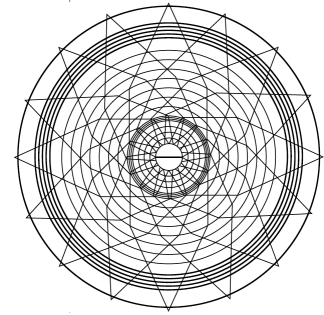


# [Scientific Articles]

Furse A.

*Ephemeral Arts in a World of Science*



## EPHEMERAL ARTS IN A WORLD OF SCIENCE

### **Furse A.**

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### **Abstract:**

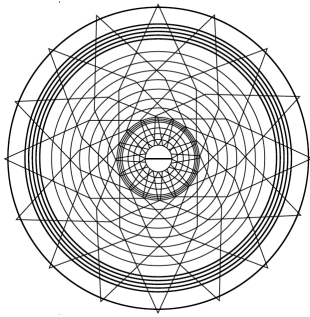
In this paper I consider some of the problems and challenges of negotiating creative practice in today's Academic environment from the perspective I know and work in, at Goldsmiths, University of London, a College internationally reputed for our Arts and Humanities teaching, practice and practice research. As a theatre and performance specialist I contextualise my thinking in a brief history of Drama Departments in the UK and their shift in the last three decades to embrace Performance Studies. I consider how this has affected pedagogic design and delivery. I finally discuss these themes within the overarching consideration of being a research-intensive institution and what this means in the UK today.

**Keywords:** creative practice, performance studies, higher education, arts and humanities teaching, pedagogic design

### **Introduction**

Preparing this keynote has given me opportunity for reflecting on the journey of the development of our theatre discipline in the UK, and for me personally, since what I am discussing has corresponded in its timelines to my own career history. Much has changed: from issues of inclusion, women's place in higher education and, more slowly, black and minority ethnic groups entering the academy; to issues of discipline such as the shift from drama to performance: from thinking of theatre as literature to thinking of performance as a term that can be applied to a wide range of behaviours and societal spectacles large and small and that, inevitably, provokes interdisciplinary thinking.

My title comes from a book *Drama in a World of Science* by a significant Englishman in the field, Glynne Wickham (1962). Wickham was appointed in 1948 to the very first UK Drama Department at Bristol University. Based on some of his lectures on the insertion of drama into higher education, Wickham is less concerned with science itself and more with that of university, and the role of a Drama Department at the time, the early nineteen sixties. Not surprisingly, his focus was on the production of dramatists, directors and productions, and how a university degree might differ from a conservatoire training to shape the theatre makers of the future. I was one of his undergraduate students from 1972 - 1975, and was educated in theatre history, play text analysis, some film critique and some acting and directing practice.



The second semantic detail in my title is the word 'ephemeral', that I first understood reading Peter Brook's seminal *The Empty Space* in 1971. I was working as his assistant translator in the Centre Internationale de Recherches Théâtrales (CIRT) in Paris at the time, a naïve ex-Royal Ballet dancer entering the mystifying and thrilling world of theatre. That the art form is ephemeral, as Brook (1971) asserts, is its strength to celebrate. It also constitutes its fragility and vulnerability in today's market economy, most acutely felt in Covid times across the world.

I am adapting Wickhams' (1962) title to speak of ephemeral practice in a world of science and argue for its value and precisely its vulnerability, in a world that seeks to instrumentalise and commodify knowledge and culture, and whose accountability tools lay a false science on top of the more slippery truths of creative research, thinking, and practice. In a society where politicians overtly prize and prioritise Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) subjects, the Arts and Humanities struggle.<sup>1</sup>

### **The emergence of Performance Studies in Higher Education**

Goldsmiths, University of London, where I've worked for almost 20 years, prides itself on our pioneering work in asserting creative practises in UK universities. We nurtured the YBA movement (Young British Artists) emerging from post-punk Margaret Thatcher's London, including the world-renowned Damian Hirst. When I joined the department at the cusp of the new millennium, we were in the top fifty list of Prime Minister Tony Blair's *Cool Britannia* (Harris, 2017) - a pride promotion of all the things which made us great as a nation culturally and signalling our then prosperous prospects. Tourists would be seen around campus taking photos of our zany student population and their definitely non-corporate style. Among many of our global reputational traits has been our championing of practice-based PhDs and interdisciplinary research. I will return to this.

Let's first look briefly at the changing landscape of university theatre and performance provision in the UK in the last decades: in the 1980's began a process of accrediting a range of non-university further education (FE) colleges, including vocational drama schools, our several conservatoires. So now in the UK we offer degrees in performing arts within conservatoires. Some of these institutions have begun to identify themselves as research institutions and provide also Masters and PhD programmes. University Drama Departments, that expanded in the second half of the twentieth century, have in turn asserted their research-led teaching environments which offer students a broader intellectual formation, often in tandem with practical study, and in the context of multidisciplinary and multicultural university campuses.

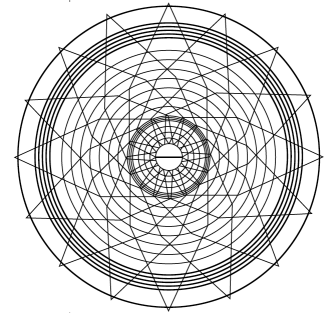
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<sup>1</sup>In the UK a very recent initiative has been taken by London School of Economics' Professor Julia Back to address this imbalance of educational opportunity, and redress the deleterious agenda, with the acronym SHAPE (social sciences, humanities & the arts for people & the economy). See London School of Economics and Political Science (2020). address this imbalance of educational opportunity, and redress the deleterious agenda, with the acronym SHAPE (social sciences, humanities & the arts for people & the economy). See London School of Economics and Political Science (2020).

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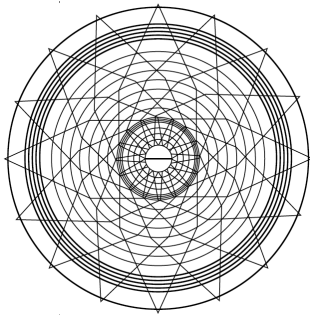
This gradually progressed towards innovative thinking about what studying theatre in an academic context might actually mean: how the study of theatre in the broadest sense could be delivered in challenging ways and be porous to, for example, the emergence of Cultural Studies in the late 1970's, an assertive interdisciplinary project that has shaped so much intellectual development since the legendary Jamaican-born Stuart Hall (2016) co-pioneered the Centre for Cultural Studies at Birmingham University together with Goldsmiths' Richard Hoggart (2009)<sup>2</sup>. This commitment to include popular culture in the academic disciplines was revolutionary and its legacy remains. It has unquestionably influenced theatrical research along with many other disciplines. In discipline-specific terms, the largest debt owed to an expanding definition of theatre studies is to Richard Schechner (2003), the New York director and academic, whose pivotal influence on the shift from the study of theatre as dramatic literatures to Performance Studies has been active and consistent. The co-authors of the book *The Rise of Performance Studies*, James Harding and Cindy Rosenthal (2011), propose how, over the last quarter-century, Performance Studies have reframed the entire discourse around the theorising of practice and, in turn, praxis itself.

This paradigm shift was indebted to the theories of sociologist Erving Goffman, whose influential proposal on the dramaturgy of social relations introduced the notion of *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, the title of his ground-breaking book first published in 1956. Here, unusually for theatre in the world of science, theatre itself was used as a model by which to propose a sociological perspective on the performativity of every human interaction: how individuals fix, model and design our presence in the world, suggesting that it is precisely that we are social beings that means we are actors in every sense, adapting to environments in which we play out our existence according to shifting sets of codes and conventions. The term 'dramaturgy' was employed to identify how we structure our social interactions. This has dilated understanding of the profound overlaps between psychology and the performativity of the quotidian, contributing also to the valorisation of how lives are ordinarily lived as significant culturally, narrowing the gap between the 'high' and the 'low' cultures and comprehending human society as a complex weaving of presentation and representation. If we start with this notion that we are each actors on the social stage, we begin to realise the dynamics of power, role, and hierarchies. I tend to start all my teaching with alerting students to our interactive performativity in the moment of the teacher-student relationship. This begins a journey of looking at the world around as something to interpret and not simply take for granted. It offers the possibility of comprehending non-absolute truths, of looking at the world semiotically.

The analysis of how power itself is expressed in social dramaturgies is on the agenda. In this Performance Studies crucible, we will find ideas stemming from linguistics, such as semiotics, and from philosophy, sociology, anthropology, psychology, gender studies and postcolonial theory. We find ourselves in a new

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<sup>2</sup> This was closed down in 2002 (University of Birmingham, n. d.).



ideational space where meaning, and meaning-making, topic and enquiry, drama and the dramatic are shaken and stirred into a potent cerebral cocktail. Whilst some colleagues cling steadfast to drama - understandably, for of course it has its important place and the study of literature remains vulnerable in a STEM world - the very word 'performance', when allied with the word 'study' has produced an elastic revolution in interdisciplinary thinking and praxis.

Performance Studies (Schechner) is now a *sui generis* discipline, applied in visual cultures as in theatre and performance departments and beyond. As the authors above note: it constitutes nothing short of a retheorising of the very concept of what performing means, not only as art practise but as human interactivity, delivering unprecedented intellectual freedom to explore some fascinating interstices between life itself and art. Above all, Performance Studies suggest a democratising of knowledge and breaks down the authority of the canon, suggesting rhizomatic knowledges that create what Deleuze and Guattari (2013) have called a felt: horizontal, pressed together thinking rather than striated, and consequently hierarchical, forms of intellectual authority. This of course has been of special benefit to liberation movements of gender, race and class.

It is no coincidence that Performance Studies should have arisen and been driven by American intellectuals. The American university system allows for interdisciplinarity across an undergraduate curriculum (I have taught chemists and mathematicians on my sabbaticals at Princeton). This has produced interdisciplinary confidence exemplified in a vanguard of pioneering scholars possessing flair and energy, who write with depth and breadth and who harness other fields than their own specialism into their thinking. Slower to catch up, we certainly owe a debt here in the UK. The burgeoning of critical performance literature produced in the UK in the past twenty years has been forged by those moulded in the liberating vibrancy of the new Performance Studies climate.

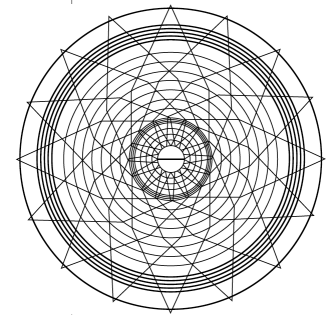
### **The rise of the Postdramatic**

When I first entered Higher Education fulltime just over twenty years ago, coming from the theatrical profession, it was striking how many new ideas were buzzing about and being published, many of which had not at the time shaped practitioners, but have evidently done so since through their education and training. There is noticeable effect of the university degree that has included Performance Studies on a newer generation of artists and their preoccupations. The term Postdramatic, coined by Hans-Thies Lehmann (2004) in his book *Postdramatic Theater*, captured the rise of performance over drama and plays since the European Avant Garde, producing a new reference point for works devised against tradition in new, often horizontal and collective structures of production, insisted upon by young artists hungry for new paradigms and processes by which to articulate their reality, and young audiences equally keen to see their class and cultural experience reflected in these new vocabularies.

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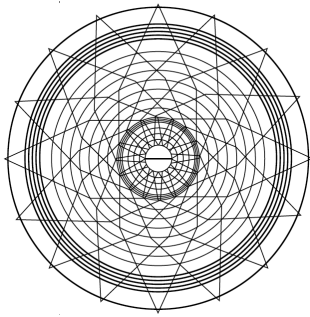


Postdramatic terminology supports understanding of experimental creative production methodologies, whilst Performance Studies leads to unexpected intellectual adventures around the broad topic of performance itself. I note the fascinating and eclectic topics of our PhD students, coming to us from all parts of today's globalised world, each decidedly non-dramatic literature-based researches. My own research interests, following a profoundly life-changing encounter with Reproductive medical intervention twenty-five years ago, has taken me into exploring the braiding of performance and medicine. My new Masters theory course Performance and Medicine has attracted international students who have written papers on topics as broad as Vampirism and venereal disease, the Executioner and their relationship with anatomy since the Guillotine, Plague and HIV Aids, and the significance of the mask in China during the pandemic. My book for Routledge — *Performing Nerves* (Furse, 2020) — examines four types of hysteria from the 19th century to contemporary eating disorders, taking in World War One shellshock en route, and has drawn on medical history and cultural theory more than literary criticism. The point I'm making is simply here is that Performance Studies, located in a theatre department such as the one I work in, expands consciousness towards new ways of interpreting Goffman's (1990) generative ideas on everyday life dramaturgies.

### **The curriculum: Performance Studies and the Postdramatic**

I will now turn briefly to curricula, and how Performance Studies has influenced these. To give you just one example of our undergraduate curriculum at Goldsmiths (2020): for some years I led a first-year praxis foundation module called Space-Body-Spectator. We examined each of these terms, turning each word into a cluster of meanings: space would look at architecture and public spaces, proxemics and movement, even consider our concept of interior bodily space; spectatorship explored audience as cultural and anthropological phenomenon and the writings of Walter Benjamin (1999), Guy Debord (1995), Jean Baudrillard (2006) and other analysts of the spectacular and the representational in mass media society; the body was explored in its many cultural as well as performative and artistic meanings. From such an enquiry, students would make their own performances for theatre and sites and write reflectively on such projects.

My Masters Programme in Performance Making (Goldsmiths, University of London, n. d.) stubbornly resists defining in any fixed terms what performance actually is today. Eschewing a house-style, students are attracted to this international programme to find their voice as live practitioners in a hybrid field of creative practice and theoretical study. They're noticeably increasingly socially and politically committed to interrogate their own society. Their performances can take many forms. Two years ago, the annual prize was awarded to two women whose Final Show involved the painstaking preparation, archiving and live practice of climbing a very high tree with full harnessing and necessary equipment, an expert standing by, in full view of spectators behind a large glass window. What was pertinent, and that one discovered in their archival materials that formed part of the spectator experience, was their terror of this



accomplishment: both had serious vertigo. Thus, it wasn't just the performance of what a tree surgeon executes in their profession, but a very personal triumph over fear, physical weakness and unwomanly behaviours; added to which was the investigation of ownership and control of such trees in public spaces, and processes of access and permission.

Such works will fill a festival that will also include theatre, dance and performance art practises. Meanwhile, applicants to the programme are increasingly familiar with the premise that performance is today an eclectic field of research enquiry, and that their careers might embrace presenting their compositions in festivals, to creating projects with marginalised communities, to pragmatic conceptual works of Live Art<sup>3</sup> (Sofaer, 2011) - that is, authentic non-representational conceptual practise - to interactive online experiments<sup>4</sup>.

### **Doctoral study: practice PhDs**

Turning now to the specific challenges of supervising creative practice PhDs, this remains a moveable feast of possibility, harnessed to basic ground rules. At Goldsmiths (2020) - one of the pioneering institutions to offer practice-based PhDs as well as those by publication (I'm currently supervising the last of these) - our regulations establish that the word length would normally not exceed fifty thousand and we would expect at least thirty thousand. The candidate is required to design a research topic in which the theory speaks to the practice and vice versa. This is not always as obvious as it might sound. I have experience of a brilliant and renowned choreographer, dyslexic and not writing in their first language, straining so hard at first attempt that they wrote a seventy thousand-word thesis. The examiners declared this practice the best they had ever seen - and failed them. They said the writing did nothing to illuminate or interrelate coherently with the practice. Distraught, the candidate went away for a year, appealed, regained confidence, and eventually rewrote the thesis. The new panel of Examiners loved this but advised further cutting. They wanted the 'artist voice'. Finding this both a paradox and a comfort after a decade of scholarly research, the thesis was delivered. They passed. They had gone through many hoops, encountered some of the more elusive aspects of writing a PhD by practice, whilst I in turn encountered some of the paradoxes involved in supervising and meeting very different examiner perspectives. This successful thesis is now an expanding global training programme. I supervise a thesis by a dancer who, initially terrified of theory, has got so swept up in their theoretical investigations - now an extraordinary set of intellectual ramifications - that they had temporarily forgotten how to practice the theory. Such conundrums are part of the often-uncharted territory of embarking on a practice PhD where there is no one-size-fits-all, only a set of academic frameworks and codes of practice to negotiate.

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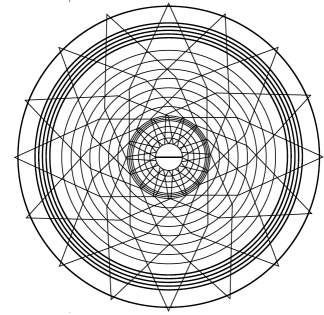
<sup>3</sup> The term emerged in the mid 1980s out of frustration with the inadequacy of existing nomenclature to identify the breadth and eclecticism of experimental, authorial performance practices. See e.g. Sofaer (2011).

<sup>4</sup> The latter obligatory this year, see: <https://www.circafestival.com>

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Practice PhDs are not an exact science in short. These two examples signal that the relationship between theory and practice is unstable and adaptable and cannot follow a road-map orthodoxy of praxis. The shape of the PhD will depend on the project. There are many challenges. Not least, the mind that is ready for creative research is not the same as the one that is ready to write analytically. Different parts of the brain are being employed and finding a seamless approach is ninety percent of the job. What's the time structure going to be? What comes first: practical chickens or theoretical eggs? How do we do and speak the doing at the same time? How do we articulate heuristics? An array of approaches to writing practice, or about practice exist. Some students necessarily need to explain in infinite detail the experiential embodied discoveries of practical exercises or performance tasks. Painstaking to read, they're nonetheless an essential ingredient in exploring a phenomenological approach to the lived body in live practice.

## **Critical Tools**

In the quest for new knowledge via practice research, Merleau-Ponty's (2004) phenomenological philosophy has provided influential theoretical tools by which to handle material that can otherwise be anecdotal and even solipsistic. Meanwhile, some artists have provided valuable articulations, publishing eloquently and influentially on their work. Seminal to thinking of the dancing/moving body in research terms I would cite Steve Paxton (2020)<sup>5</sup>, the distinguished pioneering founder of Contact Improvisation and master of words, as well as his contemporary, New York Judson Church Post Modern choreographer, filmmaker, and Avant Garde doyenne Yvonne Rainer, whose 1965 *No Manifesto*<sup>6</sup> has defined the commitment to non-representational performance for some decades (Rainer, 1965):

*No to spectacle.*

*No to virtuosity.*

*No to transformations and magic and make-believe.*

*No to the glamour and transcendency of the star image.*

*No to the heroic.*

*No to the anti-heroic.*

*No to trash imagery.*

*No to involvement of performer or spectator.*

*No to style.*

*No to camp.*

*No to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer.*

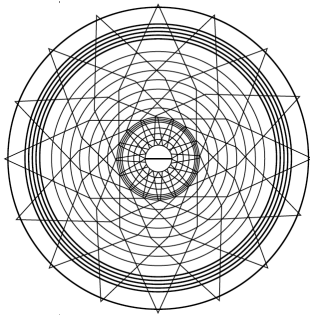
*No to eccentricity.*

*No to moving or being moved*

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<sup>5</sup> His later research following Contact Improvisation can be found at <https://www.materialforthespine.com/>

<sup>6</sup> See e.g., <https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/yvonne-rainer-no-manifesto/1454>



It is precisely in the sphere of representation or not, or, let's say the theatrical act of transformation and make-believe - pretending to be another in short - as opposed to the performance of authenticity (the Goffman everyday self as it were) that divides the theatre-as-drama sector from the Performance Studies/Postdramatic referencing sector. Today the binaries sneak up on each other, borrow and steal, but for a long time their clear distinction held sway. I've defined my own Masters programme as this: in theatre people are performing their relationship with each other, in performance they're performing their relationship to the world. It's simplistic but helps explain the psychological versus conceptual divide.

### **The Research Agenda**

Of the above considerations, from pedagogy and curriculum, to doctoral research, all are overarched by what is understood as constituting Research in Higher Education in the UK. Goldsmiths' research academics are contracted not only to deliver pedagogy from our research, but to spend forty percent of our working lives producing such for governmental accountability exercises.

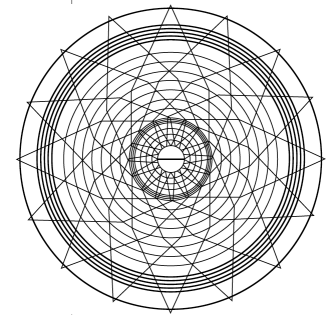
The UK's Research Excellence Framework (REF) is a national audit that takes place every six years and grades each university in a public league table. Results affect university income from central government. REF defines research as "*a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared*" (REF-2021, 2018). Academics are required to grade research of all types - books, articles, projects and creative practice - on a scale of one to four. To achieve four stars (the top grading) you need to prove that your research is world-leading in contributing to new knowledge in the field. There is much emphasis on international significance. A department's outputs are submitted to external panels, who scrutinise the organisation's own evaluations according to REF criteria. There is a cross-institutional peer reviewing process to ensure parity of standard. The REF has also more recently introduced a new category - that produces twenty-five percent of a final assessment, impact. Impact is defined as an "*effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia*" (REF-2021, 2018). Essentially this is an explanation of where the tax-payers money is going so as to ensure that academics are not only operating in ivory towers of intellectual self-service but can demonstrate public engagement. As a working practitioner with Arts Council and other public arts funding for the past forty years, arguing for the social engagement of my work is nothing new. I make theatre after all and need to reach audiences. Proving this however, according to REF qualifiers, is a trickier challenge. It involves gathering testimonials, before-and-after evidence, and a range of other methods for answering that simple but knotty question "what changed?" We produce Impact Case Studies, and a great deal of labour and money is spent developing these with both internal and external advisors. Meanwhile there is understandable academic resistance to scholarly works being required to justify themselves within an impact agenda.



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Meanwhile, creative practice researchers working in ephemeral arts are establishing our research value in impact terms as compared to, for example, creating a vital change in human rights law, or a scientific discovery that saves lives. We wryly comment today as we work on REF 2021 that we're not exactly Oxford University, producing the vaccine for Covid-19. Now that's impact! Our impacts will generally be, rather, on changing people's hearts and minds, on small shifts of organisation or behaviour, on contributing to social cohesion, enhancing individual and collective experience and on influencing creative thinking in general. This is challenging to prove or evaluate in REF terms, particularly owing to the fact that some effects of creative practice can only be understood in any data collecting terms, where this is even possible, a long time after.

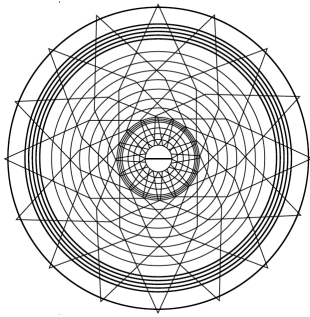
As previously stated, the current UK government is seeking to improve Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics provision (STEM) subjects that are considered profitable and useful, whilst it construes the arts, as well as social sciences and the humanities, as 'low-value' due to job and income prospects following such degrees and doubtlessly because these produce questioning citizens<sup>7</sup>. Education is of course an instrumental tool of ideology. Policy consistently undermines SHAPE disciplines in cultural as well as primary and secondary educational funding policy. In our UK Higher education landscape, in which we have been effectively privatised, students paying very high fees<sup>8</sup>, the REF counts for a great deal: income from government is determined by the scores, even though this forms a relatively small percentage of income overall. Thus, it could be argued that the REF value ascribed to a department and an institution is more reputational than economic, though with cascading economic affect. A department with a high REF score will receive an inflated budget over a department that achieves a low score. And as for the reputational question the argument goes that you don't get customers if you're not seen to provide excellent service as measured in published league tables of varying kinds including the National Student Survey (the NSS) and the tables generated by national newspapers.

UK universities are operating in a highly competitive environment. In competing for students, we are beholden to all kinds of audits. A prospective student is searching for the best that money can buy, and this keeps institutions on our toes daily in an endless cycle of surveys and student satisfaction protocols. It is an understatement to say that the semi-privatisation of our universities is corrupting the learning environment. It is frankly deleterious, and we feel the affect as it seeps down into the educational soil and infects the roots of our academies on a daily basis. Audits require mechanisms, measuring rods, standards and vocabularies that go with data collection

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<sup>7</sup> The latest Covid deficit recovery plan published by the Government in July 2020 makes this explicit, linking the value of university course to employability, setting conditions for any Government-backed loan. See Department for Education (2020).

<sup>8</sup> Current BA Home/EU Fees are in excess of £9000 per annum.



and proof. These are derived from science protocols. This is why they sit uncomfortably with creative research.

As co-director of our department's REF 2021 research submission, ninety percent of my remit is taken up with justifying research within terminologies and quasi-scientific data collection that work against the very principles of creative research practice and its encounters with its publics. Culture isn't a commodity whose effect can be instantly measured. Spectatorship isn't always consumerism that elicits pleasure, or consolation, or any other enjoyable benefit. Seeking to measure precisely the impact of an artistic experience derived from research is only ever going to be schematic. Sociologists have assessed and proved the culture-is-good-for-you argument and perennially come up with useful evidence, such as that music is beneficial because it improves brain performance, that drama socialises the child and can reduce anxiety and so on.<sup>9</sup>

### **Proving research criteria: new knowledge**

My fundamental point is that using merely instrumental tools risks becoming a *reductio ad absurdum*; for the impacts and effects of culture, and the timelines along which these are felt, the small and larger fireworks that ignite in a person's psyche and lived experience are impossible to package neatly into REF regulatory frameworks or any report to justify public spending.

Meanwhile, guiding my practice research colleagues through the imperatives of this exercise in the production of their research portfolios, I find myself repeating *contre-coeur*<sup>10</sup> the REF mantra: "this is a value judgement you're making, innovation you're claiming without evidence. The REF panel want the facts so that they can assess the value". Or "this is a description not a research question". They might throw up their hands and say, "I know what happened, I was there", and I am obliged to say, "did you capture that moment on video or audience questionnaire?" or some such. That's not to say that my colleagues aren't busy researching in the strict sense of addressing a problem by finding out new things. It's that they're researching according to their own terms of 'finding out', not the REF's; then, straining to provide evidence in frames of reference with which they don't identify and being required to keep a detailed archive of their practice as it evolves that is not always conducive to how a research methodology is operating.

There is increased awareness of the imperative for evidence to justify funding. Today, archiving ephemeral practice as-it-happens is a correlative industry for the live practitioner, which is a frequent contradiction in terms. An artist trained in working to reach into the creative source - which cannot ever be defined in absolutes - has to simultaneously be looking in their rear-view mirror, gathering archive. There is a proliferating culture of brilliant websites for far less brilliant work, another fall-out from

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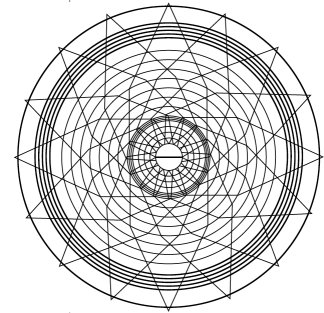
<sup>9</sup> I was on a funding panel recently who awarded the substantial cash prize to a music researcher doing just this, since we are counteracting a government that has drastically reduced arts learning in schools.

<sup>10</sup> (French) Literally 'against the heart' so: reluctantly

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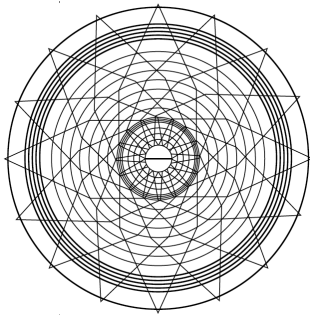
what Guy Debord (1995) called *The Society of the Spectacle*. For some, producing archival evidence comes easily. For others it's an agony, not just in the sense of pain, but in the word's original meaning: a contest, steeped in contradictory forces.

On the other hand, as regards durable evidence of the ephemeral: contemporary practice can sometimes appear as if out of nowhere, without precedence or reference, reinventing an unknown wheel that has turned many years earlier, invisible to the younger practitioner. Such lacunae can arise simply due to lack of access to history. Much twentieth century innovation occurred pre-video and digital recording (Furse, 2002). There is a paucity of evidence in, for example, the history of what we called Alternative Theatre in the UK that I'm incidentally currently working to address. We are at pains as educators to join the dots, assist our students in finding out what their heritage might be, and how they are - even unwittingly and coincidentally - taking ideas of the past forward into the present and future. Again, Performance Studies can provide useful intellectual reference points to support locating an assumption of novelty into an historic context.

Another twist to note: the ethos of performance research has created, in turn, examples of practice that can be something created entirely for the academic world to feed on. Not performance for paying publics and the media, but performance enquiries that never produce an encounter with audience, nor have to prove themselves worthy of, say public funding. Such work will not make a REF Impact Case Study but might go into a pack of Research submissions. There is nothing intrinsically invalid with such research processes, for they might bring important new insights (a REF criterion) that will transmit and pass through the culture eventually. Only, one can find a straining-to-prove, as if the university environment itself and all attendant critical theories have encouraged a kind of falsehood, an intellectualising of activities that are frequently simpler, more obvious, and less opaque than any theoretical justification can sincerely substantiate.

### **Conclusion**

Ephemeral practice research means many things. As an artist practitioner and researcher who writes creatively as well as critically and theoretically, you may not be surprised that I remain sceptical of the REF exercise. Not because I don't understand the need to justify public spending, but because I'm not sure that the REF has found the right mechanism for this as regards creative arts research. We are proving our value to society in a particular neo-liberal political moment in the UK, a political move to the right started by Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s, who declared there was no such thing as society, only individuals. The word 'industry' has seamlessly slipped into the arts vocabulary so that we now have Cultural Industries and not just culture; we have Cultural Entrepreneurship rather than cultural activity; and we have Cultural Capital, each the consequence of neo-liberal policy, as deftly parsed by Robert Hewison (2014) in his book *Cultural Capital, The Rise and Fall of Creative Britain*. The languages of the factory and business applied to creative arts are the new normal. This is the landscape of the cynic, whom the literary wit Oscar Wilde (1995) defined in



his 1892 play *Lady Windermere's Fan*, as someone who knows “the price of everything and the value of nothing”.

Reducing the value of creative practice to an instrumental measure, and testing this against investment, will remain distasteful to those who actually produce cultural knowledge. In the UK this shift in values has occurred in my own adult lifetime. I started working professionally when the Arts Council was funding what it defined as quality work, not what rapidly, under Thatcher, became a bums-on-seats (audience numbers) value system, box-ticking, that has prevailed since.

Universities have been slower to succumb to the market but have done so perforce since the hefty hike in tuition fees in 2011, following swiftly on post-2008 austerity politics. Today, our managers will tell us, acutely felt during Covid-19, we have nothing to prove other than our cost-effectiveness. The REF, which presides over all UK research institutions, serves this ideology. What we can rescue from its negative affect on academic freedom and creative vigour, is that at least it brings the opportunity for colleagues to discover each other's work in some detail, to re-establish our departmental identity and aims, and to focus on our common purpose.

I speak this in the midst of pandemic. Not only are theatres going bankrupt but the UK government has caught HEIs in a double bind: we are privatised to the extent that at Goldsmiths, for example, seventy-five % of our income depends on fees, with some nine% on the public purse through Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) that responds to REF results. This means that we continue to be defined as ‘public sector institutions’ and not businesses that can benefit from the government's current subsidies to prop up the economy. Our futures depend on private bank or Government loans and the dexterity of those who will survive within our universities to come up with recovery plans. These, doubtlessly, will include some of the learning that shifting to online teaching has taught us. We can envisage, on the bright side, opportunity for closer collaboration beyond our borders for both our pedagogy and research futures. Entropy might not be totally reversed, but kept at bay if creative thinking in universities finds ways to duck and dive in what has, in the UK, become an obstacle course around which we navigate ways of avoiding some of the pitfalls of what is now termed a ‘Knowledge Economy’<sup>11</sup>, in which our value is reduced to numbers on a scale.

And so finally, paradoxically, as theatre arts were brought into the university environment precisely to insist on their intrinsic value in a world of science, seventy years on we continue to compete in and with this world to validate how we bring benefit. Creative research and pedagogy constitute a questioning relationship to society and in turn produce societal effect. We know this. But we continue to struggle to prove how ephemeral arts, that leave memory rather than material trace, and whose impact is so hard to monetise, can generate thinking beyond frames, oppressions and national borders. As we live through the current global pandemic and climate catastrophe, and the certain economic crash that will follow, the imagination, as the

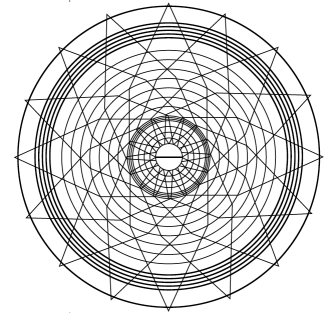
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<sup>11</sup> The knowledge economy is a system of consumption and production based on intellectual capital.

## [Scientific Articles]

Furse A.

*Ephemeral Arts in a World of Science*



Situationists, led by Guy Debord (1995), proclaimed back in 1968, will have to seize power. Because, quite simply, we are going to have to imagine really very hard how to face the future.

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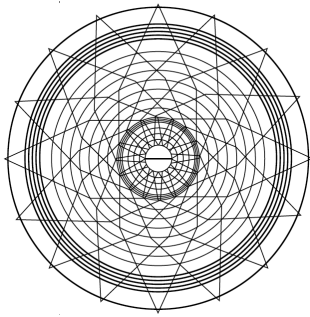
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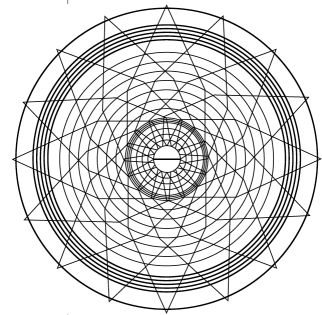
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*Ephemeral Arts in a World of Science*



### ЭФЕМЕРНОЕ ИСКУССТВО В МИРЕ НАУКИ

**Фурс А.**

PhD, профессор в Голдсмитском колледже

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**Аннотация:**

В статье автор рассматривает некоторые проблемы и вызовы, касающиеся ведения переговоров о творческой практике в современной академической среде, с позиции собственного знания и практики в Голдсмитском колледже Лондонского университета, известном во всем мире преподаванием в сфере искусства и гуманитарных наук, практической работой и прикладными исследованиями. Как специалист по театру и перформансу, автор размышляет в контексте краткой истории драматических факультетов в Великобритании и их переходе в течение последних трех десятилетий к изучению перформанса. Наконец, автор обсуждает эти темы в рамках всеобъемлющего рассмотрения того, что такое институт с высокой научно-исследовательской активностью и что это означает в Великобритании сегодня.

**Ключевые слова:** творческая практика, перформансы, высшее образование, преподавание искусств и гуманитарных наук, педагогический дизайн