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Editorial

What are the characteristics of popular entertainment? We know that these are shaped by the sites of their performances. Yet the circus tent and the theatre stage (however configured) form the tip of an iceberg that is made up of side show booths, marketplace stalls, pubs, street venues and even television studios that all mediate the interaction between the performers and their audiences. Nonetheless, standup comedians, buskers, variety performers and showmen know the value of the eccentric, the exotic and the unusual. Even a good joke juxtaposes the ordinary with an extraordinary outcome. It is this juxtaposition that turns the commonplace into something memorable. As often as not, this process involves complementary manifestations of satire, parody and outrageous burlesque allowing for the display of contrasting yet often inexorably logical viewpoints. Thus it is perhaps appropriate that two of the strands in our current issue should concern themselves with unusual and exotic people (the manifestations of ethnology and entertainment) and unusual and idiosyncratic places (the manifestations of sites and performance).

In her 2002 book *Performance and Evolution in the Age of Darwin*, Jane Goodall discussed the relationship between the emergent science of ethnology, the displays of exotic peoples mounted in the name of scientific scrutiny and evaluation, and the performance of ethnicity utilised by 19th century showmen like P.T. Barnum. In the book she briefly touched on the parody of scientific terminology that pervaded the early issues of the magazine *Punch*, commencing in 1841. Her article in this issue explores in greater detail the themes of racial and cultural polarity seen through the satiric prism of the magazine. The figure of Punch, of course, is itself closely connected to its popular theatre antecedents and the magazine's early contributors constantly employed stage imagery to explore the idiosyncrasies of social customs, particularly English ones. The article shows the ways in which the English upper crust could be displayed as carnival fools, and pilloried in particular "the fashionable attitudes of compassionate condescension towards the uncivilised" that they themselves displayed. In this respect the magazine reflected a particularly English enjoyment of caricature, burlesque and 'topsyturvydom' that transformed the usual into the unusual.

Jane Goodall also explored the development, during the last decades of the 19th century, of ethnological congresses and wild action shows, suggesting

that “almost all the ethnological displays [such as the Midway display at the 1894 Chicago World’s Fair] were skewed towards performance.”¹ Scott Magelssen and Heidi Nees in their article, develop this with particular reference to the *Wild West* shows of Buffalo Bill Cody and the politics of Native representation and agency in this context. Suggesting that these immensely popular shows raised questions even in their time about the possibility of subversiveness, they ask whether these shows were themselves counter-sites to a mythical notion of the American West. If Indians like Sitting Bull were in fact performing ‘themselves,’ did the shows provide them with a capacity for self-empowerment, or were they simply passive participants in another instance of commercial exploitation? At a different time and in a different place, Sharon Mazer raises some of the same questions. To many people, an awareness of the indigenous Māori of New Zealand is probably confined to the *haka*, the traditional dance of defiance that prefaces a game of rugby football in which New Zealanders are taking part. Mazer, however, focuses on the *Kapa Haka*, represented in a festival first promoted as recently as 1972, which she describes as an invention designed to preserve and promulgate ideas of contemporary Māori identity while exploring and celebrating notions of tribe, genealogy and connection with their land. The *Kapa Haka* festivals act to preserve and celebrate Māori language and culture through performance while at the same time offering what she calls a ritualisation of resistance to the dominant non-Māori European culture. Within this arena the Māori are unquestionably performing ‘themselves.’

Although it may be ahistorical to apply scientific notions of ethnology to a discussion of human monstrosity, Karen Jillings’ investigation of the career of Lazarus Colloredo and his conjoined brother, Jean Baptista, within the early-modern context of obsession with the strange and the marvellous, does show some striking similarities with later performances of selfhood. Certainly the 19th century exhibitor of the exotic and the unusual provided the evidence that ethnologists needed. The article argues that “For contemporaries... [monstrosities provided] embedded evidence of both divine omnipotence and nature’s fecundity, transforming the very sight of them into an instructive and awe-inspiring...form of entertainment.” She quotes Robert Bogdan who refers to freak shows in which the individuals are “active participants in their own presentation”² to offer a parallel with Lazarus Colloredo’s ostentatious display of himself to his spectators. One might argue the same for Sitting Bull and Buffalo Bill Cody whose autobiographical performances (to borrow Jane Goodall’s phrase) challenged in their time “the boundary between self and others.”

While *Punch’s* “charivari” referred back to a licenced world of carnival, another representative of such a world could also be found in the stage figure of the Fool. John Astington uses an early 1620s print of Will Sommers, the court fool of Henry VIII, to explore the relationship between the figure of “a private entertainer for an elite circle” and his stage manifestation. As we know, the Fool was empowered to comment on the dominant notions of social status through a parodic commentary. The article explores this ability using Samuel Rowley’s 1603 play *When you see me you’ll know me* in which Will Sommers figures as just such a commentator. The 1620s’ print seems to suggest a stage costume that

reflects a recent performance of this figure, but it also displays a disquieting mixture of the emblematic and the real, in that, though the costume may reflect a stage persona, the facial depiction seems to suggest a particularity that might offer a glimpse of the real man.

In our previous issue we offered an exploration of the nexus between sport and entertainment. Here we explore the roles of performers and spectators within the field of mountain bike racing where athletes develop and display their skills and spectators offer their own contribution to the 'dramaturgy' of the event. While cross-country mountain bike racing was only added to the Olympics in 1996, cycling has had a long association with entertainment. We can point to the inclusion of cycling among the novelty acts of pantomime during the 1890s, the mass cycling parades held from 1896 onward, as well as the connection between cycling and physical prowess which Eugene Sandow demonstrated in 1897.³ Moreover, cross-country cycling goes back at least to the pioneering feats of endurance performed by Walter Robinson in 1919 as he crossed the Berwyn mountains of Wales with all the dash of a melodramatic hero.⁴ The intervening years have seen skilled performances develop, and Kath Bicknell, herself an experienced mountain bike rider, in her article argues for the existence of a symbiotic relationship between bike riders as performers and spectators as co-participants in an experience that affects them both. Spectators, she suggests, enhance the execution of the riders and provide ongoing motivation during the event. Like actors in a production, riders 'agree to take a chance' and follow a predetermined 'script' fashioned by the nature of the event and the 'staging' of the course itself. In some respects such a relationship might remind one of that enjoyed by music hall, variety and especially circus performers with their spectators, even if today theatre audiences no longer draw "on their own embodied appreciation...to generate words that would encourage performers in their approach to an obstacle and help them to negotiate their performance more successfully." Certainly circus and variety performers solicit and receive the encouragement of their spectators and 19th century theatre audiences, as we know, were vociferous in acknowledging well-crafted moments and not averse to criticising a lack of accomplishment. In mountain bike riding this symbiosis seems to remain.

The site of performance and the manner in which it fashions audience responses remains a *donnée* of entertainment. Paul Davies, himself an accomplished writer for the stage and television, recounts his journey as a writer of site-specific theatrical events. His company TheatreWorks was at the forefront of the so-called Australian New Wave that flourished in Melbourne during the 1970s and 1980s. The company was particularly noted for its dramatisation of neighbourhood stories involving the participation of the community and staged in court-houses, botanical gardens and on trams. In this particular case, his article chronicles an attempt to inhabit an *objet trouvé* – a once grand mansion – and to tell its story, using key moments in its history, a history which finds dramatic parallels in that of the Australian nation. The account thus contains some of the same fascination with "the lure of the local" and the appreciation of "historical narrative as it is written in the landscape or place by the people who

live or lived there” that draws Mike Pearson, himself a distinguished performer and site-specific facilitator, to scrutinise the “lived experiences of land, of the interrelationship of performance and the everyday, and of the entangled nature of land, human subject and event.”⁵

Finally, our *Afterpieces* in this issue contain two review articles that use as their focus two recent scholarly books, both published in 2010: Jim Davis’s edited volume of essays *Victorian Pantomime* and Veronica Kelly’s *The Empire Actors* which chronicles the tours of starring actors who “travelled the world in style, carrying messages of trade, fashion, tourism, modernity and the privilege of being a member of the British Empire” to Australasia from the 1890s to the post-World War One period. We hope that future issues will attract other writers to comment on new and significant books and use this forum for the wider discussion of the ideas they suggest.

¹ Jane R. Goodall, *Performance and Evolution in the Age of Darwin: Out of the Natural Order*, (London: Routledge 2002), 103.

² Robert Bogdan, “In Defence of *Freak Show*,” *Disability, Handicap and Society* 8 (1993): 92.

³ See the chapter on bicycles in Andrew Horrall, *Popular Culture in London c. 1890-1918: the transformation of entertainment* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 54-64.

⁴ Walter M. Robinson, “Over the top: crossing the Berwyn Mountains in March,” *Cycling*, (May 8 1919): 344-5.

⁵ Mike Pearson, *In Comes I: Performance, Memory and Landscape* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press), 7 and quoting L. R. Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: The New Press 1997), 7.