***All at Sea*:**

Tracing *Jouissance* in the Digital Archives of Triangle Theatre

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Abstract

From January to May 2012, I curated a performance project entitled *All at Sea* for Second Year BA Drama Students at the University of Northampton that was directed by Carran Waterfield of Triangle Theatre. As an integral part of this project, and in collaboration with Waterfield, the students developed a digital archive of this performance process (*All at Sea*), which drew inspiration from previous digital transpositions of scenic work developed by Triangle (in particular, Richard Talbot's *The Clown Who Lost His Memory* (2008) and Waterfield's *The Last Women* (2009)).

During this presentation, I shall discuss the ways in which Triangle articulate the digital documentation of their work in accordance with the (il)logic of their postdramatic performance texts, allowing their digital archives (including the site created by my students under Waterfield's guidance) to be permeated by a trace of the subversive, drive-laden potency of their montages. I shall also argue that by treating the documentation of the performance work as an organic extension of their elliptic creative process, the company interrogates the archive's status as *arkhe*, as topo-nomonological agent of consignation, as (questionable) reference to stable themes and concepts already given as past.

Keywords: Triangle Theatre; Digital Archive; *Jouissance*; *All at Sea*; University of Northampton BA (Hons) Drama.

The focus of my paper today is on the performance repertoire and digital archives of Triangle Theatre, and the ways in which the company's specific approach to devising and documenting their postdramatic theatrical work was translated into an educational context on a module I coordinated last year on the BA Drama degree programme at the University of Northampton entitled Professional Practices.

I wish to interrogate a complex dialectic that emerged in this specific pedagogic process between

a) the spectral structure of the archive,

b) the generative capacity of the archive as a stimulus for the creation of new work

c) the affect-laden processual presence of the live theatrical event, and

d) the trace of the embodied theatrical experience – that which remains after the performance event and its documentation and foregrounding through digital media

I want to examine the ways in which, in this particular case, performance and archive fuse and inform one another in the nebulous interstices, the liminal spaces, between the virtual, the theatrical and the real. I hope to demonstrate how Triangle attempt to trace the remains of the *jouissance*, the semiotic excess of their performance work, within their archives, and also show how the digital documentation of their work acted as a catalyst, stimulating the development of a new performance – my students' production. I will also address the ways in which Triangle's repertoire is itself an always already subversive, embodied performance-based archive, given the company's enduring preoccupation with heritage, history and memory.

Triangle Theatre was founded in 1988 in Coventry by artistic director Carran Waterfield. The first phase of the company's work, from 1988 to 1998, was mainly characterized by critically acclaimed one-woman shows devised and performed by Waterfield, which explored the interfaces between reminiscence theatre and the confessional monologue. These performances fused testimonial accounts with transgenerational postmemory and mythological motifs in order to explore trauma, memory and history from a decidedly feminist perspective. Over this period, Waterfield developed a uniquely elliptic, highly physical performance style, fruit of her long-term collaboration with members of Odin Teatret, the Roy Hart theatre, and Ian Cameron of Plutot La Vie.

In 1998, Waterfield was joined by permanent collaborator Richard Talbot. The company's work shifted in direction, and they began developing immersive, participatory

performance events in collaboration with local art gallery and museum, The Herbert. Over the following decade, Triangle went on to develop award-winning provocative, experimental work delving into the affective, historical terrain of the city of Coventry, drawing on the museum's collections as stimuli for the production of new bodies of work whilst concurrently critiquing the institution and exploring what performance might mean in a museum context (Jackson and Kidd, 2010). As an integral part of this work, the company developed a number of innovative archives, on both DVD and digital formats, documenting their creative processes and artistic outputs. It was this grounding in postdramatic theatrical practice and digital archiving that Carran Waterfield brought to the fore in her work with the Drama students at the University of Northampton.

The module I coordinated and Waterfield taught on in Northampton was designed to enable 2nd Year Drama students to produce a professional-level theatrical performance, and to introduce them to the rigors of industry-level practice. Waterfield developed a devised production with the students entitled *All at Sea*. Like Triangle's own work, *All at Sea* was a multilayered, polyphonic performance, fusing new writing based on testimonial accounts of family history with mythological motifs and Shakespearean texts chosen by the students at the start of the creative process.

Waterfield elicited often highly sensitive and emotionally charged material from the students by beginning her work with them with an exploration of her own personal initiation into the theatre through the online digital archives of Triangle's work. She gave two introductory performance-lectures to the students, weaving in excerpts from her previous performances and publications, and got them to actively search through Triangle's digital archives, setting them a number of investigative tasks which could only be carried out by actively engaging with the digital documentation of the company's repertoire.

The students then e-mailed Carran their own personal responses to the online traces of her body of work, and the memories evoked by their encounter with the archive went on to become the raw material for the burgeoning performance text. In a sense, *All at Sea* the performance thus became an embodied, performatic archive of the fecund, tripartite encounter between

a) the digital documentation of Triangle's own repertoire and Waterfield's first two performance-lectures – themselves embodied extensions/transformative iterations of Triangle's (digital) archive

b) the transgenerational, familial and personal material that Waterfield had used as a basis for these productions

c) The students own personal memories and lived experiences, which were evoked through their encounter with the archive

The students went on to create improvisations based on the embodied trace of the personal memories that they shared at the beginning of the devising period. These improvisations were eventually honed into fixed scores, sequences of physical actions developed by the students themselves, which were interwoven to form the overall structure of the performance. In creating the montage, Waterfield prioritized rhythmic pulsionality over narrative linearity, and followed the logic of a sea journey, starting off with a 'boarding scene', and climaxing at the end with a 'docking'. The scenic action was interspersed throughout with the students' own self-composed testimonial monologues and Shakespearean excerpts, chosen as much for their dissonant libidinal impact as for any sense of narrative arch or dramatic cohesion.

Thus, to paraphrase Giannachi, Kaye and Shanks (2012: 8), in *All at Sea* Waterfield "approached the performance of presence through structures that were explicitly multiple,

aligning the performance of presence with the articulation and crossing of thresholds and the doubling of the fictive with the real". The presence of the live performance – and its excess *jouissance* - was palimpsestuously shaped by its vertiginous, pulsional non-linearity, which jolted the witness out of the safe, comfortable zone of the "student performance" into an altogether more complex aesthetic terrain.

I would like to turn to the digital archive of *All at Sea* now, which was developed concurrently with the performance, in order to show you a short extract from Carran's first performance-lecture. I shall then discuss what she says in the light of Triangle's theatrical aesthetic and digital documentation process, in order to assess the impact that this particular approach to making and documenting theatre had on the performance and archive developed by my students in collaboration with Waterfield.

[https://sites.google.com/site/dra2030digitalarchive2012/the-boarding/carrans-first-lecture]

Far from a flight of fantasy, Waterfield's evocation of Hecate here reveals what I believe to be one of the guiding principles underpinning both the aesthetic and the ethics of Triangle's work – the abject feminine.

According to Kristeva (1982: 4), the abject is "(…) what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous the composite". In developmental terms, it represents the pre-objectal relationship foreclosed by primal repression, which, according to Kristeva, is triggered when the pre-verbal infant (r)ejects the mother as all-encompassing being inseparable from its self.

This initial foreclosure, this *abjection* of a part of the child's psyche during this initial phase of object formation, is subsequently reinforced by imaginary alienation (the Lacanian mirror phase of child development) and symbolic castration (language acquisition and

acculturation), in effect creating a zone of psychic exclusion where the maternally-connoted pre-objectal, the animal, and the non-sensical, drive-laden orders of consciousness are relegated to and repudiated.

This abjected zone of exclusion remains a synchronic element of the subject's psychic make-up, and forms the 'enigmatic foundation' of obsessive compulsive, paranoid and psychotic disorders, triggered subsequently by either the repression or foreclusion of castration. Thus the abject either overwhelms the subject, emerging as symptom – the ambiguous territory in which phallogocentric meaning breaks down in psychic disorders – or is kept in check through sublimation – which channels the pre-nominal and pre-objectal into the sacred and art. Thus the *deject*, the subject steeped in abjection, who locates herself in this ambiguous territory, is the madwoman, the mystic, the artist.

Beyond the microcosm of psychic functioning, Judith Butler (1993) suggests that the process of abjection occurs in the macrocosm of society and culture through the regulated, heteronormative, phallogocentric sexing of the human subject. The phallogocentric economy produces the feminine (and the queer) as its constitutive outside through the regulatory ideal of "sex" which is enforced through the performative iteration of heteronormative social norms. Thus, the real of the queer and of femininity is abjected out of the bounds of phallogocentric discourse. However, it can return to haunt the very language from which it is excluded, and this is the task of the radical feminist; to imbue her discourse with the abject, to speak from this unintelligible domain.

I posit that this disruptive, improper femininity, situated on the margins of law and language, exploring and drawing upon the unutterable abject, is precisely the domain charted by the work of Triangle Theatre. Over the past 25 years, Waterfield, and Talbot's performance work has charted the decidedly improper, affect-laden liminal territory that

always already underpins and unsettles the phallogocentric economy of the symbolic. This performatic avowal of the abject thus radically challenges the archontic principle, which according to Derrida presupposes "a nomological arkhē of the law, of institution, of domiciliation, of filiation" (Derrida, 1995, 59). If archiving is in part an essentially paternal and patriarchic process of repression and consignation, does Triangle's abject performance repertoire and its concurrent digital documentation radically break with the phallogocentric and ocularcentric assumptions underpinning the patrilineal, West-identified tradition of the archive?

Triangle's repertoire as embodied, transformational, performance-based archive would certainly seem to challenge Derrida's Freudian inflected articulation of the nomological archontic principle. The company's performances have consistently rearticulated hegemonic historiography and cultural memory by emphasizing difference and giving voice to the abjected feminine and queer subject. Aesthetically, the company has also consistently accentuated the spectral trace of the pre-nomological drives, that invisible embodied archive of affective impulses always already underscoring and upsetting the symbolic. The company also attempt to mirror this strategy in their resolutely processual digital documentation, whose spectral play of absent presence is structured according to the pulsional (il)logic of their performance texts and spreads out rhizomatically on-line in ever-evolving transversal formats, evading and confounding a more arboreal logic founded on vertical and linear connections between past, present and future

Nevertheless, in the case of *All at Sea* at least, compromises had to be taken. Whilst the affect-laden, impulse driven non-linear performance text was, like Triangle's professional productions, steeped in the (il)logic of abjection, the digital archive the students produced under my guidance was necessarily characterized by a deferred obedience to, and filiation with, the far more phallogocentric aims and objectives of an institute of Higher Education.

Even though the site was organized according to the non-linear structure of the performance text, in accordance with Triangle's practice, care was taken to ensure that the students were able to effectively integrate what had been a challenging creative process by connecting the devising and production process to relevant, academically admonished theories and concepts. The archive also had to reflect the varied learning outcomes of the modular framework in which the performance had been developed, and thus there is a stark contrast to the tone of certain sub-pages contained on the site, which also reflect different students' differing levels of engagement with and understanding of the creative process.

Nonetheless, the student's online archive, which was produced in collaboration with learning technologist Robert Farmer, was developed organically alongside the performance, and was composed from an ongoing, student-led process of documentation, drawing on photos, recorded footage, journal entries and reflective statements. The site itself is ensconced within the wider framework of Triangle's online digital archive, and branches out to older websites, blogs and Vimeo pages generated by Waterfield and Talbot, which are embedded as links on the *All at Sea* site. A spectral trace of the live presence of the performance is articulated through multimedia recordings of the training and devising processes, which are interlinked with clips from the final production. Thus the archive reflects to a certain extent the processual aesthetic of the performance.

What's more, and to conclude, the performance and the digital archive were also concurrently laboratory spaces for Waterfield to continue to explore the key themes and issues that have characterized her work over the years. Waterfield used *All at Sea* as a space to explore material for an upcoming professional production, provisionally entitled *The Little Blue Man*, which will be developed over the coming twelve months. Thus, just as Triangle's digital archive served as a springboard for my students' creative process, their performance and concurrent documentational practices have in turn, in some small way, informed and

influenced Triangle Theatre's latest production. And thus this eternal return of the archive produces new creative offshoots, new embodied extensions of an abject performance and achiving process characterized by affect and an excess of *jouissance*.

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Professional Biography

Dr. Patrick Campbell is a Lecturer in Drama and Performance, a performance practitioner and academic. His research is both theoretical and practice-based, and focuses on the ways in which artists working within a postdramatic theatrical paradigm are challenging monolithic, phallogocentric framings of subjectivity, representability and heritage through performance and training.

As an artist, Patrick has directed and performed in site-specific and immersive theatre performances that explore the liminal space between myth, biography and autobiography, working in collaboration with companies and institutions such as the Contact Theatre

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