Scenographic Shakespeares: Site, Space and Performance.

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Abstracts

Sally Barden, Kings College London.
'Site-specificity, archaeology and the empty space at the contemporary Rose Playhouse'

In 1989, two thirds of the footprint of Philip Henslowe's Rose Playhouse were excavated in the foundations of a Southwark office building. After a high-profile public debate over the site's value, the foundations were redesigned so that the new building could be constructed on three massive arches over the remains of the theatre. Lacking funds at the time to complete the excavation, the two thirds already exposed were re-buried under a temporary protective covering of sand, water, and concrete, where they have now remained for twenty-six years. The dig is scheduled for 2017; in the interim, the Rose has remained open as a visitor centre and museum and, crucially, as a theatre.

In its provisional form as an incomplete archaeology project, the Rose has provided an unusual space for the performance of early modern drama. Operating as a small studio space on one edge of the wide pit constituting the grave site of the ruined theatre, it also allows for some elements of the performances to take place on the concrete surface on the far side of the former Rose's 71ft diameter. The outcome is a peculiar divided performance space, where the intimacy of the studio is juxtaposed against performance elements which take place some distance from the audience, across a significant spatial distance and an implied temporal distance, with the evocative empty space of the reinterred Rose footprint at the centre of it.

In this paper I outline the use of and effects of the Rose's divided performance space in productions of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and *Macbeth*, and Jonson's *The Devil is an Ass*. In each case, the distance imposed by the archaeological remains is deployed as a way of 'othering' elements of the performance. I consider performances at the Rose in relation to the idea of site-specificity, considering in particular the ways that the space prompts rewriting and reinterpretation of the plays in order to recognise the temporal disjuncture of performing early modern drama on a postmodern stage. Structured around the remains of Henslowe's lost theatre, the space literalises the temporal gap between these early modern plays and their contemporary audiences.

Jennifer Holl, Rhode Island College.
'Tavern Shakespeare'

For the past several years, New York City has become saturated with tavern Shakespeare productions. From Drunk Shakespeare to Shakesbeer to Shotspeare, booze-fueled, interactive Shakespeare performance has become so ubiquitous that *The Wall Street Journal* recently noted that such shows "are almost as easy to come by as traditional productions in proper theaters."

Of course, tavern theater—and even tavern Shakespeare, specifically—boasts a lengthy history. Pamela Allen Brown has thoroughly discussed the varied types of performances that took place in early modern alehouses, and Gabriel Egan has convincingly argued that King's Man John Heminges operated a tap-house adjoining the Globe. In Shakespeare, taverns further function as decidedly theatrical spaces—most notably, perhaps, in Hal's and Falstaff's improvised role-playing in the Boar's Head in *1 Henry IV*, but also as the impetus for the performance of *The Taming of the Shrew* and the site of Ford's disguised turn as Brooks in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

As Shakespeare's taverns reveal the everyday theatricality of the alehouse, they likewise cast light on the commercial transactions and conspicuous consumption of the theater. Like Shakespeare's taverns, tavern Shakespeare similarly places at its forefront what traditional theaters often marginalize to lobbies and spaces outside the auditorium doors: namely, the financial transactions that sustain performance. In contemporary tavern Shakespeare, consumption—whether economic or alcoholic—remains on display, not only through visible monetary exchange, but also through the presence of servers, patron tables, and the omnipresent bar. As interactive, convivial consumption resides at the heart of most of these productions, tavern Shakespeare further wields its commercial environment as an extended form of *platea*, as both players and playgoers partake of the same forms of conspicuous consumption and often occupy the same barroom fixtures.

Productions like Drunk Shakespeare and Shotspeare employ few fixed set-pieces, and the roving Shakesbeer—a Shakespeare-themed pub crawl through four plays and four bars—employs none at all. As such, the space of performance persistently asserts itself as a tavern, forgoing the dramatic loci in favor of a kind of meta-scenography that refuses to conceal its overtly commercial functions. This paper explores the dissolution of theatrical boundaries facilitated in the recent trend in tavern Shakespeare—primarily between profit and performance, but also between player and playgoer, production and consumption, and traditional notions of *locus* and *platea*. As I will explore, through these various transgressions, tavern Shakespeare productions invariably offer a kind of meta-theatrical Shakespeare experience, in which the tavern play-space renders particularly visible the modes of production and commercial strategies that facilitate performance.

Margaret Jane Kidnie, University of Western Ontario
'Proximal Dreams: Peter Sellars at the Stratford Festival'

Antoni Cimolino, Artistic Director of the Stratford Festival, programmed not one, but two, productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the summer of 2014 as part of a season designed to explore "Minds Pushed to the Edge." The first was a main-house staging of *Dream* directed by Chris Abraham, which has since been described (from the same main-stage space in the pre-show "induction" to his 2015 production of *Taming of the Shrew*) as "my big fat gay Shakespearean wedding". The second production was also called *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but it was subtitled "a chamber play"; directed by Peter Sellars, it was performed by four actors. It was staged in none of Stratford's four, world-class theatres, but at the Masonic Concert Hall, slightly renovated for the purpose. Abigail DeVille, a Harlem-based installation

artist, designed the set, James F. Ingalls was the Lighting Designer, and the Mexican composer, Tareke Ortiz, designed the sound.

My SAA contribution will analyze this staging, with particular attention to issues of immersive space (and I have some great photos to share as well! Bridget and Christian, these set and auditorium photos are seriously memory-hungry, and it would be great if a dropbox could be created to which we can each upload our papers). I'll then build on this analysis of ambient space to talk about the way rehearsal method and creative process shaped language and character, eventually concluding by thinking about the dynamic between space and story-telling in this production of the *Dream*.

Courtney Lehman, University of the Pacific
'Displacing the Present: Deepa Mehta's *Water*'

And when husbands die, God help us,
wives also half die. So how can a
half-dead woman feel pain?
                    —*Water*

Location could not be more important than it is in Deepa Mehta's 2005 film, *Water*. Written by Mehta, *Water* is set in 1938, when Ghandi's campaign of passive resistance was increasingly attracting the attention of India's youth. In Mehta's film, Narayan, a member of the elite Brahmin caste and a passionate disciple of Ghandi, falls in love with Kalyani, the beautiful young widow condemned to live out her days in an "ashram" (or widows' home) as a pariah. In the ashram, caste makes no difference—all widows have their heads shaved and are draped in a simple white sheet to indicate atonement for their husbands' death; they live in abject conditions, removed from contact with the outside world, and are permitted to eat only one meal a day. Only Kalyani is allowed to keep her long hair because the owner of the ashram also acts as a procuress, lining up clients for her so that the ashram remains "in business." When Kalyani escapes the wicked matriarch and runs away with Narayan, she realizes halfway across the Ganges that his father has been one of her clients. Without explanation, she turns back toward the ashram, where she undergoes a ritual cleansing and wades into the river until she disappears beneath the surface of the water—an ending that is ultimately more tragic, I will argue, than Romeo and Juliet's double suicide.

Originally filmed in Varanasi, the holiest of India's seven holy cities and the historic site of pilgrimages for those seeking the purifying waters of the Ganges, *Water* came to grinding halt only two days into the shoot. Claiming that the film's championing of widows' rights was an assault on Hindu values, hundreds of enraged neo-nationalists set fire to the sets and threw them into the Ganges, calling for Mehta's death as they burned the director in effigy. Due to a lack of government protection and the severity of the violence, Mehta was forced to leave India and put *Water*—the third and final installment of her elemental trilogy (preceded by *Fire* [1996] and *Earth* [1998])—on hold indefinitely. Four years later, and in spite of formidable odds, she mustered the backing and crew to start over, moving the production to Sri Lanka. The founding gesture of *Water*, then, is an act of spatial and geopolitical displacement. Through mesmerizing, scenographic and cinematographic "insistences," as Pier Paolo

Pasolini would describe them, Mehta seduces the viewer into a dream of India's nascent independence even as she inscribes a brutal topography of gender that exposes the extent to which fantasies of nationhood—along with the microfascisms and fundamentalisms they support—draw life from the "half-dead" bodies of women worldwide.

Cristina Rosell, Louisiana State University
'(In)Temperate Designs: Bodies of Space in *As You Like It*"

Where does *As You Like It* take place? We are informed by stage directions that small portions of the play take place at "court," while the majority occurs in the Forest of Arden. But where exactly are the court and nearby forest located?
Given Shakespeare's heavy borrowing from Thomas Lodge's prose romance, *Rosalynde*, the Forest of Arden is understood to be located in France. However, Arden is also the name of "an English forest near Shakespeare's birthplace in Warwickshire," creating a "fortuitous overlapping of French and English place-names…indicative of the play's double vision" (Howard 586). Simultaneously French and English, Arden and its neighboring court invite comparisons between the real and the fictive. But what purchase do we gain by interpreting the court as a thinly veiled representation of England circa 1599, the year of the play's composition and a time of civil dissatisfaction with the now curmudgeonly Queen Elizabeth? What is to be gained by viewing the Forest of Arden as a nostalgic throwback to the Queen's Golden Age? Our understanding of these theatrical locales is further complicated by their relation to each other. Does Arden compose part of the national body represented by the court, does it exist on the margins of this court, or is it simply ungoverned wilderness?

This paper will investigate how these dramatic loci – the court and the Forest of Arden – are imagined and realized in performance so as to help us interpret the text, particularly the form and temper of this body politic. Working within the tradition of the pastoral mode, Shakespeare juxtaposes the court and the forest throughout this play. While the court is characterized as treacherous, artificial, and unhealthy (as represented by its choleric and usurping head of state, Duke Frederick), the forest, by contrast, is envisioned as an idyllic green world, a natural and restorative refuge for those in need. It is clear, however, that the humorous court and forest are in need of reconciliation – the two must be tempered in order to unify and thereby heal the rift within this national body. Humoral, historiographical, and scenographic theories will enrich our understanding of these theatrical sites/spaces and their (in)temperate designs, particularly their relation to form and character, or how they embody the temperament of a nation.

Kelly Stage, University of Nebraska
'*The Knight of the Burning Pestle*: Staging the Scene and Setting the Stage'

"Come Nell, shall we go? The play is done" (Ep. 1) says George the Grocer in the epilogue of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle.* Epilogues are always loaded theatrical apparatus to consider, and they navigate the space between script and audience in tricky ways, but George's statement is even trickier than most. The play of course is not done when George asks—his wife Nell must have her say, which takes her another eleven lines. The relationship between the frame setup of *The Knight of the*

Burning Pestle, the interior play, and the audience bends expectations even for the convention-bending early modern theater. *The Knight* is steeped in its own metatheatricality; from the moment that George and Nell speak out, there is no going back to a simple relationship between audience and performers. The presence of the citizens even acknowledges and sets aside the typical over-showy gallants sitting onstage and causes us to wonder who is and is not able to write and rewrite a show: is this play ever actually "done"? This paper will explore the relationship between performance on stage, audience participation, and authorial control. I will consider *The Knight* in its early modern context as well as in relationship to a 2014 performance at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse in London. While we know that the original play was a flop in 1607—though we can only speculate as to the exact reason—the Wanamaker show went over well, with good reviews (and a satisfied audience as I happened to witness it, at least). In looking at the Wanamaker performance, we are able to see at least some of the ways that a new performance must make up for the gap in time between 2014 and 1607, even if the place of the playing—the physical theater—iterates the physical constraints of the past. The gap— and perhaps the 2014 audience's ability to enjoy the play—may explain important differences between what may be two very different plays called *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. One vigorously questions the stranglehold of audience expectation and the transgressive qualities of patron power to the point of self-immolation, and another plays with the reproduction of an entirely other theater space and a performance that more subtly—and perhaps unintentionally— questions a modern desire for authenticity that can define such a quality only in limited terms.

Don Weingust, University of California, Berkeley
'Shakespeare Outside-In: Early Lessons from the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse'

The Sam Wanamaker Playhouse ("SWP") is a radically different recreated early modern playing space than the much-larger, eponymous playhouse at the institution that houses it, Shakespeare's Globe. That plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries moved regularly between spaces having at least some correlations with these two recreations provides potential insight into and poses challenges for understandings about early modern performance, audiences, and the enterprise of later-modern attempted recreations of early modern performance spaces. Through the vehicle of the Globe's "Outside-In" 2015 productions of *Richard II*, and a series of productions specifically crafted for the SWP, this paper will seek to describe and analyze some of the early lessons of performance in this unique venue and raise some of the questions about early modern playing spaces that follow. In addition to broader questions about the space, of particular interest to this study are matters of lighting this indoor theatre, sound within it, its influence on acting style and vocal technique, performance by children there and the space's creation of effects of intimacy and distance. This study is a part of a larger examination of original practices in later-modern performance of the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

Stephen Wittek, McGill University
'Scenographic Shakespeares: Site, Space, and Performance'

Since 2013, researchers for the Early Modern Conversions project have been working to cultivate a better understanding of the marked rise in conversional activity that spread across Europe in connection to formative developments such as the

Reformation, colonial operations in the New World, and increased interaction between previously isolated peoples and economies. With the goal of pushing this research agenda forward, my paper for the 'Scenographic Shakespeares' seminar offers a framework for understanding the relation between conversion and another key structure of early modern thought: theatrical performance. In readings of The Honest Whore (Dekker and Middleton), A Game at Chess (Middleton), and The Winter's Tale (Shakespeare), the analysis argues for the unique ability of theatrical space (platea) to facilitate creative experimentation and critical examination around questions of conversion, and also considers the special benefits to conversional thinking afforded by the increased attention to scenographic space (locus) that marks the drama of the early seventeenth century. The London stage presents a propitious focus for this line of enquiry, not only because theatrical experience naturally brings a critical pressure to bear on the limits and possibilities of identity formation, but also because the dramatists of the period repeatedly grappled with questions of conversion, applied the structures of conversion to new areas of human experience, and helped to push thought about conversion forward.

Susanne Wofford, New York University
'Image and Time in Kentridge's *Refuse the Hour* and Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*'

In this paper I want to explore the idea proposed in the Seminar Call that we might work towards identifying and understanding "moments when spectators simultaneously experience the play, its designed setting, and the site in which performance unfolds" and that we might think more about the relation and tensions, and identities among (a) the imagined spaces places and their environmental mood and symbolism, (b) the theater itself in which the audience experiences these places, and (c) the imagined places in the texts under study. This is a topic I have thought a lot about in terms of the relation between the words in a text that is set, say, in medieval Scotland, but performed as a story in Southern Africa (just an example). In such a case the theatrical semiotics are doubled: the theatrical "sign" will point simultaneously to two referents. Now I hope to have an opportunity to explore this issue in imagery and to bring the audience into the picture.

In order to undertake this, I hope to compare a non-Shakespearean production by William Kentridge of *Refuse the Hour*, a multi-media Chamber opera, composed by Phillip Miller, with several examples from Shakespeare productions, probably including Sam Mendes' a *Winter's Tale* that was a part of the Bridge Project, and the new Branagh production of *Winter's Tale*. Both *The Winter's Tale* and *Refuse the Hour* take on time as a central focus and theme, and conceptualize visually the difference between audience time, fictional time, and the time of the actors on stage. As in his designs for the Shostakovich opera of *The Nose* at the Metropolitan Opera, in *Refuse the Hour* Kentridge relies on visual projection—film and other designs projected onto a series of screens that enable a 3-D and also a temporal effect. Bringing a giant metronome onto the stage—in the BAM production of *Refuse the Hour* it hung over the front of the stage, high above the audience—Kentridge spoke both backwards and forwards and explored the capacity of film to move images backwards and forwards, in contrast to the inability of people to do the same. BAM called it a "phantasmagoric investigation of temporality," and one of the

collaborators, Peter Galison, is a noted Historian of Science and Professor at Harvard. Mendes' mise-en-scène for *The Winter's Tale* also "conjured up a world of ticking clocks, tolling bells," according to Ben Brantley (NY Times review). I have not yet seen the Branagh *Winter's Tale*, but hope to examine the mis-en-scene of both Bohemia and the final scene in the filmed version which is available this month in New York.

I hypothesize that Kentridge is influenced by the work of Josef Svoboda in his Lantern Magika, staged in the Czech pavilion at Expo '67 in Montreal, and in his many later productions (including Shakespearean ones) using a blending of live theater with projections and film techniques. I have not yet been able to determine whether Svoboda created designs for a *Winter's Tale*. [There was a production by Jan Kaĉer of *The Winter's Tale* in Prague in 1992 but I have not been able to learn anything about it yet.]

One of the questions I hope to explore is the difference between the visual explorations of central themes, the creation of ambiance and environment, and the creation of sonic and visual reminders of time passing—in other words, the tension between image and temporality, and the importance of this as a stage experience. I hope in my conclusion to be able to speculate some on how these questions, and these productions, transform and problematize the final scene of *The Winter's Tale*.