

Telling Stories Told to Me – personal, political, postcolonial.

I write in a variety of ways, with vastly different dramaturgies, for multiple audiences and a variety of mediums. I discuss three projects that explore this diversity and the particular demands for the dramaturg/writer when adapting for radio; making collaborative site-specific work; and being writer of a bilingual script (British Sign Language/spoken and projected English) with a disability and Deaf perspective:

Reans Girls, BBC Radio 4, transmitted 12 December 2006, is adapted from Foursight Theatre's acclaimed interactive/site-specific/community/promenade performance, based on interviews with women immigrants to Whitmore Reans, Wolverhampton, 1956-74. The stories were personal and often highly political in the feminist sense of the personal being political, but also in a postcolonial aspect – the interviewees were from former colonies whose identity positions and social realities were shaped by colonial history.

How might a performance work be devised, written and assembled which could provoke a synergy between present realities and historical memories in central Europe? This was one of the central questions for *Speaking Stones: images, voices, fragments...from that which comes after*, a site-specific collaboration with director Phillip Zarrilli and Austrian company Theatre Asou. Commissioned in 2002, it was Theatre Asou's response to the political coalition of Austrian People's Party and Austrian Freedom Party led by Jorg Haider and to the increasingly xenophobic and nationalistic thinking of the Austrian government at that time. It was a response to the contemporary issues of the displacement of peoples within central Europe, and with an eye on an often unspoken past, a hidden history – the Holocaust as it was played out in Nazi-occupied Austria during World War II.

Speaking Stones was site-specific, in a vast underground quarry in Aflenz, quarried since Roman times and used by the Nazis as a labour camp during the Allied bombings of 1943/44, transporting Russian, Polish and Yugoslav prisoners from the concentration camp at Mauthausen. Due to the history of the quarry's use during World War II, mention of the quarry was banished from generally accepted Styrian historical register – a 'lost history'.

Structurally and aesthetically, *Speaking Stones* is a 'post-dramatic'. 'post-psychological' performance score – where the 6 actors engage in specific psychophysical tasks and/or deliver fragments of texts as they materialize and inhabit a series of 'figures' and 'personas'. Locating the work deep within the quarry allowed the images, voices and fragments to 'resonate' with the particular history of the quarry – offering moments and glimpses backwards and forwards in time, creating a frisson not possible in a formal theatrical environment, or perhaps with a more traditional dramaturgy or aesthetic.

Finally, *peeling*, commissioned by Graeae Theatre Company, which uses alternative dramaturgies informed by a d/Deaf and disability perspective (sign theatre; surtitles; audio description integrated into the fabric of the script, etc) and a 'crip' sensibility and aesthetic.

Academics Susan Crutchfield and Marcy Epstein maintain that "Dominant culture assumes an able body. Disability is about lives; there is an art to living and showing disability; and disability is political."¹

The female protagonists in *peeling* were modern, complex, sexual women, who read *Heat* magazine, bitched about *Big Brother* and made difficult decisions about their fertility and potential offspring. Women who were, as *The Times* put it: "...(H)umorous, sardonic, disbelieving, outraged, foul-mouthed, quarrelsome, defiant" – and never victims, twisted and bitter 'handicaps' who are marvellous, considering, and always tragic but brave – which is still, unfortunately, the mainstream's representation of disabled people. I discuss developments in disability and Deaf arts and culture, with reference to live performance and 'alternative dramaturgies'.

For further information, see www.kaiteoreilly.com and www.disabilityarts.com

¹ Susan Crutchfield and Marcy Epstein, editors – Points of Contact: Disability, Art and Culture. Introduction