality or Community Voice?"

3. David Feeney "Novelties of Lightlessness: Blindness, Beauty, and the Sighted Imagination"

Panel Session 2: Representing Disability

1. Pam Thomas "On Disability Arts and Culture"

2. Claire Molloy "Disability imagery and the 'commodification of alienation' in 'shock music' video"

3. Rebecca Mallett "*Hey Timmy, How Many Able-bodied People Does it Take to Screw in a Light Bulb?: The Troublesome Subversion of Disability Stereotypes*"

As White (2005:67) has observed “[s]hocking, irreverent, obscene, politically incorrect and offensive are words commonly used to describe the animated series South Park”. All these terms could also be applied to South Park’s treatment of ‘disability’ issues. However, if by simultaneously presenting and contesting ‘stereotypes’ of disabled people South Park’s creators “tackle disability issues with a consciousness rarely seen in film or on television” (White, *ibid*), then the ‘shocking, irreverent, obscene, politically incorrect and offensive’ tags become potentially ‘positive’ interpretations as well as ‘negative’ condemnations. Drawing on the findings of a recently completed doctoral thesis, and using South Park as an extended representational example, this paper does not consider ‘stereotypes’ of disability as such but rather considers how the concept of ‘stereotypes’ sanctions certain critical and political responses.

Firstly, exploring the early search for negative stereotypes, which led to the repeated citation of common examples, through the offering of ideological explanations for their persistence, ‘stereotypes’ will be positioned as a ‘technique of commentary’. Such a technique is deemed to offer the capacity to simplify, order and fix the text in ‘either/or’ terms. It will also be shown how it is through the idea of ‘stereotypes of disability’ that accounts of representation’s role in the maintenance of a disadvantageous social and symbolic order were first established. However, where characters such as South Park’s

Timmy would once have been marshalled into a suitable category of derision, some areas of disability-criticism have begun to acknowledge that 'stereotypes' are not exclusively a 'negative' form. The second part of the paper will consider the more recent recognition of representation's potential subversion of 'stereotypes'. In particular, I am interested here in what impact such a recognition has for the political project of disability-criticism. The paper will conclude with a discussion on the problematics (and opportunities) of freeing texts from the specific constraints imposed by the critical concept of 'stereotypes'.

References:

White, J. (2005) "Krazy kripples': Using South Park to talk about disability' in L. Ben-Moshe, R. C. Cory, M. Feldbaum and K. Sagendorf (eds.) *Building Pedagogical Curb Cuts: Incorporating Disability into the University Classroom and Curriculum*, Syracuse, The Graduate School, Syracuse University, pp.83-91.

Plenary Two: Professor George McKay "Crippled With Nerves Popular Music and Disability"

Sunday 27 th May 2007

Plenary Three: Debbie Jolly "Rethinking Disability Representation in Museums and Galleries"

The Rethinking Disability Representation project is developing politically aware approaches to the interpretation of disability in museums and galleries by using a 'social model' perspective. The project is managed by the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries at the University of Leicester. It involves nine partner museums each taking issues of disability and disability representation forward.

This innovative approach has been achieved through working partnerships with key experts in the disability field – a Think Tank of disabled activists, artists and cultural practitioners - and work with local disabled people.

By equipping the partner museums involved with an understanding of disability issues and politics, and enabling them

to share ideas and existing good practice within the project, a new confidence in the ways disability can be addressed within museums and art interpretation is emerging - opening up new sophisticated routes towards representation and interpretation.

The presentation will provide an overview of the project, its beginnings, methods and aims, and offer some examples of the partner museums 'work in progress'.

Rethinking Disability Representation presents a unique opportunity to reveal the hidden histories of disabled people in the UK and to engage with disability politics more widely. It is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and The National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts (NESTA).

Panel Session 4: Challenging Representations

1. Heather Hollins "Beyond the Glass Case: Museums, Culture and Disabled People"

Mike Oliver (1990) argued that disabled people have been denied access to the key political, educational and cultural institutions which could enable them to fully participate in society, and that this exclusion has resulted in their marginalisation.

One of the key cultural institutions that disabled people have historically, and currently are being denied access to, are museums. Museums have a unique place in society as they are the place where we as a nation and as communities choose to place in perpetuity, the objects which we consider to be important. Who museums collect from and the objects they choose to display, communicates a very visible and public message about who our society thinks is important, and who is not.

Many museums are housed in historic buildings with imposing facades and grand sets of sweeping steps at the entrance, and therefore advertise their lack of accessibility at the front door. Once inside, objects behind glass cases and rows text panels add to disabled people's exclusion, along with a lack of disability representation within exhibitions.

In this paper I will explore the underlying reasons behind why museums are currently excluding disabled people, and how the need to challenge access goes beyond the glass case to the heart of the organisation. Using the Holocaust Centre, Nottinghamshire, as case study I will explore how museum staff

and disabled people must work together to breakdown barriers to inclusion to enable them to be represented within mainstream discourses on the nature of our contemporary multicultural society.

2. Hannah Macpherson "Articulating blind touch: thinking through the feet"

Through reference to auto-biographies of blindness and interview material with members of specialist blind and visually impaired walking groups this paper aims to explore some of the problems of talking about the experience of touch. The paper reflects on how people with blindness are receptive to and articulate tactile impressions and consideration is given to how the articulation of touch relates to certain discourses and stereotypes of touch and blindness. In so doing the paper highlights some of the ways in which the embodied experience of touch is mediated through language and makes the simple point that language does not simply convey tactile experience, it mediates its expression. With this research 'problem' in mind I turn to how some interview participants drew attention to their feet - transcending the stereotype of blind touch as primarily associated with the hand. Some of the ways in which the impressions of the feet are talked about by people with blindness are revealed, including the way in which where feet are part of embodied processes of immersion and forgetting as well as a source of contemplation, humour, visualization and dreams.

Panel Session 5: Culture in the Curriculum?

1. Irene Rose and Claire Molloy "Situating Cultural Disability Studies in the Curriculum"

2. Nicole Matthews "Taking the Curriculum into the Community: Reflections of working on the "In the Picture" project with Scope"

3. Colette Conroy - short presentation on a forthcoming issue of Research in Drama Education on Disability

Call for Contributions: Research in Drama Education

"On Disability: Creative Tensions in Applied Theatre"

This themed edition of *Research in Drama Education* will examine the creative and political achievements of the dialogue between disabled people and drama practitioners (disabled and non disabled).

At various points during the last thirty years these different strands have worked together or moved apart in response to political and financial circumstances. For example, in the UK, many celebrated disability arts groups and companies of disabled people have grown from skills and ideas that were developed in workshops and drama projects in special schools and day centres. The journey from segregation to participation, the gaps between politics, art and therapy, and the relationship between disabled and non-disabled collaborators are all sources of tension. How do practitioners make these tensions creative?

This themed edition seeks perspectives on/from each of these strands, and all related others, in the hope of making debates around these subjects more accessible to participants and scholars in the area. We invite work that will help us to appraise the contribution of disabled people and the disability movement to Applied Drama/Theatre practice. We particularly welcome contributions that help to question the assumption that access and equality mean more than opening a door for others. We hope that the issue will reflect the dynamism and diversity of creative partnerships in disability arts internationally.

Contributions might:

- Analyse issues of autonomy and politics in disability drama/theatre practices.
- Investigate accessible working techniques and techniques for collaboration and deliberation
- Investigate accessible performance strategies
- Investigate integrated and participatory projects
- Explore the tensions between the disability movement and arts professionals
- Offer analyses of changing aesthetic responses to bodies in performance
- Develop connections between academic work in the field and disabled communities
- Discuss strategies for disability equality training through drama

- Query the operation of power in creative and funding partnerships
- Analyse issues of autonomy, advocacy and control
- Review recent conferences/publications/performance events in the field.

We will welcome diverse and creative responses to the questions raised in this call for papers. Contributions might take the form of short or full length scholarly articles, interviews, dialogues, polemics, reviews and other accounts of practice. Collaborative work is especially welcome. Elements of the themed issue will be developed in collaboration and discussion via a symposium in Autumn 2007.

Deadlines:

Expressions of interest and proposals: 20th June 2007.

Abstracts: 1st September 2007.

Submission of papers: 1st February 2008.

Please send correspondence/queries to:

Colette.Conroy@uwe.ac.uk

About Research in Drama Education: Research in Drama Education is a refereed journal aimed at those who are interested in applying performance practices to cultural engagement, educational innovation and social change. It provides an international forum for research into drama and theatre conducted in community, educational, developmental and therapeutic contexts. The journal offers a dissemination of completed research and research in progress, and through its Viewpoints section it encourages debate between researchers both on its published articles and on other matters. Contributions are drawn from a range of people involved in drama and theatre from around the world. It aims to bring the fruits of the best researchers to an international readership and to further debates in the rich and diverse field of educational drama and applied theatre. Further details are available at:

<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/13569783.asp>

Plenary Four: Lucy Burke "Representing Alzheimers and the production of 'bare lives'"

Alzheimer's emerges as a disease category of epidemic proportions only in the late twentieth century. It is an attribution that speaks to the 'biomedicalisation' of dementia, and the drive within the field of Geriatric medicine to separate so called 'normal ageing' from pathological ageing and illness. It stands at present as one of the key conditions held to justify the ends of ethically contested practices such as stem cell research and genetic mapping, and as a persistent problem within current bioethical debates around the limits of meaningful life and the definition of personhood. In the field of dementia studies, much discussion has focused upon the ethical consequences that follow from the adoption of a model of the person that views cognitive abilities, memory and consciousness as the determining attributes of personhood. Many have pointed out that the boundaries between health and impairment (normal and pathological ageing) in the diagnosis of Alzheimer's elude precise definition. In this light, sociological research on dementia by scholars such as Karen Lyman, Jaber Gubrium, Lawrence Cohen (amongst others) has demonstrated the powers of medical diagnosis to effect a kind of ontological transformation of the person manifesting the symptoms of memory loss and cognitive decline into Alzheimer's sufferer. The argument is that far from neutral, the process of diagnosis itself is instrumental in producing the impaired subject, condemning them to what Lyman terms 'a self-fulfilling prophecy of impairment'. In this scenario, all behaviour ('typical' and otherwise) becomes flattened out and made sense of primarily in terms of the perceived characteristics of the disease. Those with dementia are often prematurely consigned to a form of biosocial death (the social death of the living subject) on the grounds of cognitive impairment.

The critique of the biomedical paradigm that has emerged in sociological work on dementia foregrounds the iatrogenic powers of discourse to produce, and to devalue, the subject it purportedly describes. As such, it places questions of language, discourse and representation – the paradigms through which we 'know' and construct dementia – at the centre of ethical debate. My aim in this paper is to consider the ways in which first person narratives about Alzheimer's engage with what we might describe as the boundary dispute around personhood at the limits of life. My main

focus here is the negotiation of the “fact” of the brain as the site of disease, and the ways that this is imagined in relation to the self and as a problem of writing and of literary form. I want to argue for the political and ethical significance of these texts in writing against the grain of dominant cultural constructions of Alzheimer’s and its perceived ‘victims’. I also believe that they raise wider, and important questions, about the theoretical models of subjectivity that we deploy and about the critical scholarship that has emerged thus far around the recent proliferation of illness and disability narratives.
