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Editorial

Peter Bailey, Jacky Bratton and others have argued persuasively that melodrama offers a conduit for the processing of modernist concerns and popular anxieties. Even if the issues raised are subsumed in a narrative that affirms the continuing existence of heroes, villains and distressed women, the issues are indeed raised and, as it were, laid on the table as new knowledge for popular audiences and in a form that fuses that knowledge with fantasy, authenticity with fiction. Lisa Skwirblies refers to this in the context of two entertainments which appeared in Berlin between 1904 and 1907, whose subject was the extermination of the Herero and Nama peoples in German Southwest Africa (Namibia today). The first took place in the Circus Busch in 1904; the second was part of the annual Metropol revue in 1907. The first had elements of German operetta and music hall but its shape as described by Skwirblies might remind us of the British circus tradition usually identified with Astley's Amphitheatre in London which saw the same sort of triumphalism displayed in shows about Waterloo or the Alma during the Crimean War. It might also remind us of the spectacular Drury Lane autumn melodramas that featured British soldiers in South Africa (*Cheer, Boys, Cheer* 1895), Egypt (*Freedom* 1883) or Afghanistan (*Youth* 1881). They all displayed a certainty about the efficacy of patriotic zeal. The image, though not a Drury Lane melodrama, displays this certainty:

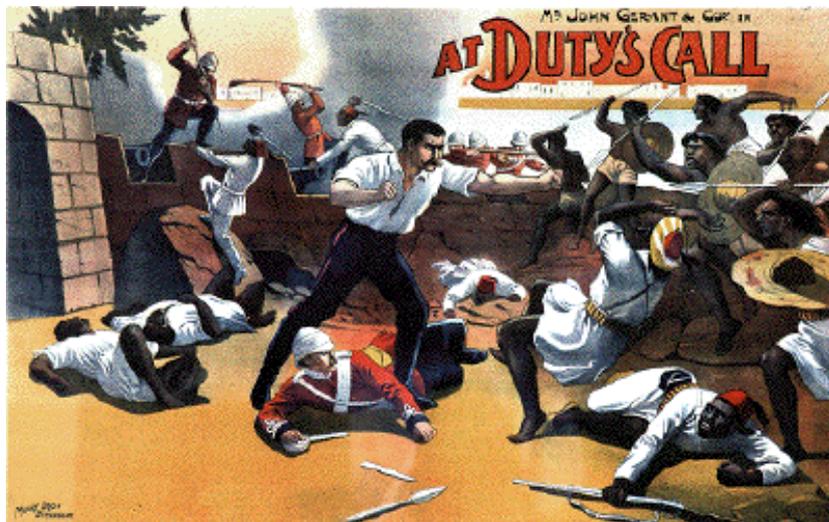


Figure 1. *At Duty's Call* arranged by John Gerant 1898 Michael R. Booth Theatre Collection, University of Newcastle

Yet the autumn melodramas were also capable of reflecting changed and changing political and social attitudes. A case in point is Cecil Raleigh's *The Best of Friends* in 1902 set during the Second Anglo-Boer War, a mere two years before the Berlin circus would show German troops returning confidently home in its show *German Southwest Africa – War Images from the German Colonies*. In Michael Booth's words, *The Best of Friends* was mounted in an atmosphere where "the confident, expansionist mood of the nineties had soaked away into the veldt with the blood of some 6000 British and colonial dead and 23,000 wounded."¹ Thus the play reflected a war weariness, a community of sympathy for the Boers and a desire for reconciliation. The capacity to show suffering as a component of colonial expansionism did appear in the 1907 Metropol revue *You Gotta See This*. The theatre's annual revue tended to be topical and satirical. The appearance on stage of exhausted and dehydrated German soldiers in Southwest Africa drew polarised responses: the depiction wasn't satirical and strove to be authentic. Nonetheless the events of the war between 1904 and 1907 proved potent selling points to Berlin audiences.

In 2013 Dave Calvert's article in this journal recounted the history of the character of Pierrot from the earliest days in the *commedia dell'arte* to the character's French manifestation at the end of the 18th century to its appearance as part of a British pierrot troupe from the end of the 19th century, as well as its persistence into the post-World War 2 period.² The British version proved to be an enduring one particularly as it was identified with a seaside environment. During World War 1 many frontline concert parties presented themselves as a pierrot troupe and this persona proved lasting in POW camps as well. Calvert was (and possibly still is) a member of the Pierrotters, billed as the last existing professional pierrot troupe in Britain (and possibly the world). In our current issue this tradition is represented in the article by Tony Lidington, himself a performer and director of the Pierrotters. Lidington has moved in a different direction and I'll return to him shortly. But from an historical perspective the article by Laura Purcell-Gates discusses the relationship of the Pierrot figure to the development of mime techniques in France during the 19th century. Despite its *commedia* origins the Pierrot figure in France was slowly stripped of its viscerality and was replaced by the external manifestations of 'sang-froid' whereby performers' movements increasingly came to resemble those of automata and puppets while nuance and subtle expressivity were translated into minimalist facial expression. Indeed the figure became a point of departure in the debates about the most appropriate ways of expressing 'the natural' in performance. Ironically the popular Pierrot figure became increasingly the preserve of elite coteries of theatregoers in the late 19th century as it became increasingly sentimentalised. The 1857 image of Paul Legrand captures this particular development:



Figure 2. Paul Legrand 1857

This is a far cry from the determinedly carnivalesque thrust of Tony Lidington's work which in his guise as a Pierrot can be glimpsed in action (usually frenetic) on the web as part of the Pierrotters. His article here however documents a detachment from the pierrot company in his pursuit of the role and effectiveness of an itinerant British showman. He hasn't lost touch with the seaside but his construction of a portable theatre which accompanies him and which in a sense he inhabits (the *Imaginarium*) allows him to practice his craft in any public space where he explores the interactions between himself and his audiences who themselves he persuades to be co-participants. Lidington is very well aware of the differing dynamics that need to be controlled and shaped as part of the theatricalised space he has created in a shared public realm. In the course of his experimentation he has fashioned a peep-show controlled by a raree-man or, in Lidington's transformation, by a seer performer, essentially a clever fool capable of disseminating interpretations of current issues in a form that destabilises received traditions and thus can be interpreted as a political act. From a scholar-performance perspective Lidington documents a journey of discovery: the manipulation of spectators in ways that make them pliant and receptive, transforming their found environment into a carnival space—even for just a moment.

A unifying thread in this issue traces the changes in the role of spectators and their engagement with performers. This relationship can be a problematic one and has produced some energetic debates among scholars about the most appropriate methods to be used in the analysis of the dynamics as performers, spectators and even media managers explore a changing diversity in performance practices. It makes theatrical historiography and its parameters uncomfortably elastic. The process however is an energising one and this in particular is reflected in the elasticity with which we describe the world of popular entertainments and examine the spaces where these negotiations take place.

In our investigations of spectatorship we have embraced the effects of globalisation and trans-national travel on reception and the porous boundaries between spectators and players at sporting events and also in city streets where theatre companies have constructed living farmscapes that have transformed their urban contexts.³ In regard to sporting events and especially those that have been televised, we are familiar with the apparent dichotomy between spectators who are actual physical participants in a live event and the much larger cohort scattered throughout a country or the world (as in the case of a World Cup broadcast or of a Grand Slam tennis final) but accessed individually in front of a television set. The televisual audiences are able to see much more of the event as multi-camera angles reveal every facet of the performer's technique and instant replays of key moments make them into instant experts possessing an insider knowledge that the live spectators are not privileged to possess. Thus technology has once again destabilised our perceptions about liveness and the nature of the performance moment.

We have all just emerged from a presidential race which has exposed us to these techniques in a political context. In 2004 Diana Taylor wrote:

A well-rehearsed politician stands elevated on an elaborately crafted stage in a huge auditorium, delivering an impassioned speech to delegates and supporters. The adoring wife and children look on. [...] Those present as "live," embodied spectators see most of the proceedings on huge monitors. [...] For distant spectators who watch the proceedings on television, the delegates, stage hands, and hecklers inside, and protestors outside, become performers, a part of the show they see. For them, the event is further mediated by professional spectators, those expert commentators who evaluate the efficacy of the performance. Does it motivate and persuade spectators? [...] At the bottom of the screen, an information loop encourages viewers to participate actively by emailing their reactions to the designated website. [...] A successful performance turns spectators into voters and donors, whether those spectators are embodied (live), or the product of the 'live' transmission that creates spectators everywhere.⁴

She could equally have been describing a performer in the Eurovision Song Contest and the conditions of performance which Chris Hay and Billy Kanafani describe in their article on the 2015 Contest. They experienced the 2014 Contest from the distance of their home television sets but in 2015 they determined to experience the event live. Their experiences return us to the porous boundaries of spectatorship and invite us to assess the value of participant-observation approaches to audience research. They emphasise clearly the existence of two audiences for the Contest: the actual physically present spectators and the broadcast spectators, and they demonstrate instances where both are manipulated by the technological decisions and the fiat of the show's comperes. Each audience set was able to enjoy a distinct experience of liveness even if parts of the Contest's staging were inaccessible or invisible to the physically present audience and could only be read by the broadcast audience. The article argues for a more complex and multi-layered notion of liveness in which spatial

co-presence becomes inessential for liveness to be realised. With this position Philip Auslander is likely to concur: "Liveness is the experience of having an active connection to an event taking place now, but somewhere else, whether that somewhere else is miles away or only inches away."⁵

In his article, Tony Lidington suggests that itinerant showmen performing outdoors in public spaces may develop a more serious role, to present matters of everyday concern gilded over by the fantasticated creations of popular entertainment. Mikael Stromberg returns us to the value of outdoor entertainment but from a very different perspective: the arguments that ensued in Sweden over the relative values of outdoor and indoor theatres after the creation of *Skansen*, the first outdoor theatre in Stockholm erected in 1910. The value judgements that ensued quickly became embroiled in an ongoing discussion about high and low art. In this debate, outdoor theatres offering entertainment and dominated by light-hearted fun could easily be dismissed by their opponents as inadequate vehicles for cultivating the tastes and theatrical awareness of the people. Stromberg argues that this debate assumed a political dimension in Sweden associated with power and its imposition of a particular upper class notion about the role of culture. Nonetheless, outdoor theatres became widespread and a much loved phenomenon particularly during the Swedish summers. The whole argument became further complicated when performers like the influential Viran Rydkvist who started outdoors but took her themes and practices into an indoor intimate space (an intimacy much loved by Strindberg). A sizable working class audience followed her and responded to the way in which she poured the new wine of political discussion into the old bottles of the comic folk plays.

Central to Stromberg's discussion has been the role of the historiographer and the preservation of narratives that privilege particular value systems. Sharon Mazer's *Afterpiece* also challenges the role of the theatrical historiographer and its practitioners. In some ways her theme returns us to the analysis of the German genocide and its depictions of the indigene. Mazer's comments have been spurred on by the appearance of a number of books in which the Maori population of New Zealand takes centre stage. Mazer, however, is much exercised by the lack of what she calls creative and thoughtful speculation in the analysis of performance and the ways in which theatre and performance can be seen to construct and sustain local communities in the face of colonisation and globalisation. It will doubtless be an ongoing discussion: in any case *la lotta continua*.

¹ Michael Booth, "Soldiers of the Queen: Drury lane Imperialism," in Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou eds. *Melodrama: the Cultural Emergence of a Genre* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 16-17.

² Dave Calvert, "From Pedrolino to a Pierrot: the origin, ancestry and ambivalence of the British Pierrot troupe." *Popular Entertainment Studies*, 14, 1 (2013), 6-23.

³ See Susan Haedicke, "Performing Farmscapes in Urban Streets," *Popular Entertainment Studies*, 7, 1-2 (2016): 93-113 and on globalisation more generally "Negotiating the Entertainment Business," *Popular Entertainment Studies*, 6,2 (2015).

⁴ Diana Taylor, Editorial remarks, "The new radical performance artists: staging democracy in the Americas," *e_mispherica*, 1,1 (2004) accessible at:
http://hemisphericinstitute.org/journal/1_1/editorial_eng.html.

⁵ Philip Auslander, "Afterword: So Close and Yet So Far Away – The Proxemics of Liveness" in *Experiencing Liveness in Contemporary Performance*, ed. Matthew Reason and Anja Mølle Lindelof (London: Routledge, 2016), 132.