

*The view from ground level:
Performance methods and
transdisciplinary experiences*

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What is performance studies?

Three dimensions:

- imagining
- transforming
- knowing

(Based on Dwight Conquergood: *mimesis, poiesis, kinesis*)

Imagining: imitating, acting, representing, showing, demonstrating



events that we recognize as “performances” by conventions of separation

Imagining – the “subjunctive mood” – playful, alternatives, what if?



Victor Turner: “subjunctive mood” of the liminal state: “the mood of maybe, might-be, as-if, hypothesis, fantasy, conjecture, desire”; Stanislavski’s “magic if”; LM Bogad’s “serious play”

Initiation ritual of boys in Malawi. Image from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rite_of_passage

Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA), www.contemporarytheatrereview.org/2015/irresistible-images

Imagining – dramaturgical analysis



the analysis of dramatic composition – that is, how the ‘scene’ is constructed including what people are doing, but also costume, objects, relationships, setting, use of time and repetition, cultural resonances, etc.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lecture_hall#/media/File:5th_Floor_Lecture_Hall.jpg

Image by Facundo Patrini from 30 May 2017,

https://twitter.com/facu_pedrini/status/869713257552121856

Transforming: 'to perform' = 'to do, to accomplish'



J.L. Austin and Judith Butler on 'performativity'

Photo by Richard L. Copley

<https://www.rutgers.edu/news/i-am-man-conversation-william-lucy>

The Arrest of Diepo Negoro by Lieutenant-General Baron De Kock, by Nicolaas Pieneman (1830-1835), <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-A-2238>

Transforming: 'to perform' = 'to do, to accomplish'



Repetition and resignification



Guillermo Gómez-Peña and La Pocha Nostra
image from <https://paseoproject.org/portfolio/la-pocha-nostra/>

Knowing: experiential and embodied ways of relating to the world (and to each other)



Performance values forms of knowledge that are embodied, passed from body to body
What we come to know through doing ourselves, through being with others in real-time

Knowing: experiential and embodied ways of relating to the world



Dwight Conquergood, 'Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research', *TDR/The Drama Review* 46, no. 2 (2002)

"The dominant way of knowing in the academy is that of empirical observation and critical analysis from a distanced perspective: "knowing that," and "knowing about." This is a view from above the object of inquiry: knowledge that is anchored in paradigm and secured in print.

This propositional knowledge is shadowed by another way of knowing that is grounded in active, intimate, hands-on participation and personal connection: "knowing how," and "knowing who." This is a view from ground level, in the thick of things. This is knowledge that is anchored in practice and circulated within a performance community, but is ephemeral." (p. 146)

"Performance studies is uniquely suited for the challenge of braiding together disparate and stratified ways of knowing." (p. 152)

Knowing: experiential and embodied ways of relating to the world



Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003

“Performances function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity” (p. 2) ...

“By taking performance seriously as a system of learning, storing, and transmitting knowledge, performance studies allows us to expand what we understand by ‘knowledge.’

This move, for starters, might prepare us to challenge the preponderance of writing in Western epistemologies. As I suggest in this study, writing has paradoxically come to stand in for and against embodiment.” (p. 16)

Knowing: experiential and embodied ways of relating to the world



Aileen Moreton-Robinson, "Towards an Australian Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory: A Methodological Tool." *Australian Feminist Studies* 28, no. 78 (2013): 331–47.

"Stand point theory's recognition of partiality and subjectivity brings together the body and knowledge production, which is in contrast to the disembodied epistemological privileging of 'validity' and 'objectivity' within western patriarchal knowledge production." (p. 333)

What is performance studies?

- Performing as imagining: what is performing? What are the elements of the staging, backdrop, environment, music, objects, etc? What has been practiced?
- Performing as transforming: What is the function? What is it trying to achieve? (This might include unintended or unconscious goals.)
- Performing as knowing: What is the embodied or kinesthetic experience? What ways of knowing other than official, top-down, literary knowledge are being preserved here?

4E theories of cognition

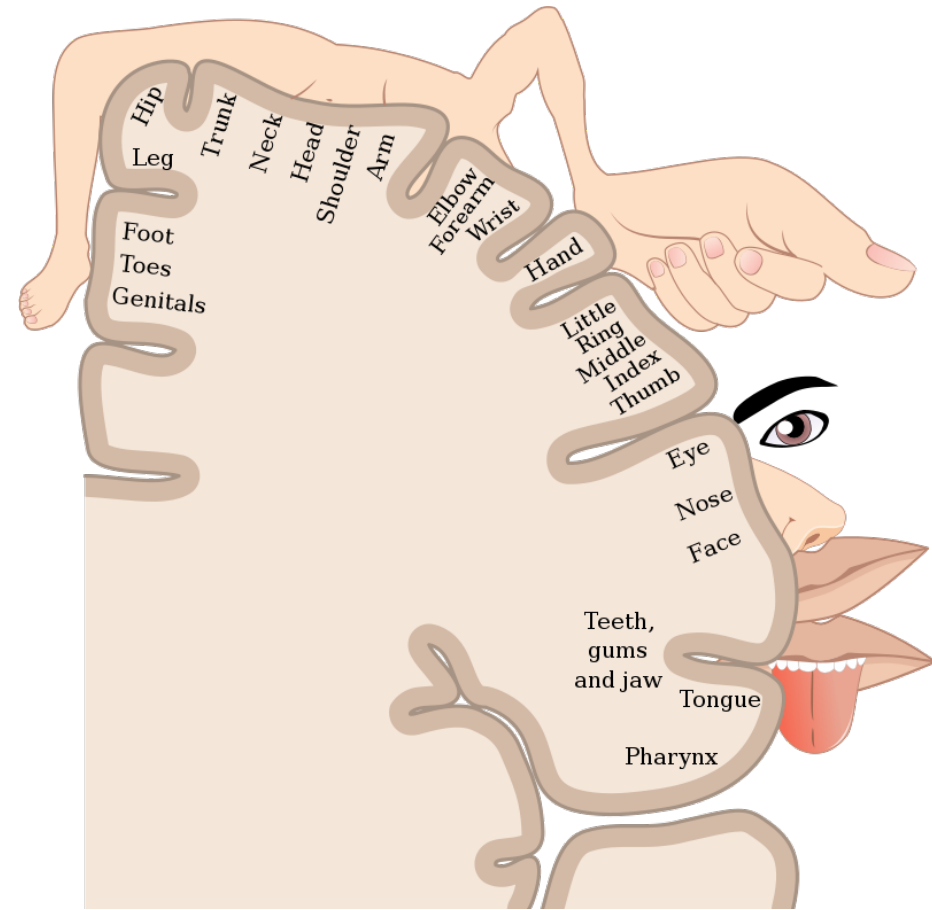


Image from
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cortical_homunculus

not a separate brain manipulating representations, but thinking is embodied, enactive, embedded, or extended.

“cognitive processes are not restricted to structures and operations instantiated in the brain, but incorporate wider bodily structures and processes”

Mark J. Rowlands, *The New Science of the Mind: From Extended Mind to Embodied Phenomenology*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010, p. 57

See also Petra Kuppens, *Eco Soma: Pain and Joy in Speculative Performance Encounters*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2022. <https://manifold.umn.edu/projects/eco-soma>

affect theory



Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*.
Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.

“Everyday life is a life lived on the level of surging affects, impacts suffered or barely avoided.” (p. 9)

“The ordinary is a circuit that’s always tuned in to some little something somewhere.
A mode of attending to the possible and the threatening, it amasses the resonance in things.” (p. 12)

“atmospheric attunement”



“An atmosphere is not an inert context but a force field in which people find themselves. It is not an effect of other forces but a lived affect—a capacity to affect and to be affected that pushes a present into a composition, an expressivity, the sense of potentiality and event.” (p. 452)

Attunement involves “attention to the matterings, the complex emergent worlds, happening in everyday life”; to their “qualities, rhythms, forces, relations, and movements.” (p. 445)

“In a situation, things hanging in the air are worth describing.” (p. 447)

“grounded theory”

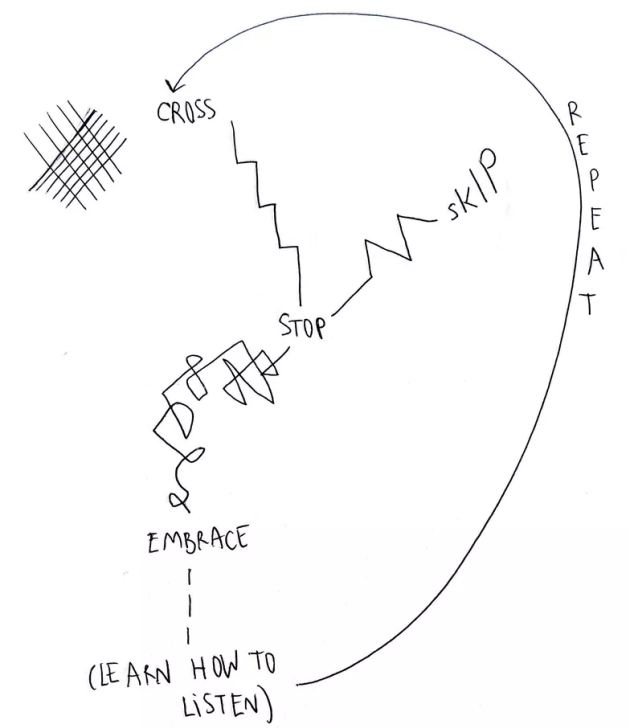
Reconciling qualitative and quantitative methods

“In discovering theory, one generates conceptual categories or their properties from evidence” (p. 23)

Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (1967; repr., New Brunswick, NJ, and London: Aldine Transaction, 2004)

Image from The City as Stage at Utrecht University





Teacher and student scores from The City as Stage course at Utrecht University

Exercise for you – experiential scavenger hunt

1. Location prompt – choose from selection
2. Observation and writing prompt – randomly allocated (draw from the bag, or use the online prompt generator)
3. 15 minutes: 5 minutes following location prompt, 5 minutes observation and writing, then upload to Padlet





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