The Embedded Researcher and the Affective Power of Performance
Brian Singleton

Theatre and performance are socio-political constructs and have tended to reflect, deliberately or unconsciously, the concerns and values of the societies from which they emerge. Their very nature also has the power to render the invisible visible, to give voice to the voiceless, and to showcase peripheral identities in society (in terms of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity and class) at the very heart of cultural representation.

Irish theatre historically has been indelibly linked to nation building and this has resulted in the erasure of identities that have not found a place in national narratives. My research has always focused on the recovery, representation and analysis of marginalized identities in theatre and performance, and my book, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre* (Palgrave 2011, revised 2015) seeks to uncover marginalized masculinities in Irish society through theatrical means.

*Embedded research in and as performance* – My current research remains concerned with marginalized identities, erased or ignored over time, but rather than focusing on textual residue in theatre, which often comes in the form of play scripts, I now focus directly on live performance: the process of its creation, its relationship with audiences and its affective power.

My latest monograph analyses ANU Productions’ award-winning The Monto Cycle, four site-responsive performances (2010–15) that told the story of the quarter-square mile of inner city North Dublin colloquially known as The Monto, over the preceding 100 years. Immersed in the sites with daily life all around, these performances blended into the present their representations of various moments of the area’s past, from its red-light colonial manifestation, to its postcolonial response in a so-called ‘Magdalene laundry’, to the loyalist bomb of 1974, the heroin epidemic of the 1980s and the human trafficking of the contemporary moment.

The second production in the Monto tetralogy, *Laundry* (2011) was nominated by *The Irish Times* as one of the top one hundred art works of the first century of the Irish republic. When I emerged from the former ‘Gloucester Street laundry’ where most of the performance of *Laundry* took place, and in which spectators were led alone through installation-like scenes, I felt compelled to talk about it, but not only in the form of research papers at conferences. As part of the rehearsal process for the third production, *The Boys of Foley Street*, I gave a talk to the company on masculinities (the subject of my earlier book), observed the research phase of the fourth production, *Vardo*, and spoke about my research as part of a Symposium, not in a conference setting, but embedded within one of the sites of the actual performance. Research thus became performance temporarily.

Eventually I sat down to interview the directors Louise Lowe and Owen Boss, studied their research materials and produced my most recent book, *ANU Productions: The Monto Cycle* (Palgrave, 2016). This is specifically written as an eBook—a first for me—because the political power of this type of contemporary culture now lies in the ‘experience’ of the spectator, and of the researcher being aware of his/her co-presence in that performance.

**Embedded research in and as performance** – My current research remains concerned with marginalized identities, erased or ignored over time, but rather than focusing on textual residue in theatre, which often comes in the form of play scripts, I now focus directly on live performance: the process of its creation, its relationship with audiences and its affective power.

**Embedded research in and as performance** – My current research remains concerned with marginalized identities, erased or ignored over time, but rather than focusing on textual residue in theatre, which often comes in the form of play scripts, I now focus directly on live performance: the process of its creation, its relationship with audiences and its affective power.

---

**Brian Singleton** received his BA from the University of London and his PhD from the University of Birmingham, and was Postdoctoral Research Fellow of the British Academy. He became Lecturer in Drama at Trinity in 1990 and Samuel Beckett Professor of Drama in 2011. He is the author and editor of six books, and over a hundred peer-reviewed book chapters and journal articles. A former president of the International Federation for Theatre Research, he specializes in uncovering and analysing marginalized identities in theatre and performance.

Contact: bsnglton@tcd.ie
Theatre and performance are socio–political constructs and have tended to reflect, deliberately or unconsciously, the concerns and values of the societies from which they emerge.
→ To read the full publication, please click here