
PERFORMING ARTS

WHY PERFORMANCE MATTERS

FREE



MUSIC

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WELCOME

EDITORIAL

Jessica Mitchell | Intellect

AT INTELLECT, WE BELIEVE ABSOLUTELY IN THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PERFORMING ARTS.

The genesis for this magazine was the enquiry, 'Does performance matter?' A pretty silly question to ask the leading lights in performance studies, some might say; but as the recession bites we're all being forced to justify the validity not just of the performing arts, but of 'The Arts' in general.

For all the contributors to this magazine, notions of validity are understandably intertwined within the realms of their own specialism – be that punk music, stand-up comedy, Shakespeare, a nineteenth-century French satirist, disability culture, or applied theatre – but for all that diversity there was a common thread: the solace of being alone together in one room, participating in something that only exists in that moment. For that kind of intimacy, for *mono no aware*, only performance will do.

At Intellect, we believe absolutely in the importance of the performing arts – for the sake of the process, for the sake of the product, for the words, for the rhythm, for social change, for democracy, for catharsis: to empower us, to inspire us, to improve us. And because we believe in it, we will continue to provide a platform for performance research, in all its many forms: to campaign for the validity of ideas per se, rather than the commercial validity of an idea. We owe as much to the performing arts community, to our authors, editors and contributors, and to everyone else for whom it matters.

NO MORE HEROES

Phil Kiszely, Editor, *Punk & Post-Punk*

What first attracted you to punk music and its subculture and what did it mean to you growing up?

Rather bizarrely, it was TV's *Pop Quiz*, featuring Duran Duran and Spandau Ballet. It was probably a Christmas special and it was probably 1983, which means I was the ripe old age of 12. It featured footage of the New York Dolls (a clip from their 1973 *Old Grey Whistle Test* appearance, if I remember correctly; the one that inspired the first wave of punks to form bands) and I was completely blown away. Quite simply, I'd never seen attitude, swagger and cool like it. I immediately became an avid Dolls fan, and very soon afterwards quite the little aficionado of the 70s New York underground. When I read about fellow Mancunian Morrissey's obsession for the Dolls a few years later, I was struck by its similarity to mine.

As I grew through my teens, I loved the indie scene of the mid-80s. I was very lucky to have an older brother who spent a fortune on records every week, and I just soaked it all in. But most of all there was something really special about Manchester in those days: the Buzzcocks-Joy Division heritage, of course, but also The Smiths and 'Madchester' identities. Heady stuff, no doubt about it, and I loved every minute of it. I remember being 15 and cheekily saying hello to Tony Wilson one bank holiday Monday in 1987; it was at the International 2 venue, and The Happy Mondays were sharing a bill with The Fall (along with local favourites The Bodines and The Man from Delmonte). It seemed to me that I was at the centre of the universe.

The thing was that, in those days, the post-punk/indie scene was truly alternative and quite enigmatic. You either knew about it and were part of it, or you didn't

and weren't. And in that spirit of running counter to the mainstream, I started exploring rock 'n' roll music from the past - psyche, 60s garage punk, rockabilly, northern soul - and found that I adored it. So for me as a teenager, punk was a portal to interesting music and style, first and foremost. And from that came a deeper interest in culture. It was a lens through which to view everything that was going on around me.

What drew you to the idea of editing an academic journal on punk?

It literally was a question of, if I don't do it now someone else will soon. On 9 September 2009, I co-hosted (along with my University of Leeds colleague, Dr Alice O'Grady) an international conference called Post-Punk Performance. We had such a great selection of papers, and the event was such a resounding success, that the seed was planted in my mind that day. Author Alex Ogg agreed to lend his expertise and co-helm the project, and both of us put together a proposal for Intellect.

Punk is one of the most important moments in pop culture history, and we wanted to understand how and why it resonates so deeply. We worked on the simple premise that punk and post-punk pervade most aspects of contemporary culture in one way or another. Popular music, certainly, but also fine art, contemporary theatre and performance, film, modern dance, live art, fashion, stand-up comedy - all of these spheres acknowledge some kind of debt. We thought we'd explore the connections.

How does such a potent form of anti-establishment counter-culture sit with the Academy and its ethos?

The Academy should push bound-

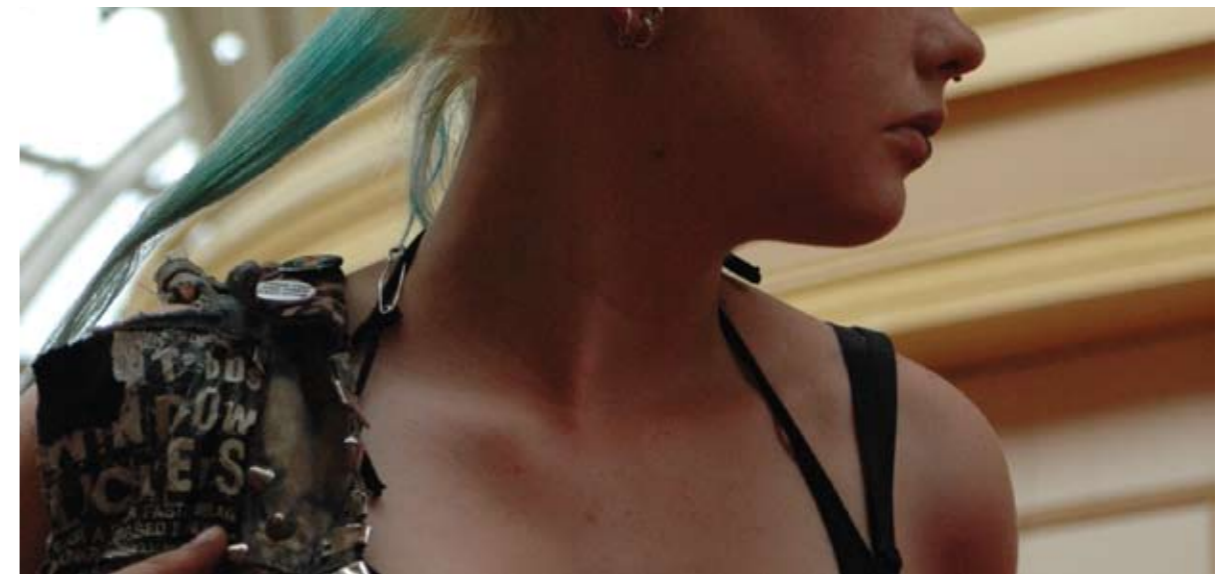
aries. That's what academics are here for; it's in the job description. I lecture in theatre and performance and I'm interested in creativity, not just in professional contexts but also in communities. The DIY aspect of punk is particularly fascinating to me - fanzines, websites, clothes, venues, bands, you name it. I like to be involved, in one way or another, in that creativity.

And it's massively important to document and analyse. Some marginal aspects of punk cultures are very distasteful to me - extreme right-wing politics, for example. Although punk does, as a whole, tend to favour socialism, Marxism or anarchism, there isn't really a definite ideological or political cohesion. Bands, musicians and practitioners can be found on all points of the political spectrum. This sociopolitical aspect, which also feeds into a class question, both reflects and reacts against the wider cultural moment. As a scholar, one of the things I'm really interested in is the complexity of that relationship.

It sounds like *Punk & Post Punk* is profoundly multidisciplinary. Why is this so important to the success of the journal?

It's absolutely multidisciplinary. As I said earlier, one of our primary aims is to understand the breadth of punk's impact. And the multidisciplinary aspect reflects the direction most arts research is taking at the moment. For me, it's not just about the subject matter; it's also about interdisciplinary research methodologies. Alex and I are both keen to showcase an array of rigorous approaches to punk and post-punk cultures.

One of the interesting things about the journal is the fact that industry personnel are involved. Alongside peer-reviewed articles, every issue will feature interviews



with musicians and practitioners. Of particular delight to me is the fact that Billy Rath (of Johnny Thunders & the Heartbreakers fame) has agreed to speak to us. Similarly, my good friend John Robb (author, journalist, Membranes, Goldblade) is on the advisory board.

What are your aspirations for the journal?

I'd like it to be recognized as a groundbreaking publication. Hopefully, it will develop over the next few years to become the main point of intersection between academy, industry and media.

Who is your favourite punk artist or performer and why?

I like the proto-stuff - the 60s garage punk that can be found on Lenny Kaye's seminal *Nuggets* album, as well as series like 'Pebbles' and 'Back from the Grave'. To me they have all the best qualities - raw, energetic, naïve, arrogant, charming...

But if I had to choose one artist, it would be The Stranglers. I think they are probably the most interesting and misunderstood band in the history of popular music. Albums like *Black and White*, *The Raven*, and (*Gospel According to*) *The Meninblack* are as creative, groundbreaking and brilliant as anything I've heard. The Stranglers have been completely marginalized over the years, written out of the story. History tends to favour the relatively safe political correctness of The Clash, who consequently

now even challenge the Sex Pistols as the ultimate punk icons. The Stranglers, by contrast, are always cast as the misogynist villains of the piece, but that's a gross misrepresentation of their ironic humour and incredible talent.

Punk has exerted a great influence on popular culture, but it has also, arguably, been commoditized and mythologized. Where do you see the importance of authenticity and does this concept still matter?

Everything from the past gets repackaged to fit the present. The same can be said about commercialization and mythologizing. It reminds me, in fact, of that great line in *Withnail & I*, 'They're selling hippy wigs in Woolworths...' I think punk was commoditized and commercialized almost straight away; hip hop, of course, suffered the same fate, although it took longer to happen. In fact, anything that is truly oppositional gets diluted and absorbed into the mainstream sooner or later.

That element of 'London post-card punk' will always be there, but that uniform-genre mentality is the very antithesis of punk. The original ethos continues to make itself felt very strongly, though. And that legacy is remarkable. Punk spawned the independent record label explosion, for example, which was home to a proliferation of styles and sounds never seen before, or since, in popular music. For me the real spirit of punk can't be bottled and sold. If you think about the first British acts - the

Sex Pistols, The Stranglers, The Clash, and The Damned - they were all totally different; they shared an energy and irreverence, but that was it. The whole point of punk was originality and assertion. And it still is, whether it's music, alternative comedy, the dance of Karole Armitage, the art of Damien Hirst, steampunk retro fashioning, vegan and alternative lifestyles, queer politicking, body modification, protesting in the street. The list goes on, and it all relates to, or references in one form or another, punk.

What does the future hold for punk and post-punk music and culture?

I think we're at a very exciting juncture. This postmodern moment dictates that absolutely anything is possible. Technology has revolutionized DIY culture. Punk in action was the Rage Against the Machine vs X-Factor Facebook campaign. Punk in action was the Arctic Monkeys achieving fame via MySpace. Punk in action was students occupying administration buildings and taking to the streets in protest over fees. I look forward to the next big thing, whatever it may be, and the journal will be there to explore it in-depth.

Read on... Phil Kiszely |
University of Leeds
Editor: *Punk & Post-Punk*,
ISSN 20441983

DISABILITY CULTURE AND PERFORMANCE

Petra Kuppers, Project Director, with Lisa Steichmann and Jonny Gray



Image: ©Lisa Steichmann. Left and right, Olimpias Tiresias workshop, Rhode Island



In 2007/2008, the Olimpias Performance Projects hosted *Tiresias*, part of our explorations in community performance and disability culture. We reinvented the blind seer, the hermaphrodite who lived both as a man and a woman, the old man with his staff, who speaks her oracular words and watches the world go by. Disability artists from across the US and beyond came together under her/his name, and explored what it means to be visible. Tiresias is never the protagonist in the old Greek dramas, but always in the background: in *Oedipus Rex*, in *Antigone*, in *The Bacchae*. We take her out of the shadows, and take on his mantle. In our project, we played with video, wrote poetry, and created a photo exhibit of gorgeous wet-process photography. We ran performance workshops in theatres, on beaches, in parks, on university campuses, near lakes, at Centers for Independent Living, in classrooms, and explored together how to use art practice to find beauty in change, and how to reclaim old images. We revealed ourselves, and shrouded ourselves. All photography was process work: photos were not

released without an extensive process of permission and reflection, and many of the *Tiresias* photos will remain part of our unseen archive, never to be shared in public.

No one performance or exhibition was the end point of *Tiresias*. The ongoing dialogue and unfolding thought patterns of our processes are our product. We wrote to each other after each workshop, created knowledge through artistic collaborative practice, used feints and trickster methods to explore disability representations. Most of the people in the project identify as disabled, and all of us share a commitment to social justice and a belief in the transformative power of the arts. Here is a short excerpt from our conversations.

Petra (Project Director)
Tiresias shoot, Rhode Island

We are working at the Wildlife Refuge Center. Over lunch, a Narragansett Indian woman spoke to us of the traditional wisdom embedded in the area, and she spoke of cup and saucer stones: huge boulders that



NO ONE PERFORMANCE OR EXHIBITION WAS THE END POINT OF *TIRESIAS*. THE ONGOING DIALOGUE AND UNFOLDING THOUGHT PATTERNS OF OUR PROCESSES ARE OUR PRODUCT.

lie on top of stone tablets. When put in motion they rock back and forth, creating vibrations in the earth that communicate to the next set of stones, miles and miles away. A deep, sonorous boom sounds when these boulders, erratics placed in the landscape by retreating glaciers, become mobile. Erratics in the landscape: unusual shapes, yet natural, belonging to, belonging of, belonging with.

Touposett Pond is a deep, dark pond, out in the woods. It is full of green young shoots, lichen nearly fluorescent: tendrils spreading across moss, across rocks, over fallen trees. Everything is alive, and recycling, and spinning with the vibrancy of full juice. The pond is still, although chipmunks and many birds trill around us.

Our step into Tiresian land is enabled by poetry. Ana Flores, a long-time Olimpias collaborator, has placed poetry boxes along the path, as part of her *Punctuating Place* installation. The boxes hold journals and pens, and visitors are encouraged to engage creatively with the confluence of site, their visit, and the sounds and senses of the world on the forest path. So just before we come to the pond, we write poems into Ana's book, about the birds that turn Jonny's bird-watcher head, and about the lichen-covered rocks around us. We step down to the pond and shed our clothes, lean against an old tree, against each other. I feel the dark humus of pond debris smear onto our naked bodies. I relax into it all. Lisa exposes her films.

Lisa Steichmann (project photographer)

This is the wildness I sense in *Tiresias*: here we are

getting right into it. I step around ferns that are barely coming up and unfolding, the light is soft through the overcast sky, a softness of forms against the damp, broken ground, the rocks with all the moss. I keep thinking about the thorns that snatch at us, snagging and clawing and poking. The beautiful tension between the skin and the organic decay all around us, fully away from the human-shaped environments we've been working in. Everything emerging, uncurling, and coming up from the earth: a birth all around us. It feels as if there are twenty different languages spoken at once: the bird songs around us, so close.

Jonny Gray (performance artist and performance studies scholar)

Tiresias is notoriously oblique in the way he answers questions. He predicts the future, but rarely to the benefit of those who seek (?) his advice. Only afterwards – usually tragically – do his predictions prove useful: so too, Petra – though minus the tragic consequences. I meet her and Alison and Lisa for dinner at an Indian restaurant in East Greenwich, RI. I am late because my capacity to follow directions is confounded by my frequent inability to ask for them. These three women are welcoming when I finally arrive, but clearly laughing together over inside jokes about red satin and photo shoots. A late e-mail might have provided clues, but we are collectively uncertain about what it contained. I, certainly, am clueless and trying to catch up over samosas and poppadums. Petra diverts my enquiries in her sly way – 'All will become clear,' she tells me. 'Oh, and am I comfortable with nude photography?'

How do I say 'Yes' – because I am – and yet still mark how startled I am at the request? What *is* going on?

On the other side of the (first) photo shoot, I am still not entirely certain I know the answers to any of my questions. For me, though, uncertainty is a central part of *Tiresias*. Why must I know? It will happen. Art goes on. And so, I follow suit (pun intended) and strip: drape myself in red cloth, move and embrace and follow directions. As Petra and Alison join me or do their own posing, I try to be observant but not prurient – a fully present audience with active feedback, but not a vocal voyeur. And yes, I do connect. In part, I draw on my limited queer experience of the 'hook-up' – those anonymous, brief sexual encounters with men just met. Dominant culture tries to tell me that such encounters are shameful. Yet I have always experienced them as sex-positive articulations of brotherhood, of community. My photo shoot with Petra and Lisa and Alison is not sexual in the way of those hook-ups, but it does similarly involve overcoming societal norms of appropriate contact, skin on skin. It is beautiful to me in a similar way.

So there I am in a hotel room with women I've more or less just met, each of us being brave with each other, being present to each other, being intimate with each other, making connections in the name of art and community and process.

True to her Tiresian augury, there *was* red cloth involved, there *was* nudity, and there *was* photography. The predictions, in other words, came true. I have had encounters, embraced difference (literally, even)

and challenged myself to know myself through such encounters. We move bravely from strangers to new friends to a community with an interesting, immediate history. And if uncertainty remains, wasn't it always there in the first place? Won't it always be there to some significant degree? And isn't that part of *Tiresias*'s lesson?

Now, at the end of our weekend, we've taken pictures together in a hotel room, we've taken pictures together in the woods, we've taken pictures together on the beach. We've shared meals and shared art together, the life sustaining forces of each sharing curdling into a hybrid and indeterminate form of vital sustenance. And I, for one, feel healthier for it.

Read on... Petra Koppers | University of Michigan
Contributor: *Choreographic Practices*, ISSN 20405669
Editorial board member: *Journal of Arts & Communities*, ISSN 17571936

More about *Tiresias* and other Olimpias Performance Projects can be found in Petra Koppers, *Disability Culture and Community Performance: Find a Strange and Twisted Shape* (Palgrave, 2011).



A BAD PERFORMANCE OF A FINE PLAY IS LESS ACCEPTABLE THAN A FINE PERFORMANCE OF A BAD PLAY.

Peter Thomson

Why performance matters

When a journal that had started life in 1990 as *Studies in Theatre Production* was – by a slippage subtle enough to maintain the initials STP – reborn in 2000 as *Studies in Theatre & Performance*, the change of title recorded a shift of focus that was already well established. ‘Theatre’ is felt by many to be too housebound to stand alone. The new millennium acknowledges the primacy of performance. Armies ‘perform’. So do banks, universities and the NHS. However slender the content, there is always form in the conduct of public life. Britain’s got talent. Whether or not you are an admirer of the current prime minister’s public-school performance of sincerity, you can scarcely doubt that he’s a better performer than Gordon Brown was or Ed Miliband is. That’s why he was ‘almost’ elected in the first place, and why he now looks so smug during the gladiatorial combat of Prime Minister’s Questions.

I haven’t much time for the more convoluted applications of performance theory. They tend to neglect the intervention of the actor. A bad performance of a fine play is less acceptable than a fine performance of a bad play. I would rather have seen Henry Irving in *The Bells* than suffered in the audience at one of my children’s school-play treatments of Shakespeare. The self-exposure of a ‘real’ performer is exhilarating. There is no disjunction between brain and body, and the voice serves its purpose. Many of the clever people teaching drama and related subjects in universities and elsewhere are less interested in plays and actors than I am. The bloodlessness of virtual performance and post-dramatic theatre deters me. And I haven’t much interest in eavesdropping on the dialogues that performance theorists tirelessly conduct with each other. But I hope my own prejudices and limitations are not too obviously reflected in *Studies in Theatre & Performance*. It probably isn’t a ‘fashionable’ journal, but it is an uncommonly open one.

Read on... Peter Thomson | University of Exeter
Editor: *Studies in Theatre & Performance*, ISSN 14682761

A CIVIC ART

Monica Prendergast and Juliana Saxton

Adapted from *Applied Theatre: International Case Studies and Challenges for Practice*

Theatre has long occupied the role of providing means for talking back to power. Across many cultures and traditions over time we can trace patterns and instances of groups of people using the stage as a space and place to tell the story of their lives. This aesthetic and emotional outlet allows for potential *catharsis*: a safe way for citizens to express their concerns, criticisms and frustrations to each other and to society at large. And often that opportunity has been enough. Some examples of this kind of theatrical expression are to be

like Henrik Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw and Bertolt Brecht offer a theatre of social criticism, debate and, in Brecht's case, potential revolutionary action. More contemporary playwrights such as Caryl Churchill, Dario Fo, Wole Soyinka, Ariel Dorfman, Tony Kushner, Anna Deavere Smith and others, have focused much of their writing on exposing and exploring social and political issues. Applied theatre is informed by these plays and playwrights to the extent that they offer clear models as to how effective theatre can tackle a range of topical

APPLIED THEATRE IS AN ART FORM THAT CAN ONLY HAPPEN BECAUSE IT MATTERS.

found in the social dramas of rituals such as carnivals, Feast of Fools, initiation rites, trickster figures in myths and legends, and the servant figure in drama who has more power in the world of a play than his or her masters. The roots of Greek chorus, *commedia dell'arte*, Molière, Shakespeare and, closer to our own time, the comedies of Shaw and Coward, for example, have always been fed by this power reversal, which is sanctioned and accepted within the protected space of the fictional world of the stage.

In modern western theatre history, playwrights

issues and provide an aesthetic site for their considered examination.

Martin Esslin (1976) writes, 'All drama is... a political event: it either reasserts or undermines the code of conduct of a given society'. Applied theatre works overtly either to reassert or to undermine sociopolitical norms, as its intent is to reveal more clearly the way the world is working. There are many genres of applied theatre: reminiscence theatre, community-based theatre and museum theatre are most often reassertions and celebrations of memory and history; on the other hand,

theatre of the oppressed, popular theatre, theatre in education, theatre for health education and theatre for development are most often focused on challenging the status quo and presenting new possibilities in order to promote positive social change. Other genres, for example, prison theatre or documentary theatre, may fall within either camp, depending upon intention and context. Applied theatre uses reassertions in order to re-examine the world, to discover how it works and our place in it; such examinations have the potential to be educational, reflective and/or rehabilitative.

In 1993, Marvin Carlson pointed out that 'the continuing point of debate in modern theatre theory has been over whether the theatre should be viewed primarily as an engaged social phenomenon or as a politically indifferent aesthetic artefact'. That debate continues. Herbert Blau (1990), who sees theatre as 'life showing itself to life', asserts that theatre is a public art that should function at the dead centre of community. Blau, like Brecht before him, believes that theatre should force the audience to confront its obligations and responsibilities, and by the middle of the twentieth century, theatre makers began to take up Blau's challenge, recognizing audiences as integral to the wholeness of a performance. But after a couple of centuries of being quiet and in the dark, traditional theatre audiences did not always take kindly to this new attention. Applied theatre audiences are more willing to participate, however, because they are being actively engaged in matters that are of significance to them.

Changes and developments always occur inside the

wider sociopolitical and economic movements of their time, and by the end of the last century, theatre had been influenced by such things as the fall of the Berlin Wall, feminism, globalism, the space race, chaos theory, and the rise of the individual, who was now ready to question authority and ask 'Who holds the power?' and 'By what right?' Such questions and concerns, together with wars, global warming, and the increasing disparity between rich and poor, continue to engage and trouble us. Today, around the world, applied theatre projects are specifically designed to join spectators, actors and performance in a communal celebration of experience, or to act as prompts for conversations about issues that concern communities.

But applied theatre is not only local in its attention to the everyday world, it is also concerned with the greater issues of active citizenship and democratic practice, all framed in the aesthetic structures of theatre: the most social of art forms. This participant-driven negotiation of the aesthetic with the everyday, infused with those wider concerns, results in the variety of forms of applied theatre – a civic art that functions at the living centre of its communities – an art form that can only happen because it matters.

Read on... Monica Prendergast and Juliana Saxton | Lesley University and University of Victoria
Editors: *Applied Theatre: International Case Studies and Challenges for Practice*, ISBN 978841502816



STAND UP

Chris Ritchie, Editor, *Comedy Studies*

In comedy there is nothing quite like the live performance. Now more than ever we can access comedians on TV, on talk shows, quiz shows and sitcoms; we can access archived live performance on the Internet – most notably YouTube (an invaluable source of research material) – and buy any number of DVDs from Amazon or high street retailers. However, we access these as documents, and have no influence on the outcome or performance. The joke remains the same. We may often find ourselves only mildly amused at a gag, wondering why the original audience are laughing uproariously. This, of course, constitutes the obvious difference between being there as it is happening and watching others who were there as it happened. A comedy performance is often intimate but also direct: an experience that we acknowledge can never be repeated. Although a comedian can do the same 20-minute-set night after night, there are a great many variables that affect the delivery and reception of that performance: variables such as what day of the week it is, how much the audience have drunk, how much the comedian has drunk, who was on before, how late on the bill the act is, what the venue is like and how frequently the comedian has performed the set. In the theatre the audience has an effect on the performance: every actor can detect whether the audience is with them or not. In comedy the effect is even more direct: if it doesn't get an immediate laugh it isn't working. This has an effect on the confidence of the comedian, the confidence of the audience and the standard of the performance thereafter.

Live performance matters to the performer and the audience for different reasons. For the performer the live context is immediately gratifying (or depressing, depending on reaction): each laugh is an indication of the progress of the performance and the approval (or not) of the audience. It is a chance for comedians to communicate directly, to speak to people about the things that motivate, annoy or perplex us. For the audience the live experience is a democratic one: everyone has an input into the progress of the show and has the privilege of being there as it happens. In some cases we come away having learnt something we may not have known before, or having seen something familiar in a new light.

THE LIVE EXPERIENCE IS A DEMOCRATIC ONE: EVERYONE HAS AN INPUT INTO THE PROGRESS OF THE SHOW AND THE PRIVILEGE OF BEING THERE AS IT HAPPENS.

Max Miller (d. 1963) was one of the most influential British comedians of all time, not directly but because he influenced people who influenced others who had never even heard of him. There is very little footage of Max performing, apart from a rather tame and badly edited clip from *Hoots Mon!* (1940), which really does not show him at his best. When we look back at this kind of material we wonder 'Why was this risqué?' or even 'Why is this funny?' But if we had seen him live it would have been different: it is not just the jokes but also the enormous charisma of the performer, the era in which he was performing and, of course, the very fact of 'being there'. The laughter and warmth of the crowd, even in the most banal of clips, is telling. Many people now will probably never 'get' Max, but rather than looking at the act itself we should look at the audience to gauge the effect he had on folk.

Personally, the best live performance I ever saw was Bill Hicks at Nottingham Trent University in 1991 after seeing his HBO special *One Night Stand* late one night on Channel 4 (it featured a long conversation on his sexual politics – which were deemed dubious!). Seeing him perform live, in relatively relaxed mode, to a generous audience housed in a venue that resembled a school assembly hall, was memorable. He revisited bits that are now acknowledged as 'standards' then started taking subjects from the audience to improvise on: someone shouted 'philosophy' to which he replied 'If I tell a joke in a forest and there's no one to hear it, is it still funny?' He ended the show – which overran as he was clearly enjoying himself, despite the fact that he was suffering from the pancreatic cancer that later did him in – by grabbing a girl from the audience and

carrying her offstage. How very rock 'n' roll you may say, but being there, seeing him move effortlessly from his set to improv to this finale, was impressive. And that's something you don't get from a DVD.

In the UK there is no lack of comedy venues – be they theatres, pub gigs, concert halls, or festivals – and they all create different responses. For comedy the best performances are when the audience is there for a specific performer; when that audience know roughly what to expect and are generally supportive. This differs on nights with relatively unknown acts – most if not all of whom the audience have never heard of. This can work out in various ways. Performing live comedy at one of the many festivals around the UK can be an unpredictable and challenging experience, particularly when performing at odd hours in hot tents (or soggy ones) to an audience who are not necessarily there for comedy, or in the same time zone, and are therefore not observing the same etiquette as in comedy clubs. However, if a performer is not prepared to take on the awkward, bizarre or challenging, then should they be up there in the first place? It is this unpredictability that makes each performance interesting for the performer and the audience, and although settling down on the sofa with a takeaway and a DVD is certainly pleasing, it is also predictable: we end up being spectators instead of participants in the live performance. Besides, it does you good to get out occasionally!

Read on... Chris Ritchie | Southampton Solent University
Editor: *Comedy Studies*, ISSN 2040610X



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PERFORMANCE: NECESSARY/EVIL

Jon Tuttle, Author, *The Trustus Plays*

Anyone wondering if performance matters need look no further than Jefferson Mays' astounding portrayal of Alfred Kirschner's heartbreaking portrayal of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf's hilarious portrayal of an SS officer-in-drag (and thirty other characters) in Doug Wright's Pulitzer-winning *I Am My Own Wife*. It was one of those had-to-be-there, lightning-in-a-bottle performances that keep proving live theatre is more vital and vibrant than ever.

Or so I hear. I'm a long way from New York, so I missed its 2003 run at Playwrights Horizons and then the Lyceum on Broadway. But I did read the book. So I can, you know, imagine it. Because I'm, you know, a playwright. What I laughingly call my career depends on my imagination. So of course I can imagine it. I'm sure I can.

Of course I can't. Who could *possibly* imagine a single actor morphing in a split second from one character to another, *thirty* times, simply by changing his posture, his accent or his hat? Not me. As much as I admire the script, which is a lot, I cannot honestly say I truly know the play because I wasn't there when it 'happened'. And therefore there's no way I'd ever try to *write* such a thing: it sounds not merely impossible, which is sometimes just another word for 'irresistible challenge', but *actually impossible*. I take some solace from the fact that Wright couldn't imagine it either; Mays had to convince him, through a long development process, that he could do the whole play himself. That's one thing actors do: they show us the limits of the possible and then, if they're good actors, what's beyond. That's why, from what I hear anyway, it was such a good play. That's also why actors around the country have been clamouring to do it: they want the role of Jefferson Mays. So yes: performance matters. Of course it does.

So let's move past the obvious and speak frankly: to the extent that 'performance' means 'production', it is a necessary evil. 'Necessary' because what most playwrights want most is to have their plays published. It sounds mercenary, but it's true. Purists will argue, but it's true. However magnificent a transient theatrical performance may be, it cannot bestow the permanence that comes with publication. And most

publishers won't consider a play that hasn't been produced. 'Evil' because, besides dissipating into the ether, a theatrical performance almost always (here's the paradox) disappoints. Rare is the live play that can match the imaginary one inside the playwright's head; in the playwright's head, beauty abounds, or terror, or poignancy, or whatever it is he/she is gunning for in every split second. Also, all the tech cues are dead-on, the audience hasn't been corrupted by Jerry Bruckheimer films, and the actors are not actors but the characters themselves: they cannot blow their lines because they *are* their lines, so nothing they say is performative. Even after the best of productions, the most honest way a playwright can answer the question 'How did you like it?' is to shrug and say, 'Close enough, bub'.

And besides, productions can destroy a play. Favourite example: a play I wrote a long time ago – and it wasn't that great to begin with – was supposed to begin in a timeless twilight with the soft chanting of an ancient Navajo. If you've ever heard it, you know the soft chanting of an ancient Navajo is something sacred and solemn. The lines were typed as 'Hey-ey-ey-ey-ey', which was as close as I could come to transcribing that breathless, deathless lament. What I got instead, at a production in San Francisco, was some buffoon in cheesy make-up charging out like a Poconos lounge comic shouting 'Heya! Heya! Heya!' And it was all downhill from there. Two hours later, I hated my play very much.

So why subject a play to performance at all? Why risk ruining it – in front of paying strangers hoping for a nice evening? For that matter, why write a play to begin with? Most people don't write any, and no harm seems to come to them.

Because a playwright is just like everyone else: he has a story. Actually no: he *is* a story, very much like one of Pirandello's 'six characters'; he *is* a story who *must* tell himself to others. Like everyone else, he needs the social and psychological validation that sharing his story can confer. In this much, he's an actor. Actors respect their craft but what they really need is love. And maybe some money. So, like a novelist or any other writer, the playwright performs the role

ONE AUDIENCE MEMBER JUMPED FROM HER SEAT, RAN TO THE LADIES' ROOM, VOMITED TWICE, AND THEN DASHED BACK UP ON STAGE SO SHE WOULDN'T MISS A MOMENT OF THE SECOND ACT.

of God and starts creating people who, as a single parent, he must then raise and nurture. For months these people wake him up at night, startle him in the shower or distract him while he drives. Sometimes when they speak he answers out loud. He will begin to worry about them, or miss them even when he's away too long. And when, finally, the story they contain congeals as a play he will invest all his energies into shopping it around and giving them all up for adoption. Because unlike a novelist or other writer, whose stories are usually received by readers singly and in silence, a playwright needs a mob, a shared experience. He needs that wave moving tangibly through an audience when they are feeling the same extraordinary thing at the same extraordinary moment.

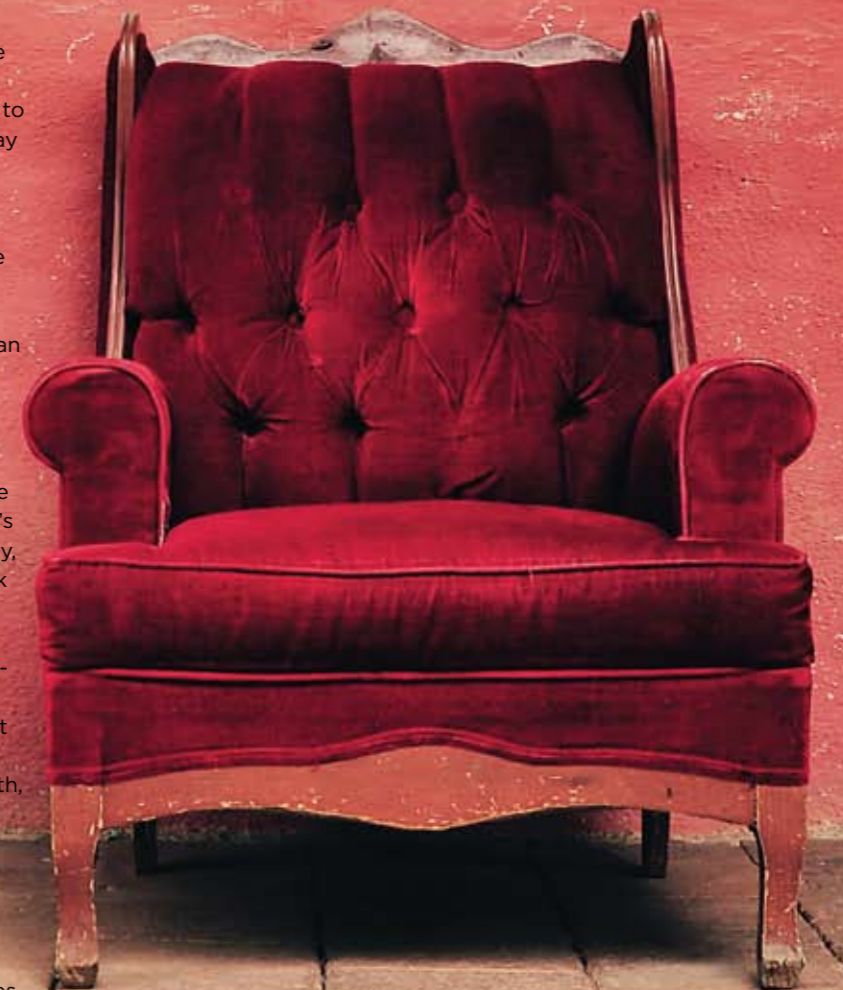
He needs performance.

And so do the rest of us. We go to plays to see our own stories embodied and retold. Sometimes we go to see films for the same reason, but usually that's just for the spectacle. For the truth that is in intimacy, for the air and the iron, as John Updike said, we seek out other people, not recordings of people. And we don't mind if it hurts. Sometimes we *want* it to hurt.

Favourite example: years ago, at a nearby university's production of Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming*, the director conspired to seat the audience right up on the stage, in chairs in and around the noxious living room where Teddy presents his new bride, Ruth, to his ruthless family. It was harrowing. It was blood curdling. It was such a powerful, anxiety-inducing performance that during the interval one audience member jumped from her seat, ran to the ladies' room, vomited twice, and then dashed back up on stage so she wouldn't miss a moment of the second act. It was the sort of performance that almost makes you imagine *you* could write such a thing.

I know that because I was there.

Read on... Jon Tuttle | Trustus Theatre and Francis Marion University
Author: *The Trustus Plays*, ISBN 9781841502243



IT'S FOUND EVERYWHERE –
A GRAND PUBLIC SQUARE,
A CONFERENCE ROOM, A
SUBURBAN BAKERY.

Elena Siemens

Why performance matters

Shakespeare's dictum remains true today: all the world's still a stage. Performance is an inevitable part of our daily lives, offering an inexhaustible repertoire of models/roles we follow, sometimes eagerly, at other times – reluctantly. Nor is it confined to specially constructed theatrical spaces. It's found everywhere – a grand public square, a conference room, a suburban bakery. Look closely and you'll notice a distinct cast of characters performing a show. And don't be deceived; you're in it too.

Read on... Elena Siemens | University of Alberta

Author: *Theatre in Passing: A Moscow Photo-Diary*, ISBN 9781841503745



IN THE FRAME: THEATRE PHOTOGRAPHY AS DOCUMENTATION

Kate Dorney, Editor, *Studies in Theatre & Performance*



Before I joined the V&A, when I thought about theatre documentation my mind naturally turned to written sources such as correspondence, legal documents, reviews, and prompt books. I now work in a collection that contains more than five thousand set and costume designs, and more than two million photographs, including Victorian *cartes de visite* from the earliest days of photography through to the entire outputs of photographers and studios. These pictures document a huge array of performances across a range of genres: circus, pantomime and cabaret sit alongside theatre, dance and opera: press photographs alongside studio shots and backstage ones. In the last two years I have spent a considerable time studying both the V&A's design collection and its photography collection because I am one of the UK's contributing editors to the vastly ambitious World Scenography Project 1975–2015, which seeks to document and contextualize the development and achievement of scenographic practice and the tracing of influences and styles through original artwork, production shots and short essays. What I've discovered is a scenographic void in performance photography. This has come about because of changes in the way that photocalls are commonly constructed and directed: no photographer is far enough away to get decent shots of the set – or the lighting – indeed, the only person

likely to take a picture that focuses on the set and lighting is the set or lighting designer. The photocall, designed to sell tickets, focuses on the lead performers, emoting in tight close-ups. Even a full-length shot is rare. This is the limitation of using material generated for marketing purposes as documentation. We no longer expect the pre-publicity, the posters, the website, the adverts, to reflect the production itself, and we also accept that programme playtexts are published before the production is finalized and that the cast list might differ from that printed in the programme; but photos are somehow so tantalizingly close to the action it's somehow more disappointing that they aren't the faithful record performance historians wish for.

The recent acquisition of the archive of prolific theatre photographer Douglas H. Jeffery, whose career began in the 1950s and ended in the late 1990s, has been an invaluable source of pictures for the World Scenography Project and has also been the starting point for the creation of a visually-driven history of post-war British theatre designed for tablets, provisionally titled *The Story of Modern British Theatre 1945–2010*. Jeffery began his career as theatre photography was changing. Where the previous generation had specialized in stills recreated in the studio to produce a beautifully composed series of shots



Images: ©Victoria & Albert Museum. Top left, photocall for *Educating Rita*, 16 June 1980 at The [Donmar] Warehouse, image by Douglas H. Jeffery. Bottom left, production meeting for *Crimes of Passion*, Royal Court Theatre, 1967, image by Douglas H. Jeffery. Right, a typically posed theatre photograph, *Waiting for Godot*, Criterion Theatre, 1955, image by Houston Rogers

conveying the spirit of the production – an art perfected by Angus McBean and Houston Rogers (even if the details were rearranged, as in the work of McBean) – in the late 1950s, realism and reportage eclipsed artifice and suggestion. Snowdon pioneered a photojournalist approach to theatre photography in which actors looked like ordinary people (rather than the exquisite creatures created by McBean and Rogers) and were shown in grainy close-ups that captured movement and emotion rather than poise and control. This style was made possible by technological (new, lighter cameras and films with faster exposure times) and economic shifts such as state-subsidized companies opening up their processes to examination and experimentation and welcoming photographers into the rehearsal room to document their work. Jeffery was one of the first photographers to persuade theatres to allow him access to rehearsals and his archive shows that he was present at many landmark productions of the twentieth century: Edward Bond’s *Saved* at the Royal Court; Howard Brenton’s *The Romans in Britain* at the National Theatre; Harrison Birtwistle’s *The Mask of Orpheus* at the London Coliseum; the experimental work at Riverside Studios; and the work of the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-on-Avon and in London.

The Story of Modern British Theatre focuses on plays that shaped post-war theatre history in some way (by provoking public outcry, breaking new ground, marking the beginning of a performer/writer/director’s career) and can be illustrated from the collections. For each play there is a summary of the main themes and critical reception, details of the first cast and then a range of photographs from the first production illustrating the main themes of the play. Reviewing stills for inclusion in the project has made me contemplate the limitations of photographs as documentation, even with a collection that doesn’t rely on the photocall shots through which photographers earned their living. Production stills enshrine performances in public memory offering a distillation of the event and the performers who created it, but it takes a lot of shots to get the few that capture the

moment. The intriguing thing about working with the Jeffery collection is having access to the negatives and, without the photographer himself on hand to veto shots, selecting images that might not be perfectly composed or balanced, but seem to convey a sense of energy or process. In Jeffery’s shots of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, for example, there is a dynamism and rawness to this shot of Richard O’Brien and Patricia Quinn doing the ‘Timewarp’: a rawness missing from the kinds of stills of shows we usually see that focus on the lead actors. In this shot from the *Crimes of Passion* double bill of Joe Orton staged at the Royal Court in 1967, everyone in the room seems to have their body angled away from Peter Gill as he talks through the set – perhaps appalled by whatever it is they’re being asked to achieve. The only people smiling are Gill (the director) and Orton (the writer). This is a rare shot of a production meeting: no cast, no costumes, no run through, just the production team staring at the model as the director explains what he wants and they wonder how they can achieve it. The final shot selected here gives a sense of Jeffery’s mischievous spirit, but also of the conditions under which photocalls operate: fixed poses, photographers vying with each other for the best position and the best shot while the actors do their best to ‘act natural’.

Since these shots were taken in 1980, the introduction of cheap digital cameras and video cameras has revolutionized the documentation of theatre practice – companies can upload their own pictures to Twitter and Flickr, and put videos up on Youtube – making it immediate and accessible, but it will only be saved for future generations if practitioners put as much effort into preserving their practice as they do into marketing it in the first place. Like a still photograph, the work doesn’t end with the moment of capture – that’s just the beginning.

Read on... Kate Dorney | Department of Theatre & Performance, Victoria & Albert Museum
Editor: *Studies in Theatre & Performance*, ISSN 14682761

Q&A

PERFORMANCE IS THE MEANS BY WHICH LIFE IS PLAYED OUT: REHEARSED, REPEATED, AND ENACTED.

Carole-Anne Upton

Why performance matters

In theatre, as in education, we often speak of the ‘Real World’ as a place apart. This is so commonplace now that we hardly even register it. The thinking seems to be that educational institutions, like sites of performance, somehow operate in a dimension apart while real life happens somewhere else.

Of course, by a wonderful aporia, this Real World is, in such distinctions, necessarily a product of the imagination. The phrase ‘real-world scenario’ – setting aside its management consultancy overtones – captures beautifully the necessary intervention of the imagination in any attempt to contemplate, and indeed manage, life as it is, or as it might be.

Performance is the means by which life is played out: rehearsed, repeated, and enacted. It is an infinitely rich and absolutely crucial part of the real world: the here and the now of people gathering together to imagine, to contemplate, to question, to redress, to celebrate and to reflect upon the way people live. It engages the imagination, the intellect, and the body in the materiality of existence, and as such is an essential aspect of human experience. It’s a deeply pleasurable pursuit, and for me, it’s about nothing less than how to live well.

Read on... Carole-Anne Upton | University of Ulster
Editor: *Performing Ethos*, ISSN 17571979

Image: ©Stephen Cumiskey. The audience, Tim Crouch, and Vic Llewellyn in *The Author* by Tim Crouch, www.timcrouchtheatre.co.uk/shows/the-author/images

A PROFOUND EXPERIENCE OF BEAUTY AND PAIN

Mark Brown, Editor, *Howard Barker Interviews 1980–2010: Conversations in Catastrophe*

Howard Barker is a unique voice in world theatre. Through his 'Theatre of Catastrophe', exemplified by such plays as *The Europeans*, *Gertrude – The Cry* and *Slowly*, he has forged his own distinct form of modern tragedy. For Barker the theatre is a place for imagination and moral speculation, not constrained by the demands of realism nor any ideology. 'It is not', he argues, 'to insult an audience to offer it ambiguity'.

Companies such as Royal Court Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Open Space Theatre Company, the Sheffield Crucible and the Almeida staged Barker's early work, which is played extensively, in translation, throughout Europe, and in the United States and Australia. Barker is currently Artistic Director of The Wrestling School, a company established to disseminate his works and develop his theory of production.

As the first collection of interviews conducted with Barker throughout his illustrious career, *Howard Barker Interviews 1980–2010: Conversations in Catastrophe* gives a strong sense of the life and work of this innovative dramatist.

Barker on...

His teenage years:

'I'd come from a stable working-class background – relatively prosperous and socially ambitious, with my parents who believed passionately in the idea of a "good education" – but theatre played no part whatsoever. My school was a philistine South London grammar school, so "O" and "A" level texts were the only plays I was acquainted with there. But a few of us – regarded warily by teachers and the bulk of the school – used to improvise a satirical/surrealist serial every lunchtime in the back of a disused army truck.

We acted characters we despised, like Dr Barnardo, Ernest Shackleton, Kennedy, Christ, and James Bond. We had diabolical figures too, like Crippen and Hitler. We never saw ourselves as making theatre, though. So when the thing ran out of steam and died, no one thought the next thing to do would be to prepare a script.' *From an interview with Malcolm Hay and Simon Trussler (1980)*

The relationship between the artist and the State:

'It seems to me impossible that the State and the artist should enjoy anything but a fleeting similarity of interest, usually in the aftermath of a revolution when the artist mistakenly believes his imagination will be licenced as part of the cultural rebirth of a new order. The rapid restitution of economic and social priorities and the assertion of the collective, or its mediators, over the individual interpretation of society, make this inevitably short-lived. States are mechanisms of discipline, and perpetually involved in rewriting and reordering experience, annexing it and abolishing it in the interests of proclaimed moral certitudes. The artist, as long as he is in profound union with his imagination, inevitably finds himself opposing ideological imperatives and exposed to censorship.' *From an interview with David Ian Rabey (1989)*

Art in a culture of entertainment:

'[A] society of absolute leisure can only induce mass insanity. Naturally it won't be recognized as such. But one of the symptoms will be the sort of spiritual exhaustion we can already discern among intellectuals, the majority of whom have forsaken any kind of discriminatory or discerning attitude towards – to take a single topic – art or literature. In this general miasma of entertainment, if the human spirit exists at all in odd pockets of resistance, it will identify itself in a demand for the problematic as opposed to the celebratory, the enigmatic as opposed to the accessible: the secret as opposed to the transparent. Naturally this demand entails moral and intellectual labour. Authentic works of art will be seen as hard work, as they have frequently been in the past. But in this soporific climate, hard work will be seen as a privilege. Not only this, but these works must – can only – infringe the laws of the soporific order. They will perhaps be illegal. Who knows?' *From an interview with Dan Hefko (1998)*

Tragedy:

'Pain itself is beautiful when it's represented dramatically. Tragedy is about pain, and it's about voyeurism, to some extent; it's about watching the pain of a person, or a group of individuals, on the stage. The moment you put an action on the stage, of course, it

I hold such efforts in contempt. But to show by theatrical methods, it's the test of a great director, I write without inhibition. As director, WE EMBRACE THE PARADOX OF THIS SOLITUDE IN A CROWD.

changes; it's not the same as an action in the street. The theatre of the 1950s, and it still happens at the Royal Court, rather insists that the street and the theatre are the same thing; I would say they were never the same thing: the street is the street, and the theatre is the theatre.

Once you're in a darkened room, it is not the street. The fact is it completely alters your perception of an event. A murder or a passionate love act committed on the stage is quite different from one committed in the street, and pain, in that context, acquires a certain beauty. It seems to me that society requires pain: civility requires pain. We must suffer, we *do* suffer, individually, but also collectively we must suffer. Tragedy makes suffering its business, and it makes it beautiful.' *From an interview with Mark Brown (2008)*

The influence of his working-class background on his work:

'In terms of my method in dialogue, my background has been deeply significant. The rhythm and pulse of my mother's and grandfather's speech can be heard in my own texts. It was an education in living poetry, vivid and violent. And the vocabulary – especially when anger informed it – was replete with words from the seventeenth century. When my mother was abusive, it was musical. The mix of this ancient argot with the cultivated phrasing I acquired through literature creates a distinctive voice. No other writer sounds like me.' *From an interview with Nina Rapi (2010)*

Read on... Mark Brown | Theatre critic of the *Sunday Herald* and performing arts writer for the *Daily Telegraph*. Editor: *Howard Barker Interviews 1980–2010: Conversations in Catastrophe*, ISBN 9781841503981

Why performance matters

Performance matters to different people for different reasons. Many commentators argue that live performance continues to thrive because people need the 'collective experience' that being in a theatre audience provides.

However, 'the audience', in that sense, is a myth. The most brilliant theatre 'individuates' us: it compels us to experience it alone in the dark. When we embrace the paradox of this solitude in a crowd – as, arguably, the work of truly great theatre artists requires us to do – we are confronted with an extraordinary combination of that which is seminal to our humanity (love, sexual desire, death) with the accumulated achievements of human culture.

As Howard Barker wrote in 1986, 'a carnival is not a revolution'. The greatest live performance does not luxuriate in a populist celebration of 'the collective', but, rather, it engages us in a profound, often deeply personal, experience of beauty and pain.

PERFORMING SHAKESPEARE

Debra Charlton, Author, *Holistic Shakespeare*

During Shakespeare's lifetime, audiences attended the theatre to *hear* a play, not to *see* one. This distinction in audience reception, so antithetical to our own visually-oriented culture, highlights the primacy of language in Shakespeare's plays. Words, not images, are Shakespeare's dominant theatrical medium. His dramaturgy is defined by an extraordinarily rich linguistic soundscape that eliminates the need for detailed pictorialization. Stripped of many of the visual elements that characterize the modern stage, Shakespeare's theatre relied almost exclusively on the physical actor to embody the playwright's written word. In early modern staging practices, spoken décor supplemented minimalist scenery, and rhyming couplets, rather than a drawn curtain or lighting cues, punctuated transitions between scenes.

Fast-forward 400 years. In our visual society, Shakespeare's aural poses unique challenges for many modern performers. Reared in the traditions of Stanislavski-based performance-training – in which the literal written word serves as an adjunctive tool that is frequently subordinated to imaginative personalization – contemporary actors learn to read *between* rather than *within* the lines of a play. This creates a sort of textual myopia that becomes painfully evident when the actor is confronted with the requirements of language-centred scripts. Not attuned to the physical and analytical demands of heightened texts, performers who have been trained to de-emphasize language in favour of interiority are often frustrated by Shakespeare's wordplay. Consequently, they strive to forcibly reshape Shakespeare's language into naturalistic dialogue. During their preparation for a role, such actors expend energy on paraphrasing Shakespeare's lines into modern colloquial speech, and gloss over alliteration, repetition, and other forms of patterning in a misconceived attempt to modernize the language. These actors subconsciously perceive Shakespeare's writing as dated or flawed, and they direct their attentions towards remedying its perceived defects, rather than honouring Shakespeare's language with all the resources at their disposal.

It has become commonplace to assert that Shakespeare's plays contain no subtext. Unlike realistic

playwrights – Chekhov or Ibsen, for example – whose characters often struggle to articulate their inner feelings, thereby rendering what remains *unspoken* more important than what is actually *said*, Shakespeare uses highly expressive language to supply all the information that the actor requires to develop a fully dimensional role. *Everything* is contained within the text – Shakespeare's characters say what they mean and mean what they say. Even when his notorious con artists such as Iago or Gloucester (glib relics of the medieval vice figure) manipulate words to deliberately mislead other characters, they take the audience into their confidence; they let us in on their secrets and share their private motivations and intentions. Through the convention of direct audience address, we become aural witnesses to the Macbeths' scheme to murder Duncan, and unwilling co-conspirators in Iago's plan to destroy Othello's marriage.

For the actor, mastery of the intricacies of Shakespeare's language constitutes the most direct pathway to effective communication with the audience. Thus, the ability to identify and *play* metrical and verbal patterns, which will then be conveyed to the ear of the listener, is as necessary to the Shakespearean actor as a classical musician's ability to read music. Like a musical score Shakespeare's text provides the actor with an architectural blueprint from which to derive cues on staging, directorial concept, and character. Nevertheless, despite its obvious centrality to actor process, a willingness and ability to undertake detailed textual analysis remains an area of critical deficit for many modern performers. Some approach the task with reluctance because they believe that it rightfully belongs to the realm of the academic, not the artist; they justify neglect of the practical, and often difficult, task of carving out the text by claiming that the process somehow stifles artistic creativity. This viewpoint

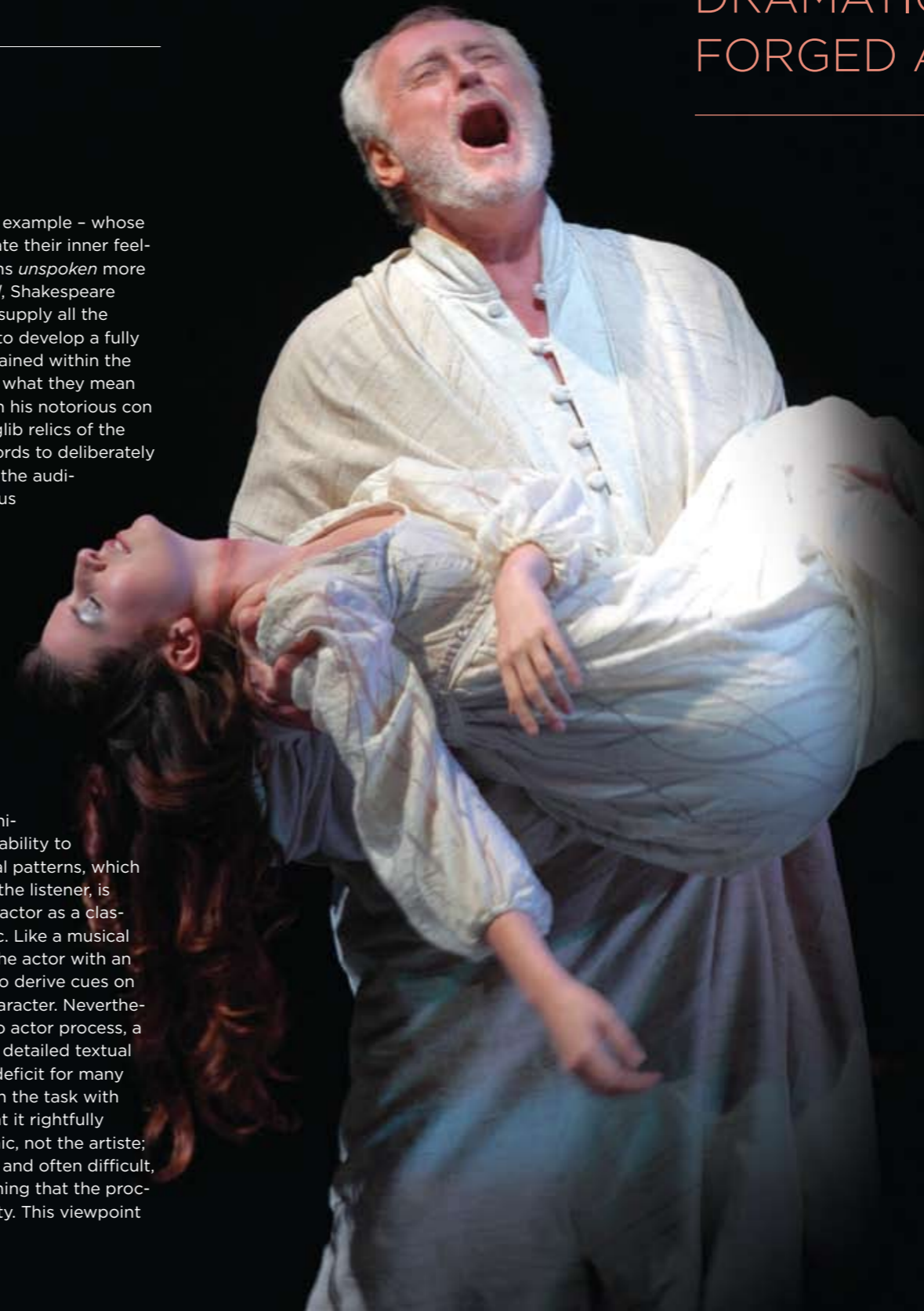
EACH TIME A PERFORMER VOICES SHAKESPEARE'S WORDS THE LINK BETWEEN BODY EXPERIENCE AND DRAMATIC LANGUAGE IS FORGED ANEW.

implies that Shakespeare's language is merely decorative and fails to embrace its utility as a detailed roadmap for character development.

Although some performers are gifted with a natural affinity for heightened language, the knowledge and skills necessary for careful textual excavation of a Shakespearean play requires disciplined training. In many classical theatre companies, most notably the Royal Shakespeare Company, textual training is led by the voice department. The dual function of voice and text specialists stresses the symbiotic relationship between the actor's physical body and the literal text. As with any dramatic work, the playwright's words remain incomplete and static without the physical embodiment of the actor. Each time a performer voices Shakespeare's words the link between body experience and dramatic language is forged anew. In order to meet the rigours of Shakespeare's complex, often voluptuous, language, the actor must fully inhabit the body/voice, and discipline his/her physical instrument to perform with optimal sensitivity and responsiveness. Thus, the actor requires deep engagement of his/her complete intellectual, emotional, and physical resources in order to serve up a Shakespearean text to its fullest potential.

Almost 400 years after Shakespeare's death, the dramatist's remarkable plays still represent the consummate achievement of English dramatic literature. Our enduring satisfaction in his plays derives from their ability to simultaneously engage our intellect and emotions, and awaken our senses. Shakespeare's plays offer multilayered pleasures as works of poetry, reflections on the human heart, and philosophical explorations of the nature of humanity. Actors privileged to inhabit Shakespeare's roles inherit a rich theatrical tradition that connects us to past and future through his living works.

Read on... Debra Charlton | Texas State University
Author: *Holistic Shakespeare*, ISBN 9781841504711

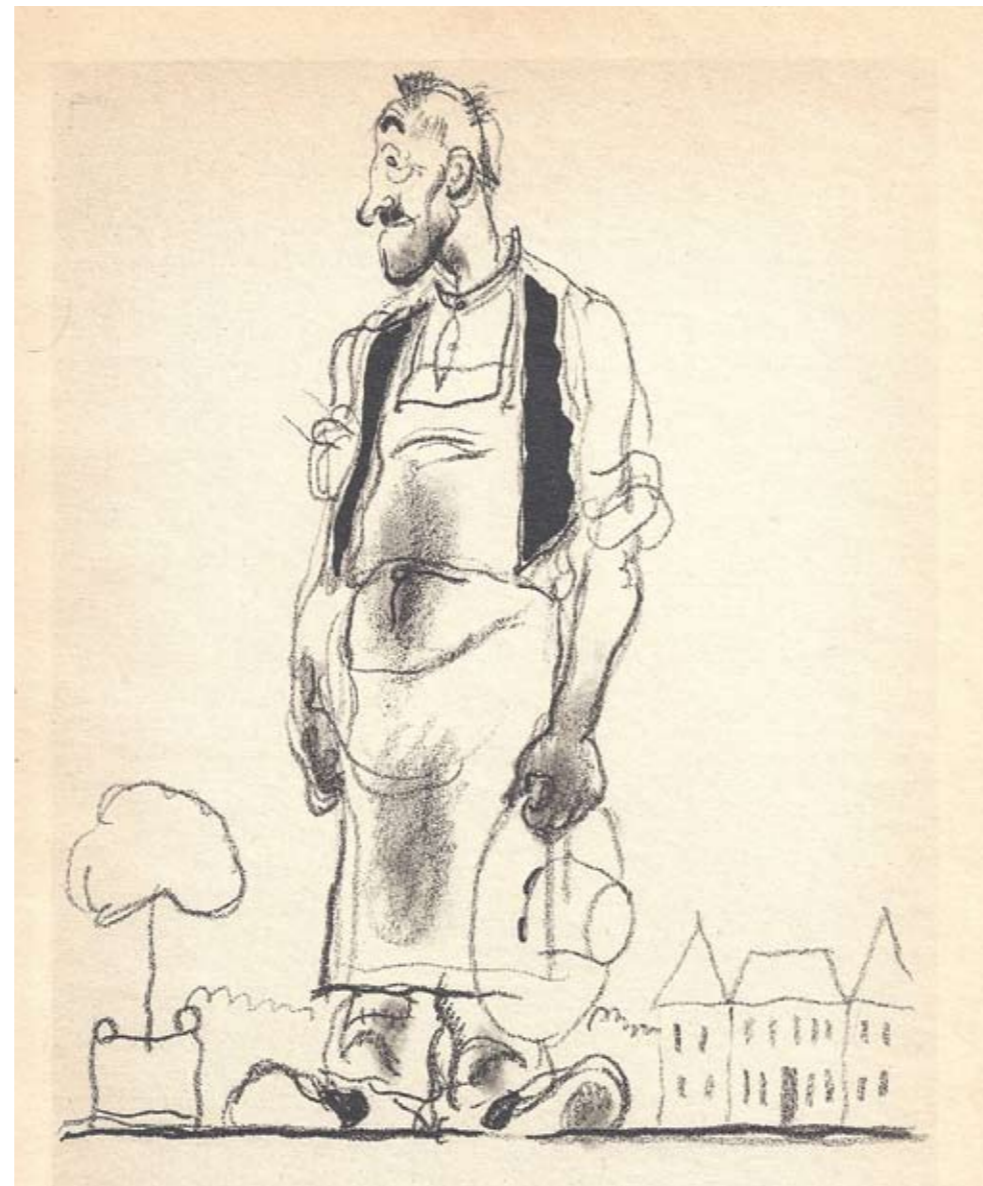


A FEARLESS AND PROVOCATIVE WRITER

Richard J. Hand, Author, *Octave Mirbeau, Two Plays: Business is Business and Charity*

The forthcoming translations of *Business is Business* and *Charity* will make Octave Mirbeau's two greatest plays available in English for the first time. Octave Mirbeau (1848–1917) was a giant of French letters, acclaimed – and sometimes denounced – by his contemporaries. He was a prominent and 'living' voice, who made his presence in French culture felt through his acerbic journalism, his experimental and sometimes scabrous fiction and, comparatively late in his career, his extraordinary plays. Mirbeau was a genuinely international figure, celebrated by no less than Leo Tolstoy, who believed Mirbeau to be not only 'France's greatest contemporary writer' but also the pre-eminent example of the 'secular genius' of French culture as a whole. His fame in Russia was matched by his standing in Germany. In fact, Mirbeau was very much a European man of letters, renowned everywhere... except in Britain. Why was he more or less completely neglected across the English Channel? Quite simply, his robust genius would have been far too risqué for the Victorians and Edwardians of his era. Mirbeau was, in many ways, a fearless and provocative writer who made an extraordinary political journey from being a conservative and monarchist to being a committed anarchist. His astonishing Decadent novels *The Torture Garden* (1899) and *The Diary of a Chambermaid* (1900) are provocative works of erotica that can still shock the reader with their sadomasochistic excesses and have lost none of their power as brutal satires of the bourgeoisie and of imperialism.

Mirbeau's plays are a different thing altogether, on the face of it. *Business is Business* and *Charity* are, at first glance, conventional comedies of manners: perfectly structured plays with delicious wit and highly developed characters. But beneath the surface lurks the same, mischievous Mirbeau; both plays are uncompromising and damning satires on the hypocrisies and injustices of contemporary society, and would have been intolerable for the late and unlamented British theatre censor.



MIRBEAU WANTED US TO QUESTION SOCIETY, SO THAT WE GO INTO THE WORLD AND IMPROVE IT.

At the heart of *Business is Business* (1903) is the demonic Isidore Lechat, a self-made millionaire and wannabe politician who tyrannizes anything and anyone who crosses his path. Callous, adulterous, unscrupulous, Lechat is many things. But one thing is constant: he is always democratic in his wickedness – the birds in his garden are subject to the same persecution as his servants, his rivals or his family. He has only one soft spot (as one hopes all demagogues must have), his devotion to his son and heir, the reckless Xavier: a relationship that Mirbeau develops with ruthless intent. In *Charity* (1908), a play about a charity home run by Baron Courtin, a prominent and respected liberal politician, Mirbeau presents the deep-seated corruption that lies behind the rhetoric and sanctimony of the self-appointed guardians of the dispossessed. The self-proclaimed integrity and superiority of those with moral authority inexorably unravels before our eyes.

How can Mirbeau's theatre, this well-crafted and passionate drama that gives such a vivid picture of la belle époque, have any relevance to our own time? Although Mirbeau is long dead and his plays over a century old, when we read and watch the plays now, we can only be struck by the relevance of his theatre to our own world. Mirbeau's fearsome Isidore Lechat is alive and well. He continues to stalk the international realms of power and influence. We see his shadow in the controversy that surrounds immensely rich and powerful figures such as Fred Goodwin, Philip Green and Rupert Murdoch. We see his ghost lurking in the allegations that are currently levelled at other contemporaries such as Silvio Berlusconi and Dominique Strauss-Kahn, high-powered men who are accused of exploiting their power for personal gratification. *Charity* also presents individuals of great ability and charisma who have, we come to realize, abused the system. In the charity home Baron Courtin has established for adolescent girls we are reminded of how unscrupulous power can find a 'loophole': the British politicians guilty of fiddling









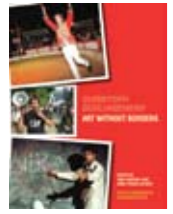

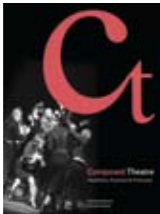

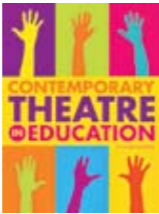


























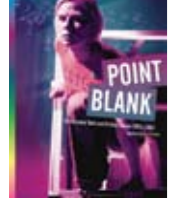







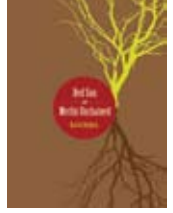



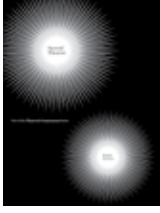



their expenses; the institutional corruption of FIFA; the horrors perpetrated in under-regulated care homes and private hospitals. Mirbeau lived in a world seemingly very different from the global village of Twitter-busted super-injunctions, rigged competitions and phone hacking, but he would have found the mechanisms, power relationships and even the personalities all too familiar. It has become a cliché, but *plus ça change plus c'est la même chose* couldn't be more aptly applied than it is to Mirbeau's drama...

Yet Mirbeau does not strive to depress us. At his heart there is formidable compassion and hope. He also wanted to give his theatre audience a good night out and fill the auditorium with laughter. The excesses of Isidore Lechat are hilarious in their audacity and *Charity* delights us with its playful repartee and the richness of its characterization. When the house lights dim and the curtain rises, Mirbeau wanted us to look through the fourth wall and see our society and laugh at it. But he also wants us to question it, so that we go out into the world and improve it – and ourselves.











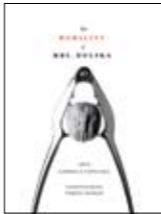







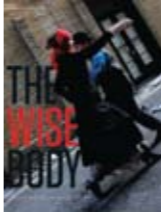















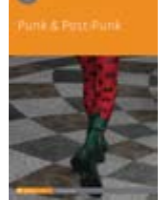
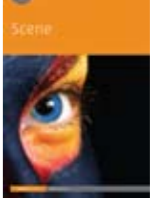
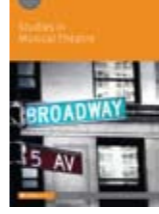

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