

PERFORMANCE RESEARCH



Canton, Cardiff.

Talking with Mike Pearson. Performance practice as research – something that is on the agenda in UK universities. Can theatrical performance (or a novel, or painting) be classed as research?



Being there – Tri Bywyd: a work of theatre/archaeology by Brith Gof 1995

Barry Eisler, the novelist and my good friend, came along to our Visual Anthropology workshop at Stanford some time ago to talk about his writing. He has a fascination with the textures of the everyday and is clearly writing a kind of ethnography (much action set in Japan and east Asia). It is just that his research is focused upon a narrative structure rather than a disciplinary field.

When artist Cliff McLucas came to our archaeological excavations in Sicily at Monte Polizzo in 1999 to begin work on the Three Landscapes Project he was far more rigorous in his research than many of my scientific colleagues (this bugged some of them terribly). It is just also that he posted no disciplinary limits on what was relevant to his project – the limits were set by the artistic integrity of his work.

But this is 'conventional' research into people, places, facts.

Consider instead how we might investigate, for example, the nature of presence (qualities of liveness, what it is to feel a presence, to feel one is 'there', somewhere, in the presence of someone). One way is to follow a series of iterative practices – develop different performances that aim to explore presence and study these in their conception, enactment/manifestation and reception (ethnographically, the performer and audience, even auto-ethnography).