

## 13. Presenting the Theatre of Drottningholm

David Wiles

*Edited transcript of the keynote address to the International Federation for Theatre Research, given during the conference 'Presenting the Theatrical Past: Interplays of Artefacts, Discourses and Practices' from the stage of the Drottningholm Palace Theatre on 15 June 2016.<sup>1</sup>*

[INITIAL GREETING DELIVERED FROM THE BOX ADJACENT TO THE STAGE ON THE KING'S SIDE, FOLLOWING AN ORCHESTRAL PRELUDE CONDUCTED BY MARK TATLOW.<sup>2</sup>]

Welcome to the theatre of Drottningholm, on its two hundred and fiftieth anniversary... It would be odd to give an 'academic' lecture in a space like this. So think of it as the building delivering the keynote address. And I am here just to perform the introductions, and do a little bit of translation – ably assisted by Mark down here and his team. We are less concerned with *presenting* the old theatre of Drottningholm than *presenting* it, for our purpose today is to try to make the eighteenth century present for you on the stage. This is a World Heritage Site, and the word 'heritage' carries a lot of baggage, so let's start with that: what does the word 'heritage' imply? Ownership perhaps. We could quantify the theatre's financial yield for the Swedish tourist board. Heritage is a comfortable way of wrapping the past up for you to consume. Mark, if you wouldn't mind standing up... Look at Mark's wig. The wig to me, forgive me Mark, is a perfect symbol of heritage; in Roland Barthes's terms it's a pure signifier of eighteenth-century-ness.

Let me introduce you first to Queen Louisa Ulrika there on the stage curtain, aka the goddess Minerva, goddess of education and

1. A video recording of the keynote lecture can be visited here: <https://performingpremodernity.com/anthology/>. Thanks to Magnus Tessing Schneider and Meike Wagner for transcribing this lecture.

2. 'Entrée de Pluton' in act 2, scene 2 of Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie* (ed.).

3. Louisa Ulrika of Prussia (1720–1782), queen consort of Sweden 1751–1771 (ed.).

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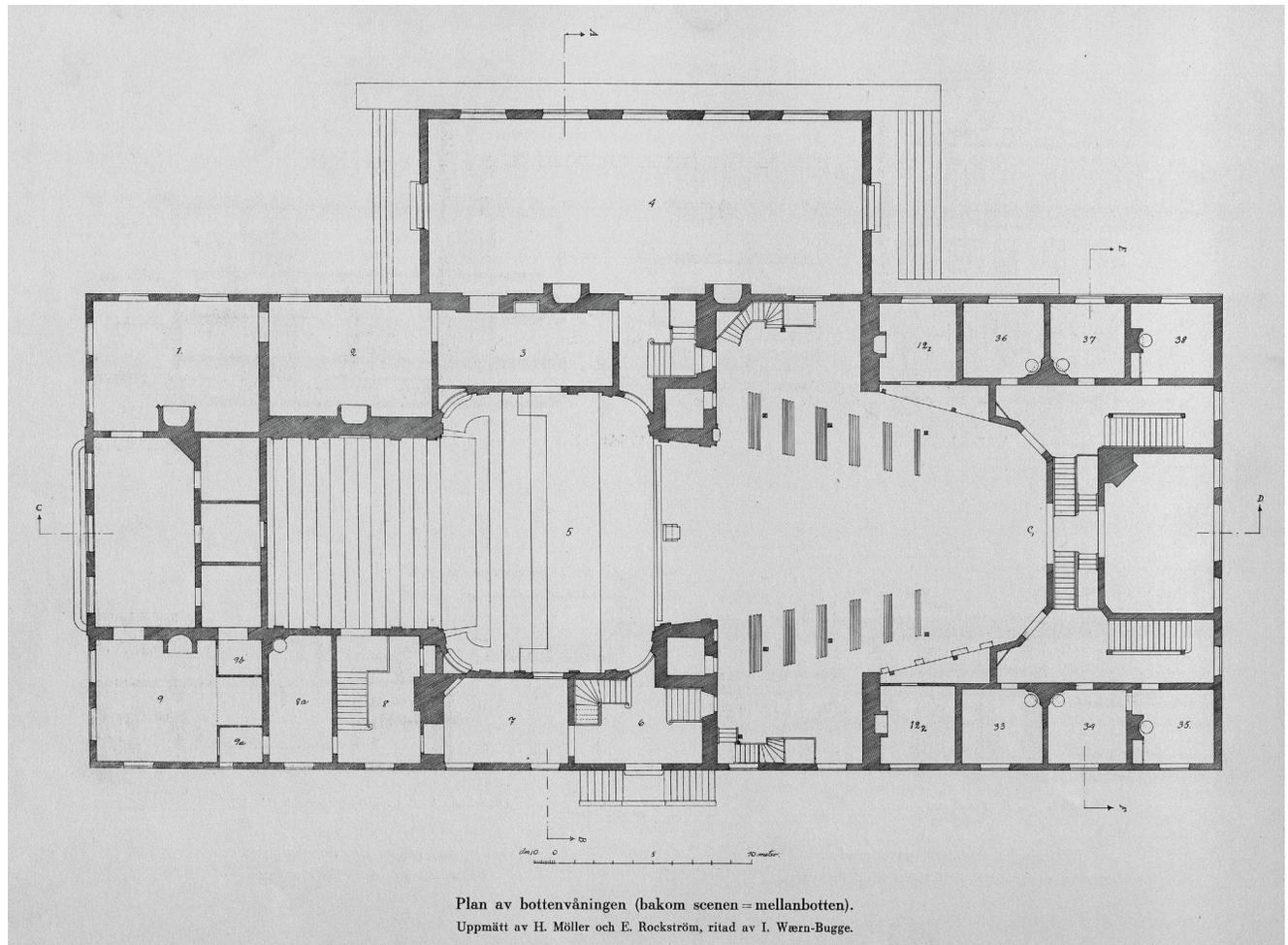
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**Figure 1.** David Wiles' keynote lecture. Drottningholm Palace Theatre, 2016. Screenshot from video. © Stockholm University. License: CC BY-NC.

war.<sup>3</sup> And then direct your eyes to the auditorium. An earlier theatre of 1754 burnt down. It was built on the German imperial model, curving round the stage. And instead of this long rectangle reaching back, you had a huge imperial box, a stage for the monarch as goddess, creating two foci of attention: the monarch there, the play here – the audience can look at either. So why replace it with *this* in the 1760s? In eighteenth-century terms, it's an extraordinary design (see Fig. 2). Heritage discourse doesn't much care to talk politics, but the fact is, Queen Louisa Ulrika carried out a coup a couple of years



**Figure 2.** Ingeborg Wærn Bugge: Ground plan of the Drottningholm Palace Theatre. In Agne Beijer, *Slottsteatrarna på Drottningholm och Gripsholm* (Stockholm: Lindfors, 1937), 174. No current holder of the copyright has been identified. License: CC BY-NC.

after building her first theatre. She wanted to wrest power away from parliament, and it all proved very ignominious – she failed, and was consigned to her royal playground. So she couldn't plausibly play Minerva any longer. The monarch now had to sit here at the front. Much more modestly.

But then again, this seat at the front is where Louis XIV would have sat for a court entertainment, and you may have spotted how the grounds outside are modelled on Versailles. Yet this isn't quite France. In a French rectangular theatre you had a balcony going all the way round, creating a dynamic of spectator-looking-at-spectator. What this theatre actually offers us behind its frivolous Rococo trimmings is a prototype modernist auditorium. It puts you in neat straight rows, you've got to behave yourselves, you've got to face forward, you've got to concentrate on the play, or in this case, on a quasi-lecture. So, that's interesting to me. But then again, you have to add a metaphysical dimension. As you came in you may have noticed that curtain there halfway up the rectangle. Imagine an axis line between the two boxes: you get a complete mirror relationship, perfect symmetry. So, if the monarch stands up and turns around, she or he can see all the plebs (in your case the people who arrived on the last bus) back there in the recess, dressed in Swedish national costume, playing roles in the political show that the monarch has orchestrated. So, there you have another dimension of the space.

Then again, focus on the lovely sensuous curves of this oval formation here in the middle. It's very odd, because from this box I can't see the stage properly. And my eyes are drawn to the middle of the oval, not to you plebs at the back. And from the king's box next to me you can't see all of the audience, which is why I decided not to speak from there. The best explanation is that opera houses regularly converted into temporary ballrooms, so the seats could be removed to turn this central area into a dancing space. But Crown Prince Gustav couldn't dance, he'd got a dodgy leg, so the layout was redundant. Gustav is a crucial figure.<sup>4</sup> As king he staged a successful coup, unlike his mother; he suppressed parliament, brought in socially liberal legislation along with expensive wars, and was eventually assassinated in the opera house in town. After this presentation you will be entertained in something like a banqueting area that was added on by Gustav in the 1790s. It reflects a completely different ideology, one

4. Gustav III (1746–1792), king of Sweden 1771–1792 (ed.).

related to the abutting English park which is laid out in the style of Capability Brown.<sup>5</sup> It makes a statement that monarchical power is part of the order of nature, not part of the metaphysical mysteries that the Baroque garden and French-style architecture celebrate.

You have grasped the general idea that I refuse to talk about this space as a beautiful unified whole. I think of it as essentially a bundle of contradictions. Elements that don't stack up. To me as an historian that's much more interesting than a slice of heritage. But enough on the space and its layers of political meaning: it is the *stage* that people get most excited about. We talk of this as a 'Baroque' theatre because the stage technology had been going strong for some hundred and twenty years, first devised by the Italians. This old technology had an exceptional shelflife because it was so powerful, as I hope you will soon understand for yourselves.

[DAVID LEAVES THE BOX. THE CURTAINS OPEN TO MUSIC. DAVID WALKS ONTO THE STAGE.]

No applause. If it's for the theatre, well that's OK, but not for a dry historical lecture. So, as far as theatre history goes, there are, if I may put it crudely, first 'the boys' version of theatre history'... The boys' version gets very excited about the technology, the thunder machine for example. And these flats which roll in on little railway lines using the chariot and pole system – the hidden lead-covered railway is just here. And then there is what one might call 'the girls' view of history' which gets much more interested in story, in imagination, in another world that's more in the head and in the feelings. I tend to gravitate, as you may guess, more in the girly direction.<sup>6</sup> That's a segue to mention that the role of women in eighteenth-century theatre became increasingly important, because women were taken to be experts in embodied feeling. As your first treat, we are going to give you an extract from a cantata by Handel from the early eighteenth century, a sort of operatic monologue.<sup>7</sup> It will be performed by Laila Cathleen Neuman who is a specialist in eighteenth-century performance. The

5. Capability Brown (1716–1783), English landscape architect (ed.).

6. These remarks caused some intakes of breath and a subsequent complaint. Humour doesn't travel well across cultures. I haven't edited out these remarks from the record, however ill judged, because I was seeking to make the serious point that historiography through its priorities has long been a gendered practice.

7. George Frideric Handel, *Armida abbandonata* (1707), HWV 105 (ed.).

story, very briefly: Armida is a Muslim sorceress, and her young gentleman is a crusader knight. He escapes her charms and sails hell for leather towards the horizon. On she comes in great distress, calling upon the waves and winds to drown him. That's the storyline. You are going to experience the thunder machine and the cloud effect, but try to think of these not just as technical gizmos, but as metaphors that create continuity with the feelings expressed through movement and voice. Costume-wise, we've got the best we could find, possessing at least volume and movement. What you would have seen would have been far more exotic and sumptuous. When you listen to some of the ornamental twirls and repetitions in the aria that follows the initial recitative, try to relate them to the architectural ornamentation around you. OK, Laila, over to you.

[LAILA CATHLEEN NEUMAN AS ARMIDA SINGS THE ITALIAN TEXT, MOVING AND GESTURING IN A HISTORICALLY INFORMED AND FLUID BAROQUE STYLE.]

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*Recitativo*

Per te mi struggo, infido,  
per te languisco, ingrato; ah! pur lo sai  
che sol da tuoi bei rai  
per te piagato ho il seno,  
e pur tu m'abbandoni, infido amante.

I yearn for you, faithless man;  
I pine for you, ungrateful man; ah, you know  
that your fair eyes alone  
pierced this bosom of mine,  
and yet, faithless lover, you abandon me...

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*Accompagnato – interspersed by sounds of the wind*

O voi dell'incostante  
e procelloso mar orridi mostri,  
dai più profondi chiostri  
a vendicarmi uscite,  
e contro quel crudel incrudelite.  
Sì, sì! sia vostro il vanto,  
e del vostro rigore,  
un mostro lacerar di voi maggiore;  
onde, venti, che fate,  
che voi nol sommergete? Ah no! fermate!

O horrid monsters of the inconstant  
and stormy sea!  
Ascend from the cloistered depths  
to avenge me  
and offer cruelty to that cruel man.  
Yes, yes! You and your severity  
may boast of having  
lashed a monster greater than yourselves.  
Waves and winds: what are you doing since  
you are not drowning him? Ah no! Stop...!

*Aria – clouds descend*

Venti, fermate, sì,  
 nol sommergete;  
 è ver che mi tradì,  
 ma pur l'adoro.

Onde crudeli, no,  
 non l'uccidete;  
 è ver che mi sprezzò,  
 ma è il mio tesoro.

Yes, stop, winds:  
 do not drown him;  
 it is true that he betrayed me,  
 yet I adore him still.

No, cruel waves:  
 do not kill him;  
 it is true that he scorned me,  
 yet he is my darling.



**Figure 3.** David Wiles (right) and Laila Cathleen Neuman (left) on stage. Drottningholm Palace Theatre, 2016. Screenshot from video. © Stockholm University. License: CC BY-NC.

Thank you, Laila. That was beautiful. Now we are going to try an exercise in a different historical style, namely the style of the late twentieth century. We thought that was important because most directors who come in here develop their show in a rehearsal room somewhere far away. And they come here, they do their show the normal way you do an opera show. The method always involves a search for sincerity. Gestures are a tricky one, though: how do you find a gestural language that's operatic but not quite everyday-life, and is perceived as truthful. The actress will probably be encouraged to 'inhabit the space', because psychological interiority is tied up with spatial interiority. If the boat and the beach are there [I.E. UPSTAGE], then you've got to be on the beach, you've got to go to the boat and play it that way. [TO LAILA] So if you want to, head upstage. And, we'd better have some more light, because in a consumer society people like to see what they've paid for. It's true, people always turn the lights up. And Mark is always complaining about it.

[LAILA DELIVERS THE CANTATA IN A LATE TWENTIETH-CENTURY STYLE.]

Thank you, Laila. Just go back upstage a minute... Notice the incompatibility of scale when we are working on a raked perspectival set: see how her proportion breaks the optical illusion. And twenty-first-century people are too big anyway compared with eighteenth-century people. When Laila retreated upstage I hope you picked up on the acoustical differences as well as the visuals. In case you didn't, we will do a quick replay in a historically informed style. Notice now, as Laila does it again, a rhetorical antithesis in the first two lines between 'struggo', a yearning that reaches out, and 'languisco', a languishing that directs us in to the heart. Then the shift of mood, first into love, then mounting anger. Compare this emotional palette with the late twentieth-century search for inner truth, which tends to yield only a single emotional colouring.

[FINAL REPRISE. APPLAUSE.]

There is one other small anachronism I should call your attention to... that's Mark here, who entertained you so much in the warm-up, and in his wig that looks so eighteenth-century. There wouldn't have been a conductor. So, Laila would have engaged directly with the instrumentalists facing her. In the eighteenth century, the woman was in charge. Today, when almost all conductors are male, we have patriarchy. A small historical point of comparison, with apologies to Mark...

OK, let us pursue history and authenticity. If we take an eighteenth-century theatre like this and eighteenth-century instruments and an eighteenth-century text and throw in what we can glean about eighteenth-century acting methods, what is the resultant chemistry? To address the problem, our case study is going to be Rousseau's *Pygmalion*. The play, conveniently, was written just before this theatre was built, and it was first performed just afterwards, so historically it's a nice match.<sup>8</sup> And some of you are going to see a full performance this evening in Stockholm. For now, you just get a five minute extract.

Pygmalion... I am sure you know the story of the sculptor who falls in love with his beautiful statue and brings it to life. Rousseau is an interesting figure, though. He was a republican, who became the darling of the French Revolution, and there is nothing Rousseau hated more than French court theatre. So how do we make sense of that text on this stage? If heritage is allowed to erase politics, the problem of course disappears. Rousseau handed the text, eventually, to amateurs to perform in Lyon because he thought that amateurs could produce the necessary sincerity while Parisian professionals would kill it absolutely. That's an interesting challenge for any attempt at historical reenactment: how do we historicise sincerity?

I should also say something about the problem of language. Rousseau believed – as actually most linguists now believe – that

8. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Pygmalion*, text from 1762, music by Horace Coignet from 1770 (ed.).

language started as a vehicle for musical expression, that it was related fundamentally to feeling, with its propositional content being largely incidental. He preferred Italian singing to French, judging Italian to be the language of feeling. Laila gave us some of those wonderful Italian vowels – ‘infido’, ‘sommergete’, ‘amante’ – they make you want to gesture. But turn them into French – ‘infidèle’, ‘submergez’, ‘amoureux’ – you can feel the work my English mouth has to do to catch the French. French is a fantastic language for philosophical analysis – and, if you get the timing right, it’s pretty good for spoken tragedy. But from Rousseau’s point of view, a disaster for opera. So that led him to the particular form of this play, where Pygmalion talks about his emotions, expressing or rather describing them in the French language as best he can. And then, when his feelings become too overwhelming, he moves into mime, and all the feelings are expressed by the orchestra. It was a remarkable experiment, pointing the way to nineteenth-century melodrama. Rousseau innovated in almost every medium he tackled, and is often seen as inventor of the modern self. He wrote his *Confessions* in an effort to describe his own personal uniqueness. And so, this piece is also an exploration of selfhood: ‘I make a statue. The statue is part of me’. Until the statue becomes someone else, at which point, is that someone else also part of me? Which leads him into metaphysical stuff about the merging of human selves and the pain of separateness.

I should add a word about the conundrum of costume. I’ve indicated that this theatre sits on a historical cusp, marking the end of the Baroque era. According to Baroque practice, the actor or actress comes in wearing the most sumptuous courtly dress of the day that they can muster, never mind the social and historical context. And then in the second half of the eighteenth century came a shift to historical authenticity, so the costume had to reflect the cultural context of the story. That proved quite a problem on this stage, because once King Gustav got into writing new-style operas, out went all these

perspective sets because he needed scene painting that captured a specific social milieu. So what do you do about costume in *Pygmalion*? If you go for fashionable Baroque outfits, then we have to forget that this is a dusty sculptor's workshop. And more pressingly, what about the statue, if the actress is dressed up in mountains of expensive fabric? The emergent ideal was historical authenticity, which implies that a Greek statue should be semi-nude with scanty Greek drapes. The *Pygmalion* story became an excuse in the nineteenth century for pornographic dramas where the near-naked actress was consumed by the male gaze – but this problem did not present itself so starkly in the 1760s. Rousseau's play almost revels in the danger, pulling in contradictory directions.

So let me now introduce João Luís Paixão who is going to perform our extract from *Pygmalion*. In rehearsal costume, so that your imaginations can be open to all possibilities. As we can see, he has put on a bit of makeup to create the energetic brow that was so important in Baroque expression. And then there's the set. To catch the idea of a historical cusp I toyed with the thought of having a classical set on one side to suggest the world of Ovid, the ancient city of Tyre; and on the other side the realist milieu of a lower-class dwelling. Rousseau was proud that his father was an artisan. Fortunately perhaps, the theatre refused to be subverted, because the ropes linking these flats are all intertwined, so we settled for the plebeian setting.

So, if we may, we'll have the change to the peasant's cottage.

[EXTENDED SPECTACLE OF THE SET CHANGING.]

Can I just remind you, this doesn't simply happen by magic. There are about twelve people, doing summer jobs mostly, and all paid minimum wage, toiling away invisibly for your pleasure. Royal power in the eighteenth century also depended on the toiling masses. Please give a round of applause for these people down below.

[JOÃO LUÍS PAIXÃO PERFORMS AN EXCERPT FROM ROUSSEAU'S *Pygmalion*. I HAVE ADDED TO THE PRINTED TEXT (IN BOLD) INSTRUCTIONS TO THE COMPOSER THAT CHARACTERISE THE MIMED INTERLUDES.<sup>9</sup>]

*(Il lève le voile en tremblant, et se prosterne. On voit la statue de Galathée posée sur un piédestal fort petit, mais exhaussé par un gradin de marbre, formé de quelques marches demi-circulaires.)* [Un petit nombre de notes exprime le désir, l'effroi, enfin le mouvement rapide et comme involontaire par lequel Pygmalion découvre la statue.]

Ô Galathée! recevez mon hommage. Oui je me suis trompé: j'ai voulu vous faire nymphe, et je vous ai fait déesse: Vénus même est moins belle que vous.

Vanité, faiblesse humaine! je ne puis me lasser d'admirer mon ouvrage; je m'enivre d'amour-propre; je m'adore dans ce que j'ai fait... Non, jamais rien de si beau ne parut dans la nature; j'ai passé l'ouvrage des dieux...

Quoi! tant de beautés sortent de mes mains? Mes mains les ont donc touchées? Ma bouche a donc pu... Pygmalion! Je vois un défaut. Ce vêtement couvre trop le nu; il faut l'échancier davantage; les charmes qu'il recèle doivent être mieux annoncés.

*(Il prend son maillet et son ciseau, [Une musique fréquemment coupée par des soupirs et des demi-soupirs, peint l'irrésolution de l'artiste, sa démarche incertaine, son agitation, son effroi.] puis s'avançant lentement, il monte, en hésitant, les gradins de la statue qu'il semble n'oser toucher. Enfin, le ciseau déjà levé, il s'arrête.)*

Quel tremblement! quel trouble! Je tiens le ciseau d'une main mal assurée... je ne puis... je n'ose... je gêterai tout.

*(Il s'encourage, et enfin, présentant son ciseau, il en donne un seul coup, et, saisi d'effroi, il le laisse tomber, en poussant un grand cri.)*

Dieux! je sens la chair palpitante repousser le ciseau!...

*(Il redescend, tremblant et confus.)*

*(Trembling, he lifts the veil away, and bows low. We see the statue of Galatea placed on a pedestal that is very small, but set on a marble platform made up of steps in a semi-circle.)* [A few notes to express the desire, the fear, then the quick and almost involuntary action whereby Pygmalion uncovers the statue.]

Galatea! Receive my homage. Yes, I made a mistake. I meant to make you a nymph, but I made you a goddess. Even Venus is less beautiful than you.

Vanity, the human weakness! I cannot tire of admiring my creation. I'm drunk with amour-propre. I adore myself in the object I've made. No, nothing so beautiful ever appeared in nature. I have surpassed the creation of the gods...

Really? Have so many beautiful aspects emerged from my hands? My hands have touched them?... Could my mouth have... Pygmalion! I see a flaw. This garment covers the nude too much. It must be cut lower. The charms it hides must be better prefigured.

*(He picks up his hammer and chisel, [Music often interrupted by sighs, and half-sighs, depicting the artist's indecision, his hesitant movement, his agitation, his fear] then slowly moves closer. Hesitantly, he climbs the steps of the statue, but he seems unable to dare touch it. Finally, with the chisel already raised, he stops.)*

What turmoil! I can't stop trembling! I can't hold the chisel in this unsteady hand... I cannot... I dare not... I'll spoil everything.

*(He summons his courage and finally strikes the statue just once with his chisel, but then overcome by fright, he drops it and utters a loud cry.)*

Great gods! I feel the chisel pushed away by palpitating flesh!

*(He steps down from the pedestal, trembling and confused.)*

...Vaine terreur, fol aveuglement!... Non, je n’y toucherai point; les dieux m’épouvantent. Sans doute elle est déjà consacrée à leur rang.

*(Il la considère de nouveau.)*

Que veux-tu changer? regarde; quels nouveaux charmes veux-tu lui donner?... Ah! c’est la perfection qui fait son défaut.... Divine Galathée! moins parfaite, il ne te manquerait rien.

*(Tendrement.)* [Une douce mélodie peint le sentiment d’une âme tendrement pénétrée.]

Mais il te manque une âme: ta figure ne peut s’en passer.

*(Avec plus d’attendrissement encore.)* [La musique devient plus expressive.]

Que l’âme faite pour animer un tel corps doit être belle!

*(Il s’arrête longtemps.)* [Sans perdre le caractère précédent, elle prend une nuance de trouble et d’agitation.]

Vain terror, mad blindness! No, I shall not touch it. The gods terrify me. She’s no doubt already consecrated among them.

*(He considers her once more.)*

What do you want to change? Look! What new charms do you want to give her?... Ah! Her perfection is her flaw... Divine Galatea! Less perfect, you would lack nothing...

*(Tenderly.)* [A soft melody depicts the feeling of a soul imbued with tenderness.]

But you have no soul. Your features must have a soul.

*(Even more tenderly.)* [The music grows in expressivity.]

How beautiful must be the soul fit to give life to such a body!

*(He pauses for a long time.)* [Without losing its earlier qualities, the music hints at anxiety and turmoil.]

What I want to talk about first is the method. João was coached in period gesture by Jed Wentz who is here today. Jed is a specialist in period movement and made a very fine practice-based PhD on the subject. In essence, today’s standard Stanislavskian approach – leaving aside the MPA<sup>10</sup> – implies that you start with the intent. You do not play the emotion, the emotion follows from the intent. The eighteenth-century, nineteenth-century, seventeenth-century assumption is that the job of the actor starts by analysing the emotions and then you play those emotions for all you are worth. Actually, the old method is not so different, because by the time you’ve analysed the text into its different emotions, you need to have a sense of narrative, with implications about intent, and you’re carving the text into useful units or ‘bits’ of action. In the era of cognitive science, we’ve all been

9. These instructions accompany the score published in 1772. They are not in Coignet’s original score of 1770 created with Rousseau’s participation and collaboration. How far Rousseau should be regarded as the author of these instructions is disputed, but there is no reason to doubt that they catch his intentions.

10. Konstantin Stanislavski’s (1863–1938) later ‘method of physical actions’ (ed.).

taught to recognise that we act first, and then we feel, and then we formulate the intention retrospectively. So the eighteenth-century method makes a lot more sense to me than it did, say, twenty years ago.

Let's try to illustrate how the text has been carved up. First of all, we start with wonder: 'Not just a nymph! Wow! A goddess!' And then we cut to guilt: 'Oh heck, I did that, it's all self-love!' And then we cut to pride: 'Oh wow, no one else could have done that!'... So, just give us those three.

[JOÃO DEMONSTRATES: j'ai voulu vous faire nymphe, et je vous ai fait déesse: Vénus même est moins belle que vous. = WONDER Vanité, faiblesse humaine! = GUILT je ne puis me lasser d'admirer mon ouvrage; je m'enivre d'amour-propre; je m'adore dans ce que j'ai fait = PRIDE.]

That's a rather crude demo, and there are all sorts of complications. How do you play mixed emotions? Whose taxonomy of emotions do you follow? What's the difference between an emotion and a passion? There's lots of room for debate and refinement. The real peak to aim for was romantic love. Every eighteenth-century play had to deal with romantic love – and yet, in the twenty-first century, I've never met a student who can do it: we do relationships; we don't do *love*. [TO JOÃO] I wish I could have a week to work with you and Jed and see if we could study the textbooks and crack it, but... ah well...

The next big issue is the perennial inside-outside debate. Classical rhetoricians offer both ways: either you start from working the imagination, letting the imagination, the 'soul', tell the body what to do, *or* you do it the other way round. I think you like starting from the body best?

[JOÃO REPLIES: I would say that we have to work in this reenactment 'outside-in', because we don't know the vocabulary, and we first need to establish that on the body, so that the body can articulate the words, because 'inside-out' they can't be spontaneous.]

It's the endless conundrum in the history of acting... I want to flag another issue, now, and that is 'declamation', declamation being a

mode of speech that was particular to the stage. It eliminated all the detritus of individuality and social context and aspired to catch the quintessence of the emotions embodied by the actor. No one can tell you exactly how actors declaimed because they spent so much time arguing, saying: ‘No that old way of speaking is wrong, it’s died the death! Let’s bring it to life this way!’ What João went for in his demo was musicality, a lot of cadence, pushing the voice in the direction of the music, speaking Rousseau’s prose as if he was performing alexandrines on the French tragic stage. [To JOÃO] So I suggest now, try to follow the style of Garrick.<sup>11</sup> All the documentation on Garrick indicates – and Rousseau had a very happy encounter with Garrick, by the way – that he cut out a lot of the modulation, concentrated on rhythm and timing, in order to catch in those micro-pauses, the feeling that lay behind the words. So the handover will be different between you and the orchestra: it’s not so much a continuum of sound as a continuum of the feeling underlying the sound. I don’t know if it’ll work or not. See what happens. Go for clarity, lose much of the Italian *bel canto*; find the head resonators, to let in that French intellectual clarity.

[JOÃO TRIES TO DECLAIM IN THE STYLE OF GARRICK.]

OK, we could pursue it. It’s an example of the kind of historical investigation that you can only really perform in a space like this, to say: OK, does it *work* for you in the front? Does it work for all you people up the back? Can you make the voice as big as before? We can only find answers by experimentation.

Let’s go on to the last example we’re going to give you, and that’s a piece of Rameau. When Rousseau picked up the Pygmalion story, he did it in part as a riposte to the man he hated most, Rameau. Rameau was a writer of fashionable court opera in Paris. We can’t do Rameau’s *Pygmalion* because João’s voice isn’t right for it, so we are going to take a climactic moment from Rameau’s most famous tragedy. It’s his version of the Euripidean Hippolytus story, you probably all know it.<sup>12</sup> Towards the end, Theseus has been down in the Underworld, comes back up, learns that his beloved son Hippolytus

11. David Garrick (1717–1779), English actor celebrated for the ‘naturalness’ of his acting (ed.).

12. Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Hippolyte et Aricie* (1733). His *Pygmalion* is from 1748 (ed.).

has had an affair with Theseus' young second wife, Phaedra, and in fury he calls on his weapon of mass-destruction given him by his divine parent, and a sea-monster comes to destroy Hippolytus. In Rameau's version, Theseus is about to commit suicide by throwing himself into the water when Neptune appears in the nick of time to prevent him. The entry of gods is what this theatre does best, using the laws of perspective to create a god of superhuman scale: an emblem of monarchical power. So you know the story. What is hard for us to grasp when we parachute in from the twenty-first century is the way one show got its meaning from contesting the previous. Rousseau was trying to give his audience something more authentic, more real and less royalist than they had got from Rameau. Rameau, in his turn, was taking that classic of the French stage, Racine's *Phèdre*, and saying, 'OK, Racine was using poetry, but I'm going to take the resources of music and dance, and I'm going to make those emotions work even more powerfully for this privileged audience'. The difficulty can be ironed over if we say, 'OK, let's generalise the eighteenth century, cut out all the politics and artistic debate – we'll put on our wigs and give you the standard eighteenth-century package'. Much more comfortable, because we know where we are.

So, now as I wind up I'd like you to think about spectatorship. We always say about exercises in historical reenactment: 'unfortunately you can't recreate the audience'. But you can at least think about your own spectatorship. Rousseau was pretty much the first person to come up with the concept of 'identification'. He formulated it; and now it's common sense. Rousseau wanted the spectators to reach out in sympathy towards the protagonist on stage, to share their feelings, even identify, as if saying: 'You, ordinary human beings out there, watch a mere artisan, an ordinary person, having noble feelings on stage'. It was a deeply democratic – or I should rather say, bourgeois – way of thinking about the actor-audience relationship. Rameau is in another place – and emphatically not today's consumer society. He is not putting a product on stage to sell it, but seeing performance as a social transaction.



**Figure 4.** João Luís Paixão (left) and David Wiles (right) on stage. Drottningholm Palace Theatre, 2016. Screenshot from video. © Stockholm University. License: CC BY-NC.

Materialism was a popular philosophy in the mid-eighteenth century, so let's think about spectating in material terms. There [POINTING TO THE ORCHESTRA] we have the violin, and the bow setting up vibrations on the strings. Here we have João's voice, his breath is setting up vibrations on the cords in his larynx. So what happens now if we think: successful acting is the ability to transmit those vibrations to you. Think historically and imagine your bodies as a web of nerves transmitting messages to and fro, so success becomes a matter of the performers down there [I.E. IN THE ORCHESTRA], and up here [ON STAGE] making vibrations happen in you. One test of whether the scene works will be whether you feel a sort of tingling on top of the scalp, because the key emotion is going to be horror. And if it doesn't work for you, well... that may be due to the performers, but it may be because your own instruments haven't been properly tuned. Once this piece starts, I'm not going to say anything else. I think you have got my drift: that this is a very special place for experiment, that although you can't put the

eighteenth century back on the stage, it is worth trying, because working with the body is an important way of practicing the art of being a theatre historian.

[DAVID LEAVES. JOÃO SINGS THESÉE'S RÉCITATIF FROM RAMEAU'S *HIPPOLYTE ET ARICIE*, ACT 5, SCENE I.]

THÉSÉE	THESEUS
Grands dieux! De quels remords je me sens déchiré! Que d'horreurs à la fois! J'ai vu Phèdre expirer.	Great gods! Such remorse tears me apart! So many horrors at once! I have seen Phaedra breathe her last.
Quel mystère odieux, quel amour détestable, L'inhumaine en mourant vient de me déclarer! Mon fils... Ô douleur qui m'accable; Il était innocent! Dieux! Que je suis coupable! Rentrons dans les enfers: qui peut me retenir, D'un monstre tel que moi délivrons la nature. De la plus horrible imposture, Les perfides auteurs viennent de se punir. Mes parricides vœux ont consommé le crime;	What vile secret, what hateful love did that inhuman woman relate to me as she died! My son... Grief overwhelms me – he was innocent! Gods! And the guilt is mine! Let me return to the Underworld – the place to hold me, to spare nature from a monster such as myself. For their terrible fraud, the treacherous culprits have punished themselves. My internecine invocations are the consummation of that crime,
Et je dois à mon fils sa dernière victime. Dieu des mers, aux mortels cache-moi pour jamais. ( <i>Il veut se précipiter dans les flots.</i> )	and I owe my son one last victim. God of the seas, hide me from mortals forever. ( <i>He is about to leap into the waves.</i> )
Scène II: Neptune, Thésée. ( <i>Neptune sort du sein des mers.</i> )	Scene II: Neptune, Theseus. ( <i>Neptune arises from the bosom of the ocean.</i> )
NEPTUNE Arrête!	NEPTUNE Wait!

[THE FIGURE WHO RISES THROUGH THE TRAP-DOOR BRANDISHING A TRIDENT IS IN FACT DAVID. FROM THE PIT MARK SHOUTS THE 'ARRÊTE!']