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17. DRAMA EDUCATION AND MEMORY

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Mapping memory onto the landscape of drama and theatre education can help illuminate the diverse ways in which practices of memory are made manifest in a multiplicity of aesthetic forms across the discipline(s). Drama education has the capacity to situate participants between history and memory, offering a process for constructing and rehearsing our own identities among the narratives of others, present and past. “Contemporary research examining memory and memorial underscores the fact that in provoking history as an act of remembrance for a new generation, we are narrating a sense of self” (Zatzman, 2005, p. 95).

How might the performance of memory invite youth to theorize their lives in performance as acts of retrieval? While not exhaustive, what follows here is a representative listing of practices of memory found in current drama and theatre education literature.

The study of memory in applied theatre contexts has been deftly articulated by Helen Nicholson who provides a comprehensive analysis of embodied practices of memory in her own work (2003); further, she positions the performance of memory as both political act and social justice response (2009). Drawing on a Foucauldian construction of counter-memory, Nicholson reminds us of the scope and promise of “re-locating memory” and asks us to consider “the different ways in which memories are shaped and reshaped performatively” (2009, p. 269). She highlights the significance of counter-memory insofar as it supports alternative voices, narratives of belonging, and the creation of community.

Drama/theatre practices that stage memory as a cultural archive of possibilities include documentary forms such as verbatim theatre/ theatre of witness/ theatre of testimony/ museum theatre/ site-specific performance and ethnographic theatre which focuses on, for example, health and theatre. These theatrical constructions may highlight remembering/forgetting and uncover traces of (self) representation in sometimes unexpected sites and documents (Kadar et al., 2005). Nora has suggested that any place, object, action, or condition is potentially a “realm of memory”, in the recovery of identity (Nora & Kritzman, 1996). Drawing upon objects and archival traces as pre-texts for exploring memory can help to make visible performances of identity and to counter historical erasure. Interviews, documents and other ephemera, for example, can be shaped to re-inscribe events/issues/sites/histories, in the present. The collecting of memories is (often) an inherent part of the gathering of data; a foundation from which to excavate textualized identities.

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and histories of individuals or communities. Anderson and Wilkinson (2007) describe a characteristic example of a verbatim theatre process:

Memories, typically free from analysis, raw and vivid, were gathered through interviews. Hours of tapes were then transcribed, edited and frequently fed back into the community as a play by the same actors who first collected the stories, as a way of triangulating the data. The theatre projects that came out of this process represented a way of understanding a shared past, a traumatic present, a diversity of truths. (p. 156)

From the multiple subjectivities and geographies that identify diasporic communities of memory in performance (e.g., Foon’s New Canadian Kid, 1989; Sher’s Under the Banyan Tree, 2005; Roy’s Letters to my Grandma, 2009), to issues of compassionate care in the resonant and alternative forms of scholarship that theatre offers to research in health (e.g., Holm et al., 2005), for example, memory is often situated as central to aesthetic explorations. Museum Theatre, using “theatre and theatrical techniques as a means of mediating knowledge and understanding in the context of museum education” (Jackson & Leahy, 2005, p. 304), not only unearths the memories and narratives held by objects, ephemera and collections (Bridal, 2004; Hughes et al., 2007), but also raises questions about whose voices/stories are heard in or are absent from museum spaces. Reminiscence Theatre (e.g., Schweizter, 2007; Wang, 2006), Playback Theatre (Dennis, 2008; Fox, 2009), and site-specific performance (Mackey, 2002). provide opportunities to “share thoughts, feelings, memories-stories” (Fox, 2009, p. 241). From facing difficult knowledge in the theatre of witness (e.g., Kaufman’s The Laramie Project; Soans’ Arab-Israeli Cookbook; McLeod’s The Shape of a Girl) or theatre of testimony (e.g., Moving On Project, 2007; Greig’s Dr. Korczak’s Example, 2004; Sher’s Hana’s Suitcase, 2006; Nottage’s Ruined, 2009) to my own work in Holocaust Education, the pedagogical and aesthetic project of memory acts to unfix the past in an effort to inform the personal and public present, both critically and creatively.

In both formal and informal educational/community settings, participants need to know that “they themselves are located at the intersection of histories, memory space and artmaking” (Zatzman, 2003, p. 35). “We cross boundaries in drama work, both in and out of role, carrying memories from the other”. As such, drama/theatre can signal both a form of witnessing (p. 35) and an “ethical responsibility that underpins this kind of work” (Stuart-Fisher, 2009, p. 110). With respect to the study of the Holocaust, witnessing is defined as receiving the obligation to re-tell, to re-perform testimony, enabling the staging of stories across fluid generational and temporal boundaries. From the outset, it is important to note that the shaping of memory is also mediated by an awareness of the very reasons for recalling particular histories. Thus, I am conscious of the necessity for artists and teachers to engage the lived experiences of participants in order to support their sense of agency and shared authority in the remembering and re-telling (Hatton, 2003; Zatzman, 2003). Further, when these “communities of memory” read the specific circumstances of