

Third Annual Symposium:
Innovation in Performance History and Practice
Wednesday 6th July, 10.00am-6.00pm, University of Bristol

Abstracts

Louise Wingrove (Bristol) *“Vehement vixens” and “sassing back”*: rediscovering the appeal of the Victorian music-hall serio-comedienne

In his article ‘Conspiracy of Meaning: Music-Hall and the Knowingness of Popular Culture,’ Peter Bailey describes how “[w]ork on style and performance has advanced markedly, but the text has still too rarely been made to leave the page, and the actual dynamics of engagement in the stage form remain understudied” (Bailey 1994, p. 142). One such performer whose style and legacy has been affected by a lack of investigation into the “actual dynamics” of performance is the figure of the Victorian music-hall serio-comedienne. Serio-comediennes were solo female performers whose repertoires consisted of a mixture of comic and serious songs, interspersed with patter. The material was often subversive and satirical, providing singers with great success with a wide ranging audience. However, due to the immediate, subversive and subjective nature of popular entertainment, the appeal of these performers has remained under-researched or shrouded in a reputation created and distorted by a mixture of biased archival sources and contemporary opinions passed down over time. A clear example of this distortion can be found in sheet music, simultaneously providing a template for the reenactment of a song and, through illustration, lyrics and censorship, containing a flawed representation of performers repertoires and legacies, created by publishers.

Therefore, in order to address the issues of the legacy and appeal of serio-comediennes and the bias of sources, I propose that a more innovative, practical approach to sources such as sheet music is needed. With this in mind, and wishing to rediscover the appeal of the serio-comedienne and bring the text from the page back to the stage, I have recorded my own renditions of select pieces of sheet music by serio-comediennes Jenny Hill (1849-1896) and Bessie Bellwood (1856-1896), grounded in social context, reviews and interviews. Through this approach, I aimed to see how the formation of a new, practice based methodology could change the ways sheet music and performers could be understood and appreciated. This paper reflects on the discoveries I have made through my engagement with the practical recording process.

Maria Barrett (Warwick) *Class, aesthetics and repertoire: the case of the Royal Court Theatre, Liverpool*

Contemporary empirical studies find that theatre audiences are overrepresented by more affluent social groups. Even so, some theatres, such as Liverpool’s Royal Court, are successful in attracting working class people to their audiences. This research uses the Royal Court as a case study, employing empirical, ethnographic methods such as thick description, focus groups, depth interviews, and organic digital data analysis, to understand the Theatre’s innovative performance practices.

It finds that the Royal Court, Liverpool, has cultivated a working class audience by promoting a particular form of theatre repertoire, including content permeated by tropes such as comedy, participation, localism, and nostalgia for a shared class experience. This

recalls Bourdieu's assertions in *Distinction* (1984) about a working class aesthetic. The paper sheds further light on the relationship between class and taste, with theatre creating distinction, and the Royal Court exploiting class-related aesthetic preferences.

The paper has implications for policy makers, theatres and cultural institutions engaged in widening access and participation. It also further explores the relevance of Bourdieu's 'conceptual triad', and extends the understanding of how class is lived and performed in contemporary theatregoing.

Rebecca Benzie Fraser (Exeter) *Innovative Historiography from the Playwright and Scholar in the Shadow of the World War One Centenary*

This paper considers the playwright as innovator in the cultural landscape of the World War One centenary. I address *An August Bank Holiday Lark* by Deborah McAndrew, a new piece of writing, which premiered in the centenary year (2014); the play is set in a fictional Lancashire town and follows a folk dancing community during the outbreak of WWI. In an interview I conducted with McAndrew she said she wanted to remove symbols of remembrance from the piece, stating, 'I didn't want any poppies,' rather her vision was for the play to be 'a tribute to the women who picked it all up at the end, [...] and they held it all together and they carried on.' (2015) I consider the dramaturgy of the female narratives in *An August Bank Holiday Lark* and explore gender politics within the piece in reference to current feminist debate. I build on this analysis to address the politics of the representation of solidarity and the women as caregiver offered in the play, in order to explore how this reimagining of the past mirrors or challenges contemporary feminist discourse.

In challenging male centred accounts of history and traditional symbols of remembrance *An August Bank Holiday Lark* calls for an innovative response from scholars. I argue that normative modes of performance are drawn on by playwrights in the representation of WWI and reinforced in the expanse of centenary celebrations. Drawing on the fields of theatre studies and historiography my analysis explores how McAndrew reimagines history and how this representation speaks of contemporary cultural concerns. I argue that McAndrew's attempt to create a female centred plot results in equal attention being given to male characters, and I explore the socio-cultural implications of this dramaturgy in reference to scholarship concerned with feminist performance analysis and contemporary feminist discourse.

Rebecca Fredrickson (Shakespeare Institute) *"If sight and shape be true": The camera as surrogate eye in NTLive's As You Like It*

Since 2009, the National Theatre has regularly broadcasted stage productions live to cinemas around the world. As the popularity of this practice has increased, expanding to such theatres as the Royal Shakespeare Company and Shakespeare's Globe, the genre of live broadcasting of live theatre performance is coming into its own.

Being so new, published research on the subject is extremely rare, and many questions remain untouched. In the interest of filling that void, at least partially, I will endeavor to analyze the specific role of the camera in live cinema broadcasts of theatre productions. By referring to such theorists as Carroll, Pudovkin, and Bazin, I will examine the camera's role in storytelling and film ontology, with a special emphasis on existential phenomenology as set forth by Vivian Sobchack. Through these theories, I will build a picture of how the camera functions as a surrogate eye, transforming reality and the

experience of seeing. Finally, I will apply this to a broadcast context by analyzing the effect of the camera on the experience of watching the National Theatre's recent production of *As You Like It*.

Kirsty Sedgman (Independent) *Experiencing Innovation: Capturing Audience Response*

From 'participatory' to 'immersive', and from 'intimate' to 'site-specific', the past decade especially has seen a sharp rise in theatrical events seeking to destabilise traditional audience/performer relations. This presentation asks what happens when audiences take part in experimental events. While theatre-lovers, academics, and professional critics tend to relish the opportunities afforded by innovation, audience members who are less 'culturally confident' often find it difficult to make sense of these encounters, and may experience hesitations and unease. For many people, the utilisation of non-traditional spaces and creative theatrical forms can lead to a fear that they may not find value in the performance: a sense that these events are simply not 'for them'.

This presentation investigates how different audience members negotiate pleasures and disappointments when taking part in deliberately challenging theatrical events. It takes its findings from a range of cultural value studies, including a large-scale project investigating how people developed relationships with the new National Theatre Wales. By incorporating playful, immersive, mobile elements within their first year, the company sought to unsettle fixed ideas of place. Bringing together 800 questionnaire responses, 40 interviews, a series of vox pops, and an innovative 'town-talk' strand, this research mapped the complex processes by which different people responded to NTW's attempt to disturb understandings of home and identity.

Furthermore, this presentation examines how emerging empirical research methods can help to draw out deep discursive information on value and experience. From walking fieldwork to metaphor elicitation, this presentation includes a practical demonstration of a number of creative methodologies, and explains how these innovative approaches can be usefully combined.

Mark Smith (York) *Performing digital community around Forced Entertainment's livestreams*

The recent livestreaming of several of Forced Entertainment's durational works, such as *Speak Bitterness* and *Quizoola!24*, prompted enduring experiences of community and performance which both echoed and outgrew the streamed performances themselves. In retweeting, commenting upon and responding to what they saw and heard, audiences participated in the evolution of a 'shadow performance', which at times seemed to become the *primary* experience.

The functioning and possibilities of such experiences are neatly predicted by Mike Pearson when he speaks of the aims of theatre archaeology: 'to regard performance as generative of materials produced before, during and after the event, not only as technical information but as personal experience' and 'to attempt a synthesis of the narratives of the watchers and watched in non-hierarchical integrations of the written and the remembered' (Pearson & Shanks 2001: 67).

In this paper, I ask how audiences are innovating online performance. I assess the online experiences facilitated by Forced Entertainment's free livestreams – from the social and performative to the intensely individual – in terms of what Pearson calls 'reconstruction'. This, in Pavis's gloss, 'entails new performance, rather than abstract analysis' (2003: 45).

It is ‘a creative process in the present and not a speculation on past meaning or intention’ (Pearson & Thomas 1994: 133).

Audiences of these livestreams hence coalesced in an innovative community endeavour which functioned both as (present-tense) documentation and, more crucially, as performance *per se*. In keeping with the crowd-sourced, open-source, word-of-mouth nature of our constantly-connected society, this took place impulsively, independently, as a groundswell. It was organised around hashtags promoted by the company, but its communally evolved performance forms took root without intervention from ‘the artists’. In these innovative shadow performances, then, it is audiences that are leading the way.

Kelli Zezulka (Leeds) *“To look forward, you must first look back”*: innovation in lighting control and the development of the lighting programmer

In the approximately 135 years since electricity was first introduced at the Savoy Theatre in London (the first public building in the UK to have electricity), theatre lighting control has changed considerably: from direct control dimmers mounted on the walls backstage to manual desks and today’s memory control desks. With this change, the role of lighting programmer has come into its own: the programmer must be what Nick Hunt and Susan Melrose call a “mastercraftsperson”, one who can navigate the many complex systems of a theatrical production. Modern lighting consoles are incredibly complex tools, but despite their definite advantages, the quote above from Francis Reid reminds us that the capabilities of now-obsolete consoles can inform the development of new lighting control software. This paper will explore the link between the development of the lighting console and those who operate it and how the past can inform the future of lighting programming.

Ella Hawkins (Shakespeare Institute) *William Poel and the beginnings of the “original practices” movement: innovation or evolution?*

William Poel is widely considered to be the founding father of the ‘Original Practices’ (OP) movement in the history of Shakespearean performance. The director’s attempts to replicate Elizabethan performance practices at the turn of the 19th century have been described as ‘revolutionary’, and an ‘emergent alternative’ to the visually spectacular nineteenth-century productions that preceded them. Today, Poel’s work is afforded great significance in the development of reconstructive Shakespeare: his bare platform stage, replica Elizabethan costumes, and emphasis on aesthetic and textual authenticity can still be found in productions staged at Shakespeare’s Globe and by other organisations associated with OP. However, many of Poel’s underlying intentions and approaches to research hold strong links with the aforementioned pictorial stagings of Shakespeare that he often criticised. While the Elizabethan focus of the director’s approach was relatively novel, the practice of authentically representing historical settings on stage for educational purposes was not.

This paper will explore the ways in which Poel’s work at the close of the nineteenth century can be seen as a continuation of the pictorial approach to staging Shakespeare followed by actor-manager Charles Kean, and dramatist and antiquarian J. R. Planché, decades earlier. To what extent can Poel’s practices actually be considered a departure from the earlier historically- inspired productions, and how might these earlier beginnings affect the way in which we understand OP Shakespeare today? Through a close analysis of specific productions staged by each practitioner, I will argue that the roots of OP

Shakespeare can in fact be traced back beyond Poel, and that the director's work was simply a period of development in an ongoing evolutionary process.

Ysabel Clare (Goldsmiths, University of London) *Innovation, innovation, innovation: a how-to guide to a self-perpetuating process*

This paper argues that innovative methodology can generate original responses to research material and therefore self-reflexively perpetuate innovation.

A new methodology has been extrapolated from the work of Gregory Bateson. The intention was to avoid pre-determined analytical typology. At the heart of Bateson's work are three propositions: difference, re-iteration and abduction. Application of these relational distinctions to complex systems results in the revelation of subtle distinctions at the level of category and type. The propositions can therefore be used, counter-intuitively, to address human behaviour and experience. This usefulness was tested in the field of performance practice by applying them to an analysis of Stanislavsky's actor training exercises. The results offer a new perspective on his work, evidencing a system behind the System in the form of an explicit model of the structure of subjective experience correlating with contemporary developments in the field of embodied cognition, as well as a new conceptualization of the process of acting. Innovation begets innovation.

The paper outlines the methodology, showing how apparently inexplicably complex material that has been characterized as resistant to analysis can actually be explored in detail with an illogical application of logical typing. Using examples from the analysis of Stanislavsky's acting exercises, it shows how analytical strategies, including the generation of tables, graphs and diagrams, can incrementally reveal layers of information and how at each new level, new distinctions and possibilities become accessible. The resulting models, that literally situate human behaviour and the practice of acting, are briefly outlined, and it is suggested that the methodology is by nature designed to generate taxonomies.

Finally participants are invited to challenge the author with prospective research material in order to demonstrate in the moment how to use this approach, apply it to their own work, and generate their own logically sound taxonomies.

Bogdan Florea (Bristol) *Egg-Hamlet: can you really innovate Shakespeare?*

A re-interpretation of *Hamlet* appeared as a positively fruitful avenue for my practice-as-research.

Vis-a-vis such plan, the reaction was: 'Oh! *Hamlet* is such a long, illogical, tedious play, very hard to follow. Why do it?' Knowingly perhaps, the Professor who advised that (an internationally recognised Shakespeare expert), inscribed himself in a longer line of thought regarding Shakespeare's writing for stage, echoing Appia, Artaud, Eduard Gordon Craig, Mallarme, Maeterlinck or our contemporaries Sir Nicholas Hytner (London National Theatre's Artistic Director until 2015) and director Robert Wilson.

Can you really innovate Shakespeare's text and make it viewable and truly understandable for contemporary audiences?

My presentation will try to answer this question by putting the contestations of Shakespeare by the above-mentioned artists and thinkers, in line with the planning process for the piece *egg-Hamlet*, which I realise in collaboration with artist Ileana Gherghina,

who says: 'I want to exit the theatre culture, for which Hamlet is a cooked, eaten and defecated matter already. *Hamlet* has become a religion, which cannot be touched or retouched.'

By drawing upon Hans-Thies Lehmann's theory of the Post-dramatic Theatre, I will endeavour to demonstrate that what is called the new post-dramatic text (the needed textual component for the theatre of the new era) has been present for a very long time and it is Shakespeare's. I will advocate that instead of having reached its limits, Shakespeare's plays (and in our case *Hamlet*) can be used as *the* ideal platform for the plenary advent of the post-dramatic dramaturgy.

Also, by evoking Vilem Flusser's theory of *technical images*, I will argue how it is possible – quoting the thinking behind computational technology – to radically re-interpret/re-imagine the vast synergies of symbols of the Shakespearean text, into a contemporarily readable/accessible interface (a new spectacle 'egg'), which does not do away with text and syntax but re-discovers it using a totally new performative algorithm, within a totally new protocol of audience reception.

'Hamlet's pain is similar to that of the egg: the egg exists inside without being understood and seen from the outside. The incapacity of the egg' – Ileana Gherghina.

Catherine Love (RHUL) *Aesthetic or economic? Shifting definitions of artistic innovation*

Much like 'excellence', a word whose meaning in relation to the arts has been repeatedly debated over the years, 'innovation' has proved difficult to define for arts policy-makers. Despite frequent demands for arts organisations to innovate both their practice and their producing models, there is, as Hasan Bakhshi and David Throsby acknowledged in a 2010 report, 'little clarity about what innovation means in an arts and cultural context' (Bakhshi and Throsby 2010: 4).

This paper will trace changing uses of the term 'innovation' in DCMS and Arts Council policy documents, as well as associated reports and reviews, from 1997 onwards. It will also consider the wider cultural, political and economic forces at play in this period, interrogating the extent to which innovation has been defined along economic as well as aesthetic lines. Given the neoliberal turn of recent thinking about arts funding, do calls for innovation serve a market agenda rather than – or as well as – an artistic one?

Finally, at the close of my paper I will open up the question of how my findings intersect with some of the trends in contemporary theatre practice during these years. I will ask what implications shifting understandings of innovation might have for different theatrical forms and begin to suggest some of the ways in which theatre-makers have responded to changing funding priorities.

Jay Paul Skelton (Kingston University) *"Everything old is new again": Performing classical text using Stanislavsky and Viewpoints*

One of the greatest challenges for contemporary actors is performing classical text. John Barton calls it a collision of "the Two Traditions"; namely, our naturalistic approach to acting as influenced by Stanislavsky, and the language-based tradition of Elizabethan players. However, new research into Stanislavsky's late-career reassessment of his "system" not only invites us to question our own understanding of his methods, but also suggests innovative ways for modern theatre artists to integrate "the Two Traditions"

when tackling classical text. My demonstration offers early steps toward an interdisciplinary rehearsal methodology that combines Stanislavsky's experimental rehearsal practice referred to as Active Analysis, and Viewpoints, originally developed by Mary Overlie for dancers and choreographers, as a fresh approach to embodying classical text in general and Shakespeare in particular. My presentation will also address how this unified methodology uses improvisation as a means for actors to fully experience speaking in Shakespeare as an action to produce change in both the stage fiction *and* the performance conditions in real time and space. I hope this research might contribute to the ongoing reconsideration of Stanislavsky's "system" and invite contemporary theatre artists to examine their own relationship to the history of performance practice.

Acatia Finbow (Exeter/Tate) *The innovative document: negotiating the unknown future value of documentation in the museum*

All documentation, arguably, is innovative. It transforms performances, (re)presenting them in new ways, enduring where they apparently disappear, producing material from the immaterial, and decentralising authorship from the performer. Documentation is also, according to a number of theorists, always created with a view to the future; to an audience who will experience the performance through the networked materials of the collective documentation in a way which is different from the 'original' live audience.

This paper will explore practices of documentation, and its view to the future, in two ways. Firstly, it will consider the innovative practices of museums documenting performance, both historically and in the current artistic environment, and how the institution creates documents without knowing their future purpose. Second, it will consider the application of the lens of value as a means to analyse the actions undertaken by the museum with regard to the document: its creation, its collection, its exhibition. Change over time in the type of value assigned to the document, both historical and contemporary, will be of particular importance in understanding the clarification of the unknown value of the document.

Two case studies from Tate's history will be used to illustrate these aspects of documentation: a 1972 exhibition at Tate Britain titled *Seven Exhibitions*, which displayed performance-based photographic documents and included a live performance event, and a 2015 two-day event at Tate Modern called *If Tate Modern were Musée de la danse?* which was the subject of a research project documentation workshop. In each case, the innovative nature of the documentation strategy undertaken around these significant events will be explored, the value the documents have been assigned over time will be analysed, and their potential position in the future museum will be considered.