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About us

The *Scottish Journal of Performance* is an open access refereed journal which aims to promote and stimulate discussion, development and dissemination of original research, focusing both on performance in Scotland (contemporary and historical) and / or wider aspects of performance presented by scholars and reflective practitioners based at Scottish academic institutions.

Published bi-annually and run by doctoral students, the *Scottish Journal of Performance* welcomes submissions from both established and early career researchers and operates a peer review system ensuring presentation of quality research in performance.

Performance in this context encompasses a wide range of arts and entertainment and takes as central themes dance, drama, film, music and television. The *Scottish Journal of Performance* takes as a key focus the creation and execution of performance in various contexts, encouraging the adoption of a wide range of range of research methods and approaches.

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Editorial

BEN FLETCHER-WATSON & KIRSTY KAY

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Scholar as interloper: whose stories are we telling?

In performance as in research, identities may be deconstructed and reconstructed in a constantly-shifting practice of cultural representation. This fourth issue of the *Scottish Journal of Performance* presents a selection of papers addressing the theme of 'scholar as interloper'. Three researchers provide differing subversions, both of their identities within the academy and of their appropriation of other personae within performance culture. Additionally, they explore issues around the subjective voice of the people they are researching, questioning how to let them speak for themselves whilst remaining conscious of their own subjective biases and experiences.

With the publication of Bronisław Malinowski's personal diaries in 1967, the ethnographic field was thrown into reflexive turmoil with the realisation that the subjective voice of the researcher is as fundamental to research as the object of study itself. The 'problem' of the researcher has remained ever-present since then, with autoethnography and the (re)insertion of the 'I' subject into qualitative research a performative act in itself, the questioning of one's own identity becoming a foundation from which to explore the identities of others.

Stuart Hall has described identity as 'not as transparent or

unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact... we should think, instead, of identity as a “production”, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation’. Thus identity takes on many facets of the performance of a role, constantly developing, evolving or turning in on itself. For Hall, and as evidenced by the variety of papers within this issue, these fragmented, even antagonistic constructions are produced in ‘specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies’.

Lucy Amsden reflects on the multiple characters she represents at an evening of clowning in Edinburgh: a performer before an audience; a researcher recording her thoughts in the moment; a scholar-clown persona designed to entertain; a trained artist possessing elite skills. For Paolo Maccagno, a Milanese prison becomes a construction site of identity as fathers and sons run marathons together, blending rehabilitation with reaffirmation of parental responsibility. Ben Fletcher-Watson takes his seat at a performance intended for people with autism and confronts questions around the ethics of autoethnography and the absence of the autistic voice.

For all three authors, status, role and presence become slippery as they reflect on lived experience within an academic register.

In the first article, Lucy Amsden examines a recent scratch performance of clown cabaret from Scotland, both as participant and observer. The diversity of the 11 acts featured is nonetheless enfolded into a mutually understood interpretive praxis where clown identity can be anatomised. For example, the overtly constructivist process of creating a character, an ‘adopted persona’, provides Amsden with an opportunity to scrutinise her proposed identity as

‘Scotland’s top clown researcher’ (in a field of one). Failure, humility, flexibility and chaos each impact upon the tensions governing the contemporary clown.

Thus, definitions of ‘performance’ are usefully problematised, highlighting the inherent incompleteness of personal authenticity, and the consequent need for differing modes of inquiry. Just as Amsden’s training at École Philippe Gaulier is variously evoked through embodied practice, shared language(s) in rehearsal and even the echo of Gaulier’s own voice, so her identity as researcher/performer is multiplied, its evolution re-emphasised.

Paolo Maccagno explores the lived identities of incarcerated men within the Italian prison system. He reflects on his experience training male inmates to run marathons in the *Go Daddy!* father and son marathon-running programme.

Drawing on his experience running and training others to run long distances, he creates a performance project which reconnects male prisoners with their children to run marathons together—one on either side of the prison wall. Through this they explore their own physical limits as a way to question the limits of their agency and identities.

In his exploration of the performance of limits, Maccagno investigates those boundaries of identity as they are experienced, not only questioning the limits of his role as volunteer, researcher and fellow marathon-runner, but also examining how modern disciplinary systems construct and bound identities, revealing the tension between freedom, rehabilitation and punishment.

The new phenomenon of ‘relaxed performances’ forms the

basis of Ben Fletcher-Watson's investigation into how the additional support needs of autistic audiences are being accommodated within mainstream theatre productions. Combining a synopsis of current practice with a personal case study, he raises pertinent questions for this relatively under-researched phenomenon, exposing not only the need for further research but also the ethical issues surrounding voicing the needs of disabled communities.

As a new approach to inclusive theatre, Fletcher-Watson stimulates discussion on how relaxed performances impact the conventions of theatre as a performative genre, on performers and staff members, and whether his role as a neurotypical researcher contributes to the lack of inclusivity for the autistic community to express their own agency. His presence highlights the potential for 'ethical murkiness' for those involved in the subjective research process.

This issue also presents reviews of a number of recently published texts addressing performance from a variety of standpoints, including composition, conducting, playwriting, acting and dramaturgy. Kathryn Jourdan reviews *El Sistema: orchestrating Venezuela's youth*, by Geoffrey Baker; Sam Haddow reviews *Modernist and avant-garde performance: an introduction*, by Claire Warden; Ben Fletcher-Watson reviews *Contemporary Scottish plays*, edited by Trish Reid; Marc Silberschatz reviews *Acting Shakespeare's language*, by Andy Hinds; Shona Mackay reviews *Dramaturging personal narratives: who am I and where is here?*, by Judith Rudakoff; Bede Williams reviews *Sleeping in temples*, by Susan Tomes; and David Watkin reviews *Charles Mackerras*, edited by Nigel Simeone and John Tyrrell.

We would like to thank the University of St Andrews, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Anglia Ruskin University,

the editorial team, advisory board, our peer reviewers, funders, and especially our authors.

After four issues, Ben Fletcher-Watson is standing down as Co-editor, to be replaced by Bede Williams (University of St Andrews). Another founding member of the SJoP team, Thomas Butler, is also retiring as Journal Manager/Web Editor, with Lucy Hollingworth (Royal Conservatoire of Scotland) taking over the reins. We wish them all the best in their future endeavours.

BEN FLETCHER-WATSON AND KIRSTY KAY
Co-editors, *Scottish Journal of Performance*

'I'm not really a clown': critical reflection on a Clown Cabaret Scratch Night

LUCY AMSDEN

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This article is a critical reflection on the Clown Cabaret Scratch Night at Assembly Roxy, 14 November 2014, organised by Plutôt la Vie and CloWnStePPing. It considers the variety of acts included in the show and how this plurality connects to the wider contemporary genre of theatre clown. From a participant-observer perspective, I introduce the tensions and contradictions in and between the acts. I suggest that this event can provide a snapshot of how the genre is currently perceived and practiced in Scotland today. Of particular prominence are the role of the 'flop' in the clown's relationship with the audience, the tension between rehearsal and spontaneity, and the connection to the 'authentic self' of the performer this implies.

Keywords: clown, performer training, rehearsal process, audience



Figure 1: The author performing at the Clown Cabaret Scratch Night.

All images by Mihaela Bodlovic.

I entered the stage, walking as normally as my flippers permitted, breathing through my snorkel and peering at the audience through steamed-up goggles. I stopped, smiled, turned my toes out neatly. They laughed. I shifted the goggles to my forehead, taking the red nose with them. 'I'm not really a clown', I told them, 'I'm a researcher'. They laughed again. During my act, I explained my journey from bad student at Gaulier's school to enthusiastic researcher, to exhausted and anxious postgraduate in the final stages of completing my thesis, and finally to intimidated but excited performer.

Held at Assembly Roxy in Edinburgh on 14 November 2014, this was the third Clown Cabaret Scratch Night organised by Plutôt la Vie and CloWnStePPing. These established companies organised the event as a 'platform for established and emerging artists to experiment with ideas, and develop a wide variety of material with roots in a Theatre Clown audience relationship' (Plutôt la Vie, 2014, n.p.). The event was planned as a space where practitioners could develop work in this genre, there being no other such opportunity in Scotland outside the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. The purpose of the event was multiple: to give performers the opportunity to develop clown scenes with

guidance from experienced practitioners and ‘essential live audience feedback’, to bring practitioners together to build a community for collaboration and the chance to see each other’s work, and finally to ‘broaden the audience’s expectation of clown’ (Licata and Feijóo, 2014, n.p.). This specialist scratch night provides a snapshot of the genre as it emerges in Scotland. I will document the event from my perspective as a participant-observer, and provide critical reflection on the process and performance event. This experience was not practice-as-research, but rather an experiment with some ideas from my theoretical and practical exploration of clown at École Philippe Gaulier. I sought to experience the role of clown, which I define as ‘playing with the intention of making the audience laugh’ (Amsden, 2015, p.59). I hoped to describe or even share my research in the context of a clown act, comically professing my non-adherence to the role while enacting some clowning skill. I also watched most of the other acts during performance or rehearsal, allowing me to conduct analysis of selected performances. Following the event, I conducted an interview with two of the organisers in which we reflected on the event and the genre as they understand it. I also contacted performers by email to ask for their own reflections on the event, some of whom provided written responses.

The organisers refer to the practice explored in the scratch nights as ‘Theatre Clown’, and elsewhere as ‘Contemporary Clown’. Acts were selected for inclusion by producer/practitioners who are primarily concerned with a playful and responsive audience relationship, most visible when the clown makes the audience laugh and responds to this laughter. Such practice has been influenced by the teaching of Jacques Lecoq (1921–1999) and Philippe Gaulier (b. 1942), both of whom have explored this traditionally popular form alongside mask, tragedy, melodrama and bouffon since the 1960s. Some of the participants of the scratch night have taken short courses with Gaulier, and a

culture of workshops in physical theatre training allows the ideas of these teachers to percolate and shift as they are passed on. In their book on Lecoq and the British theatre, Chamberlain and Yarrow acknowledge that the proliferation of short workshops has meant that there exists a large network of practitioners in the UK 'who have worked with Lecoq graduates, knowingly or unknowingly, incorporated the exercises, methods and aesthetics into their own work and passed them on to others' (2000, p.2). In conversation and rehearsal, Licata acknowledged my own experience with Gaulier by explicitly evoking his keywords and principles, and during rehearsal another performer who trained at the school even gave himself feedback in what resembled an impression of Gaulier's voice. The event also included clown practices drawing on a range of practitioners diverging from this dominant paradigm. These include more circus-based acts that used tricks that went wrong (see Davison, 2013), and dramatic numbers that used the 'clownesque'- in which 'incongruous events...reflect a clown's logical (or illogical) view of the world' but encourage pathos as well as laughter (Peacock, 2009, p.106).

The participants

The show consisted of 11 acts by a total of 16 performers, 15 of whom are based in Scotland. It was organised by three experienced clown performers and directors: Tim Licata, Melanie Jordan and Saras Feijóo. Tim was a founding member of Plutôt la Vie in 2002 and works as a performer, director and teacher of theatre, including clown, bouffon and Feldenkrais. He is influenced by his experience studying with Gaulier and Monika Pagneux. He also works with Hearts and Minds, a charity that provides performance in hospitals and care settings. Melanie is a performer and director, has worked with Plutôt la Vie and was awarded a Fringe First Award for her show *Sanitise* at Underbelly in

2014. Saras is a clown performer under the company name CloWnStePPing. She has trained and performed in a variety of contexts in Colombia, Venezuela and Europe.

The opening act had a dramatic structure, performed wordlessly with live cello accompaniment. It consisted of three performers with suits, bowler hats and white faces decorated with black shapes. The relationship between these individuals was elusive; the piece had a theme of memories, diaries and perhaps a more sinister surveillance, as one performer continually tried to catch out the other two as they shared cut-out shapes from notebooks. This was a new act performed by experienced cabaret act Creative Martyrs. The final act of the night was based on a magic act entitled 'El Fantastico and his glamorous assistant Luna Balloona': Fergus Dunnet and Suzie Ferguson performed a series of illusions that were either comical in their success (such as the apparent ingestion of an inflated modelling balloon), or in their failure (such as a levitation trick which had its mechanism revealed accidentally). Fergus and Suzie had previously performed this act regularly in street performance in Barcelona. These two acts had very different tones, the opening being wistful, intriguing and poetic, whereas the final act was more flamboyant and used comic violence to create high energy and laughter.



Figures 2 and 3: Creative Martyrs (above) and El Fantastico and Luna Balloona (below).

Circus and event performer DeLighters (Jusztina Hermann), performed a skilled hula hooping display, with one aspect that disrupted the professionalism of the performance– she tried to keep hold of her handbag. At first this led to awkward poses during particular tricks, but then she dropped the bag and had to stretch to pick it up while attempting to continue the routine. Then the soundtrack that accompanied her act ran out, and she signalled to the technician to play the track again while she finished the routine. This cabaret was a chance to continue working with an idea that had been developed with Angela de Castro at the SURGE festival of street arts, physical theatre and circus, in

Glasgow 2011.

The Bare Hearts (Bec Phipps and Cat Somerville) also used this presentational mode, not creating a setting but acknowledging the fact they were on stage. They entered the stage as cleaners, but on noticing the audience performed a series of dances. This act used a similar premise to that of Jusztina, the dancing changed and there were mishaps with props, but still the dance continued.



Figures 4 and 5: DeLighters (above) and the Bare Hearts (below).

Marcus Roche introduced and then impersonated a French

economics specialist, positioning the audience as his seminar attendees. In a similar vein, Ronan McMahon reimaged the stage as a 'serious' performance space of a silent lecture on complex number theory, illustrated on a blackboard. These two acts played with the difficulty of explaining or presenting, and both used high-status clown persona undermined by the concept he was trying to explain.



Figures 6 and 7: Marcus Roche (above) and Ronan McMahon (below).

Andrew Simpson's act documented a real, difficult experience. Using physical interaction with the audience, he

discussed an intimate moment from his personal life and explored discomfort in the form and content of his act. Like Andrew, Lucy McGreal confronted romance in her scene. She invited a member of the audience to join her for a blind date on the stage. The audience participation in this act asked a lot of the volunteer chosen, as Lucy invited him onstage and then stared at him, as though waiting for him to speak. At the end of the scene she serenaded her date with the John Legend song *All of me*, accompanied on the ukulele. Tim, who introduced the night, also appeared in this scene as a waiter involved in a final plot twist.



Figures 8 and 9: Andrew Simpson (above) and Lucy McGreal (below).

The remaining two acts were excerpts from longer shows currently in development and both used comedy and pathos to deal with emotional themes, presented with fictional or dramatic settings. Saras presented a section from her show *Blooming Surprise*, in which she was alone and looking for company in an airport. Aron de Casmaker presented a scene from his show, *Entrenched*, about the life of soldiers in the Second World War. Aron used a single word- 'Sauerkraut'- and costume to depict a German soldier. He threw balls of paper into the audience, playfully asking individuals to make the sound of their impact, but then ended the piece with projected images of real warfare. These scenes both sought to contrast different types of emotion, and included quiet and sombre moments as well as laughter.



Figure 10: Saras Feijóo.



Figure 11: Aron de Casmaker.

The performers were eight women and eight men, although one woman was in drag, wearing a moustache. In this context, clown is not the predominantly male practice described by Peacock (2009). Five performers wore plastic red noses, while the remaining performers had their faces bare, and the colourful face paint associated with the American circus (Auguste) tradition did not appear. Costumes varied between smart, tatty, and bright or surreal clothes. There was little reference to 'classic' clown acts (see Rémy, 1945; Townsen, 1976), and very little slapstick, or comic violence (see Peacock, 2014). Not all of the acts seemed to prioritise making the audience laugh, suggesting a possible shift from Gaulier's definition of successful clowning which does focus on the audience's laughter: 'the work of a clown is to make the audience burst out laughing' (Gaulier, 2007, p.289). If judged according to a Gaulier-based definition of clowning, there were varying levels of clown success, as measured by different levels of audience laughter. Overall, there was a lot of laughter in response to the scratch night, but the acts demonstrated a variety of approaches to the genre of clown, with narrative and pathos being significant in some moments, so measuring laughter would not be the most productive evaluation of the event. Furthermore, because of the developmental aspect of the show, the acts varied in how 'finished' they were, or how successful

according to their own definitions. It is interesting to trace themes across the clown material that made up the acts, including difficult or awkward interactions, fun actions somehow going wrong, and frightening or emotional situations juxtaposed with comedy. A question that emerged in several acts and my own participation was how the clown can be understood as personal, an idea that connects with the plurality created by the show overall.

Personal clowning

The organisers deliberately sought a diverse range of acts, stating in their call for participants:

If you have a short piece or an idea for a piece that you would like to develop- we would like to hear from you! With or without a red nose, the evening is open to your interpretation of Clown. Masks, slapstick, silence, movement, magic, juggling, circus, poetic clown, new vaudeville... No holds barred! Everything is welcome (Feijóo, 2014, n.p.).

Nonetheless, the content of the event reflects a certain understanding of clown, primarily because a playful relationship with the audience was a definitive feature of the genre for the organisers. Tim, Melanie and Saras selected acts at several stages: application, audition and development, and at these stages they sought:

A certain kind of relationship with the audience, which can be very broad [...] I think we wanted to open that out to see what other interpretations of clown might come in or might be brought in (Licata, 2014, n.p.).

The organisers assessed performances for suitability by

application and audition, choosing only pieces that demonstrated an interest in connecting with the audience. This was taken more literally by Lucy, Andrew and Aron, who singled out individuals and invited them to join in the performance. However, all performers adhered to this definition of clown because they acknowledged the presence of the audience with eye contact and/or reactions to laughter when it occurred. A stated interest in a broad and fluid interpretation of the genre was shadowed by a shared definition of the boundaries of an extant if non-mainstream practice.

Variation according to personal inclination, skill and preference is an intrinsic part of the genre as imagined by Gaulier and Lecoq. This contains the paradox of the selection process. Saras explained her own application of this idea:

everyone has their own way to interpret clown, because we are different, and clown is [...] from what we are, in some way, so that's where the diversity will be based, in my opinion (Feijóo, 2014, n.p.).

Performers also associated themselves with their material, and when asked how this event would influence them in future, individuals described a continually changing practice. Jusztina spoke of her clown as a persona who she had 'enjoyed developing and making friends with', as though the clown existed in some way independently of herself (Hermann, 2015, n.p.). Aron described himself as 'the performer who walks on stage open to the reaction to the audience. As a clown performer, I hope this will always mean I change' (de Casmaker, 2014, n.p.). Similarly, Suzie answered that her clowning 'is changing and developing all the time. Just like I am' (Ferguson, 2014, n.p.). Andrew told me that the slow, awkward feeling in his piece was his tactic to connect with the audience- 'it was important for me that

it was very closely linked to my real life, uncomfortably so'— so that this authentic discomfort could be shared honestly (Simpson, 2015, n.p.). Peacock (2009) describes a contemporary understanding of proximity between clown performance and the performer who devises it:

When a clown performs, the audience see the ideas and attitude of that individual conveyed by an adopted persona that has developed out of the individual's personality and which could never be adopted and lived in the same way by anyone else (p.14).

These practitioners in Scotland, in various ways, adhere to the notion of clown as inherently connected to the performer.

Clown practitioner, teacher and writer Jon Davison critiques a 'clown orthodoxy' that seeks sincerity, spontaneity and 'inner authenticity' (Davison, 2013, p.198). He suggests that there is a common misunderstanding that the appearance of failure in clown acts necessarily means the act is spontaneous and the clown's performance is sincere or connected to the performers self. This criticism is based on the realisation that although clown students experience real failure in the clown classroom, failures in clown performance can be, and often are, acted.

We can accept [...] failure in full view of an audience, who will see everything as long as the performer lets them. This creates an effect, for the audience and the performer, that something that is usually hidden is being revealed (2013, p.199).

This complex discussion was played out in the acts of the Clown Cabaret Scratch Night. Many mistakes in the skill-based acts were deliberately created for comic effect, as

were the awkward moments created by the presentations and the fictional mistakes depicted in the more dramatic acts. According to Davison's argument, it is the acknowledgement of the audience's audible or visible response to these (acted) failures that makes the clowns appear to reveal something authentic about themselves—even though the failures themselves were artificially created. He suggests that the appearance of authenticity in contemporary clown is thus a 'theatrical truth-effect' (*ibid.*). Laura Purcell Gates agrees that flops can be acted when she suggests that:

In a clown performance before an audience, it is a rehearsed mistake; in the clown classroom, it is genuine— the student truly messes up and faces a moment (often unbearable) of not knowing what to do next (2011, p.236).

Performers in this event did rehearse many of their mistakes, with Jusstina's dropped handbag being a clear example. The structure of this act meant that even though her mistake had been planned, dropping the bag gave her a physical problem to resolve, as she tried to continue spinning the hoop while stretching to pick up the bag. While Jusstina did know 'what to do next' because she had rehearsed the act, the reality of splitting her concentration between two tasks created the effect of a flop, handled honestly and imaginatively in real-time in front of the audience. It is perhaps the moment of reacting to a flop, whether it is rehearsed or a surprise to the performer, that brings the question of authenticity into the audience experience. I laughed when Jusstina dropped and tried to regain her bag in the performance, despite having seen the same actions in the technical rehearsal a few hours before. Despite expecting this moment, her admission of the problem and difficulty of performing the two actions still made me laugh.

Development

While scratch nights provide audience feedback, and a selection process offers some opportunity for critique from experienced practitioners, this event laid particular emphasis on development for the participants. My audition involved presenting an idea for the act and then being directed and provoked to improvise further material. This interaction was familiar to me from clown workshops and at times provoked me to feel moments of 'not knowing what to do next' described by Purcell Gates. The same structure was used and the process continued in a 'development day', two hours of rehearsal with Tim, Saras and Melanie. This was an attraction for participants including myself, and seven of the acts took this opportunity for rehearsal and advice.

Given the timing of the audition, towards the deadline of my PhD submission, I was in an anxious frame of mind. I had written a joke in which I boasted of being 'Scotland's top clown researcher', and then admitted that I don't know of anybody else in the country studying this subject. Tim suggested I repeat this statement, but with more humility, and none of the bravado. He then asked for details about the amount of time I had spent on my thesis. His next instruction was to silently ask myself 'why?'. Tim, Saras and Melanie laughed as I reflected on this question, and although in other situations I might have been defensive, I was complicit in this laughter. As a result, the act I developed directly referred to my research experience rather than my findings. This changed my role from theoretical 'expert' to ridiculous student and practical beginner, making me to some extent 'wrong' in the context of the show (Davison, 2013, p.131). My quest to be taken seriously matched those tasks of other performers- it was a task destined to be undermined, and as such worked in the same way as Ronan's complex number theory lecture, Jusstina's hula hoop routine and Bec and Cat's dance. After deciding to use this humble attitude towards my research, I used the development day to identify actions or ideas that

made the directors laugh and then found ways of repeating these and changing them. I explicitly played a game with the audience, explaining how the game worked and their role in it: I could take a step forward when 'they liked me', which I measured by smiles and laughter, but had to step back when they were unamused. In doing so I referred to Gaulier's term 'the flop', saying that I was there to discover 'what it's like when the audience don't laugh'. We watched each other, waiting. I heard that they were not laughing, and nodded '... Huh' as I stepped back. This game, which I learned with Gaulier, has also been developed by Davison, who explains that '[i]nterestingly, these steps back often generate the biggest laughs. Why? Because they are admissions of failure' (2013, p.291). As I had hoped, and as suggested by Davison, this acknowledgement of my flop did get one of the biggest laughs of my performance, and because I had explained the game, the audience went on to generously clap and cheer as I moved forward. This moment of my piece was developed in the rehearsal but depended on some skills of responsive timing, a dichotomy that was visible in a number of the acts.

Fixity and flexibility

While the organisers sought performers who were responsive to the audience, we all presented sketches which were 'written' in the sense that we knew we would perform certain actions, words and/or narratives. By the end of my development session, Tim gave me some very specific direction concerning timing that I used in the performance. It broke up my entrance into a series of distinct actions. These were described, approximately as follows: 'You come in, nervous and excited. Then there's a beat. You move the flippers. Beat, then a smile'. In performance, there was a laugh during each 'beat' described above, and I believe the beats lasted longer than they had done in the technical rehearsal, because I did not do the next action until the

laugh had subsided. The actual timing was not fixed, but the rhythm was, and this responsive skill appears to be a definitive element of clown practice according to this event.

During my development day, I was encouraged to slow down and give time for audience laughter, which was explained in terms of personal revelation with the phrase 'give us space to see you'. Melanie mentioned that this feedback had been relevant to other performers as well. However, following the show, the organisers agreed that in future they will give feedback to performers about something just as important – noticing 'when you're losing the audience and when it's time to move on' (Licata, 2014, n.p.). In future scratch nights the organisers intend to develop their 'curatorial' role, making sure to have development time with every participant, and being strict about timing on the night. Saras hopes that this will have an impact on the quality of the audience experience:

I think this structure helps you to deliver something that makes sense to the audience. Because otherwise it will be this 'oh yes I am a clown, I go on the stage I do everything that I want, because I'm a clown', but then you are wasting the time of the audience, and their energy (Feijóo, 2014, n.p.).

With more responsibility to the other performers, and attention given to the audience's disapproval as well as their approval, the show would maintain its ambiguities yet be more coherent and enjoyable.

The other performers whose technical rehearsals I observed were able to detail the actions of their scene fairly specifically, but with some flexibility in timing. Lucy and Andrew planned to use audience volunteers, so in the technical rehearsal they were only able to estimate what

would happen but could still provide details of actions they planned to perform at some point. Licata described this phenomenon as ‘a lovely paradox’ in clown dramaturgy:

[i]n a sense, you need to know what you’re doing, and it needs to be very free, and so there’s this paradox of being kind of structured chaos, those two things are there (2014, n.p.).

This ‘lovely paradox’ is parallel to a closely related dichotomy, also discussed in the development day, between the clown being improvised or responsive and the structured, repeatable act. Tim also referred to this as a ‘dance between technique and life’, where a delicate balance must be struck between reliable performance skills (such as being audible, timing and structure) on one hand, and a genuine connection with the audience on the other (2014, n.p.).

In my own performance, I found a very ambivalent position regarding the truth. Like Andrew, I took the idea of clown-as-personal literally, and so presented spoken content referring directly to my life off-stage. A section of my material consisted of three short stories of critical feedback I had received from Gaulier while participating in his Clown course (2009). The first is true; he stopped me as I stood on stage and asked ‘why do you move from side to side like a penguin with bowel problems?’ This was a comic, cutting and precise observation of a bad habit, which I now notice every time I am on stage. The second two stories capture the way I felt when leaving the school, but are somewhat embellished. The events in the story did happen while I was at the school but to other students. These had both the comic effect and communicated a truthful emotion, even though they were in some sense acted, or Davison’s ‘theatrical truth-effect’. Another layer was added to this ‘dance’ of technique and life, because after the show several people asked me if I really was a researcher, and if I really was

writing this article, or if that had just been a joke. The audience members wanted verification of my spoken content, suggesting that the authenticity of acts was also of interest to the audience.

Conclusion

The clowns were smart, scruffy, masked, unmasked, clever, stupid, skilled, confident and awkward. Their acts were silent, spoken, fictional, presentational, funny and sad. In several performances, there were tensions between the real and fake, generic tradition and personal revelation, the rehearsed and the improvised. My own experience and the accounts of other practitioners involved suggests that these tensions are significant to clown practice as it exists in this context. Plurality in the show, created by the fluidity of the genre's boundaries, also connects this practice to the teaching of Gaulier, Lecoq and a widening network of practitioners developing from this paradigm. The cabaret structure and development pattern fits a workshop-based training structure by allowing for ongoing learning, variation, and contradiction within the genre. This performance structure is suitable for clowning because it presents a varied sample of different practices, and in this snapshot of Scottish clown practice, ambiguity abounds.

Furthermore, the organisers' interest in the clown's relationship with the audience meant that the question of authenticity circulated in rehearsal and performance. Though the event was curated by audition and the acts rehearsed to technical detail, the fact this event is called a scratch night means that all the material is framed as undergoing development. The value placed on responsiveness to the audience suggests that an element of unpredictability and willingness to experiment and improve acts is also prized in Scottish clown practice.

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About the author

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PRACTITIONER REPORT:

Running walls: the performance of the limit in prison

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Humanity does not start out from freedom but from limitation (Foucault, 1995, p.292).

The limit to freedom, represented by the wall of the prison, is the limit to run to reach the finish-line of the marathon: run the limit! Training prisoners to run a marathon as a practice of the limit. Inside and outside meet on the limit, in a suspended place where running is a movement of rehabilitation and transformation.

Go Daddy! is an educational project based upon the pedagogy of resilience and a form of anthropological research into body and movement. It is a case study investigating personal limits through an art performance based on marathon running with prisoner-fathers; a limit-experience as a 'practice of freedom' (Foucault) to activate the prison and through it see a social system where neoliberalism is expressed; a pilot project for wider research at the intersection of different academic traditions, pointing towards a new direction for critical engagement with performance. Drawing from that experience, this article examines the potentialities of marathon running in prison as a performance of limits: a healing possibility for personhood to be based on 'presence' (Abramović) and

awareness, since, as Foucault notes, the experiential body can become a locus of resistance against normalising power. Through analysis of the Go Daddy! project, this paper considers how an art performance can be an experiment in the sense not of testing a hypothesis but of opening an exploratory path of inquiry into human life and a new way of conducting anthropology as a learning process—in other words, the possibility for art to be science.

Keywords: marathon, running, prison, walls, presence, limit

Introduction



Loïc Wacquant makes the claim that social scientists must get ‘in and out of the belly of the beast’ in order to overcome ‘the curious eclipse of prison ethnography in the age of mass incarceration’ (2002, p.371). In response to this claim, the *Go Daddy!* project provides a new concept for academic inquiry pointing towards a new direction for critical engagement with performance. It proposes marathon running in prison as an action for prisoners and

researchers to perform. Conceived as a practice of the limit that plays with boundaries, it takes the form of an art performance, and at the same time an inquiry into the possibilities of leading a group of people through creative processes where body and movement are at the core of the experience and a source of knowledge, opening the possibility of science in the 'first person' (Varela, 1996; 1999).

In combining prison research with performance studies and touching on themes of neoliberalism, liminal identities and the body, this paper provides an interdisciplinary contribution to social science concentrating on discipline and resistance through the notion of the limit, from the perspective provided by the theoretical frame of Foucault's concept of the limit-experience (1994).

This research highlights the ambiguous connection between different forms of 'discipline', of societal norms of rehabilitation and family, and how these forms are challenged by the performance of marathon running. *Go Daddy!* proposes the paradox of contrasting imprisonment with marathon running and the exploration of its potentialities in juxtaposing two very different experiences that both test the human being's capacity. Drawing in particular on the anthropology and phenomenology of the body, this study shows how this contrast provides a space for resisting the limits imposed by prison, suggesting possibilities of dignity and personhood. The paper first introduces the research project *Go Daddy!* in terms of methodology, positionality and process. It then explores the notion of limit in the experience of the *wall of the marathon runner* and in the *walls of the prison*, challenging the traditional understanding of the concept as a space of transition between different states of being (van Gennep, 2010; Turner, 1969). In conclusion, it shows how the notion of limit emerging from the research, as explored in different contemporary fields of knowledge ranging from

anthropology, cultural geography and art, can overcome the idea of a linear progression between states and focus on the condition of liminality itself as a permanent dimension of life where presence offers a possibility of freedom.

***Go Daddy!* Marathon running in prison: context and method**

Since the beginning of 2013, I have been working inside Bollate prison (Milan). Thanks to the cooperation of *Bambinisenzasbarre*¹, an NGO working in direct contact with the Italian Government for the rights of parent-prisoners to exercise their parenthood, I developed a project where I worked with prisoners through marathon running. *Go Daddy!* is an educational project situated in the pedagogy of resilience involving a group of 20 fathers serving in Bollate prison. Starting at the beginning of 2013, it finished its first phase in June 2014 after the ‘team of lost fathers’ participated in the Milan city marathon.

Bollate prison is situated to the North-West of Milan. It accommodates slightly more than 1,000 prisoners—men and women—who are serving at least five years. It has a utopian vision of inmate relationality at the heart of prisoner corrections. It does so by encouraging prisoners to become (better) citizens, for example through being tolerant and affectionate towards others. Prisoners are subject to a strict monitoring regime where their capacity to engage in good relations is scrutinised. The prison offers ‘rooms of affection’, which provide prisoners and their families the opportunity to spend meaningful quality time together. In so doing, family bonds are strengthened thanks to a friendly visiting environment which fosters desistance from crime.

Following this model of intervention promoted by the new penal authority (2009), *Bambinisenzasbarre* developed a

project called 'The Yellow Space', a room inside the prison where children meet with their parent-prisoner. *Go Daddy!* is an idea that expands The Yellow Space beyond the walls of a room into a space to run between the inside and outside.

Supporting Bambinisenzasbarre's core objective, one of the main goals of the project was to foster and promote fatherhood. *Go Daddy!* was designed as a pilot project to test the potentialities of such an innovative approach. Many decisions were therefore taken to simplify the first experiment. Only 20 fathers were accepted (men only, because women are placed in another building and cannot mix). These men were already part of other Bambinisenzasbarre group discussions and projects, and were therefore familiar with organisation's ethos. The prisoners were each serving different lengths of sentence, but were generally in the last years of their imprisonment. For this project, I was a volunteer offering marathon running training. Every week, for the entire duration of the project, we had a three-hour appointment on Thursday morning, divided into a running technique class (using images and videos), and a training session running close to the walls of the prison. The course fitted into the prison regime without disturbing its equilibrium: the choice of day and time took into account the need for prisoners to participate without conflicting with the many tasks required by the prison (for example, work and educational courses). Running close to the prison walls was an important step forward after a few months spent running in circles around small football fields, which, according to the prison's rules, was the only space for prisoners who wanted to run. At the beginning of the project, we accepted this condition, but created better possibilities during the process. The course provided every prisoner-runner with his own programme, including: team/group coaching every week (class, Feldenkrais² lesson, running); an individual timetable to carry out alone during the week; a running log; practice races; and finally the marathon itself.

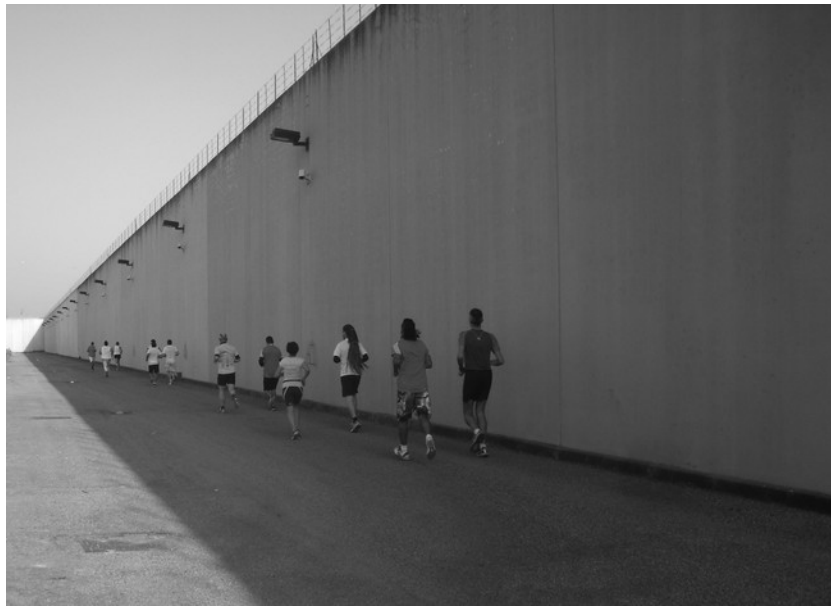
Based on this experience, I developed a research project focusing on running, physical exertion, and bodily discipline to understand what this process had to say about prison and the kinds of subjectivity it generates. The limit-experience of the marathon has been used as a methodological tool to put the prison to work and to activate it as a system. Through different bodywork techniques (running, Feldenkrais method), body-biographies, field notes and informal discussions, my intention was to explore the following research questions:

- How does the experience of freedom and presence that is connected to a marathon relate to the process of subjectification imposed by the prison?
- How can this practice operate to improve the quality of relationships between fathers and children?

The wall of the marathon runner

Limit-experience as a practice of freedom

The idea of a limit-experience functions to uproot the individual from himself, [to position him] where he is no longer himself, and where he will be carried to his own annihilation or dissolution. This is an activity/work of de-subjectification (Foucault, 1994, p.43).



As Foucault described, the limit-experience is an active 'pratique de liberté' (practice of freedom) where freedom is tightly connected to ethics, as care of the Self (Holmes et al., 2006). The limit experience is not research of the extreme or a codified rite of passage³ but an existential opening belonging to diffused anonymous and anarchic practices, producing frail individuals challenging the established order. It is close to the idea of 'edgework' on which several sociologists and anthropologists (Jay, 1995; Lyng, 2004; Oksala, 2004; Tobias, 2005; Holmes et al., 2006) are working to explore the meaning of high-risk practices. This range of activities shares the common attraction of exploring the limits of human experience in the complex process of self-creation to discover new possibilities of embodied existence (Lyng, 2004) within a panoptic and disciplinary society.

The first thing I told the group of prisoners on our initial meeting was that we were not just going to run, but were going to run a marathon! The idea was to face the limit, a peculiar experience in the marathon popularly referred to in Italian as the 'wall of the marathon runner', or in English as 'hitting the wall' (Stevinson and Biddle, 1998).

Participating in a marathon implies accepting a subjectification given by the race itself in terms of classification and personal branding. It is an exercise in identity construction and voluntary submission. But at the same time, in a marathon every runner has to face a no-man's-land at around the 20th mile, the so-called 'wall of the marathon runner', in order to cross the finish-line. The strain produced whilst experiencing 'the wall' can destroy any sense of identity, and with it cultural background, forcing the runner to direct their gaze towards emptiness. To overcome the wall s/he has to think of it not as a separating line but as a limit, an unknown space, a 'wilderness', a threshold to explore. At the limit, the marathon runner stops feeling imprisoned and confined within an 'identity' and discovers their own 'presence' (de Martino, 1997) in the free act of running. The marathon, therefore, is a 'limit-experience' (Foucault, 1994, p.43) of transformation that 'undermines the subject' (Jay, 1995, p.158). The limit offers the possibility of change and transformation, and the marathon is a practice of freedom.

I am learning not to win... and it is beautiful!
(prisoner's words, translated from Italian by
author throughout)

Running the 'wall of the marathon runner' highlighted different signs of resistance between prisoners. The above words show a process of learning where prisoners started to accept new possibilities of meaning—even if these were in contrast to the stereotypes and social values as normally recognised. When a new prisoner joined the group, those who had been in the programme for longer immediately informed him about the difference between running and running a marathon: 'maybe you are a fast runner, but here we run differently... what counts is resistance in the long run'. Each prisoner had to find the strength to resist the

'obligation to win' during a race, leaning on the feeling of pleasure and beauty that comes from the practice. Indeed, even if the finish line and chronometer are strong motivations for every runner in the marathon, if you want to arrive at the end in the best way, you mustn't think about the finish line: you have to run as if you would run forever! The experience of strain requires a particular attitude (Maccagno, 2015).

Running in prison

'Let's run together!', I proposed to the group of prisoners. Running is a movement, therefore a way of perception⁴ (Merleau-Ponty, 1962); it is 'thinking in movement' (Sheets-Johnstone, 2009). I was proposing changing their way of moving, and therefore of thinking, through the performance of running. This move opened up a research setting with great potential. Rather than facing my participants to collect information, I was running with them. By moving side-by-side in the same direction, we overcame the static face-to-face confrontation of bodies so characteristic of the common interview. Learning together how to 'run the wall' has been an exciting process of discovery and knowledge. Most of our discussions happened during our runs close to the prison walls. Many of the rigidities of communicating with each other disappeared while moving. Intimate confessions and personal life stories were revealed in a general atmosphere of relaxation and openness within the group. Running provided unique sensations to the prisoners from the beginning.

After the first run I went to have a shower, opened the door of the dressing room and felt on my face the fresh air of the door opening. I felt so well [...] and said: 'this is exactly the best of existence'. And cried. Really cried, and I am not

one of those with easy tears (prisoner's words).

The experience of a first run leaves an impression in the body that is difficult to explain. It connects directly with the feeling of being alive: being shot out to into a sense of presence. The sensation of increased energy is very strong. Suddenly you wake up to a condition of lucidity that you don't ever want to forget or lose. Everyday life appears sleepy and apathetic. Running provides a new kind of presence. The discovery of this dimension is often contrasted sharply with the strictly controlled lives of prisoners: 'how can I feel so well while I am in prison?'. The contrast between the visceral feeling of being present and the many forms of identification and pressure imposed by the prison was striking. Nevertheless this paradox seemed not to create problems, but on the contrary facilitated a release of accumulated tensions and contributed to a process of self-awareness.

There is a crucial difference between identity and presence: the former is socially constructed through the interplay (games) of multiple forms of power, defined by Foucault as 'technologies of the Self' (1998); the latter emerges in the limit-experience⁵ and in this particular project through the practice of marathon running as a feeling of 'being alive' (Ingold, 2011). Resistance was possible through the perception of this new embodied pulse of life, a barycentre in movement that everyone experienced through running. In the performance of running, the identity of the subject tends to blur and expand. The sensation is that of an evaporation of the distinction between yourself and others. Running joins us together in a 'pre-linguistic fashion, beyond the sensation of separated individualities opening to a sensation of presence within a broadened dimension of anonymity' (Maccagno, 2015, p.68).

During the project, each runner had his own plan to follow.

Being a marathon runner is a vocation, transforming very rigid timetables into life's rhythm. It means choosing a discipline from the inside as a healing game to develop resilience. An increased sense of self appeared within the group. This feeling was connected to the practice of running itself. The participation in our group meeting became more and more frequent and focused. All the participants ran alone during the week and started to follow their individual programmes with greater commitment than at the beginning. It was possible to register a gradual and incremental process of learning along with an increased feeling of pleasure. The cumulative and repetitive aspect of running started to transform the lives of the prisoners. They were interested in maintaining the regularity of their runs which provided them with a time and space suspended from the normal routine of the prison. Running produced a liminal dimension for self-creation. The discipline of training entered their lives and they felt an attachment towards it. They felt that they had the right to that feeling and had to protect it, resisting.

Even if it is raining we want to go running. No matter if the guards complain and try to convince us not to go today. It is our day of training and it doesn't matter if we get wet (prisoner's words).

A rich vein of work (Dirsuweit, 1999; Baer, 2005; Sibley & van Hoven, 2009) has emerged around the nature and experience of carceral spaces, in which theorisations of incarceration underpinned by Foucault are contested. According to these studies, rather than being 'docile', prisoners express resistance to omni-disciplinary control through the reclaiming of prison space. Defending a space to run is in itself a resistant action. For each prisoner runner, as the participant implies above, 'running forever' became a movement of resistance to defend a space of neverending liminality.

The wall of the prison

The lost fathers

One of the most important projects of Bambinisenzasbarre is The Yellow Space, a reception centre between the inside and outside of the prison, where children meet their parents. In continuity with that project, which confirms the well-studied porosity of the prison wall (Moran, 2013), *Go Daddy!* built a setting between inside and outside, where parenting could be overtly performed in this constructed environment. The marathon offered a very powerful ritual where fatherhood could be expressed: it is a common practice between marathon runners to dedicate the effort to their children and raise them in the air when they are crossing the finish line. That gesture is recognised as Ettore's gesture or the archaic gesture of the father (Zoja, 2000). In our Thursday training seminars, I gave prisoners suggestions of this kind through videos and short communications which raised many interesting discussions. During the preparation for the marathon, many races of different distances were organised inside the prison where families of the prisoners participated and fathers and children ran together, creating new ways for them to interact with each other that could transcend the dynamics of prison and its constraining effect on family relationships.

The marathon is in itself a huge challenge for anyone and immediately inspired in many of the prisoners a dream of redemption and the possibility of a more dignified interaction with their children than typically afforded by the prison. Being inside a prison often means to be deprived of your sense of self, hence the importance of proposing marathon running as an opportunity to increase one's own self-estimation and to engage with children in a dignified manner. Prisoners were invited to write letters to their children communicating their intention to participate in a marathon as an occasion to start a relationship on a different level. As a strategy for absent fathers to promote

meaningful father-child interaction, they (father and child) were asked to prepare t-shirts for the race. They worked together in this preparation: on the front, the child was asked to make a drawing for his/her father and on the back the father was asked to write a message to dedicate to their child. The slogan on which we all agreed was: *When everything crumbles, you can keep standing and running!* The dream of the marathon, embedded in these fathers' words, is a message of resilience.



On 6 April, we realised that dream of participating in the Milan Relay Marathon with a team of 'lost fathers'. This name was decided upon by the group of prisoners, inspired by *Peter Pan*. Preparation for the marathon was a creative time where prisoners had the opportunity to reinvent their identity. We wrote together a tale to dedicate to the children where prisoners played the role of the 'lost boys'. They became the 'lost fathers' living in a Neverland who decided to run a marathon for their children. Under this label we included fathers not necessarily in prison who nonetheless considered themselves as part of the team, helping us to bring the marathon runners to the finish line in Milan city

centre (not all the prisoners had permission for day release on the day of the marathon). Fatherhood provided a crossing of dimensions, between inside and outside: 20 runners, comprising those serving time in prison and runner-fathers from the outside (the 'free'), ran the race together. Our marathon started inside the prison, where ten fathers (seven prisoners and three 'free') ran their six miles. Immediately afterwards, the marathon continued outside where other participants (seven 'free' and three prisoners who obtained permission) ran to connect the inside of the prison with the outside of the official Milan marathon route. Here the team of fathers crossed the finish line at Sforza Castle where they concluded their race by raising their children in the air. Everyone, fathers inside and outside alike, received a medal for participation and a picture with their child, in a process that de-stigmatised and conferred dignity. At the Milan Marathon Awards 2014, *Go Daddy!* received the prize for the best project connected to running. The *Go Daddy!* team went beyond the wall with a symbolic bridge between inside and outside, binding the 'lost fathers' together into one team.

Volunteer-prisoners or prisoner-volunteers?

This is the 'land of freedom'. Yet I lost my desire to run. I want back my hour of air to go out running, to get clean, to feel the wind through my hair (prisoner's words).

Bringing the practice of the marathon into the 'land of freedom' of the Bollate prison was an important focus for research. This prison is unique in Italy: it explicitly positions itself as a benevolent moral institution and appears as a welfarist unit *par excellence*. Inside, punishment and rehabilitation co-exist somewhat uneasily, with neoliberal penalty standing in tension with the government of love,

friendship, and tolerance⁶. From this perspective, *Go Daddy!* has provided an opportunity to study the neoliberal penal state (Muehlebach, 2012), of which Italy represents an interesting site of analysis⁷. As Wacquant states ‘the study of the prison becomes a window into the deepest contradictions and the darkest secrets of our age’ (2002, p.389). The project situated itself coherently within the institution and its moral philosophy. Exploiting the rhetoric of sacrifice and strain, a foundation of the marathon, it got inside in a harmless way, with recognisable features, within the walls of the prison, as a moral project⁸. In this paradigmatic context, the intention of the project has been to define a setting where the subjectivity of the inmates is placed within tensions between freedom, rehabilitation and punishment: a way to study moral authoritarianism in the field. The hypocrisy of a hidden power masked under the skin of an illusionary freedom is what characterised the normal life of the prisoners in their attempt to find ways of moral rehabilitation within the aggressive penal bureaucracy of the institution: prisoners are subject to a strict monitoring regime where inmates’ capacity to engage in positive relations is scrutinised. Every prisoner has his/her own educator and a personal *percorso trattamentale* (path of rehabilitation) that is periodically checked and revised. Depending on their progress, he/she can receive permission to go out, to work out, to get out earlier. What the Bollate prison is metaphorically saying to the prisoners is that the walls do not exist any more, because the possibility of getting out is in their hands: they are asked to become ‘volunteers’ in their own rehabilitation. It is common practice to ask prisoners to participate in menial jobs like cleaning carceral spaces such as common rooms and corridors. Many accept these in order to show their positive attitude and maintain good relationships with the guards and their educators. Others simply refuse to be volunteers and prefer to ‘walk the corridors’ (prisoner’s words). Prisoners are crushed in such tensions and many of them want to change prison and leave the ‘land of freedom’.

My desire to 'know from the inside'⁹ drove me to be a volunteer. This provided me with the recognisable identity in the eyes of the institution required to run the project. Only thanks to Bamibinsenzasbarre did I have the opportunity to enter the prison. The idea of the project was in my mind for many years but I needed a precise role to get inside: the institution demands an identity that fits with their programmes and regulations. According to Muehlebach (2011; 2012), in Italy, volunteering is part of a process of neoliberal governance which considers a progressive empowerment of the private sector and of the citizens' individuality. A volunteer is one who accepts not to be paid in order to be a citizen. He wants to work so as not to be excluded. I personally suffered many tensions because of the contradictory feelings experienced during the project. I was disappointed by the limited financial resources, and at the same time happy for the progressive success of our work.

The prisoner and the volunteer both participate in these moral activities in order to find their place within frames of identification in a neoliberal state.

How can I be a father in a world like this? They call it the 'land of freedom' and they open a door... so you start running to go through it but then you hit against something and suddenly realise that it is closed with glass. It is better that the wall is a wall. Yes, I prefer to be a slave and know it. Know when I have my hour of air (prisoner's words).

Bringing the marathon within the walls was an action to emphasise the existence of the physical wall: to make it obvious, to underline it, to run along it. Like a piece of land art revealing the landscape as if seen for the first time, in the same way the marathon highlights the wall, making it visible, finally cleaning it from false hypocrisies of freedom.

The marathon is the awareness that the wall is there, that you cannot avoid it. My identity in the eye of prisoners, as I introduced myself to them for the very first time, was of a marathon runner—I was their trainer. I was not there to study them—they were not my research objects to collect data from. My action was closer to one of an artist who engages in ‘experiments’, in the sense not of testing a hypothesis but of opening an exploratory path of inquiry in human life. The decision of reflecting on the experience as a social scientist came afterwards, from the awareness of discovered potentiality under which *Go Daddy!* appeared as a pilot project for wider research. During the one and a half years spent together, many things happened: the people involved came out from their separated individualities, started to talk to each other, gained a mutual understanding of their common situation. The secrets between prisoners, where no one knows about you and the crime you committed, started to unravel. Thanks to a neutral and liminal identity as marathon runners, all of us started to recognise a possibility of communication, creating awareness and releasing the sense of blame that burdened everyone. Many of them gave up hope for early release and stopped engaging with the proposed new rehabilitative programmes in order to have just their ‘hour of air’ (prisoner’s words). The desire to participate in the marathon comes from within and coordinated all of us. In the end I realised something that in the beginning I could not even confess to myself: I was not there for them, I was there for myself. And so together we ran walls, the wall of the marathon runner, the walls of the prison, the invisible walls that man is continuously building to secure himself... Running is ‘dwelling poetically’.

Performance on the edge of life

In June 2014, we had our last meetings and runs. I knew I could not continue with the project at that moment but I felt

it was not a definitive separation. Even if good educational practice normally advises finding a proper way to end the path together, I did not feel so pressed by the necessity of saying goodbye. My surprise was discovering that the prisoners felt the same. When asked about what they were going to do now, many of them answered: 'After this I will continue to participate to marathons and most of all keep on running' (prisoner's words). The systematic and repetitive practice of running in the long term can transform life and become a philosophical practice of care of the self: '[b]eing a marathon runner is a sort of transparency appl[ie]d to everyday life. [...] an escape from the world in the world' (Maccagno, 2015, p.67). From this point of view, the project did not finish; it just opened to the prisoners a dimension of neverending liminality as a result of the practice of marathon running.

This argument destabilises the notion that liminality represents a space of linear transformation from one state to another as it has been introduced first to anthropology by van Gennep (2010) with the triphasic structure of the rite (separation—margin—aggregation) and developed by Turner (1969) with the idea of liminality as a suspended 'anti-structure'. This linear progression through the pre-liminal, liminal and post-liminal stages has been contested by different scholars (Phillips, 1990; Willett and Deegan, 2001; Moran, 2013) who note a state of permanent liminality where individuals become identified with a state of 'betweenness'. Within this body of research, the project presented here suggests that marathon running in prison operates as a 'repetitive threshold-crossing, where transformation is temporary and transient, but also cumulative' (Moran, 2013, p.349). Prisoners as runners entered repetitively the liminal dimension of 'running forever', affecting and transforming their lives.

The notion of limit emerging from this research highlights

that in the lived and phenomenological experience of the limit, borders between inside and outside, between stage and real life, may not exist. The performance of the limit does not shift between what Turner called 'states' (1967, p.93). On the contrary, it is a continuous becoming which 'has neither beginning nor end' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.323). Ingold expands on this, saying that a line of becoming always prises an opening, defining a landscape where 'there are no insides and outsides, no enclosures or disclosures, only openings and ways through' (2011, pp.83–84). In this context the role of the performance is one of an awakening to an energetic sense of presence.

'For me performance is the tool that I choose to make myself present' (Abramović quoted in Akers, 2012, p.19). Marina Abramović, a pioneer of performance art, affirms that performance is deeply founded on presence. In her exhibition at MoMA, *The artist is present* (2010), she performed in the atrium of the museum every day for three months. Visitors were encouraged to sit silently across from the artist for a duration of their choosing, becoming participants in the artwork. Talking about this experience, Abramović said that this has been her work with 'the greatest potential in transformation [...] a sort of extension of vital energy' (*ibid.*, p.42).

In every moment people are passing to get to the cafeteria, to the cinema, in the gallery, to the first and second floor: it is a continuous flow of people. I thought that if I would have created a small zone in the middle of that movement, as the centre of a tornado that is quiet, I would have created a situation between me and the people without conditions of time (*ibid.*, p.46).

There is a similar creative approach to stage and setting in both the *Go Daddy!* project and the Abramović exhibition: bringing the fragile and liberating movement of marathon

running to the heart of a tornado of technologies of identification (Foucault, 1998) resounds with Abramović's decision to position her silent performance at the centre of oppressively frantic human movement. They both open a 'quiet' space for a limit-experience of de-subjectification (Foucault, 1994, p.43), 'without conditions of time' (Abramović, quoted in Akers, 2012, p.46). The striking contrast of energies creates the possibility of a performance on the edge of life, where presence is a possibility of freedom.



Conclusions

Marathon running acted as a catalyst of resistance and a cathartic space for limit-experience for the prisoners participating in the *Go Daddy!* project. 'Running forever' was a message to keep in mind while running but at the same time it was a very powerful seed planted in each participant's own life. Learning to run the 'wall of the marathon runner' had become a practice of freedom. The effect of such practice, according to Holmes et al., 'is not

predictable, not scientifically measurable' (2006, p.328). Indeed, unpredictability is a characteristic of liminal carceral spaces, as highlighted by Moran (2013), and of liminality in general. The *Go Daddy!* project challenges more conventional methods of research in trying to deal with that characteristic. Moreover, it offers a new conceptual idea for academic inquiry: an art performance as a learning process to open an exploratory path of inquiry into human life.

Go Daddy! resulted in a creative practice of the limit, where I was able to observe and participate in a process where boundaries between inside and outside were continuously crossed and put into question (run *outside* the normal spaces of the prison, organise a race *inside*, invite parents from *outside* to come *inside* the prison for the race, participate in a real marathon *outside* the prison). It was a way of deconstructing the architecture of the prison, bringing the inside and the outside together on a totally indistinct threshold.

Go Daddy! was conceived as a pilot project to challenge the institution of the prison: moving away from punishment, towards rehabilitation. It is now going to be developed into a wider research initiative around performance studies and prison identities in other European countries involving academic institutions and associations (Children of Prisoners Europe¹⁰, Bambinisenzasbarre). A further step is to propose alternative paths of rehabilitation such as, for example, pilgrimage instead of detention: a marathon can become a real pilgrimage into a landscape and offer a possibility of rehabilitation in confrontation with the wilderness. The project will contribute to wider developments of carceral systems and to positive social change. This way of undertaking anthropology constitutes an investigation into the anthropology of the limit and is part of my larger programme of research that investigates

new possibilities of freedom in a neoliberal era. In seeking ways to answer to the world, the practices of the limit give expression to an anthropology through movement of hope, care, and inspiration.

Notes

1. See: www.bambinisenzasbarre.org.

2. The Feldenkrais method is a somatic educational method based on movement.

3. The limit-experience does not have to be confused with research of the extreme to test one's physical possibilities, as many sports activities seem to show nowadays. Neither is it a temporary phase in a rite of passage (van Gennep, 2010) as commonly understood by traditional anthropology (discussed later in the article). The limit-experience, on the contrary, is never excessive, certainly challenging but possible. It is not an unconscious desire for death, but hope of an awakening to a more intense sense of life.

4. As Merleau-Ponty states, 'a bodily movement carries its own immanent intentionality' (1962, pp.110–111).

5. Foucault asserts that subjectivity is fluid and always seeking lines of escape from governing agencies (1998). The Self responds to these normalising processes not by trying to free itself from this regulation, but rather by inventing alternative practices, which Foucault identified as 'pratiques de liberté' (practices of freedom) (Holmes et al., 2006).

6. Upon entry, prisoners sign a contract binding them to an ethic of non-violence and non-discrimination against the prison's large (35%) immigrant population and sex-offender population. Such contractual binding to an ethic of tolerance also includes cultivating a spirit of co-management, participation, and peer-counselling.

7. In 2010, the Italian government declared a state of emergency in the country's prisons and launched a plan to tackle its catastrophic overcrowding and high suicide rates. The plan entailed the expansion of prisons and the hiring of thousands of new guards and must be situated within a global explosion in the growth of prisons since the

'epochal shift from the social to the penal treatment' of social ills (Wacquant, 2008, p.51). As is the case elsewhere, Italy has seen almost total abandonment of the ideal of rehabilitation, with prisons increasingly serving to warehouse inmates. Italy is an interesting site of analysis because of its long history of authoritarianism due to the after-effects of Fascism as well as the culture of Catholicism that both reinforces and mitigates against this authoritarianism.

8. Due to the presence of a strong Catholic culture, morality is a rhetoric on which a practice of rehabilitation is based that conceptualises wrongdoing through cycles of punishment and forgiveness, sin and salvation.

9. *Knowing from the inside* is the title of a project of research led by Professor Tim Ingold at the University of Aberdeen (<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/research/kfi/>). Its fundamental premise is that knowledge grows from our practical and observational engagement with beings and things around us.

10. See: <http://childrenofprisoners.eu/>.

11. The video *Go Daddy! The dream of the marathon*, edited by the author in May 2014, is available at: <https://youtu.be/wdOIXV4SZ14>. Ethical approval has been received.

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This project is dedicated to all 'lost fathers' prisoners of a world of walls. To all friends of solitude.

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Relaxed performance: audiences with autism in mainstream theatre

BEN FLETCHER-WATSON

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Emerging less than a decade ago, 'relaxed performances' now take place at many theatres in the UK and USA. These events encourage attendance at mainstream productions by hitherto neglected audiences, particularly those with autism. The changes made may include reduced intensity of lighting and sound, the provision of visual stories to familiarise theatregoers with the venue and production, and trained staff on hand to assist visitors.

This paper examines the rise in relaxed performance since 2009, providing a synopsis of current practice. A short case study of a relaxed performance of The Lion King then prompts three questions: what do autistic theatregoers want from a theatre performance? Do relaxed performances alter the conventions of live theatre? What is their impact on actors?

The paper also considers the role of human rights in inclusive arts, and proposes several avenues for future research into this challenging and exciting movement.

Keywords: relaxed performance, autism, theatre, autism-friendly, The Lion King

Introduction

In recent years, theatres around the world have begun to embrace new means of accommodating audiences previously neglected by theatre makers. Performances for babies and their carers are now increasingly common in Europe and the USA (Fletcher-Watson et al., 2014), along with productions designed to engage people with dementia, profound multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) and those on the autism spectrum (Brown, 2012). Performances may reduce audience size to ensure comfort and engagement (Belloli, Morris and Phinney, 2013), provide participatory experiences such as communal eating or dance (Nerattini, 2009), employ kinaesthetic and other sensory stimuli (Brown, 2012), and tour to non-theatrical venues, including special schools, care homes and nurseries. When creating such pieces, artists tend to draw on theoretical frameworks from psychology, pedagogy, dramatherapy and medicine, in addition to conventional dramaturgical modes.

Similarly, theatre is regularly employed as a therapeutic intervention for a variety of groups, such as people with intellectual disabilities (Sherratt and Peter, 2002; Ramamoorthi and Nelson, 2011; Godfrey and Haythorne, 2013; Lewis and Banerjee, 2013; Corbett et al., 2014). Artists and therapists use drama exercises with participants to develop their social or emotional skills, although the resulting work is very rarely presented in a professional context (Hall, 2010). Both theatre for and by these neglected audiences is, to an extent, therefore excluded from the sites where performances are traditionally presented—the theatre itself.

Indeed, it has long been recognised that ‘mainstream theatre fails to fulfil the needs of some spectators in our society’ (Lancaster, 1997, p.75). Therefore, a parallel third movement of inclusion aims to encourage attendance at mainstream productions by audiences disadvantaged by

various factors, including disability (for example, via the provision of a T-loop or hearing aid loop for D/deaf patrons, and touch tours of the set for partially-sighted visitors), income (as at 'Pay What You Can' performances) or inexperience (through audience development and outreach activities).

However, for audience members with intellectual disabilities and those on the autism spectrum¹, access to mainstream theatre has traditionally been severely limited, often due to concerns about potential disruption for other theatregoers (see, for example Elkin, 2015). A 2002 survey found that 68% of children with disabilities did not engage with play and leisure providers due to being 'made to feel uncomfortable' (quoted in Broach et al., 2003, p.22). In an effort to accommodate these disadvantaged groups², occasional performances within longer runs have begun to be tailored to their specific needs. Originally known as autism-friendly or sensory-friendly performances, such events are now generally described as relaxed performances (RPs), reflecting perhaps a growing recognition of their appeal to a wider constituency than solely autistic people and their families. The term 'relaxed' remains contested, with alternatives proposed including 'extra-live' (Thom, 2015) and, more provocatively, 'not uptight' (Roundhouse, 2015), mirroring Rosemarie Garland Thomson's binary coinages of 'extraordinary' and 'normate' to describe bodies in society (1997). As the term used most widely in current marketing materials from venues, 'relaxed performance' is the preferred term in this paper.

RPs became a part of inclusive practice in 2009, with the first autism-friendly performances taking place at Polka Theatre in London. Other pioneers included West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds, as well as London's Little Angel Theatre and Unicorn Theatre. The Relaxed Performance Project in 2012 and 2013—organised by the Ambassador Theatre

Group, Prince's Foundation for Children and the Arts, the Society of London Theatres and the Theatrical Management Association—has been highlighted as the tipping point (Kempe, 2014), although it is important to note that this emerged from an 'Industry Inspiration Day' held on 10 October 2011 at the Unicorn Theatre (<http://www.uktheatre.org>, 2011). The project saw large cultural organisations such as the Royal Shakespeare Company and National Theatre work alongside West End venues and regional theatres to produce a series of RPs directed at children and young people.

In the USA, a similar genealogy can be traced, with RPs staged from 2011 at regional venues specialising in children's theatre such as Adventure Theatre in Maryland and Paper Mill Playhouse in New Jersey. In October of that year, the first Broadway RP was presented at New York's Minskoff Theatre, for Disney's *The Lion King*.

The number of RPs has risen sharply since then, despite claims that they are still 'few and far between' (Heaton, 2013, p.2). In 2014 in particular, UK pantomimes increasingly began to offer RPs, with at least 48 staged during the 2014–15 season. As Kempe has noted, 'for many children their first and often only experience of live theatre is the annual pantomime. To exclude families living with autism from this is tantamount to excluding them from a part of their local community and national cultural heritage' (2014, p.263).

Autism and theatre

Autism is mostly known for a characteristic and unusual style of social interaction (Frith, 2003), but a need for routine and predictability, and unusual reactions to sensory input are also features of the diagnosis (Wing and Gould,

1979). Some, but not all, people with autism also have an intellectual disability (ID). For autistic audience members with or without ID, crowds of people, loud noises, unfamiliar spaces and dimmed lighting can conspire to produce a profoundly unsettling atmosphere. In addition, some theatres still do not actively welcome patrons who require accommodations to enjoy a performance, seeing them perhaps as outside their desired audience, or part of outreach activity rather than customers.

Typically, a relaxed performance attempts to accommodate numerous common features of autism to create a safe, non-judgmental atmosphere where the autistic theatregoer can relax and enjoy live performance:

Feature of autism	Accommodation in relaxed performance
Insistence on sameness	<p>Social stories (also called visual stories)—these documents, circulated in advance, can be brief character guides or song lists, or longer documents with photographs of the theatre, accompanying Makaton symbols³ (used by many children with autism and/or IDs) and a description of what will happen from when they enter the venue to when the show ends. Some venues provide a separate ‘list of surprises’, allowing carers to choose whether to share these.</p> <p>‘Meet Your Seat!’: a free Open House on a day prior to performance expressly for children to become familiar with the space and grounds and to ease their transition.</p> <p>A short welcome/introduction to the stage: some venues choose to demonstrate surprises which will appear, such as trapdoors or flown scenery, in order to let theatregoers prepare.</p>
Hypersensitivities/hyposensitivities	<p>Hand driers in toilets turned off.</p> <p>House lights kept on.</p> <p>Signallers with glow sticks or flash cards on either side of the stage to warn theatregoers of upcoming loud</p>

	<p>noises, or to signal that clapping will occur.</p> <p>Coloured cards to hold up to signal a willingness to engage in interaction with performers.</p> <p>Small changes to the production, including reducing intense special effects, lowering the tap sounds of dance routines, softening transitions and lowering the pitch of some songs.</p>
High incidence of epilepsy	Removing strobe lights (a potential trigger for photo-sensitive epilepsy).
High incidence of anxiety	Calm spaces/activity areas in the lobby, where children can watch a live stream of the show if they need to leave the auditorium; colouring books, puzzles, games and quiet toys for use as needed.
Lack of understanding of autism among general public	Training for frontline staff, and the presence of trained helpers in the theatre and lobby, providing assistance to families—these may be local students, special education experts, social workers or ushers with an interest in inclusive arts.

Figure 1: table outlining various inclusive measures employed for relaxed performances. (Synthesised from Fletcher-Watson and Fletcher-Watson, 2013; Andrews and Begley, 2014; Kempe, 2014; Stone, 2014; Kempe, 2015)

Other measures not necessarily linked specifically to autism include:

- reduced ticket prices, reflecting the need for carers to accompany audience members
- ‘buggy parking’ in the lobby for walking frames and strollers
- free handouts or downloadable activity sheets to continue to explore the world of the production at home or school (Fletcher-Watson and Fletcher-Watson, 2013)

In the UK, many of these measures connect to the National Autistic Society's SPELL framework for understanding and responding to the needs of people on the autism spectrum (Beadle-Brown, Roberts and Mills, 2009; Beadle-Brown and Mills, 2010). SPELL stands for: Structure (to promote independence through predictability); Positive (approaches and expectations should be positive to encourage exploration of new areas); Empathy (from those who interact with the autism community); Low arousal (to minimise distraction); and Links (between people with autism and their carers, parents, teachers, advocates and others).

The rise in relaxed performance

While the increase in availability of RPs has been reported widely in the media (Booth, 2013; Rubin, 2013, Stern, 2013; Carey, 2014; Didcock, 2014; Elkin, 2014; Merrill, 2014; Costa, 2015; Gallagher, 2015; Halpern, 2015; Viswanathan, 2015; Wise, 2015), few reliable or comprehensive records exist. A database of over 300 relaxed performances was therefore constructed using Google searches in English, covering variations on 'relaxed performance', 'sensory-friendly' and 'autism-friendly', in conjunction with citation searches and listings from major international festivals⁴. The following data were gathered for each performance: title, genre, venue, city, country and date. Where a production provided several RPs as part of a run, such as *The Lion King* at New York's Minskoff Theatre, each performance was listed separately.

The database shows a steep rise in RPs around the world from 2009 (the earliest identified relaxed performance) to 2015. Figure 2 provides a visualisation of these data, moving from a handful of performances in 2009 and 2010 to over 120 separate events in 2014. By December 2014, more than

90 RPs had already been announced for the coming year.

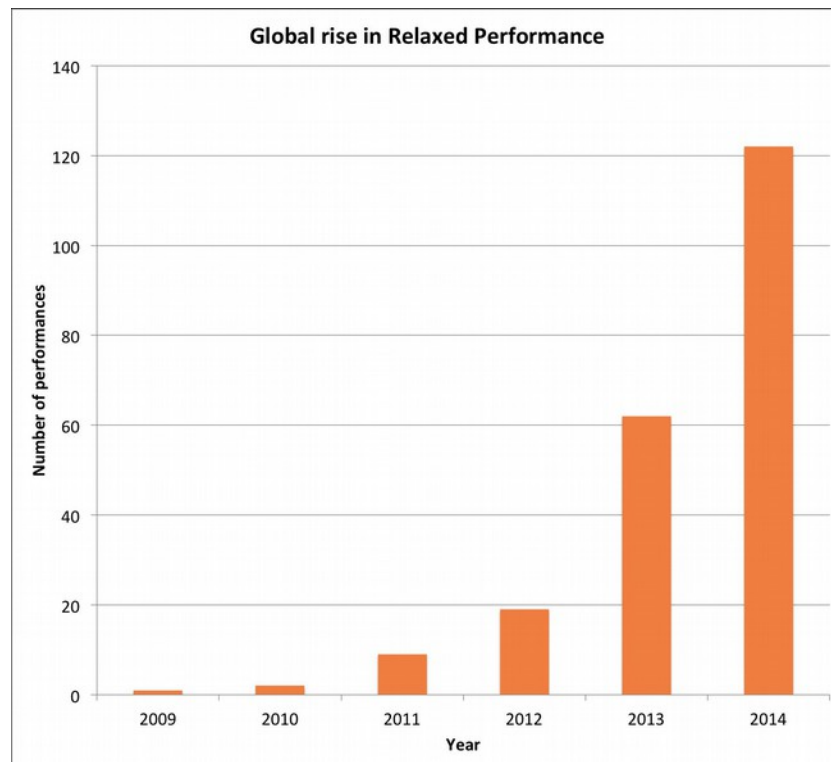


Figure 2: Global rise in relaxed performance, 2009-2014.

Children's productions represent the majority of RPs, making up 54% of the total. A considerable number of productions (22%) are pantomimes, despite a claim by the Relaxed Performance Project that pantomime may be more challenging than traditional productions (Ambassador Theatre Group et al., 2013), although other studies have noted that some theatregoers with autism may in fact enjoy a highly stimulating environment, and be disappointed if explosions and other visual effects are reduced (Kempe, 2014). Musicals make up another 15%. Only a small proportion of performances (8%) derive from adult texts such as Shakespeare or contemporary drama. There is therefore currently a lack of provision for adults with autism and others who may wish to enjoy traditional drama but require a degree of accommodation in order to be able to visit the theatre.

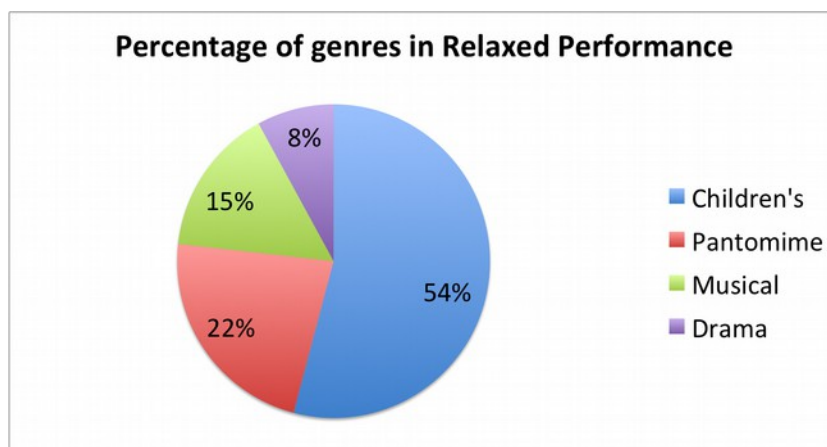


Figure 3: Percentage of specific genres in relaxed performance.

Attending a relaxed performance: a case study

On 24 November 2013, I attended a relaxed performance of Disney's *The Lion King* at the Edinburgh Playhouse with my 4-year-old daughter, who does not have autism. The following text is presented as an attempt to describe in detail the subjective experience of attending an RP, seeking to adopt and adapt Petra Kuppers's undertaking to focus 'not on art work created by people who live with diagnoses of autism, but on [performances] acted out, narrated, and danced by nondisabled people (who [may or may not] have significant experience of people who live with the diagnosis)' (2008, p.193). This lens seems particularly appropriate given the prevalence of nondisabled performers within RPs, permitting in particular the exploration of their experience or inexperience of playing to audiences with autism and the impacts this may have. Additionally, previous RP case studies (such as Kempe, 2014) have centred on production, rather than spectatorship.

We took our seats around 15 minutes before the show began, giving me time to settle and prepare my daughter for the performance, which would be the longest theatre experience she had attended to date. She put on her new

pink ear-defenders, bought at her request as ‘shows are too loud’ and played games on an iPhone to while away the time. Looking around, other children were engaged in similar activities—sensory sensitivity means that many young people with autism choose to wear ear-defenders, and technology plays a significant role in their lives, from educational games to speech aids for non-verbal children.

My daughter did not stand out as an interloper at this event. The audience member to my left, accompanied by his partner and their son in his 20s, offered a booster seat. In his eyes, we were just another family attending the autism-friendly performance, which of course we were, but I was suddenly struck by the ethical murkiness of my ‘undercover’ visit. Of course, no-one would ask me about my daughter’s diagnosis (or lack of one), but their expressions suggested that they had made an understandable assumption that she was a member of the autism community.

As we waited, I wondered about the extent to which autism-friendly performances might be forcing autistic people into a mainstream activity which they would not choose for themselves. What agency had been granted to the spectators around me to decide whether they wished to visit? Equally troublingly, should ‘neurotypicals’⁵ like me and my daughter be allowed to go to such performances, taking up seats put aside for people who are normally not made welcome in the theatre? These thoughts are still a concern to me now.

The event began with a welcome from two performers in costume, Stephen Carlile, playing Scar, and Gugwana Dlamini, playing Rafiki. Carlile noted that the cast were ‘honoured’ to be performing today, pointed out the National Autistic Society volunteers around the auditorium, and stated that this was a special place—unlike the rest of the world, which expects people with autism to fit in with it, this

theatre on this day was fitting in with autism. This generated a huge cheer from the audience. I know that there are strong feelings in the autism community that it is neurotypicals who need to learn the required skills to interact with autistic people, not vice versa, and the response to Carlile seemed to back this up.

The show then opened with Circle of Life and a parade of animals entering through the audience via both aisles. For a young boy next to us, an enormous elephant made up of four performers proved too much, and he asked to leave, but in the main, the audience responded as they would continue to respond for the remainder of the performance—loudly and joyfully.

Some effects seemed to have been muted slightly, such as the African drums set into balconies either side of the stage, but other effects were, perhaps unwisely, left intact. In particular, loud and sudden gas jets were set off in one scene, which caused many people around us to jump in surprise.

It was noticeable that the actors did not seem fazed by the unremitting noise and movement, which must have been louder and more obvious than in typical matinees. Audience members came and went as they wished, but I did not observe a single spectator object at having to let another theatregoer past. On the contrary, parents and carers exchanged smiles whenever this happened, and it is impossible to say whether this was out of sympathy, politeness or happiness at not being judged.

During the interval, groups of people quickly formed in the bar and lobby, excitedly discussing both the onstage action and their experiences in the auditorium. Quite a few people stayed in their seats and ate snacks or played on portable

devices.

As the second half progressed, I noticed an increase in movement and noise from other audience members, perhaps suggesting a dissatisfaction with the length of time spent in the venue. People began to leave around ten minutes before the end of the show, either to avoid the rush later or because they had seen enough. We made our exit as the curtain call began. I noticed many people waving both hands above their heads in the BSL (British Sign Language) sign for 'applause'. Despite this, the clapping was tremendously loud!

Walking through the lobby, I noticed a large merchandising stand by the exit doors. For a moment, I was taken aback by the incursion of commercialism at this special event, but this could be considered part of the 'mainstreaming' of autism-friendly theatre: when people with autism are welcomed into venues, they become consumers as well as audiences.

Discussion

My experience at *The Lion King* prompted a series of questions which may trouble some of the assumptions prevalent in existing literature on theatre and autism.

- What does the autistic theatregoer want from a theatre performance, relaxed or otherwise?
- Is RP a discrete mode of performance, or is it simply an adaptation of theatre etiquette? How are the semiotics and conventions of live theatre affected by RP?

- Does the presence of autistic audiences impact on an actor's performance, and if so, how?

The first question concerns the often contradictory aims of stakeholders in accessible arts: for venues, RPs can offer an opportunity to engage with (and be seen to engage with) a previously neglected audience. The reduced income concomitant with RP is outweighed by benefits in areas such as media coverage, audience development, outreach and new skills for staff. For educators, RPs could be seen to have the potential to develop social skills in people with autism. For parents, they may provide the chance to enjoy time with their family and wider peer group in a non-judgmental space. For campaigners, 'the RP can represent an opportunity to signal the presence and nature of autism to the wider community. By fostering greater understanding and acceptance, some of the tensions that can spark alarming behaviour may be alleviated' (Kempe, 2014, p.272).

Yet the voice of the autistic audience member is rarely heard in debates on social inclusion. Like the very young or the very old they are spoken for, and their cultural experiences can centre on being brought into the mainstream, rather than curating their own artistic engagement. This has been described as 'an assumption of the self as normative which informs ideas of inclusion, rather than [recognising] the focus in the legislation to enable participation in civic life and access to services' (Roberts, Beadle-Brown and Youell, 2011, p.49). Indeed, normative assumptions extend to a common belief that, like very young children, autistic people of all ages attend the theatre as a learning experience, rather than a purely aesthetic one: 'they can see that others are responding emotionally and so begin to learn appropriate responses themselves' (Kempe, 2014, p.265) and 'through RPs they will learn how to engage in a social and cultural event, not least through experiencing the joint attention it fosters' (ibid., p.272). Performance thus seems to

become instrumentalist and future-oriented, perhaps not enjoyable in the moment, but ‘for your own good’ in terms of development. Few commentators describe RP as an enjoyable cultural activity, as they might for theatre for neurotypical audiences.

Additionally, RPs are generally subsidised to reduce ticket prices and in some cases, reflect the smaller audience capacity. This also occurs in other inclusive arts, such as performances for people with dementia, and may be one reason for the apparently instrumentalist view prevalent among programmers and artists alike—the activity becomes outreach rather than another strand of performance, meaning that it must have identifiable public benefit. Therefore, claims about socialisation and the associated publicity around positive experiences are placed at the forefront, situating people with autism as beneficiaries of culture rather than consumers. As Tony Heaton has provocatively queried, ‘it could be argued that we are achieving partial access, but is this potentially more disempowering?’ (2013, p.3).

It is interesting to note that a small number of relaxed performances do not focus on theatregoers with additional support needs, but instead are described as ‘baby-friendly performances’ (Gardner, 2013). As noted above, these productions tend to make small changes to the audience experience to allow them to attend mainstream theatre, in this case, making allowances for the presence of babies, such as permitting theatregoers to leave and re-enter, to feed and to make a degree of noise, mirroring parent-and-baby cinema screenings. The atmosphere remains non-judgmental, but there are none of the instrumentalist overtones of performances for people with autism. These productions simply allow adults to enjoy the arts while making allowances for their caring responsibilities.

The explicit right of autistic people to access theatre is enshrined in Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which states that they should ‘enjoy access to television programmes, films, theatre and other cultural activities, in accessible formats; enjoy access to places for cultural performances or services, such as theatres’ (United Nations, 2006). Yet the right to withdraw, whether from culture or from community as a whole, is not granted: as has been proposed in relation to children’s rights, ‘arguably, the absence... of the right *not* to participate in culture may trouble the entire document’ (Fletcher-Watson, 2015, p.28). It should also be noted that ‘not everyone agrees that effort should be made to help people access the community—some self-advocacy groups maintain that people with autism should be “allowed” to isolate themselves and abstain from social inclusion if they wish’ (Roberts, Beadle-Brown and Youell, 2011, p.46). For example, Edinburgh-based Lung Ha’s Theatre Company have traditionally maintained an ‘intellectual disability exclusive’ artistic process, deliberately removed from mainstream society in order to guarantee a supportive environment (Hall, 2010, p.54). Consultation with theatregoers extends beyond the decision to attend an event, and must be negotiated constantly and with care throughout any encounter with the arts.

The desires of autistic theatregoers, especially adults, may therefore demand greater representation, from programming decisions made in collaboration with advisors in the autism community to involvement in the creation of new pieces, to participation during a live event. In particular, attending to responses from adults with autism could point towards possibilities for more relaxed performances in adult theatre.

The second question emerges from the liminal status of relaxed performance, which could be said to exist in the

space between traditional performance and inclusive practice. The atmosphere at an RP is different from a conventional theatre event, marked by noise, physical movement and visibility of the audience. However, the production on stage appears broadly unaffected by this previously 'inappropriate' behaviour. Kurt Lancaster has discussed Susan Bennett's theories about the creation of theatre etiquette: 'in the seventeenth-century, with the rise of private theatres... the audience as a whole became more segregated from the performance space. Caused in part by higher admission prices, theatre architecture, and so forth, this separation bred a more passive and elite audience' (1997, p.76). Supporting this view of modern theatre design as 'unrelaxed', David Bellwood of Shakespeare's Globe, a replica of an Elizabethan theatre which currently stages RPs, states: 'I would forgive you for thinking that the Globe is already a relaxed environment... the sun (or cloud cover) dictates the light levels within the theatre, and as our actors do not use microphones there is nothing to adjust there (as there would be in a West End musical)' (2013, n.p.).

Performer Jess Thom has explored the concept of 'relaxed venues' (Thom, 2015; Tripney, 2015), moving beyond the potentially marginalising effect of RPs to create theatres which accommodate disadvantaged audiences at every performance. For Thom, this could support inclusion by 'introducing relaxed performances to more people, building and sustaining links with new audiences, and developing confidence about access issues amongst theatre companies' (Thom, 2015, n.p.). It can be argued that such theatres could thus play a role in shifting cultural perceptions of disability, adapting to their patrons rather than expecting them to engage with the semiotic conventions of the mainstream, and taking a more radically inclusive approach which blends audiences with and without additional needs. However, as Edward Hall has noted, shared spaces can serve to reproduce marginalisation rather than challenge it (2010).

To explore this further, it may be useful to contrast relaxed performance with an associated but distinct mode of performance, that of theatre for people with complex disabilities, such as *Blue* (2006) by Oily Cart. Both fall under the umbrella term 'non-judgmental performance', and both are attentive to the needs of their audiences, but their conventions differ. Oily Cart's productions are usually short, at between 25 and 40 minutes, while RPs are full-length, often incorporating an interval. Theatre for people with complex disabilities tends to be participatory throughout (Brown, 2012), while RP follows the conventions of the individual production, often following a traditionally non-participatory model, such as the Broadway musical. Oily Cart and others develop their work from the outset for an audience with additional needs, meaning that they make each aesthetic decision aware of the requirement for safety, comfort and engagement (Young, 2004), while RP presents existing material in a newly created context. Oily Cart has developed individual practices for accommodating its heterogeneous theatregoers, such as one-on-one performances in swimming pools, or the use of suspended chairs to stimulate kinaesthetic sensations; by contrast, RPs presume a homogeneous audience, providing a swathe of generic inclusive measures (see figure 1) to accommodate the majority of needs. Semiotically, theatre for people with complex disabilities recognises and adapts to its audience's lack of recognition of theatre etiquette, for example by replacing applause with intimate moments of one-on-one interaction; RP retains most theatrical conventions, such as raising curtains, clapping hands⁶ and sitting in rows in an auditorium.

Overall, it appears that performances made specifically for people with autism (as well as drama education and dramatherapy approaches) represent discrete theatrical practices, but the status of RP is less clear. Its distinctiveness may yet develop further as the movement grows and practice becomes codified. However, the on-stage

element currently retains all the hallmarks of traditional mainstream performance, in keeping with the original inclusive aim of these events. This prompts my third question.

Frontline staff are trained in how to respond to autistic audiences for an RP, but actors are not generally assisted to the same extent. The unusual audience dynamic is undoubtedly noticeable to performers, but there is a lack of research into its impact on their performance. In an interview with BBC News on 19 June 2014, actor Alex Gaumond described his experience of playing Miss Trunchbull in an RP of *Matilda The Musical* (Royal Shakespeare Company, 2010):

It was such an enriching experience, and some of the reactions you got from those kids were so spot-on. I mean, [during] one of my exits, I was called a 'miserable old bat', which I thought is exactly right, you know. They're getting the story, they're getting it, and yes, they possibly don't have that sort of self-censorship to suppress what they feel, or what they want to shout out, and they just shout it out—but they're getting the story (transcribed from Beal, 2014).

Gaumond's pleasure at participating in a RP is evident, yet it is unclear whether the interjections affected his ability to perform. The availability of specific training in theatre for children at institutions such as Rose Bruford College, London, coupled with the long history of courses in Applied Theatre, Theatre in Education, and Drama in Education at UK drama schools, suggests that actors believe they may benefit from education in performance for non-traditional audiences. It also seems likely, as the movement grows, that even actors who choose to work mainly in adult theatre and musicals, as opposed to theatre for children or pantomime, will increasingly be presented with the opportunity to perform in a RP. Until further studies are carried out into

performance to autistic audiences, it is not possible to determine whether new training is required, but it may be the case that greater understanding could produce autism-friendly acting, as well as autism-friendly audience experiences.

Conclusion

The tension between instrumentalism and inclusivity continues to problematise the RP movement, most notably in the seeming lack of agency granted to autistic theatregoers beyond the auditorium experience. More research is also needed into the impact on professional performers of participating in RPs, and there may be a need for further training at drama schools and conservatoires as the movement develops.

Several notable features of autism are not currently accommodated by RP practice. In particular, the size of the crowd at larger venues may be off-putting to a significant proportion of the potential audience. New developments in livecasting (streaming live theatre to the web or to cinemas), such as NT Live (NESTA, 2011), may offer a solution to this issue. The combination of a livecast and a relaxed performance could permit patrons who do not welcome the presence of large numbers of strangers to enjoy a specially adapted performance along with those who seek a live theatre experience, albeit with a risk of marginalisation if live broadcasting is used as an alternative to RP rather than a complement. This model has proved successful in the past—for example, a livecast of *Couldn't Care Less* (Strange Theatre and Plutôt La Vie) on 18 October 2013 allowed carers for people with dementia to watch the performance from their homes, acknowledging the difficulty they would have encountered in combining a visit to the theatre with their caring responsibilities.

Alternatively, companies such as Fevered Sleep have begun to experiment with transmedia performance, for example in the app *It's the Skin You're Living In* (2014), which invites users to collaborate and pool their digital devices in small groups in order to access scenes from a film.

Additionally, mobile apps and digital technology are not yet embedded within arts experiences for autistic people to the same extent as in other domains, such as education or communication. There has been a 'recent explosion in technologies for people with ASD [autism spectrum disorder]' (Fletcher-Watson, S., 2014, p.87), alongside a rise in theatre-derived apps for the general public (Fletcher-Watson, B., 2014). Significant opportunities exist for the development of autism-specific digital products which may augment live arts events. Notably, Circus Starr, an accessible community circus company, designed their own iOS app to deliver an interactive, personalised storybook as a social story (see figure 1), providing a 'virtual, ring-side circus experience without ever leaving the house' (Logan, 2014). Similarly, Imagination Stage in Maryland has generated social stories in video format, allowing patrons to become familiar with the theatre venue via their computer or mobile device at a time of their choosing (2015).

However, it may also be possible to employ these technologies to permit people with autism to become involved in the evaluation of productions before they are performed, ensuring greater engagement and recognising the importance of involving a target audience at all stages of the development process. Genres such as theatre for Early Years already invite test audiences into rehearsals to gauge responses to work-in-progress (Schneider, 2009), but there are perhaps added ethical and logistical considerations (such as the need for accessible rehearsal spaces) when creating work for the autism community. Furthermore, existing investigative methods tend to rely on observation

(for younger children), or verbal and pictorial feedback (for older children and adults); these methods may not be appropriate for use with people with autism, whose engagement signals and communication preferences can differ markedly from those of neurotypical theatregoers. A communication interface, combined with video recordings of rehearsed moments, could perhaps cater to their needs while recognising their right to access culture.

It may also be valuable to consider means of extending relaxed practices beyond the current provision of pantomime and children's theatre, to encompass more adult theatre and perhaps other art forms such as opera and ballet. The co-creation of new theatrical experiences with autistic people, possibly through the development of digital interfaces, offers exciting possibilities for the future direction of relaxed performance.

However, for this to occur, a shift in perception of RP seems to be required. Just as theatre for Early Years has moved away from instrumentalist conceptions of teaching 'theatre literacy' in order to produce audiences of the future, and towards an acknowledgement of the right to participate in arts and culture on a child's own terms from birth (Fletcher-Watson et al., 2014), so perhaps it is time for relaxed performances to be seen as an opportunity for people with autism to enjoy art for its own sake, rather than a form of socialisation imposed by carers. The intrinsic benefits of attending cultural events are significant, but equally, theatre professionals should recognise the right of a person with autism to visit the theatre for pleasure.

Notes

1.This paper both uses person-first language ('people with autism') and refers to 'autistic people', in line with mixed preferences in the autism community (Pellicano, Dinsmore and Charman, 2013).

2.Tim Webb of PMLD theatre specialists Oily Cart has provocatively situated them as 'impossible audiences' (Waldron, 2015, n.p.).

3.Makaton is a communication programme which uses signs and symbols to support spoken language.

4.Bree Hadley (2015) has highlighted the impact of the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) in the USA and the Disability Discrimination Act (1996) in the UK upon theatre venues' requirement to address access, noting that Australia lacks equivalent legislation. This could partially explain the relative paucity of RPs in Australia. However, it should also be noted that the data collection for this study is by necessity Anglo-centric, and does not imply the movement has not spread to Asia, Africa or South America. Nonetheless, personal communications from autism and theatre professionals in Japan, Argentina, Italy, Finland, Norway and the Netherlands indicate no awareness of an emerging autism-friendly mainstream theatre movement in those countries. Internationally-coordinated research could begin to overcome the limitation of reliance on Anglo-centric terminology.

5.'Neurotypical', also NT, is a term which has emerged from within the neurodiversity movement to describe people who are not on the autism spectrum.

6.Although some visitors at the RPs I have attended chose to employ the BSL sign for applause, this was not explicitly requested by any company or venue, despite the potential for overstimulation of hypersensitive individuals of loud clapping.

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Book review: *El Sistema: orchestrating Venezuela's youth*, by Geoffrey Baker

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***El Sistema: orchestrating Venezuela's youth*, by Geoffrey Baker. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014; ISBN: 9780199341559 (\$35.00)**

Geoffrey Baker has produced a critical, in-depth study of the Venezuelan music education programme known as El Sistema¹ which has developed over the past forty years, establishing children's and youth orchestras on a huge scale across the country. El Sistema seeks to bring about social transformation through music-making within the context of the orchestra, recently inspiring a large number of Sistema-related organisations around the world. Employing ethnographic techniques such as interviewing, observation and the examination of documentation over the period of a year in Venezuela, he has provided a critique of an organisation he characterises as autocratic, out-dated, corrupt and even abusive. He asks far-reaching questions regarding whether the Sistema model is a healthy one to be emulated internationally, and suggests that the notion of the orchestra as a vehicle for social change is deeply flawed.

So what sort of book is this? Baker writes within traditions of critical ethnography which set individual or local experiences and perspectives within a wider context, seeking to uncover oppressive social structures and practices. The emphasis is on unmasking underlying ideologies, making apparent that which has been hidden,

exposing the unequal power relations between dominant cultural discourses and those marginalised by them. He does not claim to give a balanced account, but seeks to give a 'counter-weight' (p.19) to the extant adulatory accounts of El Sistema in Venezuela. Baker situates his book within the field of 'activist ethnomusicology' and is therefore committed to giving voice to those 'marginalised in the public realm, rather than those who have dominated it' (p.18). His aim, he writes, was not 'a comprehensive or conclusive narrative but rather a critical, informed analysis of some of El Sistema's key actors and core claims' (p.20). The book seeks to 'go beyond an examination of the Venezuelan programme to encompass a broader critical analysis of the youth orchestra as a vehicle for a rounded, inclusive education in music and citizenship' (p.5). The object of his critique, as he states, is 'not classical music per se but institutions, pedagogies and practices that mediate it' (p.12).

In El Sistema and the model of the orchestra central to its programme, Baker finds old-fashioned, authoritarian structures and practices which shape young people to become docile workers rather than politically engaged citizens (p.200), creating 'a microcosm of capitalist society' (p.202). He insists that 'the pursuit of social justice requires the critique of oppressive structures and exclusive forces in conventional music education, not their perpetuation and expansion in new guises'. But Baker judges El Sistema, and particularly the actions of its founder José Antonio Abreu, from the comfortable perspective of someone living in highly-developed social structures within stable, democratic settings, and shows little understanding of or sympathy for the deeply challenging political, economic and social circumstances in Venezuela. There must be, of course, no leeway given as regards abusive practices, but there is a harsh idealism in Baker's uncompromising stance which needs to be acknowledged and unpacked a little if practitioners and policy makers are to benefit from his

research. His insistence on polarising the discussion sometimes leads me to question whether Baker actually wants to engage with practitioners, or simply to reinforce ideological battle lines.

On the one hand, this book addresses a set of difficult issues which it might be easier for the international Sistema community to turn away from. Its unflinching questioning of deeply held assumptions and values is to be welcomed, for there is much to learn from here for practitioners who will shape Sistema-inspired programmes into the future. On the other hand, Baker speaks in a tone which is often lacking in graciousness. When discussing the wider influence of El Sistema, he tends to disregard the relationships which have become established between members of the Venezuelan programme and Sistema practitioners around the world, all of whom he seems eager to dismiss with no more than a cursory glance. But many of these people have set about re-imagining how inclusive, immersive music-making might be established afresh in contexts of social exclusion elsewhere, choosing richer, more progressive, child-centred pedagogies than those narrowly-focused methods Baker critiques in Chapter 6, such as endless repetition and memorisation.

Let me first of all lay my cards on the table. I am a professional viola player, a trained secondary school music teacher, and have recently completed a doctorate in the philosophy of music education. I am also a board member of Sistema Scotland, although the views expressed here are my own and should not be taken as representing those of Sistema Scotland. I am interested in this book in terms of how it might help us reflect on our practices in the Sistema Scotland's Big Noise programmes and shape these for the future. I am committed to finding ways of ethically re-orienting practice within music education, as well as reconceptualising how the orchestra might function.

I am not in a position to assess the validity of Baker's claims as regards unhealthy structures or abuses within the Venezuelan programme. These have been commented on already by Venezuelan author Carlos M. Añes (2014), who notes that Baker rigorously omits all positive voices. I can say that I am grateful for the generosity and support of the El Sistema organisation in the setting up of our programme in Scotland, for their warm hospitality during my recent visit to Venezuela and for the kindness of the Venezuelan musicians who captured the hearts of the children of Big Noise in Raploch when they visited in June 2012.

The wider issues Baker draws out, however, concerning the orchestra as a model for social transformation, his critique of the 'classical' music profession, and of Sistema-inspired programmes around the world, are of huge significance for me, and this response to Baker's book is inevitably to some extent a personal one. The book is sometimes painful reading, but I welcome Baker's intention to open up a critical, reflective space in which to examine Sistema practices. It is important at the outset however that the reader attempts to distinguish those criticisms which Baker lays at the Venezuelans' door both from those directed at the wider 'classical' music profession, and from those directed at Sistema-inspired practitioners. Disentangling these is not always straightforward, as Baker doesn't always make these basic distinctions clear.

The first part of the book examines the Venezuelan organisation, with a critical look at Abreu's life and career, at Gustavo Dudamel and the Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra (which has now dropped its 'youth' label). Baker draws out some important issues which fall into two categories: practices characteristic of the Venezuelan Sistema programme, and issues concerning practice in the 'classical' music world internationally. In Venezuela, for instance, there is a blurring of the boundaries between youth

orchestra and professional players, as El Sistema pays young people there to be part of some of its flagship ensembles. According to Baker's research they tend to be paid rather better than other professionals, within or outside of orchestral music. This is a very different notion of the youth orchestra from the one we are familiar with in Britain. Baker is critical of the scholarships or stipends which young people in nucleo [local El Sistema centre] youth orchestras are sometimes given, but Sistema staff explain these as aimed at increasing opportunities for students to attend conservatoire or university whilst remaining involved in orchestral playing.

Baker highlights the dominance of classical music by a handful of organisations and agencies, and the adulation accorded to a few top international artists. He juxtaposes the 'revolutionary' label given by many commentators to Dudamel and his idolising by the 'conservative' musical establishment, one which Baker aligns with corporate, capitalist interests (p.52). In the context of a critical discussion of Dudamel fitting easily into life as a conducting superstar and advertising expensive watches, we read:

Dudamel's trajectory tells us less about him than it does about El Sistema's ideological basis... For all the social rhetoric, El Sistema is a project with a markedly commercial slant, indeed one that fits hand-in-glove with global music capitalism (p.49).

Music as 'commodity' and as 'spectacle' are, Baker claims, inherent in El Sistema's ideology and priorities, revealing the 'conservative thinking that lies behind the revolutionary surface' (p.59). Baker chooses a leftist reading to reinforce his criticisms of Abreu's predilection for large-scale stage events to impress visitors and funding bodies. The Sunday concerts I attended at the Centre for Social Action through Music in Caracas however were joyful celebrations of

communal music-making and achievement, to an audience of parents and friends. Baker puts forward no evidence to support his view that Sistema-inspired initiatives around the world have a 'markedly commercial slant'. My orchestral colleagues in the profession would smile ironically at a criticism of having a 'markedly commercial slant': 'if only', they might say.

The reader must negotiate a middle way through Baker's discourse and remember that this does not claim to be a balanced account. There are other aspects of Baker's style for which the reader must be on their guard. In drawing from an array of sources within and outside of the music education research literature, Baker doesn't always clarify the broader discussion from which he pulls out short extracts. This sometimes has the effect of dizzying the reader—as if the camera pans around too quickly—allowing a certain sleight of hand to creep in where texts are cited to sustain assertions that they do not in fact support. One example comes within a discussion of two early evaluations of the first stages of development of Big Noise in Raploch. First, Baker claims the Scottish Government's 2011 report, *Evaluation of Big Noise*, 'presents a mixed picture' (p.306). Baker doesn't make it clear whether this is his own verdict or his reporting of the evaluation's conclusions. The government report of 2011 is in fact very positive about developments through Big Noise, and doesn't present any evidence of a 'mixed picture'; this positivity presumably being the reason that Baker's colleague Owen Logan is, apparently, so critical of the report in his unpublished work that Baker cites (p.265).

Baker refers to the *Knowledge exchange with Sistema Scotland* paper from 2010 (Allan et al.) which reports on another early evaluative endeavour. He writes:

Allan et al's (2010) research points to [other] continuities between Venezuelan and Scottish projects, such as a faith-based approach that reduces productive ambiguity, reflection, and critique, and a streak of paternalism and exclusion behind the trumpeting of social inclusion. The impressive drive and focused mission that propel the project forward appear to have some problematic undercurrents (p.307).

Baker's use of 'faith-based' here is highly misleading, even mischievous. He has picked up an observation from Allan et al.:

We noticed that in overcoming the huge hurdles associated with the launch of such an ambitious charity—primarily funding and the support of governmental institutions—the individuals driving Sistema Scotland have adopted a professional perspective that prioritises a need for unquestioning faith in the intrinsic value and efficacy of the programme. This bold position provides a tremendous energy to the operation of Sistema Scotland, but—like any agenda-driven professional perspective—it is not without limitations. These could be seen to include a narrow and focused vision of the programme's place within an existing community and services infrastructure, for example, and a 'missionary' stance in relation to the Raploch community, reliant on statements of faith in the process from all involved (2010, p.334).

Yet he doesn't set out the context of the original discussion and explain that this is not suggestive of a religious perspective, but rather of 'faith in the process', in terms of the organisation's strongly coherent vision. Such ambiguity is certainly advantageous for Baker's rhetoric, but undermines the book's claim to academic rigour.

I have yet to trace where Baker found the 'streak of

paternalism and exclusion behind the trumpeting of social inclusion' (p.307) in Sistema Scotland's Big Noise programme. It would seem that, having cast himself as the whistleblower on El Sistema in Venezuela in Part One of the book, it seems impossible for Baker to retain much objectivity (or even interest) when it comes to passing comment on the Sistema-inspired programmes around the world. Instead of coming to visit and engaging in some ethnographic work on Scotland, for instance, Baker is content with producing a strangely biased account of the first two external, published evaluations, where it becomes impossible for the reader to detect which opinions are put forward as citations and which are put forward as his own. It appears that he read these reports quickly, giving the website only a cursory glance in order to detect a 'dismissive attitude toward popular and traditional music' (p.306)².

In the context of this academic book it is jarring to suddenly encounter a more journalistic turn of phrase. For instance, after a discussion of Estelle Jorgensen's work and its influence upon his, Baker observes that the 'miniature civil society' she envisages music educators creating 'is founded upon tackling long-standing problems of oppressive structures, not strengthening tradition'. We then read, '[t]his means grappling with El Sistema's weaknesses, not engaging in bourgeois fantasies about the power of Beethoven to save the poor' (p.14). By introducing the dated Marxist rhetoric of the deluded bourgeoisie, Baker unmasks his own ideological standpoint and undermines his assertion that 'skepticism, critique, and the raising of uncomfortable issues should not then be confused with a desire to weaken El Sistema—quite the opposite' (p.21).

Part Two of the book sets the Sistema model within the wider context of music education, beginning with a discussion of the orchestra as a model for social action.

Baker takes issue with the orchestra on many levels: as autocratic and modelling despotic power relations of bygone European princes; as subjugating musicians in outdated, servile roles; and elevating the show or spectacle above all else, the ends justifying the means, sometimes to a horrifying degree (p.114). From my own professional life, I know that many practices within orchestral management must be transformed through a fresh vision. I tease a young conductor I regularly work with for wearing nineteenth century servants' dress, for instance, and I recall an experience one evening twenty years ago, after a performance in a central European concert hall, of feeling totally alienated as the conductor kept returning to the platform to take the applause long after the orchestra had departed, as was the local custom. Having given our all, the audience response was for him alone.

Baker cites plenty of research which uncovers the stresses orchestral players undergo through poorly thought-out working conditions. I remember walking off the stage during the very first week of my professional career, when suffering a high D trumpet at full volume from a riser behind me. I recall too, back in the 1990s, petitioning for flexible contracts and for rotation within string sections as a means of reshaping the orchestra as an institution. These changes *are* taking place now, however. Orchestras have begun to safeguard players' interests and change contractual and seating arrangements in order to diversify. Players are taking more responsibility for running their ensembles, creating possibilities for a much wider range of playing opportunities in varied contexts, turning outwards to serve their wider communities and welcoming as creative partners musicians from other kinds of musical traditions and those working with new musical processes. Of course this is just the beginning of the re-imagining which needs to take place: but isn't it time now to move on from a critical unmasking, necessary as it has been, to ask what new vision there is for the orchestra, to dream dreams and seek 'the

impossible' for the future, as Lee Higgins describes in the field of community music (2012)?

Baker usefully draws out some significant themes from contemporary music education research literature: the need for a greater plurality of musical expressions in an educational context, for the breaking down of hierarchies where one kind of music is elevated above another, for young people to have more control over their own learning, their voices listened to and to be invited into decision-making and leadership roles. He sets these in opposition to practices he perceives within El Sistema. Yet many of these are qualities which, as Sistema-inspired programmes mature and enter their longer term, are becoming, and will increasingly become, part of their musical and social practices. Already in Sistema Scotland's Big Noise programmes, for instance, the team includes musicians who compose and play regularly in a wide range of bands and experimental ensembles. There are singer songwriters, highly experienced orchestral players, folk musicians, music therapists, community musicians and trained school music teachers. The young people of Big Noise have opportunities through a broad-based curriculum to engage in creative work with a visiting composer, improvise regularly, and are involved in learning skills in playing traditional Scottish music and jazz, attending other local groups as they grow into musical and social relations with the wider community.

Baker does put forward alternatives to an orchestra-based programme, which he says more adequately embody practices identified as 'progressive' through the music education research literature. He suggests (following a citation from Thomas Turino) '[a]n ideal music project would expose children to different kinds of music, ensembles, and the values associated with them, allowing them to experience and reflect on a variety of notions of

citizenship' (p.131). This ideal of engaging with many different musical expressions and values may well be appropriate for a classroom-based music curriculum, but it raises issues of tokenism or even cultural imperialism unless resources are gathered carefully and serious thought is given to how to engage ethically with 'other people's music'. Questions arise too concerning the relationship between what might be appropriate within a school music curriculum and what a Sistema-inspired programme might offer. By giving children opportunities to learn specific instrumental skills, where they acquire musical fluency through sustained engagement, Sistema-inspired programmes provide an entry point which allows young people to play a variety of music with others in the orchestra, and a starting point into an exploration of an infinity of other musical expressions throughout their lives. My early research in Shetland found that a high level of musical fluency (and instrumental proficiency) amongst young people who play within local traditions, brings wide-ranging listening and performing interests in other, less familiar musical styles (Jourdan, 2008).

The third section of Baker's book explores the notion of social action through music, widening the discussion to the notion of 'classical' music's role within programmes of social action. He poses two 'core questions': 'Was El Sistema conceived as a social project in 1975? And does it actually prioritise social action over musical goals today?' (p.163). Baker suggests that a shift in emphasis in how El Sistema presented itself during the 1990s was intended to bring the organisation more into alignment with the social justice priorities of the Chávez government—thereby securing its ongoing funding—and away from its original aims which Baker identifies as having been to populate Venezuelan orchestras with Venezuelan musicians rather than with Europeans or North Americans. He is critical of the suggestion that El Sistema actively seeks out the most disadvantaged children, but acknowledges that this *is* a

priority for Sistema-inspired programmes around the world, such as the 'more nuanced and proactive approach to fostering social inclusion and community relations' of Sistema Scotland (p.306). On my recent visit to several nucleos in Caracas and one in a more rural setting there was a social mix of children, but there didn't seem to be much doubt that the majority in Caracas's centres lived in nearby *barrios*.

But if Abreu didn't set up El Sistema in the first instance as a social intervention, this does not invalidate the developing model, which has motivated others to offer young people in marginalised communities elsewhere the opportunities and potential benefits of learning to play together in an orchestra. Nor is it surprising that, having established an extensive programme of music-making nationally, the founder would seek to ensure its future by adapting to changing political landscapes. As for his accommodation with the government of Hugo Chávez, it is easy to be judgemental from the comfortable vantage point of a mature democracy, but has Baker really thought through the choices available to Abreu? It is hard to argue that instead it would have been better for him to allow El Sistema to have been wiped out.

Beyond being suspicious about Abreu's motives, Baker is wary of the notion of 'social inclusion' which he considers to be 'El Sistema's primary *raison d'être* in the eyes of the Venezuelan state and the cornerstone of the program's fame and funding' (p.179), quoting critics on the left who see it as a 'form of regulating the poor' and 'a top-down programme of social control' (p.180, citing The Cultural Policy Collective's *Beyond social inclusion*, 2004). From this perspective 'the discourse of social inclusion has served to obscure debate about material inequality' (The Cultural Policy Collective, 2004, p.6), masking issues of poverty and social injustice by effacing discourses of class and

exploitation. This outlook criticises the social inclusion agenda for imposing cultural hierarchies of the middle classes onto peripheral communities whose culture is not recognised as being of value, fostering homogeneity rather than diversity. Not all Sistema-inspired programmes use discourses of social inclusion, with Sistema Scotland talking of 'social transformation' and others of 'social action', but the question must be asked of Baker: which measures of health and well-being *are* acceptable within his critical outlook?

Practitioners within Sistema-inspired projects are concerned with helping to improve the lives of children and communities in terms of better health and well-being outcomes, encouraging choices which put young people on different trajectories from the dependency of unemployment or criminal activity which might otherwise have become a reality. Far from imposing a rigid ideological position, the recently published report on the Big Noise programmes in Raploch and Govanhill emphasises the flexibility of the Sistema Scotland approach, which tailors the programme to serve specific communities and particular individuals within them (Glasgow Centre for Population Health, 2015a), a quality we learned from seeing the adaptability of Venezuelan nucleos. Significantly the report's examination of the programme's impact concludes that 'people change lives':

A recurring theme across this evaluation is the emphasis Sistema Scotland places on the quality of the relationship between musician and participant. It is this quality of relationship that is so important to the theorised impact pathways. Indeed many of the strengths of the Big Noise delivery... are designed to enable the opportunity for this relationship to flourish. Consistent with other social regeneration evidence and narrative, Sistema Scotland's vision could be described as 'people change lives' not services or programmes or necessarily even music (GCPH, 2015a, p.12).

It is the long-term relationship of Big Noise musician and participant through which social transformation can happen, through which a 'utopian space' (Jorgensen, 2004, p.8, cited by Baker) can open up. This was the overriding impression from my recent Venezuelan trip: of tender, compassionate practice by additional educational needs teachers, for instance, which calls into question some of the highly professionalised caring familiar to us in the United Kingdom. Perhaps Baker's structural, critical approach doesn't have the tools to examine such practices at the face-to-face level—where it might be argued much of the social benefit of Sistema-inspired projects occurs—where a quasi-improvisatory ethical orientation in the practitioner must respond attentively and responsibly to the child or young person before them. I have written elsewhere of what it might mean if we understand music-making in terms of 'looking into the face of the other' in an act of hospitality and responsibility (Jourdan, 2015). French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1969) exhorts us to 'look into the face of the other' and respond to the ethical call we find there as our primary, pre-ontological responsibility to each other before all other considerations, ideologies or ways of conceptualising the world. Such a re-orientation transforms practices within music education and the music profession.

The final part of the book turns to issues concerning the evaluation of impact. It discusses several Latin American programmes which Baker describes as more 'progressive' than El Sistema in Venezuela, including a project in Medellín, Colombia, which started with the 'classical' musical tradition then changed to broaden its focus, and offers a wider training in music theory, and also a Brazilian scheme which managed to reach the poorest children apparently much more effectively than El Sistema in Venezuela, and where young people had a role in strategic decision-making.

He presents other programmes in Colombia, musical and otherwise, where he identifies an emphasis on agency, creative capacity, plurality and critical reflection in order to resist 'hegemonic forms of power' (p.313) and to change society. Costa Rica's recent curriculum reforms, which sought to overturn 'a pattern of colonialism and exclusion' (*ibid.*) are described as encouraging practices where young people construct their own knowledge through research, engagement and reflection rooted in their communities and the areas in which they live. A wide range of 'musics' are explored alongside history, new technologies, composition, arranging and improvising, with the teacher as a mediator rather than in a position of 'power'. Young people are creating '*their* music' alongside the musics of their communities and past and present musical forms from wider society.

Baker remains blind, however, to ethical practices within the orchestral model he rejects, the moment-by-moment experiences and skills honed within the orchestra: for instance the ability to yield to others, play within the sound of another, to lead gently, to contribute strongly whilst being sensitive and alert to players around you. These aspects require sensitivity and a deep sense of teamwork, but sit better within an ethical rather than the emancipatory discourse favoured by Baker. The role of the conductor is being re-imagined too. I am struck by the practice of the conductor I work alongside, who invites players into the process, to find together the shape of a musical work during the week of rehearsal, and who resists expectations of bringing a hermetically-sealed interpretation to be efficiently imposed from the podium. Many orchestras don't appreciate this approach as their time-worn attitudes are tenacious. Orchestras are too accustomed to the infantilising processes which Baker rightly identifies through the research literature. But for players sometimes bruised by overbearing conductors who keep power on the podium, and who deny them any part in creative decisions

and processes, it can be a healing experience to work with those who are re-imagining the role of *maestro*, inviting in players to co-create, and audiences to journey with them, in ethically-oriented practice. Here perhaps are the beginnings of the 'excellence in terms of the *quality of social bonds* created through music making' which Baker, citing Turino (2008), suggests exist in other musical cultures.

Despite Baker's scathing portrayal of him, there *is* something revolutionary in what Dudamel brings in his ability to inspire and gently lead young musicians, apparent when he rehearsed with the members of the SBO sitting alongside the children of Big Noise in Raploch in June 2012. Players and conductor reached out to the younger musicians in a nurturing manner as they played, physically affirming them by leaning in towards the children to build confidence, and supporting their sound without overpowering it, in order to encourage them to really play out (Jourdan, 2012). Despite Baker's criticism of the Venezuelan Sistema organisation and his insistence that the background structures of classical music are oppressive and exclusive, the practices of the Bolivar players in relating to the young people of Big Noise, and in the sort of leadership shown by Dudamel, reveal a fresh, ethical dimension which points forward to possibilities for a re-envisaging of the role of conductor, player and orchestra.

The model of the orchestra is a useful one within a Sistema-inspired context partly because there are possibilities for all levels of player to join in, with specially-adapted parts for younger players to sit alongside those more experienced others who are playing the complete parts. This is why the 'side-by-side' experience with professional orchestral 'buddies' has become common practice in Sistema-inspired programmes. The notion of apprenticeship, of the 'master' as someone who has 'gone before', of the musician who can draw younger players further into the infinity of music-

making, of learning a set of skills with which to follow fresh paths in the future, is not an oppressive social force when practised ethically, as I've explored elsewhere through the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (Jourdan, 2015). Sistema practitioners such as those in the Big Noise programmes work hard to be attentive to the needs of the young people they teach, establishing ethical musical and social practices in every area of their programme. These practices include positive behaviour management and highly developed, ethical child-protection strategies, progressive pedagogies, and the inclusion of all kinds of musical styles in arrangements for young players to enjoy learning together.

Baker poses the question, 'should music education provide a pragmatic space (training for the real world) or a utopian one (the chance to experience alternatives)?' and asks, '[w]hich side of the binary does Sistema lean towards?' (p.233). He writes that 'pragmatists as well as utopians might... ask how well El Sistema is preparing Venezuelan children for life in the twenty-first century' and 'whether the conventional symphony orchestra is an appropriate tool' (p.237). Such polarities are unhelpful, meaningless in the context of face-to-face ethical encounters between musician and participant, as is Baker's refusal to acknowledge the inclusive usefulness of the orchestral model used in Sistema-inspired programmes.

This is the heart of the debate. Practitioners in Sistema-inspired programmes are engaged in re-imagining their lives together, 'presag[ing] a more civil society' and modelling 'society yet to come', as they draw young people into music-making within the orchestra (p.13, citing Jorgenson, 2003, p.120). They too, through their responsive and reflective relationships with each young person, are 'prefigur[ing] what society might become' (p.233, citing Jorgensen, 2003, p.8) by inviting children who have not previously experienced learning an instrument to share in

musical practices which have often been the preserve of the more privileged, playing in the orchestra which offers an *inclusive* vehicle for playing and learning together, contrary to Baker's accusations of exclusivity (p. 181, p. 307). But this doesn't mean Sistema-inspired programmes shouldn't also be meeting the immediate needs of young participants, helping them to develop skills for healthy choices and positive outcomes in their lives ahead. The recently released report of the evaluation of the Big Noise centres includes in its conclusions that:

Strong evaluation evidence indicates that children who participate in the Big Noise orchestra demonstrate improved language and other skills, as well as higher levels of confidence and pride.

The Big Noise environment offers a sense of security and belonging, which it is anticipated will support the development of mutual support networks and resilience among participants over the medium term.

The impact of Big Noise on participants' emotional wellbeing was regularly cited as a key benefit of the programme. In the short term this develops participants' creativity, adaptability, problem-solving and decision-making skills, team working, collaboration and cooperation skills and their self-discipline and control. It is anticipated that over the long term, employability and employment outcomes (and others) may be enhanced (GCPH, 2015a, p.8).

The Big Noise programmes have been judged to bring short- and projected longer-term transformations amongst participant communities, enhancing well-being and encouraging the development of life skills, whilst the learning and playing of music alongside others opens up new vistas, presents unfettered horizons and encourages

young people to dream dreams, as described by a 14-year old Big Noise participant, quoted in the evaluation report:

The music, how we hear music, how we get involved, build up your communication, build up your confidence. Coming to Big Noise, you've got people you know and people you don't know. You've got music behind your back, pushing you. So it's like somebody pushing you to do something, but it's music, and it's pushing you to make good things like building your confidence. When I started Big Noise I was shy, look at me now. Anyone can achieve any goals they want (GCPH, 2015b, p.46).

Baker aims to open up a critical space as regards Sistema programmes, yet his excoriating responses on his blog to any criticism of his own work hardly encourage the kind of constructive reflection which could flow from some of the issues raised by this book. Baker's insistence that the opportunities offered by Sistema-inspired programmes are structurally inappropriate and his denial of the possibility of re-envisaging the orchestra as a vehicle for social action comes across as an ideologically-motivated position, which closes down the potential for constructive debate that he might have as an academic with professional musicians who have put themselves on the front line of music education. Unfortunately this weakens the usefulness of the book, and means it may well alienate more than it brings about constructive provocation. It is time now to move on from critical unmasking and structural critiques, from binaries and polarities, in order to work together in ethical relationships between researcher and practitioner, mirroring the responsive face-to-face relationship of Sistema musician and participant.

Notes

1. Previously called FESNOJIV (Venezuelan State Foundation for the National System of Youth and Children's Orchestras) and now known as Fundación Musical Simón Bolívar.

2. Quoted from the Big Noise website
<<http://makeabignoise.org.uk/sistema-scotland/frequent-questions/>>
[Accessed 24 June 2015]:

Why classical music and not Scottish traditional or another type of music?

The social benefits of Sistema come from the structure, challenges and cooperative nature of a symphony orchestra. So it is the symphony orchestra we are built around rather than classical music. The orchestra is big enough and flexible enough to challenge children with a wide range of abilities—and yet allows them to all play together with a common purpose. Within a properly functioning orchestra, children learn that they have an individual responsibility, that they are part of a section, which in turn is part of a much larger group. We believe that there is a unique, inherent inclusiveness in the symphony orchestra.

There is scope within the orchestra to explore many different genres of music, and we do. The Raploch orchestras have enjoyed learning a rich and diverse selection of repertoire from Lady Gaga to Handel. We have had ceilidhs too and Latin American music of course!

We would throw the question back however: 'Why not classical?'

There is no reason the children should be excluded from making and listening to classical music.

Can Big Noise offer some other kinds of music tuition?

Big Noise is an orchestral programme. Sistema's social benefits come from the intensity, immersion and scale of a symphony orchestra. We don't have plans for anything else. There are many other worthy musical pursuits but we don't believe they bring the same level of social benefit that our orchestras are set up to achieve. It will be wonderful if the children grow up to get enjoyment from playing and listening to whatever kind of music they develop a taste for. For us though, it is the symphony orchestra that has the capacity to provide the social transformation we hope to achieve.

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KATHRYN JOURDAN is a freelance viola player living in Edinburgh. She teaches academic music, viola and chamber music at St Mary's Music School, and has recently completed a PhD in the philosophy of music education, in the Faculty of Education, Cambridge University. She is a Board member of Sistema Scotland and serves on the editorial board of the *British Journal of Music Education*.

Book review: *Modernist and avant-garde performance: an introduction*, by Claire Warden

SAM HADDOW

DOI: 10.14439/sjop.2015.0202.06

Publication date: 26 June 2015

***Modernist and avant-garde performance: an introduction*, by Claire Warden. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015; ISBN: 9780748681556 (£19.99)**

To extend a metaphor, Claire Warden's new book *Modernist avant-garde performance: an introduction* provides a healthy reminder that one should never judge a book by its cover. Or its blurb. Or its format. Or, in fact, its declaration of intent. Because what this book *does* provide is a genuinely stimulating discussion of some of the most exciting performance practices that twentieth-century Europe had to offer, by a generous scholar with an infectious love of her subject. What it does *not* provide, however, is most of what is promised by its packaging and publication material.

In a (perhaps economically understandable) bid to maximise the marketability of their product, Edinburgh University Press are promoting this as a textbook for students newly encountering the material, and tutors looking to enliven their pedagogies in suitably experimental fashions. Tailored to these audiences, the dust jacket proclaims '[t]he first detailed, student-focused introduction to modernist avant-garde performance', 'practical exercises at the end of each chapter' and 'links to performance-based explorations of theatrical techniques'. Unfortunately, there are manifold problems with these statements. For one thing, there *are* books in existence that serve as introductions to

modernist, avant-garde performance. There is *Contours of the theatrical avant-garde* (2000), for example, which compiles a wealth of research from scholars like Philip Auslander, Erika Fischer-Lichte and Christopher Innes. There is also *Theories of the avant-garde theatre: a casebook from Kleist to Camus* (2013) which provides a compendium of writings from practitioners such as Maeterlinck, Meyerhold and Schlemmer, ideally suited to offer students first-hand exposure to these topics. For another, the 'practical exercises' and 'links to performance' are largely relegated to short text boxes at the close of each chapter, each containing basic classroom activities such as 'write a manifesto for a twentieth-century theatre company of your own creation' (p.41), 'draw whatever comes into your head' (p.69) or 'create your own masks [...] taking your lead from [Eugene] O'Neill's stage directions' (p.115). Whilst these instructions are perfectly serviceable, they hardly test the frontiers of education in line with the revolutionary intentions of their subject matter.

My suggestion would be that readers dispense with the claims made about the book, as well as its occasional internal gesticulations towards pedagogy (these include some rather awkward direct addresses to the 'student' reader), and instead treat the text as an extended, well-informed and absorbing conversation. Warden herself makes a similar suggestion, in fact, when she exhorts theatrical and fine-art spectators to 'switch off that ever-present need to make sense of everything and simply feel, experience or viscerally respond to the artwork' (p.8). This loose, unstructured attitude informs the best elements of the book itself: these are the thematically rather than chronologically organised chapters, which allow Warden to dart between subjects at a moment's notice, and a tenaciously holistic perception of the cultural and political developments of her focal period (roughly 1890–1945). In this latter element, she even employs a subversive historiography, which she quietly reflects on by saying:

Actually ‘new modernist studies’, as it is termed, is less about discovering a definitive way of understanding this art or applying overarching banners of meaning than it is about simply opening up the material and approaching it afresh (pp.8–9).

This sentiment has more in common with Rancière’s anti-hierarchical belief that ‘the student must see everything for themselves’ (p.23) than with a self-proclaimed ‘textbook’. Warden is at her best when exploring those things that *she* finds fascinating about the European avant-gardists and modernists, rather than telling us why we should like them. In her second chapter, ‘Performing modernisms’, for example, her writing properly takes off, sprinting through a kaleidoscopic terrain of surrealist prose-poems, futurist scenography and expressionist paintings with irrepressible glee. Such is the enthusiasm Warden displays for her subject that both writer and reader are encouraged, momentarily, to forget the book’s pedagogical affectations, and engage instead in a deeply agreeable exploration of ideas. It is not at all ironic that Warden is a better teacher at those points where she stops directly addressing the reader as a student, and settles into her own intellectual excitements with unmitigated relish. As a scholar of the European avant-garde, she is presumably more aware than most that inspiration is not well served by didactic instruction.

One of the book’s other highlights is a chapter entitled ‘The modernist body’ which traces the roots of contemporary scholarly investigations into embodied performance back into the activities of the European avant-gardists. Meyerhold’s celebrated ‘biomechanics’ are given respectful attention, as are Craig and Jarry’s disparate investigations into the marionette. For me, the most notable point is a short section on ‘Death and after death’ that examines the emergent paranoia of robots replacing humanity, complete with grisly accounts of Karel Čapek’s *R.U.R.* and Elmer

Rice's *The adding machine*. As an undergraduate student, these would have provided a strong impetus to further study, which actually does fulfil the final pedagogical boast itemised on this book's dust jacket. It is a shame, then, that whoever was responsible for the presentation of this book did not take more heed of the nature of Warden's project. Again, in line with Rancière's notions of 'emancipatory' education (1991), the ways in which this book may best serve students is not as a *teaching* aid but as an accessible and engrossing study of an (it must be said, impressively broad) set of cultural and artistic practices.

As for tutors, it may well be that some find the exercises and points for reflection at the end of each chapter to be useful aids when planning their classes. Personally though, I suspect this book would be more productively employed in tandem with exercises that offer greater opportunity to 'open up the material and experience it afresh' (p.9)- an obvious candidate would be Tim Etchells's endlessly subversive *Certain fragments* (1999).

None of which is to say that this book should not be given to students. It should. It is an excellent introduction to a fascinating subject. It just needs to be disentangled from its packaging.

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Book review: *Contemporary Scottish plays*, edited by Trish Reid

BEN FLETCHER-WATSON

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Publication date: 26 June 2015

Contemporary Scottish plays, edited by Trish Reid. London: Bloomsbury, 2014; ISBN: 9781472574435 (£17.99)

The first in a projected series of plays from around the UK, *Contemporary Scottish plays* is also the latest anthology to celebrate Scottish playwriting: from the seventies, *A Decade's Drama* and *Plays of the Seventies*; from the eighties, *Scot-Free*; in the nineties, *Made in Scotland* and *Scotland Plays*. Canongate produced a doorstopper volume (Craig and Stevenson, 2001) spanning the twentieth century from J.M. Barrie's *Mary Rose* (1920) to Chris Hannan's *Shining Souls* (1996). Trish Reid now updates this Caledonian canon by presenting recent plays from 2009 to 2013, although she takes pains to note that her volume 'lays no claim to be a "best of" selection' (p.ix).

The first two plays present narratives from the past, although both problematise audiences' preconceptions of historical 'truth'. *Caledonia* by Alistair Beaton satirises the dismal tale of Scotland's Darien colony in the 1690s, while Rob Drummond's *Bullet Catch* purports to recreate the onstage death of a (fictional) Victorian magician. David Archibald has claimed that *Caledonia* 'signifies a partial refocusing on the past in Scottish theatre' (2011, p.94), a prediction borne out by the recent rise in Scottish history plays, including *Dunsinane* by David Grieg (2010), *The James Plays* by Rona Munro (2014), and Tim Barrow's *Union* (2014). However, historical dramas have a long

lineage in Scotland—from John Home’s tragedy *Douglas* (1756), catalyst for the famous cry ‘whaur’s yer Wullie Shakespeare noo?’, to John McGrath’s seminal ceilidh play *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* (1973) and *Bondagers* (1991) by Sue Glover. Beaton’s play reaches for McGrath-style pathos with the inclusion of musical numbers by a chorus, the Nameless of the Earth, yet his satire, like Barrow’s, can fall too readily into caricature to be truly effective. By contrast, *Bullet Catch* turns its pseudo-historical conceit into a thrilling, high-stakes game with the audience:

Bullet Catch is essentially a magic show that relies on a different audience volunteer for each performance... the text is never the same for each reiteration of the performance (Overend, 2014, n.p.).

Drummond’s script is therefore less a blueprint for performance than an amalgam of reactions by many volunteers, and a wry commentary on the ‘magic’ of the theatre. For example, the script does not explain how a particular levitation trick is achieved, although the actor does so in performance. The reader is kept in suspense, simultaneously privileged and disadvantaged by a calculated instability between Drummond’s written word and his performative act. It is rare to find a script that subverts so overtly and wittily the reading of a play.

Morna Pearson takes her title *The Artist Man and the Mother Woman* from Shaw’s *Man and Superman*, asking like him, ‘Which shall use up the other? That is the issue between them’. This interest in power relations, especially in competing nationalisms, perhaps defines the entire volume. It may be mischievous to compare Edie and Geoffrey to England and Scotland, but their twisted incestuous dynamic bears more than a passing resemblance to the characterisation of a divorcing couple or

dysfunctional family propounded in the UK media in September 2014.

Rantin, created by 'a band called Kieran Hurley' (p.312), provides a more optimistic portrait of modern Scotland, in keeping with Nadine Holdsworth's description of David Greig and Stephen Greenhorn:

They propose a nation that is never static, always in process, proud of its heritage as well as its increasing heterogeneity and, above all, one that can surprise and provoke engagement beyond the confines of a restrictive and potentially damaging nationalism (2003, p.39).

Hurley and his collaborators, all potent voices in the Yes campaign, present a rousing patchwork of song and monologue which nods to McGrath while extending his socialist legacy into a new century. Politics, popular culture, internationalism and satire slide into and around one another, creating an intoxicating brew but steering clear of agit-prop.

To an extent, *Narrative* exists at a remove from the other scripts. The least obviously 'Scottish' of the collection, having premiered at the Royal Court with a mainly English cast, and written by Scottish-born Anthony Neilson (now resident in London), it challenges traditional conceptions of narrative, for example by killing off characters at random. Plot and story are shown to be nothing more than attempts to add coherence to an incomprehensible universe.

What Scotlands emerge from these plays? Various described as 'too poor. And too small' (p.15), 'filled with wickedness and abominations' (p.106) and 'this big funny mongrel' (p.345), Scotland is a country that disappoints and inspires in equal measure. These are not state-of-the-nation

pieces, but each speaks to a contemporary understanding of Scottishness, particularly in terms of power and status. Perhaps the most fascinating characters are Evelyn in *Artist Man...* and Shona in *Rantin'*—both teenage supermarket employees in small towns, and both seeking an escape from drudgery through alcohol. But where Evelyn appears to meet a sorry end, Shona's adoption of Luddism as a response to human obsolescence provides a bracing and hilarious example to the spectator.

Reid's selection of plays hints at the current strength of Scottish new writing, supported by companies and venues around the country. Her claim of a 'golden age' (p.ix) may sound like hyperbole, but on the evidence of this volume, theatregoers and artists alike have every reason to feel optimistic. *Contemporary Scottish plays* will inevitably become a chronicle of triumphs past, like the texts that precede it, but it is to be hoped that at least a few of these plays will come to define early twenty-first century theatre.

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About the review author

BEN FLETCHER-WATSON is a doctoral candidate at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and the University of St Andrews. His research examines Scottish performing arts for the very young, as well as the links between children's theatre and mobile technology. He has been involved in the development of several digital products inspired by theatre and music, including *White: The App*, *VM Fireworks* and *Secret Suitcases*. He is currently editing a selection of scripts, *Visual Theatre for Children* (Intellect, 2016).

Book review: *Acting Shakespeare's language*, by Andy Hinds

MARC SILBERSCHATZ

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***Acting Shakespeare's language*, by Andy Hinds. London: Oberon Books Ltd, 2015; ISBN: 9781783190089 (£14.99)**

In my career as a director and academic, I have often been asked by students, actors and directors to recommend reading about Shakespearean performance. Responding to this is a struggle. An approach to and understanding of Shakespearean performance is something that in many ways cannot be taught. Rather, I believe the key is in the cultivation of individual ownership of practices in the service of artistic identity and values. Though a single text elucidating the practice of performing Shakespeare can never and will never exist, *Acting Shakespeare's language* belongs on a very short list of texts that will, in almost all cases, support this ownership and prove stimulating and useful to anyone with an interest in the subject.

The focus of the chapters varies, ranging from foundational ideas or practices ('Questions, orders and explanations', pp.1-17), to specific uses of language in Shakespeare ('Thou and you', pp.37-43), to theoretical discussion ('Why honour the verse?', pp.57-60), to broad requirements of Shakespearean acting ('Acting Shakespeare's verse', pp.61-113; 'Acting Shakespeare's prose', pp.168-192; 'Solo speeches', pp.193-257). Within the chapters are numerous practical exercises that the reader is encouraged to undertake while reading the book. These are helpfully indexed so that they may be quickly found and explored. It is

therefore more possible to jump around the text, finding specific tools for specific situations. However, it is clear that each chapter of the book builds on the previous, lays foundation for a subsequent chapter, or both. For this reason, the full efficacy of Hinds's text reveals itself in the cumulative weight of his theories and practices as they develop throughout the text.

There are a number of strengths to Hinds's approach to and presentation of Shakespearean performance. First among these is Hinds's recognition that while writing on theory and practice can be beneficial in the transmission of practical approaches to performance, this writing must be supplemented with individual, subjective experience of the material presented. It is not unusual that a book on practical performance techniques would encourage the reader to actually engage in the practices described, but Hinds takes this a step further. There are many places in the book where Hinds presents not only his own opinion of the strongest way to approach a piece of text, but several alternatives. Frequently, the reader is expected to explore these and other possible variations. Hinds avoids insisting on the rightness of one variation and instead asks the reader to make an individual aesthetic judgement of what he/she feels is most effective. This approach suggests a recognition that there is no single correct interpretation of Shakespearean text and that any approach to teaching Shakespearean performance must attempt to develop ownership of the practices in the service of individual artistic vision. That Hinds allows space for disagreement and contradiction is a key step in this process and one which more texts on performing Shakespeare should endeavour to deploy.

Beyond this, *Acting Shakespeare's language* is admirable in its thoroughness. The text ranges from basic exercises to highly complex ways of thinking about or approaching the performance of Shakespearean text. What is particularly

noteworthy is that in the presentation of his ideas, Hinds offers original insights into what appear to be beginner-level exercises. In this way, even highly experienced and knowledgeable readers will encounter new ideas or practices throughout the entirety of the book. Related to this is Hinds's refusal to accept received wisdom about Shakespearean text without first ensuring that it stands up to scrutiny, allowing sustained interrogation into the theory and practice of Shakespearean performance.

One of the key challenges of a text like this is that it represents an attempt to translate practice into a written account or description. While Hinds is extremely successful in this regard, there are places where his written articulation of practice is less clear and precise than it could have been. Early in the text, Hinds argues that 'every human utterance is an explanation, a question, an order' and that 'when delivering lines, then, there are only three types of objective a character can have... "to explain", "to ask" or "to order"' (Hinds, 2015, p.3). In reading the rest of the book, I have taken this to mean that all actions an actor might play could be grouped into three broad categories (explanations, questions or orders). However, it is possible that a reader (particularly someone without a grounding in action- and objective-based acting) might believe Hinds is suggesting that all they need ever do in performance is explain, ask or order. Similarly, in articulating scansion, Hinds offers examples of what he considers mis-scanned lines (these are almost always lines with too many unstressed syllables in a row). He asks the reader to recognise how the text seems to 'skitter' and refers to this type of scansion as 'skidding' or 'skiddy' (Hinds, 2015, pp.65-68). While I am in complete agreement with Hinds's overarching point- that the rhythm and meter of iambic verse should be honoured- the language he uses is imprecise and seems to reflect personal feeling more than a fully articulated argument for or against a particular scansion choice. This section particularly stands out: it reads as more dogmatic and less clearly

articulated than the rest of the book.

In spite of these comparatively minor issues, in writing *Acting Shakespeare's language*, Hinds has offered a major practical tool for actors, directors, students, teachers and Shakespeare aficionados. There is much within this text that will be beneficial regardless of the reader's level of knowledge or experience. If the reader has a grounding in action- and objective-based acting, this book could be considered a primary source of knowledge and practice in Shakespearean performance. Highly recommended.

About the review author

MARC SILBERSCHATZ is a lecturer in drama at the University of Sunderland. He holds a PhD from the University of St Andrews and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. His practice-led research focuses on developing contributions to rehearsal and performance practice that attempt to minimise pre-agreed-upon performance structure and divided consciousness in actors. Also a professional theatre director, he has staged (among other things) productions of fourteen Shakespeare plays in both the United States and the United Kingdom.

Book review: *Dramaturging personal narratives: who am I and where is here?*, by Judith Rudakoff

SHONA MACKAY

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***Dramaturging personal narratives: who am I and where is here?*, by Judith Rudakoff. Bristol: Intellect, 2015; ISBN: 9781783204199 (£37.00)**

Dramaturging personal narratives explores and examines issues surrounding cultural and personal identity by looking closely at creative expressions of home and self. As a dramaturg with over thirty years' experience in both academic and theatrical fields, Judith Rudakoff discusses a number of her own dramaturgical tools and methods which she uses to elicit stories and experiences from those she creates performances with.

A variety of projects and plays created using Rudakoff's methods make up the bulk of this text, with stories originating from South Africa, Cuba, India and Canada. It is clear from the outset that inclusion and collaboration are fundamental building blocks for the author's work and practice. It is also encouraging and refreshing that Rudakoff is keen for the reader to utilise her dramaturgical tools to create their own versions of the projects. She makes her aims clear in the opening pages of the text: 'In short, the goal of this book is to introduce the principles of my methods, to demonstrate the process in action, and to show creative outcome in order to stimulate readers to generate their own versions of the projects' (p.6).

Split into four main sections, the majority of the book focuses on *The Ashley Plays*, a set of short, original plays used as a vehicle to perform personal narratives. In the first section Rudakoff sets out descriptions of how the Ashley character can be formed, including research tools to assist with the choice of setting and context for the play, a suggested duration, and assistance with issues relating to staging and audience management for live performances. There are also instructions for the creation and sharing of 'virtual cycles', which are devised via electronic communication and can be viewed online¹. Her directions are clear and well-devised.

Writing in diary format, the author then describes experiences of creating numerous cycles of *The Ashley Plays*; three in Cape Town between 2002 and 2006, two in Canada in 2006 and 2008 and one in India in 2008. Through Rudakoff's descriptions the reader can follow the processes undertaken by the different dramaturgs and participants as they encountered difficulties, discoveries, and revelations. Each cycle is well documented with accompanying images and examples of participants' texts and materials, unedited to retain authenticity. As each *Ashley Cycle* is unique and individual, Rudakoff adapts and moulds her approach as required for each new setting, depending on potential barriers (for example language or physical ability), external circumstances, politics, group dynamics and the participants' level of experience. Her approach is inclusive and encompassing.

Rudakoff continues with discussion of the virtual *Ashley Cycles* created in 2007 and 2008, highlighting a different way of working whereby participants from different countries could collaborate on an *Ashley Cycle*, bringing together different cultural backgrounds, ideas and understandings of their own concepts of 'home'. The key research tool for these virtual cycles was an online forum

where participants could communicate and share ideas. Transcripts from online conversations and posts to the forum are included within this section, giving a deeper insight into each individual process alongside a larger community dynamic.

The next section, *Photobiography*, feels very short in relation to the others and I feel it could have been a bit more balanced in the context of the whole book. The ideas within the section are interesting as Rudakoff describes an exercise that involved participants taking photographs (on the concept of home) based on a series of thirteen prompts/questions. This exercise alone seems appealing as a way to generate material, especially in circumstances where there may be barriers to self-expression or even a lack of confidence in terms of theatricality, but I feel it could have been expanded to delve a bit deeper and explore the visual art element of expression and creativity which was being introduced here.

All in all, *Dramaturging personal narratives* has many strengths, including the documentation of accessible practices. The author also deals very well with the issue of inclusion despite social and cultural barriers, and the dissemination of personal work on a local, national and international level. Rudakoff's willingness to share her dramaturgical methods in order that others can participate and make their own versions is inspiring and shows a commitment to her practice, focusing on sharing, exploring and unpicking personal stories and narratives from every walk of life.

My one small criticism of this book lies in the fact that Rudakoff does not cite any other work, methodologies or research in this particular field—I feel that it would have really added to the strength of the text had there been some theoretical grounding. It seems that the author may have

felt this would detract from the work as she provides this disclaimer: 'I do not engage in theoretical analysis as I am focussed on exploring the practical application of process. I do not cite the work of other dramaturgs or scholars to validate or contextualize my own' (p.6). However, other works could have been mentioned purely as a means of offering the reader a fuller understanding of this research area without the need to validate her own work in doing so.

Theatre and performance practitioners interested in autobiographical/personal works would be the ideal audience for this particular text but I would also recommend it to any individuals looking for ways to start exploring this rich area of creativity. There is no requirement for a theatrical background in order to engage with her ideas and the processes are not limited to the concept of home. These methods could easily be adapted to explore many other aspects of self and identity across a variety of media, including film, music and visual art. This is an interesting addition to the field of autobiographical performance.

Note

1. Examples of the virtual *Ashley Cycles* and other projects discussed in this book can be found at <http://www.yorku.ca/gardens>.

About the review author

SHONA MACKAY is a Glasgow-based composer and mixed-media artist currently undertaking a PhD at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Her practice-based research explores her own use of autobiographical material in composition, including themes of gender, identity and communication. She is also interested in finding ways to enhance a sense of connection between audience, performers and composer.

Book review: *Sleeping in temples*, by Susan Tomes

BEDE WILLIAMS

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Sleeping in temples, by Susan Tomes. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2014; ISBN: 9781843839750 (£19.99)

Sleeping in temples is the fourth book by the Edinburgh-based pianist and author Susan Tomes. The book is drawn from the author's memories, experiences and thoughts about the music she has been intensely and sincerely committed to as a pianist performing at the highest international standard for many years. Tomes describes the book as being about the music she loves: throughout, this is underpinned by the way she describes the rewards and challenges of being a classical pianist performing 'long-form' music in an age that perpetuates the instantaneous and immediate. The book is refreshing in its willingness to cut across fashionable ideologies (the visual aspect of classical performance is given a dressing-down on more than one occasion), as is Tomes's willingness to articulate her thoughts about music through her lived experience, as opposed to academic discourse.

There is a clarity and directness to this book that opens it to music lovers and makes it useful for performers. The writing is full of vivid anecdotes and Tomes proves herself to be a master storyteller throughout. Tomes introduces the book by saying that 'being a classical musician is something that mystifies people... including the musicians themselves... I often find it helps me if I attempt to explain it to myself' (p.x). In these explanations I found there to be

rich musings about the ontology of music, the chapter titled 'Play the contents, not the container' gives an outstanding demonstration of how performance can inform scholarship. I also found that at all points there was a symbiosis between the way Tomes aspires to communicate as a performer and the way she communicates as a writer, a quality that should be valued in autoethnographic writing.

Though much of the content under discussion is timeless, just as Tomes wants us to understand classical music as being, the book also comments on a range of issues in and around the performance of classical music today. Using analogies to architecture, art and cooking, Tomes wants to get into music as a writer just in the same way she does as a performer. No stone is left unturned; everything from concert etiquette, the popular/classical divide, TV talent shows, contemporary art and the internet are all presented with illuminating commentary that will be comforting for those already in or aspiring to be in the profession, as well as those who make up a very necessary component of performance: the audience.

Performers coming to the book (whether pianists or not) will find well-balanced and persuasive arguments that we should prepare for performance by confronting music on its own terms. Preparation is done between the performer and the score; we should seek to understand each piece without preconception. Much is said about the value and use of recordings, as well as the dangers of them: a case in point is given with an extended discussion of the Schubert Sonata D960 and how the first movement is often performed slowly under the influence of certain recordings, although there is no marking in the score to corroborate this trend.

Performers will also be rewarded by Tomes's lucid writing about her experiences with Sándor Végh. Tomes describes how 'Végh believed that music could be made to "speak", not

by imitating actual human words, but by looking deeply into the composer's markings (such as staccato, legato, dots under a slur, rests) to understand what light and shade they could convey, as well as what texture they could bring to the surface' (pp.150–151). To me there is a strong sense of authority in Tomes's ideas about performing music, not least because of her stature as a pianist, but because of the sincerity with which she relays her early experiences, whether as a student at the Junior Academy of the Royal Scottish Academy of Music (now known as the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland) or when she was a recent graduate undertaking self-financed concert engagements. Music students and graduates will take comfort from hearing about the amount of work Tomes has invested at all points in her life, and how as a child the desire to play music caught on strong and hard. They will also be comforted by Tomes not pretending that embarking on a career in classical music today, when the standard is so high, is an easy thing.

To Tomes, the 'great works' of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert et al. are like 'temples'. Only by way of summary at the end of the book does Tomes tell us that the ancient Greeks used to sleep in temples to help them conjure dreams that might offer a perspective on woken reality. Tomes's thesis is that long-form classical music is an art that speaks to us about change and transformation. As a practice-led researcher myself who often feels that making any claims about what music is or isn't is taboo, I found the underpinning theme of the book to be about having confidence in our own feelings about music, and seeking to uncover our feelings without distorting what is already there. Tomes believes that the classical music which we enjoy the most has a narrative because we can hear musical material to which things happen, we can sense narrative because we know what change feels like. She tells us that 'we instinctively understand what is turmoil and what is calm, or what is certainty and what is doubt' (p.50). There is

a striking resemblance here to Charles Rosen's *Music and sentiment* where he asserts 'grasping [the] emotional or dramatic meaning [of music] is either immediate or requires only becoming familiar with it' (p.ix).

Tomes's dedication to her art is a message to us all. I personally was reminded that before anything else, our duty as a performer is to go about our music making with uncompromising care and honesty.

Reference

Rosen, C., 2010. *Music and sentiment*. London: Yale University Press.

About the review author

BEDE WILLIAMS studied as a trumpeter and conductor at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and at international masterclasses. In addition to his concert schedule, Bede is New Music Coordinator, Research Coordinator and Teaching Fellow at the University of St Andrews. He is Music Director of the St Andrews New Music Ensemble, Conductor of the St Andrews Chamber Orchestra and Leader of the Alba Brass Quintet. His practice-led research focuses on interpretation: this research supports his performance as a trumpeter and conductor of existing and new repertoire.

Book review: *Charles Mackerras*, edited by Nigel Simeone and John Tyrrell

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For some years I was principal cellist in each of the orchestras that Sir Charles Mackerras conducted regularly. He had noticed that our diaries often coincided: 'I feel like the King of Prussia, with my own personal cellist!' This was no accident. In the two shared seats (in the Philharmonia and Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment) I carefully contrived to be there for his projects and when he invited me to guest in the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, I stayed. Reading Nigel Simeone and John Tyrrell's *Charles Mackerras* was a very touching experience for me, as I expect it would be for the countless others who were affected by his music-making. It was also an informative experience: for instance, I had no idea that he had conducted 110 operas by the time he left English National Opera aged 52! Young conductors could do worse than read it for programme ideas (in 100 pages of detailed appendices), for ideas on managing your forces (such as his letter on being appointed to ENO) or simply for its countless insights into an inspiring and selfless life dedicated to music.

This is a thoroughly researched biography, where Mackerras's voice leaps off the page in excerpts from his correspondence—I even felt slightly uncomfortable reading a letter to his mother about his rivalry with Colin Davis.

Woven through its fabric are tributes and reminiscences from many who knew him, including an especially touching memoir by Patrick Summers, an account by John Stein of his extraordinary time at Welsh National Opera, and a piece by Rosenna East which beautifully captures his relationship with the SCO. Rather than strive for stylistic consistency or eliminate repetition, the editors allow these diverse contributors to speak in their own voices. Indeed, whether the tributes come from worlds where he was a pioneer—Janáček scholarship, or performance practice—or from the opera house or concert hall, it is the very recurrence of themes itself which is telling: life-long curiosity, learning lightly worn, and a demanding yet humble dedication to the composer. For some older players, and most singers, ‘demanding’ could be something of a euphemism, an issue not shirked by the book.

Hailing as he did from the age of the tyrannical big-personality maestro, it was this uncompromising desire to serve the composer that set him apart. Richard Morrison recalls being in an amateur choir performing *The Creation*: ‘He growled and grunted; cajoled and coaxed; insisted and inspired. Not on his own behalf, of course, but on Haydn’s’ (p.201). Those older players would grudgingly admit that he possessed an uncanny tempo equivalent of ‘perfect pitch’, not a gift but the result of hard work. He could switch from two to four beats per bar *exactly* and give upbeats in the speed he wanted (surprisingly rare skills). He always knew what players and singers needed, never too proud to give more than one upbeat. But it was his control over very subtle differences in tempi which—spread large-scale over a whole Mozart opera or Brahms symphony—allowed him to pace the drama of his performances.

In 1966, when massed choral societies were the norm, Mackerras recorded Handel’s *Messiah* with small forces, lively tempi and vocal ornamentation. His interest in

historically informed performance practice, long before it became fashionable, was neither antiquarianism nor iconoclasm but another way into the composer's score, the duty of any performer. For example, his fascination with Steinbach's advice on Brahms was not a stricture but a mind-opening encounter. Film of those *Messiah* sessions (on YouTube) shows how long ago it all was—the bass, Raimund Herincx, is chain smoking! Another sign of the times comes in a manifesto for opera conductors written to management during his Sadler's Wells/ENO days, asking 'How does Scottish Opera manage to afford so many international, ex-Wells singers which the Wells cannot?' (p.31).

When he invited me to the SCO for *La Clemenza di Tito* it was my first experience of doing opera with him. At the first recitative rehearsal I told him about the work I had been doing on the eighteenth-century practice of accompanying recitative with chords on the cello. The 80-year-old Mozartian (with more operatic experience than the whole room combined) grudgingly said he would give it a try. At the end of the rehearsal he beamed toothily 'I love it!'. It was this flexibility and openness that was both a symptom and a cause of his youthful approach. From then on he insisted on cello chords in recitative wherever possible. This was a rod for my own back, as he was intensely interested in all aspects of recitative, making detailed suggestions about chord positions, character, colour, bow strokes and so on. Once he knew that I was interested in conducting he immediately insisted that the cellist attend every recitative rehearsal—not usually considered necessary, but a hugely rewarding learning experience for me.

His 'Three Orchestras' loved hearing his stories—the story behind the famous East German parts he brought with him, paid for out of his fee in ostmarks. Printed on fragile Cold War paper and covered in corrections in his own hand, they

were a strange palimpsest of years of practical experience and the latest scholarship. Some might have found these parts 'controlling'. For others they were a practical time-saving way of getting what he wanted: his own distinct sound and his own very detailed ideas about the music, whilst letting orchestras retain their own character, whether the OAE, SCO, the Philharmonia, or the Czech Philharmonic. (In his hands the soloist in Dvořák's Cello Concerto didn't have to play *sempre ff.*) He enjoyed telling the story of his completion of Mozart's Rondo for Piano and Orchestra, K386. Mozart's autograph had been cut up into postcards by Thomas Attwood and posted out to his friends in a strangely misplaced act of reverence. Completing it presents an unusual challenge—rather than missing one line, or needing finishing, different parts are missing at different times. Every few years lost segments came to light in auctions. He delighted in having his work gradually marked by the master, proud as a schoolboy that his rate was close to 50 percent!

Those who were lucky enough to be at those Mozart symphony SCO/Linn Records recording sessions all realised they were witnessing something exceptional, remembering a beatific smile appearing during odd moments that tickled his fancy—his own sheer, humble pleasure at the smallest details in the music. I had my own insight into that humility during those Mozart sessions. In justifying his lightning fast minuets, he mentioned research which saw them as precursors to Beethoven's scherzo. I asked him about it in the break and he referred me to an article. That night I downloaded it from JSTOR and was astonished: it was a tirade against modern conductors taking minuets too slowly—the chief culprit, one Charles Mackerras.

About the review author

DAVID WATKIN read Music at Cambridge, studying the cello with William Pleeth and singing with Kenneth Bowen. Solo recordings include Vivaldi, Haydn, Beethoven and Francis Pott. His recent Bach recording was hailed as ‘revelatory’ (*BBC Music Magazine*) and ‘a triumph’ (*Gramophone*). With the Eroica Quartet he has recorded Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Debussy and Ravel. He has been a soloist at Wigmore Hall, Barbican, Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Carnegie Hall, New York and performed the Schumann Concerto with Sir John Eliot Gardiner and ORR at Lincoln Center, New York. As guest artist he has collaborated with, among others, the Tokyo Quartet, Robert Levin and Fredericka von Stade. He has been Principal Cello in some of the world’s leading ensembles, including English Baroque Soloists, Orchestre Revolutionnaire et Romantique, the Philharmonia Orchestra and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, and has worked under, and received guidance from, some of the leading conductors of the age. In conducting, the breadth of his musical background—academic and practical, ‘early’ and modern, vocal and instrumental—gives him a unique perspective. He has conducted the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, RSNO, the Swedish Baroque Orchestra, the Academy of Ancient Music, the Meadows Chamber Orchestra and at the Royal Academy of Music, the Guildhall School of Music and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, where he is now Head of Strings.