

The Society for Theatre Research's New Researchers' Network
Fifth Annual Symposium:
Practising Research; Researching Practice
Sunday 8th July, 10.00am-5.00pm
King's College London – Strand Campus, King's Building

10:00-10:15 **Registration** *K2.40*

10:15-11:15 **Keynote Address – Dr Naomi Paxton** 'Reaching out in both directions: suffrage theatre, research, and performance' *K2.40*

11:20-12:35 **Panel 1 – Embodying Archival Evidence** *K2.40*

- Anna Loren, 'Staging Silence: A discussion of the creative process surrounding the use of archival material to retrieve a submerged history'
- Katie Noble, 'A Treatise on Theatre as Visual Culture; or, a Methodology for Medea in 18th-Century Drama and Art'
- Ella Hawkins, "'Authentic" underwear at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre: practice as experiment, re-enactment, and research'

12:35-13:35 Lunch (not provided)

13:35-14:50 **Panel 2 – Embodied Identities** *K2.40*

- Francesco Bentivegna, 'Who Is Voicing? The Production and Re-production of Posthuman Voices'
- Giorgia Campi, 'Fragmentation, identity and character in performer training'

14:55-16:10 **Panel 3 – Positioning the Researcher** *K2.40*

- Karian Schuitema, "'Just like clowns!" Subverting rules and structures at special school by applying comedy performance to practical and collaborative research'
- Corinne Furness, "'Me? I'm just the researcher": A field guide to researching (with) the Royal Shakespeare Company'
- Heath Pennington, 'Tied Up In Research: Breaking the Scholar-Practitioner Binary'

16:15-17:00 **Provocations and Discussion** *K2.40*

- Hailey Bachrach, 'Bad Acting: Querying the Limits of Practice as Research'
- Hannah Greenstreet, 'Historicising the contemporary: practising contemporary theatre research'
- Rachael Nicholas, 'Talking to Audiences: Reception as Practice?'

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Abstracts

Panel 1 – Embodying Archival Evidence

Anna Loren - Staging Silence: A discussion of the creative process surrounding the use of archival material to retrieve a submerged history.

As a researcher–practitioner, I am primarily concerned with the process of creating performance from biographical material and, in excavating the stories locked within personal and historical objects. Through my current research project, I seek to create a performance methodology, through the use of objects and archival material, with the express purpose of retrieving a submerged history of women's sexual oppression, in the service of Japanese militarism and imperialism between 1932-1945. The 'comfort system' as it is widely referenced, 'consisted of the legalized military rape of subject women on a scale - and over a period of time – previously unknown in history' (Hicks 1995). The central thread of my research is focused on uncovering my own family history, pertinent to my grandmother's internment by Japanese forces in Burma in 1941. I seek to create a series of new works that interrogates the legacy of intergenerational trauma and, that reclaims my own family history within this broader socio-historical context.

While there are meticulous military diaries of the Burma Campaign, written histories of gendered violence in wartime are considerably sparser, particularly concerning women of Asian heritage. Their story is a footnote, a silent addendum to the masculine, militarist narrative. It is for this reason that one must look a little deeper, to unlock the stories veiled within certain objects, texts and photographs. Even now, there is much contention surrounding the ongoing, active suppression of the 'comfort women' history and notably, the memorial statues intended to honor them.

This paper will reflect on my research process thus far and, it's application in the creation of new work.

Katie Noble - 'A Treatise on Theatre as Visual Culture; or, a Methodology for Medea in 18th-Century Drama and Art'

Researching drama of the eighteenth century and its relation to contemporary social beliefs can be a minefield. With access to scripts mediated via published texts and little to no visual record of the productions themselves, how can researchers gauge the extent to which eighteenth-century theatre can be seen to mirror (or even influence) societal opinion? Looking at the published texts is not enough, and there is much insight to be gained by widening our gaze to include sources such as directors' cut editions, contemporary reviews, and commercial prints. My paper is a musing on methodology; a work-in-progress treatise for

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the study of drama within the field of visual culture, and specifically for its interdisciplinary study alongside other visual arts such as painting and print. After making my case for the study of drama alongside visual art I will contextualise my argument with examples from my Masters thesis, which looks at the representation of Euripides's *Medea* in eighteenth-century drama, alongside commercial prints and visual representations by George Romney. From Richard Glover's Euripidean tragedy and its associated prints, to Romney's drawings

and Emma Hamilton's theatrical attitudes; I will consider how theatre and other visual art sources can be used in unison to build a convincing picture of the eighteenth century's attitude to *Medea* and her unnerving duality of being both mother and murderer.

Ella Hawkins - "Authentic" underwear at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre: practice as experiment, re-enactment, and research'

As part of its 1997 Opening Season, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre staged a production of *Henry V* that was intended to be performed 'according to the principles and practices of reconstructed authenticity'.¹ Researching and recreating Elizabethan clothing was a central part of this experimental process. As well as reconstructing surviving outer garments from the period, the theatre's costume team dedicated significant time to making Elizabethan undergarments which would not actually be visible during performance.² This element of the production's 'authentic' approach to clothing attracted copious media attention in 1997,³ and has since been cited regularly in criticism regarding 'original practices' performance. As previously asked by Rob Conkie: 'why would someone want to wear undergarments which have been designated as authentic'?⁴ Repositioning the Globe's infamous hand-knitted hose in relation to experimental archaeology, historical re-enactment, and living history, I argue that the theatre's reconstructive approach to costume design simultaneously advanced and democratised research into early modern performance practices. These early 'original practices' experiments used widely-acknowledged research methodologies to offer valuable experiential insights into past practices and peoples, and made major contributions to fields beyond Shakespeare Studies (particularly Fashion History and Early Modern Studies).

¹ Rob Conkie, *The Globe Theatre Project: Shakespeare and Authenticity* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 2006), p. 4.

² Jenny Tiramani, 'Extensive research has gone into the clothes that will be worn for this production', programme note, *Henry V*, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre (1997).

³ Conkie, p. 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*

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Panel 2 – Embodied Identities

Francesco Bentivegna - 'Who Is Voicing? The Production and Re-production of Posthuman Voices'

In the last decade, a new field of performance studies, Voice Studies, has placed voice as its main subject of interest. Scholars like Thomaidis and Neumark claim that voice engenders relationality, rather than just subjectivity or identity: voice is not a singular expression, but a relation of pluralities, a multiplicity that becomes 'in-between' (Thomaidis, Macpherson 2015: 4). In my PaR-PhD, I address this in-between-ness as related to ongoing discussions on the future of technology and its evolution. Groups like Google Deepmind and OpenAI are expanding current debates on robot ethics and the future purposes of AI, while popular media outlets are addressing this issue from an interdisciplinary perspective.

This paper reports the results of my first Practice Chapter, where the posthuman condition is questioned through artificial voices. Central to this analysis is the role of relation and the decrease of the boundaries between human and 'the other' (in this case, technology). My Practice Chapter explores the production and reception of posthuman voices, questioning the similarities and differences between what I define as *techno-posthuman voices* and *bio-mediated voices*. The first term refers to TTS and computer-based sound, while the second stands for recorded and/or digitally modified human voices. Despite a prolific production of works addressing posthumanism on identity, body, and multiplicity, performance studies have not given adequate attention to posthuman voices. This Practice Research investigates these porous boundaries, as well as the agency of technology in contemporary performance making, and contributes to our developing knowledge of artificial voices and/in performance by asking: how are posthuman voices produced, conceptualised, and received in contemporary performance practice?

Giorgia Campi - 'Fragmentation, identity and character in performer training'

For this conference, I would like to offer a 20-minute working demonstration, which explores the potential of the performative dimensions of an academic presentation. How is an academic presentation also a form of practice as research? What gets lost in translating practice into description of practice? How can I embody the arguments as I describe them and move beyond description?

In order to test these questions, this performance lecture will play with languages, gesture, song and silence to explore identity and fragmentation through a playful and theoretical examination of selected moments of traditional training practices I have experienced. This semi-fictional autobiographical performance will allow me to show, as well as explain, the

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constant riveting tension between harmony and fragmentation of self, brought about by 'othering' one's own cultural gendered body-mind, through radically different cultural experiences and training practices. But as the narrator's persona expresses with hysterical paroxysm her hunger for uncovering universal essential principles running underneath diverse practices, an-other small voice begins an ode to separation and discontinuity that leaves the self un-found, un-belonging, un-finished, un-tangled, possibly...free.

Within the frame of my current PhD enquiry on the impact of different traditional training practices on the contemporary actor's perceived sense of self and affectivity, I will question the role of training as simultaneously freeing and trapping the actor's expression. I will argue for a healthy disentanglement from an essentialist perception of self. Instead I will propose that undergoing different training practices can lead the performer through a process of fragmentation and self-othering, which is fruitful and fertile for the development of the actor's creativity.

Panel 3 – Positioning the Researcher

Karian Schuitema - “Just like clowns!” Subverting rules and structures at special school by applying comedy performance to practical and collaborative research’

Children are increasingly offered opportunities to practice their right of having an 'active voice' and are invited to participate in research projects in which they can share their views and opinions on a range of topics. The arts are often chosen to develop practical research and activities such as drama, performance and dance aim to highlight children's voices. Work by Ainslie Yardley (2014), Sybille Peters (2013) and the initiative '5x5x5 Creative' (Bancroft et al, 2008) illustrates how the performing arts can provide a platform for the child's creative enquiry and embodied responses. However, there are not many current research projects in which children with learning disabilities are offered access to these opportunities to become active research collaborators. As these children may have different means of communication they may need alternative ways to collaborate as researchers and experts.

This proposed 20-minute presentation will discuss how comedy performance can be applied to practical research to disrupt traditional power structures between children and adults by prioritising laughter as a means of communication. Looking at the concept of 'Bakhtinian carnivalesque', the paper will suggest that breaking the rules, fooling around and acting like 'clowns' may be a very important way to research school environments and day-to-day experiences. It will discuss observations from a Leverhulme funded early career project in which children at special schools were invited to respond to the research question: "what is funny?" Playing close attention to the collaborators' interactions, the paper will argue that practical research can create moments of empowerment, helping children to express their sense of humour and their point of view.

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Corinne Furness - "Me? I'm just the researcher": A field guide to researching (with) the Royal Shakespeare Company'

In 2016 in conjunction with 14 amateur drama groups the Royal Shakespeare Company staged *A Midsummer Night's Dream: A Play for the Nation*. From autumn 2015 I was embedded with the production, observing training, production meetings, rehearsals, techs, and performances. Made up entirely of material generated whilst I was 'in the field', from field notes to lists, voice memos to creative responses, this paper uses the specifics of my particular experience of being embedded within this particular production to consider the role of the embedded researcher. Focussing on the training and rehearsal process it explores how both I and the RSC attempted to negotiate issues of error, failure, and risk in the context of a play which exploits such vulnerabilities for laughs. It argues for the acknowledgement of the dual role of the embedded researcher: invited guest and paid spectator. By drawing attention to its own making, this performative paper will seek not only to reflect the lived experience of the rehearsal room but also question how we might better talk about the unfinished, the unmade, and the provisional work of making (and researching) theatre.

Small print: This research was sanctioned by the RSC. Their logo will be on the slides. Their money paid my train fare to rehearsals and the underwhelming sandwiches I bought to eat there.

Heath Pennington - 'Tied Up In Research: Breaking the Scholar-Practitioner Binary'

Kinbaku, or Japanese rope bondage, has been steadily growing in popularity since emerging in commercialized art and pornography in 1920s Japan. Though *kinbaku*, also known as *shibari*, is firmly ensconced within BDSM (bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, sadism and masochism; also known as "kink"), the internet and mainstream media have increasingly brought *kinbaku*, like BDSM, into the public eye in simplified forms. These often negate BDSM's emphasis on safe, sane, and consensual practice.⁵

I approach my research on *kinbaku* and BDSM through the lenses of performance and gender studies, which enable me to problematize popular media's dumbing-down of kink's complex corporeal praxis. My fieldwork with diverse BDSM communities provides empirical evidence to support my research, and enables me to take up a position as scholar-practitioner through participant observation and ethnographic interviews. In this position, I employ interdisciplinary feminist methodologies, working to destabilize hierarchical researcher/practitioner binaries. Additionally, I bring a critical eye to prevailing portrayals of gender within BDSM, and numerous images of *kinbaku* specifically, which serve to reinforce

⁵ Weiss, M. D. (2006). Mainstreaming Kink: The Politics of BDSM Representation in U.S. Popular Media. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 50(2-3), 103-132. https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v50n02_06

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traditional stereotypes of passive women and active men, constructing kinbaku as a normative expression of mainstream pornotropes.

That said, this work attempts to disrupt researcher/practitioner power dynamics while representing a subject still frequently viewed as taboo in the hope of counteracting negative conceptions of violence and misogyny from audiences' potential previous exposure to kink/kinbaku.

The provocation will take place in three parts:

1. Introduction (4-5 min) – situates myself as scholar-practitioner and briefly discusses my research, presents my fellow performer, and closes by positioning the practice in its sociocultural and historical milieu, expanding on the information above;
2. Performance (10-12 min) – I as "researcher" with field notebook in hand take notes as my partner performs a rope bondage self-tie, and am slowly involved in the tie until I can no longer notate;
3. Reflection(4-5 min) – allows the audience insight into how my methodology shapes my praxis, I review the goals of the intervention.