

PERFORMING PLACE 1 (PERFORMANCE)

This section offers video examples of framed, planned, rehearsed moments of performance that were devised and took place across the three years of the Caer Llan Trilogy. On the surface, they appear to represent experimentation with site-specific performance, described by Pearson and Shanks as:

... conceived for, mounted within and conditioned by the particulars of found spaces, existing social situations or locations, both used and disused: sites of work, play and worship: cattle-market, chapel, factory, cathedral, railway station. They rely, for their conception and their interpretation, upon the complex coexistence, superimposition and interpenetration of a number of narratives and architectures, historical and contemporary, of two basic orders: that which is of the site, its fixtures and fittings, and that which is brought to the site, the performance and its scenography: of that which pre-exists the work and that which is of the work: of the past and of the present. They are inseparable from their sites, the only contexts within which they are intelligible. Performance recontextualises such sites: it is the latest occupation of a location at which other occupations – their material traces and histories – are still apparent: site is not just an interesting, and disinterested, backdrop. Such performance, in its themes and means of exposition, is not of necessity congruent with its site as when a sixth-century battle is enacted in a car factory. Interpenetrating narratives jostle to create meanings. The multiple meanings and readings of performance and site intermingle, amending and compromising one another. (Pearson and Shanks, 2001: 23)

Wilkie summarises site-specific similarly:

- Use of non-theatre locations ('found spaces')
- Influence of site in the creation of the performance
- Notion of 'fit' – that the performance 'fit' the site and vice-versa. It is important to note, however, that the 'fit' may not be a comfortable merging with the resonances of the site but might be a reaction against them. (Wilkie, 2002: 149)

Taken individually, the clips appear to demonstrate a range of site-specific performances where the pieces are devised for and in the site. It is possible to offer the agglomeration of performance work of the CLT as the *performance of place* rather than *site-specific performance*, however. The following two points suggest where the difference might lie.

1. Sites were *re-performed*.

I am suggesting that it is in a *repeated* performance of sites that a performance of place is differentiated from many other forms of performance, including site-specific. Sites were performed and, at another time, re-performed. This collection of performances offered different readings, interpretations and theatricalities of the site. Within such repetitions were the material and psychological traces of previous performances and site use. Indeed, it was in the process of seemingly erasing previous performances through the 'new' performance that traces of earlier performances were sometimes uncovered and valued. Ideas, motifs or moments from previous performances were inadvertently or deliberately repeated within the new and it was through this trace that certain ideas, motifs or moments become explicit. This is evident in three sets of material offered: Site 2/pool and surround; Site 6/mossy

stones; Site 3/wasteland. For example, a clear comment about our potentially superficial disregard for the land is evident across the Site2/pool and surround extracts.

One way of thinking about this is to think of the sites as only ever *under erasure* - what Derrida refers to as *sous rature*. Derrida suggests that certain words are always 'under erasure' because they are not sufficient to convey a meaning and yet they are the nearest possible word that can be used. Previous interpretations of the word are open to question. The word should be crossed out and written again to indicate that it is a proximal word that is not adequate. He describes this: 'At each step I was obliged to proceed by ellipses, corrections and corrections of corrections, letting go of each concept at the very moment that I needed to use it' (Derrida, 1976: xviii). (Derrida sourced this from Heidegger's crossing out of the word Being followed by the word written again. Heidegger did this to indicate that Being is before everything and needs not even be stated.) If we apply this to performance at Caer Llan, what becomes interesting is that Phelan's ephemerality of performance (1993) becomes equivocal; for those participating, previous performances were invoked through later ones. Re-performance offered traces and evocations of past performances and the resonances attached to those previous performances. Each performance was, therefore, under erasure but not fully erased; performances were not, perhaps, ephemeral because they were recalled in following work.

The second set of extracts, Site 6/Mossy Stones, provides an example of this. For those of us returning to the site and watching the third performance (CL3, by the MA group), certain traces of previous performances were present: the choice of activities; the sense of individual isolation; the questions of 'nature'/materiality that the site provoked. The response of one participant on watching this piece adds to the point. He was convinced that the MAs had seen the previous year's work on video, so familiar was it. This was an interesting moment for him. The previous year's work (ghosts/quarry workers' cottage sequence) had been full of tension in the devising process. He appeared to take some form of reassurance on seeing similar ideas explored again; it was as if the work of his group from the previous year had been validated, that it hadn't disappeared entirely and that there was a retrospective additional credibility because the conceits had been addressed again.

Previous performances were *under erasure*, not erased; the previous performance/memory was altered and re-pointed by new interpellations.

2. Fused performances

In addition to the re-performance and memory-fusion of sites suggested by the three examples of Site 2/pool and surround, Site 6/mossy stones and Site 3/wasteland, there were other kinds of performance fusion. In [The Years Pass](#) and [The Virtuous Well](#), both CL3, there is an *immanent* fusion of pasts and present, rather than the fusion that arose from different works across different years.

My own [individual response](#) in CL3 was an attempt to use the building's archaeology symbolically for different years. In this way it offered a reasonably simple vertical, tempo-historical and physically represented fusion. The owners of Caer Llan had rebuilt some of the layers of walls over the years, supporting this tempo-historical symbolism.

The core research group's final piece, *The Virtuous Well*, demonstrated a further fusion. It was devised with the intention of drawing on the *collated genre of performance practice* that had developed over many years: an ontological and methodological palimpsest. The group

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selected some elements of stories used before for example (such as the girl escaping from her window, used in [Site 3/wasteland](#)), incorporated lines from previous performances and sifted past performance practices, adapting effective performance ideas (e.g. the creation of large creatures). They selected an overall style that they found challenging yet rewarding in its familiarity. As performers they extended themselves, beyond their 'comfort zones' yet such challenges were, in themselves, familiar practice; they were used to such extension (see, for example, [Bouffants](#)).

Finally, they asked me to direct the work. This was a curious, convoluted act that recognised a particular memory of practice (myself as director), perhaps a pleasure in passing over the guidance of the piece after years of group-led experiments and, perhaps, a wish to draw me back into a comprehensive hands-on role where I, too, was able to experiment closely with familiar practitioners and feel comfortable in that practice. What was emerging was a collation of past performance practices, embedded in our physical and mental memory archives that was being called forth in this performance fusion. Thrift suggests 'places are 'passings' that 'haunt' 'us'' (1999: 310). The group seemed to be deliberately provoking the place, and its passing years of experience, to haunt us in this aggregation and manifestation of performance practice. This performance was, of itself, an ontological performance palimpsest, a fusion that drew on previous 'ways of being' as practitioners in that place.

Re-performance of sites and fused performances are performance collations and I am suggesting that these may well be interesting and specific traits attached to the performance of place.