



Peader Kirk re-enacting greenroom archive at PRG Presents, Contact Theatre (Manchester). July 2025.

## **Between Then and Now: Performing Archives**

The Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester, 23-24 June 2026

Convened by the Performance Research Group, Manchester School of Theatre,  
Manchester Metropolitan University

### **Call for contributions**

We invite contributions to the conference and sharing event 'Between Then and Now: Performing Archives' which will take place at Manchester's Royal Exchange Theatre on 23-24 June 2026. The conference seeks to interrogate the role of the archive in shaping, capturing, echoing, and contextualising performance, and to bring this area of thinking and practice into productive dialogue. Our host, the Royal Exchange is celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year and the conference speaks to the sector in terms of how archives serve as celebration, commemoration, preservation and legacy.

Following on from our previous conference, *Scoring Performance/Performing Scores* (2023), we are interested in exploring how the archive can be a score for future development, how it can be reactivated, reanimated or re-enacted. This research also suggests a recall from the past to the present and we are particularly concerned, in the current political climate, with work that affords a consideration of temporality at a time when archives are being erased.

As Leslie Hill and Helen Paris wrote in *Performance and Place* (2006), 'there isn't a place you can go to see 'Interior Scroll' by Carolee Schneeman or other famous performance works. They happened. And then they were over. You really had to be there.' (Hill and Paris, 2008: 6). In

Derrida's terms, they are 'born of their own disappearance' (Derrida 1978: 233) and can't be captured or archived. Peggy Phelan wrote that 'Performance marks the body itself as loss' (Phelan 1993: 148) and questions the potential of re-enactment to bring the original event back to life. As such, the after-lives of performance reside in the archive, what remains in ephemera and artefacts, detritus and documentation.

Manchester Met's Performance Research Group specialises in supervising a number of PhD students who are currently investigating the archives of venues or companies such as greenroom, Khayal Theatre and Reckless Sleepers. There is a particular interest in maintaining and preserving archives of theatres and companies in a way that is legacy driven, practice-led and often anniversarial. The archive in this case becomes both a repository of past events and a generator for new material to be developed by artist-researchers. Additionally, there has been a turn in recent years towards theatre companies and theatre restaging or revisiting their earlier works. In 2019, [The Goat Island Archive](#) exhibited 'the residual working materials' of the company alongside a series of 'activations' of their archive. In 2024, Complicite restaged [Mnemonic](#) at the National Theatre to mark its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This year, The Wooster Group 'reanimate' [Nayatt School](#), their 1978 piece resampling and reconfiguring original footage of the show. This conference asks what compels companies to revisit their oeuvre and what changes in the process of reenactment, between then and now.

In the 20+ years since Hal Foster wrote of the 'archival impulse' in relational art practices of the first decade of the new millennium, artists have continued to mine, invent, rescue, trouble and voice the Archive in general terms and specific archives in particular. Performance has played a crucial role in many of these interventions providing practices rooted in the visual and material with temporal forms through which archival traces can be renegotiated and reactivated. Indeed, we might see an almost causal relation between archives and performance in visual artworks of the 21<sup>st</sup> century where the 'will to connect', as Foster puts it, that characterises so much of this work relies upon a renewed engagement with liveness, individual and collective bodies, cultural action or political activism.

For artists operating out of an image and object-based tradition, 'performing archives' is a critical act of performative construction; one in which the production of counter-memories, alternative knowledges and reclaimed technologies embrace the vital question of what form it might take to reanimate archives in the present, for the future.

We invite short papers, provocations, roundtable discussions, short performances, archival objects, and other forms of academic and artistic work. Areas that may be addressed include, but are not limited to:

- The activation of historical and documentary archives through performance
- The archiving of performance, including non-script-based performance forms
- The presence of audiences and observers in the archive, and the means of archiving their experiences
- Erasure, and what has been excluded from archives
- Archives of amateur, informal, and non-institutionalised theatre practices
- Archives of theatres and theatre companies as legacy and/or trace
- Reanimating and/or reactivating the archive

- Questions of accuracy and falsity in archival material, and how this can be performed.
- Archives as a pedagogical tool
- Archives as generative
- Popular performance forms, of both the present and the past
- Archives of popular music and film in performance
- The revisiting and remixing of a company's past performance work
- Performance as a tool to highlight unrecognized histories
- Performance and lecture-performance as tools for historians
- Performative hauntings

You are welcome to submit a proposal for contribution in whatever form is most appropriate to the work that you are doing. Because of technical, logistical and financial limitations, we will not be able to accommodate all requests, but we will do our best to address your needs. Please note, however:

- This will be an in-person conference only. While we welcome digital material, remote participation is not possible.
- To accommodate as wide a group of voices as possible, all presentations will be strictly limited to a maximum of 15 minutes per person. If you wish to present something that is not time-bound in this way (ie, an object, poster, or durational piece that does not require consistent attention), please contact us.
- The space we will be presenting in is limited and does not have access to sprung floors or theatrical lighting, though video and sound are possible.

We hope that this conference will lead to the publication of a special issue of an appropriate journal; however, acceptance on this conference does not guarantee publication, and we reserve the right to include in the journal work not presented in this conference.

If you are interested in participating in this conference, please fill out this form:

<https://forms.office.com/e/FQFdL99pFY>

Submissions are due **on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2026**.

If you have further questions, please contact the organisers at

[performanceresearch@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:performanceresearch@mmu.ac.uk).

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