*Staging and Re-cycling: Retrieving, Reflecting and Re-framing the Archive*

Chapter 17

Essay 3: **Spectatorial Ghosts** John Keefe

Abstract.

This essay suggests all staging(s) and theatre(s) are 'haunted' and processual experiences, recollections and colourings event to event, and to the 'eftermaele' or after. Aspects of the sensory system are outlined with respect to re-cycling and originality. The work of Arlander is presented as a case-study in repetition. The universal proclivity for stories is examined as a part of embodied simulation. Some snap-shots of re-worked pieces are presented as forms of 'playing it again'.

Theatre as a series of 'disappearances and remains'.

In his survey of the 'haunted stage', Carlson re-iterates the truism we are faced with and take further in this project - that all theatres (all art forms) are haunted, inherently re-use their materials in the conception, construction and staging of the 'make believes' that constitute mimetic theatre. Every theatre event is influenced in one way or another, in one context or another by what has gone before. Every theatre event is a response (knowingly or more usually, we would argue, unknowingly or denying) to that before; in terms of theatre history, culturally, politically. As Elin Diamond succinctly states in her re-looking at mimesis:

...every performance... embeds features of previous performances. (Diamond 1997: 1)

But as a truism, in one context or another, the truth and fact of theatre's position as borrower, poacher, re-cycler is not diminished. The many 're-'s' and variants that run through this (and other) volumes simply underpin such truth. For example, Richard Gough's 'acts of re-membering' in his account of the history and times of *Performance Research* (Gough 2018); the brushings with, the passings-by, the recollections both within the article and for us as readers of names, events, articles. It is an archive.

The ghosts and hauntings that partially characterise the threads of the papers and essays found here are therefore to be acknowledged as such, along with truisms are part of the risk the project also acknowledges.

If we are to live and work with theatre ghosts, then it seems also we have to live with our own ghosts as spectators. I suggest this goes beyond Carlson's enjoyable re-telling of the pleasure in seeing the same scenery in use (p.122) or seeing the same actors in one production to the next (p.111) - a movement made all the more culturally inter-textual when between theatre-cinema-television-the internet.

So, to regard performance as only being in the moment is to be so only in part.

Performance cannot be saved, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so it becomes something other than performance... Performance... becomes itself through disappearance. (Phelan 1993: 146)

As Rebecca Schneider (2012) points out, the problem of theatre is that it has no original artwork: this seems predicated on the assumption we distinguish between the play-text (drama, literature?) and theatre (the stage or performance text?).

And in a sense both these statements are true; the performance itself is, strictly speaking, ephemeral, of the moment-by-moment; it disappears. But if we put to one side the archiving implied here, we may also speak of that which comes after. The pleasure of speaking about what we have seen, the thoughts and feelings provoked and evoked within the context of our processual experiences. The engaging with what Barba calls 'eftermaele'; that which will be said after, that which follows. (see Barba 1992.)

...the theater is essentially a ghosted space filled with the possibility of arresting judgment and forcing ‘recognition or re-knowing or un-forgetting’ in Rayner’s

terms. (Colbert 2011: 160)

The spectator, with all his/her preferences and prejudices, keeps many ghosts in their personal archive: the ghosts that play their own part in re-cycling and re-staging our theatres. We may approach such positive ghosts that maintain the performance in another way, that does not disappear.

Processions, Lookings and Loops

Part of the practice of being a spectator is the willing and knowing suspension of disbelief, the necessary psychical distance that allows us to both see the play for what it is and for an empathy founded in our embodied simulation. This is a continual process:

A process of generating theatre meaning assumedly takes place in the context of each theatre experience; i.e., in the actual encounter between a theatre performance and a spectator. (Rozik 2008: 1)

Each such encounter is the temporary culmination of all previous encounters and will consequently take its place in affecting the next encounter. A juxtaposition of Rozik and Zarrilli may be allowed here.

Rozik also allows us to enrich the notion of mimesis from a simple 'imitation' with other forms of representation or imagistic thinking; the brain's (here, the embodied mind) ability to employ images in the processes of thinking. Hence, our embodied sensory systems: 'conceptual blending theory' allows us to see theatre images for the 'double-ness' they inherently are; 'visual intentionalism' allows us to process dual visual stimuli. (See 'Impossible Theatres and the Possible' below.)

‘Re-cycling’ in all its forms is a dynamic process for both the spectator and the maker. It is a neurological-cognitive process that also allows a place for the imagination, for subjective as well as interpretive input.

To begin with, improvisation (or any type of music performance) includes the folowing components, roughly in the following order:

(i) Complex electrochemical signals are passed between parts of the

nervous system and on to endocrine and muscle systems;

(2) muscles, bones, and connective tissues execute a complex sequence of

actions;

(3) rapid visual, tactile, and proprioceptive monitoring of actions takes place;

(4) music is produced by the instrument or voice;

(5) self-produced sounds, and other auditory input, are sensed;

(6) sensed sounds are set into cognitive representations and evaluated as music;

(7) further cognitive processing in the central nervous system generates the design of the next action sequence and triggers it.

- return to step (1) and repeat (Pressing 1998: 129-30)

Pressing suggests a model that rests on ‘what has gone before-what is then done’ as the basis for the actions that follow. (One is reminded of Meyerhold’s 3-stage model of action in both training and performance whereby I prepare to act - I act - I finish as preparation for next action.) Pressing, however, also notes the paradox of inventiveness and coherence as these push in opposite directions:

…inventiveness comes from the commitment to avoid repetition as much as possible, while coherence is only achieved by some degree of structural unity,

which is only possible with repetition. (: 166)

Is ‘repetition’ here to repeat in a different way as the musician or any other practitioner-artist uses their own previous work? What is the spectator repeating when seeing another production of a play seen before, or sometimes seeing the same production again (as also with films on television or as box sets)? What are we repeating when going to see the same actor in their next show? What is repetition?

Whatever you portray you should always portray

As if it were happening now... He is sitting not only

In your theatre but also

In the world.

(Bertolt Brecht 1981: 307-8)

Forms of Repetition

Repetition is one of the family of 're-' words and concepts; those that capture some 'doing again'. At its simplest it is doing the same task over and over (and over). But as Pressing implies, repetition may be the basis of the same-but-different. Our understanding of Greek Classical theatre is that it worked to a 'repeating' pattern of staging and presentation, allowing familiar stories to be told in differing ways. Acknowledging disputes over dating, the *Corpus Christie Play* was performed annually from the mid-fourteenth to the mid-sixteenth centuries, again following the same yearly pattern whilst allowing small changes to script and staging across those years.

Maria Loh, in her paper, indicates that a change in perception of repetition comes about between the Baroque and modernism. (I would, however, emphasise Romanticism as central to this transition.) For the pre-modernist discourse, repetition, emulation and innovation fed each other; may be seen as 'eclectic imitation', enhancing skills, learning, appreciation and an early form of inter-textuality. Loh cites Lancellotti that one book contains many books and one author, many authors. Such invention between these voices gives us pleasure as

...we feel great delight when we see two equal forces (or two forces between whom we are unable to detect too much difference) come together in competition.

(Loh 2004: 478)

The Baroque represents a different perspective on originality (an eighteenth-century coining) and repetition. Originality, as we now understand the term, seems to be a concern of and for romanticism and modernism with an insistence on the new or proclaimed new. But in terms that echo the point running through this volume that we may modify our notions of art (and similar works):

...the possibility of originality is continuously negotiated between the producer, the object, and the spectator with each new viewing experience. (: 477)

In contrast to this relationship of play, of re-approaching, of the processual between the work and the spectator, the romantic-modernist sense of repetition seems one of *angst* or opportunity.

In his paper 'Repetition', (literally, 'the taking back'; see Melberg) Kierkegaard uses the term to capture both our pleasure and our concern in being caught between recollection - a kind of movement backwards to recover the past - and repetition - a moving forward in the now. For Kierkegaard, both a pleasure of back and forth and an anxiety about the 'now'; what then is being taken back? In a different sense of movement, Deleuze (1994) seems to see repetition, despite its possibility of originating difference, in existential terms as the passing of time and thus one's own mortality. In contrast, Heidegger (1992) sees repetition as a process to reclaim or re-open the past, to contest and discover new meanings from new positions of perceiving.

I am reminded here of Kelleher's path of images or sketches from memory; what is recalled, repeated to ones-self, the musings on our theatrical experiences, the sometimes mis-remembering(s) that may also be the pleasure of what we might call 'repeated hedonic experiences'.

What is being suggested here is that the concept of repetition cannot be falsely separated from issues of quality (what is being repeated), from reasons of why (traditions and familiarity or commercial re-consumption, being mis-lead by novelty), from issues of choice (we choose of our own volition to see the same show or actor again and again), from reasons of enjoyment at seeing what we are familiar with. If we, as knowing spectators, are cultural nomads and poachers (see Keefe 2012), then confronting simple binary explanations means being confronted by Brecht's challenge of estranging the familiar.

Returning and Re-visiting: Lookings

In 2002-2003, Annette Arlander began her *Animal Years* performance sequence; a series of twelve one-year video projects located on Harakka Island near Helsinki, Finland and based on the Chinese calendar's twelve-year animal cycle. The sequence allows us - via the presenting subject - to see changes in the landscape, the seasons, the weather, the climate with these acting as forces on the landscape. The project allowed the showing of landscape as a process; in Arlander's words a 'sculpting in time' (Arlander 2014: 27). The project allows the nature of cyclical time to be considered when documenting these changes in one place in one week each year. Apparent stasis becomes balanced by the changes both recorded and felt by the subject; time is both linear and cyclical. In a sense, we could see this as (metaphorically) both dramatic and post-dramatic in the way time is experienced.

This double quality is also part of the duration and consumption of performance. In the theatre or other live performance, these coincide - but only between 'curtain up' and 'curtain down' as a spectatorial experience. This experience is extended but of course diverges either side of these points; the getting to, the entering, the leaving of the theatre for the spectator, the preparation and winding down for the actor - but also the 'eftermaele' for both.

In performances for camera the performer's experience of duration differs from the viewers' experience of duration (watching a video work)... What is more interesting, a single duration of production can be transformed into various durations of consumption. (:30)

Is it trite to re-iterate that what may be said, what may follow also acts on us after viewing such recorded work?

In 2017, Arlander returned to the same site to record a repetition of the same action as in 2003-2004. This allows her to reflect on changes and concerns between then and now, 'what is repeated, what stays the same' (Arlander 2018: 1).

What stays almost the same, and what is constantly shifting? The attention of the viewer can be focused on the repeated action and the small shifts in it. Or, alternatively, on that which is changing, like the surrounding landscape.

(Arlander 2016: 49)

Can we see this as an example also of looking in-ward and out-ward as a locality is returned to, is re-considered?

However, if in-ward/out-ward repetition is an aesthetic strategy here, then the questions implied are themselves processual, for both maker and viewer. The repetition that Arlander is seeking and capturing (via choices made across her visits), once presented in exhibition or showing, is open to the interpretation of the spectator or viewer. Her revisits then become subject to the re-visits the spectator may make to her work, the responses both changing and being coloured by each visit. The cycle of seasons and changes remain never-the-less familiar. There are ghosts within the same, ghosts within the apparent different.

Looking at the images accompanying here work, it is the figure in landscape, the figure against the horizon that is equally striking to the musing on time and change that may be evoked by her images and texts. Here, I am intrigued by another sense of placing in landscapes: the concept of *shakkei* or 'borrowed scenery'. Can we take this into landscape performance where the artefact is set against a wider scene or view, perhaps amending our understanding of landscape scenography? Does this allow us to play with forms of 'side-by-side' or 'be-side' (see Derrida later in this volume), with forms of juxtaposition?

In relation to our writing on landscape, it is the notion of horizon that we can look more closely at here. As with landscape or north, we may see the horizon as a fact of terrain or equally read it metaphorically, romantically, with desire or fear. Coming from the Greek for 'boundary', it is - paradoxically - a boundary that is not fixed, hence we can project on to it what we wish. The horizon may represent the liminal: present and beyond. It may be something we move towards - the point aimed for - and if reached, no longer the horizon or never reached, as a point or line moving away from us.

The direct engagement, then, between spectator and film in the film experience cannot be considered a monologic one between a viewing subject and a viewed object. Rather, it is a dialectical engagement of two viewing subjects who also exist as visible objects. (Sobchack 1992: 23)

Arlander's figure is always seen from behind; we see it looking at the far horizon as we do within the image. As projection or recipient of desires, it echoes Anthony Gormley's *Another Place: 100 Figures* (Cuxhaven 1997/ Crosby 2007) looking out to sea (but where we are able to walk around the figures) or *Event Horizon: 31 Figures* (London 2007) where these are more remote by being placed on top of prominent buildings. The spectator is both the interpreter viewing the images or figures and the subject represented by the figures.

As with Munch's figures set on the coast-line between land and sea or against the woods they may be going into we look as we imagine the figures looking.

Stories will always haunt us

In recalling a discussion about theatre and national identities, Kelleher quotes Hermanis on theatre and story:

Comparing it with music, with visual arts in the twentieth century, theatre is always 'climbing backwards'. Perhaps this anachronistic quality... is to do with the storytelling that is about to happen, the audience is waiting to hear the story. (Kelleher: 106)

As with my response in the paper above, I am bemused at the stance of rejection this seems to represent. As an additional note to the quote on 'return, repeat and re-write' acknowledges, audiences may be expecting not only a story but their own story - what this should be.

But this seems to be a re-casting of what Brecht also implicitly and wryly acknowledges; that the audience always want a story, will always make the story presented their own whatever the intentions of the theatre-maker. As we may still ask of Ranciére (2007), what does the spectator need emancipating from? The individual spectator from the shared experience - an atomising of the shared experience? From the 'Aristotelian model' that Brecht is frustrated by but remains a shaping presence as we have seen? We may borrow Ranciére's - and implicitly Hermanis' - desire (echoing Brecht) that theatre disrupt our position. But unless we take a structuralist position that the Aristotelian model dictates our theatre rather than simply dominates, the model may itself be the basis for work that ruptures, is disruptive within the fact that the knowing, embodied spectator will make any work his/her own. Whilst we can acknowledge Ranciére's critique of some dramaturgical assumptions, the notion of 'emancipation' itself implies something needing to be inculcated; that is, lacking in our shared, proximal and perverse qualified agency resting on - potentially - rupturing positive prejudice and situated judgements (see chapter 22).

Perhaps we should put to one side terms such as emancipated and passive when not used with nuance and borrow the phrase 'engaged' (see Uytterhoeven 2019), to sit alongside/beside the 'knowing/embodied' state that is spectatorship.

We may come to the endurance of story from another, empirical, perspective; that our pre-disposition to tell and receive stories is predicated on the biocultural paradigm and universal that any and all human activity is a symbiotic expression of our mind and bodily nature. Whilst the term can be misused in that one literary or artistic culture is made politically hegemonic i.e. a particular is taken as representing all rather than a local this is, at a deep level, anti-universalist. Rather:

For any given domain of literature (e.g. narrative), universals are features of works in that domain that recur across genetically and areally unrelated traditions with greater frequency than would be predicted by chance. (Gallese and Wojciehowski (2018: 12)

In this sense, as already noted, the first universal is the human proclivity for fiction; the neurobiological ability to imagine and enter fictional worlds. It seems that to see something and to imagine it, to act and imagining an action share partly common brain circuits.

A recent high-density EEG study showed that the brain circuits that inhibit action execution are partly the same as those that allow us to imagine to act.

(Gallese 2018: 75)

These bodily activities are part of embodied simulation, triggered by both perceiving an action or emotion or imagining doing or perceiving something. Such 'seeing-as' where theory of mind and feeling of body combine as the particular perception involved in aesthetic experience. This experience both goes beyond and underpins our knowing suspension of disbelief. Gallese and Wojciehowski characterise this as a 'liberated embodied simulation'. Removed from but sharing our presence in daily life, such embodied simulation is what allows us to enjoy the fictions as if from a safe distance. The *frisson* of safe thrills/emotions/things that are close to us but at the extremes of expression. Thus, we both desire and enjoy the entering of forms of intermediate worlds presented as stories in words and pictures; what may be called an embodied narratology.

In this sense, a further universal is the body-mind, the embodied mind itself.

Narrative is a peculiar form of mediated intersubjectivity, where the text - the medium - enables readers to entertain multiple relationships with fictional characters... can be explained by the peculiar meta-representational features of the human mind... and the Feeling-of-Body generated by liberated embodied simulation. (Gallese and Wojciehowski 2011: 25)

Drawing on these theories of mind-body and embodied cognition, a recent study on acting using fMRI scanning has shown a similar 'double consciousness' in acting styles based on the 'inside-out' approach of Stanislavski and others. This indicates that, whilst drawing on base skills and training, acting or presenting a character involves de-activation in the brain areas involved in self-processing, that acting requires the dual consciousness associated with embodied cognition. (see Brown, Cockett and Yuan, 2019) (see also Murray and Keefe 2016: 230)

I would suggest that this becomes a further aspect of the universal to tell, to act out or present stories within specific traditions and styles of story-telling. The double consciousness of the actor as both *actant* (awareness of function) and character (the fictional figure presented) is matched by the spectator's double consciousness of the experience (the reality of the theatre) and the fiction (the world of the play). Our ability as spectator's is to hold both at the same time or moment-by-moment as we move in and out of the world of the play despite the coughing around us, the more-or-less comfortable seats. We view from states of ‘décalage’ or 'perpetual transitions' between our understandings of the world from which we watch and the worlds we enter.

Story is liminal; the desire to tell and enter stories is an inherited universal - what stories, how told, their effect, in what styles and languages becomes the variety of particulars that may be more-or-less structurally hegemonic across eras and cultures, may or may not be given/treated/received as if a universal. We re-cycle the archetypes that inform the idea of stories as the particular stereo-types (positive and/or negative) and stock-types of our stories.

Despite the best efforts of theatre-makers (who share and work from these same pre-dispositions), as spectators we will enter, access, accept and reject the fictions in our own ways from our procession of shared and personal experiences and archives.

Snapshots: playing it again (or not)

*War Requiem* by Benjamin Britten: a setting of the Requiem Mass and poems by Wilfred Owen. First performance at Coventry Cathedral 1962.

*War Requiem* (1989) by Derek Jarman: a film that re-imagines the original concert piece, that retains the integrity (structurally and tonally) of the original as the foundation for integrating images of war and violence.

*Dumbo* (1941): an animation film whereby simple coloured cels evoke the mother-child archetype that recycle our deepest visceral memories and emotions.

*Dumbo* (2019) by Tim Burton: a re-make in which the original cels are replaced by CGI animation that reduces our ability to imagine to ersatz realism and misguided spectacle that does not trust the spectator.

*Arcadia* (2019) by Paul Wright: a collage re-imagining a history of Britain using clips from documentary and feature films; when watching one is reminded of earlier attempts to capture the strangeness and unsettledness of nature, rites and the land - an archive including *Elgar* by Ken Russell (1962), *A Field in England* by Ben Wheatley (2013), *The Wicker Man* by Robin Hardy (1973), *Penda's Fen* by David Rudkin (1975), *A Canterbury Tale* by Powell and Pressburger (1944).

*Sweeny Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (1979) by Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler. Based on and a re-working as music theatre, of the play by Christopher Bond. The first Sondheim I saw, and the beginning of my lasting admiration of his work. Of course, this actually began much earlier with his lyrics for *West Side Story* (1957) as the songs from the musicals were played and heard on the Light Programme. It represents the inherent strangeness of the 'musical'.

*Sweeny Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (2007) by Tim Burton: a re-imagining that retains the structure of the original musical but presents it, opens it up as film-as-film not merely as filmed theatre (see Keefe 2012).

*Top Girls* (1982) by Caryl Churchill: one actor playing one central character juxtaposed with 6 actors playing 15 other characters; a dramaturgy that challenges and plays to the spectator's imagination, found also in *Cloud Nine* (1979/1980).

*Top Girls* (2019, National Theatre London): a revival/re-staging that matches an actor with each character thus reducing the challenge of complexity and denying a richness of imagination to the spectator.

*Company* (2018, Gielgud Theatre London): Robert/Bobby from 1970 becomes Roberta/ Bobbie; Sondheim is re-worked and re-staged not simply revived.

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