"On a Corpus-based Approach to Verbatim Theatre in the Context of Alecky Blythe's Recorded Delivery Technique"

If contemporary verbatim theatre – a type of theatre based on the actual words spoken by "real people" – can be said to have increasingly used 'the technology that gave linguists to study naturally occurring speech' (Dorney 2009, 225) over the past two decades in Britain, does this necessarily suggest that this strand of performance would therefore lend itself particularly well to a corpus-based approach? And if so, which TEI criteria (if any) for the xml labelling of these plays should be used? Next, would it be possible to develop automatic (or semi-automatic) procedures for structuring verbatim pieces?

To answer these pressing questions, this paper will first unpick the rationale behind such statements made by theatre scholars and journalists alike, before attempting to define verbatim theatre in relation to other performance texts such as oral history, non-verbatim plays, parliamentary debates, interviews and public inquiries. If the range of critical frames within which verbatim theatre has been couched would seem at first sight to have left no terrain unmapped (ethics, jurisprudence, cognitive neuroscience, intersectionality, feminism, ethnography, social research, trauma studies, translation, or even gerontology – to name only ten of them), there has not yet been any exploration of the relevance of a corpus-based approach to verbatim texts, which this paper will seek to address. Due to the evasive nature of verbatim theatre and its plurality of methodologies in the 21st century (and the necessarily limited scope of this paper), it may be necessary in a first instance to concentrate our attention on particular case studies rather than attempt to theorise a reputedly moving target. More specifically, then, this paper will focus exclusively on British artist Alecky Blythe's work and her high-profile recorded delivery technique, so as to ground these theoretical considerations in actual practice. To achieve this, this study will propose to analyse three performance texts - *Come Out Eli* (2003), *London Road* (2011) and *Little Revolution* (2014) - and interrogate the extent of their resonance with a corpus-based approach. Indeed, it will be suggested that each verbatim technique – the headphone-verbatim approach of both *Come Out Eli* and *Little Revolution* or the innovative verbatim-musical composition of *London Road* – may require the creation of new norms beyond the current standards in operation for the non-verbatim theatrical texts. Finally, this paper will aim to elaborate a series of applications (for both scholars and theatre practitioners) deriving from the utilisation of a corpus-based approach in the context of verbatim performance texts.

Bibliography

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