

Introduction

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What can artists learn from theatre scholars when it comes to performing historical works on stage today? And what can theatre scholars learn from today's artists when it comes to understanding the works and practices of the past? How is the experience of modern spectators affected by attending performances in historic theatres? And how, aesthetically, do we experience the reconstruction of productions from the remote past?

The essays in the present book try to answer these – and many other – questions by initiating a dialogue between academic and artistic research. Behind all of the essays is a mixture of fascination and dissatisfaction with today's performances of drama and opera classics, particularly those that take place in historic theatres, and those operating within the so-called Historically Informed Performance (HIP) movement. The essays reflect a desire to develop and expand the methods traditionally used by theatre historians. They present a variety of angles on today's performances in historic theatres and on today's attempts to revive theatrical practices of the past.

The book covers the findings of the research group 'Performing Premodernity: Exploring Cultural Heritage through the Drottningholm Court Theatre', which worked from 2013 to 2018, funded by the Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences.¹ The core group was made up of six researchers: Meike Wagner (the project leader), Petra Dotlačilová, Maria Gullstam, Willmar Sauter, Magnus Tessing Schneider, and Mark Tatlow (the group's musical director and principal artistic researcher). The research focused on theatrical and operatic practices of the second half of the eighteenth century. This was a period of wide-ranging artistic innovation (e.g. the operatic reforms of Rousseau, Gluck, and Mozart, the theatrical manifestos

1. The name of the research group was inspired by the stated decision of the funding body to invest in 'research in premodernity' ('forskning om förmodernitet'), by which they meant the period before 1800. The historiographical problems that arose from the foundation's description of the eighteenth century as 'premodern' and the nineteenth century as 'modern' were the subject of a special issue of *Scandia: Tidskrift för historisk forskning* in 2015 (vol. 8, no. 2). See Magnus Linnarsson's introductory essay, 'Förmodernitet: Analytiskt begrepp eller kronologisk restpost?' (pp. 9–18), as well as Willmar Sauter's contribution, 'Förmodernitet – ett koncept för det ännu-inte-moderna: Estetisk historicitet som länk mellan då och nu' (pp. 50–70). The name of the research group notwithstanding, the term 'premodernity' is not used as a category of periodisation in this volume, except in chapter 1, 'Adequate Rhetorical Delivery when Staging Premodernity'.

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of Diderot, Lessing, and Schiller, the various historical developments in dramaturgy, acting style, costume design, and lighting technique) as well as of the social and political transformations that culminated in the American Revolution of 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789. These few decades also saw the establishment of several modern theatre institutions, e.g. of the Hamburg National Theatre that existed 1767–1769, of the Royal Swedish Opera in 1773, of the National Theatre in Vienna in 1776, of the National Theatre in Prague in 1783, and of the Royal Swedish Dramatic Theatre in 1788.

The group's work was initially centred on the Drottningholm theatre from 1766. This famous building, just outside Stockholm, has authentic stage sets and machinery preserved almost in their original eighteenth-century state: a fact that placed it at the centre of twentieth-century theatre historiography and that in 1991 made a significant contribution to the Royal Domain of Drottningholm attaining the status of a UNESCO World Heritage Site, a recognition of the 'outstanding universal value' of the palace, its gardens, and its theatre.² But Performing Premodernity also extended its activities to two other eighteenth-century theatres. The first was the similarly well-preserved theatre at the State Castle of Český Krumlov in the Czech Republic, which was also built in 1766, and therefore provided a direct point of comparison with Drottningholm. The second, set in the outskirts of Stockholm, was the Ulriksdal Palace Theatre (also known as Confidencen). It was built in 1753, turned into a royal hunting lodge in the 1860s, and restored as a theatre in the early 2000s.

From the outset, Performing Premodernity planned to combine academic and artistic research as a way of deepening and nuancing the understanding of eighteenth-century theatre practices. The academic study of historical accounts of specific productions, of visual sources, of other physical artefacts, and of philosophical and aesthetic writings from the period were set in dialogue with the dramaturgical insights and aesthetic experiences we gained from our practical *doing* in the historical spaces (see Fig. 1). Experimentation with lighting,

2. UNESCO motivates the inclusion of the Royal Domain of Drottningholm as a World Heritage Site as follows: 'The ensemble of Drottningholm is the best example of a royal residence built in the 18th century in Sweden and is representative of all European architecture of that period, heir to the influences exerted by the Chateau of Versailles on the construction of royal residences in western, central and northern Europe': <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/559> (accessed 3 January 2023).



Figure 1. Performing Premodernity exploring eighteenth-century costumes. From top left: Mark Tatlow, Magnus Tessing Schneider, Willmar Sauter, Maria Gullstam, Meike Wagner, Petra Dotlačilová. Stockholm, 2020. Photo: Lenka Elbert Dotlačilová ©. License: CC BY-NC.

costumes, stage movement, vocal and instrumental practices, and the flow of energy between performers and spectators led to the investigation of topics that we might not otherwise have explored. In turn, these investigations led us to challenge long-held views of the sites, repertoires, and performance practices of eighteenth-century theatre. Each practical experiment was followed by group discussions where the aesthetic experiences of the participants were confronted with eighteenth-century sources, dramaturgical principles, and philosophical ideas, all representing different modes of knowing.

Performing Premodernity's experimental, practice-based approach to eighteenth-century theatre accords with the view of the late Enlightenment (the second half of the eighteenth century, which saw a gradual radicalisation of Enlightenment thinking) as 'a real and still unexplored laboratory of modernity'.³ Over the past two decades this view has been central to the positive reassessment of a period when ideal and practice, philosophy and art influenced and guided each other to an unprecedented degree, and the stage was the site of both utopian visions and radical artistic changes. Any attempt at a holistic understanding of the theatrical practices of the period must take these exchanges into account. A strictly antiquarian approach that merely tries to establish 'how it really was', without considering the visionary dimension of the reforms of people like Rousseau, Gluck, and Mozart, will inevitably fail to grasp the impetus and the dynamic, communicative aspect of eighteenth-century theatre. This problem was always at the heart of the research questions and internal discussions of the Performing Premodernity group, and it was not by chance that we chose to focus on some of the most radical, or avant-garde, stage works of the period in our experimental productions and workshops.

Our most elaborate practical project was a historically informed production of *Pygmalion*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's so-called *scène lyrique* from 1762, with a musical score by Horace Coignet from 1770. Our production was premiered at Český Krumlov in 2015,

3. Vincenzo Ferrone, *The Enlightenment: History of An Idea* (Princeton University Press, 2017), xiii.

with João Luís Paixão and Laila Cathleen Neuman (two artistic researchers associated with Performing Premodernity) in the two roles. In 2015 and 2016 we performed it at the grand hall of the historic House of Nobility in Stockholm, in 2018 at the Utrecht Early Music Festival, and in 2019 in a double bill with Rousseau's 1752 opera *Le Devin du village* at Ulriksdal.⁴ *Pygmalion* was staged by a team of scholars, consisting of Petra Dotlačilová, Maria Gullstam, Magnus Tessing Schneider, and Jed Wentz (also an associate member of the research group) in addition to the two performers. *Le Devin du village* was staged by choreographer and stage director Karin Modigh, with costumes designed by costume designer and researcher Anna Kjellsdotter (both associate members of the research group), while Gullstam and Dotlačilová were academic advisers.

Group members were also involved in productions of Domenico Cimarosa's *Il matrimonio segreto* and of Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito* at Drottningholm in 2013. Both operas were conducted by Mark Tatlow, and staged by two associate members of the research group: Deda Cristina Colonna (Cimarosa), and Sigrid T'Hooft (Mozart). Furthermore, two little-known one-act operas from the 1780s were performed at Vadstena Castle in 2016 in a double bill as part of Vadstena-Akademien, an annual festival devoted to the revival of unknown operas. The double bill was made up of Giovanni Paisiello's *Nina o sia La pazza per amore*, and Pietro Morandi's *Comala*, staged by Deda Cristina Colonna, and with Mark Tatlow as music director. All of these productions were chosen to explore specific issues relating to eighteenth-century performance practice. The relationship between verse declamation and the delivery of sung recitative was the topic of exploration in *La clemenza di Tito*. In *Nina* and *Comala*, it was about performance leadership, and the relationship between the orchestra and the stage, aiming to create a less hierarchical ensemble both in rehearsal, and in the public performances, which were directed without a conductor in the traditional sense.

4. Videos of the performances at Český Krumlov, at Riddarhuset in Stockholm, and in Utrecht are available on the Performing Premodernity homepage: <https://performingpremodernity.com/anthology/>.

The research group organised themed international conferences to coincide with the premieres of several of these productions. Proceedings from the conferences include: *Rousseau on Stage: Playwright, Musician, Spectator*, edited by Maria Gullstam and Michael O'Dea, and published in 2017 by the Oxford Voltaire Foundation; *Mozart's La clemenza di Tito: A Reappraisal*, edited by Magnus Tessing Schneider and Ruth Tatlow, and published in 2018 by Stockholm University Press (open access); and a special issue of *LIR.journal* focusing on *Nina* and *Comala*, edited by Magnus Tessing Schneider, and published in 2019 under the title 'Sensibility and Passion: Studies in Early Italian Opera' (open access).

The emphasis on the interrelations between aesthetic experience and historical knowledge is a common denominator between both the laboratory workshops of Performing Premodernity and the essays in this volume, in the same way that the conceptualising of the aesthetic experience was at the heart of the philosophical discourse surrounding the dramatic arts in the eighteenth century. Starting from an understanding of aesthetics (*aisthētikós*) as both sense perception and sensitive cognition, our Performing Premodernity group operates with a notion of aesthetic experience inspired by Kant and Schiller: the aesthetic experience negotiates our rational and our emotional understanding, enabling us to expand the ways in which we feel and think.⁵ As academic and artistic researchers, we are interested in how the interrelations between historical knowledge and aesthetic experience can enhance our understanding of theatre history while at the same time helping us to develop holistic artistic practices. We held workshops at historical theatres with singers, instrumentalists, dancers, and other practitioners, to study the impact of the auditory and visual conditions, as well as the potential impact of the physical spaces on performers and spectators. We also allowed an interaction between the performers, the space, and the dramaturgical concepts from the period in order to study their impact on both the physical embodiment of the characters and the dynamics of the staged

5. For Meike Wagner's discussion of aesthetic experience as an epistemological practice, see chapter 2, 'On a Praxeology of Theatre Historiography'.

narrative. For example, at our first Drottningholm workshop in 2015, we used duets from Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* and *Don Giovanni* and an excerpt from *Pygmalion*, with Paixão and Neuman on stage. The aim was to explore what would happen when the semi-circular positioning of actors (documented in visual sources and acting treatises) and the materiality of the theatre space itself (with its raked floor, symmetrical stage design, and delicate acoustics), encountered sources relating to the original performance of Mozart's operas. Our second workshop was held in 2017 at Ulriksdal. Here we used excerpts from Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*, with the singer Maria Sanner and dancer Noah Hellwig on stage. The aim was to explore the interaction between choreographed stage movement and fabrics and cuts known from eighteenth-century costume designs. We also focused on the effect of candlelight, a type of stage lighting permitted at Ulriksdal, where the stage is a modern reconstruction, but prohibited at the World Heritage Site of Drottningholm.

Over the course of the research project, it became clear that as academics and as artists, we needed to avoid the extremes of what might be called 'paper-driven' and 'concept-driven' positions, both of which were, for historiographical and aesthetic reasons, found to be inadequate.

The paper-driven position is typically represented by the positivist approach to theatre historiography within the academic field (as in the traditional attempts to reconstruct stage productions from the past) and by the literalist branch of the HIP movement within the artistic field, as manifested in performances based on the theories of the twentieth-century Australian musician and scholar Dene Barnett, who claimed that eighteenth-century acting was built on 'a vocabulary of gestures each with an individual meaning known to all in advance'.⁶ In short, the paper-driven position is focused on material reconstruction while it ignores the corporeality and aesthetic experience of the historical audience. This has led to the privileging of certain types of historical documents (visual documentation, rhetorical treatises, and other types of prescriptive sources) that are available in textual

6. Dene Barnett, *The Art of Gesture: The Practices and Principles of 18th Century Acting* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1987), 10. For a refutation of the ideological premises of Barnett's historiography, see Magnus Tessing Schneider, 'Dene Barnett's Eighteenth Century, Or, What Is Historically Informed Performance?', *Performing Premodernity Online* 2 (January 2015): <https://performingpremodernity.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/PPO2-Schneider.pdf> (accessed 23 March 2023).

and graphical formats, and to certain ways of reading those sources (attempts to establish codified rules or theatrical conventions of the past), causing other sources and approaches to be passed by, including, for example, the revolutionary programmes and ideals of the time, evidence of the aesthetic experiences of historical spectators, and the knowledge that may be gathered from experimentation in historical spaces with the use of historical practices and artefacts (lighting, costumes, stage movement). Such a selective attitude towards the historical evidence has generated a skewed image of eighteenth-century theatre, especially among the more literalistic followers of historical principles, who, in our view, have tended to put too much emphasis on courtly rules of propriety, on watertight class divisions, and on stereotyped forms of expression.⁷ For example, while rhetoric certainly played a central role in eighteenth-century acting, there has been an overemphasis on codified behaviours and too little attention to rhetorical instinct, to the speaker-performer's sensitivity to the audience, and to the specific situation, all of which are central to classical rhetoric. It is, however, this standardised image of eighteenth-century theatre that has been widely proliferated through educational schemes, and which has been commodified by traditionalists within the HIP movement. Such a position tends to ignore both the experience of today's spectator and that of the historical spectator, and it is frequently used to support arguments for applying a codified system of acting, even though relying on dubious after-the-fact ideas of what the historical audience understood and experienced.

The concept-driven position goes in the opposite direction, since it identifies theatre historiography with positivism and therefore altogether rejects the historical approach to theatre. The lack of historical awareness characteristic of this approach inevitably generates a progressivist image of history, confirming that the Enlightenment was basically 'unenlightened', dominated by oppressive power politics, and permeated by contradictions and hypocrisy. We recognise this attitude from the *Regietheater* movement that prevails in today's

7. The sociological approach to theatre history, which has been dominant since the middle of the twentieth century, has tended to overemphasise the significance of social class in eighteenth-century theatre, by positing, for example, that the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie had distinctly different preferences whereas in fact eighteenth-century observers thought more in terms of different degrees of connoisseurship, that is, in aesthetic rather than in sociological terms. On this topic, see Pierpaolo Polzonetti, 'Opera as Process', in *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Opera*, ed. Anthony R. DelDonna and Pierpaolo Polzonetti (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3–23.

opera houses. It rejects the past, using old stage works as decontextualised props without entering into a dialogue with the historical materials and their context. Or it enters the dialogue only to a superficial extent such as by reproducing the standard narratives about the eighteenth century. What the concept-driven position *does* take into account, however, is the eventness of contemporary performance, though this position also tends to underprivilege aesthetics. It subjects truth and beauty to morality – the values of today’s ethical consensus – and underestimates the relevance of historical concepts and the critical thinking embedded in the works of the past.⁸ This embedded thinking could be developed and experienced by today’s audiences through a serious engagement with the works’ historicity.

The artists and the historians within the Performing Premodernity group felt that both the paper-driven and the concept-driven positions were inadequate means through which to understand eighteenth-century theatre and its practices, and that a more holistic approach had to be developed. Drawing on the perspective of modern phenomenology, we placed the aesthetic experience of the theatrical event at the centre of theatre historiography, giving attention both to the theatregoers of the past and to the theatre historians of today, and, one might add, to the regular theatregoers of today. This inevitably challenged the standardised image of eighteenth-century theatre: the oppressive codes began to lose their force, and the democratic dimension of past and present aesthetic experiences began to emerge. By confronting stage works and philosophical concepts developed by the period’s revolutionary artist-reformers with the artefacts and social-scenic conventions of the time, we strove to break down standardised images of the period, using the experimental productions as our means. As we engaged with the radical dramaturgy and philosophical and theatrical context of *Pygmalion*, it turned out that its uniqueness – a concept central to late eighteenth-century aesthetics and to the dramatic principles of the time – evaded the classification and codification offered by the models of traditional theatre

8. On the moralism of the so-called ethical turn and its influence on opera research, see the postscript, ‘In Defence of the Operatic Work’, in Magnus Tessing Schneider, *The Original Portrayal of Mozart’s Don Giovanni* (London: Routledge, 2021), 213–226: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429281709> (accessed 23 March 2023).

historiography. In order to ‘save’ those models it would have been necessary to treat *Pygmalion* as an anomaly. We chose instead to go in the opposite direction; to embrace the uniqueness of the work, thus allowing for the complication and diversification of the customary historical narratives. Accessing the radical or experimental aspects of old stage works through enhanced historical awareness is challenging for theatre historians and theatre artists, whether or not they identify with the HIP or with the *Regietheater* movements.

The holistic approach to theatre historiography, which bridges gaps between academic and artistic research, led to theoretical developments that are the focus of the first section. Chapter 1 is a scholarly commentary based on a paper read at one of the research group’s first symposia, in 2014, by one of its associate members, musicologist and rhetorician Jette Barnholdt Hansen who passed away in 2017. Her chapter focuses on the ancient Greek concept of *kairós*, which denotes the opportune and decisive moment of performing an action, pointing to the fact that any acting practice based on rhetorical principles must take the current context, including the experience of the audience, into account. Although shorter and less developed than the other chapters, we have decided to include it, both as a tribute to our late colleague and because it is a timely reminder of the necessity of going beyond the rules of vocal delivery, derived from historical sources. The next two chapters take the 2015 Drottningholm workshop as their point of departure. 2) The *historiographic praxeology* described by Meike Wagner aims to enhance and challenge historiographical epistemologies through experimental theatre practices. 3) The *aesthetic historicity* described by Willmar Sauter directs our attention to forms of interaction between today’s artists and historical artefacts and written works, which may generate modern aesthetic experiences that negotiate with historical aesthetic experiences. Inspired by practical experiments in theatre sites from the eighteenth century, *historiographic praxeology* and *aesthetic historicity* both provide theatre researchers with new methodologies that connect historical

awareness and aesthetic experience: while *historiographic praxeology* is mainly concerned with theatre historiography, *aesthetic historicity* is chiefly concerned with the analysis of performance. 4) Adapting the concept of *contemporaneity* from Jan Kott's essays on twentieth-century Shakespeare productions, Magnus Tessing Schneider argues that the revival and reimagining of specific historical performance practices may enhance rather than hamper the connection between the stage performance and the experience of today's audience. In the final contribution to this section, 5) Mark Tatlow explores the early performance history of Haydn's cantata *Arianna a Naxos*, a piece he has performed numerous times. He uses his experience to examine the meeting between historically informed performance practices, the specificity of the musical expression, and the performer's overarching aim of affecting the audience emotionally.

The second part of the book turns to the specific theatrical experiments conducted within Performing Premodernity, and to the way these were experienced both by the historians and by the artists involved. 6) Drawing on methodologies associated with Material Culture as well as Costume and Dance Studies, Petra Dotlačilová reflects on the results of the research group's 2017 Ulriksdal workshop, which focused on the relationship between costumes, lighting, and stage movement. The next two essays deal specifically with the group's staging of Rousseau's *Pygmalion*, and with the challenges of mounting a historically informed production of a work intended to break with more or less every theatrical convention of the time. While in chapter 7) Maria Gullstam focuses on the general dramaturgical principles, tracing the development in the production and in her aesthetic responses, in chapter 8) Petra Dotlačilová discusses the problems of creating historically informed costumes for what was essentially an avant-garde work. The section concludes with two interviews that focus on the artists' experience of integrating historical information and artefacts into their performance. In chapter 9) the singers Laila Cathleen Neuman and João Luís Paxião, who took part in several of the



Figure 2. The Performing Premodernity research group at work. Annecy, 2015. Photo: Etienne Zurawski ©. License: CC BY-NC.

group's workshops, and who performed *Pygmalion*, talk about the theatrical experiments from their practical perspective. In chapter 10) Mark Tatlow, who was the musical director of all productions organised by Performing Premodernity, describes the evolving process of his decade-long relationship with the HIP movement.

The third and final part of the anthology takes as its point of departure the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary in 2016 of the Drottningholm Palace Theatre. In August of that year, the theatre saw the premiere of a new production of *Don Giovanni*, staged by Ivan Alexandre and conducted by Marc Minkowski. In his analysis of the performances in chapter 11), Willmar Sauter reflects on the problems

that tend to arise when artists trained in the *Regietheater* style enter the historic stage of an eighteenth-century theatre. Two months earlier, the theatre department of Stockholm University had hosted a large-scale conference of the International Federation for Theatre Research with the theme: ‘Presenting the Theatrical Past: Interplays of Artefacts, Discourses and Practices’. Chapter 12) is a report of a panel debate that Willmar Sauter chaired on the morning of 15 June 2016, and which featured an international group of theatre scholars, practitioners, and administrators, who met to discuss the relationship between tangible and intangible cultural heritage, specifically with regard to the Drottningholm theatre and the HIP movement. In the afternoon of the same day, all conference participants were taken from the conference location to the Drottningholm theatre where David Wiles delivered the keynote lecture from the stage, illustrated by three artistic researchers associated with Performing Premodernity: Laila Cathleen Neuman, João Luís Paxião, and Mark Tatlow. Wiles’ talk – reproduced in chapter 13) – dealt more specifically with the challenges and potentials of performing on the historic site, inviting the audience of theatre researchers to think of both the Drottningholm space and of eighteenth-century theatre as ‘a bundle of contradictions’, in which conflicting ideologies intersect and interact, whether these are ideologies of material and immaterial heritage, conventionality and radicality, or acting and spectating.

The following mix of theoretical essays, debate articles, historical case studies, workshop and conference reports, interviews, and public lectures reflect the dialogue character of the Performing Premodernity research project (see Fig. 2). Our aim in this volume is to introduce new perspectives and concepts into the academic and artistic discourses on both theatre historiography and historical and historically informed theatre practices. We look forward to continuing the conversations with artists, scholars, and audiences.