Introduction: Mix and Stir

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At the outset of my course on theatre and performance research methods – a topic I have offered about twenty times – I ask the doctoral students to tally the number of years of education they have completed. In classes averaging a dozen students, some of whom have master's degrees, the tally around the seminar table quickly adds up to over two hundred years. Despite two centuries of diligent and successful studentship, virtually no one has ever taken a course on research methods, though information retrieval skills could stand in for this (among students who took the course in the early 1990s), cultural theory might be understood as this (especially during the 2000s), and practice-as-research (a legitimate but only partial substitute) has sometimes been mentioned (in the years since 2010). To think differently requires a new orientation to the making of knowledge. Two centuries is a lot of time to focus on accumulating knowledge of content – such as theatre history, dramatic literature, and performance theory – rather than on understanding how that content was derived. Most students excel at identifying what scholarship argues yet find it difficult to switch gears and focus on how research comes into being. Given that discovery is the hallmark of doctoral dissertations, I try to guide students to inductively recognize how others' research transpired so that, in time, they may propose their own project, justify a plan for how to do it, feel confident during the research process, and know how to switch up their tactics if circumstances warrant. Transparency about this process is the basic promise taken up in this book. This chapter explains how theatre and performance studies (hereafter, TaPS) research typically proceeds and how approaches combine to reflect the complexity of enquiries. This should ease the way for anyone seeking a firmer foothold by demystifying processes and providing vocabulary for what it is we do when we 'do research'.

Part of the challenge is learning to be precise about how we account for efforts. My course is organized on the book-a-week model – including the latest prize-winning titles – and arrays as many contrasting approaches

as possible. Students are charged with determining how the research proceeded. Their statements such as 'the author looked for sources on topic A' receive my rejoinder 'what is *look*?' Likewise, statements such as 'the author analysed the evidence' receive the response 'what is *analyse*?' I state these queries neutrally, yet relentlessly. This Socratic probing continues while everyone chimes in with verbs, trying to rescue classmates and beat the pattern. Finally, when someone pinpoints what they mean by 'collect' or 'read', and 'examine' or 'account', the fog starts to lift. One must 'collect', but *how*? By looking *where*, at *what*, on *which* criteria? Amidst the plethora of the possible, what is done and how is it justifiable? Once something has been 'collected', what are the criteria for noticing things of particular relevance, and thus for 'doing research'? (One *does* what? *Why*? And then one does *what else*?) It may not matter whether the name of a specific tradition can be attached to the thing(s) done, though understanding of that will come eventually; what matters is to be conscious of the steps undertaken, each of which represents a tradition of thought, makes sense in relation to the research question(s), and delimits the enquiry. Theatre and performance research is complex; complex research is *designed*; and to design involves forethought about what are likely to be the best ways to investigate a compelling question and derive explanations. In this book, we call these steps *planning* (the design of a project), *doing* (methods of garnering information), and *interpreting* (methodologies for explaining).

When conducting research, looking for and collecting information differs from construing information into arguments. This is a key insight for humanities projects: there will be a set of activities involving intentional effort to seek and identify stuff (not 'the topic', but something about the topic that a researcher hopes to learn through increments of data) and another set of activities dedicated to understanding and explaining what this stuff adds up to (doing something with the data). For the sake of differentiation, the first kind of activity involves *methods*: ways to gather information relevant to the project, whether that information is just data or, conversely, will later become evidence (data in service of claims). The second type of activity utilizes *methodologies*: analysis (preceding or coextensive with writing) will resemble prior studies' processes of making sense of the stuff that was gathered by deploying theories (these help make narratives about data comprehensible). Methods and methodologies almost invariably exist prior to a novice researcher stepping forth to investigate something. They are 'out there' for us to learn about, understand, selectively use, and ingeniously combine. They structure what and how we research and think. To name what these antecedents are, then to

purposefully engage them, is more art than science, and like arts there are techniques – protocols, skill sets, and ethics – necessary to their use. Their skilful (and defensible) use requires practice, though practice is done while learning, in smaller-scale studies that can scale up if the approach is promising. We often attain these capabilities without realizing it, which is a mercy given those two hundred-plus years of effort prior to understanding that we have choices of how to do what we do. Being asked to slow down and define 'looking' and to make considered decisions about 'analysing' holds us accountable: this is tradecraft.

Tradecraft

To know when one deploys a method and when one embarks on a methodology is helpful in a research process, even if it is a rare study that facilitates strictly consecutive deployment. Field research (say, observing a theatre company in rehearsal while taking notes on how artistic decisions are determined, using methods such as field observation, survey techniques, or interviews within the traditions of critical performance ethnography or practice-as-research) must precede analysis (reading notes, collating survey responses, or listening to recordings, and, after many iterations, listing the characteristics of the decision-making process, essential features, and variants). To take this hypothetical example further, once a list of characteristics of artistic decision-making is created, it is subject to methodological understanding in a corresponding intellectual tradition (e.g. content analysis). In tracking trends, the researcher might then want to investigate patterns; the findings could, for example, be accounted for as a system produced through activities representing deeply held cultural concepts or experiences superseding individuals (structuralism); as descriptions of actions and inter-dynamic interactions of sets of people and things (actor-network theory); or as individuals' negotiation of genealogies of practice relating to language or social structure coalescing into institutionalized ways of thinking (discourse theory). There are more possibilities, but the point is that information gathered during field research may be subjected to multiple methodologies (traditions of interpretation), singly or in combination, and this predicates a lot about the conclusions.

Methods are selection criteria that strongly influence how a researcher spends their time. Which choices of methods will most likely facilitate finding what is germane to a question? What kind of vigilance while engaging with others, observing, or reading will result in notes useful for the analysis they will later undergo? If the research incorporates documenting

a production, one might gather insight at rehearsals and watch performances. The next goal may be to understand performance vis-à-vis culture, and so a researcher might discuss the production with contributing artists, consult what artists generated in preparation for the production (such as designs), or gather traces of performance reception from digital sites or in archives or libraries. One might even turn their attention to things referred to in the production – such as contemporary events, history, or other cultural knowledge – which are 'not theatre'.

Multi-method as well as multi-methodological approaches may be needed. What is observed, who is engaged, and what is taken down as notes are consequential because the intended methodological traditions of interpretation will require that certain kinds of criteria were prioritized at the earlier stage of enquiry. Because one cannot necessarily know what matters most when setting out to design research, one must rely on skill and experience to ensure that the project's data-gathering method(s) be more efficient and ultimately useful when data is analysed. One can decide between methodologies after the observations are made, but it is impossible to note-take everything and to prepare for every interpretive contingency, especially since insight is likely to occur throughout the process. With a set of (unoptimized) notes in hand, one might then ask: Which choices are conducive to deriving the best explanations? Which characteristics of what is observed should be correlated or contrasted?

TaPS allows eclectic approaches partly because it is the sum of an academic history engaged, successively and variously, with folkloric, archaeological, anthropological, literary, sociological, philosophical, and historical approaches dedicated not only to its own performative products (such as scripts, scores, designs, and other documentation) but also to art or architecture, culture and social behaviour, cognitive processes, governance, trade, and technology (influences that each have their own methods and methodologies that fall into or out of favour over time). In justifying the validity and importance of the live event (and live events from the past), TaPS adopts the premises of other disciplines and takes up the ways these disciplines pursued their insights, yet sometimes radically changes the context. For example, in *Building Character: The Art and Science of Casting*, Amy Cook (2018: 26) acts as a 'disciplinary ambassador' between theatre scholars and cognitive linguists, promoting understanding of the consequences of casting choices. Like many other TaPS scholars interested in cognitive science, she does not do anything empirical: instead, she utilizes semiotics and reception theory to reveal 'where the character's body is constructed from words'.

In different regions and scholarly organizations, TaPS has been defined through allegiance to a particular discipline or approach (McKenzie et al., 2010; Riley & Hunter, 2009). Lately, TaPS has generated its own, distinct, methods and methodologies, such as performance genealogy, (applied) practice-as-research, and critical media history. Collectively, TaPS is a sum of these parts. This allows for a tremendous variety of enquiries, which in turn means a significant burden in understanding the tradecraft of the many traditions of enquiry, along with the opportunity to mix traditions in research design.

Drama, Theatre, and Performance Research

TaPS research sometimes begins with dramatic texts. Whereas a 'close reading' of a play text may focus on genre and form, prosody, literary and linguistic devices, and any other formalist elements (in the New Critical or Russian formalist sense), a practised student of drama 'stages' performance in the mind's eye (and ear) while reading. Anne Ubersfeld (1999: xxi) argues in *Reading Theatre* that reading a dramatic script differs from reading other kinds of texts, for 'the key lies outside itself', in the domain of performance. This is a distinction with a difference that reflects Otakar Zich's contrast between a dramatic work seen from within ('from the viewpoint of its inner relations') and one seen without (from an audience's perspective) (Gajdoš, 2007: 82). For a director or dramaturg, reading a dramatic text might entail noting the potential for double casting, picturing characters' interactions, and connecting the plot to the visual or sonic world that the characters inhabit. An actor may think about what a specific character does and how they express themselves, experience or promulgate the consequences of ideology, and navigate their world. Setting out to do research, a scholar may find it advantageous to try to 'experience' the play from a spectator's vantage, to inhabit one of these theatre makers' identities, or to approximate a historicized perspective with culturally specific knowledge about staging, acting practices, dramatic theory, social history, and formalist norms.

The printing of plays has evolved in ways that presume readers' engagement beyond what is on the page, necessitating a shift towards performative criteria (Peters, 2000; Worthen, 2005; 2010). Dramatic scripts tend to be replete with dialogue and sparing about everything else, yet specific methods become involved in reading practices when, for example, a phenomenological approach investigates the experience of stage time (which differs from both reading time and elapsed time), querying how

action unfolds through plot sequencing and how this temporal unfolding is conveyed through design elements, pacing, and visual storytelling. For a researcher, this predicates an infinite set of possibilities for a putative audience's experience, but stops well short of such an experience in the reading. The distinction that arises between the work on the stage and what the playwright calls for in staging is hinted at in Table 1.1.

Though a solely intrinsic approach to textual analysis in any tradition of criticism – psychoanalytic, structuralist, materialist, feminist, postcolonial, and so on – is a likely starting point in research, it is no longer a typical goal in TaPS (Walker, 2006). As scripts are regarded as performance-in-potential, a kind of companion to the mise en scène of performance, or a pale shadow of a complex production genealogy, a performative analysis is likely to occur, emphasizing what could transpire multi-sensorially in production. If productions have occurred, a researcher may also want to ascertain what was experienced and then recorded. There is mediation in all these steps. Eyewitness accounts of performance are not reportage (as with play-by-play real-time sports coverage) but what Patrice Pavis (2003: 9–10) calls 'analysis by reconstruction', whether as evaluative reviews or as descriptions. Even when scholars write about what they have witnessed, they do so after the fact, as historians. Their emphases typically fall upon: (1) what happens on and around the stage, (2) the holistic complexity of the event, and (3) theatre in culture (in which case extrinsic research is engaged).

Table 1.1 schematizes a set of play-related questions to differentiate practices of reading, staging in the mind's eye (and ear), accounting for staged choices, and explicating the event within its cultural setting. The first three types of enquiry – intrinsic, performative, and historical approaches – accord with what Christopher B. Balme (2008: 127) terms the theatrical text, the production (any specific staging of the text), and the performance on a given occasion. These lines of enquiry frequently combine in research projects. If the research highlights, for example, a key production within a project about a director's aesthetic, then the onus may be on specifying the choices in the case study's mise en scène, comparing and contrasting these with other examples from the director's oeuvre, and contextualizing them against other directors' productions of the play, thus incorporating all three approaches (intrinsic, performative, and historical). Each approach gives a focus for data collection (methods), and thus a sense of what to look for. If the researcher has seen the production, they must choose what to do with this knowledge, perhaps combining their own sense of the performance (e.g. notes and memories) with other available sources (such as designs,

Table 1.1 *Theatre and performance studies (TaPS) analysis template*

	Question	Focus for methods	Assumption	Predominant methodologies
Intrinsic (text)	*What characterizes this play as a work on the page?*	Genre, form, style Ideology Plot, sequencing Prosody, speech Setting, characters	Interpretation depends upon the use and combination of formalist elements	Deconstruction Formalism Philology Semiotics
Performative (mise en scène)	*How can the play be staged?*	Characterological inflection, interaction Incorporation of other performance forms Light, scenic, costume, and sound elements Onstage and offstage worlds Stylization, pacing, temporalities	Interpretation is a sensory experience, even as a reading practice, which calls forth imagined performance possibilities	Dramaturgical Phenomenology Semiotics
Historical (case study)	*What staging choices were made in a given production?*	Casting, acting, proxemics Producers' history (company ethos, relation to repertoire, intertheatricality) Production history Specific mises-en-scène: acting, scenography, etc.	Historical location of performance will affect production choices (relative to text) and predicate reception, subject to interpretation and misunderstanding	Performance genealogy Performance reconstruction Semiotics
Extrinsic (reception)	*What does the play have to do with the culture that produced it, and with concurrent concerns?*	'Context' for interpretation of the production Horizon of expectations for audiences Meaning in/for culture Performance as social rite Resonance with concurrent issues	Interpretation involves the 'cultural moment', which is seen differently in retrospect, and the habitus (habits, skills, and dispositions) of the producing and/or receiving culture	Discourse theory Material and object theory Reception studies Resistant critiques Semiotics

illustrations, reviews, and prompt books) to constitute evidence leading to understanding the production's genesis into a particular set of choices and results. Once there is data to work with, research on the case study can be further developed through methodological choices. For example, a post-structuralist approach may regard as 'dead' both the playwright (irrelevant to the autonomous artistic acts of theatre makers) and the director (irrelevant to spectators' critical acts of performance interpretation), whereas a psychoanalytic approach may dig deep into the playwright's and/or director's biography. The fourth approach, extrinsic, focuses on reception and is predicated on the circulating stew of cultural and political preoccupations and knowledge of performance repertoires that inflect how a given performance (or production) is capable of being understood and prompting reactions. Exemplary versions of this approach can be found in Ric Knowles's (2004: 17) case studies in *Reading the Material Theatre*, which model 'precisely *how* audiences produce meaning in negotiation with the particular, local theatrical event', following methodological antecedents by Marvin Carlson (1989) in semiotics and Susan Bennett (1997) in reader-response theory.

For Prague School linguist Jiří Veltruský, drama stands on its own as a work of art yet also transforms into another kind of art work, which he called 'the scenic situation' (Gajdoš, 2007: 87, 89). TaPS offers tailor-made approaches for identifying information about 'scenic situations', as well as approaches adopted from other disciplines. Pavis (2003: 9), who, like Ubersfeld and Erika Fischer-Lichte, is influenced by semiotics, allows for psychological, psychoanalytic, sociological, anthropological, and intercultural approaches to analysis of mises-en-scène. He also delineates phenomenological criteria to enable a spectator to specify an overall sense of a performance developed with 'neither the apparent objectivity of empirical observation, nor the absolute universality of abstract theory', lying between 'detailed yet fragmentary description and general, unverifiable theory, between formless signifiers and polysemic signifieds'. P. N. Campbell (1982: 11–21) refers to the facets of a play's existence (as script, staged work, and received production) as interdependent rhetorics that can strengthen, amend, alter, or oppose (the understanding of) a text. Rhetorics are specific to each play, and unique to each production, yet for them to be understood requires playgoers to have cultural knowledge that lies outside performance. Thus, Campbell considers it valuable to think across multiple categories to discern the full scope of a performance. The last column in Table 1.1 indicates some (but by no means all) of the concerns that may be engaged on behalf of indicative questions about matters

extrinsic to the play text, and the methodologies that accord to them. Not all kinds of analysis may be possible or sensible for every circumstance, and frequently the methodologies will be additively mixed to sustain different facets of an enquiry, account for different kinds of information, and craft a more replete account.

Table 1.1's schema is useful for approaching many kinds of performance, including non-dramatic (non-textually sourced) types. When one is considering performance art, for example, the focus may be on a case study (without either the antecedent or post facto 'trace' of a script), but formalist and phenomenological concerns of intrinsic and performative analysis still pertain. In this vein, when Patrick Anderson (2010: 91–93) marks 'the break from theatrical conventions signaled and emblematized' in Ana Mendieta's and Marina Abramović's performance art works (which took place in art galleries and the open air), he accounts for aesthetic elements and shows how these bear on extrinsic reception. He argues that the works have a performance genealogy distinct from theatre, and yet, he stipulates, 'I do not mean to consign these artists' work strictly to the domain of body art'; instead, he sees their work 'precisely as performance, in the broadest possible sense of that word'. He attends to the 'social, cultural, and political impact' of works, specifically the way that durationality in performance and spectacularity relates to affect's ability to shift cultural-political contexts. For analytical purposes, such 'impacts' of performance have common grounds with performative, historical, and extrinsic analysis of drama.

Likewise, in her explication of movement in contemporary performance, Rachel Fensham (2021: 3–4) signals a relationship between the performative and extrinsic analyses of Table 1.1. 'What' questions translate to 'how' questions predicated on spectators' connecting viewing to meaningful things in their own experience. This can be the essence of an analysis focused on extrinsic concerns. For example, she argues that performance strips down form, allowing for 'macro- and micro-levels of attention at one and the same time, with extension – spatial, rhythmic, haptic – into the world around the self'. This emphasizes the kinds of things a spectator attends to, deploying formalist criteria to experience a work phenomenologically. Attending to how we pay attention to the ways movement functions across a range of registers leads to a set of historically framed but culturally conscious questions: 'in what ways do the learned and specialized techniques of performing bodies contribute to understandings of social and political understandings of movement?'

With a performative (not textual) starting point, close attention to both traditions and choices in performance connects case studies to culture

and history with specificity (and through the explanatory work afforded by theory). This framework gives scope for many kinds of resistant critique (queer, feminist, Indigenous, Black, Global South, etc.) that track what Fensham (2021: 142) describes as 'perceptions of movement [that] are both internal and observational, and eminently social and political' for different bodies. Such modes of critique take into account viewers' awareness of 'lived possibilities in patterns of production, consumption and imagination', while also relating to globalization, scaling up the nature of the enquiry (Fensham, 2021: 153). Through case studies of performance, Fensham demonstrates how distinct traditions and locations of interpretation connect the mechanics of movement to subjectivity. Subjectivity, in turn, is integral for applying methodologies related to postcolonial and feminist frameworks, which link formalism to phenomenology and affect studies. Relating production case studies to reception in such ways is a frequent approach, but it is not ubiquitous.

Incompleteness and Unrecoverability

Some TaPS research has entirely different points of departure. For example, Christin Essin's (2021) *Working Backstage: A Cultural History and Ethnography of Technical Theater Labor* has little to no use for the analytical criteria of Table 1.1, for it is about the work of performance-making rather than performance per se. Essin shows how, from the perspective of scholarship, knowledge is gathered 'out there' (whether from live people or their artefacts) and synthesized as new insights for the academic sphere. Essin's niche is the occupational landscape of Broadway's technicians. Her case study contributes to the sociology of work, yet her methods are common in TaPS (interviews conducted over several years, augmented by archival research). Initially, Essin (2021: 22) relied on her own contacts from when she was a technician in regional theatre, but the scope of interviewees expanded as participants suggested and helped recruit additional participants (snowball sampling). From copious interviews, she derived a taxonomy of positions and their hierarchies, built up through profiles of individuals. There is no eventhood of rehearsing, opening, and running a production in these human profiles, but rather tasks, careers, and personal networks. Theatre-making is at the centre, yet performance is rather incidental to the professional ethnography, which widely skirts the idea of production histories (Essin, 2021: 18). Individual informants' testimony facilitates network analysis of a cultural unit (Broadway theatre in general and the history and identity of the New York branch of the stageworkers'