ARCHAEOLOGY – THE “MATERIALITIES OF ITS DISCOURSE” – DEPRESSING LECTURE HALLS

Mike (Pearson) and I presented a series of performed lectures in the first years of the European Association of Archaeologists annual meetings across Europe – 1991 through 1996.

Performed lectures – raising the level of expressive demands upon presenter and audience with intellectual content uncompromised – intermedia presentation dealing in the textures of archaeology and the past, what meaning cannot convey.

These were where we worked out our ideas for Theatre/Archaeology. We struggled with the irony that not one conference venue could cope with our requests for anything more than a slide projector and screen, even though academic gatherings might be thought to be gatherings of specialists in the arts of communication.

One rather wonderful moment in Riga when we adapted ourselves to a tiny soviet-era projector, a painted wall and no blackout to hide the views out over the city square.

Stanford Cantor Arts Center 2001

In the end I gave up trying to do anything that demanded more than a laptop and video projector (that I usually took with me). And then even abandoned these most of the time – imagery is too low resolution – I now lug around a medium format projector. Unless precise needs can be met. Here in Glasgow I relied upon the conference to meet my modest need of showing some QuickTime movies. Typically, of course, the Wintel machine I was required to use couldn’t deal with them. My fault

entirely for expecting anything different. This is what the media industry is all about – forcing your hand.

But it was encouraging to see so many very well prepared and presented papers at TAG. Their average quality far surpassed that of even the better graduate students here in the US – and they can be superb. And they were radically challenging the way we deal with the archaeological past. Truly professional

I say papers – because it is not a surprise that they were all wrapped up in academic language. This is a heartfeld criticism – it was what I was accused of – though I always though it arose through my obsession with precision. It can also easily be part of an aspiration to sound right – and there was a little too much talking the right talk in Glasgow.

And what a depressing venue – a 1960s high rise lecture block. Dank and musty even on a sparkling sharp frosty morning.

Presentation posters and poetry in litter-ridden corridors.

How can anyone be expected to develop a new archaeological poetics in these circumstances? Unless you work with the sad decay of such academic fabric!