In the margins of a printed page a reader scribbles immediate, unvarnished reactions. From the margins of a text she engages in dialogue with the material, analyzing and expanding it, delighting in it and disputing it, maybe even strengthening it. Perhaps it is in the “blank spaces” that surround sanctioned practices where an “interdiscipline” such as performance studies should make its home – and perhaps theatre and performance must speak from the margins of thought and experience to produce works that are innovative, engaging, and relevant.

If “being there” (in an experiential, embodied, intersubjective sense) is considered elemental to theatre and live performance, what about those people, ideas, and techniques that are excluded from being there? In this seminar, we will explore how experiences of exclusion, of marginalization, of not being allowed to “be there” might transform into something productive for theatre and performance studies. We are interested in what individuals and groups do or have done from the margins of the field: their stratagems of defiance, the allure of alterity, the illicit practices that emerge in response to elision, and the various melancholies, sovereignties, ambiguities, and possibilities offered by “being there” without belonging there.

Before the performance, who and what are excluded from the institutions of schooling and training? How and why does this exclusion occur? What changes have occurred in theatre history in the kinds of people and techniques excluded from performance training? What resistance has there been against such marginalization? What, if anything, has happened when a group or a technique that was previously excluded gains inclusion in mainstream performance?

During the performance, who stands offstage in the wings, and how do their experiences impact on the performance itself? Is the role of technical and production crews a marginal one, and how can or should this work be represented, practiced, theorised? Who sits in the audience and how do our performance practices limit the kind of people who are welcome to sit there? How have companies or artists gone about cultivating audiences of groups who are not normally found in a theatre? What can we make of self-exclusions—a refusal to perform, an anti-aesthetic, a capitulation or passivity—that seem to be fundamentally unproductive?

After the performance, whose reactions and evaluations are considered legitimate and by whom? How do performing artists and performance scholars disagree in their evaluations of performances and how do they address their differing perspectives? What are the standards for determining if a performance has “failed” and who gets to define them? What kinds of performance defy critical scholarship, and what kinds of scholarship defy contemporary performance?
We invite abstracts that address one of the above areas of inquiry to participate in a conference panel designed to encourage conversation, collaboration and professional exchange. The seminar conveners will choose 2-3 papers under each heading—Before, During, and After.

Accepted papers will not be read at the July conference; instead, seminar participants will submit draft papers of 2000-2500 words to other members of the seminar via web posting. With the guidance of the seminar co-chairs, participants will explore points of intersection and departure among the 6-9 papers, and we will use our conference slot to present and discuss these findings, not individual research.

Accepted panel participants must be prepared to submit drafts of their papers for circulation by 1 June 2006. Seminar members will be expected to have read all the papers and to have been in contact with other members well in advance of the July conference.

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