

PREFACE

This volume traces an evolving dialogue between - and the gradual convergence and co-mingling of - two discrete projects: in performance and in archaeology.

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It has its origins in a somewhat unlikely place. At the beginning of the 1990s a centre of archaeological theory was located in a small market town in west Wales, at the University of Wales, Lampeter. It was there that a series of encounters between performance and archaeology began. In their meetings and discussions, prehistorian Julian Thomas, classicist Michael Shanks and Mike Pearson, then artistic director of Welsh theatre company Brith Got (translated - faint recollections), rapidly found mutualities of interest and approach. The initial talk was of archaeological excavation as performance event; of the dramatisation of the past within heritage re-enactments; of the sensualities of place; of the articulation of space, body and action in bounded contexts; of the problems of presentation and representation; of performance and the past as generative of, and constituted by, multiple and conflicting narratives. Above all, both disciplines acknowledged their functioning as modes of cultural production, involving the recontextualisation of material rather than its reconstruction.

In structure, this volume chronicles the development of the collaboration between Michael Shanks and Mike Pearson in their theoretical and practical endeavours, commencing with their interdisciplinary borrowing of certain notions and procedures to help expand and illuminate particular disciplinary perceptions and stances, and culminating in the joint elaboration of a **blurred genre**, a mixture of narration and scientific practices, an integrated approach to recording, writing and illustrating the material past.

Given the profligate adoption in cultural and critical theory and discourse of terms such as 'performance' and 'the performative' (and indeed 'archaeology' *pace* Foucault 1989) to describe notions of social affirmation, utterance and action - from Erving Goffman to Judith Butler - it was Julian Thomas who first suggested that the use of the term 'theatre' might help signal a specific focus on artistic practice and the aesthetic event and dispel any initial confusion about the siting of the discussants. The almost immediate and contrary use of 'performance' in place of 'theatre' in this text serves to indicate a particular concern with those genres of theatre that, by and large, are not reliant upon the exposition of dramatic literature and that 'stage the subject in process' (Reinelt forthcoming) rather than the 'character' and that attend to 'the making and fashioning of certain materials, especially the body and the exploration of the limits of representation-ability' (*ibid.*). This is what we term 'performance'. And the 'performative' used herein, at least initially, has a rhetorical dimension.

Given the idiosyncratic and personal nature of two converging projects, it was inevitable that

this volume should tend towards the (auto)biographical. But, as Walter Benjamin said (1992: 91), 'thus the traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel'. From time to time, the book also relies heavily on others, for their thoughts have often led not merely to further intellectual reflection but to embodiment as tenets of practice or positions to be held, their origins obscured by what they have inspired. And here as Walter Benjamin said (ibid.: 107):

it is granted to him to reach back to a whole lifetime (a life, incidentally, that comprises not only his own experience but no little of the experience of others; what the storyteller knows from hearsay is added to his own). His gift is the ability to relate his life; his distinction, to be able to tell his entire life. The storyteller: he is the man who could let the wick of his life be consumed completely by the gentle flame of his story.

To help the reader, therefore, and to give credit where due, the Afterword and acknowledgements are quite detailed.

In this way the book necessarily has more than one voice. The typefaces change to indicate the personal voices of each of the authors, and also where they join, though the degree to which we have learned from each other makes this a crude device.

It begins in the present, with reflections on contemporary conditions.

MP + MS

A project in performance

As I write this book, we are launching an undergraduate course in performance studies in the Department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies in the University of Wales Aberystwyth (Pearson *et al.* 1999). Our aim is to devise distinctive pedagogical approaches, both practical and theoretical, that utilise the particular - and not, I stress, parochial - cultural and geographical resources of Aberystwyth, its landscape, language and history; that employ the particular material assets of the location, its architecture and social fabric, as a creative stimulus (working in the specific architectures of chapels, the particular social arrangement of cattle markets and in the barely accessible depths of forests, with objects drawn from the local farmers' co-operative and the county museum); that draw upon those traditions of experimental theatre-making that have proposed alternative approaches to the forms, preoccupations, functions and placement of theatre in Wales and that have acknowledged 'the close link between culture, subjectivity and place without reverting to nostalgia, new age mysticism or an aggressive "native soil" ideology' (Roms 1997: 80); that conspicuously foreground those particular histories, personalities and practices that have revealed 'the complex relationship between ourselves, our bodies and our environment, [between] our physical and sensual experience of a place, and . . . the impact a particular location can have on our lives' (ibid.). All this constitutes for us a kind of intellectual ecology, a challenge to notions of **centre/periphery**.

Whilst the course may involve the study of the **aesthetic event** of conventional theatre (as a social encounter and as a mode of cultural production rather than merely the staging of a play), we state our explicit interest in devised performance, physical theatre, site-specific work and performance art - those genres where dramatic literature does not necessarily play a central organising role — as they are manifest historically, ethnically and experimentally. Our simple desire is to find useful ways of understanding and describing what is, or was, going on in the phenomenon we call performance and then to encourage practical initiatives in its conception. If Schechner's definition of performance as 'organised human behaviour presented before witnesses' still holds, then the pertinent questions will be: How is it organised? What constitutes behaviour? How is it presented? What is the relationship with witnesses? We aim to develop a series of 'principles of practice' - approaches to conception, design, rehearsal and manifestation, a continuum of strategies and procedures which attend, with varying degrees of rigour, to questions of real-time presentation and representation.

As performance has grown in importance - particularly within the social sciences - as a means of exploring the myriad ways in which meaning is created and social life is "shaped, it is essential to include different histories, genealogies, geographies and politics in the fabric of the academic discipline. It is also crucial to embrace the scrutiny of the widest spectrum of performative practices as they occur in our artistic and social life: in activities and arenas where image manipulation and management is implicated, and in those hybrid artistic genres that electronic communication begins to conspire. Performance studies also employs performance as an optic through which to examine the performative phenomena that constitute our contemporary experience - from theme park to internet, from Brit-art to Jerry Springer, from drag to rap - thereby widening understanding of performance as both a vital artistic practice and as a means to understand historical, social and cultural processes, (<http://www.nyu.edu/pages/psi>)

How do we constitute the particular accent of our discourse? It is, of necessity, **site-specific**. It assumes, of desire, a deliberate erasure of the finely etched line between the academic and the artistic. Out here, on the edges, off the beaten track, people who speak the same language literally and metaphorically are few enough. Our colleagues from Welsh literature studies can direct us to the performative nature of bardic poetry. But there are others - archaeologists, human geographers, earth scientists, social historians, cultural politicians - who pose familiar questions about place and identity, as well as institutions increasingly charged with responsibility for the representation of notions of cultural and national identity - the media, museums, environmental and heritage agencies. We feel as much affinity with them as with the sociological biases of extant models of performance studies. They can help orient us, revealing new ways of looking and telling. Our approaches then will be diverse, context-dependent and inter-disciplinary. We want to accommodate the broadest range of potential approaches without distilling them into a 'party line'. We espouse pragmatism and flexibility: we acknowledge the anecdotal. We doubt that our 'take' on performance studies has well-defined disciplinary boundaries.

We seem to be operating within a triangular field of attention which includes at its apexes the terms '**practice**', '**context**' and '**analysis**'. Practice because several of us are professional performance practitioners and because we want to make things - performances, knowledges - as much as we want to reflect on things. Context because we are interested in the ramifications of social, cultural, political and historical context upon the nature, form and function of performance, as operational in our particular set of circumstances, and because we are equally concerned with the effect of the performance environment - location, site, architecture, scenography - upon dramaturgy and techniques of exposition. Analysis because we desire to develop appropriate means to describe, document and ultimately legitimise performance practices. Within and upon this field there are a multitude of available stances and viewpoints. And it is always possible to shift position. Each one of us in our work may stand from time to time closer to one apex than the others, whilst still holding the others in view. So whilst we may be considering an analysis of practice (or a practice of analysis), context still claims our attention ('What does this mean . . . here?'). And the folklorist, the archaeologist, the geographer are most welcome to come and stand in our field. We do not simply want to appropriate their methodologies. We want them to look, and to enable us to look through them, at performance: it is already in the nature of their discourses to favour the local, the particular. Their analytical approaches must surely be instructive; at least, they are not forever searching for a universal revelation of the human condition. Finally, we want to reclaim and re-articulate the notion of 'event-ness' in performance studies - practice, context, theory.

MP

An archaeological project

As I write this book we are setting our hopes and designs upon a new Archaeology Center at Stanford University, California. It will cut across several departments - of Classics, History, Anthropological Sciences, Cultural and Social Anthropology, Earth Sciences, of Art History. While archaeology has always been this interdisciplinary field, divisions and rifts have been the norm, frequently focusing on that familiar and disabling cultural divide between science and the humanities. We intend something different - a creative intermingling, where the boundaries of the discipline are deliberately blurred, held suspended. Archaeology-truly interdisciplinary. For me this is the culmination of a twenty-year argument about the character of what we call archaeology. For me, archaeology is not a discipline but a cultural field. It means to work upon understanding archaeological things - material traces and material cultures, understanding the creative event that is the construction of archaeological knowledge, and the historical context of such an archaeological project.

This may all seem a little strange and oblique to those unfamiliar with archaeology. Let me explain, and to do so I will need to anticipate some of the arguments of the book. I consider this is excusable, for a preface is, after all, the place where we read of the circumstances under

which a book has come to be written. And the topic is a significant one - disciplinary connections, the boundaries of the academy, and the shape of creative practices.

The origins of contemporary archaeology are to be found with the emergence of industrial modernity and Enlightenment thought in the eighteenth century. A reorientation of attitudes towards the material past was central to the new ideologies of classicism (the sanctity of a Graeco-Roman rather than merely Roman past), Hellenism (classical Greece as the childhood of civilisation and Europe) and Romanticism (redefinitions of the political and creative individual) (Shanks 1996). The nation-states of Europe competed for the material relics of ancient civilisations, cultural capital to witness their own membership of a civilised elite. Archaeology simultaneously provided tangible manifestations of national and local ancestry, material continuities justifying territorial ownership. And while the traces of Celtic Gaul or the megaliths of British prehistory might be attached to a sense of enduring identity, the ruin of the shattered archaeological past and its melancholic loss attests as well to the distance and indeed the difference of the past - the past is both here and now, but also lost and distant in its ruin.

The experiences of antiquarians, travellers and Enlightenment scholars of the Mediterranean were central to the emergence of archaeology and this particular form that it took. There were new notions of visiting rooted in the picturesque and sublime, new views of the past in the landscape -topographical interests of the like of aristocratic traveller and collector Choiseul-Gouffier, William Gell writing his itineraries for Greece, military man William Martin Leake locating sites mentioned in ancient history books. New relationships of inspiration between past and present, arts and architectures developed. For example: neo-Classicism and the Greek revival, typified by the architectural work of members of the British Society of Dilettanti, Stuart and Revett. The Mediterranean and Near East became a theatre for ostentatious and self-conscious programmes of research and the manipulation of the past in the present-from conservation and restoration programmes in the planning of the new metropolis, to the work of the foreign institutes of learning set up by imperial powers across the world.

From the nineteenth century archaeology was significantly influenced by German scientific history, *Altertumswissenschaft*, developing increasingly rigorous methods and procedures. But it was only in the 1970s that the British archaeologist David Clarke felt able to report a new critical awareness in the discipline. He termed this a 'Moss of innocence' (Clarke 1973). An introspective approach began to emerge, which focused upon methods and theories along with a more mature view outwards, which questioned archaeology's place within the humanities and social sciences, and society as a whole. Since then archaeology has come to be seen as much an anthropological as an historical discipline, with artefacts conceived not merely as temporal indices and cultural markers, supplying date, sequence and ethnic identity to an archaeological culture history, but also as means to understand past society. Most importantly, artefacts and material environments are now conceived as *active* in society and history, partners with human subjects in making society and history what they are rather than merely illustrating a logic or momentum established elsewhere.

In the 1980s social archaeologies further stressed the importance of context: that any artefact - a work of art, for example - must be set in the context of the society that produced

it, rather than allowed to simply stand on its own and speak for itself. And this context includes also the past in the present. So the enormous growth of interest in what has been termed 'heritage' or 'patrimony' has accompanied a realisation of the vital part played by material culture, and particularly the archaeological past, in contemporary constructions of social identity. At the same time various issues of cultural politics have conspicuously highlighted the same point about the embeddedness of the past in the present - the return of cultural treasures from foreign museums to their origins and the sacredness of human remains and attempted pro-

scriptions on their archaeological study by some Native American groups-are two such cases. A few words of clarification are necessary here, in parenthesis, with regard to the concept of heritage. Defined generally as inherited cultural material and goods, the word always has connotations of conservative political and cultural agendas, nostalgic, consoling and reactionary programmes of the conservation and promotion of a high cultural canon. Heritage: great achievements bequeathed to us from the past, central to our identity, often nationalist identity, as members of worthy nation-states and educated social classes. But the term is also used in a more neutral sense: archaeological heritage management in the UK is the close equivalent of cultural resource management in the US ... well, arguably. And this is the point - the term is slippery and contested (Shanks 1992a). What is not in doubt is that the culture industry that includes the heritage industry (Hewison 1987) is a vast and growing cultural and economic sector, covering salvage and rescue archaeology, development and planning, the art market, cultural tourism, museums, book and magazine publishing, mass media 'edutainment', as well as academics and their work.

I take a particular stand in respect of the changes in archaeology described here. I have indicated how I ally myself with those who would have of archaeology a powerful interdisciplinary mix. It is not coincidental that here in the heart of Silicon Valley Stanford archaeologists are looking to find just such a new reconciliation of science and humanities, arts and academia, rich cultural textures allied with new communicative media. A premise for making this work is that we have to be sophisticated in our theory and practice. We also embrace open experiment.

For example, and as we will argue in this book, the social needs to be understood as an *embodied* field: society is felt, enjoyed and suffered, as well as rationally thought. The statistical analysis of social science is not enough. Archaeologists, like many others in the humanities, are now attending to the phenomenological qualities of things and places, what it means to experience architectural space and landscape, the significance of different experiences. Megaliths not simply as tombs, but as sculptures in ritual landscapes of vista and social perspective. Weapons not merely as the functional accoutrements of warfare, the compositions of their metals analysed for evidence of ancient metallurgy, but also as appendages to different experiences and techniques of the body. A house not merely as scene of the domestic economy, its refuse analysed for evidence of butchery practices and cropping regimes, but also as the quality or texture of local space.

Here archaeology's intimate connection of the global and the local is relevant. Widely appealing as a subject, archaeology works upon the details of local pasts. Archaeological remains are now so often a main component in regional as well as national planning. And rather

than treat them as representatives of a past gone and now fragmented, to be conserved or preserved according to some calculation of value to the present, I stress that temporality be described as *actuality*, the return of the past in the present, but in different guise. Something once inconsequential may turn out to be heavily charged with cultural significance for later people. So conspicuously in old places layered in archaeological traces, an artefact, building or ruin from the past does not hold comfortably some point in a linear flow of time from past through to present. It is not just a dated event in the past. Instead the past bubbles around us.

This is the life of things in the present, the life-cycle of artefacts and buildings, enfolded in a multitemporal mix which is the fundamental texture of our human social experience.

This is what I mean when I refer to the need to work upon understanding archaeological things and the creative event that is the construction of archaeological knowledge. It is to think about the very character of the social fabric, its materiality and temporality. It is to cut across disciplines and explode the boundaries of academia. It means that archaeologists have much to talk about and work upon with geographers and material scientists, philosophers of science and geneticists, with those who work upon and think about that field of social practice we call performance.

This is actually a brief sketch of some elements of what has come to be termed '**interpretive archaeology**' (Hodder *et al.* 1995), and this is my archaeological project, my contribution to our plans at Stanford. The term has grown out of what was called 'postprocessual' archaeology (explained in Shanks and Hodder 1995). It designates a set of approaches to the ruined material past which foreground interpretation, the ongoing process of making sense of what never was firm or certain. This archaeology entertains no final and definitive account of the past as it was, but fosters multivocal and multiple accounts: a creative but none the less critical attention and response to the interests, needs and desires of different constituencies (those people, groups or communities who have or express interest in the material past).

MS

A joint project

Our particular archaeological and performance projects came together initially as we met through the work of an arts company - Brith Gof, founded by one of us (MP) some twenty-five years ago and which the other (MS) joined as a company director more recently. This book is in some ways a document of certain aspects of the work of Brith Gof; we include many illustrations of company work and an appendix listing some performed pieces. But we hope that we have begun to make clear that we stress the deeper structural features of our common project: an interdisciplinary and hybrid focus on the textures of social and cultural experience; the means and materials of forging cultural ecologies or milieux which attend to that contemporary tension between the global and the local; how we model the event of this cultural production, the weaving of connections through such indeterminate times and places.

It is worth saying that, in some ways, this places our project within cultural studies, as it

has emerged from Britain (Turner 1996) and as it is has been related to performance studies (Diamond 1996). Our reference here is to located and interventionist work, provocative, challenging orthodox canons of method and objects of interest (juxtaposing Greek art and street shoes in Copenhagen), challenging foundational discourses (such as dramatic literature), stressing the connection between cultural production and its contexts.

MP + MS