

## **Surveying the Self: mobilising embodied artistic research to reclaim and reframe disability narratives in a Theatre and Performance department in Johannesburg**

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“The ambiguous decision to perform one’s body, to enact a drama of activity and passivity within one’s physicality opens up new chapters for disability narratives – and for performance” (Kuppers, 2001:39).

Part poetics, part politics, this paper integrates conventional research and narrative reflection in a performative exploration of my own experience as a disabled theatre maker and academic in the broader context of decoloniality and transformation imperatives at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa. Disability, as an identity marker and as a minority culture, is largely misunderstood, stigmatised, and ignored; and its artistic potential is underutilised. As part of a larger research project which intends to design and execute a performance studies curriculum that prioritises disabled students and centralises their embodied and tacit knowledge as innovative members of South Africa’s artistic community; this paper imagines a more socially just, progressive and inclusive personal and pedagogical paradigm from which I wish to operate; and out of which I hope to generate productive and necessarily complex discussions about the transformative potential of embodied performative research as a tool with which to reclaim and reframe disability as an artful and ingenious existence. Through positioning myself as an academic storyteller, I aim to mobilise the natural intersections between live performance as an embodied experience of socio-cultural representation and communication, and disability as an embodied experience of difference to subvert problematic assumptions and heteronormative discourses that continue to define and limit the disabled artist in the university space and beyond.

**KEYWORDS:** Disability, Theatre and Performance, higher education pedagogy, embodied artistic research, decoloniality

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