

***EFTERMAELE*: THAT WHICH REMAINS AFTER THE EVENT A PANEL DISCUSSION CONCERNING THE USE OF VIDEO IN THE DOCUMENTATION OF LIVE PERFORMANCE**

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Eftermaele is a Danish word that means something like reputation or legacy, or perhaps a combination of the two. I first came across it in a short article written by Eugenio Barba in *The Drama Review* in 1992 in which he reflects on the anguish common to artists who work in/with the ephemeral. Such works, by definition, exist only in the moment in which they were created and Barba, asking “what will be said about our work after we have gone?” bemoans the fact that theatre artists seem so heedless of their own *eftermaele*.

When I read Barba’s essay, I was just beginning to teach documentation as an integral part of the undergraduate course in performance studies at the University of Sydney. The Theatre Workshop, whose work played such a large part in the genesis of performance studies as we were developing it at the time, had always documented the productions it sponsored. Over the years of trial and error in collaboration with Theatre Workshop and through our attempts to take advantage of the ever-proliferating new technologies, it became evident to me that the task of performance documentation needed to be taken seriously in the academic context. In my opinion, the skills involved in documenting performance and in ‘reading’ documents of all sorts so as to retrieve the performance information they hold are essential elements in the formation of a performance studies specialist. While Barba was not thinking about video recording or indeed about documentation, his word ‘*eftermaele*’ helps to bring into focus what is at stake in the documentation process both for the artists themselves and for the culture they are instrumental in bringing into being through their work.

Video recording is of course not the only medium involved in performance documentation: written descriptions of performance, other written traces, still photography and, more recently, digital media have a major contribution to make (the 2008 issue of *About Performance* is devoted to the use of still photography to document performance; see McAuley 2008). Video has, however, become a key element in respect of performance documentation since the 1980s when the technology first became widely available. The wealth of experience acquired by performance practitioners and scholars since then and the complexity of the issues raised by the interface between video and live performance led to the decision to focus this panel on video rather than other means of documentation. Interestingly, the authors of both the case studies that form the basis of the panel discussion make a strong case for the need for other materials to supplement video recordings if they are to be useful beyond the

immediate context of production.

Video promised so much when it first appeared: it could record so many of the sign systems involved in performance, it was so much easier to use than film and the recording process could be relatively unobtrusive, recordings could be made in real time, using the theatre lighting levels and could, at a pinch, be made by a single operator located behind the audience, handling the recording of both sound and image. As we all know now, the early promise fizzled out into disappointment: actors hated the performances they saw recorded, and even when sound and light levels were adequate, what was recorded was simply not what they recalled having done. Many directors still refuse to have their productions recorded, not wishing to leave as testimony something that falls so far short of what they know audiences experienced. Over the years, however, performance makers have developed more realistic expectations of what purposes can be served by video and it now fulfils a number of functions in the production process, from the so-called 'truth tapes,' (usually a single camera, minimally edited recording that is made during the run and rarely consulted thereafter) to the heavily edited promotional recordings commissioned from professional video artists that have become an essential part of the marketing process of productions.

It is significant that, notwithstanding the gradual acceptance of the video recording of performance within the performance making community and the widespread practice of making recordings for various purposes, there is no substantial pressure coming from performance makers for the establishment of a national video archive or for the systematic collection and preservation of recordings. The funding bodies and entrepreneurs, like the artists themselves, seem content for video recordings to join the other traces of performance that are abandoned as a kind of detritus or accidental by-product of the performance experience, or are collected haphazardly by individuals and institutions and subsequently made available to viewers in an equally haphazard and ad hoc manner. This is doubtless yet another manifestation of the curious neglect of the *Eftermaele* by theatre practitioners to which Barba draws attention.

The discussion of performance documentation in academic conferences frequently turns on logistics such as the difficulty of getting permission to record or to gain access to recordings, and on ethical and political issues such as copyright and intellectual property, and on the lack of a national or state archive. All of these are important issues but for this panel, I wanted to take a step backwards and focus on an area that is logically prior but is rarely discussed, namely what constitutes a 'good' recording. Even though video recording has become a routine practice in relation to live performance over the last 20 years, and over the same period it has become increasingly common for academics presenting conference papers to include short extracts from video recordings as evidence or illustration, it is significant that neither performance practitioners nor performance scholars have produced much in way of systematic analysis of what it is they want to see in a recording. Asking what makes a 'good' recording from the artists' point of view, or from that of other users of performance documentation such as analysts, historians, theorists, archivists, publicists, entrepreneurs and funding bodies, I am very much aware that the accumulated knowledge and experience of the last 20 years has not been written down. The knowledge exists within the domain of practice and, as usual, this remains part of oral culture. As the practitioners reach retirement age, they take their know-how (and often their collections of master tapes) into retirement with them.

Within the academic field of theatre and performance studies, we need to talk a lot more about the quality of the recordings we use for teaching and research purposes, we need to share information about what constitutes an effective recording in what context and for what kinds of purpose. Performers, too, need to place on the record their responses to recordings of their work and to be more pro-active

in the recording process. We need to have on-going discussions about the sorts of recordings that need to be preserved and the sorts of recordings that should be made if the idea of *eftermaele* is taken seriously. I would dearly like to see A.D.S.A. award an annual prize for the best performance documentation, as it does for the best essay, book or student production and allocate time at the annual conference for viewing of the short listed recordings. This would not only raise the profile of documentation but would necessarily lead to debate about ways and means, and to regularly revised attempts to codify best practice.

The panel revolved around the presentation of two case studies, in which the maker of a video recording of performance presented an extract from his work, discussing issues arising from the making and from subsequent commentary on the recording by the artists involved in the performance and by other people using it in different contexts. The case studies involved very different kinds of performance (corroboree in the Northern Territory and text-based theatre performed in a non-traditional space in Adelaide) but produced some fascinating areas of common concern and overlapping recommendations. Dominique Sweeney's account of filming corroborees at Kalumburu was profoundly affected by his discovery in Canberra of film dating from 40 years earlier and by taking this back to Kalumburu and watching it with groups of local people. Russell Emerson's presentation uses his recording of Brink Theatre's production of *4.48 Psychosis* in order to distill experiences derived from his 20 years of involvement in recording performance in many different kinds of context and for many different purposes. Emerging from both accounts is the need for video recordings to be supplemented in a systematic way by other materials and recommendations for how this can best be done. More importantly, the case studies and the panel discussion that followed emphasised ways in which documentation permits performance to extend its work within a given cultural context and beyond and across a substantial time frame. This, in turn, hints at the potential for a radical repositioning of both theatre and performance in cultural discourse.

References

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