

Abstract and Brief Chronicles: Creative and Critical Curation of Performance

Justin B. Hopkins

The un-stated aim of any curatorial endeavour is to produce a situation like no other.

— Claire Doherty, 107

What is performance curation? The website of the recently established Erasmus Mundus Master of Arts in International Performance Research (MAIPR) proposes:

Taken from visual arts practice, curation refers to a range of activities including management, design and documentation of exhibits, performances, or other formal events. May involve e.g. website design, production documentation, gallery exhibit curation, or performance prospectus.

As a MAIPR graduate, I feel the need both to tighten and expand this useful, practical definition, theoretically unifying the various activities associated with the emerging term under the linked concepts *mediation* and *mediatization*.

Following the usual scholarly course of surveying the field of existing literature proves difficult since almost no literature on performance curation exists. Instead, I use the *Oxford English Dictionary* and a brief overview of the growth of agentic curation in the visual arts to establish my contention that curation is a connective attempt to mediate between art (visual, performing, or otherwise) and its audience. Curation creates not art, but the *experience* of art.

Leaving aside the more managerial aspects of curation (arts administration, education, marketing), I concentrate on the curatorial phenomenon of the *archive*, the recording, storing, and re-playing of performance. In particular, I examine how contemporary, computerized archives mediatize live performance events, specifically performances of Shakespeare's plays. Acknowledging the recent challenge to the empiricism of archive (so-called) science, I urge the engaging of both objective and

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subjective methods of archiving the repertoire. After all, curation, like the art it *mediat(iz)es*, is, by its nature, selective, not comprehensive, and I urge the adoption of an honestly personal approach to the discipline's nascent discourse.

Mediation: bridging the experience of art

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) defines *curating* as the “supervision of a museum, gallery, or the like by a curator; the work of storing and preserving exhibits.” Further, a *curator*, according to the *OED*, is “[o]ne who has the care or charge of a person or thing”; “a manager, overseer, steward” (II.3); “a keeper, custodian” (II.5). The vocabulary reveals a perception of the position as authoritative and protective but lacking the input of creative perspective, which, I will show, is outdated even in the visual arts field, where curators have begun curating in more aesthetically agentic fashion in the last fifty years. But first a glance at the *OED* definition of *mediation* seems worthwhile. Apart from the obvious legal and the less usual ecclesiastical and spiritual meanings (1.a,b,c), *mediation* emerges more generally as “the state or fact of serving as an intermediate agent, a means of action, or a medium of transmission; instrumentality” (2.a). The word's psychological signification stands out as well: “The interposition of stages or processes between stimulus and result, or intention and realization” (2.b). Here we begin to find hints of the degree of agency to which curators—certainly in the visual arts, and, I assert, in the performing arts also—aspire. No longer content merely to “keep” the art, a curator now (ideally) actively enters into the preparation and presentation of art in an “instrumental” way, a key (and often creative) contributor to the journey from the artist's “intention” to the art's “realization.” I will return to the application of the *mediation* terminology to the performing arts. Now, however, I offer an overview of recent visual arts curation.

The latter half of the twentieth century brought a shift—a “turn”—in the position of visual arts curation. In 1975, curator Lawrence Alloway hypothesized: “the profession of curator is in crisis” (221). A time of cultural upheaval in the world at large, the art world proved no exception. Previously assuming what the *OED* might call a “custodial” role, curators were beginning to emerge as a more creative force in their own right. Harald Szeemann, for example, credited as a major figure and force in the shift (himself trained in theatre as well as in visual art), pushed boundaries throughout the 1960s, including notoriously providing the visionary Christo and Jeanne-Claude with their opportunity to wrap the Kunsthalle Bern in 1968. Such elaborate, collaborative gestures demonstrated the spirit of the times, but there were other tensions as well. As the Cold War conflict between capitalism and socialism dragged on, financial concerns, which have never been far from art, seemed poised to overwhelm it. Responding to perceived pressure from the market to subjugate curatorial efforts to commercial constraints, Alloway advocated resisting the “cash-inking” mentality and “maintaining intellectual independence which can be equated with cultural responsibility” (229). By and large, Alloway's hopes appear to have been fulfilled; curators have since gained considerable “intellectual independence” and

agency, with Szeemann being followed by such visionaries as Hans Ulrich-Obrist, contributor to the founding of the European biennial festival *Manifesta*, and Jens Hoffman, co-founder of the American *People's Biennial*. Curator and scholar Paul O'Neill captures the situation neatly: "Indicative of a shift in the primary role of curator is the changing perception of the curator as carer to a curator who has a more creative and active part to play within the production of art itself" (*Turn* 15). Clearly, curators became much more integral to the artistic process.

However, increased involvement came at a cost—the loss of a firm sense of identity in the profession, to the point that O'Neill observes: "even the most fundamental terms are floating signifiers, fluctuating between different meanings" (*Subjects* 13). Embedded in this identity crisis is the contention over just how involved in the artistic process a curator should be. Okwui Enwezor defines his curatorial responsibility as "an interpretive one, as well as performative" (110). But how much should a curator interpret, or impose his or her own perspective into the collection, the exhibition? Is the curator merely a mirror of the art, or is the curator making art? What is his or her rhetorical responsibility? It can hardly be denied that there is at least some presentation of the curator's point of view in the display of an exhibition, but the degree to which he or she may manipulate the art for his or her own purposes—for reasons ranging from significant ideology to simple taste—is a subject of considerable controversy in the current discourse regarding contemporary curation. Curator and scholar Carlos Basualdo summarizes the situation:

One gets the impression, for example, that many critics respond indignantly to any insinuation of subordination of the individual works to an overly complex thematic frame, as if the primary function of these shows were that of freeing the art from its intellectual overdeterminations. In other cases, the absence of theme is perceived as an inexcusable lack. Only rarely is the exhibit structure of the event itself or its frequent extra-artistic ramifications given serious consideration—and this in spite of the fact that quite often these latter are structurally constitutive elements in terms of the explicit goals of their organizers. (41)

Basualdo bemoans the lose-lose scenario: curators are damned if they do, damned if they don't, and the reactionary nature of the criticism prevents a reasonable, responsible response to the issues (aesthetic and politic) at stake.

On the other hand, perhaps the critical indignation is not so outrageous given the yet-recent growth in the potential of the curatorial "gesture." O'Neill recalls the introduction in the 1990s of "[t]he idea of the curator as some type of meta-artist" (*Turn* 22). Critic JJ Charlesworth confirms the trend: "Curators and curatorial practice are now as visible as artists themselves" (91). This (self-)positioning of curators alongside if not *as* artists—themselves makers of art—is a far cry from their former roles, care-taking for art and artists. And the vision of the curator as artist is by no means the only one in the discourse. Curators compare themselves to a plethora of professions: cinematic auteurs, in the tradition of the French New Wave, displaying "thematic consistency of production, a strong creative sensibility in regard to how the director interprets a script, and an apparent artistic development" (Hoffman 138);

literary authors, responsible for “the deployment of different narrative or structural devices” (A. Wilson 195); academic researchers, involved in “investigation, discovery, and critical reflection” and “substantially contributing to knowledge within a particular field” (L. Wells 30 and 31); editors of anthologies, who “work by continually developing and clarifying the relation between the establishment of a theme at an initial and general level” (Rendell 63); psychoanalysts and social organizers (Beech and Hutchinson 56 and 58); cultural ambassadors (Mosquera 136); critics (Liam Gillick, cited in M. Wilson 207); and capitalistic middlemen, “representing and speculating in the interests and needs of producers and consumers and thus regulating the link between the market and everyday life” (Andreason and Larsen 25). This final assertion neatly returns my overview to its starting point with Alloway’s concerns about commercially-centered curatorship, but this circularity is not the reason I highlight Andreason and Larson, who do not, after all, call for economically-motivated curation. Instead, I wish to (re)emphasize the parallel acknowledgement of a pair of key elements in curative identity—agency and mediation: “[a curator] is a performative and exemplary agent, acquiring subjectivity in and by the act of mediation” (Andreason and Larsen 27).

And so I return to my original argument, which, apparently, is not so original in the visual arts field. Curation is mediation. Curators are mediators, and as Gilles Deleuze writes: “Mediators are fundamental. Creation’s all about mediators. Without them, nothing happens” (125 and cited by Andreason and Larson 22). Deleuze and Andreason and Larson stress the necessity of mediation—hence, curation—in the creation process. To echo the *OED*, mediators are the “means of action” (2.a)—they’re how things get done. More voices on the subject are worth hearing here: Hans-Ulrich Obrist, who evokes Felix Feneon’s definition of a curator as a “*passerelle*”, a pedestrian bridge between the artist and the world; and Harald Szeemann, who refers to himself as “*un animateur-négociateur*”, simultaneously animating and negotiating the aesthetic and social dimensions of the art world to create the right mental space or climate for the artwork to flourish (18). These notable curators express themselves explicitly in terms of mediation, of going-between. Curators may or may not be artists themselves, but being, as they are, the “medium of transmission” (*OED* 2.a), they are an essential part of the artistic process. Without the act of mediation, of *connection* they provide, whether literally or figuratively carrying art from the producer to the consumer, whether illuminating or enlivening the work, the art is inaccessible.

Turning now to the performing arts, can I apply the same curatorial concept of mediation? Dance scholar Katie Lawrence provides a link between performing and visual arts:

In *Art in Question*, academic and curator Martin Kemp calls artists and curators “stagers of visual events” The words “stager” and “event” imply action, moving visual art towards the condition of performance and, simultaneously, blurring the boundaries between curator and artist and between arts disciplines. (170)

The performativity of visual arts curation acknowledged (see also Bishop), Lawrence proceeds to address the performance world directly:

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Curating is not a term generally applied to dance in Britain; the nearest equivalent might be “programmer” or “producer”. Pauline Johnson, creative producer of music and dance events, understands curating in the visual arts sense of “bringing together a collection”, comparable to bringing together a group of artists for a curated evening of performance. (171)

Between Lawrence, Johnson, and Kemp, then, the interpenetration of the two worlds in the one word is established. Perhaps it is not unreasonable to think that what goes for one goes for both.

Here is the crux of the matter: whatever else he or she does, the basic responsibility of the curator is the creation not (necessarily) of art, but of an *experience* of art. A curator seeks to create a unique experience, as noted by Clémentine Deliss: “Exhibitions [and, I suggest, performance events] are ambivalent spaces whose ability to evoke passionate subjective responses is intimately connected to the way in which they transmit the potency of the experiential to the viewer or participant” (87). Reading Deliss through the *OED*’s definition of “mediation”: the “transmission” of the subject from “intention”/“stimulation” (“artwork”) to “realization”/“result” (“response”) is the task of curation; the curator connects the “multiplicity of bodies” in “a matrix of overlapping positions” (Lawrence 172) to create the potent experience desired. Whether more or less interpretively or rhetorically, the curator provides essential access, making art available to experience.

Mediatization: subjectivity versus objectivity in the archive

Having established the theoretical grounding of performance curation in experiential mediation, I wish to introduce the concept of *mediatization* to the mix. Perhaps not too surprisingly, the *OED* observes an obscure equation between the verbs *mediatize* and *mediate* (2); however, “[m]ore generally”, the former refers to a reduction “in power or effect by interposing a mediating agent” and, recently, an attempt “to render subject to interpretation or exploitation by the mass media” (1.b). The act of mediatization appears automatically to detract from its subject. As before, I will engage more thoroughly the *OED*’s definition. But before proceeding, since I intend to explore how performance records mediatize the experience of live performance events in that curatorial space known as the archive, I must situate my attitude towards that phenomenon of the archive.

Like visual arts curation, the archive is experiencing postmodern challenge and change. Drawing on Derridean and Foucaultian criticism, Helen Freshwater seeks to undermine the authority of the archive, conveyed in part by the Benjaminian authenticating aura of original objects and documents it contains (732-733). Indeed, she questions “the very promise of the archive itself: the myth of the fixed historical record” and insists:

Once removed from the world of recitation—enunciation—the voices of the past preserved in the archive will be mediated by the decisions of a series of archivists,

experts, and academics. These “curators” control which voices are given the opportunity to speak again to a wider audience. (734)

Thus, when we read (or, more likely, are read to) from the archive, we receive a subjective (his-or-her)story, not the objective account revered by proponents of archival so-called science. Peter Holland supports Freshwater’s viewpoint:

The retentiveness of our holding on to the object for its evidentiary status is a sign of the continuing positivistic bias underpinning our analytics. Our annals become truthful because we fail to record the provisionality of their analysis, their always untrue a(n)ality. We are, in short, often embarrassingly poor historians and worse archivists, trusting the materiality of our evidence as if its historiography, its status as a writing of history, does not need questioning. But it does. (*Lost* 13)

“Provisionality” and the punny “a(n)ality” substitute for “subjectivity,” but the message is still the same—according to Holland and Freshwater, the myth of the immutable archive needs debunking. So, what remains when the man (or woman) behind the curatorial curtain is exposed?

Freshwater follows the line of the deconstructionists so far as to observe that if the author is indeed dead, the authors “who contributed to the archive are more dead than most” (738). She shies away from the morbid magnitude of this conclusion, however, later: “We have replaced the archive’s traditional legitimacy with a site of conflicted signification. But this need not lead toward the fatalistic conception that there are no facts, only interpretations” (751). Rather, what is required for a “revalorization of the archive” is a radical “redefinition” which acknowledges the unavoidable impact upon the facts by the interpretations (751). Furthermore, Freshwater asserts:

Any redefinition of the archive must attend to the singularity of performance as a medium. Such a redefinition would need to address the theater’s realization as a corporeal art, its development through processes of devising and improvisation, and modern performance’s increasing disassociation from textuality. (754)

While I cautiously accept Freshwater’s admonition against treating the archive as an absolute authority, it is this observation of performance’s “time-based nature” and her corresponding lament that “[n]o amount of video, documentary recording, or personal testimony can capture the ephemerality” (754) that informs my immediate perspective. The tension she observes between subjective and objective records lies at the heart of any discussion of mediatization.

It is a tension also observed by Kate Dorney, who, in her defense of the archive (and archivists) against Freshwater’s “certain hostility” (20), presents the multi-faceted potentialities of the archive. Acknowledging the inherent subjectivity of approaching the archive, she nonetheless affirms the opportunity for valuable intellectual discovery in this “space for a quest to pursue ideas and narratives, for speculation, contemplation and, occasionally, reward” (22). Those opportunities are perhaps especially significant in the field of performance, according to Dorney, precisely *because* of its ephemeral nature:

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Because each performance is different, it's always (even when it's most "complete": a broadcast-quality video recording for example) deprived of both its original live context and the responses of the audience for whom the performance was being given. Given that the event itself is gone, never to be reproduced, it's little wonder then that theater historians like to return to what *can* be captured of the event, to the chronicles, to the archives, to the basic repertoire data: to the idea that something happened at a particular place on a particular date and with these people. (22)

Thus, the value of an effective performance archive could correspond in inverse proportion to the degree of difficulty of achieving such efficacy. Any objective record of performance is invaluable, given the extreme subjectivity of its usual impact, confined to memory.

Objectivity and subjectivity exist in tension, then, as do comprehensiveness and selectivity, and the archive and memory. Dorney (35) shares with Freshwater (742) an appreciation for Carolyn Steedman's refutation of Derrida's equation of the archive with memory:

The Archive is not potentially made up of *everything*, as is human memory.... The Archive is made from selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past and also from the mad fragmentations that no one intended to preserve.... And *nothing happens to this stuff, in the Archive*. It is indexed, and catalogued, and some of it is lost. But as stuff, it just sits there until it is read, and used, and narrativised. (68)

Memory and the archive share similar functions, but the latter lacks a built-in curatorial coordinator. Like memories, the traces of performance are limited and, like visual art, remain inert until animated, narrativised, mediated, mediatized. And, naturally, that animation, narration, *mediat(izat)ion* will carry a degree of interpretation (OED 1.b). If Freshwater would agree that mediat(izat)ion is a "reduction," an "exploitation" (OED 1.b), Dorney resists what Freshwater might celebrate: "the idea of primarily being a facilitator of access to material... a new model of curatorship, and one that is closer to the traditional role of the librarian or archivist" (26). Taking a step back, both must admit at least that the mediat(izat)ion of the performance event found in any archive is *different* from the event itself. But just how different?

Very different, according to Diana Taylor, who explores the tensions between the archive and the repertoire. The archive, she argues, consists of "enduring materials" such as "documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archaeological remains, bones, videos, films, CDs, all those items supposedly resistant to change," while the repertoire "enacts embodied memory: performance, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing—in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge" (20). Tellingly, Taylor distances herself from the world-wide-web in her model:

Now on the brink of a digital revolution that both utilizes and threatens to displace writing, the body again seems poised to disappear in a virtual space that eludes embodiment. ... Without ignoring the pressures to rethink writing and embodiment from the vantage point of the epistemic changes brought on by digital technologies, I

will focus my analysis here on some of the methodological implications of revalorizing expressive, embodied culture. (16)

Taylor's "revalorizing" of the repertoire—echoing, in indirect inversion, Freshwater's "revalorization of the archive" (751)—is impressive, but belaboured. W.B. Worthen challenges what he calls the "weary dichotomy," the binary between archive and repertoire (*Bones* 11). Taylor herself acknowledges: "[t]he telling is as important as the writing, the doing as central as the recording" (35). While she intends her rhetoric to "revalorize" the repertoire, it just as tidily reinforces the archive, since, by implication, the writing must also be as important as the telling and the recording as central as the doing.

However, rather than hierarchize, or equalize, why not synthesize? Earlier even than Taylor segregated the archive and repertoire, Rebecca Schneider wondered:

If we consider performance as "of" disappearance, if we think of ephemerality as "vanishing", and if we think of performance as the antithesis of "saving", do we limit ourselves to an understanding of performance predetermined by a cultural habituation to the patrilineal, West-identified (arguably white-cultural) logic of the Archive? (100)

Schneider, like Worthen, wishes to complicate the relationship between the archive (fixed text) and the repertoire (fluid performance), concluding "[t]he archive itself becomes a social *performance* of retroaction.... We are reading, then, the document as performative act, and as site [cite?] of performance" (105). I wish to complicate it still further. While I do not deny the fundamental difference between the two—siding with Peggy Phelan (*Unmarked*) against Philip Auslander (*Liveness*) in their ontological squaring—I wish to demonstrate the fallibility of the reductionist perspective on the archive seemingly supported by Taylor, Freshwater, and the *OED*. I develop my contention in the connected curatorial concepts of mediation and mediatization in this essay and in my experimental, electronic exhibition, which I locate somewhere between the book and the body. This exhibition is not merely a record on a page, and it is certainly not a performance on a stage. Instead, it unites the two, combining elements of the enduring and the ephemeral, the objective and the subjective, in its experiential, cyberspatial, hypertextual re-presentation of live performance. Indeed, it is an archive inextricably linked with the repertoire it re-produces, a *toire-chive*, if I may coin a term.

Mediat(izat)ion: building a live toire-chive

Now, how to mediat(iz)e performance in a toire-chive? First, I must specify the kind of performance under scrutiny. I focus on dramatic performance, with a nod towards dance. Other forms present their own problems. Music, for example, has long been subject to mediatization, but I lack the space and the expertise to deal thoroughly with the issues attendant on its presentation and re-presentation. Instead, given my own background, I will focus on the theatre, particularly on performances of Shakespeare's

plays. Peter Holland notes how digital technology has revolutionized theatrical archiving: “the digital age redefines the activities of recording, recovering and remembering” (*Memory* 16). For all the potential benefits of that redefinition, Holland recognizes the distracting downside as well: “theatre has become enmired in the possibilities of its own uses of recording, of constructing a particular kind of memory of Shakespeare... through the engagement with the apparatus of media record” (*Memory* 17). Similarly complaining of dilution, Alan Galey contemplates what he clearly considers a bit of a mess: “we could say that [mediat(iz)ed Shakespeare] projects focus on noise, not just message. These projects treat Shakespeare’s texts not as signals from the past to be purged of interference, but as bearers of impressions made by *non*authorial agents (collaborators, players, audiences, readers, editors)” (312, emphasis mine). With respect to Galey, surely *other*-authorial would be a more appropriate appellation, especially given the extremely collaborative nature of drama. But his point is not wholly invalid. Apparently, an (over?)abundance of options has uncomfortably complicated choice.

Indeed, with great possibility tends to come great controversy, and the debate about how to record performance is not new. All acknowledge that nothing is quite like the real thing. Some maintain simply writing about the event in an honestly subjective, selective report is as good as it gets. Stanley Wells, for example, advocates the advantage of the written response:

For all the limitations of literary responses to performance, at least they record the impression created, if only on one individual, at the time the performance was given. Performance is not an objective phenomenon. It reaches out to an audience and is incomplete without the audience’s reactions.... If we are interested purely and simply in the external appurtenances of the theatrical event, then mechanical recording media may satisfy our needs. But if we want to know how it felt to be there, what it was like to be in the presence of Kean or Irving, Olivier or Edith Evans, the contribution made by the written word—assisted maybe by the visual artist—is indispensable. (xx)

Wells would suit the archive to the medium: performance does not pretend objectivity, so neither should its record. Some demur, preferring the supposed objectivity and comprehensiveness of the audio-visual film. Steve Dixon opposes Wells’ opinion:

While acknowledging the limitations and distortions of the medium, we must also recognize that well-conceived video recordings document live performances more reliably than written documentation which, however detailed, can only ever provide a description. By incorporating photographic documentation within a text, we can certainly receive a clearer visual sense of a performance and its *mise-en-scène*, but it is not until we progress to moving pictures (through video, film, or digital media) that we can really get a sense of “how it was.” (*Digits* 156)

It is important to note that neither Wells nor Dixon discount the usefulness of the other’s favoured medium. Far from being stuck in his literary roots, Wells, among others, pioneered many current performance studies practices; his stated prioritization

of textual record does not discount his labours introducing and integrating a wide variety of documentary materials into the archives (Shewring). For his part, Dixon seems to take for granted the presence of a textual record of some kind, but both his and Wells' preferences are strongly expressed.

Sarah Bay-Cheng seemingly backs Dixon, asserting that though “[f]ormally, the recording of performance is always a distortion of the live event, radically reorganizing space, composition, and time,” still “the viewing of the event itself, even through the mediating gaze of a camera lens projected on a screen, may seem preferable—more immediate even—than the written record” (40). However, Bay-Cheng further believes: “the best way to interpret mediated theatre as historical documentation is to make visible—whether or not they are clearly defined in the recording itself—the gaps and distortions made by the moving screen images to the live performance” (40). Hence an awareness of the difference of media of stage and screen is highlighted. Interestingly, Bay-Cheng’s insistence on emphasizing “the gaps and distortions” in mediat(iz)ed performance parallel Dixon’s preference for the inset, grainy CD-ROM video files to the full-screen, high-definition of DVD, since the double-framing (evocative of a proscenium stage) and the lower quality of the former are actually, in comparison to the cinematic latter, “powerful, evanescent, and inherently theatrical” (Dixon *Digital* 642). For both Bay-Cheng and Dixon, then, it is critical to retain a sense of detachment between the stage and screen experience, even while depending on the joining of the two for the benefit of the archive.

Apart from the argument over whether to film or not to film, Barbara Hodgdon contributes to the discussion of performance mediat(izat)ion in two essays dealing with whether or not to photograph. The theatre still photograph, she claims, “distils and intensifies, elicits inner speech even as it speaks for its odd or interesting self” (*Photography* 91). It is its own entity, yes, but still the still signifies a moment, a memory of great potency: “Because the photograph preserves a moment of performance time and prevents it being effaced by the supersession of further moment, photographs can be compared to images stored in memory” (*Shopping* 139). There is a risk, of course, of treating the photograph as purely cosmetic, “merely a visual footnote to narrative” (*Photography* 96); however, Hodgdon protests that prudent use proves worthwhile: “the meanings of the still make an inchoate connection to the text but also perform alongside it” (*Photography* 92). For Hodgdon, as for Stanley Wells, the text (performance *and* response) remains central, the image a powerful complement (when appropriately handled). Creating a tripartite mini-toire-chive incorporating object, image, and text, Hodgdon assembles what could be considered a paragon of performance curation:

Juxtaposing hangered doublet and gown, haunted by the absent body, to an Angus McBean photograph of [Richard] Burton [as Henry V] (figure 6) effects a curious oscillation between garment and black-and-white still in which the costume’s colours bleed over, tinting, toning, re-animating the photograph. Moreover, the still itself invites another memory, a review-as-caption: wrote Kenneth Tynan, “Burton is a still

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brimming pool, running disturbingly deep; at twenty-five he commands repose and can make silence garrulous.” (*Shopping* 143)

This combination of multiple media of memory supports my own curatorial contention in choosing between image—moving or still, silent or sounding—and text: surely some combination of both is best.

There are precedents for my perspective and my project, from the CD-ROMs of the late 1990s to the websites of the last decade. Among other examples, Steve Dixon offers his own CD, *Chameleons 2*, as “a comprehensive template for the documentation and analysis of performance using digital multimedia” (“Digits” 153). Dixon presents the myriad potentials of the multimedia realized in *Chameleons 2*:

Within a multimedia program, one is able to document and cross-reference a vast amount of data and then retrieve specific items within seconds. “Multimedia” also amalgamates and connects documentation in multiple formats—text, photographs, video, audio, artwork. In archiving a performance, there is thus the flexibility to input a whole range of material. (“Digits” 156)

Here we witness that marriage of many media, coexisting within a framework promoting easy accessibility. Dixon also praises Christie Carson’s CD of *King Lear*, released at roughly the same time as *Chameleons 2* (*Digital* 626). Carson’s own account of her efforts with *Lear* resemble Dixon’s discussion of *Chameleons* in their shared motivation to “give wider and certainly more leisurely access to the wealth of...material... collected within a specific framework of enquiry” (Carson *Creating* 435). Access—making as much available as easily as possible—seems a goal for both Carson and Dixon, and it remains a key curatorial concept for keepers and presenters of toire-chives as well as more traditional exhibitions.

Yet selectivity clashes with comprehensiveness in the attempt to provide access. In one crucial difference between their separate attempts, Dixon enthuses about his use of film (“Digits” 156), whereas Carson refuses to include “sound or moving images” (*Creating* 437) in her CD:

This is partly a result of copyright and budgetary restrictions, but there are also two underlying philosophical reasons for this decision. First, I did not want to prioritize any particular interpretations of the play. The authority given to the one or two sound or video recordings I would have been able to include would have surely undermined the breadth of the other performance material made available. Second, I did not want to give the impression that film and television adaptations could be seen as representative of what has taken place on stage over time. (*Creating* 437)

Understandable practicalities aside, Carson’s conceptual balk at technological reproduction of performance contrasts with, if not contradicts, her subsequent enthusiastic appraisal of the “digital technology allow[ing] for the storage, preservation and distribution of time-based archival material which can be invaluable” (*Creating* 437). Carson’s concern for an equal playing field in her archive is admirable, but does not democratic idealism merely disallow access to those invaluable time-based materials, aural and video recordings? Does her desire to avoid too closely

connecting screen and stage performance reflect Stanley Wells' reluctance to cede superiority of the written word as performance record? And in her closing remarks—reminding her readers that “access to information is not the same as access to understanding” and advocating “the use of carefully defined and constructed tools... rather than a reliance on simple access to information on the internet” (*Creating* 441)—is there a clue to her reservation about technology? Perhaps Carson and Wells share a prioritization of subjective authorial perspective in the presentation of performance record over the supposedly more objective, yet somehow falsier and certainly flatter point-of-view indicated by the visual/sonic capture. Again, I urge a pragmatic recognition of personal, selective, subjective preference against dogmatic debate over achieving comprehensive objectivity.

As Dixon notes, CD-ROMs enjoyed only a short shelf-life before being relegated to obsolescence (*Digital* 623). Since its inception, however, the Internet's tides of information-flow show no signs of ebbing. Already at the time Dixon created *Chameleons 2*, there were attempts to harness the power of the world-wide-web for purposes of performance curation. Scott Cummings relates the efforts of the Shakespeare Interactive Research Group—led by scholars Larry Freidlander, Janet Murray, and Peter Donaldson—in creating the *Shakespeare Electronic Archive (SEA)*, “a new kind of learning and research environment, one that provides instantaneous and flexible modes of access to an array of previously dispersed verbal and visual information” (94). Undoubtedly a proto-typical toire-chive, the *SEA* would include full texts of all of Shakespeare's plays, with in-text links to quarto and folio facsimiles, images, video-recordings, playbills and promptbooks (95-98). Writing in 1998, shortly before the *SEA*'s (limited) release, Cummings calls the *SEA* “the cornerstone of a virtual Shakespearean ‘docuverse’ that, mindboggling as it is to imagine, could contain everything in every medium about every play” (98). This enormous ambition, though as yet unfulfilled, is not unwarranted. Theoretically, the potential for such comprehensiveness exists. Technological limitation no longer precludes the possibility. Rather, resource limitation, particularly in the area of negotiating permission to publish copyrighted material, has hindered the range of selectivity since hampering Friedlander's first experiments in the field (Cummings 93). The protection afforded performance by intellectual property law presents a serious obstacle to toire-chive development, as I will later relate in more detail.

Copyright can kill a performance archive before it's even born, but it need not. In their 2009 account of developing the *Canadian Adaptations of Shakespeare Project (CASP)*, Daniel Fischlin, Dorothy Hadfield, and Gordon Lester share the bumps and triumphs in preparing *CASP* with a view to support other “large-scale, IT-based projects related to Shakespeare” (77). Alongside the technological challenges encountered, Fischlin and company comment on copyright as a “crucial issue” (97), though they are pleased to report success in one case, not only acquiring permission to publish material from Rhombus Media's popular mini-series *Slings and Arrows*, but in collaborating further than expected and hoped with Acorn Media, the show's DVD

distributor (97-98). Such a happy partnership may be the exception rather than the norm, but it evidences the enormous opportunities for exploitation.

Ultimately, copyright cooperation must come from the institutions of performance production, since they (usually) own the work they do, as well as (often) the official record. And how available is that record to the general public? In an effort to assess current curatorial practices, I explored the websites of six major theatre companies in three countries, each with a history of staging Shakespeare: in England, the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Royal National Theatre, and Shakespeare's Globe; The Old Globe in San Diego, California; Washington, D.C.'s Shakespeare Theatre Company; and Ontario's Stratford Shakespeare Festival. What criteria can I apply to this broad range of curatorial programming? In 2006, Christie Carson conducted an analysis of online archival projects undertaken by the first three companies in this list. She concluded that each was making strides in the documentation of performance (*Technology* 182), but that the state-subsidized RSC's *Exploring Shakespeare* and National Theatre's *Stagework* perpetuated a passive model of information consumption (184-88), whereas the self-supported Globe's "Adopt an Actor" ("AaA") represented an ideal of interactivity (189-90). I admire Carson's study, but I take issue with her precise definition of online interactivity. While "AaA"—in which schoolchildren correspond with a Globe actor—may be *more* interactive than browsing photographs, downloading a video, or reading a review or interview (all of which can be done on the RSC's and National's sites), surely the latter activities are interactive to a greater degree than simply booking a ticket? I suggest that interactivity is more usefully judged on a positive spectrum than negatively and absolutely, and interactivity is the curatorial criterion with which I evaluate my selection of sites. More specifically, beyond the standard sales information included in any commercial cyberspace, I analyse what kind of archival (i.e., documentary/interpretive) materials mediat(iz)e performances past and present; how accessible are these materials to a visitor; and what kind of curatorial perspective (e.g., subjective/selective or objective/comprehensive) is communicated.

Exploring Shakespeare, *Stagework*, and "Adopt an Actor" all still exist and have expanded. Six more years of actors have been (and are being) adopted at the Globe; the experimental *Exploring* of 2006 is now separate from the main RSC site, linked under an entire "Explore" section; and more companies have joined the National's similarly separated *Stagework*—the link posted under its "Discover" department. Prominently featured, each of these companies offer fairly comprehensive contextualization of current productions: plot synopses, cast and crew lists (the National neatly provides full actor bios, with headshots), reviews, photos, and—in the case of the RSC and National—videos. The RSC's "past productions" performance history is easy to "Explore" and contains comparable documentation to the current season, but the list is limited to fewer than a dozen plays—not even half the canon. In addition to *Stagework*, the NT's online Archive houses abundant reference text and images to "Discover." The (younger, un-subsidized) Globe, likely lacking the funds for quite such extensive development, has nevertheless obviously invested heavily and

especially in its “Education Online” where one can find the popular “AaA” scheme and the complete history of Globe shows, listed alphabetically by title. A noteworthy recent addition provides a forum for visitors to comment on the plays. This emphasis on audience involvement supports Carson’s claims, and it also serves as the only example of external, personal perspective on performance in any of these three sites, apart from the professional reviews quoted and/or linked.

Across the Atlantic, the other, Old Globe, in San Diego matches its London counterpart in terms of current production representation: plot summary, artist bios, production photos, and articles are available; coincidentally (?) like the London Globe, no video. Production video is offered by the D.C. Shakespeare Theatre Company (STC); likewise “Sounds & Images” by Ontario’s Stratford Shakespeare Festival, including, alongside production video, behind-the-scenes webisodes, and audience talkbacks. The commercial use-value of these contextualizing media should be noted; when it comes to “Production History” Ontario’s online offerings are much slimmer: no more than the titles of plays listed by season, with the names and dates of Artistic Directors of the Festival. Only the first two Festival productions—founder Tyrone Guthrie’s 1953 *Richard III* and *All’s Well That Ends Well*, both starring Alec Guinness and Irene Worth—are worthily detailed and encourage further consultation. Why not follow suit with “Season snippets” (e.g., José Ferrer was in attendance, honeymooning with Rosemary Clooney) for the rest of Stratford’s half-century? Surely it’s a matter merely of keeping alive and online the material supporting, say, the 2010 *As You Like It*—no major drain on resources? The D.C. STC does just this. Similar to Stratford, the STC’s archive is accessed through its “About Us” section, but instead of a simple list, nearly all of its “Past Productions” are linked to further archive information. Browsers can, for example, compare Paul Giovanni’s 1987 *Love’s Labor’s Lost* to Michael Kahn’s of twenty years later by perusing the artistic team (noticing, perhaps, that actors Floyd King, Ted Van Griethuysen, and Emery Battis all appeared in both), viewing photo galleries, and reading dramaturgy notes. It seems an obvious advantage over the barrenness of Ontario’s site, but perhaps Stratford’s is a strategic oversight: if online researchers remain unsatisfied, are they compelled to pay a visit in person, thereby benefiting the Festival economy? Or is it possible I just missed something, didn’t dig hard enough to find a crucial link, and am indicting Ontario unfairly?

Whatever the reasons for whatever the degree of interactivity in any individual institution’s web-site, it is plain that the Internet plays a bigger and bigger part in theatre’s curatorial self-representation. W.B. Worthen, surveying the cyber-field in 2002, predicts an increasing interweaving of live performance and its online manifestation:

Insofar as hypertext situates the Shakespearean text as open, a permeable border with other writing and imagery, it invites a similar kind of literacy [to performance].... it is both penetrated and constituted by other discourses... visual as well as typographic, diffused/disseminated/rhizomatic/networked as well as linear. In this highly provisional sense... it’s possible to see hyper-Shakespeare not as the end of drama, but as a new beginning. (*Hyper-Shakespeare* 19)

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Worthen was right. From the *SEA* to *CASP* to toire-chival initiatives such as the CAPITAL Centre's *Re-Performing Performance*, a "Live Archive," performance moves more and more online. As one watches clips of Footsbarn Theatre's playing of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Shakespeare's Globe, perhaps dipping into the wealth of contextualizing material available on the CAPITAL site, it would be hard to deny that the lines Worthen blurs are fading fast.

In keeping with my earlier use of dance scholar Katie Lawrence to connect visual and performing arts curation, I conclude my discussion of online curation with a website dedicated to the work of dancer, choreographer, and company-leader Siobhan Davies. In 2008, scholar Sarah Whatley described the then-soon-to-be uploaded *Siobhan Davies Dance Online (SDDO)*: "the archive will include digitised film material, photographic images, a wide variety of other artefacts, text-based materials (programmes, reviews, scholarly articles) as well as new materials created especially for the archive" (251). Now live, the *SDDO* is a testament to its creators' wish to build "an attractive and accessible archive, providing multiple entry points, allowing for multiple readings and interpretations" (Whatley 254). Seeming to serve each of the purposes set out by Steve Dixon for CD-ROMS (*Digital 625*), the web-site is educational, documentary, analytical, and performative in its own right.

I applaud Whatley and her team for their fine work in furthering the development of toire-chives, and I encourage others to follow in their footsteps, but with one substantive difference. Like many of its predecessors and contemporaries, the *SDDO* offers a wealth of perspectives, but no single subjective position can be discerned. No clear curatorial voice, if you will, can be heard. The absence is, no doubt, deliberate, an attempt at archival objectivity, and perhaps it is not inappropriate. A personal, anecdotal perspective on production record may be at odds with the preference of strict historians. Too much personality, subjectivity—not enough empiric objectivity, they may complain. Perhaps. But as Thomas Postlewait observes, the dynamic between anecdotal and empirical evidence is tense and complex, a relationship not easily negotiated. Getting it right isn't easy. Robert Shaughnessy eloquently expresses the difficulty of theatre response even when responding in the very moment of perception:

[A]ll the time I write, I am temporally dislocated, out of phase with the onstage action: torn between the desire to watch and the obligation, or compulsion, to write, I can only annotate what has just happened; I cannot fully attend to what is happening now. (*One Piece* 19)

As he mediat(iz)es the event, Shaughnessy experiences the constant tension between witnessing and recording.

I empathize, and the challenge of performance curation is problematized by the simultaneous benefit and drawback of distance from the experience. Performance curators handle not a comparatively stable and im-mediate art (a painting, a sculpture, even an installation), but an already mediat(iz)ed art, a memory of an experience of art. Echoing Steedman and Schneider, Shaughnessy complains:

[M]y own storehouse of memories is an archive without a catalogue, seemingly unprepared to differentiate between the profound, the trivial, the incidental and the utterly irrelevant. What is remembered, initially, is not necessarily what is memorable or important. (*One Piece* 16-17)

I sympathize, but I suggest that innovative curation can provide the catalogue to the archive of memory. Conscious selectivity and subjectivity, avoiding the pitfalls of pretended objective comprehensiveness through deliberate mediat(iza)tion, re-creates the experience of the performance. Curation can and does make what is memorable remembered.

Instead of perpetuating a position-less paradigm, I propose a *toire-chive* which is unabashedly personal. In so doing, I do not reject the invaluable qualities of the recorded image or sound, but I do embrace Stanley Wells' evocation of the "impression" of the theatrical event on the individual, and I hope to achieve his goal in sharing "how it felt to be there" (xx). Indeed, between reading, viewing, listening, imagining, I suggest the effect could be close to Tom Stoppard's description of the power of dramatic criticism, expressed in the foreword to the theatre writings of Kenneth Tynan: "the next best thing to having been there" (xv). The critic is responsible for sharing the experience of the performance; so is the curator.

My own *toire-chive*, a chronicle of the Royal Shakespeare Company's historic Complete Works Festival, attempts to re-create the experience of "having been there" by balancing my subjective, selective, personal perspective with more objective, comprehensive documentation. I followed the Festival in Stratford-upon-Avon between Aprils 2006 and 2007 and wrote responses to each of the over 50 productions of Shakespeare's entire canon. My *toire-chive* combines those responses with other texts, links, sounds and images (still and moving) in a heavily mediat(iz)ed exhibition. This annotated gallery, or animated article, is guided by the curatorial question of whether or not the Festival achieved what its conceivers—Michael Boyd, RSC Artistic Director and Deborah Shaw, Festival Director—claimed: a major shift in the RSC's working practice in the areas of international collaboration, spatial transformation, new work, and ensemble playing (Boyd and Shaw, *Yearbook*). I contend that the RSC did indeed expose and commit itself to many new ideas, but, nevertheless, did not abandon its previous best bet for success—traditional, solid stagings of and with big names and titles. Each entry in the exhibition engages the central curatorial question and attempts to answer or at least address some facet of it.

Though intended for online release, unfortunately, my *toire-chive* must remain on its cyber-shelf, due to the complexities of copyright law. As mentioned above, copyright often interferes with *toire-chive* development, and, sadly, such is my case. While the principle of academic and critical fair use allows considerable leeway in the reproduction of copyrighted material, the volume of material my *toire-chive* requires disallows its publication. And maybe not un-rightly so. I sincerely respect artists' rights and responsibilities to protect and profit from their own intellectual property, and though it seems a shame to bury potential for further discourse, I would not and will not violate rules providing that protection and profit. Still, I have managed to

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adapt what was originally an appendix to this essay into its own mini-toire-chive, and I offer that in “An Anecdote From the Archive.”¹ This small sample examines the RSC’s *King Lear* within the context of an incident occurring during my research.

I asked whether a curator was a mirror or a maker of art. Contrary to some points of view, I do believe that the role of the artist and the curator are separate. The curator is not responsible for the art, the performance. But as the curator mirrors the performance, his or her own image is bound to enter, to affect the reflection. Mediation is not an external, but an involved act—without that involvement, the acquisition and investment of a personal perspective, how can a curator hope to create that unique experience of art? Hamlet warns Polonius about abusing the players, whom he calls the “abstract and brief chronicles of the time: after your death, you were better have a bad epitaph than their ill report while you live” (2.2.503-506). Such is the power of performance, the impact of art, but not without the curation that connects it with the world.



¹ “An Anecdote From the Archive” is a companion piece to this essay, published online in the same issue of *Liminalities*. See <http://liminalities.net/8-1/anecdote.htm>.

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