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| Institution: Lancaster University | | |
| Unit of Assessment: 32 Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory | | |
| Title of case study: Transforming Theatre Practice by Challenging Understandings of Contemporary Performance | | |
| Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000 to 2020 | | |
| Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit: | | |
| Name(s): | Role(s) (e.g. job title): | Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: |
| Andrew Quick Tim Etchells | Professor Professor | 1991 to present 2004 to present |
| Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 to 2020 | | |
| Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N | | |
| <p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Etchells and Quick have transformed the landscape of contemporary theatre practice. Through their award-winning international companies, <i>Forced Entertainment</i> (FE) and <i>imitating the dog</i> (ITD), they have engaged large audiences in innovative forms of theatre, challenging and changing perceptions of theatre and disseminating new techniques of dramatic practice in professional and educational contexts in multiple countries, including UK, Brazil, Indonesia, Germany, Italy, Georgia, USA, France, Belgium and Hong Kong. The research has enriched and expanded the cultural lives, imaginations and sensibilities of audiences: 1.2 million people having engaged with live and on-line performances worldwide and 500 million people have been reached through intensive international media coverage. Attracting Arts Council and public funding of GBP2.9 million* since 2014, this practice has encouraged discussions of what constitutes theatre, narrative and story-telling, interrogating and shaping contemporary performance in the process.</p> | | |
| <p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>A sustained body of practice-as-research pursued by Etchells and Quick, conducted via their respective companies, FE and ITD, has provided new insights and created new practices in the field of British theatre. Both researchers are renowned innovators in their fields; in multiple forms, both have disseminated new approaches to theatre making and investigated how those approaches are experienced, via a substantial body of practice and critical reflection on practice that spans 4 decades. Their research has 3 major, overlapping foci, as follows:</p> <p>i) New Forms and Narratives in Performance: Etchells and Quick have pioneered the creation of new theatre forms and novel scenographic approaches in their practice. Their practice has rigorously interrogated the role of narrative and storytelling within performance and invented original forms around which to create new stories and challenge traditional modes of narrative production. This can be identified across a body of individual works where research has focused on the limits and possibilities of theatrical representation, the function of history, of the media and mediatization, and the relationship between theatrical spectacle and the audience.</p> <p>For Etchells, these themes are located in works such as <i>Bloody Mess</i> (2004); <i>The World in Pictures</i> (2006); <i>Void Story</i> (2009); <i>The Thrill of it All</i> (2010); <i>The Coming Storm</i> (2012); <i>Real Magic</i> (2016 [R1]); <i>Out of Order</i> (2018); and <i>Complete Works: Table Top Shakespeare</i> (2020 [R2]). Across these works, Etchells has explored and re-imagined theatre's relationship to language, to play, to chance, to duration, to popular forms and the role of liveness and reality in performance. For Quick, the above themes are located in <i>Hotel Methuselah</i> (2006); <i>Kellerman</i> (2007); <i>6 Degrees Below the Horizon</i> (2010); <i>The Zero Hour</i> (2012); <i>A Farewell to Arms</i> (2014 [R5]); <i>The Train</i> (2015 [R5]); <i>Nocturnes</i> (2016 [R6]); <i>Heart of Darkness</i> [R4]; <i>Night of the Living Dead</i> (2020 [R4]); <i>Airlock</i> (2020); and <i>Dr Blood's Old Travelling Show</i> (2020). In these works, Quick has examined the relationship between cinematic and theatrical modes of representation and developed innovative theatrical techniques utilising emerging digital technologies. Quick's adaptations of classics, <i>A Farewell to Arms</i> [R5], <i>Heart of Darkness</i> [R4] and <i>Night of the Living Dead</i> [R4] and Etchells' <i>The Complete Works: Table Top Shakespeare</i> [R2], <i>The Notebook</i> (2015) and <i>Real Magic</i> [R1] explore how theatre can be an effective tool in providing a space for the discussion of culturally significant themes such as war, race, empire, memory, human relationships, memory, politics and hope.</p> | | |

ii) Thinking Performance: Etchells' and Quick's performance work is an embodied form of practice-as-research. All the cited works are self-reflexive and are a practice-based interrogation of cultural, theoretical and historical thinking around language, place, play, space, presence, illusion, representation, history and the broader realm of the political and ethical. Examples include Quick's adaptations of classic texts [R4]: the game playing structures seen in Etchells' *Real Magic* [R1], *Bloody Mess* and *Out of Order*; and the historical and political examinations evident in Etchells' *The Notebook* (2014) and Quick's exploration of war, history and colonialism in *Hotel Methuselah*, *The Zero Hour*, *A Farewell to Arms* [R5] and *Heart of Darkness* [R4]. The philosophical relationship of theatre to decision making and ethics, and its function within the public sphere are further explored in Etchells' *Dirty Work (The Late Shift)* (2017); *From the Dark* (2016: Foreign Affairs Festival, Berlin) and in Quick's project, *Adaptations into Intermedial Theatre* [R4].

iii) Practicing Performance: A key long-term component of Etchells' and Quick's practice is the examination of creative process and the dissemination, creation and documentation of new methodologies of performance making. An example of this is the FE Collection in The British Library [R3] that holds over 300 video recordings of rehearsals workshops and performances; another is the on-line magazine *New Adventures in Performance* that explores work at the intersection of the digital and performance arts, hosted on the ITD website. The dissemination of process has been conducted through publications, workshops, residencies, skill exchanges (often supported by British Council and other large arts organisations), keynote addresses, and also via critical responses to the work. Critical reflection on creative process is evidenced in the peer-reviewed chapters 'Theatricalising Cinema/Screening Theatre', co-authored with Pete Brooks, *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader*, ed. Theresa Brayshaw et al, Routledge (2019) and 'Scenographic Technologies as Metaphor in Transmedial Performance', co-authored with Brooks, *Intermedial Theatre: Principles and Practice*, ed. Mark Crossley, Palgrave (2019).

3. References to the research

[R1] Etchells, *Real Magic* (2017), Berlin. To access research project see:

<http://www.imitatingthedog.co.uk/itd-practice-as-research-projects/>

[R2] Etchells, *Complete Works: Table Top Shakespeare* (2015) Berlin. To access research project see: <http://www.imitatingthedog.co.uk/itd-practice-as-research-projects/>

[R3] Etchells, T., 'The Forced Entertainment Collection', The British Library (<https://www.bl.uk/collection-guides/forced-entertainment>). This collection holds over 300 video recordings of performances, workshops and rehearsals from 1984 to the present.

[R4] Quick, *Adaptations into Intermedial Theatre* (2018-20). This project includes the making and touring of: *Heart of Darkness* (2018), Teatro Marche, Ancona, Italy, *Night of the Living Dead – Remix*, Leeds Playhouse, 2020). To access research project see:

<http://www.imitatingthedog.co.uk/itd-practice-as-research-projects/>

[R5] Quick, *Intermedial Approaches to Staging Acts of Reading* (2014-16), This project includes the making and touring *Farewell to Arms* (2014), Dukes Playhouse, Lancaster, *The Train* (2016), Teatro Marche, Ancona, Italy. To access research project description see:

<http://www.imitatingthedog.co.uk/itd-practice-as-research-projects/>

[R6] Quick, *Nocturnes* (2017), British Council Showcase, Edinburgh. To access research project description see: <http://www.imitatingthedog.co.uk/itd-practice-as-research-projects/>

* Details of funding from Arts Council England is available from Lancaster University and [S3].

4. Details of the impact

Practice-based research by Etchells and Quick has brought about social and cultural impact upon three main constituencies: audiences, artists/practitioners and students in secondary, further and higher educational contexts. With their respective companies as the platform to reach these constituencies, their research has shaped not only how contemporary theatre is experienced, made and imagined, but also how theatre might be taught and critically reflected upon. Both researchers have disseminated new techniques and performance making processes to help develop the practitioners of the future.

The broader influence and cultural significance of this innovative practice is reflected in the Norwegian Government's Committee Statement (2016), announcing that FE had won the prestigious International Ibsen Award (EUR300,000). The Committee stated:

“Forced Entertainment have created their own performative space within the history of theatre. Here, theatrical conventions are played out, and then they are torn apart. This influential theatre group is a group that recognises the theatre as a central voice within society, and which sincerely and with dedication uses theatre as an arena for public debate; an open, reflexive and poetic space with ethical and social value” [S1a].

Similarly, commenting on the significance of ITD’s work in the context of British Theatre, the Artistic Director of Leeds Playhouse observed:

“At the centre of any body of practice are the ideas that are being explored. As above, one can sense the relationship between research and practice through the ambition of the ideas being negotiated in the company’s unique approach. ITD not only explore new and challenge existing forms of theatre, they pursue this innovation always with an eye on the political importance of their interrogations of existing texts and stories. They are a company who are certainly changing how we think about theatre and what it is and what it might be in the future, but social, political and ethical concerns always appear to carry an equal weight to their more formal examinations of what theatre is and might become” [S2].

The impact of their research is not only ground-breaking in terms of formal innovation but also in bringing the attention of different users and interactors to the cultural significance of theatre, as a medium to understand and actively engage in contemporary life. The Executive Director for Arts and Culture, Arts Council England, stated that the work of Etchells and FE, has a *“far reaching influence on the contemporary and performance scene.”* The Director of The National Theatre observed that the company are *“a constant reminder that the way that we make work in the mainstream is only one very narrow way of making work...They are challenging, they are always provocative. They are prepared to have a real proper conversation with their audience” [S1b].*

Engaging Audiences: new narratives and forms of practice

Since 2014, Etchells and Quick have been at the creative centre of the research-informed production of 24 original works that have toured and performed both nationally and internationally. Total audience figures are in excess of 800,000 (live events) and over 400,000 (on-line events) [S3]. Both researchers have responded dynamically to the Covid-19 Pandemic, producing a number of original works online, which have created new forms and new audiences for online performance. For example ITD’s *Airlock* series commissioned by the BBC’s Culture in Quarantine Programme (2020) utilised live performance and live computer programming to create three performed graphic short stories, and their Covid-19 designed outdoor tour of *Dr Blood’s Old Travelling Show* (2020) extended formal experimentations with mixing live and mediated performance into outdoor contexts [S4]. FE’s on-line productions of *Complete Works: Table Top Shakespeare: At Home* (2020) explored new forms of solo performance via the internet. Similarly, their *End Meeting For All* (2020) series examined the dynamics of rehearsals as an extended Zoom meeting, foregrounding the emotional impact working on-line is having on so many people [S5].

Audience demographics have been highly varied, including large audiences (350,000) at major outdoor events such as ITD’s *Arrivals and Departures*, which launched Hull’s City of Culture in 2017. Other works were made specifically for children and families, for example, ITD’s *Hanuman: The Superhero Monkey*, a 28 performance run at The Singapore Repertory Company in 2016 (nominated for the Best Production for the Young by *The Straits Times* Theatre Awards, 2017). Both works experimented with new narrative forms, combining live and mediated approaches to create new narrative experiences for their audiences. FE’s *That Night Follows Day: Rehearsal Reading* in 2017-18, which toured across the UK and was also made and performed in China, Korea, Germany, Ireland and Lithuania; and FE’s *The Impossible House*, staged at The Barbican, London in 2014 [S3]. Both works explored new formal ways to tell stories in the theatre.

A significant impact is upon audiences that attend middle-scale theatre venues - and here both companies challenge expectations and engage in ‘conversations’ with existing and emerging audiences. These conversations take place through live performances, in after-show discussions, through audience feedback surveys and in social media communications and are extended in media interviews, newspaper and on-line reviews of individual works and podcasts that always accompany the tours and performances. Both companies have to submit audience

returns and feedback as a condition of their National Portfolio Arts Council England (ACE) membership. Details of these surveys (2014 to 2020) can be found in the companies' annual return forms to ACE which are in the public domain [S3]. Some examples of how the work has affected audiences is demonstrated through the following comments: *"thank you so much for the tabletop Shakespeare series – and also this charming after talk tonight. Obviously, your work has made a big difference for people in these times"; "Really enjoyed 'Real Magic' last night. Another masterclass in changing energy on stage through a simple game. Moving, thought provoking, boring and funny all at the same time. Loved the post-show discussion with Tim Etchells too. Super inspiring"; "I have honestly never seen anything like it! [Heart of Darkness]. Amazing use of digital technology to tell what was often a very disturbing story"* [S6].

Reviews by theatre critics and commentators extend the conversation about innovative theatre practice and its cultural relevance into a wider public sphere. Etchells and Quick's practice has been reviewed and discussed in over 200 newspaper articles, radio broadcasts, interviews and podcasts since 2014 (*The Times*; *The Sunday Times*; *The Guardian*; *The Observer*; *The Daily Mail*; *The Sunday Mail*; *The Daily Express*; *The New York Times*; *Vogue*; *The Stage*; *Kulturennews*; *Exeunt Magazine*; *Deutschlandfunk*; *ExBerliner Magazine*; *Time Out*; *The Stage*; *Total Theatre*; *The Big Issue*; *Northern Soul Magazine*; *Fangoria*; *Broadway World*; *British Theatre Guide*; *American Theatre* and numerous local papers) [S7]. The work has been discussed extensively on podcasts and radio broadcasts, with two appearances on BBC's *Front Row* (2018; 2020). On *A Farewell to Arms* (2014): *"In the Imitating the Dog company's intellectually bracing and visually inventive inversion... the complex framework never gets in the way of the pleasure of watching a moody thriller"* *The New York Times* (2020). *The Stage* observed in 2016 that FE *"is among the most important and influential theatre makers in the UK, inspiring generations to break away from narrative-based work, play with form and explore what performance is and could be"*. In response to *Out of Order* (2019), *The Guardian* commented, *"Where it feels truly current is its criticism of communication; the way we blindly follow and drown each other out. Out of Order may test our patience and push past the point of laughter, but by pinballing between childish hysteria and tumbleweed brutality, it mirrors our own absurdity; an uncommunicative society led by a bunch of clowns"* [S7].

Informing new thinking and discourse around theatre practice: shaping performance

Etchells' and Quick's research has impacted on professional practice across a number of contexts by exploring, training and introducing new models for theatre making and storytelling in performance. Between 2014 and 2020, 30 workshops and 6 international residencies have enabled 80 theatre professionals in 10 countries across Europe, South America, North America, Asia and Australia to engage with the research through the platforms of FE and ITD. An annual *International Skills/Ideas Exchange* programme hosted by ITD, and delivered through Lancaster Arts (Lancaster University's public arts organisation), brings together practitioners from different disciplines and backgrounds to exchange skills and ideas around practice. In reaction to *The Digital Horizons Exchange* of 2018, emerging artist Josh Cannon (Popbox Theatre) stated: *"It was a unique space for practitioners to share best practice and learn from each other. Training was part of the mix, but it was also about networking, discussing core ideas and principles. So important for my development. We were encouraged to dream and imagine what theatre might become"* [S6].

In the same period, workshops have taken place in 40 schools and 30 universities to support the development of emerging talent and support schemes include: FE's *Forced Entertainment Award*, which is aimed at an artist or company who is re-inventing theatre and performance for new audiences includes mentoring, training and in-kind and cash support (GBP10,000); and ITD's annual internship programme employs and mentors an emerging artist to collaborate on specific projects for 12 months. The 2019-20 intern states; *"My work with ITD on two major projects, Night of the Living Dead – Remix and Street (2020), has had a huge impact on my career. I have moved into performance having worked previously in other industries and this year has allowed me develop and be creative in ways I never thought possible"* [S6]. Workshops with professional practitioners and emerging artists have taken place in Georgia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Brazil, Poland, Canada, Belgium, Germany and France. Many of these workshops have taken place with support and collaboration from the British Council. The British Council's Theatre and Dance Senior programme manager describes both companies as having *"made*

valuable interventions in developing and communicating new theatre techniques to emerging artists from many different countries" [S8]. The Festival Director of Porto Alegre em Cena, Brazil communicated the following after a three-week ITD residency, *"I was very inspired by the residency you ran with the Living Dead project... We would love you to return with some of these workshops to collaborate with more local companies and artists... Your approaches are unique and important for how we can develop theatre here in Brazil"* [S6].

Quick's research has directly impacted upon 2 regional theatres in the north of England: The Dukes, Lancaster and Oldham Coliseum. Creating the scenographic designs for *The Life and Times of Mitchell & Kenyon* (The Dukes, 2014) and *Mist in the Mirror* (Oldham, 2015), Quick and the ITD team worked closely with the designers, directors, and actors of these organisations, introducing them to new techniques and processes. The Executive Director of Oldham Coliseum 2010-17 stated: *"The significance of imitating the dog's work with us on two major productions, Hound of the Baskervilles in 2012 and later Mist in the Mirror can't be underestimated. They introduced a whole new way of integrating technology into the design of these works. Not only that, but new ways of rehearsing as well. This was a completely different experience, not only for our technicians and the director, but to the actors as well"* [S9].

Enabling critical thinking amongst future practitioners

Working with young people and shaping future practice is a key function and outcome of this research. Etchells and Quick have had a significant impact on the lives of young people from the age of 11 onwards by introducing them to new creative methodologies. Specific projects include FE's *Art Breakers*, started in 2017, and which created a space where, as one 11-15 year old participant described: *"[I] can play with new ideas about performance"*. A parallel project, working with a similar age group, is FE's *That Night Follows Day Rehearsed Readings*, which involves a collaborative partner working with the company for 6 to 10 days, often involving teachers and youth workers. Having worked on this project, an educator from Lithuania said that, by participating, they had *"learnt to educate better"* [S6]. There have been further collaborations with youth theatre groups from Lancaster, Oldham and Wellingborough. A week long ITD residency with 20 young people in Wellingborough drew the following response: *"The week blew my expectations out of the water. It was so much fun. The set was amazing, the company was just brilliant to work with, they treated us with so much respect. They gave us so much to work with and they taught us loads. I literally cannot thank them enough. It's been a brilliant experience"* [S6].

In summary, research by Etchells and Quick has transformed the landscape of contemporary British theatre, challenged and changed public perceptions of what theatre is and might be and disseminated new approaches and techniques to a wide range of beneficiaries. The transformative effect of this work is perhaps best summarised by the British Council, who observe: *"Forced Entertainment and imitating the dog have and continue to bring positive influence to the development of theatre practice in the twenty-first century, in both a UK and international context. Their reach overseas is significant and their combined expertise in relation to the use of new technologies, new writing techniques, approaches to devising and collaboration is regularly called upon in relation to the British Council's professional development programmes around the world"* [S8].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[S1a] Ibsen International Theatre Award Committee Statement:

<https://www.nationaltheatret.no/en/international-ibsen-award/winners/forced-entertainment/Committee-statement/>; [S1b] Statement from the Director of the National Theatre

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-35833592>

[S2] Testimonial letter from the Artistic Director of Leeds Playhouse (2021).

[S3] Arts Council Project and Yearly Reports (contains funding information, audience figures, outreach, participation and education targets and numbers) (2014 to 2020).

[S4] imitating the dog website: www.imitatingthedog.co.uk

[S5] Forced entertainment website: <https://www.forcedentertainment.com/>

[S6] Audience Feedback, available on request.

[S7] Media Reports for Performance Works 2014-2020 (includes interviews and reviews).

[S8] Testimonial from Theatre and Dance Senior programme manager, British Council (2021).

[S9] Testimonial letter from the Executive Director at Oldham Coliseum Theatre (2021).