

Play Area: Performance Perspectives

This document brings together a diverse series of solicited perspectives on ‘staging play, playing stages’. Postgraduate and early-career researchers who might not otherwise consider play to be a central, or acknowledged aspect of their research, were invited – or *challenged* – to offer a short piece that considers how the notion and/or practice of play might feed into, touch on, or inform their own scholarly research, activity, or practice.

This document is designed to resist a univocal tone, mode of enquiry and theme, beyond the very broad theme of play. Taken together, these short pieces are meant to represent a survey of theatre and performance perspectives on play and how play might emerge as a latent phenomenon in theatre and performance studies research, or how it might be *teased out* of such research. To that extent, these responses are the product of a latency that might extend into many and varied corners of theatre and performance studies. The question then runs: how far might this latency stretch?

Heuristic Word-Play and the Multiple Meanings of ‘Coffee’

By Shaun May

A lot of humour plays with ambiguity of language. This is an obvious truism that’s almost not worth stating. For most of us, this ambiguity goes unnoticed; it is hidden away and only trips up ‘outsiders’. Whilst some people have suggested that this ambiguity is lamentable, Pinker et al. suggest that it is not just a brute fact of our language, but actually a positive feature. They make this point by looking at the logic of ‘indirect speech’, such as euphemism and innuendo. Consider the example of a man who is caught speeding, but wants to get away without a ticket. According to Pinker et al., there are three possible actions that driver can do – overt bribe, implied bribe and no bribe. The consequence of each action is plotted as follows:

| | Dishonest officer | Honest officer |
|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Don't bribe | Traffic ticket | Traffic ticket |
| Bribe | Go free | Arrest for bribery |
| Implicate bribe | Go free | Traffic ticket |

Fig. 1: Pinker et al. (834)

In terms of game theory, the implied bribe is an optimal strategy. If he doesn't bribe then he gets a ticket either way. If he bribes overtly then he goes free if the officer is dishonest, but he gets arrested if the officer is honest. The implied bribe has the same benefit as the overt bribe, but considerably less cost. In fact, as it is a cost he will incur anyway, he might as well try an implied bribe!

Now consider the following exchange from the sitcom *Seinfeld* (1989-98) between George Constanza and his date Carol:

Carol: So, uh, thanks for dinner. It was great.

George: Yeah. We should do this again.

Carol: Would you like to come upstairs for some coffee?

As Pinker suggests (22), it is clear to everyone but George that the offer of 'coffee' is a sexual come-on. As such, we laugh when George replies, 'Oh, no, thanks. I can't drink coffee late at night, it keeps me up'. George eventually realises his mistake whilst driving back and chastises himself, but by then it is too late.

Whilst it is possible that this sort of humour is just a harmless bit of fun, I suspect it is something more. Assuming that Pinker is right that the ambiguity of language is a positive feature, perhaps comedy that plays with this ambiguity has a positive social function?

A number of theorists have suggested that humour acts as a social corrective; we laugh at the person who falls short of social expectations as a way of making them toe the line. In the case of George, we might say we laugh at him because he does not understand the unspoken rules of dating. Whilst this is partly true, I think we should pick up on an important issue: namely, that precisely because they are unspoken, we seldom notice that these rules are there. It is really only when the tacit norms that structure social reality are transgressed, subverted or misunderstood that they become noticeable at all and it should be noted that often this causes laughter. I would suggest

that humour and play are an important component of the induction we all undertake in becoming socially proficient adults; they act as heuristics for social understanding. Because we enjoy laughing, we seek out ambiguity to play with, making us even more conscious of its social function. If I am right, then this means that there is much to be gained from exploring the importance of such play for social and interpersonal development.

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On the Injunction 'Enjoy'

By Adam Alston

In this edition of *Platform*, Daniel Oliver, drawing on philosopher Slavoj Žižek, reflects on the liberal coca-capitalist injunction 'Enjoy', alongside the negativity that may well accompany failure if unable to fulfil the injunction. In the spirit of this edition – and specifically this 'playful' part of the edition – I want to unpack what meanings might reside in the injunction 'Enjoy' and what relevance these meanings might have for play and performance.

First off, in the above there is an anticipatory keyword to 'Enjoy' that does not just inflect, but bullies its meaning: namely, 'injunction'. The word 'injunction' connects, etymologically, with the Latin word *iungere*, meaning 'to join' ('Injunction'). In an act of seemingly selfless generosity, 'injunction' invites the word 'Enjoy' to share in its authority. The injunction contains within it an enjoining potential. It is promiscuous. And enjoyment slavishly submits to its domination.

Before 'Enjoy' has a chance to express itself, it is framed by the sovereignty of its predecessor, 'injunction'. This is a shame, as there is a latent generosity in the Old French *enjoier*, meaning to 'give joy to' ('Enjoy'). But 'injunction' absorbs this generosity, draining its value and limiting its expressive powers to a point: that is, to a

point premised on possession, on right and on ownership. In other words, expressiveness is inverted as an impress; gestures of outwardness and communion are twisted, now manifesting as privacy. What this coupling of 'injunction' and 'Enjoy' makes clear is a narrowing of meanings away from the intersubjective and towards the personal and the egoistic.

Underlying this very brief analysis is a performance concept, one that Jon McKenzie may well recognise as part of an organisational performance paradigm (19-20). In this instance, 'performance' refers to a measure of effective organisation, with that measure being hierarchically graded up to superlative status: performing to the best possible ability, as a goal, an aspiration, or, worryingly, as an expectation. Such a 'performance paradigm' – one that might be identified, for instance, with evolving strategies of management and workplace organisation (Taylorism, Fordism, post-Fordism, Toyotism) – orders the way in which the concept and practice signalled by a word might function. This notion of an organisational performance paradigm invites us to consider the operative value of 'Enjoy' as a concept that is to materialise in practiced experience, which *must* be maximised. But the maximised concept and realised experience are at odds with one another. They fail to correlate. And this failure condemns 'Enjoy' to fail once plucked from its transcendent, lofty and idealistic home in unreality. This transcendence is hit upon by Oliver/Žižek whenever they choose to capitalise the injunction 'Enjoy'. These authors open space to acknowledge a clownish contradiction; that which is limited in meaning to an impress, as opposed to an outwardly generous sharing in joy, is condemned to an impossible union between an idealised form of enjoyment and correlation with a private self – a self who may well experience imperfect forms of enjoyment while, in experiencing those forms, ending up feeling inadequate.

Is there a way out of this – this rule of a performance paradigm, as it applies to enjoyment as an injunction? From a manifesto to reflections on paranoia, this edition approaches play as a possible answer, particularly as play – specifically *playing* – might work to restore to 'Enjoy' meanings that are antithetical to privacy, ownership and egoism: meanings that open 'Enjoy' out to others and not just to the authority of an injunction. Perhaps the public forums of theatre and performance, so long as the public nature of those gatherings is maintained, might provide one of many playing fields for their audiences to enjoy, together.

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On Play: Public Engagement

By Charlotte Bell

The role of play in cultural activities is complex. In this short piece, I advocate for play as a tool for critical inquiry in public engagement events. ‘Public engagement’ is a term that has emerged in recent years to describe an organisation’s methods of public participation and impact. It is often used to describe symposia, or conferences, that encourage dialogue and debate between, what might usefully be called, ‘expert’ and ‘non-expert’ audiences. In a 2011 report on engagement and participation, the Paul Hamlyn Foundation suggested that ‘communities remain, or at least perceive themselves to be, fundamentally separated from processes within [...] organisations’ (Lynch 5). Public engagement events are one aspect of wider practices. I offer two examples of recent public engagement events in London. The first, ‘Public Engagement and Impact: Articulating Value in Art and Design’, a one-day symposium in May convened by the School of Art, Design and Architecture at the University of Huddersfield and hosted by the Institute for Contemporary Arts (ICA) in central London; the second, ‘TRIBE: Critical Friends and Young Women’s Group Event’ at Peckham Space Gallery, a ‘picnic-style’ evening conversation event between the gallery’s critical friends group, the Young Women’s Group from Creative Arts & Music and Southwark Youth Service in partnership with Groundwork London, who worked with artist Sarah Cole in the lead up to the exhibition TRIBE (7 May – 23 July). Both public engagement events used play as a methodological tool to disseminate research to a non-expert audience while creating a supportive environment through which to critique cultural activities.

'Public Engagements and Impact' was a platform for discussing the relative value and position of cultural activity within the wider political economy. The Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014, which effects the funding and production of research and its dissemination for those working within university settings and increasing cuts to public sector arts funding, was a key concern of this platform. The two plenary sessions were group activity workshops. In one, delegates collaborated to make placards and posters in response to funding cuts to the arts. In the other, delegates used post-it notes to create an interactive mind-map on the wall in which 'value' and 'impact' were critiqued. At Peckham Space, games and activities such as mask making, 'exquisite corpse', a word wall and music box making were used to invite participants to critique the themes of the exhibition and engage in aspects of the project's production process.

Though these public engagements were distinct, both employed and encouraged play as a method for making visible some of the infrastructures of cultural activity, which remain invisible or partial to a wider audience. For example, at 'Public Engagements and Impact' the interactive mind-map became a mode through which some of the bureaucratic subtleties of RAE (2008) and REF (2014) were discussed. The playful method of drawing on the wall seemed to encourage supportive knowledge and skills sharing as artists, students, administrators and curators shared their interpretations and views.

At TRIBE, playful activities provided a space for visitors to learn more about the process of socially engaged work. They were encouraged to participate in some of the activities deployed during the production process. Crucially, play provided a duty of care to the young women who participated in the project and those visitors who may identify as 'non-artists'. Play became a multi-faceted methodology: it was both a tool for rendering the production process of socially engaged work visible and a method for initiating reflection and evaluation of the project TRIBE. The event was also a lot of fun.

Play is simultaneously insignificant and powerful. At first glance, play appears integral to both the production and reception of cultural work. Play is often an assumed component of cultural practice and performance. In the current economic climate, 'play', or 'playfulness', can seem utopian. Its connotations of entertainment and escapism and the difficulties one might encounter attempting to quantify its presence often position play as an 'added bonus' to the apparent rigour of the wider social issues

any work might tackle. However, play is a useful method that, as the two events I have mentioned here demonstrate, advocates for a serious consideration of the effects and affects of play at the level of arts administration. Play is both labour and non-labour. Play can be a conceptual and theoretical bond between organisations, the artistic practices they support and participants.

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Play Walking

By Kris Darby

In *A Playworker's Taxonomy of Play Types*, play theorist and activist Bob Hughes has ascertained a variety of different types of play, providing a framework for how children imagine and realise space. As I continue to explore the relationship between walking and performance in both my research and practice, I have increasingly understood the prominence of play within it. Therefore, taking Hughes' taxonomy as my framework, what follows are some suggestions for different types of 'play walking' that can sculpt a variety of performances from this everyday action.

1. *Symbolic Play*: Make your walk a pilgrimage and your end destination a sacred site. Look for the instrumental symbols to guide you on your walk and the dominant symbols that signal you have arrived.
2. *Rough and Tumble Play*: Walk off the beaten track, sticking to narrow streets and desire lines. Pick the trickiest route and watch your gaze move to your feet as you struggle to navigate around obstacles in your path.
3. *Socio-Dramatic Play*: Create an auto-topographical journey by re-walking a walk from your past. Ignore the stubbornness of the present and the change in geography.
4. *Social Play*: Have a mobile meeting, using the surroundings to jog the conversation along.

5. *Creative Play*: Take a walk in a different pair of shoes. How does it change your perception of yourself and of the landscape?
6. *Communication Play*: Make your walk an ear-worm, echoing the Australian Aborigine tradition of creating a song line to musically map the land.
7. *Dramatic Play*: Devise an improvised promenade performance by conducting a read-through of a play with fellow walkers.
8. *Locomotor Play*: Follow in the steps of director-practitioners Tadashi Suzuki and Robert Wilson and walk as s l o w l y as possible. If done correctly it should look as if you are still and the rest of the world is moving around you.
9. *Deep Play*: Stay outside for twenty-four hours. Walk to survive, finding shelter elsewhere. Imagine you are in artist Joe Bateman's *Nomads Land* (2010) or Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road*.
10. *Exploratory Play*: Convert your walk into a sensory guided tour, drawing the attention of your group to the significant sights, sounds, smells, textures and tastes.
11. *Fantasy Play*: Open your front door and enter the world's stage. Follow the hero's journey, making your walk a monomyth. Look for others to join you on your quest.
12. *Imaginative Play*: Take an imaginary dog for a walk. Let it off the lead and follow it.
13. *Mastery Play*: Make your walk a sculpture. Use natural objects such as stones and wood to create cairns for other walkers to encounter and alter. Document your sculpture through photography and text.
14. *Object Play*: Draw a straight line on a map and try to follow it as closely as possible whilst carrying a totem pole or snowball of collected objects (à la Lone Twin). Let others help you.
15. *Role Play*: Pick a walk and do it. Possible options: stroll, swerve, zig-zag, march, wander, charge, glide, stagger, scurry, strut, speed-walk and hike.
16. *Recapitulative Play*: Peel back the layers of the present by following an out-of-date map of your local area.

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Metaphor, Mud and Melancholy: Ostermeier's *Hamlet* in Translation

By Geraldine Brodie

Are surtitles metaphorical interlinear translations? Walter Benjamin's 1923 essay '*Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*' ('The Task of the Translator') plays with concepts of trust, language, revelation, literalness and freedom to the point where his own translators, working into English, differ markedly in their renditions. They are, however, close to agreement on Benjamin's insistence that 'all great writings contain their virtual translation between the lines', although his concluding statement that 'the interlinear version [...] is the Ur-image [*Urbild*] or ideal of all translation' (DELOS 99 – my translation) attracts further controversy. *Urbild* has been variously translated as 'archetype' (Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator' [bilingual edition] 96) or 'prototype' (Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator' 83; 'The Translator's Task' 83), but, for me, the viscosity of this metaphor requires a closer, more concrete rendering. Scholars and translators struggle to understand and apply these sentences, but I was reminded of them while in the audience for Thomas Ostermeier's German-language version of *Hamlet* at the Barbican Theatre in 2011. Ostermeier embraces the necessary impossibility of surtitles, adopting an interlinear-like incorporation into the production design rather than banishing them to the wings. For an English-speaking audience, already familiar with the original text, as 'to be or not to be' rises over a full-screen projected backdrop of Hamlet's face in monochrome close-up ('*sein oder nicht sein*'), the revelation of the literalness of translation is in stark contrast to the freedom of the *mise en scène*. Even so, might these elements unite to convey an Ur-image of *Hamlet*: the mud and the melancholy?

Oh yes, there was mud. Act III, Scene 2 of *Hamlet* is, of course, a perfect example of 'staging play, playing stages', the play within a play manipulated by Hamlet to 'catch the conscience of the king', but which also, by uniting the auditorium with the on-stage audience, enables 'every spectator [...] to become a participant', as commended by Benjamin ('What is Epic Theatre?' 76). Until this point, I had focused more on the playfulness of the nuptial dinner guests in Mafiosi sunglasses and Gertrude's Carla Bruni-esque serenade to Claudius, the swapping of wigs and the half-naked antics. Now that mud, smeared by Hamlet onto the Players, began the process of accumulating on the stage, squelching around the cast and threatening to smatter the

audience. My initial amused/bemused response to this post-dramatic playing intensified as I became aware of the pervasive, orifice-clogging, deadening mud, the visible revelation of Hamlet's melancholia. Mud played in non-verbal counterpoint to the surtitles, supporting Shakespeare's amputated lines and supplementing the German play.

Has translation given Ostermeier the freedom to uncover an interlinear interpretation that might elude a more static English-language production? Michael Billington, in his essay 'Shakespeare in Europe', finds that 'something strange happens when you lose the English language and context: you release the play's metaphorical power' (357). While empathising with Billington's notion of release, I am discomfited by any perception of loss in translation. Benjamin saw the connection between a translation and its original in the geometrical terms of a tangent brushing a circle (DELOS 97). The contact may be fleeting, but it is the fact rather than the point of contact that governs the path to be followed by the tangent thereafter. The interlinearity of this translation, where mud meets metaphor in the *mise en scène*, enhanced my response to this production. Ostermeier plays down the line with *Hamlet*, but Shakespeare's 'little O' still governs the stage.

Acknowledgments

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A 'Thickly' Smoked Moment in Time

By Karen da Silva

Performed in a laundromat as part of the Guildford International Music Festival 2013, *Launderette* is a short, witty dance eruption in which the character of Jenny Ballantyne comes up against and pushes back at the behavioural expectations of a married woman and mother in the 1960s. Against an era of discrimination and prejudice, Jenny's weekly visit to the local launderette becomes a space of personal protest. Her smoking cigarette dance describes insurgent gestures through a 'slo-mo' pile-up of past and future hopes, in collision with her present 'now'. She fumes her way into the launderette, playing out and playing up the two dimensionality of the cardboard like stances of sixties models contrasting with her own multifaceted 'real' and lived experience. Diving into a washing basket vortex of events that have triggered this moment, Jenny vents her dissent as she smokes, twists, hitchhikes and mashed potatoes her way around the tumble dryers to a sound design frenzy of wah-wah, bass and Hendrix fire.



Fig 1: *Launderette* (2013), by Karen da Silva. Guildford International Music Festival. Image by Mario Cavalli.

The performance of *Launderette* was created through a process that set out to explore the possibilities offered through a phenomenological approach to choreographing character and is the focus of this short written piece. This choreographic practice as research specifically focuses on a Heideggerian notion of historicity which refers to the way in which the past is an inevitable part of any now.

Play was key in the process of creating Jenny Ballantyne's character. I use the word play here to mean an easy, uncritical, but attentive presence with 'things', real or imagined, a space of open seeing, of moving towards, away and back again, of being-*with* and *in-the-world-of* phenomena. There are parallels between play in this context with a phenomenological attitude in relation to the centrality in phenomenology of open inquiry, in seeing things for what they are and not what we have come to suppose them to be.



Fig 2: *Launderette* (2013), by Karen da Silva. Guildford International Music Festival. Image by Tino Tedaldi.



Fig 3: *Launderette* (2013), by Karen da Silva. Guildford International Music Festival. Image by Jean Johnson-Jones.



Fig 4: *Launderette* (2013), by Karen da Silva. Guildford International Music Festival. Image by Tino Tedaldi.



Fig 5: *Launderette* (2013), by Karen da Silva. Guildford International Music Festival. Image by Mario Cavalli.

Jenny Ballantyne's present is arrived at through a processual studio detour into a fictional past to discover her back story, her before time, her past 'nows', which become disclosed through the play of travelling in and through time in order to arrive back to a future of her own present. This time travel provides a way of being-in-the-world of the 'facts' (Mitchell 31) or the 'Given Circumstances' (Stanislavski 53) of her past. Being with the imaginary events of her life allow for an excavation of her embodied historicity in order to un-conceal the imprints of her lived experience: the tells of how events, in Elizabeth Grosz's terms, have inscribed themselves on the surface of her body (148).

Dancing in and moving through her imagined lived experience, layers of her past and imagined future start to become embodied, allowing Jenny Ballantyne's character to be choreographed into a multi-dimensional way of Being. She is not simply a series of passing 'nows', but her present; her being is 'thick' with the past and future (Wagner 12). The thickly smoked presence of Jenny Ballantyne is arrived at through playing stages of Being in time in order to stage the play of *Launderette*.



Fig 6: *Launderette* (2013), by Karen da Silva. Guildford International Music Festival. Image by Tino Tedadli.

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'VALERIO! VALERIO! VALERIO...'

By Liam Jarvis

The contributions in this edition of *Platform* expound notions of 'play' and the diverse manifestations of 'playing', from how it is manifested in postdramatic 'child's play', to play within participatory art. The latter intersects with my own research into sculptural installations in gallery spaces designed to engender and produce different forms of interactivity, requiring certain kinds of input from the gallery visitor. Part of my PhD research task is to interrogate claims towards the efficacy of 'play' via the intervention of the semi-functional work of art. Whilst it is not possible to indicate the full scope of my research in this modest contribution to the journal, my aim here is rather to employ one case-study to open up a space to think about art that enables us as participants to act upon our own bodies, via the act of playing.

The work of artist and scholar in biology, Carsten Höller, is helpful to this discussion, in particular his 'Valerio' installations. This series of work is comprised of large spiralling metal slides, which allow the participant to descend from one floor of an exhibition to another. This 'relational' work, like much of Höller's work, deliberately seeks to problematise distinct binaries between object and spectator; the art, Höller suggests, exists not in the art object or the human subject, but in the synthesis and interrelations between the two; interrelations activated in the act of playing.

The 'Valerio' slide installations borrow their titles from a unique example of mass hysteria that the artist describes as 'the Valerio phenomenon'. In an extract of an interview with the artist published in the exhibition guide, *Carsten Höller: Test Site*, Höller elaborates on the origins of this term:

It's an interesting example of mass hysteria. A sound technician at a concert disappeared, and someone in the audience, pretending to know his name, shouted 'Valerio!' More and more people joined in. It was, apparently, infectious, and it spread from Brindisi to Rimini and other cities. There is something about the sound of this name that makes you want to shout it out loud. You feel a little better after you've done it, just like after having traveled [sic] down a slide'. ('Carsten Höller Talks About His Slides')

In Höller's lexicon, the title of the slides is analogous to a kind of contagious play; the slides are the apparatus of the playground, apprehended by the artist and installed in the

gallery context. This kind of ‘play’, framed as ‘art’, is a development that has been met with strong disapproval from some critical commentators; Jean Baudrillard suggested critically in his essay ‘Art... Contemporary of Itself’, that the relationship the spectator has to the contemporary work of art is ‘on the level of contamination or contagion: you plug in, become, absorb, immerse yourself just like in flows or networks. Metonymical linkage, chain reactions’ (92). Höller’s work is in itself a circulatory network completed by the viewer’s involvement. It would suggest that it is precisely the kind of immersive art that Baudrillard criticises, operating (as the ‘Valerio’ analogy implies) at the level of virulent phenomena. So what is to be gained by one’s participation in ‘playing’ with an artwork?

I visited Carsten Höller’s Test Site exhibition at Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall on 25 November 2006. This installation, which expanded on the Valerio projects, was comprised of five large slides descending from the fifth, fourth, third and second floors of the building. I observed that it was not uncommon for participants (including myself) to descend on the slides shouting out for joy: joy found in the simple and playful act of losing control whilst sliding. In Höller’s description of the ‘Valerio phenomenon’, the artist hints towards the positive physiological implications of sliding on the body of another participant, a belief that is further evidenced by Höller’s claims on the BBC News website on 9 October 2006 that research studies qualify his belief ‘that slides can help combat stress and depression’ (‘Tate Modern Unveils Giant Slides’).

This leads me to conclude that the ‘Valerio’ installations exemplify a ubiquitous shift in the gallery space towards ‘experience creation’, which has shifted analysis surrounding what an artwork ‘says’ to what it ‘does’. This shift necessitates an increasingly interdisciplinary approach to critical analysis in order to understand the physiological effects of any work that requires the participant to lend their body to a work of art.

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The Aristocracy at Play in the Nineteenth Century

By David Coates

As one of the three representatives organising the 2013 TaPRA Postgraduate Symposium, 'Play in Performance Practices', alongside Charlotte Bell and Adam Alston, I was prompted to think about the relationship between play and my own research. Though at first glance it seemed that this theme was a world away from anything that would excite a theatre historian like myself, I very quickly realised that the topic of play and the numerous issues which came out of the symposium reverberated through my own research in the field of private and amateur theatricals in the nineteenth century.

Private and amateur theatricals were at their most popular in dilettante circles during the Victorian period, at a time when high society was constrained by a multitude of codes and conventions. Everyday situations were controlled by the strictures of social etiquette and routines dominated many aspects of daily, weekly and annual activity. For the majority, childhood was short-lived and soon after leaving the nursery societal expectations were taught, learnt and accepted as norms.

In this era of rules and regulations, did one lose the ability to play after childhood? Perhaps so for many individuals. If this is not entirely the case, however, then where and when was it acceptable for one to practice play beyond the nursery?

Private and amateur theatricals arguably provided one of the few tolerable outlets for play for the upper classes in adult life in Victorian and Edwardian society. Private and amateur theatricals took place in town and country houses, hired public theatres, village halls, working mens' clubs, schools, universities, hospitals and mental

asylums, onboard ships and in army encampments in Britain and across the world. These amateur performances were very popular and fashionable society flocked to see their peers treading the boards.

Though tolerable to many, it comes as no surprise that some sections of society were far from comfortable with the craze for private theatricals or with other playful aspects of high society. The Prince of Wales, who went on to become Edward VII, spearheaded a lifestyle of play and pleasure in the mid-nineteenth century which later defined the Edwardian age – an era which has been written into history as a long garden party and a golden age. Despite this, he was repeatedly criticised for his playful antics. Regular complaints were made about the ill effects of play on the morality of young men and women and private theatricals were often firmly in the firing line. The arguments of these sections of society against theatricals were fuelled by numerous examples of elopements between young amateur actors and actresses – stories which the press rarely failed to expose.

Despite the criticisms, private theatricals continued to be popular and play continued to dominate the rehearsal process of amateurs. In rehearsal, sources suggest that individuals were freed from various customs and manners, which one would never have been able to put aside in the drawing room or at the dinner table. Behind the closed doors of the private theatre men and women felt at ease in rehearsals in a relatively open space and they could informally play together, or experiment alone.

It is surely of some interest that so many intimate relationships began during the informality of amateur rehearsals. It is also of interest to find the fifth Marquis of Anglesey expressing his effeminacy through costume and dance in his own private theatricals. Is it not also of significance that during private theatricals at Chatsworth in 1904, Cinderella went to a political meeting instead of the Prince Charming's ball?

Thus, private theatricals provided opportunities for the aristocracy and rising middle classes to play, in a society which otherwise imprisoned such an ability in early childhood. At play in private theatricals, sexuality was more freely expressed and explored and gender identities, gender expectations and gender boundaries became malleable. Political topics could be toyed with in the safety of the rehearsal room before being aired in performance on a quasi-private stage before a frequently large and influential audience, made up of household staff, the local gentry, nobility and aristocracy and often also including politicians and members of the royal family.

Playing with Words

By Deborah Leveroy

'[...] promise to forget this fellow – to illiterate him, I say, quite from your memory'
[*obliterate*] (Sheridan I.ii: 19)

One of my lasting memories of A Level sociology is sticking my hand up and saying out-loud 'I think that Becker was *pacifical*ly talking about deviance in reference to...'. My teacher interrupted: 'is that in the *pacific* ocean then?' Not realising that I had substituted the similar sounding word 'specifically' for the word 'pacific' at the time, I carried on talking, determined to make some point or another.

Only since starting my PhD research into dyslexia and acting have I become aware of the connection between word-play and dyslexia. For some dyslexic learners, 'each word or concept may be surrounded by such a rich network of associations that these associations can become overwhelming and give rise to unintended substitutions' (Eide and Eide 95). Some substitutions are structurally similar, involving similar sounding or looking words (such as my 'specific/pacific' example and Mrs Malaprop's 'illiterate/obliterate'). Other substitutions share a structural similarity and some relationship of meaning, such as Mrs Malaprop's 'O, he will *dissolve* my mystery!' [*resolve*] (Sheridan, V.iii: 99). Lastly there are conceptual substitutions: words which have no structural similarity, but are connected conceptually, such as 'I'm really hungry! What's on the *itinerary*?' [*menu*].

Eide and Eide (294-298) suggest that these substitutions reveal a dyslexic strength in perceiving distinct conceptual as well as structural relationships and empirical research has found that dyslexic groups have a greater ability to find similarities amongst verbal concepts or visual patterns than non-dyslexic groups (Everatt, Weeks & Brooks 16-41; Everatt, Steffert & Smythe 28-46). Eddie Izzard, the dyslexic comic and actor, has said that he believes 'that dyslexia tends to make you go off in a weird direction. And then you go – 'Oh, that's nice'. And that [word or image] could well lead to that' ('Eddie Izzard and the Girl'). Izzard's distinctive ability to play with words and images and 'go off in a weird direction' may be the key to his success as a stand-up comic and improviser. It may also be a rich source of creativity for other dyslexic performers and theatre-makers, enabling them to bring a playfulness and different aesthetic to their process.

With regard to my own research process, I relish playing with ideas and connecting various concepts from seemingly disparate perspectives and I continue to find myself mixing up various academic terms, such as calling Antonio Damasio's *somatic* marker hypothesis, the *tomato* marker hypothesis (I prefer my version). The dyslexic actors who have participated in my research were also more interested in subtext and word association, rather than the dictionary-definition level of words. For these actors, words and language were experienced as visceral and sensorial realities, enabling them to connect with and make their own unique meanings out of the words on the page. They have developed a different intentional relationship with language which falls outside of the standard rules of the English language, resulting in a degree of deep substitution and playfulness, which I believe should be encouraged in us all.

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