

go before reaching these goals. But one thing is certain: interracial and intercultural harmony will not be attained by covering up people's faces with masks, as in *Face Value*. *Lanling's* disaster should never be repeated. Greg's cultural amnesia in *The L.A. Plays* is no solution either. Smith's most practical lesson: People don't have to just talk about other races and cultures, they can portray other people onstage cross-racially and cross-culturally with their true faces.

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# Theatre / Archaeology

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*Editor's Note: What follows is a proposition, and responses to that proposition, offered at and after the 26-28 February 1993 conference on "Documentation and Devising" convened in Cardiff, Wales, by the Centre for Performance Research.*

## The Proposition

Mike Pearson

### Objectives

Over the past 30 years, albeit with historical and ethnic parallels, modes of performance have appeared which are not reliant upon dramatic literature. They may be uneasy with text, nonverbal even, communally composed, reliant in turn upon the expression of the performer or a synthesis of staging effect. In almost all these appearances, physical expression is something other than illustration (something to do with your hands while talking).

Even though such performances have devised sophisticated principles of theory and practice, they do not generate dramatic literature. Hence they are seen as illiterate, not serious; in archaeological terms perhaps, prehistoric. They may even be invisible!

The objectives of theatre archaeology are:

1. To find useful ways of describing what is/was going on in performance.
2. To achieve a synthesis of the narratives of the watchers and the watched (see below).
3. To attempt reconstructions as text and as second-order performance. This is a creative process in the present and not a speculation on past meaning or intention.

## Definitions

*Performance: an ephemeral event which shares characteristics with a nexus of activities including play, game, sport, and ritual. (see Schechner [1965] 1988)*

In each, a "special world" is created (constructed) by the participants, bound by rules. Time can be rearranged (the imposition of fixed patterns; one span representing another duration) and an arbitrary value can be assigned to objects (beyond their market worth). Rules may ensure coherence and momentum (direction).

Performance can exist as a strategy, a sequence of tasks, instructions, prohibitions. We have conventionally used the word scenario for "that which is to be attempted" or game-plan, plot. It may be an expenditure of energy in the here-and-now. It may be singular and unrepeatable.

The one unique feature of performance is that it must be watched, witnessed, justified. Of necessity, there are the watchers and the watched.

*Archaeology: the reconstruction of the past from its surviving material culture.*

The past is no longer seen as a monolithic, undifferentiated mass within which meaning is self-evident. Rather the past is a source of data which is gathered and interpreted according to the purpose of the archaeologist. Thus pasts are created which are "useful," not least when reinforcing a sense of place, a kind of orientation.

Current practice focuses on process in the past and the reidentification of motive and action. This is referred to as "postprocessual" in archaeological literature.

Archaeology is not just excavation (analysis). It must, in some way, synthesize (reconstruct, represent, simulate) the past.

*Theatre archaeology: the retrieval and reconstitution of performance.*

The term "theatre archaeology" is a paradox: The application of archaeological techniques to an ephemeral event. However, while performance may leave limited material traces, it does generate narratives.

## Narratives

Performance generates two orders of narrative: the narratives of the watchers and the watched.

The narratives of the watchers include those of fans/aficionados (colored by expectation, memory, history), first-timers (incredulous, extreme), and "foreigners" (those perceiving different orders of connotative meaning). And of course those of the critic, most often converted to text as reportage, review, article, thesis. These texts tend to have a high survival rate (archive, press release, quotation) which increases their authority.

What theatre archaeologists need from the watchers is description, taxonomy, natural history: working with difference and similarity, not hierarchies of value. One thing that the watcher puts into narrative is time, the time of reflection of reexperiencing and inflating the fleeting image by replaying it over and over in the memory.

The narratives of the watched can exist as text: diaries, notebooks, strategic documents (such as parallel scripts in which all staging elements are shown minute by minute), lighting plots, etc. They also exist

as analect and anecdote in an oral culture, in slang, dialect, code-words: a folklore of practices, a free-masonry of shared belief. Let us characterize this as a minority language.

All of these narratives are colored by expectation, wish, desire, and/or strategy compromised by tactics.

Proposal: both theatre and archaeology generate narratives and texts, not only as data, but as operational experience and anecdote.

## Terminology

The following (mis)appropriated terms—site, context, culture—may be of use.

*Site: a locality with limited boundaries.*

One new model in archaeology is that of continuity, the realization that many sites are inhabited over long periods. People stay put and local traditions persist. We might suggest that archaeology is simply the most recent occupation, usage, of a site.

Can we—the researchers—regard such sites as aggregations of narratives: historical (folklore, local knowledge), environmental (topography, climate, natural history), and archaeological (data, the experience of excavators)? Theatre auditoria are obvious sites of continuous occupation. The proscenium may be seen as a field endlessly cultivated (to exhaustion?).

Many performances also occur in "found" locations, often former sites of play, work, and worship. Particular narratives—architectural, historical (former usage), climatic, and environmental—will be apparent as source, framing, subtext.

The relationship is reciprocal: performance affects site, with the construction of scenographic architectures which constitute "ghost buildings within the host buildings."

We could also regard performance as one of Foucault's heterotopias:

[P]laces that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society, which are something like counter-sites, in which the real, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. (1986:24)

*Context: a broader landscape; the political and/or social setting of performance.*

Meaning is not universal. Some reflexive knowledge of performance and context is necessary. To what extent is performance a reflection, transgression, verification of its context? For example, was the complex, paradoxical imagery of Polish theatre companies under Communism devised to outwit the censor?

*Culture: an entity, grouping, system identified by shared attributes.*

A problematic term in archaeology (what constitutes an attribute? Can an artistic style indicate a social grouping?) but nonetheless useful. What are the shared attributes of Third Theatre, contact improvisation, theatre-in-education? Do we place too much emphasis in theatre on the importance of idiolect, originality, avantgardism?

## Approaches to Retrieval

### ARCHAEOLOGY

The timetable for an archaeological excavation will include formulation of research strategy (asking the right questions); collecting and recording data; processing and analyzing data (establishing attributes); interpretation and publication. Publication is the sine qua non of excavation. As a nonrepeatable operation, a written account should record all that has been destroyed, so that the reader can reconstruct the whole, and future archaeologists can mentally reexcavate and reinterpret the site.

The "site report" is the exposition of evidence with hypothesis, interpretation, and conclusion. It includes description of the site (geology, subsoil, soil, environmental data, previous field work, purpose and extent of excavation); summary of principal structures and phases (details of stratification, description of structures: dimensions, materials, dating); interpretation (reconstruction); discussion (comparison with other sites); description of finds (form, technique, decoration, etc.); specialist records; folklore; maps, plans, sections, line drawings of objects, and the like.

Of course much of this is subjective, not "hard data." Nevertheless the "site report" is instructive. It contains narratives and texts of many different orders; reading it is a constructive project. However, its bias is toward data. Perhaps in the overlap between performance and archaeology another type of "site report" could embrace other narratives and draw them into dynamic juxtaposition.

And in the reflexive relationship of performance and archaeology there may be more, much more. Even a cursory glance at current archaeological literature might indicate the beginnings of a descriptive terminology for performance.

1. We might see performers as a band, occupying a site for a short period with densities of activity (occasionally eradicated and worked over) and a hierarchical organization of space (different activities in different locations, i.e., at ritual sites there are techniques for focusing attention, securing participation and rites of passage).
2. We could view the performer as an active individual for whom behavior is context-dependent and strategic. The active individual has practical logic, experience knowledge, cultural competence, tact, dexterity, skill. He knows "how to go on" improvising as best he can within the given context (strategy).
3. We could utilize the terminology of transactions such as exchange (reciprocity, redistribution, market activity) or "peer-polity" interaction (competition, competitive emulation, warfare, transmission of innovation, symbolic entrainment, ceremonial exchange, flow of commodities, development of shared language) or that used to describe the processes of change (positive feedback, punctuated equilibria [short periods of rapid change within a longer evolutionary trajectory], catastrophe).

Performance is always about norm and variability: between seasonal performance and everyday "life," performance and performance, rehearsal and exposition, strategy and operation. And it involves qualitative improvisation and repetition without exactitude.



1. In the article, *A*, puts forth must syn. This photo, Edlingham Northum by Micha

### FORENSIC SCIENCE

At the "scene of the crime" (a cordoned off, isolated, and sealed site) everything is potentially important. No thesis is advanced until the "chain of evidence" is secured. "Everything that could matter" is recorded. The site is treated as a totality.

The "scene" is photographed from different perspectives and viewpoints. The general layout and specifics are carefully noted. Detailed descriptions are made of clothing, furniture, weapons, loose articles. Particular objects are tagged as exhibits. On a "map" of the site, the bodies are marked along with trajectories of blood splattering and ballistics. Statements are taken from witnesses, neighbors, suspects (helping us with our inquiries).

Expert testimony will eventually emerge, not least from the pathologist (description of wounds, time and cause of death). The central aim is to establish a chain of events (sequence, chronology). On site, a relative chronology may be established by irrevocable change (stratigraphy), the "decay" of site and body, other evidence of disturbance.

Thus, the crime—the performance—generates dozens of narratives, many of them discursive and tangential. All must be converted to text: only written statements are acceptable as evidence (testimony, specialists' reports).

Forensic science might be useful to us in three ways:

1. It might indicate techniques of interrogation. From the watchers and the watched, we need detail, not a summary of the plot. We

may need to ask oblique questions ("Tell me about your performance scars?" "What were you doing when...?") to reveal useful information.

2. All photographs, plans, and initial observations are collated in "scene-of-the-crime" books which allow successive detectives to orient themselves and "relive" the events.
3. Crimes are regularly reconstructed on the British Broadcasting Company's "Crimewatch," a sophisticated simulation involving the "public" as well as actors; voice-overs establish chains of events, environmental data, biographical detail, eyewitness accounts, reported activity/speech, specialist reports, photos. This often stops short of showing the crime; for that, we must use our imagination as well as the made-available information.

#### ETHNOARCHAEOLOGY

Ethnoarchaeology employs anthropological parallels to explain (pre)historic processes. For example, kabuki and noh, whose development has all but ended and where only further refinement takes place, have procedures which are prescribed and could provide a basis for a descriptive terminology.

#### "TRACK LAYING"

In large-scale projects, Brith Gof<sup>4</sup> has increasingly composed, written, and conceived the main performance constituents—libretto, music, physical action, and scenography—each in isolation from the others. Against an agreed upon structure and time base, the constituents are developed and only combined at a later date. This has led to the use of the terminology (and practice) of the recording studio. So tracks are laid down in parallel. They are then "mixed" to achieve blend and/or contradiction. This may, from time to time, include compression, erasure, or fracture of any one constituent. Coherence may be carried by any one track and this may change from moment to moment. "Sampling" may help understand how uncontexted material may be included in any one track.

#### What Is Recoverable?

Could these "approaches to retrieval" provide methods of revealing or retrieving aspects of performance that map in new and innovative ways what may be described as the "base elements" of performance: space, time, pattern, detail, object?

#### Representation/Reconstruction/Simulation

*The exposition of the narratives: the past in the present.*

#### AS TEXT

For example, here are two types of strategic text used in the creation of large-scale, site-specific projects:

1. Workbooks—technical documents that include lists of materials, procedures, constructional timetables, line drawings of particular

features to be constructed and plans, sections, and axonometric projections of the site—contain all the information necessary to create a performance in a given location by crew unfamiliar with the work.

2. Parallel texts indicate how each aspect of the performance proceeds in parallel with the others against a time base/soundtrack.

While both of these documents are strategic (before-the-event) and greatly modified in practice, they do at least give a useful impression of organizational principles.

As we convert narrative to text, we will be left with analects, anecdotes, stories, poetics, lists, choreographic plans. But we need "another way of telling." Three models spring to mind:

1. We should look at those writers who concern themselves with the accumulation of narratives at site. Among these are west Welsh writer D.J. Williams, whose autobiography (1953) helped define concepts such as *γ filltir sqwar* (the square mile we know in childhood) and *γ fro* (intimate neighborhood), John Berger in *Pig Earth* (1979), and particularly William Least Heat Moon whose *PrairyEarth* (1991) is a "deep map" of a small area in the American Midwest, a combination of the geography and natural history of a given location with accounts of the history and lived experience of its inhabitants. The practice of making a "deep map" is well suited to theatre archaeology.
2. We should encourage watchers and watched to produce texts which are other than "data." Of interest is Peter Greenaway's catalog for his exhibition *100 Objects to Represent the World* (1992) in which he lists not only the objects but also interpretations ("to demonstrate...") and representative photographs from art and everyday life.
3. We need to develop new ways of combining/integrating text and image, producing texts which in themselves will have to be interpreted. This we can term "incorporation." It may be particularly useful to re-incorporate original source material—texts, photographs, drawings....

We should not forget that the watchers will rarely remember any performance "in toto." They may remember particular moments, images, details (one musical note, sweat on the skin) which are personally suggestive. It may be interesting to represent this kind of partial remembering as a series of images (photographs, paintings, etc.) as John Berger does in *Another Way of Telling* (1982).

#### AS PERFORMANCE

*How might performance be reconstructed as performance?*

*As reenactment:* If performance exists as a set of explicit rules or tasks, then it should be possible to reenact the original. But we remember that this is a replica. What we cannot reconstruct is the original context although we might provide pointers ("did they really sit through that!?!").

*As revival:* Experimental performance has little tradition of revival. Can we imagine a company reviving a performance from ten years ago

or indeed from another company? Could a young British company, for instance, ever revive Grotowski's 1968 *Apocalypsis cum figuris*?

*As lecture:* The lecture is a basic form of archaeological exposition. What better than to hear an archaeologist talking about his/her own work particularly (invariably) with slides? The best usually have a strategy (script) but often digress (to include anecdotes provoked by the slides, to answer questions, to provide provenance). Such tactical recurrences often result from sensing the tenor of the audience. There are many orders of narrative (data, biography, jokes) and elements of proto-performance such as manual indication of process ("we think it was used like this").

This useful method is being examined by Brian Eno, Robert Wilson, and Laurie Anderson. Their work might be suggestive for the archaeologist for its use of performance methods and technology: its rhetorical usages and multiscreen projections.

(The guided tour of site is an interesting subgroup here.)

*As demonstration:* Iben Nagel Rasmussen (of Odin Teatret) has devised a demonstration which includes her (former) training practices, the (chronological) reenactment of "characters" she has created, and a script of biography, processual information, and analect.

*As storytelling:* Solo performance mixes useful information with the pleasure of telling. We are used to people talking and making sudden shifts in technique and material. We should pay closer attention to gossip with its high order of intertextuality. The solo narrative can include truth and fiction, lying and appropriation, the fragmentary, the digressive, the ambiguous. There are no hierarchies of information, no correct procedures.

*As second-order performance:* I have in mind performances about performances. Such reconstructions could include a central narration (lecture), audiovisual presentation (slides, video, soundtrack), activity "in parenthesis" (reenactment of sections), data (reviews, eyewitness accounts), discussion (question and answer), examination of props, reconstruction of training procedures (from photographs).

We may find the techniques for such work in nonlinear performances like The Wooster Group's *Brace Up!* (1991) (narration, data, reenactment) and Brith Gof's *Patagonia* (1992) (reconstruction, biography, anecdote).

*As soundtrack LP/CD, as TV version, as interactive computer program, as video disc (the Aspen project of MIT allows you to drive around Aspen and even enter certain buildings), as virtual reality:* All we should be aware of is that the material will be mediated by the medium. The TV version of Brith Gof's large-scale 1990 work, *Pax*, is a 10-minute video with two performers; the soundtrack CD is based around the voice of a Welsh rock singer who never appeared live.

*As question-and-answer. As dinner party, as party game:* Grotowski arranges his public appearances as question-and-answer sessions. He takes five questions at a time, selects two to address, and then talks about whatever's on his mind!

*As museum:* Much attention is now being paid to the museum as a construct of local narratives, as something useful. Perhaps the jammed-full closet—an exposition without hierarchy—will make a comeback!

## Notes on Theatre/Archaeology

Julian Thomas

### Definitions

*Theatre archaeology is characterized as "retrieval and reconstitution":* But archaeologists do not so much "reconstitute" what they find; rather they recontextualize, or appropriate.

There are a number of different senses of the word "record," for instance:

1. Fossil record.
2. Textual record—a written text.
3. Evidence—or raw material for an interpretive engagement ("textual practice").

In archaeology at the moment there is debate over the status of the term "text." Is the archaeological "record" like a written text? Yes and no—we don't read archaeological evidence in the same way that we read a written work, but we do enter a space of interpretive productivity, and engage in textual practice (in Barthes' sense [1981]; see also Belsey 1980:125).

The meaning of archaeological evidence is not fixed—it is polysemic. This is why what archaeologists create is never "reconstruction" in the full sense, but recontextualization.

Performance as rule-governed: But we could say that all action is improvisation upon a given (but transformable) set of rules. Thus the game plan or scenario provides the frame within which improvisation is to take place, just as cultural tradition or habit forms the frame for improvisation in everyday life. Perhaps the difference is that in the everyday, much of the frame is nondiscursive and socialized? Or could one say that with theatre performance much of what is present is both non-verbal and beyond being verbalized?

"*The one unique feature of performance is that it must be watched, witnessed, justified*": Does this mean that the Gulf War was a performance?

The richness of meaning is only partly controllable. It depends upon the set of symbolic and experiential resources which you bring to it—hence each watcher will have their own reading. What this suggests is that the watcher is an active participant in the production of meaning.

Archaeology creates identities. The relationship between groups and identities is dialectical. Neither individual nor community has a grounded essence, but is created through social action (performance). So, again, what archaeologists do is not a recovery of past essences, so much as an investigation of the machinery through which identities emerged.

The past is. We are as having-been. In our daily lives we can only conceive of ourselves as persons because we have a past. So what the archaeologist does is to build upon a fundamental characteristic of being human.