

Stage on the page: trying out the metaphor of Japanese Noh and Kabuki theatre as a way to explore text based activities in a Virtual Learning Environment

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Abstract

My research challenge is to find a way to understand relationships mediated through a text based Virtual Learning Environment for a distance learning Masters programme in Creative Writing, and to understand in what way these relationships support - or don't support - the development of those students towards their learning goals. In my research I combine concepts and approaches that are rooted in Sociology, Psychology and Literary Theory/Creative Writing.

The focus of this paper is based in work in progress on ways of thinking about those online relationships and how as a researcher to observe and understand them. I have harnessed the use of a metaphor of Japanese Kabuki and Noh theatres to help me structure my thinking and to play with ideas drawn from the different disciplines with which I approach my research. My metaphor is built on that of Goffman (1969), with performance and stage serving as a way to understand the presentation of self. My refinement of Goffman's metaphor allows me to explore the issues associated with self presentation in this asynchronous online environment where interaction is apparently more measured and controlled. As with Goffman there are criticisms to be made of the dramaturgical analogy concerning how much conscious control there is of behaviour, but these criticisms become integral to my exploration of this environment, throwing up questions about communication and what it is to perform. My attention turns to the audience. In my research of this online environment I see myself as part of the audience. I use the metaphor to explore the role of a researcher in this context, highlighting issues of ontology and epistemology that colour how I regard 'the show'. However, in pursuing an approach informed by grounded theory and from a 'relational psychoanalytic' stance, I find myself shifting position in the dramaturgical analogy. I recognise my interpretations shaping and influencing the way I collect and understand data but I also recognise that I am instrumental in generating some of that data through the relationships between me and my interviewees. I need to regard not only my own responses and interpretations as part of my research data, but also to observe the process of intersubjectivity between me and my research participants. In turn I need also to consider the process of intersubjectivity between me and my own audience, you the reader.

Keywords

Text-mediated relationships in distance learning, metaphor for understanding, methodologies for research, intersubjectivity, role of researcher, creative writing, transdisciplinarity

Introduction

My research challenge is to find a way to understand how relationships are mediated through a text based Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) for a Distance Learning Masters (DLMA) programme in Creative Writing, and to understand in what way these relationships support - or don't support - the development of those students towards their learning goals.

In this research I combine concepts and approaches that are rooted in Sociology, Psychology and Literary Theory / Creative Writing. As such this paper is included in this symposium as an example of transdisciplinarity. I do not attempt a meta-analysis of what it is like to work across disciplines, instead this paper serves as illustration of the way I have drawn on different disciplines in an attempt to develop my understanding. The focus of this paper is on ways of thinking about online relationships in the context of a Distance Learning Masters programme and how as a researcher to observe and understand them.

Drawing on an approach used in Creative Writing, I have harnessed a metaphor to help me structure and explore ideas. My intention is that this will allow both me and readers to order ways of thinking about my research context, and open up the potential to play with and combine the concepts and approaches that I draw on.

The metaphor I have chosen is that of the Japanese Noh and Kabuki theatres. After setting out the background, context and process of my research I explain why. Turning to the audience in my metaphor I ask what they can see and what they make of the show. In terms of my research this translates into the question, how shall I as an onlooker (researcher) make sense of what I observe and am told?

Background and context

The main data collection for my research is focussed on a Distance Learning Creative Writing Masters programme (DLMA) that is run through a University Department of English and Creative Writing. This is a two year programme paced over six consecutive terms with a residential week at the end of the first year. The pattern for each term is two tutorials [between individual student and their personal tutor] held either side of a two week-long online 'conference' during which students critique each others' work and discuss issues in writing. The online conference is held within the institutional VLE which is essentially designed to facilitate asynchronous text-based discussion. Students are divided into four groups allocated according to one of the four personal tutors they share in common. This manifests within the VLE as four sub sections within one site. Students can request to have access to all the groups to monitor what is happening outside of their own, but this is not set up as a feature from the outset. Groups share a café – a general discussion area – and an announcements section in common.

Although the DLMA attracts students from all over the world the cohort I am researching is largely - though not exclusively - made up of students who are either originally from the UK or have some relationship with the UK other than through the course alone. My contact with these participants has been through SKYPE and email. We have never met face-to-face.

All of the cohort (17 students) and the four course tutors agreed to me observing activities within the VLE and I recruited six participants who would work with me more closely. Originally I had intended to follow a student group over the duration of two years, but a range of circumstances relating to the new cohort led to this not being possible, so I started my involvement with students already in their second year. Of the six participants recruited only three have turned out to be fully involved, with a further one having just partial involvement. Although a significant shift from my original plan, the data I have from the three participants is rich, reflecting a spread of different outlooks, culture and age as well as a gender balance which echoes that of the course itself. [The cohort is made up of five men and twelve women; my three active participants are two women and one man, living in Canada, Ireland and Japan.] Having fewer participants has in itself enabled me to work with each more closely which in turn has allowed me to shape the project in a way that I believe is ultimately more congruent with the methodology I have evolved.

Creative Writing programmes at this level of study are often (though by no means exclusively) built on a pedagogy that sets store by peer interaction and critique, and in the process can involve exploration of sometimes intimate issues and require participants to allow themselves to be quite open, sometimes vulnerable in discussions about their writing. My starting assumption is that the way that participants relate to one another and their tutor within this programme of study is therefore of importance to their learning.

My research focuses on the way that participants and tutors relate when the process is mediated primarily through online text. My interest is focussed on peer interactions so I do not access tutorials, though my participants' relationships with their tutors are important and inevitably come into their accounts. There are shortcomings in my data collection in that not all interactions taking place relating to the programme can be observed: participants - particularly outside of the two week 'conferences' - sometimes connect outside of the VLE, by Facebook and email, and on occasion share work through Google Docs. Although aiming to draw on these instances through participants' accounts I recognise this as an unavoidable limitation in my data. Figure 1 summarises how I see the context of my data collection in relation to the course. I have placed the interactions in the VLE as central because this is where I am able to draw from the most, but it will be evident there are layers of complexity surrounding this, each with varying degrees of influence. The diagram does not reflect the relative importance of those layers, nor for any one individual student are those influences likely to be quite the same.

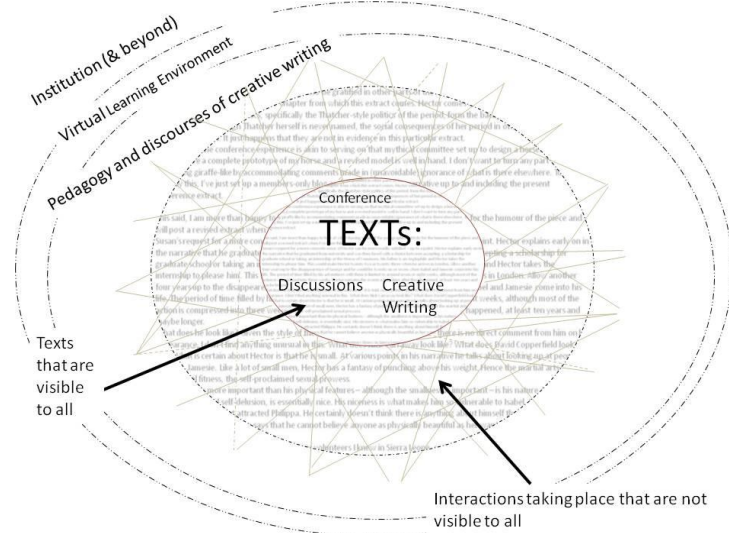


Figure 1: Context of my data collection

I set out in my data collection to gather ideas that might help answer these questions:

- What is the process of interaction between participants communicating through the virtual learning environment used for the DLMA?
- In what ways does this process affect what participants report they feel about each other and their tutor?
- Do participants consider there to be an effect on their working relationships and their learning?
- What do participants consider to be a working relationship that assists their creative writing development?
- What are the communication conventions among participants on the DLMA?

[I provide this list for context. For this paper I am focussing on ways of understanding the process of students' online interactions.]

Data Collection

Premised on the idea that the more standpoints from which you can see what is going on, the more opportunity you have of understanding it and its meaning (Charmaz, 2006, Chapter 2), I have collected data via examination of the online conference transcripts, via interviews with participants after each online conference and via my own observations, thoughts and feelings. [Interviews have been via SKYPE and recorded using CallGraph and subsequently transcribed.] Prompts for the interviews I drew from the participants' 'diaries' that I asked them to keep during the conferencing periods – intended to capture their initial response on opening messages in the VLE, 'the interpretive moment' (Enriquez, 2009: 8). Before the second and third interviews I also asked participants to complete other activities. Prior to interview two, I requested that they analyse two selected interactions from within the conference, trying out an approach I adapted from the 'voice relational method' detailed by Lawthom in Goodley et al (2004: 117). Prior to interview three, I asked participants to complete a map of how they perceived relationships within the course. Tutor and course Director interviews, and further post course interviews with each of the participants, are yet to be held.

Exploring the metaphor: Noh and Kabuki theatres

My choice of metaphor builds on Goffman's (1969) dramaturgical metaphor, where the presentation of self is regarded as a performance on a stage. One criticism of Goffman's metaphor is that it suggests more consciousness and control than is the case in human interaction, but like Ivancic (1998: 20), who draws on Billig's (1987) extension of the metaphor to include what takes place 'backstage', I find that the inclusion of tensions, conflict and layers of influence behind the stage serve to bring the metaphor to its potential. For me, to take account of all that goes on behind the stage highlights precisely the complexity of the performance 'on stage' that I identify, (see Figure 1 again). Beyond this, the attention drawn in the criticism to the elements of consciousness and control brings to the fore a question that has bubbled up for me: whether an asynchronous text based environment provides for more conscious and reflected interactions than other environments.

Furthermore, in the online environment how do 'the actors' respond to the anticipation of an audience that is wider than the interactants in their conversation?

And so to my metaphor. It was with the idea of exploring the more controlled interaction that I turned to the metaphor of the Japanese Noh and Kabuki theatre. At this point it is worth noting that I was influenced in my choice of analogy by an existing interest in Virtual Worlds, for which to me the apparent embodiment of a person through an avatar readily created a stylised, masked performer. My growing interest in online text-based environments was led by my observation that texts, including creative writing texts, were equally as revealing as avatars of the people they represented - and sometimes more intimately so. This is not to overlook that words serve as representation, that they too are symbols, equally framed and pre-designed as avatars (and can equally obscure as well as elucidate meaning), but rather a response to the more widely evident fluency and familiarity with words in everyday use - and, as well, a growing fascination with the way that they are used creatively.

So, my metaphor draws on Noh and Kabuki theatre and at this point it is appropriate to dip briefly into an account of the features of these theatre forms which serve to refine them as a metaphor for my purposes beyond Goffman's general metaphor of performance.

Features of Noh and Kabuki theatre

Noh, a form of symbolic musical drama, dates from the 14th century and was one of the influences on the development of Kabuki. Kabuki emerged in the seventeenth century as a more populist art form: a combination of drama and dance that was lively, noisy and outrageous in contrast to the refined and elegant Noh theatre. In time, though, Kabuki became equally stylised and similarly codified as Noh. While there is a story to be told about the development of these two distinct art forms (see for example, Hartnoll & Found, 1996), they do share much in common. Rather than a purist account it is a mix of their features that I draw on for my metaphor.

Performances for both Noh and Kabuki are based in traditional stories around prescribed themes. Shows are highly stylised and staged within a characteristic Noh and Kabuki theatre layout. 'Invisible' helpers [kuroko] dressed from head to toe in black to signify that they should be paid no attention may appear on stage during a scene and sometimes stay there for the whole performance. Many players wear a mask or are made-up with distinctive white face paint and painted expression. These players rehearse and are coached at great length, but in the tradition of the Noh theatre, rehearsal takes place entirely individually except for just one occasion prior to performance. This tradition is seen to relate to the Buddhist concepts of transience - every action and therefore each performance is regarded as unique and the mood and feeling of a play comes about through the interaction of all the actors in the performance itself. Both Noh and Kabuki performances traditionally last over extended periods and accounts suggest that audiences talk, eat and even sleep during the show, occasionally providing equal diversion to the performance as they call out and shout encouragement to the actors.

As a general observation, the online conferences like any organised event, have a frame similar to that of a show, perhaps looser than that of Noh or Kabuki but all the same following a set pattern, a time frame, with expectations of tutor and student roles. [And the 'invisible' kuroko of Kabuki - the stage assistants dressed in black - bear an uncanny resemblance to the Learning Technology support team!]

Perhaps the most notable feature of Noh and Kabuki are the masked or heavily made-up performers. In the English language, mask is synonymous with disguise. In my exploratory project with a group of mature students at undergraduate level prior to this current data collection, there was preoccupation by several of the participants when working online about the 'authenticity' of fellow participants, about not knowing whether others were really 'who they said they were'. Interestingly within this programme this has not been raised with me as an issue. Perhaps had I interviewed participants in their first year and particularly prior to their residential this might have been different. All the participants' accounts suggest a shift in feeling about each other after they had met face-to-face. For one of the participants the face-to-face experience enabled her to manage her exasperation with one of her group members:

And it broke down some of the misunderstandings that came when you're just dealing with it online, because I thought oh man that A, she's just so linear she's like 'what's the facts, C?' and I thought I'm not going to be able to deal with it, but she's lovely, she's a crazy woman, very funny, and ... I think that [the residential] kind of made us more accepting of each other because

we could understand where the comments were coming from in a better context. (Participant C)

The Mask and putting on a performance

A key feature of the traditional Noh masks is their design. Although the mask remains unchanged, by a tilt of the head the wearer can appear to be expressing different emotions. Figure 2 illustrates this: although the mask in the photograph is fixed to a wall, slight differences in camera position result in the same mask appearing to sport a different expression. Here we might draw the analogy with online text-mediated interactions: when asked to examine a message thread from four different perspectives, [my adaptation of voice relational methods by Lawthorn in Goodley et al (2004: 117)], the accounts from two of the participants indicated a shift in their impression of the author of the message from their first reading of him. It is debatable whether this would have been any different had the same exercise been carried out face-to-face but what distinguishes the asynchronous text-based environment is that it readily allows re-visiting and re-appraisal of an interaction. It also allows, of course, for the author of any message to refine and carefully craft their message or response in order to attempt to present the persona - or mask - they prefer.



Figure 2: Noh mask: Wikimedia Commons Public domain: source Wmpearl

One of my research participants, D, had a significant anxiety about making spelling errors or typos and since there was no facility for a spellchecker in the VLE, he always typed his messages in a Word document first to check them before pasting them across. I only learned of this anxiety through his conference diary when he recounted his worry about having for the first time typed a message directly into the VLE (it was the occasion of his birthday and he had been in haste to get out to celebrate). This anxiety struck me as particularly incongruous since D is an accomplished writer. It was only towards the end of the set of interviews that I found out from D that he attributed his spelling anxiety to the ridicule he had experienced at an early age from his school teachers. While this instance may not be about creating a mask to dissemble, it appears to be about maintaining a persona. It also links for me to orientations around formality, to 'putting on a performance'. It was intriguing to me that early on in my contact with D ever before I knew of his spelling anxiety, I had become aware that whenever I wrote an email to him I became self-conscious about taking care of the phrasing of requests, my use of language and my spelling. I interpret this as at some level identifying and responding to D's (self) judgemental eye - my response to it of course, tells more about me than D, but is also revealing of something of the process of text-based interaction.

Almost as a subtext to the debate I alluded to about 'authenticity' and self representation, towards the end of their course students in the shared café area of the Creative Writing VLE held a lengthy discussion about honesty and truth in their creative writing. The message thread was headed: 'Lying for the sake of making poems' (reference to Ted Kooser's essay of the same title in Sontag & Graham, 2001). What I interpreted as coming out of their discussion with some consensus was that honesty and truth for them was about communicating the essence of an issue. If detail of an event needed to be changed to communicate its essence better, then that was forgivable. Less acceptable, though, was where shifting detail was seen to lead to gain or misplaced sympathy for a writer.

Consciousness and control

The degree to which there is conscious control of behaviour in everyday life was a criticism levelled at Goffman with his dramaturgical metaphor (referenced in Ivanic, 1998), yet within the online environment we have the suggestion of a different possibility. Actors in traditional Noh and Kabuki rehearse almost exclusively as individuals, coming together with other actors in the show itself to create the essential mood and feeling of the play. An analogy might be drawn to this in the students' preparation and construction of their messages during their online conferences. The link in this theatre tradition to the concept of transience - that there is only one instance of a moment - is ontologically consistent with Stolorow & Atwood's (1992) concept of intersubjectivity. That is, meaning and identity are necessarily created through and in interaction with their contexts (i.e. in interaction with others and situated always in social, political and personal circumstances).

Further, within the online environment, even though all the text-based interaction is captured in full and appears as a record, it would be short-sighted to consider that its meaning is static or controlled and constant for all the players on that stage - no more than to rehearse together and attempt to pre-create the feeling of a performance would be meaningful for the Noh and Kabuki players. Each student, each participant in my research, will have accessed the messages in their VLE from a different context. I mean this not just in the broad sense of them bringing differing contexts to the environment, but also in terms of the effect of their access being mediated by technology in different ways from each other and, of course, potentially via different technologies. For example, missing one message through browsing with a poor Internet connection will contextualise another message differently than if you have followed a whole thread of a discussion without hitch, or choosing a different view or layout within the VLE - such as accessing via a mobile phone (though none of my participants have reported doing so) - may create a differing sense of message relationship. So, while there may be the equivalent of individual rehearsal off stage, once on the stage the players respond and interact with each other in a way that can no more be wholly controlled than the Noh and Kabuki performances.

The audience

It is at this point that we must turn to the audience, for the issue of ontology - that is, beliefs about 'being' / what it is to 'be' in the world - is integral to how the audience interprets the performance at a Noh or Kabuki theatre too. In Japan these traditional theatre forms are significant tourist attractions and an audience is likely to be made up of many visitors as well as those native to Japan, with differently rooted ontologies linked to cultural norms, histories and personal circumstance. Interpretations by the audience of what is taking place can vary. Lack of familiarity with the art form and perhaps lack of familiarity with the language may lead one audience member to search out only the general story theme. For another, an ardent follower of Noh and Kabuki, the focus may be on the subtleties and nuances of expression within the performance. Either way, it is possible to draw the analogy with observers of interactions in the VLE. Finding a way to understand what is taking place is necessarily rooted in a perspective. For myself, that I have an ontology that regards there as being no way things 'really are' means that I recognise that there are ways others might see the performance differently from me. While it might be a little uncalled for to include my ontological stance in casual conversation about how I am finding a Noh performance, in terms of responding to a query about how I make sense of the interactions within the VLE I regard it as essential. It necessarily colours every observation, every interpretation and every conclusion.

Grounded Theory

As a researcher I claim that my theoretical framework is informed by grounded theory, that is to say, allowing the data to reveal ways to answer my questions. It will be apparent from the account I have given, though, that this is far from unproblematic for me. To suggest that data on its own stands theory free and that it is simply a matter of collecting, coding and categorising to reveal what it holds, is to adopt an ontological position at odds with my own. Charmaz's (2006) model of grounded theory takes some account of the researcher and his/her influence on the data collected and stresses the need for the researcher to make underpinning assumptions explicit. But inherent in stressing that assumptions should be made explicit is the supposition of full awareness and an ability to see what it might be difficult to see. In this I refer not only to the analogy of sitting in the audience of the theatre and having my view obscured by a late-comer [when I can guess that I've missed something on the stage], but also to not realising the implications of a staged colour-coded signal because, without knowing it, I have a particular form of colour blindness.

In terms of data collection a further influencing factor is the level at which I look. To make my point I shall introduce here a different analogy: a beach at the seaside composed of sand and pebbles of varying size with an overhanging cliff battered by the tides. How shall I describe that beach? By its shape and sweep and location? In terms of its constituent parts - the sand and the pebbles? Is the whole separable from its parts? To understand the Noh and Kabuki performances do I need to appreciate the layers of influence on the tradition and the Japanese culture? To understand participants' relationships within the DLMA how fine grained should be the data I seek out? The frame of my attention and by implication the theory I draw out from my data is already shaped by what I am looking for, by my choice of 'lens' and by the 'magnification' of that 'lens'.

Intersubjectivity

Within literary theory Iser's (1972) conception of the reading process describes there being a gap between the writer and the reader, a 'liminal space' such that the writer's meaning and the understanding of the reader are never completely matched. It is here that I find the core of my enquiry around communication and the way that relationships are built. Hutchby (chapter 3, 2001) identifies and critiques one model of communication that he

identifies as prevailing among researchers [in the social sciences, communication studies and psychology and in certain areas of linguistics] which uses 'technological metaphors to stress the internal mechanics of cognition and the mental processing of information' - that is, a model built on the metaphor of data processing by a computer. It is this model that I identify as implicit in Iser's theory. In Iser's model, although meaning may not arrive in tact with its reader, it is regarded as leaving the writer in a fixed state. An alternative model that Hutchby discusses is that of intersubjectivity, which is not concerned with the space between interactants but the interaction itself.

This leads me to what I consider an important influencing factor in my role as a researcher. Having worked in a psychoanalytically oriented environment in the past I bring to my research a way of viewing the world that is characterised by interpretations of an individual and personalised kind. To clarify, this is aligned not to the psychoanalytic model associated with Freud [and his characteristic theory of the 'drive of internal impulses'] but closer to the ideas developed by Stolorow, Atwood et al (1992, 2002, 2011). Stolorow & Atwood (1992) contested the traditional psychoanalytic model, identifying it as rooted in 'the myth of the isolated mind'. They argue the case for a psychoanalytic model built on intersubjectivity, that is, a relational model, whereby 'psychological phenomena' are regarded 'not as products of intrapsychic mechanisms, but as forming at the interface of reciprocally interacting subjectivities' (1992:1). It is closer to their position that my orientation lies:

A person enters any situation with an established set of ordering principles (the subject's contribution to the intersubjective system), but it is the context that determines which among the array of these principles will be called on to organize the experience. Experience becomes organized by a particular invariant principle only when there is a situation that lends itself to be so organized. The organization of experience can therefore be seen as codetermined both by pre-existing principles and by an ongoing context that favors one or another of them over the others. (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992: 24)

Taking this back to the analogy of the theatre, I identify that the audience is not a 'recipient' of performance, but instead part of an intersubjective process where the audience affects - as well as gets affected by - what is happening on the Kabuki stage. The effect on the actors of audience members laughing, shouting out or sleeping might be anticipated. Less easy to anticipate is the effect of the mix of the actors' own 'ordering principles' triggered by the context created between themselves and the audience. Related back to my role in my research interviews I identify that the relationship between me and my participants also affects the data that is available, as well sometimes in small part influencing what happens 'on the stage' [in the VLE]. I am not only shaping the collection of my data by the way I make interpretations, but I am also an integral part of how my research participants give account of their performance.

Discussion

Participant P, in her second interview with me, discussed and explored her distress at the response she had received to a particular poem she had submitted for critique in one of the online conferences. I was first alerted to something significant having happened when she emailed me to say that she didn't wish to let me down and would proceed with the interview but that she wished to conduct it without webcam or voice but just through text. Once we started, however, she determined that she felt sufficiently composed and we held the interview as usual. P's keenest outrage was reserved for her tutor who had been unfamiliar with the significance of a cultural reference in her poem, a culture in which P is rooted. She was not outraged that he had been unfamiliar with its significance, more that he hadn't troubled to do a little research to find out that significance. P levelled the same criticism at all her group members in relation to other occasions where she had been required to give explanation in the absence of others 'making the effort' to do a little research. P's particular rage, though, was with her tutor. This whole issue P interpreted as a lack of cultural sensitivity, an expression of a dominant culture in relation to which her interests were regarded as marginal. As I saw it, P's interpretation was an integral part of her experience. On the other hand, the acuteness of P's rage and distress signalled to me that the issue this raised might be of wider significance to her, not least because in her interpretation of the scenario was a response that I had come to see as characteristic of her - an identification with and a passionate defence of those in less dominant, less powerful positions. Taken from a relational psychoanalytic stance I might suggest an interpretation that saw the incident as fanning the flames of an existing 'fire', a fire started in her experiences of and response to significant previous relationships that have become part of her 'set of ordering principles' (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992: 24). While I don't need to understand those relationships, I am alerted to the incident having potential meaning for P beyond the context of the course. From P's position the explanation for

her distress was subsequently framed in terms of the implications of cultural insensitivity on the fair marking of her final course portfolio.

In this scenario analysis of the associated online texts and of the interview with P may reveal the process of interaction relating to it - that is of 'reciprocally interacting subjectivities' (Stolorow and Atwood, 1992:1). Further analysis may reveal the possible effects of asynchronicity in contributing to P's experience. And further still, examination of the wider context in which P writes may reveal the relative dominance of the sub cultures within the course or within the discourses of creative writing that contribute to its setting. But for all this I argue that none of these help me understand the passion of P's outrage. In this outrage rests a significant experience that has a bearing on her relationship with her tutor and her peers. On the one hand it appears that this cannot be understood in any way other than by P's account, but on the other hand her account - just like mine - is bounded by what she is able to see, by her own frame of reference. Once again I am reminded of the concept of transience that lies in the philosophy underpinning Noh and Kabuki theatre: gathering data is neither impartial, nor meaning stable. If according to my ontology there is no way things really are, whose point of view shall I represent in my research? I would argue that the choice is mine, but coupled with that choice is a responsibility to make partiality explicit (so far as I am able) and to recognise the limit of any conclusions that I draw.

Conclusion

The focus of this paper was on ways of thinking about the online text-based relationships of the DLMA and how as a researcher to observe and understand them. The Noh and Kabuki theatre metaphor has not only helped me draw out my thinking in relation to this, but I suggest it has provided me with a thread with which to weave together the concepts and approaches of the different disciplines I draw on. This cross disciplinary mix opens up possibilities of new ways of thinking about and understanding my research participants and of understanding myself in my role as a researcher. It alerts me not only to the way that I influence and understand what I find but also to the relationship that I in turn have with my own 'audience' - you, the reader. This takes me beyond the focus of this paper to think about the ways that I write in representing my research. That though, is another story. For now, all I can aspire to is what Alvarez (2005:29) called an 'authentic voice'. In this context I interpret that to mean congruence between how I understand what it is to be in the world (the ontology that underpins my methodology), my approach to research (my method and the rigour of my method) and the way that I tell my tale.

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