

International Performance Research Pedagogies

“From 2008 to 2015, the European Union funded an experiment conducted at the pedagogical intersection of research of international performance and practice-informed research: the Erasmus Mundus MA Programme in International Performance Research. This volume provides readers with a nuanced and varied chronicle of experiences and reflections from MAIPR alumni, core staff and visiting experts. Even more imperatively, it encourages us to reflect upon our own engagements with, misgivings about and dreams for the global university. It is my fervent hope that MAIPR’s conjoined pedagogy of creativity and literacy stand not as an exceptional moment but as one of multiple roadmaps for arts and humanities education in the twenty-first century.”

—Jean Graham-Jones, Professor of Theatre, Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Literatures and Languages,
and Comparative Literature, City University of New York/USA

“This volume asks an important question: How do we think about and through a truly international education in performance research that counters Neoliberal modes of value while avoiding nostalgia for a European enlightenment model of education? International Performance Research Pedagogies offers a series of possible answers through a rigorous set of essays focusing on pedagogy and research within European university collaborations, arguing for performance as an unconditional discipline. This collection is rich, timely, and important in a time of crisis for international education, offering hope and challenge through the unique contribution of embodied performance research.”

—Patricia Ybarra, Chair and Associate Professor of Theatre Arts and Performance Studies,
Brown University, Rhode Island/USA

“How do we ‘walk our talk’ or perform what we profess as radical educators in the field of theatre and performance research? Often our ideas about the politics of knowledge production come undone in the training of new practitioners and scholars. Given the field’s fluidity and refusal to be an ‘unconditional discipline’, what might a ‘performative’ pedagogy be like? How can it truly model or embody an ‘equality of intelligences’ and knowledges especially in an international context that is well beyond the West-Rest divide? The book offers grounded and very practical but critically insightful and honest answers to these difficult questions as it shares concrete experiences at the classroom level in an international collaborative programme.”

—Jazmin Llana, Associate Professor of Drama, Theatre and Performance, De La Salle University,
Manila/Philippines

Sruti Bala • Milija Gluhovic • Hanna Korsberg • Kati Röttger
Editors

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Towards an Unconditional Discipline?

With a Foreword by Baz Kershaw

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Editors

Sruti Bala
Department of Theatre Studies
University of Amsterdam
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Milija Gluhovic
School of Theatre Studies
University of Warwick
Coventry, UK

Hanna Korsberg
Department of Theatre Research
University of Helsinki
Helsinki, Finland

Kati Röttger
Department of Theatre Studies
University of Amsterdam
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

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TOWARD PEDAGOGIES OF HOPE: SEARCHING FOR ECOSANITY IN PARADOXICAL TIMES

SOME PRACTICES OF MAIPR: THREE BRIEF SKETCHES

Induction. In Amsterdam six students of differing sexual orientations from different nations stand in a row facing a video camera and their brand new group of classmates and tutors. Each makes a brief statement about their identity in the format: ‘I am from India, and I’m traditional’, ‘I am from Canada, and I’m cosmopolitan’. Breaking rank they fervently kiss a partner, then another, and another. This is observed live online in Helsinki and Warwick by similarly diverse gatherings. Contrasting actions (speech/silence), locations (east/west/north) and interpretations (conventional/radical) problematize the nature of this networked educational display. Acting out stereotypes plus performing dumbing oralities simply confounds established educational performance epistemologies and ontologies. How rabidly eloquent can locked lips become in this most common of active silences?

Summer school. By a Finnish lake a cohort of 35 students from almost as many nations work as one group with a single tutor, making short performances on ‘What does home mean to you?’ Next they transform the actions’ material residues – props/scenarios/gestures – into an interactive/immersive installation/exhibition: experiences made for each other. That physically dynamic environment is captured reflexively as each lies down prone on large sheets of card. Partners trace their outlines, as if at a crime scene. Across diverse parts of their dead-body image all write reflections on ‘home’. Interwoven theories, critiques, practices, memories and more all animate the three-phase experiment. Individual

dwelling is investigated across multiple earthly locations, collaboratively exposing unique expressions of collective globalized futures.

Dissertation. One student from China couples Marx and Confucius to analyse the dramaturgies and socio-politics of Cultural Revolution model opera. Another from Serbia collages a socio-critical verbatim play anatomizing the rabidly nationalistic broad-daylight murder of just one football fan. A third from Malawi evolves dramas of agential change for a democratic marketplace of tomorrow. A fourth from Chile encourages the freed speech of domestic servants for making a modestly radical future. A fifth from Australia plays havoc with social media to revolutionize student learning. A sixth from Canada risks spontaneous street contact with utter strangers as a route to ecosanity. If Antarctica were as sustainably inhabitable as the other continents there would surely have been a seventh studying it for creative signs of environmentally hopeful futures.

SNAPSHOTS OF SOME COMMONLY TROUBLED FUTURES

Climate change casts weak indigenous nations against powerful affluent ones. Deadly human pandemics flood the world like mega-swarms of cannibal locusts. Food security for all but the wealthy is a ubiquitous dream of utopian pasts. Capitalist economies crash as if disaster is everyday business as usual. Fierce wars mushroom rabidly across every inhabited continent. Globalization pitches obscenely rich elites against the savagely desperate poor. Animal species increasingly go rapidly extinct as human populations proliferate. Ultra-vicious acts of terrorism flourish randomly on ideologically infested hate. *Homo sapiens* creates an anthropocene that thrives on its own extinction. The Earth's twenty-first-century calamities are becoming prolific and profound.

These were just some of the ultra-dark environmental conditions that MAIPR was born into. Think *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Catch-22* brutally combined across the whole Earth: and so it goes – inevitably?

Yet also there were emergent slivers of light: the pop-up camps for climate action (2009), the rise of energy renewables (2010), the spread of the occupy movement (2011), even the struggles of the ill-fated Arab Spring (2010), and more. The Earth tomorrow animated and illuminated by optimism. Perhaps.

But what on Earth could the subject of this collection of essays – a European Union funded higher education postgraduate masters degree

programme – contribute to significantly changing that state of affairs? Making advances to, say, greater politico-cultural and environmental ecosanity? The start of an answer to this lies in its title: Master of Arts in International Performance Research.

MAIPR ARCHITEXTURES: BUILDING BLOCKS FOR UNCONDITIONAL DISCIPLINES

MAIPR was launched in 2008, which – appropriately for the programme – was named International Year of Both Languages and Planet Earth; also of those sensible survival basics the potato, and – wait for it! – sanitation. Such coincidences chimed with rising concerns in performance studies about relationships between scholarship and repertoires, partly due to the growing international impact of practical performance research. So the curriculum's first 'modalities' – propositions of necessity or possibility – emerged as Academic Scholarship and Creative Research. A binary problematic very soon joined – partly thanks to New York scholar Diana Taylor – by the still somewhat nascent notion of immaterial archives and the directly related futuristic glimmers of performance curation. Those tripartite couplings aimed to confound binaries of all kinds, but without trashing their utility: one result of which could produce exceptional devastation for, say, computers working to make all manner of pronounced complexities – such as global warming – intelligible.

Politically speaking, those couplings implicitly were set to distribute responsibilities and rights evenly between the initial three partner universities – Helsinki, Amsterdam and Warwick – even though Warwick was the 'lead institution'. That in turn set the bar for creating flexibly radical conditions on its educational playing fields, potentially giving every individual student who embraced them a next-to-unique pedagogic game plan. Which appeared, despite its sometime extreme challenges for some, almost always to stretch positively the bounds of learning possibilities – if sometimes only in very modest ways – as openings to more sustainably hopeful futures. Then the modalities, at best, came to be like brilliantly malleable pillars in a forever-shifting pantheon of hope, having just enough internal strength to allow highly flexible pedagogic experiments to flourish truly, making up a program of *proto-transdisciplinary architectures* that were notable for their resistant suppleness: pedagogic architectures and texts combining to transcend all current disciplines. Thus the mantra of

international performance research through scholarship, creativity and curation became MAIPR's trademark refrain and innovative launch pad.

DYNAMICS OF TRILOGICALITY: FROM BINARY CONUNDRUMS TO TRIPLED COMPLEXITIES

The students came from every continent except Antarctica, and at least 49 nations. Very few arrived straight from undergraduate studies. Overall their range of theatre and performance research interests and skills across the three modalities was extraordinary, though curation was the baby of the bunch until the later years. Most had quality first degrees and many had professional experience in drama, theatre and the performance trades. Almost all became more or less radically committed to stretching the bounds of those already much extended disciplines: especially in respect of their home or birth-right countries, then cross-culturally in many locations around the globe; evolving a possibly unique diaspora network of scholar-artist-curators that reached beyond cosmopolitanism to nurture a creative ecology of committed cultural experiment. Plus, quite often, a 'glocally' oriented socio-political and environmentally alert activism.

Accordingly, I discovered, this volume has been cleverly constructed so that readers might grasp and assess the radical valence of the teaching teams' struggles to achieve an interlocking, tripartite disciplinarity that could, almost routinely, evoke pedagogic serendipities. Which is all of a piece with the structure and intent of an international programme that aimed to gain a radical edge in the day to day business of stretching the envelope of its combined disciplines and the global reach of its overall affects and effects. Key to all this and more was philosopher Jacques Derrida's notion of an order of the 'logic of as if', which [Chapter 1](#) defines as a 'training of the imagination...to generate a ferment from which knowledge that does not yet exist may emerge' (p. 2). Crucially for the MAIPR programme and its pedagogies, this proposition gestures beyond the limits of *Homo sapiens's* current epistemologies and ontologies towards the realms of a refreshed transdisciplinarity.

So, in respect of that, the idea of a 'ferment' or 'ferments' – excitement, agitation, exacerbation, stirring up, fomenting and so on – is in accord with both radical pedagogic agendas and newly refreshed ways of thinking, doing and being in and of the world. Then the fundamental simplicity of this educational stance potentially could connect the whole project more

or less directly to fabulous complexities in, say, the natural operations of the green planet. For example, in how earthly ecologies have especially critical bearings on all kinds of life and its environments on Earth. Producing a compendious interweaving of proto-activist pedagogies that just might birth forms of ecosocial, techno-biogenetic and eco-militant response to *Homo sapiens*'s commonly troubled futures as listed above (Kershaw 2015), a tripartite suite of highly resistant economical, sociological, technological, biological, psychological, practical, political, environmental, ecological and more conditions: in part designed to – as the hubristically humanistic saying goes – save the world.

But what on *this* Earth might constitute an effective international pedagogical programme for such a remarkably demanding, globally oriented, educationally innovative agenda? Especially when neo-liberal capitalist globalization rules virtually every human inch of the currently richly poor planet, threatening an end to humans as its rabid contradictory drive towards total domination of the globe's ecologies renders the world uninhabitable. Those questions and that potential outcome have provided fabulous grist to the mill of emergent performance pedagogies that *could not avoid* being responsive to those conditions, therefore threatening the whole project with a plague of double binds, in which, as [Chapter 1](#) notes, the commercialization of knowledge and the immaterialization of labour promise to eviscerate radicalism and transform universities into intellectual and ethical ruins. Yet in the actual practices of MAIPR, from beginning to end, various pedagogical means have evolved to release those binds and create educational freedoms with profound ramifications for virtually everyone involved in the programme. But in what manner was this achieved exactly and, more to the point of this Foreword, how does that feature in the pages that follow?

As I gradually came to grips with this book's overall structure I discovered that it is cunningly designed to become an especially inventive 'three by three' performative *architextural* artefact, potentially adding up to remarkably much more than its four parts. Hence, Part I contains three essays that offer clear meta-perspectives on the following three parts, each of which has four chapters. Those essays argue for: first, the historical validity of politically subjugated performances worldwide; second, cultural translations that embrace strangeness and otherness; and, third, internationalist resistance to the commercialization of education; plus overall a spreading disillusion with the nation state as a functioning entity. A crucial point here is that these critical concerns appear against a

backdrop of widespread and alarming socio-political fiascos: such as devastations of equality and justice, toxic debates in an interculturalism gone vapid, English as a deadly obstruction to the undoing of privilege. And so on.

Paradoxically, the pedagogic results of that are richly fascinating. Performance learning is directly linked to everyday life and political critique (Chapter 2); cultural translation embraces the unknown in the name a foreignness preconditioned for freshly emerging cultures (Chapter 3); and ‘internationalized’ performance research becomes a making of new maps for survival out of what wasn’t there when the oldest ones were made (Chapter 4). Thus the enigmatic logic of multiplying three-by-three with part-and-chapter multiples – requiring a steadfast faith in tiny numbers suddenly adding up to masses of more – turns out to be a pedagogical serendipity of no small extent. This is one through which the ecological principle of less becoming more makes everyday living the cornucopia of lacunae whose mysteries might well ensure sustainable survivalist futures: even as today’s ecologies continue to be radically ravaged away.

Then, within each part, the shape of each modality emerges with all the pedagogical promise of a modest but fundamental politico-educational revolt against conventionally conceived curricula. Hence Part II, ‘The University as a Platform’, opens by proposing nothing less than a transformation of globalization via resistance to its no-option injunction to ‘perform’ a wholesale commodification of the academy. The ‘global graduate’ of international neo-liberal universities is critiqued as hegemonic in reinforcing top-down North–South dogmatic cultural epistemologies, a process requiring a fundamental embrace of borderland as an ‘open wound’ running right through the transcontinental body politic. The thresholds separating campuses from communities become a liminal juncture for a militant research that sutures students and tutors in an ‘outside’ struggling to wholly re-mint the universal coin of democratic principles. Lastly, on a larger perimeter separating North–South, a rich dialogic performance ethnography is hailed through a plea to ‘provincialize’ the dominant hemisphere via the radical mutual differences of southern ‘indigenous universities’, treated as always already modelling a genuine unconditional disciplinarity. All this transpires from fundamentally reconceiving the performance of academic scholarship as such – but decidedly *not* as a total refusal of the blandishments of a global system of university education that increasingly appeals to the lowest common denominator of economically driven neo-liberal learning. Instead it is one which cunningly

reconceives its powers in the low glow of *southern* lights that thrive on newly emergent transnational, transcultural and transdisciplinary world-views and freshly unconventional pedagogies.

Now, and especially importantly, that inspiration draws substantively on the newcomer disciplinary modalities of creative research and curation. Thus the essays of Part III – ‘Pedagogy in Action’ – and Part IV – ‘Curatorial Practices’ – provide object lessons in reinventing the wheels of disciplinarity as such. But, and this is an educationally crucial ‘but’, the means of this transformation are both extraordinarily far-reaching *and* stupendously simple. A coupling of factors that, fortunately, allow me to bring this Foreword to an early close, primarily by leaving readers to guess at the detailed pleasures of these essays, especially in light of the following three brief sets of notes on the serendipitous outcomes of Derrida’s ‘as if’ philosophizing.

A BRIEF BRIEFING ON PEDAGOGIC RESOLUTIONS

As we observed almost at the outset, the late great philosopher’s ‘order of as if’ imagines performance as action-oriented processes that fundamentally shape all futures. So that provides the first note to this final section, and now I have a decently economical task in briefly accounting for the other two modalities. Hence less becomes more, again.

Firstly, the creative practice modality hinged on a paradigm of embodiment in performance through which newly minted *meta-knowledge* at least matches discursive and other major kinds of knowing, which in its most pronounced forms appears under the heading of ‘practice as research’ and similar rubrics, such as research-led practice, artistic research and so on. The key point here is that the ubiquity of performance as such in the universe implies that this meta-knowledge constitutes a major component of performance research as *transdisciplinary* experimentation, because that fundamentally echoes Derrida’s ‘order of the as if’ concept and also aligns it with what he calls the sovereign unconditionality of the humanities and, by extension, the academy *per se*. Then if this really was a crucial condition for the whole MAIPR programme and its pedagogies, we should find clear evidence of that in the four Part III essays, given their focus on the expressive doing of performance-as-such research.

Such evidence therefore is most likely to be found in the variously paradox-driven treatments of performative *embodiment* on display in the

practices described by these essays. One: the paradoxically disembodied image of the traced outline of a prone body is imaginatively presumed by the science of forensics as dead, even though its student subject in the performance of the workshop reaches well beyond just being manifestly alive. Two: performative paradoxes deconstruct students when they perform as heritage-city ethnic tourists, don costumes of the royalty of former kingdoms, shadow indigenous dancers near desert bonfires, orthodoxly ingest local cuisines, all retrieving once hopelessly lost worlds via cultural *unlearning*. Three: dramatic film-clips punctuate an untypical student lecture/seminar series, Beckett's all male *Godot* casting acquires race/gender substitutes, *Antigone's* unburied corpse morphs into live animalness, Stelarc's petri-glass-grown biomaterial ear grafted on arm-skin hears silence – such fleshing out performs as proto-paradoxical trans-knowing imaginaries. Four: student class's peripatetic tour hits intricate city performance spaces, *Antigone* again as open-air moveable feast, *Unknown Soldier* spills over from stage swamping auditoria, independent theatre perches elusively in high factory complex, mapping paradoxical overlays of happenings unbounded by borderlands. All together stir up science, art, tourism, theatre, bodies, dramas and more in a transdisciplinary 'event-hood' economy that ephemerally honours unconditional paradigms of uncontainable embodiments.

Secondly, the four curation modality essays thrive on a paradoxically object-oriented immaterial work paradigm of anciently established modes of crafty making-do with almost failures and unlikely triumphs. One: seminar room students reflect on past festival shows as embodied in current selves, recalled Romanian durational dispersed-dampness swamp arts seep into their flesh, Americanized Korean black-vacuum meditation ritual divests actual high-end classy glad-rags among peers, material world vanishes in paradoxical distribution of unexpectedly potent future bodily acts. Two: all cohort groups engage pedagogies that shape transnational interactions as students and tutors evolve methods for shared making of knowledge production, one experiments with modes for mutual curation of blended learning designs in classrooms 'flipped' to become collaborative labs, portfolio results present inevitable cultural/academic difference which unifies classmate practice as staff convert to become dedicated Socratic questioners, thus national identities emerge as paradoxes when cross-cultural imaginaries morph into contingently real transnational networks. Three: first-cohort programme alumni curate proto-pedagogic acts/events as potent curricular politics asking 'How do we live together?'

a question loudly implied by the 12 silently locked lips in its distributed inaugural induction event by performers hailing from several continents, continued in extra-curricular student-initiated mini performance festival which publicly repurposes 14 contrasting academic spaces via transnational creativity, years later spontaneous event testifies as crucial to paradoxically unpredictable dynamics of carefully/critically curated globalized performance research in a nutshell. Four: international independent curators create transformative production/consumption performatives for art institution agencies, students invent fictitious arts festivals for theatre research congress, group A offers programmatic resistance to global geo-socio-politico-economic hierarchies incorporating top-dog Shakespeare, B reinvents bardic play updates through imaginary participatory high-tech site-sensitive local-artists' performance, deliberative political double-bind paradoxes proliferate via adopt-or-adapt creative materialism. Overall, contemporaneously, processes of worldwide socio-eco-political transition produce spectacular paradoxes of almost auto-curated, capitalist-inflected, neo-liberal performance 'heterospheres' typically peopled by 'foreigners' that inhabit each and all of us. A long-predicted transformation from nationalism through transnationalism to a new globalized heterodoxy of post-nationalism. Ushering in the last-ditch emergence of an anthropogenic environment where everything goes for *Homo sapiens* except, perhaps, survival of the species.

Which brings us back very briefly to our starting point and the small matter of planet Earth's potential ruination. Very briefly, because MAIPR sadly is no more, having been stripped of its European funding by a Union apparently bent on instrumentalist neo-liberal policies that have championed austerity, 'value for money' and a swing towards political conservatism that sets nation against nation. However, despite all that, at the 2015 meeting in Paris of the seventh United Nations Commission on Climate Change an historic agreement was reached to curb global carbon emissions at 1.5 parts per million, leading to zero emissions sometime between 2030 and 2050. Yet less than a year later reports were appearing from many places that were already on the brink of exceeding that limit.

As for the ghost of MAIPR and its many alumni scholars, artists and curators – now widespread across the globe – I hazard a guess that such ironies would invite a strengthening of resolve to *balance* all their projects between the up-coming neoliberal ruins and eco-savvy rejuvenations of their international performance research. Because, for sure, through the energies of that binary engine there will always be paradoxical

transdisciplinary lacunae from which newly flourishing research-rich dramas, theatres and performances can emerge. Even perhaps triumphantly enough to practically rescue this good Earth for a renewed, more ecologically poised and sustainable, future for all.

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University of Warwick
Coventry, UK

Baz Kershaw

Baz Kershaw is Emeritus Professor at the University of Warwick. He formerly held the Foundation Chair of Drama at the University of Bristol, where he was also Director of the five-year research project PARIP (Practice as Research in Performance). He is author of *The Politics of Performance* (Routledge 1992), *The Radical in Performance* (Routledge 1999) and *Theatre Ecology* (Cambridge University Press 2007), editor of *The Cambridge History of British Theatre, Vol 3 – Since 1895* and co-editor of *Engineers of the Imagination* (Methuen 1983, 2nd ed. 1990), *Practice-as-Research in Performance and Screen* (Palgrave 2009) and *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance* (Edinburgh University Press 2011). He has published many articles in international journals and essays in edited books, as well as entries in reference texts such as the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* and *Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance*. His writings also have been republished in several international Readers and translated into Spanish, German, Chinese, Indonesian, Arabic and Turkish.

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