

Performance and Ethnography

Performance and Ethnography:
Dance, Drama, Music

Edited by

Peter Harrop and Dunja Njaradi

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

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This book first published 2013

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-4761-5, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-4761-2

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION BY WAY OF LONG ETHNOGRAPHY

PETER HARROP

Introduction

The chapters of this book were first presented as papers in July 2012 at *Traditional Performance— Contemporary Ethnography* at the University of Chester.¹ Most of our conference speakers had a background in performing arts, in dance, drama or music as well as performance studies. Several contributors also have varied and sometimes extended engagements—from different times and different places—with folklore, anthropology and ethnology. As Shannon Jackson points out in *Professing Performance* “scholars continually find themselves rehearsing and revising various kinds of intellectual histories [and] depending upon a prior disciplinary affiliation, some may emphasize certain figures over others.”² Those affiliations, rehearsals, revisions and emphases, viewed through the lenses of ethnographic case study, are a feature of this collection which gathers together ideas, models and reflections within the broader discipline of performance studies. Originating from the performance orientation in folklore studies as well as Richard Schechner’s now canonical collaboration with Victor Turner, performance studies “practice” brings together theatre and anthropology, privileging ethnography over spectatorship and process over product. The idea of “embodied ethnography” is never far away in

¹ The conference was convened by Peter Harrop and Dunja Njaradi with the support of the Performing Arts Department and Faculty of Arts and Media. A particular thanks to Professor Darren Sproston, Head of Performing Arts and Robin Gallie of the University Conference Office. The editors are particularly grateful to Shelley Hanvey for her assistance and familiarity with *how to geek*.

² Shannon Jackson, *Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 12.

these chapters, often evidencing new orientations and areas of performance research, but for the most part this volume aligns more closely to the ethnography of performance than to performance ethnography as presently conceived. The summer 2012 edition of *Canadian Theatre Review* comprised a special issue on Performance Ethnography which, while adopting more or less the same starting point as our conference, provides a complementary reflection on the possibility of performing the ethnography itself.³ In a 2004 review essay Paul Atkinson remarked of Norman Denzin's *Performance Ethnography: Critical pedagogy and the Politics of Culture* that "There is a terrible danger, it seems to me, of collapsing the social world into one's own lifeworld."⁴ The kinds of ethnographic engagement described in this volume indicate our contributors will have considered that central difficulty in one way or another, acknowledging a tension of essences between the social world and "lifeworld," but there is no unified or polemical sense of position on the matter.

By way of introduction I consider the emergence of the performance orientation in the folkloristics of the 1970's through to current trends in embodied ethnography via a durational approach to English traditions—the Long Ethnography of my title. Njaradi, originally trained as an anthropologist in Eastern Europe, revisits the Schechner/Turner collaboration to suggest new points of contact between performance and anthropology with particular reference to ritual and magic. David explores how the emplaced body can yield deeper levels of understanding and insight through engaged practice on different levels, using several detailed examples from her fieldwork with Hindu dancers in the UK as well as her current fieldwork in Bhutan. Bacon suggests a partly complementary yet partly antagonistic position whereby Performance Studies forms a theoretical space for self and other, for analysis and practice, predicated on her

³ *Canadian Theatre Review* 151, 2012, Performance Ethnography. See particularly Brian Rusted, "Introduction: From Ethnography of Performance to Performance Ethnography," 3-6 and Virginie Magnat, "Can Research Become Ceremony? Performance Ethnography and Indigenous Epistemologies," 30 – 36. The TPQ symposium on Performance Ethnography in *Text and Performance Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (2006) also contains helpful material, particularly John T. Warren, "Introduction: Performance Ethnography," 317-319 and Della Pollock, "Marking New Directions in Performance Ethnography," 325-329.

⁴ Paul Atkinson, "Review Essay, Performing ethnography and the ethnography of performance," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 25, no. 1 (2004): 107-114. Atkinson reviews Norman K. Denzin, *Performance Ethnography: Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Culture* (Thousand Oaks; London; New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003).

research with English Arabic dancers and with spirituality, moving to ask the question “what if I ask those questions of myself?” The final three chapters are more clearly defined case studies. Quigley commences a preliminary anthropology of Performance Studies itself via the ethnography of three Performance Studies international conferences. Power takes a different angle on embodied, situated knowledge, looking at the Scottish smallpipe revival to explore the artisanal production of musical instruments as performance. Power argues that the ideology of an artisanal musical maker is congealed in his instruments and carried forward to the drastic moment of musical performance. Smith takes a historical perspective to examine the commodification of mumming traditions in Newfoundland, Canada, from performative frameworks for sustained systems of localised work relations, into domestic tourist attraction.

Books and Fieldwork

What follows is the communication of a scrapbook, the weaving together of memories and separately acquired ideas, four postcards sent at different times from different places, but all addressing the same three things. Firstly; my response to traditional folkloric performance—the mummer’s play; secondly, the various ideas and bodies of knowledge that the performers and their audiences hold about that tradition; thirdly, the scholarship that seeks to contextualise, record and make sense of that.⁵ The potential for or even appropriateness of the integration of performance, performers, spectators and ethnographer-scholars (and the last three are by no means mutually exclusive) is probably the central issue of this volume. In the original conference call we asked whether it was possible to achieve an embodied, affective and sensory ethnography and whether we are shaped by engagement with ethnographic practice, by the relationship between self, duration, tradition and change. I called my symposium paper Long Ethnography since it charted a forty year engagement with mumming. Although I’ve eventually focussed on one village in the north west of England, and a local variant of mumming known as Soulcaking, my broader and current concern is actually the intersection of site, memory and performance as revealed by ethnography.⁶

⁵ For those unfamiliar with the activity of mumming the following websites provide an introduction and overview as well as considerable local and specific detail: <http://www.mastermummers.org/> and <http://www.folkplay.info/>

⁶ Peter Harrop, “The Antrobus Soulcakiers: A consideration of site, mobility and time as components of traditional performance,” *Contemporary Theatre Review* 22, no. 2 (2012): 267-273.

In re-presenting that work as an introductory chapter for this volume I also consider the extent to which the Victorian idea of survival in culture, the more recent performance orientation in folkloristics and lastly critical theory, continue to haunt the contemporary. The performance orientation certainly had a profound influence on academic folklore during a “long 1960’s,” as well as forming part of the nexus of thought that became Performance Studies. The movement encouraged reflection on fieldwork and method while theorising the importance of the context and performance of folklore, the act of folklore, in determining what folklore might mean. *Survival in culture* on the other hand, is shorthand for an earlier and persistent frame of reference posited by Edward Tylor in *Primitive Culture* in 1871, and exemplified and popularised by James Frazer in his later work *The Golden Bough*.⁷ The basis of Tylor’s argument can be summarised thus: traditional customs and folklore were the survivals of ancient beliefs, rituals and ceremonies which had, until more recently, survived in less fragmented form in those cultures least influenced by European thought. (Hence: The *Ur-form* is always either temporally or culturally distant from *us* as an opaque expression of social Darwinism.) Lastly it has become increasingly difficult to consider folklore *per se* without some acknowledgement of repetition and différance.⁸ A reflective consideration of these various scholarly shifts that have overlapped and influenced my own approaches—hopefully in the spirit of auto-ethnography rather than egocentricity—may be of value in positioning the very different contributions that make up this volume.

It is now commonplace to remark that the idea of survival in culture has itself become a survival in culture every bit as atavistic as the ritual survivals described by Tylor et al. What is less frequently considered is the extent to which those ideas have entered the fabric of contemporary traditional custom. Contemporary folklorists have accepted the extent to which the interpretation of custom offered by Frazer is used to explain traditional custom by the occasionally interested lay observer, but what

⁷ Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture, Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art and Custom*, 2 vols. (London: J. Murray, 1871); James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough, A Study in Comparative Religion*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1894).

⁸ Différance is a French term coined by Jacques Derrida, deliberately homophonous with the word “difference.” Différance plays on the fact that the French word *différer* means both “to defer” and “to differ.” It is particularly apposite in folklore where there has been an emphasis on matters of textual and performative diffusion and variation.

often exasperates the same folklorists is the popularity of that rationale among the exponents of the traditions under study, and this is especially vexing when those people are *very like* the folklorists. (Cheshire, for example, is short on savages and savage customs, lacking in peasants and peasant belief—to paraphrase the title of Richard Dorson’s classic history of the British Folklorists—so a certain kind of folklorist or local historian might be forgiven for thinking *these people should know better!*)⁹ The idea of “ancientness” has so permeated traditional performance in England that an absence of evidence can become much more compelling for the participants (actors and audiences) than the folklorists’ “prize-find” letter confirming that a particular activity was first undertaken in 1908 rather than during the bronze-age. What we have here is a blurring of the item of folklore within the performance of a “metafolklore” whereby the original item of folklore is performed as though a subsequent explanation were the grounds for its existence in the first place. Folklorists are themselves traditionally accepting of people’s reasons for doing things even when confident that the thing “those people” are doing isn’t what “those people” think it is, and that their reason for doing it is therefore suspect. Allow me the following fictitious conversation: “This morris dance has gone on here for hundreds of years” states the morris dancer. “No it hasn’t,” responds the folklorist, “it first took place in May 1908, after the son of the big house went to Cambridge, read Frazer, and discovered that morris dancing was the remnant of an ancient fertility rite, and thought the village should have some. Look, he outlines his plans in this letter to his sister dated November 1907.” “What do you academics know about it?” responds the morris dancer, herself a graduate, “This morris dance has gone on here for hundreds of years. Haven’t you read Frazer or seen the Wicker Man?” Perhaps there is a performance theology out there, somewhere over the rational rainbow, desperately seeking a secular spirituality?

The Performance Orientation

In 1963 when the distinguished American folklorist Richard Dorson wrote a review of the then current trends in Folklore theory he was able to identify five dominant schools of thought: comparative, the national, the

⁹ Richard M. Dorson, *The British Folklorists: A History* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968) and *Peasant Customs and Savage Myths: Selections from the British Folklorists*, 2 vols. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press and Routledge Kegan Paul, 1968).

anthropological, the psychological, and the structural.¹⁰ Nine years later, in 1972, he re-worked the essay and found it necessary to append a discussion of what he termed the contextual approach to folklore, which by the late 1970's was being comfortably referred to as the performance orientation in folklore.¹¹ What prompted him to re-think the work? The 37th International Congress of Americanists was held in Argentina in 1966 and led, for the folklorists, to the publication of two volumes of material which they noted as reaffirming broadly distinctive hemispheric approaches. The North American material, edited by Americo Paredes and Richard Bauman, appeared first in a special edition of the *Journal of American Folklore*¹² which the American Folklore Society quickly republished as *Toward New Perspectives in Folklore*.¹³ As varied as the material was, the following passage from Baumann's introduction acknowledged and addressed a central theme:

It may be useful to indicate the principal concerns that appear to us to emerge from the work as a whole. Of these, the most comprehensive is a full-scale and highly self-conscious reorientation from the traditional focus upon folklore as "item"—the things of folklore—to a conceptualisation of folklore as "event"—the doing of folklore. In particular there is an emphasis upon performance as an organising principle that comprehends within a single conceptual framework artistic act, expressive form, and aesthetic response, and that does so in terms of locally defined, culture specific categories and contexts.

Three years after the Buenos Aires conference, but still pre-dating the subsequent publications, the 1969 meeting of the Society, held in Atlanta, Georgia, continued to move that agenda along. Papers from Dell Hymes, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Bruce Rosenberg among others, later formed the nucleus of a published collection edited by Dan Ben-Amos and

¹⁰ Richard M. Dorson, "Current Folklore Theories," *Current Anthropology* 4, (1963): 93-112. Dorson utilises these five sub-headings to structure his essay.

¹¹ Richard M. Dorson, ed., *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 45-47 and subsequent notes 12 to 14 below.

¹² Americo Paredes and Richard Bauman, eds., "Special Edition," *Journal of American Folklore* 84, (1971).

¹³ Americo Paredes and Richard Bauman, eds., *Toward New Perspective in Folklore* (Austin: American Folklore Society, 1971). See particularly Americo Paredes, Foreword, iii – iv; and Richard Bauman, "Introduction," v – ix. (The Latin American work, co-edited by Americo Paredes and Manuel Dannemann was published in 1972 as *El Estado Actual del Folklore en Latinamerica*).

Kenneth Goldstein.¹⁴ Although *Folklore: Performance and Communication* wasn't published until 1975 it eventually confirmed the contextual turn of *Toward New Perspectives in Folklore* and provided the impetus for Dorson's re-evaluation. Here are Ben-Amos and Goldstein from the co-authored introduction to the later work:

The import of such a shift in focus from text to context for folklore studies...involves a conceptualisation of folklore in which communication and performance are key terms. It releases folklore from the literary bonds imposed upon it in archives and libraries and views it as human verbal symbolic interaction of a performing kind.¹⁵

In his contributory essay *Breakthrough into Performance*, Dell Hymes suggested that "one might even hope that folklore would take the lead in showing how appreciation and interpretation of performances as unique events can be united with analysis of the underlying rules and regulations which make performance possible and intelligible."¹⁶ Folklore did take that lead in the USA where it is widely acknowledged as a major precursor for Performance Studies. In the UK the impact of the performance orientation was most strongly felt in the Institute for Dialect and Folk Life Studies (IDFLS) at the University of Leeds, and the Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language (CECTAL) of the University of Sheffield. There were only ever a handful of Folklore "centres" in English universities (certainly not Departments) and the outcome of the 1979 general election led to a rapid series of University funding cuts which largely ended the development of Folklore in the English Academy. Furthermore, there has never been a consistent folkloric, anthropological or even social scientific presence in UK performing arts departments and that, coupled with a locally pervasive ahistoricism, sustains the performance orientation lacunae and represents a small academic "forgetting." This leaves us a UK Performance Studies focussed on, as Roms phrases it, "a privileging of the living avant garde and innovative, interdisciplinary aesthetic practices" rather than engaging with the North American broad spectrum approach.¹⁷

¹⁴ Dan Ben-Amos, and Kenneth S. Goldstein, ed., *Folklore: Performance and Communication*, Issue 40 of *Approaches to semiotics* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1975).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2-10.

¹⁶ Dell Hymes, "Breakthrough into Performance," in *Folklore: Performance and Communication*, Issue 40 of *Approaches to semiotics*, ed. Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth S. Goldstein (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1975), 11.

¹⁷ Heike Roms, "The Practice Turn: Performance and the British Academy," in *Contesting Performance: Global Sites of Research*, ed. Jon McKenzie, Heike

There is a lingering sense here in the UK (despite the clarity of, for example, Marvin Carlson's *Performance*)¹⁸ that Schechner's *Between Theater and Anthropology* came from nowhere in the mid-eighties, as though that work had no context or antecedents outside of either eponymous discipline.¹⁹

Notwithstanding, between 1978 and 1986 two series' of conferences looking at Traditional Drama and Traditional Dance were held at the University of Sheffield and at Crewe and Alsager College of Higher Education respectively.²⁰ As far as I know these were the first manifestation of the performance orientation in the UK, and arguably the first Performance Studies in the UK, deriving from the two English Folk Life centres and explicitly concerned with English traditional performance forms. In focussing (largely) on mumming, morris and related performances, these conferences brought together academics and practitioners from drama, dance, folklore, history, geography, anthropology, linguistics and computing sciences. Some of the papers from the first of those events, *Traditional Drama 1978*, were published in 1985 with a preface by Paul Smith and John Widdowson of the Sheffield University CECTAL Traditional Drama Research Group. I'll quote at some length:

Much discussion has concentrated on reconstructing the source of the actions of the plays in the religious rituals of prehistory. Over the past decade, however, criticism has been levelled at the employment of such abstract, unsubstantiated theory and also at the total neglect of any aspect of the performance of plays. This criticism has in turn fostered an expansion of research in traditional drama at all levels and pure dissatisfaction has led to the development of several alternative orientations in the scholarship. These range from [...] studies of performances in context [...] newer approaches to the subject [...] the theoretical premises

Roms, and C.J.W.-L. Wee, 51-70 (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 63. See also Peter Harrop, "What's in a Name? A Comparison of UK and US Performance Studies," *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 25, no. 3 (2005): 189-201.

¹⁸ Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1996).

¹⁹ Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985).

²⁰ The Traditional Drama conferences at CECTAL, University of Sheffield, were convened by PhD student Paul Smith, presently Professor of Folklore at St Johns Memorial University, Newfoundland, Canada. The Traditional Dance conferences were convened by Theresa Buckland, then a PhD student at IDFLS and Lecturer at Crewe and Alsager, now Professor of Dance History and Ethnography, Roehampton University, UK.

which shape the study of the plays, examinations of contemporary performances and analytical techniques.²¹

The first Traditional Dance Conference was convened by Theresa Buckland, then concluding related doctoral research at the Leeds IDFLS, at Crewe and Alsager College in 1981. The edited proceedings were published the following year and the first paper was Buckland's *English Folk Dance Scholarship: A Review*.²² These passages further illustrate the barely contained incredulity she shared with Smith and Widdowson:

He [Needham] agreed with Phillips Barker that the processional forms were the earliest and gave them a Celtic origin and, dismissing indigenous pagan origins for the sword dance, he returned to the nineteenth century view that the sword dances were imported from Scandinavia. Although Needham gave England's dance forms ethnic identity, all were still interpreted as vestiges of pre-Christian religious festivals. None of his ethnic groups arrived here after 1066 yet all of Needham's examples date from 1800 at the earliest. He used mainly nineteenth century evidence to support what can be termed a pre-Norman Conquest invasions theory. [And] they [Thurston and the Fletts] sensibly demonstrated that a knowledge of post-mediaeval dance culture in order to understand folk dance is far more important than reflecting upon unknown pre-Christian ceremonies.²³

These two series' of conferences cumulatively produced over eighty papers and achieved a good deal more than the critique of survivalism. In the development of Dance Studies one can see considerable strides have been taken through persistent work in the development of ethnochoreology (particularly the International Council for Traditional Music, Study Group on Ethnochoreology) and dance ethnography.²⁴ Work on British traditional drama has largely and stubbornly resisted the "theory explosion" although there has been growth in historical, regional and diasporic studies. The particular progress in enhancing understanding of traditional dance may

²¹ Paul Smith and J.D.A. Widdowson, "Traditional Drama Studies", in *Traditional Drama Studies Volume 1*, Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language and the Traditional Drama Research Group, ed. Paul Smith and J.D.A Widdowson (Doncaster: January Books, 1985), 3.

²² Theresa Buckland, "English Folk Dance Scholarship: A Review," in *Traditional Dance*, vol. 1, ed. Theresa Buckland (Crewe and Alsager College, 1982).

²³ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

²⁴ See International Council for Traditional Music, "Study Group on Ethnochoreology," <http://www.ictmusic.org/group/ethnochoreology>. The study group currently has 171 members, from over 45 nations.

have stemmed in part from Buckland's pan-European consciousness within the Study Group on Ethnochoreology. For myself, with a background in drama, it is relatively straightforward to see differences between a UK and a US Performance Studies, but I suggest that dance/performance studies, unlike drama/performance studies, has had a third engagement with broader European thought, cuing a further range of affiliations, rehearsals, revisions and emphases that have gone some way to realising Dell Hymes hopes. The following extract from our original call for papers tried to reflect this:

Performance studies in America, thus, were developing by carefully examining the models of performance behaviours and processes useful not only to artists and theatre scholars but to anthropologists, folklorists, play theorists etc...Schechner's seminal study *Between Theater and Anthropology* underlines the ways in which performances could be seen as key paradigms for social processes—and popularised the now famous analogy between performance behaviour and ritual. Performance Studies in continental Europe (although we do acknowledge country-to-country differences) broadly followed American perspectives on performance albeit from different traditions. Deeply rooted in the nineteenth-century interest in the “national” and “folk,” exemplified by a romanticised notion of the “peasant society,” European ethnology/anthropology easily embraced the idea of cultural/social performance in which a culture plays out aspects of its world through symbolic performative displays such as folk dance and drama and related ritual behaviour. Although performance studies in continental Europe maintained the separation between studies of theatre/art performance and national/ritual/folk style performances the balance between these scholarships is, perhaps, better achieved than in the UK.²⁵

Those earlier UK conferences have provided a notional base point for considering what the intervening thirty years of performance studies has brought to the table when it comes to appreciating and understanding the amateur, traditional, popular, particular, local, folkloric, fakeloric, competitive, unfashionable and nearly forgotten to scholarship. Before moving on to look at the response we received, however, a further note on (my) survival in culture.

²⁵ I am grateful to my colleague Dunja Njaradi, postdoctoral fellow in Performing Arts at the University of Chester, for the wording of this paragraph which formed part of a joint call for papers for the conference *Contemporary Ethnography—Traditional Performance*, University of Chester, July 13th/14th, 2012.

Ancient Mystery, Critical Theory and the Exotic

In 1968 I was persuaded by different friends to join a youth theatre and a folk dance club. Both of these organisations were products of their time and place, themselves subject to particular sets of conditions. On the one hand the youth theatre emphasised confidence and fluency in performative improvisation within a frame of ensemble work and the creation of atmosphere through a collective physicality and vocal presence. With hindsight the work reacted against the “talking heads” theatre of the day and embraced apparently “freer” yet more “ritualistic” action. Our teachers were part of the temper of the times in experimenting with the ideas of Brecht and Artaud. Of course I didn’t think about it at the time; it was pleasingly experiential by comparison with school science, and differently experimental, and there were more girls there. In the morris men, on the other hand, we were drilled in the rapper sword dance and its percussive footwork. The revival and survival of this Tyneside sword dance was the *raison d’être* of the group, but we also undertook theatrical performance of dances and calendar customs from around England, often performing during interludes at social dancing events. The leader of the group owned copies of *The Sword Dances of Northern England and English Ritual Drama: A Geographical Index*, so the dancing already held a trace of ancient mystery for me, an imagined temporal exotic.²⁶ I was introduced to a variant of the Yorkshire Longsword dance (from the village of Ampleforth as recorded by Sharp)²⁷ which had a mummers’ play attached. At midday on New Year’s Day in 1971, in a new venture, we cleared the snow from a car park between two public houses, put salt down, got a crowd and danced. The “tradition” has sustained ever since.

When I was reading for my first degree the referencing of the mummers play in both scholarly and popular literature, whether anthropological, theatre historical or folkloric was almost entirely contextualised by the doctrine of survivals. I wasn’t aware of the work of Herbert Halpert, Graham Story or Henry Glassie, but I was aware of the work of Alan Brody.²⁸ While I was trying to find ways to incorporate mumming into my

²⁶ Cecil J. Sharp, *The Sword Dances of Northern England* (East Ardsley : E.P. Publishing, 1977) and Christopher Cawte, Alex Helm and Norman Peacock, *English Ritual Drama: A Geographical Index* (London: The Folk-Lore Society, 1977).

²⁷ Sharp, 50-76.

²⁸ I’ve noted elsewhere that for a few years during the late 1960’s and into the 1970’s two parallel worlds seemed to exist in mumming scholarship. At the same

undergraduate projects, I was also being introduced to a more fashionable grapple with “the other.” In 1931 Antonin Artaud had visited the Colonial Exposition in Paris where the Netherlands exhibit consisted of a Gamelan Orchestra and dancers from Bali, the Hindu enclave of the then Dutch East Indies, now Indonesia. In 1935 Bertolt Brecht visited Moscow and saw a performance by the Chinese actor Mei Lanfang. As a student of theatre in the 1970’s these moments came to seem almost Damascene and carried a powerful suggestion that the authentic might be found in the traditional of the other. Grotowski’s *via-negativa* and Barba’s *pre-expressivity*, Brook’s multi-cultural casting for *Orghast* and *The Ik* seemed impossibly exotic and distant, mysterious and romantic. Poland—still behind the iron curtain, Iran and Uganda. I had copies of works by Artaud, Frazer and Colin Turnbull (the anthropologist whose writing on The Ik people prompted Brook’s work) on the go at the same time.²⁹ Writing in 1968 Dorson spoke of the period immediately following the Great War as being the point—in British Folklore—where “survivals gave way to revivals.”³⁰ It seemed to me that the authentic, ancient and mysterious had slipped through our fingers, leaving a residue of Cecil Sharp and the English Folk Dance and Song Society. Where did that leave the authentic in the traditional of my culture? Did geographical and cultural distance make other “traditionals” more “traditional” than my own? Authenticity lingered in Brecht-and-Artaud land, in Paris-and-Moscow land, where interesting people became even more interesting by meeting Balinese and Chinese performers. There was little of that for me in 1970s Northumberland or Yorkshire—if the truth was out there it required airfare that I didn’t have.

As an undergraduate I never realised that the demolition of survivalism was already under way, or grasped that the construction of a “canonical intercultural” was in full swing, and on one level it didn’t matter. There was a feeling I got when I performed which I liked. It was to do with ensemble, and shared seriousness of purpose, and getting things right, and

time as Herbert Halpert and Graham Story were undertaking their pioneering study [Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969)] Alan Brody was still pursuing ancient mysteries with little sense of local context or meaning [The English Mummers and their Plays: Traces of Ancient Mystery (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969)]. Within six years Henry Glassie had confirmed the shift in emphasis [All Silver and no Brass: An Irish Christmas Mumming (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1975)].

²⁹ For a full discussion of these trends and influences see Ric Knowles, *Theatre and Interculturalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

³⁰ Dorson, *The British Folklorists*, 448.

being good and showing off, and having fun, and having things to celebrate with other people. But certainly in my case there was also a particular attraction to the transitoriness and associated melancholy of calendar based performance. I learned experientially that the intersection of time and place could add powerful weight to performance and that was confirmed by my reading of performance history. The feeling grew stronger with repetition and my twin interests in drama and performance and folklore and performance gradually turned into one interest in performance anthropology reaffirmed through extended university study and a fieldwork based PhD on mumming. But of course this is not a narrative of integrations.

Towards the end of Francis Ford Coppola's 1979 film *Apocalypse Now*,³¹ once we're in the real jungle, upriver and over-the-border no-man's land, we hear Kurtz reading the poetry of T S Eliot. The camera pans Kurtz's desk sufficiently slowly for the viewer to see two other works, both referenced in Eliot's notes to *The Waste Land*.³² These are *The Golden Bough* by Sir James George Frazer, first published in two volumes in 1890 and almost certainly known to Conrad who serialised *The Heart of Darkness* (which story *Apocalypse Now* loosely retells) before publishing a full version in 1902.³³ Frazer developed the work and it was re-published in twelve volumes between 1906 and 1915, becoming an influential work which both fed and misrepresented the work of the "Great School" of British Folklorists in the popular imagination of the time. The final text on Kurtz's shelf is Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, tracing the survival in culture of the idea of the Holy Grail.³⁴ As we've seen, those scholars were part of a movement holding the view that the interplay of myth and ritual in ancient and "primitive" cultures had given rise to modern religion and that echoes—somewhat like the big bang radiation reputedly present in the static on our analogue TV screens—were to be found in the folklore of the "advanced nations" and in the rites and rituals of "primitive peoples." Hence, we have the doctrine of "survivals" in culture and an "explanation" for almost every English folk custom. By the late 1970's this was finally being demolished by fieldwork, "grounded

³¹ *Apocalypse Now*, IMDb www.imdb.com/title/tt0078788/, directed by Francis Ford Coppola, (1979, Beverly Hills CA: United Artists).

³² Thomas Stearns Eliot, *The Waste Land* (New York: Horace Liveright, 1922).

³³ Frazer op cit and Joseph Conrad, *The Heart of Darkness* (New York: Penguin, 1999).

³⁴ Jessie Laidlay Weston, *From Ritual to Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920).

theory” if you like, detailed and painstaking local history and the contextual shift in North American folkloristics described above. Thus, by the time I sat in a cinema to watch *Apocalypse Now* as a second year PhD student, that shot of the bookshelf was for me as significant as anything in the film. Willard wasn’t just killing off Kurtz but an entire scholarly project. Yet none of this detracted from my response to traditional performance. By 1979 I knew that the works that had represented my first real engagement with the world of ideas, works that had provided architecture for my emotional and embodied responses to the idea of ritual in performance, and the way in which I was drawn to the traditional in performance, intellectually at least, were built on the sand of mid and late-Victorian and Edwardian fashion. Conversely, my work on mumming had made me part of the tradition of anthropological fieldwork, which then took me to south western Ethiopia and engagement with dramatic elements of traditional ceremonies, and I still couldn’t shake the romance of repetition and ritual from my interest in the customary. In one way or another I had not succumbed to the twin lures of survivalism and the exotic: I had sprinted headlong towards them.

Lastly, when I started to perform in a mummers’ play in 1971, when I began to study mummers’ plays in earnest in 1976, I had never heard of French critical theory. I knew nothing of Deleuze, Derrida, or Foucault, but today I can’t separate what I think about these apparently simple performances from some of those (less apparently) complex ideas. Like the performances themselves they have become part of my conceptual topography. The meanings I construct are perpetually shifting, they’re not fixed, they can’t derive entirely from the performance tradition that so engages me. So while I am definitely drawn to the fixity of tradition I’m also absolutely secure in the knowledge that what comes later will be different. And here we go: Derrida and *différance*: “to defer” and “to differ” where Derrida’s coinage plays on the fact that the words are homophonous in French and in the world, because whatever comes later will be different. I particularly like an 1834 definition of ethnography in this context, “the customs, habits and differences of races of man,”³⁵ because it allows a further reconsideration of difference and *différance* since that which is customary and habitual (and invariably local) is not just indicative of difference, but of deferral. The repeated—and the customary and habitual are by definition repeated—must always and increasingly

³⁵ *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, vol 1., eds. William Little, H. W. Fowler and Jessie Coulson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), s.v., “Ethnography.”

defer from the original action. And as for Deleuze? How could it be possible to consider folklore “now” without acknowledging the content of his arguably most famous title *Difference and Repetition*?³⁶ And Deleuze, of course, was a friend of Foucault, whose work on discourse, and crucially his noting of the leakage of discourse, will always critique my unsatisfactory efforts at synthesis across the discourses of drama, folklore, ethnography, anthropology and critical theory.

Soulcaking³⁷

I’ll begin to move towards mumming now, to engage with a more specific exploration of the gaps between frames of reference on the one hand, and the particularities of tradition and performance on the other. We have to acknowledge that there are often gaps between the known history of particular mumming performances, the not-so-known histories of the source material, and the fuzzy-geography of the constructed meta-tradition in which performers and audiences can choose to place their action. Indeed the study of mummers’ plays and the efforts to plug those information gaps through the multiple frames of reference just outlined might be regarded as an enduring popular entertainment in its own right. This was recognised by Mat Levitt in 2010, in an MA dissertation submitted to the Department of Anthropology at the University of Alberta:

There are a great number of stories told about the English folk play tradition known as “mummers” plays’. These stories told by folklorists, historians, anthropologists, popular fiction writers, mummers and audience members, and lay folk in general, can be considered as part of a body of folk commentary or metafolklore. Within this body of metafolklore, there are, generally speaking, at least five types of narratives told to explain the

³⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (London: Athlone Press, 1994).

³⁷ Soulcaking is a regional form of mumming specific to North West England. Refer to <http://www.mastermummers.org/>. For detailed description and discussion of the specific Antrobus play on which my subsequent points rest see Anthony Green, “Popular Drama and the Mummers’ Play,” in *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama*, ed. David Bradby, Louis James and Bernard Sharratt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 139-166; Peter Harrop, “The Performance of English Folk Plays: A Study in Dramatic Form and Social Function” (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 1980); Susan Pattison, “The Antrobus Soulcaking Play: An Alternative Approach to the Mummers’ Play,” *Folk Life: A Journal of Ethnological Studies* 15, (1977): 5-11. Soulcaking at Antrobus, Brotherton Library Special Collections, LAVC/FIL/F005 University of Leeds: 1975. *The Antrobus Soulcakers*, Garland Films. 2009.

origins of the tradition [...] it is possible to trace, if not the origin, then the development of each of the origin stories told about the tradition [...] through space and time but [also] across lines of scholarship, literary fiction and folk commentary [...] perhaps scholarship and literature can be considered as part of the body of metafolklore; as constituents rather than objective observer.³⁸

If we take Levin's advice we may start to find the performance of informed spectatorship as a consequence of ethnographic engagement, a demonstrably embodied and performative engagement.

I first turned up in the village of Antrobus in Cheshire with a camera and a portable reel to reel tape recorder during the evening of October 31st 1977. Going back to my earlier definition of ethnography the custom, habit and difference I went looking for in Antrobus was the Soulcaiking Gang and its Soulcaiking Play, a short performance about strangers, fighting and killing, coming back to life, cross dressing, charlatans, tramps, simpletons, and the keeping of a horse's skull. The play is customary and habitual, performed in and around the Cheshire village of Antrobus some 25 times each year between Halloween and mid-November. Soulcaiking starts each year on All Souls Eve and runs into mid-November. Soul cake is a regional name given to shortbread flavoured with cinnamon, but the Antrobus Soulcakiers do not distribute soul cake. They perform a play. Nine men arrive outside a pub. The current complement includes a father and two sons, two brothers, and four cousins. Five of them are Antrobus born and bred and remain residents. The others have either lived in Antrobus or are from close by. They sing a song announcing their arrival which people in the pub may or may not hear. One of them raps on the door with a cane and walks in, a well-dressed man in top hat and tails, announcing that there will be a "dreadful fight." A soldier in nineteenth-century military uniform comes in claiming to be the Black Prince and boasting of his prowess. A second soldier, King George, refutes his claims and engages him in combat. The Black Prince is slain; his distraught mother arrives and calls for a doctor. A quack arrives and brings him back to life. The odd but harmless Dairy Doubt appears, introduces himself and exits. The tramp Beelzebub enters, steals beer and drinks it, and exits. A horse (actually a man beneath a cover holding a real horse's skull on a stake, thus conveying the appearance of a three legged horse) careers in through the onlookers. The horse has a companion called

³⁸ Mat J. Levitt, "The Laughing Storyteller: Metafolklore about the origins of Mummies." (MA diss., University of Alberta, 2011), Abstract.

“the driver” who speaks on his behalf. The gang sing a concluding song, collect money and move on to the next performance. The performers arrive, perform, and leave each venue in the space of about thirty minutes before travelling to their next location.

Soulcaking is very local, but part of a much bigger picture, and I find it intriguing that many of the performance principles utilised by Soulcakers will be familiar to those exploring site specific performance and pursuing the “mobility turn” in contemporary performance. I pointed out recently that the interplay of site specificity and mobility is commonplace in traditional performance, usually as a perambulation between pre-determined sites. Furthermore, repetition, return and retracing by performers and audiences, often over extended periods of many years, are the defining features of calendar customs. This enables a different conceptualisation of duration and mobility to that informing much contemporary performance, and allows for the development of a special relationship between people, site and memory. In Alain Badiou’s words, “it happens that something happens. That something happens to us.”³⁹ Our acts of repeated re-visiting may be a collective searching out of these personal singularities. I’d like to quote here from a recent article in which I tried to summarise what I think is going on at Antrobus, and because I want to try and tease out two broader points:

In my view the repetition that makes tradition is channelled, harnessed and celebrated because it is, as is all performance, in Diana Taylor’s phrase “a system of learning, storing and transmitting knowledge” [...] When asked of Soulcaking at Antrobus “who’s it for?” Ian McCormack, one of the performers, responds that “you’re doing it to do it.” But in the act of “being done to be done,” traditional performance is using site and time, repetition and return, to construct a portal where the “here” of place and “when” of calendar can intersect. We put ourselves in a place where the present can be invaded by shafts of involuntary and unexpected memory. I suggest this underpins the efficacy and popularity of calendar customs.⁴⁰

The performer Ian McCormack first performed with the Soulcakers the year I commenced my fieldwork. His understanding and feel for the tradition is inextricably connected to the duration of his engagement, and my understanding of that is premised on mine. The fact that I have also engaged with a calendar custom in a home place means I share a sense of

³⁹ Alain Badiou, *On Beckett*, Trans. Nina Power and Alberto Toscano, (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2003), 77.

⁴⁰ Harrop, “The Antrobus Soulcakers,” 273.

what it is to return and re-trace and to play with palimpsest and pentimento both as performer and spectator. It is this, simply, that affords me any insight I may have. My second point is that the insights thus gained may have wider and broader application despite the very singular conditions in which they were formed. I think that may be one value of ethnography.

To conclude, our chapters look for ways to look critically at those moments of music/dance/drama performance, those deeply engaging moments of ethnographic encounter; moments of dilemma and insecurity, often outside the comfort zone of scholarly methodologies, but nevertheless inherent to practice-based research. (And “it happens that something happens. That something happens to us.”)⁴¹ These moments contain what Jon McKenzie calls the “multiplicity of forces”⁴² of performance studies as they connect and re-connect disparate fields of social interactions. In revisiting the territory of the performance orientation, in touching on anthropology, dance, folklore, music and theatre to look for present trends in the ethnography of performance (and performance ethnography is one of those trends) I see three related endeavours. One: an embodied, affective and sensory ethnography that privileges encounters between ethnographer, participants and practices as key to understanding and knowledge. Two: individuals shaped by their engagement with ethnographic practice in the midst of the migration, diffusion, revival, appropriation and commodification of performance. Three: the interface of academic disciplines with the idea of performance, and the ways in which academics and practitioners are drawn to ethnography to better understand, negotiate, perform and profess their diverse fields.

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⁴¹ Badiou, *On Beckett*.

⁴² Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (London: Routledge, 2001).

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CHAPTER TWO

PERFORMANCE ETHNOGRAPHY: THEATRE AND ANTHROPOLOGY THROUGH THE NEW STUDY OF RITUAL

DUNJA NJARADI

[P]erformance has much in common with the enterprise of ethnography [...] Both are framed activities, concerned with giving meaning to experience [...].

—Deborah Kapchan¹

Whether practitioners and scholars of either discipline like it or not, there are points of contact between anthropology and theatre; and there are likely to be more coming.

—Richard Schechner²

The intention of this chapter is to broadly discuss some theoretical and methodological ground for performance ethnography. As anthropologist Deborah Kapchan noted in the epigraph above to truly understand performance one is likely to stumble upon the epistemological baggage of ethnography. This is only logical since from the beginning performance (studies) is the outcome of a brief but fruitful encounter between anthropology and theatre. Here I am referring to “theatre anthropology,” an interdisciplinary collaboration between Victor Turner and Richard Schechner. This collaboration initiated some significant shifts in theatre studies, anthropology, and also across wider social sciences, arts and humanities. The article is divided into several parts that trace and reflect these shifts in different disciplines—anthropology, dance studies, performance and theatre studies. Further, in the spirit of Schechner’s prediction above

¹ Deborah Kapchan, “Performance,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 108, no. 430 (1995): 483.

² Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1985), 3.

on the *future* points of contact between theatre and anthropology, the article discusses some recent theories of magic (and) ritual in anthropology. In other words, I wish to outline the possibility of “theatre anthropology” or “performance anthropology” for the twenty-first century. To do this, I will turn my attention to the ritual as a site of initial Schechner-Turner contact. In his publication *The Future of the Ritual* where he revisited some of his first collaborative moments with Turner, Schechner states that “[e]ven to say it in one word, ritual, is asking for trouble.”³ He is referring to the messy concept of the ritual being simultaneously explained as the ‘oldest’ behaviour rooted in what ‘reptiles’ do; inherent to the ‘old’ cultures—something that ‘natives’ do; [and as] a repository of higher symbols and religion.”⁴ I won’t try to untangle and clarify this messy web, rather I intend to discuss the event of ritual performance seen through the eyes of an anthropologist looking through the lenses of performance studies, thus reconnecting performance and anthropology. A second, minor framework, will consider anthropological difficulties with magic as something that constantly escapes and eludes scientific/rational explanation as a positive way of rethinking and reconnecting anthropology and performance studies. Concluding remarks will return to performance ethnography and the “transformative vitality”⁵ of ethnographic and performance practices.

Theatre Anthropology

This section will revisit a collaboration that heralded huge theoretical and methodological shift in Arts and Humanities in the late 20th century—I am referring here to “theatre anthropology”⁶ or the “drama analogy”⁷ as euphemism for a most fruitful interdisciplinary collaboration between anthropologist Victor Turner and theatre practitioner Richard Schechner. The collaboration between Turner and Schechner resulted in Turner’s *From Ritual to Theatre* (1982) and Schechner’s *Between Theater and Anthropology* (1985). The strongest point of contact between theatre and anthropology in the Turner/Schechner dialogue was the study of ritual. According to Turner, a ritual is the most powerful active genre of cultural

³ Richard Schechner, *The Future of the Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 228.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 251

⁵ Brian Rusted, “Editor’s note” *Canadian Theatre Review* 151, (2012).

⁶ Eugenio Barba, “Theatre Anthropology,” *The Drama Review* 94, no. 2 (1982): 5-32.

⁷ Clifford Geertz, “Blurred Genres,” *American Scholar* 49, no. 2 (1980): 165-182.