

PEARSON | SHANKS — THEATRE | ARCHAEOLOGY

A decade after our book *Theatre/Archaeology* (Routledge – [\[Link\]](#)), Mike Pearson and I have started a new series of collaborative works.

Here is a **prospectus**:

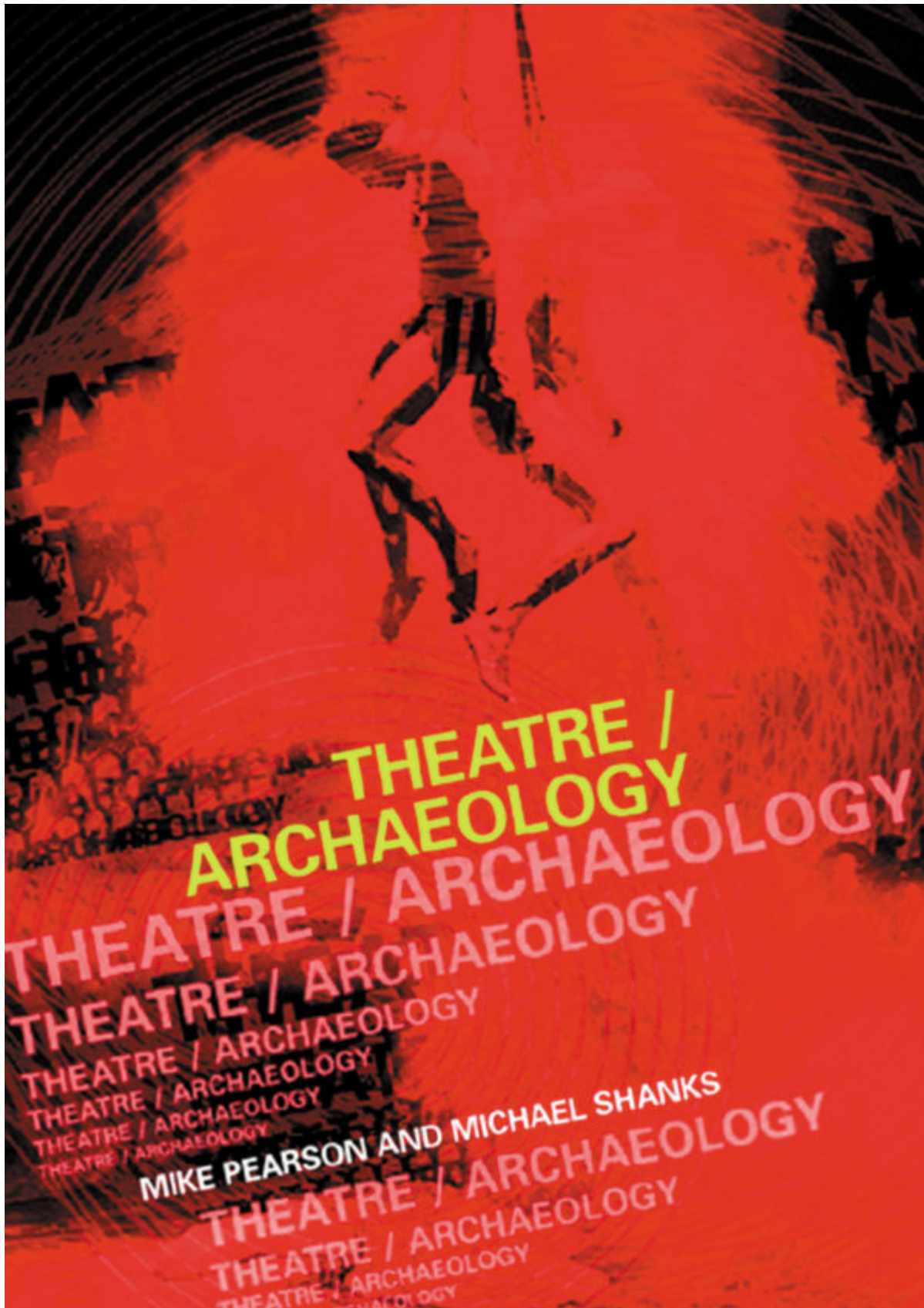
Pearson|Shanks – theatre|archaeology – return and prospect

Twenty years ago Mike Pearson, performance artist, and Michael Shanks, archaeologist, opened a dialogue and collaboration through the theatre company *Brith Gof*, of which Mike was founding artistic director.

Their common interests: forms of (re)collection, the gatherings of memory practices; and site and locale, treated as multi-temporal articulations, where different events and times endure and come together in the material forms of inhabited places, in the traces and remains of the past in the present.

Their hybrid practice around *archaeologies of the contemporary past* has involved fieldwork and shared

encounter, performed work on a large and small scale, media experiment in documentation and representation, curated itinerant colloquia, research and authoring through sites and landscapes in northern Europe (Wales, northern England and the Scottish borders), the Mediterranean (Sicily and the world of the ancient Greek city state), California, and the online world ***Second Life***.



Pearson|Shanks define this theatre/archaeology as the

re-articulation of fragments of the past as real time event. They maintain that performance, understood as dynamic, creative, constitutive design practice, offers a fertile and liberating means of addressing some key contemporary concerns regarding the significance of the material past to the present in that vast culture industry of heritage, as well as in negotiations around personal and community identity, and particularly regarding site and landscape. Concomitantly archaeological practice is a paradigm of inscription, documentation, (re)mediation, and (re)presentation of site and performance.

A central proposition is that site-specific time-based media works can be non-representational engagements, interventions in regions, sites and their temporal affinities, open and nuanced works-in-progress that offer critical commentary on univocal and restricting frames of reference, on ideologies of landscape and belonging.

Theatre/Archaeology offers provocative models for the future of the archive, another live focus of contemporary art and the archaeological imagination. Pearson|Shanks directly address the character of

documentation of event, site and artifact in performed practice. They propose ***assemblage*** as one of archaeology's constituting practices, in ***the animated archive***, where traces and remains of the past are treated not as datum but as active resources in the mobilization of the past in the present, for present and future purpose.

In 2012 Pearson|Shanks began a new series of collaborative works that build on their revival of forgotten genres of *chorography* and *pragmatography*, the early modern and antiquarian pursuit of reasoned and authentic engagement with locality and artifact in place/event, the folding of performance/performed in inhabited site.

This is a fourfold effort involving new performance work, review of past works, documentation of both, and elucidation of the principles of practice of theatre/archaeology. These will take the form of a manifold of engagements with different audiences through scripted, performed and improvised dialogues, co-authored publications, and fieldwork and visits.

Key works to 2012:

Publication: *Theatre/Archaeology* (Pearson|Shanks), Routledge 2001; *Experiencing the Past* (Shanks), Routledge 1992; *The Archaeological Imagination* (Shanks), Left Coast Press 2012; *In Comes I: Performance, Memory and Landscape* (Pearson), University of Exeter Press 2007; *Site Specific Performance* (Pearson), Palgrave Macmillan 2010; “Performing a visit: archaeologies of the contemporary past” (Pearson|Shanks), *Performance Research* 2 (1996); “Echoes of the past: chorography, topography and antiquarian engagement with place” (Shanks and Witmore), *Performance Research* 15 (2010); “Ten feet and three quarters of an inch of theatre” (McLucas) in N.Kaye (ed) *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation*, Routledge 2000.

Online: mshanks.com; carrlands.org.uk.

We have a dialogue appearing in a new volume on art and archaeology edited by Andrew Cochrane and Ian Russell, are presenting at [Performance Studies International](#) in June, and are planning a book for Routledge with Ian Russell.