

**Shakespearean Theatrical Reconstructions**  
**Seminar Leader: Farah Karim-Cooper**

**ABSTRACTS**

Douglas H. Arrell

Audience Continuity in Shakespeare's Theatre and the Implications for Original Practice

Conventions are unspoken agreements between stage and audience about how various theatrical gestures, words, actions, patterns of behaviour, genres, plots, properties, costumes and so on are to be understood. Genuine conventions depend on audience continuity. Only when a substantial part of the audience is the same from performance to performance can a rich body of conventions develop.

The high degree of conventionality that we find in Shakespeare's theatre indicates a high degree of audience continuity. The extreme form of the repertory system in this theatre, in which the same play was rarely played twice in the same week and almost never twice in a row and about 40 different plays were presented over the course of a season, was clearly designed to attract the same playgoers again and again to the theatre. Gallants and students at the Inns of Court are sometimes satirized as attending the theatre every afternoon. The large audiences that new plays attracted, and the subsequent rapid decline in audiences (as evidenced by Henslowe's records), so that a spaced-out run of 12-15 performances was the norm for successful plays, suggests that there was a core of a few thousand theatre-goers who were the principal audience for the theatre.

Since theatre was for the most part presented on work days, the core audience was primarily made up by "men who are their own masters," notably including courtiers, law students, and military men. While at each performance, and especially on holidays, there were audience members who were not part of this frequent-attending group, the performance was not primarily addressed to them. The dismissive references to the "groundlings" by Hamlet and others reflect the real attitude of theatre companies; although a small part of the performance might be designed to appeal to those who lacked the opportunity to attend frequently, they were not the primary audience. Frequency of attendance, not class, was the issue; aristocrats just up from the country sitting in the more expensive seats were also satirized for their poor taste.

Original practice companies that seek to revive the conventions of Shakespeare's theatre face the problem that their audiences lack a high degree of continuity; conventions are imposed on the audience rather than evolving as part of a shared understanding. In theory, audience continuity could be encouraged by presenting a very large repertory and by rewarding the audience for frequent attendance. But could modern companies cede the degree of power to the audience that would be the inevitable by-product of such a practice?

Ralph Alan Cohen

The Inconvenienced Audience and Early Modern Staging Practices

Working for ten years at the Blackfriars Playhouse has persuaded me that the "obstacles" we imagine early modern staging creates for contemporary audiences -- and the attending inconvenience and displeasure we assume -- turn out to be benefits instead. This paper looks first at evidence in the plays --

primarily those of Shakespeare, Jonson, and Webster -- that early modern playwrights relished opportunities to "inconvenience" audiences' and toy with their assumptions about watching a play. It looks second at the experience of the ASC at the Blackfriars Playhouse over the last ten years and shares anecdotal evidence that audiences quickly adapt to "obstacles," and, even more, adopt them as part of a bond with the actors. Finally, the paper considers the experience of the actors in working before audiences challenged in their assumptions by theatrical practices -- varying sight-lines, non-realistic special effects, direct address, and "new" signals for basic audience behavior -- to which they are unaccustomed. The paper concludes with a consideration of the ways that several avant garde companies such as Angels in the Architecture and Fuerzabruta count on "obstacles" to audiences for their delight. Thus I argue that a resistance to an exploration of early modern theatrical practices as something inconvenient to audiences trained in 19th century theatre-going is a kind of quaint conservatism, one whose critique of projects such as the Globe and the Blackfriars as inauthentic (though neither theatre makes a claim to authenticity) misses the value of the essential discoveries about the theatrical transaction -- then and now -- to be made in these spaces.

Rob Conkie

### Reconstructing Pedagogies

When I left the UK to return to Australia I started to wonder about Shakespeare in that new context, what and how the plays might mean (differently) and especially how Shakespearean Theatrical Reconstructions might fit (or not) into an Australian theatrical landscape. My paper will describe a performance-as-research project (planned for 2011) aimed at exploring a synthesis between theatrical reconstruction and contemporary, culturally-specific theatre.

Here is the project in brief:

1. An ensemble of a dozen or more performance-as-research (Masters) students will work on "original practices" for about 8 weeks...
2. ...after which they will produce an English history play -- perhaps *Henry the Sixth, Part One* -- produced according to the most stringent demands of original practices playing.
3. After that they will use more traditional modes of research to define salient features of Australian theatre, perhaps both white and indigenous.
4. The ensemble will develop a synthesis way of working, a combination of original practices and uniquely Australian theatricalities / dramaturgies.
5. The ensemble will produce a play -- probably *The Winter's Tale* -- according to this hybrid style.

Tom Cornford

### Directing the Building: New Stages at the New Globe

This paper will chart the tendency, which has gathered pace in recent years, for directors and designers to adapt or add scenic elements to the Globe's stage. Indeed, since Dominic Dromgoole became Artistic Director, only one Shakespeare play (*Othello*, 200?) has been performed on an unadapted stage, all others having in some way built out from or onto the existing stage.

I will test the assertions about the Globe's performance space which have been made by directors in justifying their decision to alter it against the evidence of their productions and my own experience of directing in the space. Frequently, directors focus on the allegedly 'wrong' position of the pillars and they

always place enormous weight on the relationship between individual actors and the audience to the exclusion of consideration of the relationships between performers and between distinct areas of the audience.

In brief, I see this as the imposition of proscenium-arch-thinking, which has resulted in the progressive ‘prosceniumizing’ (an ugly word for an ugly thing?) of the Globe’s performance space. I suggest, finally, that this practice represents a failure to live up to the agenda which the Globe as a building sets for practitioners, not because it should be ‘authentic’ to a fixed original but because it should be authentically itself: its practice should exist within the logic established by the building. That building was created as a tangible challenge to practitioners to re-think our work conceptually and methodologically and its now-usual re-building from play to play is a tangible refusal to accept that challenge.

Leslie Dunn

### Reconstructing Audience: The Acoustic Mirror of Original Practices Music

Claire van Kampen, the first music director at Shakespeare’s Globe, describes the early experiments with original practices music as “dip[ping] our toes into the hornet’s nest of ‘authenticity’” (Van Kampen, 79). The “hornets” seem to be scholars, both musicological and literary; she was originally skeptical about the Globe project because “debates about ‘authenticity’ had divided the worlds of scholars and theatre practitioners into polarized camps that seemed, by 1996, to be resolutely separated by turbulent seas of mistrust” (79). She attributes her change of heart not to new (and presumably stinger-less) collaborations between scholars and musicians, but to the responses of early Globe audiences, who proved to be “unperturbed by the brave new world they found themselves in,” despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that they “would never have opened a scholarly book about the first Globe theatre building before coming to the reconstruction” (79). Van Kampen’s characterization of the audience as a bridge between the worlds of scholar and practitioner echoes my own experience over the past two summers, doing research in the Globe music archives by day and attending performances by night. In meditating on this experience, I’ve come to believe that the most interesting questions about OP music have less to do with its “authenticity,” or lack of it, than with the particular constituents of its “authenticity-effect.” And in a reconstructed theater space such as the Globe, I’d argue that audience plays a crucial role in constructing this effect. My definition of Globe audience, however, isn’t limited to those attending the performance; it also includes the broader senses of “audience” as an act of hearing (*audiens*, audition) and a dialogue (as in “having an audience”). The Globe audience in this sense encompasses actors and musicians, who in working with OP music, in the specific acoustic and spatial environment of the Globe, seem to have experienced a parallel reconstruction of their sense of Shakespearean hearing. I would argue that it potentially includes even scholars.

Jeremy Fiebig

### Situation, Status, and Stage Geography in Original Practices Productions

Recently, some scholarship of early modern performance has concerned itself with the effect of an “original mindset” on today’s audience. Does doing a play in an early modern way (i.e., original practices or “original” character interpretation) result in early modern audience responses? Are we more

inclined to see sexist or anti-Semitic audience responses in a performance “free” of the “trappings” of modern “interpretation?” Or are these modern interpretations necessary for an appropriate or enlightened or critically informed response?

This paper examines two productions of *Macbeth* I directed in 2004 in which I sought to examine how modern audiences might regard an original mindset with regard to status. In the first production, we employed a sort of “communal” or “democratic” staging model akin to those one might see at the Globe and Blackfriars today. In the second production, we attempted to artificially impose a status on the audience, orienting actors differently on stage to reflect the changed status in the playhouse. How might status be “played with” in modern productions? Should status play be an “original practice?” How might the audience react differently to a play if they are divided and played against each other? How might status be negotiated among actors and audience? To what extent is today’s democratized audience limited from key understandings of the text relative to status? And is artificially imposing status helpful in revealing these understandings?

I also explore how such an approach might confront the debate over original practices in scholarly and theatrical circles and how the approach may fit into the larger ideological framework of the “narrative community.”<sup>1</sup>

Peter Kanelos

“There is no subtext in Shakespeare.”

“There is no subtext in Shakespeare.” This claim, made during a presentation at the 2009 Blackfriars Conference by Demetra Papadinas, the artistic director of the New England Shakespeare Festival, is a refrain often repeated by many who consider themselves “original practitioners” of Shakespeare’s work, particularly those who follow the First Folio as a guide to performance. The target of such comments is Constantin Stanislavski, whose approach to acting is predicated upon the notion of subtext: “That is what we do to the work of the dramatist; we bring to life what is hidden under the words.” (*The Actor Prepares*, 56).

By disavowing the notion of subtext, these original practitioners make a claim that subverts not only Stanislavski’s method, but the mainline twentieth-century approaches to acting that are rooted in Stanislavski’s work. Intending to clear the slate so that the “authentic” means for performing Shakespeare might be identified and applied again, original practitioners compel the theater and academic communities to look critically at conventions that have accrued in the intervening time, particularly those that shape most directly contemporary approaches to performance. Yet the issue is not so straightforward. In this essay, I will argue that the quest for “authenticity” or “originality” in Shakespearean performance is itself a post-modern enterprise. In looking at the teleology of originalism, I will ask, and seek to answer, the underlying question: What is the subtext beneath the claim that there is no subtext in Shakespeare?

James Loehlin

Working the Crowd at the Blackfriars

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Lopez uses this term in the introduction to his book *Theatrical Convention and Audience Response*.

In this paper I will explore the various strategies for audience involvement employed by the American Shakespeare Center at the Blackfriars. What are the effects of ‘casting the audience’? Does temporarily assigning audience members to roles within the play’s dramatic world (e.g. Falstaff’s soldiers, Saturninus’s followers) engage or estrange them? What early modern textual warrant might there be for such a practice? How does it square with such contemporizing touches as actor ad-libs or pop music interludes? Is this feature of the ASC’s house style an Original Practice, and does it matter?

I will try to identify some basic types of audience interaction at the Blackfriars, from directed asides to moments that require some vocal or physical response. The more ambitious moments of audience contact seem to me a high-risk, high-reward strategy: while they make the uniqueness and immediacy of the theatrical event thrillingly apparent, they may also stop the play in its tracks, or call undue attention to an aspect of the performance that has relatively little to do with the play. Is it a problem that the more significant moments of audience contact often become those parts of the play that audience members experience and remember most vividly? Or do such charged encounters define an essential part of the early modern theatrical experience that is lost from other kinds of staging?

My essay is likely to be highly anecdotal and speculative, based on my own memories of Blackfriars performances and conversations with ASC company members. However, it will be informed by some consideration of audience response to early modern drama, then and now.

Sara Thompson

A Platform for History: The Royal Shakespeare Company’s physical response to ‘Original Staging’ at the Globe

This paper explores the actor/audience relationships at both the RSC and the Globe Theatre, and how the two companies have influenced each other in the classic “original performance” realms of stage shape and audience interaction. The actor/audience relationship has, over the years (both famously and infamously), become an integral part of the RSC’s identity, and offered a comparison point between the company and others, both in the UK and abroad. The Globe at Bankside is one of the easiest companies with which to contrast it, as another theatre that performs Shakespeare as its primary remit. Critics and journalists have been depicting the two theatres as facing off against each other even before the latter opened in 1996. It was an easy comparison, with the RSC facing serious financial peril in the 1990s and early years of the 2000s and abandoning its permanent London base at the Barbican, while the Globe opened as a successful commercial theatre in the heart of London, quickly becoming a “must see” tourist attraction. The level of actor/audience interaction, partially dictated and determined by stage shape, proved to be one of the major differences between the two companies which was presented as a reason for their differing successes. The Globe, with cheap tickets and an emphasis on engaging with its audience at the heart of its philosophy, seemed to win over the masses (though perhaps not the critics). Now, with the RSC’s ongoing renovation of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre to convert it into the largest thrust stage with a tiered auditorium in the world, the need to explore the relationship between the two companies from a physical, stage design-based perspective becomes clear. And while the Globe’s success with its audiences may have proved to be a factor in the RSC’s construction plans, one must also recognise the older company’s influence on the newer, “original practice” theatre.

Don Weingust

## Original Practices: Metacriticism, Stanislavski and the Evolution of Shakespeare Studies

This essay combines three disparately considered topics, each intended to contribute to the introductory discussion in a book on the use of original practices and early texts in contemporary Shakespearean performance. The essay looks metacritically at a segment of the discussion about original practices, considers congruences in modern performance between Shakespeare's dramatic employment of rhetoric and basic Stanislavskian "units of action," and posits that the movement is a logical development of motions in Shakespearean theatre history and the aftermath of the ongoing, if recently challenged, performance-focused "Shakespeare Revolution."

Penelope Woods

### Some Thoughts on the Reciprocity of the Audience-Performer relationship at Shakespeare's Globe

An anecdote of early modern performance/audience behaviour, with which I begin this paper, foregrounds possible uncertainty about how to distinguish audience from performer, spectator from spectacle. I argue that the equally-lit staging conditions at Shakespeare's Globe have altered the conditions of the relationship between performer and audience in ways illuminated by this anecdote. Drawing on actor testimony and audience experience I consider the role of audience feedback in operation at the Globe. Noting the coincidence of broad frameworks of service governing labour in the early modern and postmodern periods I raise a question about the potential of this coincidence for employing cultural understandings of reciprocal service as a framework for exploring the relationship between audience and performer at the Globe. I conclude by contextualizing the imbrication of audience in performance at Shakespeare's Globe in a British theatrical trend in the re-negotiation of presentations of history.