

H1 The Body as a Form of Representation

H2 Introduction

This paper arises from a wish to explore the connections between the learning and teaching of literacy practices and the learning and teaching of drama in schools. Drama is a relatively new subject in the school curriculum which has grown in popularity over the last twenty years, particularly in the English-speaking world. The predominant mode of teaching and learning is through improvisation (in contrast to the study and performance of published theatrical works, for instance) whereby the students are encouraged to create dramatic texts from resources that are held within them as individuals, and between them as members of social groups.

The dramatic texts constructed in drama classrooms are constituted by the bodies of the actors, and so the particular interest here is in bodies — the individual and social bodies of school students who select particular scenes and adopt different parts in improvised drama. The body is viewed here as a form of representation. At the level of the individual, the body is seen as a signifying unit, a ‘non-lettered’ form of communication. But, most importantly, this view of the body emphasises that signifying aspects of the body — sets of gestures, postures and patterns of behaviour — are formed, shaped and filled with meaning in social and cultural contexts.

This is a departure from conventional and current approaches to drama in education. Although it is not the main intention to argue a detailed critique of these approaches in this paper, it is worth briefly outlining their significant features in order to mark out the differences in perspective from the line of argument adopted here. There are, broadly speaking, two main strands of development in the tradition of theoretical approaches to drama in education. The first strand (largely connected with the work of Dorothy Heathcote 1984 and Gavin Bolton 1984) is founded on a developmental, child-centred philosophy which emphasises the power of the dramatic process for learners in forging emotional and intellectual contact with universal social and moral issues. The second identifiable strand of educational drama theory (as, for instance, expounded by David Hornbrook 1989) places greater emphasis on the learning of the formal and stylistic

The Body as a Form of Representation

aspects of drama as a cultural form. The argument is that dramatic forms of representation (live, recorded and broadcast) have great currency and power in the cultural economy. In this, it is a theory of drama which draws from the theories and practices of literary studies and media education.

What is important to note for the purposes of the argument here is that, in the first place, neither approach develops an adequate account of dramatic representation in drama classrooms against a background of the range of other modes and genres of representation. Secondly, there is little emphasis on the diversity of students and, furthermore, how the experience of ‘difference’ locates individual and groups of students in relation to the meanings generated by different modes of representation in the world — that is, that students might learn about different forms of representations in different ways. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, although dramatic texts and forms of representation are essentially devised, comprised and presented as a corporeal or embodied form, little attention is paid to the problems and arguments around the body as a form of representation.

In formulating an approach which might begin to address these problems and omissions, I shall begin by briefly sketching out some features of the two main theoretical perspectives adopted here as my main terms of reference. This paper is an early attempt at arguing through some of the problems around the body as a form of representation and, therefore, the main aim will be to draw together a basic, outline network from the two sources. The first task will be to locate the argument in the field between drama education and literacy education, and for this I will be drawing from work on literacy in the sphere of social semiotics. Within this general framework, there needs to be some kind of definition of how I see the body as coming to carry meaning — that is, to develop the concept of ‘the body as a form of representation’. This framework will then be elaborated and applied in description and analysis of two brief examples of drama work in which children act-out their own version of soap-opera scenes — one is a transcription of material captured on videotape, the other is in the form of a brief narrative.

H2 Drama Education and Literacy

The two examples of practice, fragments of evidence which I shall come to later, are both of children taking on parts and acting out scenes based on the genre of television soap
Anton Franks, June 1995

opera. To argue that the viewing and improvised production of televisual texts relates (either wholly or partially) to the processes of literacy is to make a leap away from a narrow definition of literacy as concerned with the reading and production of written texts. It is to suggest that the viewing of television is a form of reading and that improvised performance of a televisual text is a form of writing.

There are two justifications for making this claim. The first argument, specifically related to the narrow definition of literacy in written forms of representation, makes the claim that involvement of learners in dramatic activities motivates, consolidates and enhances students' abilities in using the written form. This line of argument has been fruitfully pursued elsewhere and is not the main focus of this exploration (see Barrs 1989, Robbie 1995, Neelands 1994). The second set of arguments, whilst connected to the first, operate at a broader level, viewing literacy as constituted by sets of resources of representation available to individuals and groups, which, for instance, include the written, the visual and, in this case, the televisual. These arguments are drawn from the recent work of Gunther Kress (1993) in the area of social semiotics and education. Although there are apparent formal, physical and psychological differences between the processes of the reading and writing of verbal texts and the viewing and performance of televisual texts, they are commonly concerned with the processing and production of textual material which is both available as a resource and is powerfully deployed in social and cultural life.

There are three separate points being made here which need a little more emphasis and elaboration: firstly, that there are intersections and interactions between different modes of representation; secondly, these modes of representation are seen as sets of resources available to groups and individuals; finally, that there is an inequitable distribution of these resources for diverse social, cultural and economic groups.

Over recent years literacy has evolved (somewhat problematically) into an elastic and pluralised concept which goes beyond the processes of reading and writing of verbal texts. Included within this expanded definition is the conception of visual, televisual and computer literacies. Furthermore, it is becoming apparent that there are connections and interactions between these forms of representation in social, cultural and economic life, which make it difficult to separate them and to adhere to the established hierarchies of, say, word over picture, or picture over gesture.

Increasingly, recent work on the learning and teaching of literacy has seen the various modes of communication (linguistic, visual, performative) as sets of resources available to students, firstly in the ability to interpret and process modes of communication and, secondly in the ability to deploy these resources productively (Hodge and Kress 1993, Kalantzis and Cope 1993). In other words, there exists a cultural economy of sets of communicative resources which increasingly transcends the boundaries of nation states and the boundaries between different modes of communication. On the one hand, if one has the technical resources such as computer terminals and modems, systems such as the 'Internet' allow wide and virtually unregulated access to multi-mediated forms across the globe. The easy availability of video camcorders for use in the home and for the circulation of promotional and informational material gives groups and individuals access to technology of representation. At the other extreme, access and control of resources of mediation (newspapers, national and trans-national television networks, both satellite and cable) appears to be increasingly concentrated in the hands of trans-global corporations and individuals such as Rupert Murdoch's News International. Issues of access and control, therefore, are widely differentiated along intersecting axes of individual, social group, national and international interest.

At a localised level, children 'import' their readings of soap-opera into the drama classroom, using these readings as sets of resources (in terms of thematic concerns, stylistic and formal features of their performances and so on) which are drawn on in the production of dramatic texts. Narratives and characterisations are constructed, shaped and sequenced, scenes are given content through reference to television texts in the world. For some teachers, however, this trade in ideas, representations and forms, is not validated or legitimated. It is seen as outside the conventional and educational approach to both literacy and learning in, or about the form of drama.

Whatever perspective one adopts, whether social, cultural or economic, it has to be acknowledged that access to these resources is not equitable. The interpretation and production of communicative resources is differentiated according to gender, class, ethnicity, physical and cognitive ability and so on; in other words, access to these resources determines and is determined by a person's position in social and cultural life. Insofar as school systems, curricula and associated pedagogies are to provide resources for

The Body as a Form of Representation

the education of citizens, there are heavy responsibilities on teachers to provide the greatest possible access to all students in the teaching of literacy. It is a serious project, I would argue, because ability in deploying the resources available through the processes of literacy has a great effect on the social, economic and cultural viability of social subjects and, ultimately, for the distribution of power. The examples referred to here are from the work of children from immigrant communities in an urban, polycultural environment. The diverse groups which make up the populations of inner-cities give visible, clear and unequivocal evidence of the social and cultural differences. In these locations, it is the signifying aspects of the students' bodies and their bodily dispositions — skin colour, accent, gesture, posture, gait and so on — which most clearly mark this plurality. Differences might be less visible in, for example, rural communities, but differences persist none the less.

H2 The Body as a Form of Representation

To interpret the body as a form of representation is complex. Bodies, whether live or televised, become forms of expression in the ways that they speak, make gestures, are clothed, constructed and set in particular spaces, arranged in relation to other bodies and, in dramatic representations, arranged in temporal sequence. The processes of television production and broadcast increases the complexity of constructions upon the body as a representational form, framing and constructing dramatic representations in particular forms and styles of presentation.

But it would be impossible to interpret embodied representations without a sense of the history of these bodies in social, cultural and economic life. The body, as a form of representation, is both the medium and the surface of inscription; the history and the social position of the subject is written into the formation of the body and is inscribed by the body. In developing this definition of the body I am guided by the work of the American philosopher Judith Butler (1990 & 1993) . She is mostly concerned with the materiality of the body as defined by gender and sex, considering the way in which subjectivity and physicality are constructed in history, in social and cultural practices. Her work is complex and difficult and I do it little justice by compressing and reducing it in this way. None the less allow me a quote from her article, 'Performative acts and gender constitution', published in the collection *Performing Feminisms* (1990: 272):

The Body as a Form of Representation

‘...the body is always an embodying *of* possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention. In other words, the body *is* a historical situation, as Beauvoir has claimed, and is a manner of doing, dramatising, and *reproducing* a historical situation.

To do, to dramatisise, to reproduce, these seem to be some of the elementary structures of embodiment. This doing of gender is not merely a way in which embodied agents are exterior, surfaced, open to the perception of others. Embodiment clearly manifests a set of strategies or what Sartre would perhaps have called a style of being or Foucault, ‘a stylistics of existence.’ This style is never fully self-styled, for living styles have a history, and that history conditions and limits possibilities.’

In historical contexts, then, the acts, the performative acts which render bodies visible, readable and meaningful are held within gestures, postures, facial expressions, ways of speaking, all manner of ways in which the body is a signifier and which signify intention, all constitute our social and material being. Subjectivity, identity, rather than fixed points, are the result of historical processes and are in constant transformation of history; subject positions do not have a linear history or development, they develop and are liable to change within the context of specific social relations and cultural practices. Finally, the performative acts comprised of speech, gesture and action become, according to Butler, both readable and constitutive of identity through a process of *iterability* — that is, these acts are both *repeatable* and *repeated*.

In the genre of soap opera, for instance, we interpret the subject positions of the characters by the way speech, gesture and act are inscribed by the body of the performer. Together with the costumes that clothe the body and the constructed locations and settings, the body provides both the text and the context for the enactment of social relations in soap-opera. These only become visible and readable in soap-opera from the repetition and accumulation of references — not just repetition and accumulation within the frame of the soap-opera series itself, but also through reference to other series and television genres and to the everyday genres of social type and location. In the classroom, however, the sophisticated settings and costumes of televised soap opera drop away, and what remains are the bodies of the students who construct the text. From various reading and viewing positions, students adopt roles and select scenes, which themselves are constructed around the interplay of relations between the characters.

By drawing together a theory of literacy and a theory of the body and subjectivity I have outlined a framework for approaching the body as a form of representation. The argument has picked out from a social semiotic approach to literacy a variety of issues: the connections between forms of representation; forms and modes of representation as sets of resources to which, according to social position, there is differentiated access; and, finally, that these resources can be seen as resources for transformation. At the point of production, in, say, improvised dramatic activity, the body acts as a signifier and, drawing on Butler's work, these reiterated 'performative acts' place the 'body as signifier' in history and render it visible. Although partly circumscribed by historical circumstance, the actions of the body in improvised drama signify a level of choice in the selection of word, gesture and image, and the manner in which they are combined in dramatic action. Notions of choice and iterability of representation in dramatic activity have implications for both the internalised perception of self, or subjectivity and the presentation of self in the everyday world — that is, for social position. To elaborate these points a little further, I will now turn to the two samples of evidence, applying this perspective as a framework for analysis.

H2 The Evidence of Embodied Acts

There are two extracts of 'performance text' I want to concentrate on here. Although these examples arose in differing contexts they are comparable in these terms: the chosen form of both examples is soap opera; both scenes were enacted by a girl and a boy, none of them of European extraction; the theme of both scenes could be described as 'husband abuse'. They stand out, not only because of these similarities, but also because, they both came to my attention in the space of a week in June 1994. The first will be presented as an analysis of a transcript of two scenes from a video project and, as it is in this recorded form, it will be the main item for consideration. At the risk of fragmenting the integrity of the scenes, I shall punctuate the transcript with analysis and commentary, drawing specific references to the framework outlined above. The second piece is recorded only in memory and will be presented as a brief narrative description of an enacted scene. It is included to accumulate a sense of the currency of this form of enactment and to amplify certain points of interest. Presenting 'performance texts' in these verbal forms (transcript and narrative) is always odd and problematic, especially if the object of study is the human body. So I hope it will be forgiven if the transcript appears to be presented in a 'dramaturgical' form

Anton Franks, June 1995

The Body as a Form of Representation

and the narrative is somewhat dramatised — it is done to evoke something of the corporeal nature of the evidence.

The video project came about as a collaboration between a media studies specialist, Julian Sefton-Green, a drama teacher, Bruce Wooding and his Year 9 group. It was set up as a small-scale research project exploring the notion of ‘performance’ in media education (for Julian’s account of the project, see Chapter 7 by Julian Sefton-Green in Buckingham, D. & J. Grahame eds, *Making Media.*, forthcoming). With guidance from their teacher, the class devised an episode of soap opera through improvisation and rehearsal. Then, using a basic storyboard, they drew up a sequence of scenes to construct the episode. The project carried over a six week period, and I was invited to come on the day of the shoot in week four. After this, Julian and a small group of students edited the piece and I joined them again in the sixth week for the world premiere viewing of the first episode of *Johnswood Heights*.

The first scene takes place half-way through the episode and the second provides it with a climactic ending. Both involve the same pair of actors, Rukshana and Ataur playing wife and husband. I have selected these not least for their sensational content, secondly, because the roles and the embodied performance which carries the roles is clearly marked in patterns of speech and behaviour and, finally, because there is evidence of how the rest of the class reacted to the performance on the videotape.

Rukshana(R) sits centre-right behind table, Ataur(A) sits to stage-left of the table reading a newspaper.

A: *(without looking up from paper)* A letter.

R: *(miming something with her hands, difficult to tell what the mime represents)* Yeah, go and get it then.

(snatches paper and shouts) GO AND GET IT!

R: *(reading the newspaper)* Um...is anything there for me?

A: *(sits down again)* No.

R: There must be...I mean...it’s a letter isn’t it? *(folds the newspaper)*

A: No, nothing

(R. gives him a suspicious look)

A: [...] and they ran off.

R: *(looking hard at A., he looks away)* Oh really! And now I’m deaf am I?

She leans across the table and slaps him in the stomach, A. clutches at it as if wounded.

The Body as a Form of Representation

What's that then?

Laughter from studio 'audience'.

A. takes letter from under tee-shirt, hands it to R. who scowls at him and opens t he letter and focuses on it.

The rudimentary storyboard served as a set of basic instructions to the camera operators rather than as a script for the performers. With direction from the teacher and suggestions from their peers, the performers 'inscribe' the script for the performance through discussion, action and rehearsal — the script is 'held', or recorded, only in their bodies and, until performed and recorded, it is invisible.

This not the opening scene of the episode; the generic conventions of the soap opera form have already been firmly established by the flow of scenes which lead to this point. We already know that we are in are in a culturally mixed inner-city community, but Rukshana and Ataur have the task of establishing an exact location for the scene in terms of its geography, the specific social relationships to be unfolded, the narrative line for this specific 'sub-plot', thematic concerns and so on. From the outset, they have to indicate what kind of scene it is likely to be and what relationship it might have to other scenes in the overall shape of the episode.

The simple set of table and chairs, although they are school chairs and tables, evoke a kitchen, or diner area, achieving this status partly from the conventions established in preceding scenes, but mostly from the positioning of the bodies in the set. It is only the presence of the actors, their relative position in space, utterance, gesture and action which lends any credibility to the setting. Ataur holds up newspaper, a conventional and stereotypical sign used in all manner of dramatic texts (not least in children's improvisations and soap operas) to signify 'husband'; one involved more in the affairs of the world, perhaps, than in his own family. But it appears to be a defensive gesture — he is somewhat exposed, prone, slumped in his chair away from the table. On the other hand, Rukshana is erect, protected behind the table, her posture and facial expression signalling her relative power and status. She sits firmly, not flitting around making tea, or tidying up, which might be the complementary stereotypical portrayal of wife. The pair seem detached from each other, the angle of their bodies, the direction of their gaze has no

meeting point, but despite this, their relative positions in the set serves to signify that they are 'a couple'.

The first utterance, Ataur's 'A letter', lends coherence and credibility to the signs of set, proximity, gesture and orientation established in the opening shot. It marks action which takes place off-stage, or out of shot and, as such is a conventional dramatic device which is employed with elegant simplicity. But, perhaps most importantly, this two word utterance also serves to introduce the major thematic device of the scene. As he does not alter his posture, delivering the phrase as a flat observation, he evokes an attitude of indifference which is at odds with the tension portrayed in the posture of their bodies and relative proximity. The response from Rukshana uncovers this tension very swiftly. Her action and utterance reject the inference that the letter should lie by the door, or that she should be the one to collect it. The snatching of the paper and her over-emphatic command reinforces her dominance, which is consolidated as she proceeds to read and Ataur reappears in shot. On his return, she initiates an aggressive interrogation, signalling her lack of trust in him. The folding of the newspaper and the hard look she gives him is an unmistakable signal to the audience that, given their relationship and his obviously weak attempt at subterfuge, the situation is fast developing the potential for violence. The physical space between them is then rapidly closed with her gesture of violence as she slaps him in the stomach and the audience, their classmates, respond with laughter.

The generic characteristics of the text in this instance are clearly recognisable and mostly convincing. Even without the training of actors, the dressing of costume, set and camera angle in production, not to mention all the extra dressing of post-production and distribution, it is clearly identifiable as soap opera, with narrative structure subordinated to the character development of the main actors. The 'stylistics of existence' manifest by the central characters forcefully denoted their subject status (weak husband, strong wife), and all of this was wholly or mainly inscribed in and by the bodies of the performers. Clearly, these students were practised viewers and interpreters of soap opera drama.

The context and particular location of this performance raises an important issue which, I believe, is marked by the response of the audience — that is the relation between the roles represented in performance and the everyday roles enacted by the performers as social actors. The action of this scene is framed, marked and placed as a performance in the form

The Body as a Form of Representation

and style of a soap opera. For their audience of classmates, the bodies of Rukshana and Aatur signify *both* the dramatic *and* the everyday roles of performers, they are both themselves and 'Other'. It is, perhaps, the tension of this dualism which is registered by and provokes the laughter from their peers. The resources of representation that they have access to as viewers and producers of soap opera, allow them to put themselves in another place, but as the resources are held in their bodies and represented by their bodies through action and interaction, there appear to be points of fusion between the signifiers (their bodies as themselves) and what is signified (their bodies as 'Other'). In everyday life, it is possible that Rukshana can be belligerent, dominant and with a potential for violence, that Aatur can appear to be resentful, indifferent and deceitful. Laughter arises from the ability to fictionalise 'real' selves through the representational vehicle of the soap opera form.

In what follows, the pair of performers elaborate the narrative through a development of their fictional roles and the interaction between by making explicit reference to the adult world of family finances and relationships.

- R: It's a phone bill. (*she groans, A. looks at R. from under his brows*)
(*incredulous tone, raised voice*) I can't believe this. (*R. stands, pushing the letter into A.'s face*)
Nearly 500 quid! What is ...
- A: I'll pay for it. I'll pay for it.
- R: Really! I could really [...] you'll pay it up! Who have you been phoning?
- A: Friends.
- R: As if you have any friends! Most people you know are nerds like you, all right.
Laughter from studio 'audience'
- R: So who have you been phoning? I only called the office [?] [...]
- A: Most of them are the same number.
- R: (*looking at bill then leaning over A.*) Look, you have been running this up. Who is it?
- A: (*looks up sheepishly at R.*) Friends.
- R: (*over-emphasised and physical sigh, heaving her shoulders, looks menacingly down on A.*) Don't give me that! You say that one more time...
She rolls up the newspaper and holds it as a weapon to threaten him. He shuffles away from her to the far edge of the chair.
- R: Just give me that one more time.
Laughter from audience.
- A: [...] 's my friend

The Body as a Form of Representation

R: (*picking up bill from table*) I'm going to ring this number up. I'm going to ring this number up... (*clenching teeth and waving the rolled-up newspaper into A.'s face*) and if it's anything I don't like ... like ... I mean ... a girlfriend or something like that.

A: (*looking up at R.*) Girlfriend?

R: (*with gathering rage*) It is, isn't it! (*thrusts bill at A.*)

A: (*pointing at his own chest with both hands*) Who do you think I am?

R: A nerd, that's what I think you are. (*waving the newspaper weapon*) You'd do anything to go behind my back to teach me a lesson. Well let me tell you something. If you...if you don't know this, I'm the boss around here. If I ... if I ring this and I find out...

A: (*waving right hand dismissively and then folding arms*) All right, all right.

R: (*Dropping voice to give impression of real menace*) Don't talk to me like that!

Laughter from audience

(*gesticulating with newspaper*) If you know what's good for you you'll say sorry right now or you'll get a good hiding.

Laughter from audience

A. is twiddling his fingers and rubbing his hands

R: Sorry, go on! (*waving newspaper*)

A: (*sitting back with slightly nervous smile*) Sorry.

R: (*emphatically placing bill on table*) I'm going to phone it up. Right!

R. moves behind A. waving the rolled newspaper in his face. He sits, facing forward.

Here, the thematic concerns are introduced and developed through the accumulated symbolic value of secret telephone conversations, money and sex. Again, these are recognisable as conventional thematic devices in the genre of soap opera, establishing essential pivots for action and interaction in the development of multiple and interconnected plot lines. In this scene, they provide Rukshana with the grounds and ammunition for her verbal assault, delivered with rising ferocity. Her sardonic reiteration of his excuses serves to undermine his position and reinforces her dominance. The anomaly in her accusations (that a 'nerd' like him is unlikely to have friends but might have a girlfriend) invokes the attitude of others towards him only to underline the feelings of negativity held mutually between them. His attempts to placate and dismiss her suspicions and rising anger are dangerous, and this is signalled by the sequence of action with the newspaper accompanying the dialogue — first rolling it into a weapon and then brandishing it in such a way to accent her anger. He is forced to apologise under threat of violence. As a rolled newspaper is likely to have little physical effect, it becomes a signifier of her barely suppressed feelings of frustration and violence towards him.

The Body as a Form of Representation

As the threat of violence increases within the boundaries of the scene, laughter from the audience punctuates the action with greater frequency. The cumulative effect of the performance text — the selection of words, inflections of meaning through intonation, posture, gesture and the relative proximity of the actors — both enforce the authenticity of the generic performance, and conversely, relates to the audience perception of the actors as members of the peer group. In this improvised performance, the resources drawn from within the body and the body as a form of representation lend the performance a kind of double-edged realism: Rukshana is dominant and potentially violent wife — Rukshana as obstreperous classmate; Aatur as subordinated and uncomfortable husband — Aatur as uncomfortable classmate. The ‘say sorry’ routine would not be out of place in the playground, played out by bully and victim. But here it is framed in a different context, allowing the performance to serve as a commentary on both day-to-day interaction and the generic form of soap opera. At every level, this is intentioned action — scripted, choreographed and constructed — and it works at the meeting point of everyday and television genres.

Subsequent scenes show Rukshana in the launderette gathering gossip and details of Aatur’s activities, whilst Aatur is shown seeking the advice of a female friend. The following scene provides the ‘cliff-hanging’ climax and closure of the episode. It is worth including to give a sense of the consistency, continuity and progression of the performance.

A. is sitting in the same chair but a bit further away from the table. R. enters from stage-left, moving behind A. and flings her jacket down on the floor behind the table.

R: How could you do this to me?

She moves close in to A., between the table and the chair he is sitting on. She bends down to put her face close to his, one hand on the table, the other on the back of A.'s chair

R: How could you do this to me?

A: *(head bowed)* Leave me alone.

R: Leave me alone! Is that all the thanks I get? *(screwing-up her face in anger)* After I cared for you all these years. I left my ... *(pointing at herself)* I left my home *(pointing offstage-left)* just to marry you.

A: *(gestures with right hand, as if to brush her away)* What did I do? *(pointing at himself)* What did I do?

R: What did ... *(slapping his back to grab at the back of his tee-shirt which is pulled taut against his neck.)*

The Body as a Form of Representation

A. clutches at the neck of the shirt trying to give himself space to breathe.

R: You know what you did very well.

Audience laughter and murmurs of excitement.

R. looks around and picks up a piece of wood, a broken chair-leg, from upstage- centre, moves behind and to the left of A., raising arm and screwing-up face in rage and effort, swings a feigned blow to the back of A.'s head. After a beat, A. falls unconscious into a curled heap on the floor to the right of the chair. R. comes down on one knee and leans over him, shouting into his unconscious face.

R: I loved you ... you shouldn't have done this to me. You should have come and told me if there was anything going on between you. I told you. I loved you ... (*pointing off*) I had to hear from someone [...by...] the washing machine ... (*pointing off*) How do you think that makes me feel?

Bastard!

R. feigns another heavy blow, kicking her foot into the floor to giving sound-effect and extra emphasis

Audience laughter and growing excitement.

R. feigns two more blows, evenly measured beats.

R: I loved you.

Focus on the curled body of A.. We see R. move to pick up her jacket and exit left.

The first point of note is Aatur's posture and position in space which refers back to the opening of the previous scene. His vulnerability is more marked by the distance of his chair from the table and his limp posture. Together these signal a presentiment of foreboding, both for Aatur and the spectator. In his role of husband, he knows that he is in trouble, as Aatur the classmate and performer, he is aware of the gaze of his peers and how it might amuse them to see his, or the husband's distress. Rukshana's space at the table is empty and this adds to a feeling of apprehension as to the possibilities of what might fill the space. Her entrance is from behind Aatur and, in flinging down her jacket, she makes a gesture of anger before closing in on him. He remains sitting, prone, as she bends over him, face to face, to issue her first line. The first utterances are a repeated accusation of personal betrayal, 'How could you do this to *me*?' The self that is betrayed is not an abstracted subject, it is a very material, embodied self driven by passionate anger. His responses, emphasised by his passive posture, are feeble, those of a cowering child which pleads to be left alone. Rukshana takes his question — 'What did I do?' — as a declaration of innocence and a provocation to violence. The audience registers growing excitement as she picks up her bludgeon, a weapon which refers back to the threat of violence from the symbolic weapon of rolled newspaper in the first scene.

The Body as a Form of Representation

The remainder of the scene, the last shot of the episode, gathers a macabre rhythm from repeated, fragmented utterances which are punctuated by the feigned blows. It is not realistic action as it is clear to the audience that the chair leg makes no contact with Aatur's body and, in this, attention is drawn to the constructed nature of the represented action (again, the studio audience marks this clearly). Neither the verbal script, nor the choreography of gesture, posture and action could stand independently from each other. The text is necessarily populated and animated by the bodies of both performers, the resources for its production are gathered together from everyday life and an understanding of television texts.

The second piece of evidence is included because there are several elements which are comparable with Rukshana and Aatur's performance. I refer to it in order to expand on a few remaining points about the currency of the form, the concepts of performativity, iterability and subjectivity taken from the work of Butler (1990a, 1990b & 1993).

Less than a week after I had watched the screening of *Johnswood Heights*, I went to watch a Theatre-in-Education performance at the Medical Centre for the Victims of Torture. After the performance of a play about the concept of Englishness, the company had devised a workshop around the theme. For this performance the audience was mostly adult (including an actor from a British soap opera, *Eastenders*) and only four children. They were of Somali background and aged between eight and ten. Because of the unusual composition of the audience, the workshop designed to follow the performance was abandoned. Instead, the children opted to improvise a short scene based on *Eastenders*. Briefly, we outlined a scenario, set it in the Queen Victoria public house in Albert Square (a central location for this soap), with a lively eight year-old girl, Nahel, taking the role of Sharon, the landlady, and her elder brother Amul (aged about ten) being cast in role of the feckless husband, Grant. We played through a scene in which various members of the audience, including the other two children and our soap opera star, came into the pub, engaged in topical gossip, sat down with their drinks and then departed.

The final part of the scene, the dramatic climax, took place after Nahel-Sharon had closed the pub and locked-up. She rounded on Amul-Grant for no apparent reason and demanded, her face screwed-up with ferocity, 'What have you done with the money?' This simple, but evocative line was repeated twice. As her brother was quite a lot taller than her, her

Anton Franks, June 1995

The Body as a Form of Representation

face was turned up on a diagonal, her jaw thrust forward. Her arms were akimbo, her legs planted solidly to form a triangle with the floor. Amul-Grant stared vacantly, shamefacedly back at her. They held this position for a beat or two, and then the rest of the cast burst noisily into a vocalised rendition of the *Eastenders* theme tune and the short improvised scene ended.

Twice the scene was rehearsed through and then was performed to the remains of the audience (who had been refreshing themselves after the heat of the first performance). What struck me was that, although other bits of business with the ‘pub clientele’ changed through each rehearsal and the final ‘performance’, the final scene was repeated by Nahel with unerring accuracy each time — the same spatial relationship between herself and her brother, the same aggressive posture and gestures. She demonstrated a real sense of power both over Amul-Grant and the audience.

Both samples of evidence, I would argue, are very similar kinds of textual material which were generated by different sets of young people in widely different circumstances. The first piece of evidence, with our actors Rukshana and Aatur, arose within the context of a planned piece of work in school, sustained over a period of weeks, a piece of work that was intended to provide evidence for research. By contrast, the second fragment of evidence was inscribed, enacted by Nahel and her brother Amul, and generated within a purely coincidental set of circumstances. Although this is a tiny sample of evidences, the similarity in the two presentations suggests the currency and availability of the textual resources across the age range (between eight and fourteen), and that is clearly accessible to students whose home culture and mother tongue may not be English.

There is, furthermore, ample evidence, even in such a minute sample, that the primary source of these scenes was very similar sets of representational resources from which identifiably similar texts were constructed. Straightforwardly, the video material was planned, rehearsed and recorded; in the second piece of evidence, the fact that I witnessed Nahel and Amul repeat the performance three times with little variation of speech, gesture and action reveals that the performance is relatively stable and repeatable. Unlike the performance in *Johnswood Heights*, Nahel and Amul’s text was scripted only in their bodies, but none the less, the relatively stable and repeatable form of the performance clearly defines them as texts with particular generic features.

As to the meanings they derive from these sources, and the ways in which they transform the material through performance, the first observation to make is that it was obvious from discussion and performance that they do not consider soap opera to be like real life. It is not action lived at life's rate. The size of the action is larger than life and they know this, both as audience and performer. The giggles from performers and studio audience in the background of *Johnswood Heights* is small but significant evidence of this. It is life as represented within certain generic boundaries and students are capable of taking distanced, sceptical, if not critical positions.

In the discussion following the world premiere screening of *Johnswood Heights* we find the students reflecting on the genre of soap opera via their own mediation of the form. They are both more and less removed from the soap opera through engaging with textual material in this way. On this occasion, they were reluctant to operate at the level of talking about soap opera in general, or at least, only to the extent of how their production was like or not like a television soap opera. I think it would be true to say that, in general, they were mostly concerned with the performance of individuals — themselves. This was for them, though, the first time that they had tackled a project in this way (drama, media, new teachers, screenings). Critical discourse has to be rehearsed in different contexts as much as any other cultural practice.

Not being, I must confess, a soap opera follower (at least the televised kind, although I *am* interested in what children *do* with it), I cannot tell you whether both groups of children had taken these 'husband-abusing' scenes from a soap opera episode. It is clear that, in choosing to enact these particular scenes, both groups of students have, quite independently, committed themselves to exploring very particular themes. At a general level, the melodramatic and sensational content of both is really not the issue, as many teachers of drama are likely to typify these scenes as lacking depth. The selection and shaping of the specific thematic concern is of interest, however. We are, explicitly, in the domain of gendered, power relationships, and the central thematic pivot is around the control and exchange of money.

Another way to interpret the nature of this evidence is to move toward examining the problems that arise in the area of subject positions. The problems surface if we begin to

The Body as a Form of Representation

look at the points of possible intersection and rupture between the positions of the student as social subject and the student as dramatic subject, or, the social actor and the dramatic actor. Whatever the similarities and differences between these positions, they are held together in and by the bodies of these young people. In the first instance, concerning subject status, there were Nahel and Rukshana; their bodies were those of girls, but they acted the parts of women. Their backgrounds are part Somali, part Bangladeshi, part inner London, their skins are dark. Here, without ethnographic survey, I can only speculate about their past lives and the different cultural spheres they move through in the home, on the street, in school and so on. They acted the parts of Londoners, fixed in a televised, fictionalised community; a community not without its problems, but essentially a cohesive community. In the scene, Nahel, the little sister, was holding power against her elder brother Amul; the audience was entirely adult and included her mother. In performance, Rukshana, an adolescent Asian school student, was holding power over her classmate Ataur, an adolescent Asian boy; their audience, as you could hear, were their classmates in a school with a multicultural, mostly working-class intake. The boys, Amul and Ataur, were largely silent. Every time Ataur makes an utterance, Rukshana screams it back into his ear and then pounds him with repeated statements and questions, all delivered as imperatives, and, in the final scene rains down feigned blows and words with equal ferocity. For Amul, the treatment was postural, gestural and linguistic, with the twice repeated question, delivered as an imperative, 'What have you done with the money?', but was, perhaps less severe.

Do these scenes simply reproduce a stereotype of the nagging wife and the hen-pecked husband as objects of scorn and derision? Or, are these embodied acts subversive, transgressive and critical of the status quo? To what extent are they simply experienced as pleasure, what order of play is this, what is raised to the consciousness of these students; that is, do they learn anything? Nahel certainly derived a lot of pleasure out of the experience; she obviously enjoyed the experience of performance, especially with a live *Eastenders* star.

There is, perhaps one path to be followed in Judith Butler's argument about the materiality of gendered bodies. Bodies that are in the historical process of construction and reconstruction through iterable and repeated performative acts, acts which combine into a 'stylistics of existence' for the body. If the body is as mutable as signs are mutable, if the

Anton Franks, June 1995

The Body as a Form of Representation

body is read as form of representation in itself, we can perhaps begin to work on these problems that arise between the body as social subject and the body of dramatic subject. The iterability of these soap opera acts might suggest that it is possible to use the body as a the material signifier of a critical sign, a sign which might have the power to affect other kinds of development and mediated actions in other spheres. Whilst holding in mind the structural parameters in social, cultural and economic life, it might be possible to include in an account of embodied subjectivity, notions about the intersections between social actors and dramatic actors.

My conclusion, I fear, may not be very conclusive, but the intention has been more to explore some ideas and raise some questions for more investigation. I have proposed in this argument that, in the current history of the proliferation and interconnection of representational forms, the viewing and performing of bodies constitutes a form of literacy practice. The implications for pedagogical theory and practice are, in this part of the argument, picked out in relation to policy through reference to Kress's arguments about access to representational resources in trans-national and multicultural societies. In addition to teaching about the forms and styles of presentation, as in media education or certain kinds of drama practice, there has to careful consideration of the body as the material means for representing and (re)producing subjectivity. Although, this raises problems around the construction of bodies, and the formation and phenomenology of subjectivities. Butler's theories about the body in historical process, a body with the potential for subversion and critical action, might offer us the prospect of a route through these problems.

H2 References

- Bakhtin M M 1986 *Speech Genres and other Essays* Trans V W McGee eds C Emerson and M Holquist, University of Texas Press Austin
- Barrs M 1989 'Voice and Role in Reading and Writing' *London Drama Magazine* 7/ 6
London Drama London: 8-11
- Boal A 1979 *Theater of the Oppressed* Pluto Press London
- Bolton G 1984 *Drama as Education* Longman London
- Butler J 1993 *Bodies that Matter* Routledge London
- 1990a 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution' in Case ed 1990: 270-282
- 1990b *Gender Trouble* Routledge London
- Anton Franks, June 1995

The Body as a Form of Representation

Case S-E 1990 *Performing Feminisms* The John Hopkins University Press Baltimore Maryland

DFE 1995 *English in the National Curriculum* HMSO London

Heathcote D 1984 Johnson L and C O'Neill eds *Collected Writings on Education and Drama*
Hutchinson London

Hodge R & G R Kress 1993 *Social Semiotics* Cornell University Press Ithaca NY

Hornbrook D 1989 *Education and Dramatic Art* Basil Blackwell Oxford

— 1991 *Education in Drama* The Falmer Press Brighton

Kalantzis M and W Cope 1993 *The Powers of Literacy. A Genre Approach to Writing* Falmer Press
London

Kress G R 1993 *Learning to Write* Routledge London

— 1994 'Representational resources and the production of subjectivity: questions for a multicultural
society' [?]

Schutzman M and J Cohen-Cruz eds 1994 *Playing Boal*: Routledge London

Neelands J 1994 'To be Literate: Genre and Dramatic Representation' *English in Australia*
108 June 1994 AATE Adelaide

Robbie S 1995 'Learning about Writing through Drama' in Warren ed 1995: 103-125

Threadgold T 1993 'Performing Genres: Violence, the Making of Protected Subjects, and the
Discourses of Critical Literacy and radical Pedagogy' in *Changing English 1/1* Department of English
Media and Drama Institute of Education University of London

Vygotsky L S 1986 *Thought and Language* trans and ed A Kozulin MIT Press Cambridge Mass

Warren ed 1995 *Creating a Theatre in Your Classroom* Captus University Publications
North York Ontario