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Drama at a Time of Crisis: Actor Training, Performance Study and the Creative Workplace

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Abstract

At a time when our graduates are facing a world of ever more perplexing change and when funding for university arts is coming increasingly under threat, this paper is perhaps a means of reminding ourselves of our subject's strength ... of its value to university curricula and its clear contribution to the international creative economies. In this sense, the following paragraphs are as much about sharing with colleagues what it is that the study of performance does well as with making suggestions for enhancement. Notwithstanding this, the article concludes by suggesting ways in which deep approach learning can be applied to the study of performance, and its argument throughout is that performance study and actor training are weakened by boutique borrowing and the making of false promise.

Introduction

At a time when our graduates face a world of ever more perplexing change and when funding for university arts is coming increasingly under threat, this paper is perhaps a means of reminding ourselves of our subject's strength ... of its value to university curricula and its contribution to the international workforce. In this sense, the article is as much about sharing with colleagues what it is that the study of drama does well as with making suggestions for enhancement; notwithstanding its concluding paragraphs on deep approach learning and its creeping tone of righteous bombast is offered more as a call to conversation than to arms. As part of a series of writings on creative learning for creative employment, which in its own turn describes a personal move in teaching, research and publication away from a strict focus on contemporary performance, this article's aim is to locate some of our existing activities within a framework that, without making some of the false claims for our subject that we are wont to do, might remind colleagues outside of performance of why it is that our work is in many ways an unsung paradigm of university study. As the following section explains, the term 'performance' is not used here or in the title to exclude other-named programs so much as it is a shorthand device.

Names and Naming

When it emerged as a UK subject, BA Theatre was linked to both the educational vision and the etymology of learning through doing; whilst Theatre Studies tended to look towards the more abstract notions of *Theaterwissenschaft*. BA Theatre was then introduced because it seemed (erroneously) more dynamic and less text-based, than Theatre. Back then, few of us could have predicted the ways in which program names would be shifted around as slaves to market forces, so that a Theatre degree that recruits poorly finds its name changed to Performance Studies as little more than an attempted quick fix. The last three university departments I was a full-time member of in the UK, Chester (1990-2000), De Montfort (2000-2005) and Brunel (2005-2010) have each changed their program names at least once in the last decade and the program I currently teach on in Australia is called Performance Studies but feels like it should be Theatre Studies and, should the wind of nomenclature change, may well be called that with no significant change in curriculum content. Things are a little clearer with programs called Contemporary Performance or Applied Theatre, but distinguishing between BA Theatre, Theatre and Performance Studies is now no easy matter.

Within the context of this paper, 'performance' means performance study, not quite performance studies, with its connotation of a particular interest in avant-garde theatre, live art and intercultural practices ... Schechner's broad spectrum lens that sees many aspects of life *as* performance (Schechner, 1988) but something close enough to encompass Drama, Theatre, Theatre Studies, Performance Studies *et al.* Whilst my own feelings are that degree titles within our field have become largely inaccurate indicators of either content or philosophical underpinning, a key work on distinctions between Performance Studies, Theatre and Drama remains Roberta Mock and Ruth Way's 2005 study (Mock & Way,

2005). It is worth stressing the fact that, despite its US publication, I am referring to and drawing primarily on the situation I have experienced in European and Australian universities. Notwithstanding this, I have taught on exchange programs in numerous countries and have enough close contact with international colleagues to believe that this article has wide geographical relevance, as well as having applicability to subjects beyond performance; certainly, its appeal to creative learning for creative employment cuts across a great many areas of university life.

University Theatre and the Crisis of Change

As a window that opens up students' internal worlds, theatre and performance have always been important cornerstones in creating communication among cultures and countries, as well as within the narrower worlds of university study, whilst in terms of pedigree, university theatre has a long and well-established tradition, with Shakespeare's contemporaries already staging plays in the great European universities of the day. As time moved on, the initial university teachers of theatre were neither actors, directors nor playwrights, rather they were great historians, subtle theoreticians and talented describers, with the ability to see performance as an enriching area of study, devoid of and quite separate to the craft of vocational training. As this article will seek to demonstrate, this historical distinction is significant. This is so because vocational training for the mainstream stage is so well-served by drama schools and *conservatoires* that relatively recent attempts to align university study with training have tended to result in poor imitations and that the non-vocational study of performance has lost something of its own distinctive qualities (Ertel, 2004).

Within a more recent history, the 1960s saw European, North American and Mexican university performance becoming the platform and hub of its turbulent political climate, with tens of thousands of student militants demanding a new world and making these demands regularly through creative and overtly theatrical acts. Mass patterns of social activism throughout this decade had started shaping the values and attitudes of the generation that were college and university students during 1968. In America, the Civil Rights Movement was at its most active and visible, the Cold War, the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Anti-War Movement created shared experiences, and an increased engagement with feminism had led to a questioning of the belief that family was more important than the individual; whilst the peace movement created a loose collective of anti-establishment protesters which became the impetus for rebellion that started on college campuses and swept the world. April 4th had seen the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. and on April 23rd there was a student occupation and closure of Columbia University after students had discovered links between the university and the institutional apparatus supporting the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War, as well as their concern over an allegedly racially segregated gymnasium to be constructed in the nearby Morningside Park. In August 1968, the Democratic Party's National Convention in Chicago was disrupted by the new Youth International Party, the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam and thousands of other youth protesters.

Chicago's Mayor organized a massive police operation, backed by the National Guard and the army to deal with the protests, leading to clashes that dominated the streets for eight days. On October 2nd, a student demonstration ended in fatalities in La Plaza de las Tres Culturas at Tlatelolco, Mexico City, ten days before the celebration of the 1968 Summer Olympics in the same city. Police, paratroopers and paramilitary units had opened fire on students, killing over a hundred people in order to protect against any disruption of the Olympics. In Europe, students at Belgrade University began a seven-day occupation of buildings which resulted in armed police officers beating the students and banning all public gatherings; at the same time in Poland students demonstrated at Warsaw University when the government banned the performance of a play on the grounds that it contained anti-Soviet references. Up until 1968, Polish student theatre had enjoyed what appeared to be unique artistic freedom within post-WWII Eastern Europe, with, as Juliusz Tyszka (2010) describes it, "a liberty of expression unparalleled elsewhere in the Soviet bloc" (p.161). The Communist Party had decided that student theatre could be maintained as a kind of artistic kindergarten for supporters of artistic and political revolt, letting them exercise their beliefs within the well-guarded, limited territory of student cultural centres. The events of 1968 revealed this freedom to be no more than an iron fist in a velvet glove.

Despite this international wave, Paris was where the student riots took strongest hold, and it is worth providing an abridged chronology of events: On March 22nd, 1968, students at Nanterre University held a meeting to discuss class discrimination and university funding, which led to administrators calling the police who surrounded the building; following months of conflicts, the administration shut down the university on May 2nd; four days later, 20,000 students and lecturers began a march towards the Sorbonne that resulted in running battles with the Paris police; the next day, the crowd was 50,000 strong and the battles were fierce with terrible injuries on both sides; on May 13th, well over a million protesters marched through Paris; the next day, Sud Aviation plant workers locked managers in their offices and in the following days, workers throughout France began occupying factories; on May 15th, the National Theatre in Paris was seized and made into a permanent assembly for mass debate ... the Odéon Theatre was also occupied; by May 16th, workers had occupied fifty factories; by May 17th, 200,000 workers were on strike; by May 18th, two million workers were on strike; in the week of May 20th, numbers escalated to ten million, with two-thirds of the French workforce on strike; on May 24th, the Paris Stock Exchange was set on fire; on May 26th, the Ministry of Social Affairs provided for an increase of the minimum wage by 25% and of the average salaries by 10%: these offers were rejected as inadequate by workers and the strike went on; on May 31st, French president Charles de Gaulle ordered workers to return to work, threatening to institute a state of military emergency if they did not. Violent protest from students began to subside from this point on but the fires had been lit beneath performance and 1968 stands as a clear watershed moment for the upsurge in politically motivated student theatre, and this led in its own turn to a huge increase in the number of graduate companies that made their own distinctive and often anti-establishment practice (Harman, 1988); which is to say that the radical personal, political and socially committed

events of 1968 were to performance study what the plays of John Osborne, Eugene O'Neill and Arthur Miller had been to acting *conservatoires* and drama schools.

If we judge success by visibility then the decade from 1965-1975, was certainly the most active and productive period of university theatre, but this is to shackle success too tightly. Another way to view success, quite apart from financial gain, is to suggest that whilst theatre audiences are consistently reported as being in decline, through its study, more young people are making theatre than are watching it. From a box office perspective, this is undeniably problematic, yet from the context of creating a generation of creative thinkers and collaborative makers, this is an incredibly positive outcome, despite its under-the-radar nature. To this extent, and as enrolment figures suggest, current university performance knows no particular crisis. But such is not quite the case. Notwithstanding the impact of arts and public spending cuts, our greatest concern is the crisis wrought by our own misrepresentation of what we do and why.

University Performance and the Crisis of Misrepresentation

Universities and drama schools operate under different and often unstated covenants. With the exception of those paradigmatic institutions that move always with and even ahead of the times, drama school training, if not always rooted in emulation, comes often very close to it; and what is being emulated is an emphasis on narrative engagement through character and plot, linked to the centrality of the written script and immersion in a post-Stanislavskian sense of behavioral realism. That this results in a psychologically impelled performance style that favors back story, intention and the stalwart principles of actors' choices is axiomatic. For Gina Pane (2000), these are "pernicious art recipes based exclusively on an out-of-date analysis of other artist's work" (p.13), recipes followed by those drama schools - and many still exist - that remain embedded in a legacy of tradition, characterized by hierarchical, imitative and paternalistic structures; institutions which, as Kenneth Plonkey sees it, are run by instructors who present themselves as "guru-experts on the material being presented" and whose work is "mired in the acting theories of the past" (as cited in Pickering, 2011, p.48).

Training implies technique, and just as non-vocational university study is about *asking why*, training for the professional stage is innately bound up with *knowing how*; with students who learn and unlearn, strip away and accumulate until they are considered ready to begin their professional lives. Whilst actor training is about the evaluation and application of ideas, we can say that the type of creative thinking that accompanies BA performance is (or was) about the expansion of ideas, and in this, it is linked innately to curiosity rather than to replication. Like a tradesperson's apprenticeship, training for the stage - which for most students and members of the general public means actor-training - is about learning from professionals, just as it is about the realities of professional life. Ideas of post-dramatic performance are always likely to sit a little uneasily within institutions aspiring to turn-of-the-wrong-century acting excellence. Whilst it is no easy task to be national and international leaders in cutting edge development and industry focus, some institutions have shown themselves able to

manage the academic study/professional training relationship with rigor and success. London's Central School has an enviable reputation for combining high level research activity with professional training in acting, movement & voice, applied theatre, contemporary dramaturgies, music theatre and puppetry; whilst Melbourne's Victorian College of the Arts merges traditional convention and contemporary developments in performance in ways that emphasize autonomous artistic development within an environment of effective ensemble collaboration.

To say that universities have an obligation to ask questions and that question-asking graduates are our most prized outcome (no research points attached, but prized nonetheless) is to state only that which we already know. And yet, partly as a result of the academic qualifications that routinely accompany the Actor/Director/Stage Manager training at drama schools and *conservatoires*, preparation for the professional stage has crept into the student-imagination to the extent that, certainly at a great number of UK and Australian universities, conformity has begun to nudge innovation aside. The word *conservatoire*, with its denotation of specialist instruction in a public place, has no connection with the aversion to rapid change that comes with *conservative* and despite the fact that conservatism remains at the core of some drama schools, no all-consuming overlap is intended here. As institutions designed for a specific industry, the drama schools of this world look to focus on training that will place their graduates in gainful professional employment and if this results in a broadly naturalistic performance rehearsed to the point of seeming spontaneity then so be it. If along the way students extend their understanding of the nature of dramatic material and develop the skills and willingness to engage with the new (as many formally trained actors have) then so much the better, but this is not to argue for the inclusion of essentially non-dramatic material in theatre schools' curricula.

There is clearly something upside down about the fact that drama schools sought accreditation as academic award-conferring institutions, bringing their work in line with some of the critical rigors of the university BA, only to find that many non-vocational university programs are passing them from the other direction, which is not to suggest that the desire for accreditation was without strong ethical purpose: the real-world need for the type of public funding that came with university study allowed many UK students who would not have otherwise been able to fund their drama school training to do so to the same extent as their peers on more traditional BA routes. On the face of it, we can see that the university drive towards embodied knowledge geared to workplaces and industries is praiseworthy; but it comes with a flipside. A recent UK report found that 86% of performers working in the profession had received formal professional training (NCDT, 2010). Within the remaining 14%, many come to acting from a form of celebrity recognition elsewhere: reality television, sports, music, fashion etc., often bolstered by personal coaching. This leaves precious little room for graduates from academic programs (Elkin, 2011). To be sure, many graduates add to their BA with postgraduate study at drama schools but this in itself legislates against the idea that non-vocational BA study serves as an adequate form of training for an acting career.

Equity figures show that in the US, as in the UK and Australia, the unemployment rate for actors is consistently around 90%, and if 86% of these actors have been professionally trained then the space for BA graduates is tighter still. In light of this reality, and despite the high visibility wrought by occasional success, taking a BA Performance degree that implies a route to the professional stage becomes, at most universities, an exercise in absurdity. Alan Eisenberg, the executive director of Actor's Equity, is forthright in his belief that universities are turning out performance graduates 'for whom there is no work' and that universities are preparing students for 'a career that has no interest in them' (as cited in McMahan, 2012). Better and more honest to recognize, as Mike Pearson suggests, that we are working with "an increasing number of students who may never work in the theatre industry, and we have to offer them something else" (as cited in Tysome, 2004, p.24).

We make the argument too often and to ourselves no less than to our students that BA Performance is both a vocational and serious academic subject, but doing so reduces each approach. Training implies technique, and training for the professional stage is innately bound up with *knowing how*, with students who learn and unlearn, strip away and accumulate until they are considered ready to begin their professional lives, whereas university study, not least in performance, has a different paradigm, linked to a prime concern with *asking why*. Universities are among the oldest institutions on earth, and as they have evolved over the centuries they have clung fast to their concentration on learning over and above teaching and with investigation over resolution; and they have done this in the knowledge that learning is not always the same thing as training. If training and study are different, we are still able, and especially after Peggy Phelan (1993) to more easily read Stuart Hall's suggestion that "difference, like representation, is also a slipping and therefore contested concept" (Hall & Guy, 1996, p. 17). To a greater or lesser extent, all of us are in the business of unfixing stereotypes as and when we encounter them, and drama schools have done much in this field; universities too, in their drive toward graduate employability at a time when having a degree is no longer a passport to permanent work. Speaking in terms of essentials rather than stereotypes feels more acceptable and it is worth considering for a moment the essential and therefore authentic elements of vocational drama schools and universities. Essentialism presupposes a set of defining principles and these principles lead to superiority when that which is essential to one body (actor-training, for instance, at drama school) is seen as better than the other (actor-training within BA Performance). This happens when bolted on units in acting technique are read as *faux* within a culture of non-vocational learning. In fact, the links and overlaps between drama schools and non-vocational programs provide little more than opportunities for boutique borrowing, with each group singing from the same sheet until such time as our innate differences of intent and possibility emerge.

Recruitment and Employment

Student recruitment conceals problems and in some ways it matters little to university enrolment figures whether we teach juggling or stilt-walking or a history of 20th century theatre. Notwithstanding the popularity of certain subjects over others, the urge toward

degree study has become a feature of so many Western societies that it is hard to see any significant decrease in registrations whatever we offer, and if an on-the-ground decrease comes, it will likely be fuelled by university fees and from auditors who see small groups in large spaces in purely financial terms. In 2012, Australia, the cap regarding undergraduate entry was lifted so that universities could accept as many students as they wished. As a consequence subjects taking up little practical space are recruiting students in huge numbers whilst Performance Studies, with its need for relatively small class sizes (relative to Internet Studies and English, for example) will inevitably come to read as an expensive luxury despite the fact that annual applications far exceed capability.

In the UK where the fees for degrees in performance have risen sharply, the alarm bells have been ringing loud, but the majority of Arts and Humanities programs are charging the maximum figure the Government will allow, often for fear of appearing 'cheap'. We are witnessing and creating a cultural shift in university performance that is driven neither by the market nor by any positivist ideology. Rather, it speaks to an approach in which the culture of study is being displaced by the route of least resistance, one in which the fame-at-any-price obsession is assimilated into university study for no reason other than its own self-serving desire to point to the handful of graduates who pop up in a soap operas or sitcoms instead of the great number who use their degrees in equally valid and valuable ways but whose work takes place out of the spotlight. More concerned with conceptualizing performance than with preparation for careers as actors, the skill sets our students graduate with equip them for a wide range of careers. Of course, a career on the mainstream stage, in cinema or on television is one that we celebrate when it happens, and we probably over-celebrate it in our various prospectus entries, but it is one career destination amongst many, and it is one a tiny minority of our graduates will move into.

In some ways, one would be forgiven for thinking that a performance program would do much to unfix the high school aspirations toward mainstream forms that have changed relatively little and very slowly over recent years. One would think too that when a great many more of our graduates will forge careers as teachers than as actors, directors or playwrights that our undergraduate programs would reflect this in their constitution: strange always when it does not. Very few graduates from the university I currently teach at will ever earn their livings from theatre, and yet the university's website entry for Performance Studies tells applicants that "This course will train you in all aspects of theatre practice, including performance, directing, writing for theatre, stage management and theatre management" and that the program will equip students for careers as actors, directors for stage and film, playwrights, entertainers, set designers and casting agents (Curtin University, 2012). Students on the program are able to take one 12-week module in Acting Systems and one in Directing (this module is capped so that only a very limited number of students can actually take it); Performance Studies at Curtin offers no modules in set design and there is no preparation for employment as a casting agent, other than from students casting for any extra-curricular performances they might mount. The mismatch between suggestion and reality is extreme,

narrowing the scope down from the vast array of genuine and genuinely creative employment opportunities to an unrealistic 'if you want it you can be it' myth, exemplified by our online information to students that alternative words for 'actor' are 'movie star' and 'film star'. Whilst from a marketing perspective the route-to-theatre blurb no doubt appeals to aspirant students (our program recruits strongly) as well as to some of my colleagues, it does create a misleading and I would suggest unethical impression of what most of our graduates will actually do.

This misrepresentation creates a cycle of what is often little more than the language of confirmation bias, which obscures the realities of employability. In that context, this paper is unashamedly driven by what it is that our students do when they graduate today, rather than with what it is that we lecturers did when we went out into a very different world all those years ago. We lead ourselves into inevitable dissatisfaction when performance graduates realize that the one thing that is almost guaranteed by their degree is that it serves little useful purpose when it comes to securing a job within professional practice. The nature of theatre employment is such that no accurate figures exist, but even a cursory glance at the biographies of the most influential directors, actors and playwrights in the UK show how few have studied performance at university and our subject's guiltiest secret remains the relatively tiny number of our graduates who go on to assume any position of influence in professional theatre. To put this in some sort of context, of the nine previous artistic directors at London's National Theatre and the RSC (Royal Shakespeare Company), six attended either Oxford or Cambridge, neither of which offered theatre, drama or performance as a degree subject until recently. The University of Cambridge does now offer the study of drama (English with Drama).

Following work established in the first US drama department at the Carnegie Institute of Technology, the academic study of performance in the UK began with a handful of drama students at Bristol University in 1948; in 2011, over 20,000 British students graduated with degrees from performance programs. It goes without saying that there are not 20,000 subject-specific jobs waiting for these graduates (UCAS, 2011). Apropos of which it is interesting to note that the highest percentage of unemployed graduates in the UK are those in information technology, mathematics and accountancy, not theatre (UK Government, 2010). What is worth saying is that of the tiny few who do secure jobs in professional theatre, an even tinier few will ever do more than be the human scenery in soap operas or make a living touring small scale theatre to even smaller scale audiences. That is to say, it is highly unlikely that many UK performance graduates will ever *make a difference* through professional practice. This is not a cynical statement: making the statement does not make it true ... the facts do, and the few exceptions only prove the major rule. In terms of graduate-influence within the field, we are fighting a rear-guard action, and our chief weapon seems to be one of denial.

Cost and Value

From the perspective of students, no change has been greater than the cost of a university degree. Whilst government subsidy remains relatively high in Australia, those starting UK degree courses in 2012 will have seen their debt levels pushed to around £25,000 on graduation (UCAS, 2012). Tuition fees for 2011 were set at something over £3,000 per year, but these have risen in the intervening months to as high as £9,000 per year at a great many universities. This has happened in response to the UK Government deciding that programs in the Arts are not important enough to warrant a fee structure low enough to be attractive, resulting in a 14.6% drop in applications for Creative Arts & Design subjects; whilst the number of applicants has dropped, this has not as yet had any significant impact on the number of students accepted onto Creative Arts programs (UCAS, 2012). Government cuts have been imposed despite the fact, as this paper will demonstrate, that the creative arts combine to make a massive contribution to the UK and global economy. What is clear is that the cost per student of taking a UK degree has risen at a massively greater rate than the earnings differentiation they will enjoy over a non-graduate workforce. According to recent studies referring to the UK situation (Delni, 2010), the average lifetime earnings of a graduate with an Arts degree is only £35,000 higher than those of a non-graduate leaving school at 18 with two A-Level¹ certificates. That equates to roughly thirty years of work to break even and forty to make an extra £11,000: hardly a financially viable proposition. Little wonder then that students enter universities already thinking hard about employment. In fact, for male Arts graduates the situation is considerably worse. According to recent research carried out by the *Times Higher Education*, a male arts graduate can expect to earn £22,458 more than a male non-graduate over his lifetime, but this is less than the estimated £34,000 cost in fees and three years without full-time earnings (Times Higher Education, 2011) ... although these figures seem conservative when one considers that the fees alone will amount to approximately £25,000.

The Creative Industries

The creative economy is a difficult category to nail down, but it is bigger and broader than we think, and it is much more than culture and the arts. It joins together a broader range of industry sectors than those that traditionally have been classified as cultural, giving birth to the notion of the creative industries. But it also goes beyond a sectoral focus to embrace how creative roles or occupations are increasingly being found throughout the economy (Cunningham, 2008).

If quality professional theatre is as hard for performance graduates to access as ever before, then we can at least acknowledge its study as a boom industry in itself, and if some of those old opportunities are no longer with us, then new opportunities have emerged, not least in the widening field of the creative industries. These industries are often innovation led, knowledge intensive and highly exportable and are usually regarded as being comprised of the following

sectors: Architecture, Design and Visual Arts; Music and Performing Arts; Film, Radio and Television; Writing and Publishing; Advertising and Marketing; Creative Software Applications; Crafts; Fashion (Howkins, 2001 pp.88-117); whilst according to Richard E. Caves (2000), the creative industries are characterized by a series of identifiable economic properties or principles, including (but not limited to):

The *nobody knows* principle: Where demand uncertainty exists because the consumers' reaction to a product are neither known beforehand, nor easily understood afterward.

The *art for art's sake* principle: Creative workers tend to care about originality, technical proficiency and professional skills, alongside valuing of creative goods and ideas.

The *motley crew* principle: For relatively complex creative products, the production requires diversely skilled inputs. Each skilled input must be present and perform at some minimum level to produce a valuable outcome.

The *Infinite variety* principle: Products and events are differentiated by quality and uniqueness, where each is the result of a distinct combination of inputs leading to infinite variety options.

In the last decade, the global market value of the creative industries increased from US\$831 billion in 2000 to US\$1.8 trillion; in London alone, the creative industries generate over £21 billion each year and employ over half a million people, over 2 million nationally. This means that the creative industries already account for 7% of total UK employment ... 20% if tourism, hospitality and sports are included. If this trend continues, Government figures suggest that the UK creative industries will be a bigger employer than the financial services industry by 2013 (Arts and Business, 2010); whilst in Australia, the term creative economy now refers to the growing role of creative industries and creative people in the national economy and society and “is becoming a crucial emerging concept for Australia because the creative economy will secure our competitiveness in the global future” (Cunningham, 2008). This has led to a huge demand for creative thinkers. And creative thinkers are the graduates we produce better than any other subject area.

There are unarguable links between the study of performance and creative employment, just as there is a clear symbiosis between innovation, technological change, the creative industries and the study of arts and humanities subjects in general: in the UK, 42% of creative subject graduates (and these are primarily from performance, art and design, fashion and music) will undertake some form of creative industries employment within five years of graduating (Blackwell & Harvey, 1999); and we can see that the history of drama is also the history of adaption and adoption to the extent that live theatre production quickly embraced film, radio and television technologies. Indeed, this embrace became so close so quickly that it is

difficult to discern if theatre supported these mass media developments or if it was the other way around. By the same token, definitions such as those suggested by Caves (2000) and Howkins (2001) can only ever be regarded as both illustrative and temporary.

Rather than being seen by colleagues in other disciplines as a fringe subject, as a soft option that leaves graduates out in the cold, this puts performance at the sharp end of culture, finance, national and international growth, entrepreneurship and employability. And emphatically so, the creative industries are after all based on “those activities which have their origin in individual creativity ... and which have the potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 1998). It is now accepted that Western nations are shifting to economies where creativity is a key determinant of growth, to the extent that these areas are growing at more than twice the national averages (Bridgstock, 2010, p. 10). Rather than funnelling university students of performance into the idea that non-vocational study leads first and foremost into theatre careers, so that a career outside the arts feels like an exercise in failed promise or bad luck, we would surely be better served by alerting our cohorts to the massive range of employment opportunities that are both available and crying out for them. To this end, we can say that the future will see a shift away from the era of left brain dominance, and the Information Age that it engendered towards a new world in which the right brain qualities of inventiveness, empathy and flexibility will predominate. In his seminal 2006 book, *A Whole New Mind*, Daniel Pink makes the point that 21st century employment will be driven by collaborative thinking, group interaction, flexibility and teamwork, and that as jobs change, employers will turn more and more to workers who are capable of bringing original thinking into group tasks and assignments (Pink, 2006); and these are the graduate attributes we have always championed.

Generation Why Not Me?

As a counter to this, we are witnessing the commonplace and, I would suggest, relatively recent truth of students entering and graduating from performance degrees with no significant interest in study and barely more interest in performance. Thomas Postlewait has ironically stated that the main cause of the multiplication of performance studies departments in the US has been the exponential growth of unemployed performance studies graduates, and the same (minus the irony) might be said for the growth of all theatre-related graduates: the rise in high school theatre studies, aligned to the opening up of university entry means that students looking for subjects to study at university are increasingly drawn to subjects that a) they have studied and b) which have relatively relaxed entrance requirements (Larrue, 2010, p.15). That students might enter university programs with this feeling is something we can do little about, especially given the usual imperative to increase numbers, so that a rising cohort is seen as evidence of a healthy program; but the fact that some of our programs do little to convert high school enthusiasm into critical engagement is a charge that rightly falls to us and it begs questions of what values underpin 21st century performance study. Graduation profiles tell us little, other than that grades are on the increase and that students leave universities now with

degrees that are classified more highly than they were ten or twenty years ago, and it is well-nigh impossible to justify claims of apathy and disillusionment without relying on the evidence of one's own experience. And my own experiences, whilst broadly international, are also inevitably partial. Certainly, the situation I am currently encountering in Perth cannot but be different to that in Sydney or Melbourne, let alone Los Angeles, New York or Nebraska; but my relatively recent experience of teaching at a forward-thinking university in London lends some balance to my views and the inevitable limitations of my situation do not negate the imperative of performance to interrogate what it means to make work now, in the now and of the now, rather than assuming that what values performance once had, will remain through force of our collective will as a type of cultural medicine and aesthetic moral panacea.

Compliment and Competition

Studying performance at university has always been something of an anomaly inasmuch as we are one of the very few subjects with a profession-based counterpoint in drama schools. If one wants to be an architect or a journalist, then a BA in those subjects provides sound preparation, just as studying business management equips graduates for work in that field and a BA in tourism does what it says on the tin; yet the amount of accredited drama schools already so far outstrips the opportunities for professional acting work that performance graduates are all too easy to ignore by employers with an abundance of actors who are at once both highly trained and available. The answer, as it always has been, is one of compliment rather than competition. Non-vocational performance-based programs need the significant other of drama schools in order to establish their own principles of self, and BA Performance in this sense is a much newer self than actor-training. Viewed thus, the strength of performance study is seen in balance with rather than in opposition to drama schools. One approach functions in one way *because* the other fills the gap; but this is a knowingly one-way exchange because whilst few would seriously object to a drama school's emerging commitment to analysis and study, many would argue that when non-vocational study limps into training, the results are flawed because the training is inevitably diluted in relation to the type of staff/student hours made availableⁱⁱ. The drift towards drama schools' awarding of academic qualifications quickly became a shift, and yet this shift is misleading. Training is still any drama school's *raison d'être*, just as accreditation remains more significant than validation. The concern of this paper is not to chronicle the purpose of a 21st century drama school so much as to foreground a different kind of training for a different kind of workplace: training for contemporary performance-making no less than training for employment in that which we have begun to label as the creative industries.

The Creativity Imperative

Whilst not wishing to add to cliché ridden and euphemistic allusions to creativity, there is general agreement on what might be regarded as 'The Creative Personality'. Creative thinkers will usually possess conceptual flexibility, tenacity and perseverance, self-discipline and self-control, the ability to integrate controversial content and controversial process (Galindo,

2011). They will also demonstrate a preference for the new and unconventional. This translates into the following stages, which are the same for university study as with creative making: inspiration, saturation, frustration and realisation. In looking then at how to ensure that performance graduates are creative, innovative, enterprising and fit to work in, shape and lead the creative and cultural industries, we need to find ways of creating programs that tap into students' creative intelligence.

Our key advantage here is that university performance thrives on flexible approaches to practice. This is the same for lecturers' research and practice as for students' learning and if this indeterminacy is not in the sole domain of our subject then it is at least an innate element of how we already work. In order to transform indeterminacy into creative opportunities, we need to regard what gets learned as more significant than what it is that we think we teach, which means stepping back from positions of expertise in order to develop structured learning situations that encourage dialogue.

It is a given that we want our students to be both informed and curious about the world and to possess the skills to make a difference. In a global environment that is characterised by incessant change, one of our few certainties is that our graduating students require the means of application to translate learning into knowledge and knowledge into creative openness. Bertrand Russell is a touchstone here. Russell (1992) talked of education as beginning with inarticulate certainty and resulting in articulate doubt. We can see from this as well as from our own experiences that doubt leads to questioning in ways that certainty denies and that this constructive/creative embrace leads to graduates who can exercise wisdom in their judgements without assuming that what works once in one set of circumstances will necessarily work as well again. The crux of creative behaviour is curiosity and our driving pedagogy is the engendering of this in our students. In some ways, the battle is already half-won: our students are living through the most intensely stimulating, most vibrant time in the history of the world, and the study of performance, as with the study of any moving art, is about addressing aesthetic experience, about students' abilities to engage their senses and to respond in the present moment to a series of stimuli. Students come to university with a life history of multi-modal creativity and it seems to me imperative that we develop and tap into this throughout our degree programs.

This stems from the learning contexts we provide and it stems from a learning environment in which knowledge and learning are always contingent; from a belief that theoretical understanding and practical doing are necessarily reinforcing elements of graduate skills. So we create artistic and innovative makers by opening up possibilities for informed uncertainty; for Bertrand Russell's doubt; for the confidence to engage creatively and intelligently with the unknown. This is achieved through a focus on finding a creative synergy between curriculum goals, structures and the achieving of learning outcomes; for appropriate and flexible assessment modes, and through programs of study that are problem-based, demanding of increasingly reflective independence and geared throughout towards professional contexts. This is not a denial of theatre careers for our graduates: rather it is an honest

acknowledgement of where they are most likely to find fulfilling employment and this is defined as much by what they are unlikely to do (find satisfactory employment in professional theatre) as what they are.

The term 'problem' is used regularly at arts educational symposia: problems of funding, problems of recognition, problems of nomenclature, problems of research outcomes. Perhaps the word can be re-thought as something both positive and inevitable. Creative people after all are defined as much by their need to problem-seek as to problem-solve and this is something that does not just happen post-graduation. 'Problem-Based' then become about encouraging students to identify problems where graduates in other disciplines might perhaps see only success.

Deep Approach Learning

Through all of this, the principal aim of our day-to-day work is to improve the quality of student learning in performance. In addressing this, we will throw light on several questions:

- How do we assess learning in performance?
- To what extent do our current methods encourage a deep approach to learning?
- Can any better methods be found?
- How will we know these methods are better?

In order to explore these questions, we need to know something of the character of learning and assessment as it currently exists.

As we know, there are several ways of analysing learning outcomes (Bacon, 2003). Considerable work has been done to investigate content specific outcomes in a number of university subjects, but research has only recently begun on content-specific analyses of performance ... not least through practice-led research projects and through the analysis of practice-based research as a phenomenon for educational and cultural change (Freeman, 2010). We can identify four levels of increasingly complex learning outcomes, and apply these ourselves to outcomes in performance study. The first is mono-learning, in which only one learning element is present and required. The second is multi-learning, where several relevant elements are evident, but in an unrelated and non-synthesised way. The third is synthesised-learning. Here relevant elements are drawn together into a coherent and interdependent structure, with at least some evidence of creative planning and application. The fourth and final outcome is known as extended-abstract-learning. It is here that we find responses which are not restricted by the question and which tend towards the opening up of possibilities for creative engagement, involvement and learning (Knight, 2003).

Clearly, these Level Three and Four ideas of synthesised and extended-abstract learning are at the heart of successful creative study. They also adhere to the principle of 'most mistakes'.

The British designer and engineer, James Dyson suggested in his Richard Dimbleby Lecture that students should be marked by how many mistakes they make; that it is what they learn from those mistakes that is important (Dyson, 2004). If Dyson is right (and I think that he is) then the quality of students' learning needs to be closely correlated to the approach we take to teaching. Broadly speaking, students may take a 'surface' approach, in which material is learned superficially without significant evidence of understanding, or they may take a 'deep' approach in which the learning changes the way in which the student understands or perceives the subject and its context. For us in performance, a deep approach is one which involves our students in constructing a personally meaningful and well-formed knowledge base, so that subject-consideration and understanding are used as stepping-off points for new initiatives.

Deep approach learning is almost always a significant feature in the development of creative thinkers (Lublin, 2003 & Cope, 2003). Again, there are four key features involved in deep approach learning, the first of which is intrinsic: motivation. Clearly, students are more likely to take a deep approach to learning when the motivation to learn is internal, coming from their own needs and desires and existing in climates where students' agendas are as welcome on modules of study as our own. Key here is the need to fuse motivational contexts to the assessment strategies used. The second is activity, because students are more likely to make connections between what is being learned and past experiences when they are encouraged through active rather than passive learning, which trades on our subject's long-term emphasis on learning through doing. Third, is interaction through doing, through the talking through of ideas and concepts with fellow students, which amounts to powerful ways of reflecting on and testing learning and which allows modes of negotiating and structuring meaning which are generally more effective than solitary reflection. Again, this is in the nature of group and sub-group practice and the inevitably collaborative nature of performance study. Last, is a well-structured knowledge base, on the principle that new learning can only be approached on a deep level if students can relate this to their extant knowledge and experience.

A surface approach to learning has its own identifying aspects: students are given limited opportunities to consolidate new knowledge or to relate it to what they already know; disproportionately high levels of staff/student contact time, which augur against students' need to be independent and active in their learning and to have opportunities to discuss their learning with peers. Excessive contact time may also encourage the view that learning is passive, which is likely to encourage a surface approach: the guru-driven 'do as I do' approach. We often see this on programs which seem to be saying that students can make any type of work they like as long as it is also the type of work that tutors like. Reliance on overly prescriptive material: this is about the dread emulation rather than innovation, about making work 'in the style of', so that students engage in mock-ensembles in their by-rote study of Brecht, turning influence and inspiration into regurgitation. The lack of opportunity to study subjects in depth is linked to this: if students have no opportunity to develop their learning in depth in any particular areas then their ability to make personally meaningful sense of it is

likely to be diminished. To this list can be added one further feature: assessment methods which reward surface approaches. Assessment methods which permit or even encourage surface approaches to be rewarded can be a strong influence on the ways in which students learn. Most students are able to take a surface or deep approach in different circumstances.... that is to say that learning approaches are not personal unchanging characteristics. They are by contrast almost always dependent on context and intention.

Context notwithstanding, we can see the logical need to develop learning which corresponds to a deep, creative approach; to the concomitant need to avoid teaching, learning and assessment which offers prescription rather than provocation; and the need for awareness that students will often be oriented primarily towards short-term arithmetical success, making them prone to adopt whichever learning strategy is most likely to gain that success. As we have seen, it is a sign of our times that an increasing proportion of students enter higher education with an achievement orientation. This is of interest since it has significance for the kinds of strategies which might be successful in improving student learning in performance.

At its base level, learning can be conceived of as the passive increase in knowledge; students develop as they move through programs of study, and the ways in which learning takes place are duty-bound to move with them. Students tend to begin their learning through the repeating of relevant knowledge, before moving on to the acquiring of some skills and techniques; these aspects are academically redundant if they do not lead toward the abstraction of technique, and creative, inventive, informed and effective making. Within this taxonomy, the final two are qualitatively different from the first since they involve an active construction of personal meaning on the part of the learner. If knowledge is knowing what needs doing next, then skill is knowing how to do it. Because informed creative practice is dependent upon the exercise of a complex interrelationship of skills, knowledge and understanding, we need to acknowledge that some of this knowledge and understanding is both explicit and factual, inasmuch as it is usually acquired like most factual knowledge from conventional sources of educational information such as lectures, reading and observation.

The understanding of what creativity might involve is achieved through reflective practice and the construction of a personal knowledge base. This knowledge base, although individually formulated, has commonality with others in the creative community...and amounts to a tacit theory of performance values. Creative learning notwithstanding, this paper is not arguing for throwing the baby of knowledge out with the formulaic bath water. Knowledge is precious to us precisely because our subject has a relatively small body of factual and/or objective knowledge which a student can acquire and which can be assessed. What matters is that students' theoretical understanding is in considerable part gained by and developed through practice and reflection.

We know a few things in performance. We know that there are many ways of knowing, and many ways of discovering that we do not know very much at all. That the things we do know

come through empathy, identification, experience, frustration, flawed resolution, reflection and resonance as much as they come from more overt educational methods. We know that learning takes place when explanation is linked to action. We know that learning through action is very different from knowing about action. We know that performance is messy and that its manners are bad; that it sits uneasily with many ideas of academic objectivity and verification; that its goals are often less well-defined and always hard to measure; that performance deals with jumps and starts and sometimes with complete revisions; that performance is unpredictable, and so are its students and so is its study. We know too that if our work is a blend of the Apollonian, with its stress on the rational, systematic, linear and controlling, then it is equally Dionysian, with its tendency towards the divergent, the imaginative, the expressive, the impromptu and the open-ended.

Words in print suggest a certainty that is not always felt. And yet one certainty has driven this paper's concern: performance study needs to locate itself as absolutely central to 21st century university curricula: not as a poor relation to the *conservatoire*, nor even as a feeder into it, but as an invaluable aspect of our educational, professional, economic and cultural lives.

Recognizing that creativity and innovation is generating a spate of tangible economic outcomes does not reduce graduates' prospects of securing work in professional performance: just the opposite, because professional performance will always be a valued and vibrant part of this world. And whilst for some, the idea that our graduates might use their creative nous to form and work in businesses and industries that are not theatre-driven is anathema, it is unavoidably apparent that there is a vibrant and valuable group of economic activities that can create and transform the imagination and lives of its employees as well as producing goods, services and events that enrich the lives of consumers. As positive as our graduates' employment prospects are, the warnings are stark. We live in litigious times. Not long surely before we find ourselves sued by a graduate for misrepresentation and false promise. When that day comes, we may find little sympathy from the bench and less still from a jury of parents who find themselves impoverished, not from paying out for a wasted degree but from buying into the myths we peddle, the lies we continue to tell and the opportunities for employment we fail to address.

ⁱ A-Levels are properly referred to as the Advanced General Certificate of Education. They are one of the types of principal examination course studied by pupils in England, Wales and Northern Ireland immediately after the conclusion of compulsory education, usually between the ages of 17 and 18, and are the principal entry requirements for most higher education and university courses. A-Levels have, since the 1950s, been held up as representing the 'gold standard' of school educational attainment. Continually rising pass rates (which are now at nearly 100%) have led to perfectly reasonable claims that that gold standard has been devalued and that courses are becoming easier. It is also alleged in many quarters, that some courses are clearly easier than others, and that this has led to a migration of students away from subjects, such as mathematics, physics and modern languages, towards subjects that are perceived as easier. Official figures certainly show a trend of fewer candidates taking those courses that are regarded as harder. Because university entry is at least in part predicated upon one's

A-Level subjects the rise in high school Theatre Studies and Drama (widely seen as easier than the sciences) has been instrumental in the concomitant rise in Theatre and Drama at university.

ⁱⁱ Most non-vocational performance studies programs in the UK and Australia average 10-12 hours per week of contact time, usually over two 12-week semesters each year. The pattern at drama schools is more likely to be between 30 and 40 contact hours per week, spread over longer semesters.

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John Freeman joined Curtin University from Brunel University where he was Reader in Theatre. He has written on contemporary performance and creative learning for a range of international publications and has authored and edited five books: *Performance Practice; Tracing the Footprints; New Performance/New Writing; Blood, Sweat & Theory*; and *The Greatest Shows on Earth: World Theatre from Peter Brook to the Sydney Olympics*. His next book, *Remaking Memory: Autoethnography, Memoir and the Ethics of Self* will be published in 2014. He is a peer reviewer for the Australian Research Council, a member of the steering committee for an Innovation and Development Grant-funded project exploring e-portfolios for creative and performing arts students in Australian universities, and is a member of the International Research Centre for Development and Training.

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