Tracing Creation
Genetics, Genes, and Genealogies of Performance

International Arts Campus deSingel, Antwerp (Belgium)
9 to 11 March 2016

An international conference organised by the Research Centre for Visual Poetics (University of Antwerp) in association with

- Clic Centre for Literary and Intermedial Crossings (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)
- Lira Laboratoire International de Recherches en Arts (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3)
- S:PAM Studies in Performing Arts and Media (Ghent University)
- Royal Conservatoire Antwerp (AP University College)

When does a performance begin and when does it end? Does it only exist when it is staged in front of an audience, or does its life also exceed that transitory moment? Is the actual showing of the work performance’s primary mode of existence? Or could it be that the allure of the act tends to make us forget about the gamut of creative decisions, daily rehearsals, and preparatory materials that determine its appearance on stage and yet remain absent from it? How, when, and where exactly does a performance come into being?

The international conference Tracing Creation is aimed at exploring those processes that, strictly speaking, precede the moment a performance is staged but which nevertheless leave their mark on its form, structure, or content, thus playing a crucial role in what is presented to the public. By proposing Genetics, Genes, and Genealogies as three anchor points around which investigations into the creative process may be clustered, the conference intends to stimulate the genetic study of performance as a newly emerging and promising branch of research in the field of theatre studies.
Because the main focus of theatre
studies has traditionally been the
analysis of concrete stagings, the
creative processes during which
the work is made received only
occasional attention. In contrast
to the study of literature, which
has a well-established tradition in
genetic research, theatre scholars
have only recently begun to inquire
into the genetics of performance.
Acknowledgement is growing that
a thorough understanding of what
happens on stage can greatly bene-
fit from analysing those processes
that take place beside it. However,
as this is a relatively new research
domain, there is a pressing need to
develop solid methodologies that
can enhance the genetic study of
the performing arts.

In order to excavate the pre-histo-
ries of performance, the various
documents generated in the course
of artistic processes (including
director’s notebooks, drawings,
videos, audio recordings, et cetera)
provide a rich yet underexplored
source of information. In this re-
spect, analysing performance from
a genetic point of view immediately
raises the vexed issue of how live
performance relates to its material
documentation: how can various
means of notation, recording, and
archiving adequately chart how a
given work was created as well as
enable its future restagings? In oth-
er words, how can different forms of
documentation represent, preserve,
and transmit what can be described
as the genes of the performing arts.
Among these so-called genes, we
could include the materials that are
used to create performances, the
aesthetic forms in which they take
shape, and the dramaturgical strat-
egies that undergird them. Rather
than reinforcing the essentialist
idea that live performance exists
exclusively in and as embodied
practice, the topic of genes intends
to promote an expanded under-
standing of performance’s being by
scrutinizing the various means and
media that buttress its appearance.
Indeed, with the advent of what
Hans-Thies Lehmann has famous-
ly called “postdramatic theatre”
(1999), the modes of presentation
and sources of inspiration em-
ployed by contemporary artists
have become decidedly intermedial
in nature, which calls for reflection
on how changing media affect the
genes of performance. The man-
ifold intermedial transpositions
that occur between page and stage,
between screening and seeing,
between noting and noticing are
therefore of crucial importance to
acquire a better insight into how
the actual act leaves its traces and
residues in a diversity of media that
contribute to its creation and also
secure its afterlife.

To call attention to the genetic
study of the performing arts also
calls for new perspectives on how
their histories are written, told, or
recorded. Scrutinizing how per-
formance comes into being entails
that grand narratives make place
for seemingly trivial anecdotes,
sketchy details, or small coinci-
dences that perhaps occur in the
margins, but which may bear unex-
pected importance on the creation
of the work. Any increased interest
in the genetics of performance is
therefore likely to inspire a form of
historiography that is close to
Michel Foucault’s notion of gene-
alogy. Nevertheless, the question
of how to adopt a genealogical ap-
proach in the scholarly research on
the performing arts and their histo-
ries requires further scrutiny, both
on the level of methodology and
with regard to concrete research
outputs.

The organisers of the international conference Tracing Creation invite individual papers as well as panel proposals that engage with these issues from various and preferably interdisciplinary perspectives. We also welcome proposals for alternative presentation formats, such as lecture-
performances, roundtable discussions, working seminars, et cetera.

Possible topics include but are not limited to:

- Methodologies for the genetic study of the performing arts
- Genetic research and interdisciplinarity
- Convergences and divergences between literary, musical, dramatic, and theatrical genetics
- Digital humanities and the development of technological tools for genetic research
- Typologies of creation and documentation: drawing, notebooks, notation, aural and visual forms
- Challenges of documenting and archiving creative processes in theatre, dance and performance
- Comparative analyses of documentation of historical and contemporary performance
- Intermedial transpositions and translations
- Genetic research, rehearsal studies, and alternative historiographies of the performing arts
- Genealogical (re)presentations
Please submit your paper and panel proposals no later than 31 July 2015 to tracingcreation@uantwerpen.be. Proposals can be submitted in English or French. Paper submissions should include 300-word abstracts and a brief bio (max. 100 words). Panel proposals should include 300-word abstracts for each paper; a short rationale explaining the coherence of the panel (max. 300 words), and a brief bio (max. 100 words) for each panellist. Alternative presentation formats should provide information on technical requirements.

For more information, please visit: http://dighum.uantwerpen.be/didascimagination/

For any further inquiries, please e-mail tracingcreation@uantwerpen.be

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