

Richard Gough

Future Proof (With Courage & Curiosity):
Training for a theatre that does not yet exist

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Intro

This presentation explores the strategies, conditions and precedents of a theatre-training programme aimed to nurture practitioners not for the profession as it currently exists but rather for how it might be – in the future, as yet, unforeseen and unimagined.

Through examining three specific historical examples, this article asks how the rigorous integration of theory and practice would seem to generate the circumstances for radical and unorthodox ways of thinking and making theatre: courageous practices of innovation and reinvention, fuelled by insatiable curiosity.

For a speculative manifesto for a theatre programme (school, academy, temporary installation, insertion, guerrilla action, insurrection), I will propose and illustrate five conditions:

1. That a deep integration of theory and practice is systematically advanced – theory as a practice; practice as theory. Artist-led research and practice as research that is supported and critiqued through rigorous appraisal, generating reflexive and articulate practitioners.

2. That the teachers, the educators, the pedagogues are practising artists themselves and continue to create work within the profession, alongside their teaching – at least in part, a certain expertise in aesthetics, theatre history, political and critical theory could best be illuminated by academics/scholars, but even this should be orchestrated and delivered with the practitioner in mind.

3. That a dynamic relationship between tradition and innovation is vigorously pursued and that no one canon of work (specific company, aesthetic movement, world theatre culture) is upheld as a model. That the worlds of performance and the great traditions of world theatre are apprehended, placed in dynamic relations and attempts made to understand them on their own terms (not through a privileging of Western theatre aesthetics).

4. That the conditions of a scientific laboratory, enflamed through alchemical inspiration, are sought, whereby risk and experiment can be taken without fear of failure. Where the curiosity of students and the ‘beginner’s mind’ (Zeami, the early Noh master) is nurtured and the emergent practitioner is encouraged ‘Try again. Fail again. Fail better’.¹

¹ Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho*, (London: John Calder, 1983), p. 1.

5. That at least some part of the programme takes place outside urban landscapes, as 'escape' from city dwelling and the demands of everyday 21st-century living – as retreat into the rural, to natural environments. Such relocation is necessary to generate a dislocation of the mundane and prosaic, as a creative intervention and the realisation of liminal spaces to allow for the unforeseen and unexpected.

Guiding this presentation and the aspirations for which it hopes might be made manifest is John Cage's aphorism: 'An experimental action is one the outcome of which is not foreseen'²

Dartington College of Arts

Twenty years before Andrzej Wirth established the groundbreaking theatre programme at Giessen, Dartington College of Arts was beginning to take shape on the Dartington Estate, Totnes, Devon. In parallel to and building upon an unconventional kindergarten and upon schools that were progressive, radical and coeducational at boarding, primary and secondary levels – the vision: to provide education from nursery to PhD in a rural and idyllic location on a journey of uncompromising learning processes. Formally, Dartington College of Arts was established in 1961 but ever since Leonard Elmhirst bought the vast estate in 1925, there had been a commitment to host artists and to enable experimental educational projects. Dorothy Elmhirst was a wealthy American widow committed to patronage of the arts and an unswerving belief in their edifying and enriching power for participants and the active engagement in the arts. The Elmhirsts had restored the magnificent medieval hall, courtyard and surrounding buildings dating back to the 14th century, and adopted progressive measures to nurture and develop the thousand-acre estate. They set out to: 'create a centre of educational and agricultural experiment. This was also to be a powerful draw for artists and musicians from around the world, and a remarkable centre of creative activity'.³

The Elmhirsts' vision was a utopian community at odds with the disconcerting and alienating temper of early-modernist times. The crucial factor that differentiates theirs from many such idealistic endeavours is that they had the funds to realise it and a seemingly endless financial resource. Artists flocked to Dartington throughout the 1930s and aligned themselves to the Elmhirsts' vision. The Indian poet/painter Rabindranath Tagore had a long-standing relationship with the Elmhirsts and Dartington, and his notion of 'rural reconstruction' motivated their thinking about the estate. Numerous artists in the 1930s and 1940s visited or sought refuge at Dartington, in exile or en route to America. Between 1936 and 1939, Michael Chekhov established the Chekhov Theatre School as a residential programme at Dartington and, likewise, Kurt Jooss, the innovative choreographer, established a dance school in the mid-1930s. These two short-lived initiatives previsioned what was to become the Dartington College of Arts.

² John Cage, *Composition as Process: Indeterminacy*, in Christoph Cox, Daniel Warner, *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* (New York: Continuum, rev. ed. 2017), pp. 176–187 (p. 184).

³ Peter Kingston, 'Dartington College of Arts' Relocation Could Be a Threat of Its Identity', *The Guardian*, 1 June 2010.

The truly innovative, groundbreaking and change-making era of Dartington College of Arts was from the mid-1960s through to the mid-1980s, thus it does in many ways precede Giessen from the perspective of this symposium. The underlying ethos was of 'learning by doing'. As a specialist college, being less than 500 students across all four years, Dartington College of Arts initially concentrated on Art, Music and Theatre with Dance rapidly becoming a distinctive programme within the theatre-arts provision. Although positioned in a remote, rural and idyllic part of Devon – the closest town, Totnes, itself being a site of pilgrimage and settlement for 1960s alternative subculture – Dartington was always committed to socially engaged artistic practice and, increasingly through the 1980s and 1990s, to performance work informed by critical and cultural theory. Being a relatively small and co-dependent year group, miles from any large city and with natural landscapes, vast manicured gardens, historic buildings (both medieval and Bauhaus/Gropius-inspired) in abundance, work flourished that was site specific and site-located, trans – and inter-disciplinary, and that was inspired by many visiting professional artists and the core staff, in the main being practicing artists themselves.

The journalist Mark Kidel wrote of Dartington:

The idea that learning might be returned, as it were, to the world, by breaking down or at least softening the barriers between school and work, family and general community life, has always been – and still is – radical.⁴

Dartington's guiding ethos – Learning by Doing – might today be termed 'experiential learning'. This is similar to what was described yesterday by Heiner Goebbels, as a pedagogical practice at Giessen. And as now in Giessen, so then in Dartington, this sometimes meant the lecturers (leaders/teachers) were also exploring their own artistic research and enabling 'practice-based learning', where the teaching staff did not guide with clarity and profess with certainty, but rather curated the conditions for experiment and discovery. At the trans-disciplinary interface, this meant that some innovative, socially engaged performance resulted from the application of theatre to communities, and at a disciplinary level, the emergence of several distinctive fields of study/practice, one for example being Performance Writing. This emergent practice is neither simply creative writing nor playwriting nor writing scenarios for performance, but a compound of many genres of writing, from poetry to manifestos to dance scores to performative writing.

In the same way that Giessen can proudly proclaim the prodigy of such companies as Rimini Protokoll and She She Pop, so too Dartington can point to the work of Stan's Café, Lone Twin and Desperate Optimists – and what is interesting about this particular set of artist companies is their commitment to work/art with an agenda of social engagement. They all make work that has connections with site, place, specificity on the border between performance and installation, event, celebration, community action and participation, with their work located yet also transferable

⁴ Mark Kidel, *Beyond the Classroom: Dartington's Experiments in Education*, (Devon: Green Books, 1990).

to international contexts, socially aware and political. In this sense, the spirit of Dartington continues to flow and remains true to the founding beliefs of the Elmhursts, although now mutated from anxiety about early modernism to critique of neoliberalism, sharing a belief in socially engaged artistic practice for the empowerment of communities.

By the 1990s, however, Dartington was struggling to remain independent, and continued for the better part of a decade to remain true to its ethos through a partnership with nearby Plymouth University. However, for many complex reasons having to do with shifts in UK Higher Education funding and most significantly with changes in priorities for the Dartington Trust (still owners of the premises) and a whole host of commercial and (conflicting) philanthropic enterprises, the very existence of the College was put at risk in 2006. Eventually, Dartington College of Arts was closed through a merger with Falmouth Art College (two and a half hours farther west into Cornwall). Staff and students were 'relocated'; given that so many of the ideals and so much of the ethos of Dartington was embedded in the 'location', it can easily be imagined what problems and disorientation such relocation (dislocation) might entail.

The merger of Dartington into what became Falmouth University was in effect an erasure, as in so many commercially necessitated transactions: a form of asset stripping. Dartington became subservient to the more entrepreneurial rubric and the creative-industry aligned aspirations of a 21st-century university. Dartington's subversive and maverick (some might say feral) position became subsumed. Within a few years, even the by-line 'Falmouth University incorporating Dartington College of Arts' was dropped, deleted – the incorporation complete. Two years later (2015), the remaining Dartington theatre programme was closed and the staff put at risk of redundancy. The existence of the spirit of Dartington within Falmouth University was always a fragile ecology because in dismantling Dartington, Falmouth had failed to grasp that the greatest asset of Dartington was its ethos and its commitment to nurturing artists for art forms and practices yet to be realised (yet to be imagined): not for the profession as it currently exists nor for how it is currently configured, but for how it might be. In the context of the 21st-century neoliberal UK, Dartington could never have survived demands made through the monetisation of learning and the commodification of knowledge, and the consequent shifts in teaching, learning and student expectations. And this perhaps is a crucial issue for us to reflect upon as we chronicle the theme 'Giessen & Others' at this symposium. How can utopian and idealistic models for nurturing and envisioning theatre of the future be forged, realised and sustained in times of austerity, neoliberalism, paucity of patronage, and with the demands of ever quantifiable purpose and measured outcomes?

UK universities (theory and practice)

Bristol, Exeter – Falmouth

RCSSD

It is perhaps worth emphasising that Dartington College of Arts in its primacy, in its most creative, independent and innovative phase, (mid-1960s through to mid-1990s) was uniquely positioned within the landscape of UK higher-education institutions offering training or studies

in theatre (drama, theatre, dance performance). From the 1950s onwards, there had been a polarisation between the universities and the conservatories (the vocational, academy model, as here in Poland). This polarisation advanced Drama and Theatre studies within universities (theatre history, theory, dramaturgy, literature review and criticism) and Acting & Directing – practice and production in the conservatories (training and technique – voice, body, acting – character development, interpretation of texts, scenography): put crudely, a straight division between theory and practice. Dartington had embraced both – a full-bodied and dynamic integration of the two (praxis) remaining elusive, but an attempt for one (theory) to inform the other (practice) at least creating a distinctive organism.

By the mid 1970s, the original Drama Departments of the UK universities were themselves shifting (Bristol, Exeter, Hull, Manchester, Glasgow, Kent); they began to embrace practice, first as a way of testing theory and theoretical approaches, a way of learning through doing, then in more applied, open and experimental modes. Within the context of a university, with students required to critically reflect upon their own work and empowered and encouraged to take risks, experiment and innovate, great advances were made. Now, less trained bodies (from an orthodox, traditional, professional sense) were making work envisioned by sharp and culturally savvy minds – critically reflected and reflexive, informed by critical theory and enflamed, enraged, engaged and compelled by new (mainly French) critical theorists and philosophers. This was the dawn of a new age of theatre practice, nurtured from within a handful of British universities, perhaps paralleling Giessen, in the way in which postmodern fervour led to an embrace of deconstructionism and critical theory leading to various emanations of practice and productions of the emergent post-dramatic (if as yet unnamed and unclassified as such).

From Exeter, Forced Entertainment emerged, from Bristol, Bodies in Flight, from Swansea, Volcano Theatre, to name but a few (the list is a long one). In this sense, Dartington's once unique position was already surpassed, its creative, innovative moment had past. Curiously, at this point (mid-1980s through 1990s), university Drama and Theatre Departments were being more experimental and forward-looking, contributing more to developments in form and function of theatre (socially and aesthetically) than the conservatories, which appeared to remain committed to preserving the status quo of British theatre of a former glorious age, the well-made play, psychological realism, film and TV acting, music theatre and the business of show business: impervious to new developments, cocooned from influences from abroad. I recall the staff in one of those prestigious conservatories challenging Joan Mills (my wife) about introducing Grotowski-based physical and vocal exercises (learnt directly from Zygmunt Molik's residencies at the Centre for Performance Research). Eventually someone said, without irony: 'We should keep to what we know best, British methods of training: Brecht and Stanislavski'. This revealed in one sentence a resistance to change, fear of the 'foreign', and a complete ignorance of the impact of experimental theatre on key practitioners within the UK, as well as a deep confusion with regard to German and Russian sources of 'British' theatre

training. Later, the then Head of Acting confessed: 'I don't really believe in all this "foreign stuff"'.

However, over the last ten years, many of the conservatories have moved with the times: the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and Rose Bruford College (both London-based) and the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama have realised insightful and far-reaching programmes that align theory-inflected practice with new developments that subsequently challenge the profession as it is currently configured. Through initiatives in new writing, dramaturgy, ensemble devising and immersive-theatre process, they enable graduates to influence future practice and emergent forms of performance.

Second Part: A more personal reflection

For the Curious – Opening up worlds of performance

This is the strapline of the Centre for Performance Research, of which I am the artistic director.

In our work at the Centre for Performance Research (CPR), we take as our starting point the position of Wales on the periphery of Europe, and transform this into a curatorial vision, and we take a broad look at contemporary performance work. I produce work which proposes new developments in art forms and between disciplines and which reaches out to, and engages with, new audiences: dance/theatre; installation/performance; music and multimedia projects; site-specific and landscape-based events. Performance which makes the marginal central, celebrating diversity and all of that which exists on the periphery, on the edge, on the border between different art forms and between social and aesthetic action – that which disturbs, illuminates, challenges the norm, takes a paradoxical position, is made off-centre, off side, on purpose. Work that is made in and from a particular and specific set of circumstances and which is distinguished by its own sense of displacement, which is angry and passionate, flagrant and partisan, speaking directly, visually and viscerally to a wide audience. Parallel to this, for over forty years we have organised short-lived, occasional or recurrent experimental schools, residential retreats and alternate professional development opportunities functioning as pop-up academies and operating as if a 'dangerous supplement' to orthodox training and the academy.

I believe strongly that global perspectives on national developments and innovation in cultural forms enrich understandings and imaginings. I am a generalist, more interested in the similarities and differences in cultural practices and artistic development between and across cultures; I embrace an international/transnational world view of theatre and performance and place research in British theatre within such a context, informed by post-colonial critique, critical theory, practitioner know-how and emboldened by artist-led research – wishing to relate to a contemporary multicultural (and European) Britain.

My life's work has been driven by curiosity, an insatiable curiosity about the performance traditions of the world and the performance cultures of other people. Parallel to this, I have been committed to

creating and producing (for UK audiences and other countries) innovative and experimental performance work emerging from the interface of theatre, music, installation and participatory practices (including cooking and eating, pursuing commensality) – work that does not emanate from written texts. I am passionate about the creative links between innovation and tradition and committed to an evolving integration of theory and practice.

But how does one know another culture?

Is dancing the dance, the form, of another tradition an indication that knowing, feeling, embracing another culture leads to a closer understanding? With increased opportunity to encounter other world-theatre traditions (actually or virtually) in this day and age, is such immersion efficacious any longer?

Having followed a standard British education up to age 18, the values of British drama, and the dominance of the play and the playwright, was inculcated in me. I still love Shakespeare but, equally, I reject or rather contest all that education taught me about privilege, Euro-centricity and the supremacy of English dramatists. It still astonishes me how few Drama and Theatre Departments in the UK embrace a worldview of theatre and performance, and I know this is also true for the States and the rest of Europe. As if my position was not already marginal enough, several years ago at a gathering of many UK Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies scholars (lecturers and professors), and as part of a much longer keynote paper, I set them a test, a quiz to challenge their Western theatre bias. It went like this:

1. Other than Chikamatsu, name a Japanese playwright who wrote for the Bunraku and Kabuki stage.
2. What are the roots of Commedia?
3. Which came first, Kun Ju or Jin Ju?
4. Name an Islamic playwright.
5. Who wrote the *Natyashastra* (and this is a trick question)?
6. What is name of the sung, epic, narrative form of traditional Korean theatre?
7. In what part of Africa are the Yoruba found, and can you name a Yoruban playwright?
8. Name three Noh plays.
9. What is the difference between Lakardhami and Natyadharmi?
10. Name three contemporary Australian theatre companies.

Or, just as an example to reverse the questioning and evoke the standard British reference points:

–The answer is Shakespeare, the play is *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

–The question would have been: who was a contemporary of the Chinese playwright Tang Xianzu, and which play was possibly written in the same year as *The Peony Pavilion*?

Theatre history describes how, time and time again, one highly developed, specific, peculiar and idiosyncratic set of theatre practices and aesthetics has had formative and transformative influence on another nation's theatre culture – import results in impact. Is this a form of viral transmission?

Does the export and import of theatre lead to a form of contamination? Infection in the most positive sense: a challenge to the old and the known,

the tried and tested, a challenge to complacency and tradition, inspiration for the new, an alternative view; an opening of the doors of imagination; an incorporation of new techniques and aesthetic practices – renewal, renaissance and regeneration. Through such intercultural exchange and interweaving, a ripple effect of one innovative and creative strategy is generated, transmitting training techniques across cultures, from one individual to another, in unforeseen and unpredictable ways, serendipitous, subversive and subterranean: transmission of performance knowledge; the chain of participants; the necklace of technique; the impact that sustained highly-perfected and detailed training has on the world through theatre. Thus, avoiding dogma, bridging the present, one foot in the past, one in the future.

I suggested at the outset (condition 3) that an openness and an attempt to understand the complexity of world theatre and the rich diversity of great world-theatre traditions was a necessary component to an ecosystem of change and innovation within theatre practice – destabilizing the Western canon and any privileging of one nation's theatre culture over that of another.

Intercultural Theatre Institute

After going into some depth about Dartington College of Arts, I want to briefly mention another 'institution', on the other side of the world, that has also been through various difficulties of survival and reinvention but which is thankfully flourishing today – it is the Intercultural Theatre Institute (ITI). Similar to my own organisation, the CPR, ITI began more as a theatre organisation to offer short courses for professional development, conferences, master classes, summer schools, retreats and intensives – a necklace of opportunities and structural interventions into performance training and thinking. But in recent years, ITI has determined to offer complete three-year professional diplomas and is now regarded as a stable, independent theatre school occupying a beautiful villa on Emily Hill right in the centre of Singapore.

ITI was originally founded by Kuo Pao Kun, the pioneer of Singaporean theatre: playwright, director and arts activist, and founder of several seminal institutions of Singapore culture: the arts centre The Substation, and The Practice Theatre Company. Originally conceived as The Practice Performing Arts, it aimed to integrate dance, drama and music training, and create a symbiosis between creative performance and arts education. Today ITI, now functioning through the charismatic Keralan/Singaporean 'Sasi' (T. Sasitharan), develops Pao Kun's founding vision of intercultural actor training using a matrix of traditional theatre systems and conceptions of theatre-making from different cultures, with a view to producing critically and socially engaged artists who make original contemporary theatre. So, here we have a trans – and interdisciplinary approach within an Asian context drawing upon the great traditions of Asian theatre and dance, but open too to Western theatre-training techniques; working across all disciplines, seeking a symbiosis and, along the way, enabling young performance-makers of multicultural backgrounds to envision and embody the potential of new and emergent intercultural performance practice: new theatre for progressive transcultural times.

Robert Wilson & the Watermill Center

My third example of an institution enabling transdisciplinary experiment and nurturing young artists to propose, through action, new and innovative forms of performance is Robert Wilson's The Watermill Center, located in the Hamptons, the now luxurious residential area of Long Island, New York.

Robert Wilson has been a recurrent visiting professor to Giessen (and remains a close friend of Andrzej Wirth), and from the outset of his illustrious career Wilson has always been interested in the transformation of performance techniques and in the transmission of these techniques, and ways of thinking, to young theatre-makers ... always mindful of future generations and the future of the field.

As early as 1986, he was looking for a space to establish a residential arts complex to host summer schools, artist-development programmes and fellowship schemes, a space, a place that could be home to his growing collection of artefacts of world cultures, in part museum, an exhibition space but also an active studio and rehearsal space where the artefacts themselves could inspire new action, thought and reflection. He came across the forlorn and destitute former Western Union research centre (where the first fax machine was invented); it had been abandoned since the 1960s and was in a terrible state of disrepair. Despite this, in 1989 he purchased the land and the ruins and by 1992 the first summer programme with the Trisha Brown Dance Company was being hosted.

From the Watermill website:

The Watermill Center is a laboratory of inspiration and performance, [...] which provides a unique environment for a global community of emerging and established artists and thinkers to gather and explore new ideas together.

Completed in 2006, The Watermill Center stands in an eight-and-a-half acre arts compound, with verdant lawns and outdoor sculpture gardens. The Center is Wilson's summer home and home to an ever-burgeoning collection of artifacts, textiles, sculptures, furniture, and other art objects that are available for study.

Watermill serves as a place for young and emerging artists to work, learn, create, and grow with each other; it integrates performing arts practice with resources from the humanities, research from the sciences, and inspiration from the visual arts. Watermill is unique within the global landscape of experimental theatrical performance, and regularly convenes the brightest minds from all disciplines to do, in Wilson's words, "what no one else is doing."⁵

The Laboratory Theatre Network

Robert Wilson's evocation of a laboratory has great resonance and inspiration for me – having joined the Cardiff Laboratory Theatre at 18, I am a committed and convicted (as in 'incarcerated') laboratory technician. Cardiff Lab, formed in 1974, precociously positioned itself in the lineage of Grotowski and Barba then was recurrently hosting both of them and all their collaborators from 1978. By the end of the

⁵ <http://www.watermillcenter.org/about/history/> [accessed on 22 February].

1980s, laboratories were decidedly passé (uncool, de rigueur), a product of the 1960/1970s. But the idea of a laboratory, with the unspoken and un-shameful allegiance to alchemy, to conduct experiments to generate conditions for transmutation, to forge amidst the fire and the furnace, devils and apprenticeships, remains compelling and a timely proposition for the transdisciplinary within the dark arts of theatre.

For five years from 2011 to 2015, I conducted a research enquiry (funded by the Leverhulme Trust) entitled *The European Laboratory Network* that traced the (trans)formative influence and legacy of European theatre studios and laboratories throughout the 20th century. In its final year, it also reached out and extended its scope to include the Americas – Robert Wilson’s *The Watermill Center* was an inspirational model to draw conclusions and recommendations for the future in respect of the historical insights gained. However, as in the discussion above about patronage and the Elmhursts at Dartington, Wilson’s private support for *The Watermill Center* and his dedication to being present throughout the summer school is immense, as with the numerous private benefactors and foundations that fund *The Watermill Center*. Once again, I am left in confusion as to how a laboratory that enables risk and allows failure can exist and flourish unfettered in these neoliberal times unless through private patronage – and then the dilemma of privilege and entitlement unfolds.

Third Part – Hopes for the Future

In conclusion, I would like to share some more aspirational views (visionary desire, if one dare say) for what could be achieved in Theatre/Performance programmes within higher education (universities and conservatories), at the interface between an academic department and innovative, future thinking professional engagement.

There has been much debate across the last ten years about the ‘performative turn’ or the performance ‘turn’ in the humanities which has seen a greater emphasis placed upon the processual and ephemeral quality of human endeavour; greater attention is given to the event and less to the object, to process rather than product – on being and doing. Performance Studies is turning again to the laboratory, to the foundry, to the experimental: seeing the laboratory, the anatomy theatre and artists’ studio as sites (and modes) of discovery, and vehicles of process, aligned to a rigorous examination of process (and their events) in the public domain.

This strategy turns the secluded and enshrouded experiment into public event; it makes public not only the findings of its enquiry but also the very apparatus by which it can investigate. It advances new models for knowledge transfer and new means of investigation and yet also threads sets of research questions that are informed and nuanced by contemporary critical theory and an acute sense of political purpose (function and capacity).

I hope for a return to performance practice that encourages the inventor, the innovator, the bricoleur and the experimentalist in each of us;

that nurtures intuition that, once again, generates courage to realize the fruits of inventive curiosity.

I should like to see a greater integration of theory and practice, training which develops body and mind, creativity in the full sense, nurturing practitioners who do not feel threatened or impoverished by theory, and theorists who do not feel soiled or distracted by practice. I want practitioners to embrace theory as practice, to work with it, alongside it, above it, beneath it, within it. I want practice embodied, ennobled, made more vigorous through such incorporations – stretched, challenged, revitalized. Look at any of the great traditions of theatre and dance around the world, such a separation does not exist, is inconceivable. A physical training is a mental and spiritual training, and compositional strategies, aesthetic concepts are nurtured and developed, even inculcated from the outset, reinforced and made manifest through this training.

Here I am not only wishing for incorporation, embodied theory, but for more training that develops the performer's mind and creativity. I want to see a training of the intellect not divorced from the body, that enables courage – courage to create, courage to take a risk, courage to try again, to fail better. I want to see a training of the mind and body that not only enables the unimaginable to be imagined, but for an incorporation to realise it, make manifest, produce action on stage, with idea and image synthesized. This would be a training for the performer's imagination led and supported by a training of the body; an imagination whose visions are compelled by curiosity, an open, naive, incorrigible inquisitiveness.

For a while, let us set aside performance theory and escape the vortex of super-saturated, over-theorised reiteration. Let us return to practical experiment to make an intervention and an addition; I want to propose a performance laboratory, a space within higher education that interfaces with the profession, a place for performance research and performance practice that embraces Theatre & Performance Studies and which re-emphasises experiment and risk-taking. This could be a site, a foundry, where new theories, methods and strategies for and of performance emerge through trial and error, forged through an empirical approach.

This could be a laboratory that will enable an articulate practitioner who can interrogate their own compositional processes and theorists who are informed by performance mastery and who remain engaged in the process (transitional and conditional), avoiding fundamentalism and the ossification of insight into rules and regulations.

This could see a braiding of performance practice with academic enquiry, an interlacing of a performer's know-how with a scholar's knowledge, generating a little room where 'great reckonings' could take place.

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ABSTRACT**Richard Gough**

Future Proof (With Courage & Curiosity):
 Training for a theatre that does not yet exist

This presentation explores the strategies, conditions and precedents of a theatre-training programme aimed to nurture practitioners not for the profession as it currently exists, but rather for how it might be – in the future, as yet, unforeseen and unimagined. Through examining specific historical evidence, the presentation asks how the rigorous integration of theory and practice would seem to generate the circumstances for radical and unorthodox ways of thinking and making theatre: courageous practices of innovation and reinvention, fuelled by insatiable curiosity. From a UK perspective it considers the impact and legacy of Dartington College of Arts (Totnes, Devon) especially in how it functioned in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s and spawned many alternative and experimental theatre companies and practices (perhaps the UK's equivalent to Giessen).

It also accounts for the sustained pedagogical programmes pursued by the Centre for Performance Research (Wales) throughout the last 40 years and other like-minded institutions that have forged innovative practice (pedagogy and training) outside the academy and through independent endeavour. But the paper will also (critically) survey the attempts made within UK university theatre departments to extend theatre and performance studies into theory inflected practice, generating articulate practitioners and practice informed theorists – practice as research and research-led practice. From a European perspective the presentation will incorporate insights gained from the five-year research enquiry – The European Laboratory Network 2011–2015 (funded by the Leverhulme Trust), organised by Richard Gough and the Centre for Performance Research that traced the (trans)formative influence and legacy of theatre Studios and Laboratories throughout the 20th century. The presentation will argue for an empirical-based, laboratory-style approach to theatre training, incorporating theory and practice, (innovation and tradition) within university theatre studies – one foot in the past, one foot in the future – as a way for enabling socially relevant, uncompromising, ferocious, and enthralling theatre ... that does not yet exist.