

volunteer interviewers seems vital for developing the range and depth of documentation¹⁰.

Résumé

Le Département Théâtre et Spectacle du Victoria and Albert Museum, depuis 1992, année de la fondation du National Video Archive of Performance (NVAP) par Margaret Benton, fait des captations vidéo de spectacles de théâtre. Depuis lors, en dépit de moyens limités, plus de 200 spectacles ont été enregistrés pour la postérité. Ce travail se poursuit avec Jill Evans comme producteur.

En 2005, une bourse, du Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) a permis de capter cinq productions "culturellement diverses" pour le NVAP. Elles ont été captées entre 2006 et 2008, avec notamment un *Songe d'une nuit d'été* indien, mis en scène par de Tim Supple au Roundhouse, et *Gem of the Ocean* de August Wilson, monté au Tricycle. Ce projet et le financement extérieur ont permis au Musée, pour la première fois, d'interroger des personnes appartenant aux équipes de création de ces productions, de capter des commentaires des critiques et de réaliser des micros-trottoirs auprès des spectateurs.

Alors que l'on peut se demander si de tels bonus offrent une vue plus complète d'un spectacle qu'une simple captation habituelle, cette expérience pose des questions intéressantes sur ce qui devrait être les préoccupations premières de ce type de travail, étant donné le fait que les budgets sont généralement limités. Par exemple, est-il préférable d'interviewer le metteur en scène à froid ou plutôt d'enregistrer ses commentaires alors qu'il regarde une captation de sa pièce? Et, dans ce dernier cas, cela aura-t-il pour effet d'augmenter l'intérêt des gens pour la captation du spectacle, ou cela aura-t-il l'effet inverse? Toute une série d'autres questions concrètes se posent, notamment liées aux aspects pratiques pour enregistrer les participants à un spectacle avant que celui-ci se termine et que tout le monde se disperse.

Cet article se penche sur ces questions et se demande également comment trouver de nouveaux fonds pour développer ce genre de bonus.

¹⁰ The writer would be interested in any information, published or not, on similar work, please send to g.marsh@vam.ac.uk.

Theoretical Discussions on Digital Representations of Performance

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Introduction

Over the past eleven years the Arts and Humanities Data Service Performing Arts subject centre (AHDS Performing Arts)¹ has preserved digital data in the long term, promoted good practice in the creation and use of digital data, provided technical advice to the research community, and pursued research into the unique challenges offered by digital representations of an ephemeral art form. For the last three years, this service was hosted by the Humanities Advanced Technology and Information Institute (HATII) at the University of Glasgow².

AHDS Performing Arts closed down at the end of March 2008 as a result of the decision taken by Arts and Humanities Research Council in March 2007 to cease funding the AHDS³. This paper will briefly discuss the legacy of the service in terms of its best practice in data curation, knowledge transfer to performing arts communities, and provision of high quality and dependable digital resources related to music, dance, theatre, radio, film, television, and performance, for the UK research and teaching community. The paper will then discuss the challenges faced by the creation and interpretation of representations of performance data, drawing on our research over the past few years.

¹ <http://www.ahds.ac.uk/performingarts>.

² <http://www.hatii.arts.gla.ac.uk/>.

³ See Sarah Jones, Daisy Abbott & Seamus Ross, *Risk Assessment for AHDS Performing Arts Collections: A Response to the Withdrawal of Core Funding*, 2008. Available from: http://www.ahds.ac.uk/performingarts/news/reports/ahdspa_collection_risk_assessment.pdf (accessed 30 May 2008).

The Legacy of a National Organisation for Data Curation

AHDS Performing Arts has safeguarded the digital products of research from over 60 projects related to theatre, music, broadcasting, film, and live art, and all collections are still freely available to the public through our Web portal⁴. However, the legacy of this service goes beyond keeping content safe and accessible. The AHDS provided a national approach to developing best practice in digital curation, whilst maintaining the subject-based expertise so important for offering appropriate strategies and advice in domains with very specific needs, such as Performing Arts. This expertise has, slowly but surely, filtered out into communities of stakeholders from practitioners seeking advice on copyright to academic researchers and funding organisations. Like the collections themselves, this body of knowledge on how best to create, manage, and preserve digital content is freely available through the AHDS Website; a resource of significant value, increasingly so now that there is no UK national organisation devoted to helping content creators and users in the arts and humanities. However, in terms of this paper, the most significant legacy left by AHDS Performing Arts is assisting in the building up of communities of research and practice over the past few years; networks of performers and academics engaged with digital technologies and how they can be used and exploited to increase the lasting value of their performances.

Representations of Performance

Stanislavski wrote:

[A] work of art born on the stage lives only for a moment, and no matter how beautiful it may be it cannot be commanded to stay with us.⁵

Defining the nature of performances is at the root of all difficulties regarding their representation. Performances are live events, the enactment of which does not endure through time and this transience is their defining characteristic. Peggy Phelan states that performance “becomes itself through disappearance”⁶. The temporal nature of performance causes tension; and the fear of loss can lead to an urgent desire to counter ephemerality through documenting, whilst the loss inherent in this process leaves many dissatisfied with the outcome. Representations such as photographs, videos, or audio recordings are often discounted as

inadequate and unfaithful. The archiving of such representations can also be misleading: they capture a single moment of time or a single performance event in a much larger work which is continually evolving over time rather than reflecting the entire process of creating and enacting performances. These records provide an individual access point but only offer a very narrow perspective – each reproducing merely one aspect of the performance⁷. Inevitably they also incorporate multiple losses and additions – the translation from performance to representation is never 1:1. Arguably if we create multiple representations, as a whole they will bring us closer to the elusive “truth”. However, if the representations simply reflect specifics – the costumes, the script, details of the venue and time period – to what extent does this actually reflect the performance itself?

Practitioners of performing arts have been struggling with this issue for some time. Sophia Lycouris views the representations we create as a “manifestation of registered concerns” rather than an attempt to reconstruct the original⁸. Capturing the “essence” of the performance as opposed to reflecting a single so-called objective reality is an increasingly common strategy for documenters. Moreover, those characteristics previously largely ignored by performance archives (for example, the relationships between performer and audience) now generate both a notable concern and a challenge to attempt to capture and preserve, requiring considerable expertise and judgement from both documenters and performers alike⁹. Another emerging perspective is that memory is the most appropriate site for records of performance as its fluidity and fallibility more closely echo the ephemeral nature of performance.

If performance archives are to respond to these concerns then perhaps the traditional notion of a record as a fixed, authoritative representation of an event should be expanded. Performances are constantly evolving so the idea of capturing a static snapshot as a faithful (or even reasonable) representation is somewhat incongruous. Moreover the possibility that one viewpoint or interpretation could be valued over others and presented

⁴ <http://www.ahds.ac.uk/performingarts/collections/index.htm>.

⁵ Konstantin Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, New York, Taylor & Francis, 1987 (first published 1924), p. 570.

⁶ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: the politics of performance*, London, Routledge, 1993, p. 146.

⁷ Cf. Daisy Abbott & Emma Beer, *Getting to Know Our Audience: AHDS Performing Arts Scoping Study*. Available from: <http://www.ahds.ac.uk/performingarts/pubs/scoping-study-2006.pdf> (accessed 23 April 2008).

⁸ Sophia Lycouris, “The documentation of practice: framing trace”. *Working Papers in Art and Design*, Vol. 1, 2002. Available from: <http://www.herts.ac.uk/artdes1/research/papers/wpades/vol1/lycouris1.html> (accessed 17 April 2008).

⁹ Cf. Susan Melrose, *Still Harping On (About Expert Practitioner-Centred Modes of Knowledge and Models of Intelligibility)*, 2007. Available from: <http://www.ahds.ac.uk/performingarts/news/reports/MELROSE-AHDS.pdf> (accessed 21 April 2008) and Matthew Reason, *Documentation, Disappearance and the Representation of Live Performance*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

as the single authoritative account by virtue of being archived is strongly opposed.

Appraisal of Performance Data

Documenters of performance share the archival process of appraisal. The selection of certain features of a performance work allows (and in fact enforces) an edited representation. Performers can restrict the material they make available in order to reinforce a particular identity for themselves and their works, or choose to only include representations which show their work in the best light. Whilst this attitude may seem manipulative, archival representations of transient works or repertoire are never accurate, they do not represent the "truth" of the performance in the first place, and there are concerns from artists and curators alike that the archival record can mistakenly stand in for, or even supplant the lost performance¹⁰. However, just as archivists reappraise and assess the value of objects differently over time, artists' attitudes towards their works also change. For example, for years the Australian writer Patrick White was adamant that everything but his official publications should be destroyed.

My MSS are destroyed as soon as the books are printed. I put very little into notebooks, don't keep my friends' letters as I urge them not to keep mine, and anything unfinished when I die is to be burnt. The final versions of my books are what I want people to see and if there is anything of importance to me, it will be in those.¹¹

Towards the end of his life, however, White encouraged his friends who had previously ignored his wishes to make these personal writings available to his biographer, in order to provide a different insight into his creative works. This shows that artistic intent can change over time and that often multiple points of access to works are desired, contrary to previous indications. It is also compelling evidence that it is *not* sufficient to view artistic works as singular, complete, discrete objects and that a range of representations, be they direct or contextual, are necessary to gain a balanced view of the work¹².

For performance, there is no "final version" which can be seen, and the supplementary or deliberately documented records, along with the

¹⁰ Cf. Matthew Reason, "Archive or Memory? The Detritus of Live Performance", *National Theatre Quarterly*, 19/1, 2003.

¹¹ Patrick White, *Letters* edited by David Marr, Sydney, Random House, 1994, p. 492. Quoted in Sue McKemmish, "Evidence of Me", *Archives and Manuscripts*, 29/1, 2001. Available from: <http://www.mybestdocs.com/mckemmish-s-evidofme-ch10.htm> (accessed 22 April 2008).

¹² Cf. Richard Stone, "The Show goes on! Preserving Performing Arts Ephemera, or the Power of the Program", *Arts Libraries Journal*, 25/2, 2000.

embodied knowledge and experiences of the audience and performers are all that remains. There is a wide range of factors affecting the decisions behind what to document, its appraisal, and how it is made available (for example in UK Higher Education documentation of performance research is often a requirement of funding). If artists actively choose to document their work they may perform for two audiences: those present and those who will only experience the performance at a remove, through documentation. This decision in turn could impose boundaries on the performance, for example futilely trying to ensure a consistent experience for both sets of audiences. One of the major challenges curators and users face is attempting to discern the underlying influences behind the creation of a performance archive or repertoire.

Appraisal is inherently problematic because it is based on notions of value and taps into the old archival debate of whether the creator or the archivist should define value¹³. It is therefore questionable how accurate representations can ever be. If an artist is embarrassed by her early works, finding them crude and unsophisticated, how likely is it that she would choose to make them publicly available, even if they provided valuable research data by capturing the beginnings of her developing style? Arguably the archivist would be more detached and approach the decision more objectively, considering the value and use of the records more broadly. The archivist however brings her own bias to the decision, due to resource constraints, the collection remit, her personal definition of value, intuition, and political restraints. Power underpins exclusion and inclusion in the records, whether this is the power of an artist over her work or the influence of an authoritarian regime where official memory is sanitised.

Arguably *all* archiving is performance: records are surrogates that provide a window onto past moments that can never be recreated; and users interact with these records to reinterpret this past. In his introduction to *Scrolling Forward* David Levy reflects on a till receipt, referring to it as "a snapshot of something that happened at another time and place". He discusses the wealth of detail to be gleaned from this seemingly insignificant document, before concluding that its conventional form enables it to perform its function as proof of purchase¹⁴. Accepted forms of evidence for financial transactions are well-established. The question of how performances should be represented however is still widely contested. Some methods such as writing, photography and video-recording predominate but none has become the de facto standard.

¹³ Cf. the work of Hilary Jenkinson and Theodore Schellenberg; an ongoing debate.

¹⁴ David M. Levy, *Scrolling Forward: making sense of documents in the digital age*, New York, Arcade Publishing, 2001, p. 7-12. See also Philip Auslander, "The Performativity of Performance Documentation", in *P.A.J.: A Journal of Performance and Art*, Vol. 84, 2006, p. 1-10.

The Archive and the Repertoire

In order to delve further into the challenges faced when attempting to create and/or archive representations of performance, it is necessary to reconsider our starting premise that performance is defined by its disappearance. Diana Taylor draws a distinction between deliberately constructed material representations – such as paper programmes and photographs – that she terms the *archive*, and the immaterial experiences, memories, and invisible imprints on minds, bodies and spaces, that she terms the *repertoire*¹⁵. If we consider embodied knowledge and the development of performers' signature practices, each instantiation of a performance can itself be thought of as simply one part of an ongoing creative process that is constantly feeding back into itself. The identification of immaterial traces that are in a constant state of re-enactment counters the notion that performance disappears, and problematises our strategies for archiving performance. Archives tend to focus on a single end product, yet performances are constantly in a state of becoming and have no definable end – even the final performance cannot stand in for all of the others. The archive consequently enforces a false sense of completeness on a performance event that is part of a much wider work. When we talk about preserving the *repertoire*, we tend to impose upon it the language and strategies of the archive with its notion of the immutable and objective record. Immaterial signifiers tend to be transformed into more easily managed objects by, for example, making a video recording of a storyteller. The performance itself is not captured, the recording of it becomes as Phelan states "something other than performance"¹⁶ and as such these are not acts of representation but of transformation. The challenge is not to attempt to separate individual instantiations of a performance from the process of their creation¹⁷, or turn the immaterial into a digital archival object which is by its very nature unrepresentative, but to recognise the value of each form, potentially bringing the archive and the repertoire together to communicate meaning.

If we consider records in their broadest sense to include these immaterial traces we realise the archive is infinite and that only a fraction of the material that provides evidence of the past can ever be housed within the traditional confines of the archive. Enduring material has traditionally been given more academic authority than the ephemeral or repertoire. One possible reason for this dominance is that archival

representations separate the source of knowledge from the reader whereas the repertoire requires presence (an audience) for the transmission of meaning and is therefore perceived as inaccessible and subjective. The archive and repertoire each exceed the limitations of the other; by bringing them together and allowing them to work in tandem we can realise the full value of each.

Conclusion

Given the challenges apparent in creating archives of performance data and finding ways to unlock the value in intangible or experiential knowledge, how can those in charge of curating representations of performance limit misrepresentation when delivering content to future users? The first step is to acknowledge and make explicit that performance does not fit literary or traditional archival models, and that each single representation or record incorporates both losses and additions to the passed event. Expert performers and documenters are still wrestling with solutions. Through research and discussions undertaken by AHDS Performing Arts we believe that it is crucially important for future curators of performance data to multiply rather than close down the points of access to performances and creative processes by creating and curating records of different kinds (including those relevant to the repertoire as well as the archive)¹⁸ and by making documentation and appraisal decisions as transparent as possible.

Digital performing arts data is particularly crucial to researchers and practitioners as there exists no "original" to refer back to. However, as this data offers many different perspectives onto a performance and its context, and tends to be highly varied (producing lots of different files) and extremely complex (often resulting in very large files and/or the need for complex applications to handle the data), they are particularly challenging to curate in terms of file size and complexity. Furthermore, in order to curate data of lasting value to performing arts communities into the future, it is necessary to have a very sound theoretical understanding of how digital data represents the performing arts from which it was produced, and how these data can be created, curated, and used for maximum value in the years to come.

¹⁵ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, 2005.

¹⁶ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: the politics of performance*, op. cit., p. 146.

¹⁷ Cf. J. Freeman, *Tracing the Footprints: Documenting the Process of Performance*, Maryland, University Press of America, 2003.

¹⁸ For example oral history collections create archival objects from subjective re-performances, other recent work engages with creating "evolving archives" (such as the Live Archives wiki: <http://www.livearchives.org/>) or re-enactments based on archival and repertoire materials (for example the Performing the Archive project: <http://project.arnolfini.org.uk/?t=3&st=2>). Communities of practice and research networks could also be considered to be "curating" repertoire.

Résumé

Définir la nature des représentations est à la base même de toutes les difficultés concernant leur présentation. Les données numériques sur les arts de la scène sont particulièrement importantes pour les chercheurs et les spécialistes, car elles constituent des enregistrements d'un art qui ne bénéficie d'aucun « original » auquel on peut se référer. Cependant, comme ces données présentent plusieurs « visions » différentes d'une représentation et de son contexte, elles sont en général très variées et complexes. Elles présentent aussi un défi en termes de maintenance, particulièrement à cause de la taille des fichiers et de leur complexité. Par ailleurs, afin de maintenir les données ayant une valeur historique future pour les communautés des arts de la scène, il est nécessaire d'avoir une très solide compréhension théorique de la façon dont les données numériques représentent les arts de la scène, de même que de la manière dont elles peuvent être créées, maintenues et utilisées pour en maximiser la valeur pour les années à venir. En s'appuyant sur des recherches menées par l'AHDS Performing Arts – organisme national britannique qui effectue recherches et maintenance de contenu numérique des disciplines des arts de la scène et qui prodigue des conseils à cet égard –, cet article examine la théorie entourant les présentations numériques des représentations et la façon dont elles peuvent être conservées pour en préserver la valeur historique. Il examine les défis que présentent la création et la maintenance de données liées à une forme d'art complexe et éphémère et le besoin d'une expertise spécifique.

2. HÉBERGER LES COLLECTIONS THÉÂTRALES ET LES OUVRIR AU PUBLIC

2. HOUSING PERFORMANCE COLLECTIONS AND OPENING THE DOOR TO THE PUBLIC