

# MEMORY AND RETURN – TRI BYWYD (THREE LIVES) 1995



On the return of the past: document, memory, and archive.

Katie Pearl (theatre director and professor at Wesleyan – see her extraordinary work here – [\[Link\]](#)) recently got in touch asking about the performance in Wales in 1995 of Tri Bywyd (translation – *Three Lives*), a work of theatre/archaeology by arts company Brith Gof. Specifically she mentioned a video of the event and asked if I knew how to get it. This has stirred some memories, and made me reflect upon the documentation, reporting and recording of live events such as performance.

Try Bywyd was a work of site specific theatre set in a remote ruin called Esgair Fraith. This family farm was being revealed in the 1990s by the harvesting of a conifer plantation that had taken the place of the upland community who had been

forcibly evicted by the UK government in the 1940s. The work comprised three scenarios, that of the site itself, and two other lives and deaths, those of Sarah Jacob, known in the 1860s as the Welsh Fasting Girl, and Lynette White, murdered in Cardiff in 1988. The juxtaposition (or *katachresis*) delivered a critical commentary on community, personal and state authorized agencies in the “principality” of Wales, via theatre/archaeology, defined as the re-articulation of fragments of the past as real-time event.

I have always been skeptical of the capacity of video to faithfully represent such performative critique. (There’s also the broader question, of course, of what video witnesses – think of the body cameras, forensic, now used by police in the US). While I may recall a video camera at the dress rehearsal, and maybe another in the audience at one of the performances, I have never sought them out to view or use. Instead Mike Pearson (Brith Gof Art Director) and I incorporated the research and performed event into discussion of a series of works we produced in the 1990s and after and involving what we have called deep mapping [\[Link\]](#) [\[Link\]](#). Cliff McLucas (Brith Gof Art Director) used my still photography [\[Link\]](#) in a graphical diagram of the design of the work [\[Link\]](#).

Our point is to challenge the concept of *mimetic* representation of an event, and instead explore re-presentation as just that – reworking, re-enacting, re-locating to pragmatic and rhetorical purpose. Exploring how we use media to make a case.

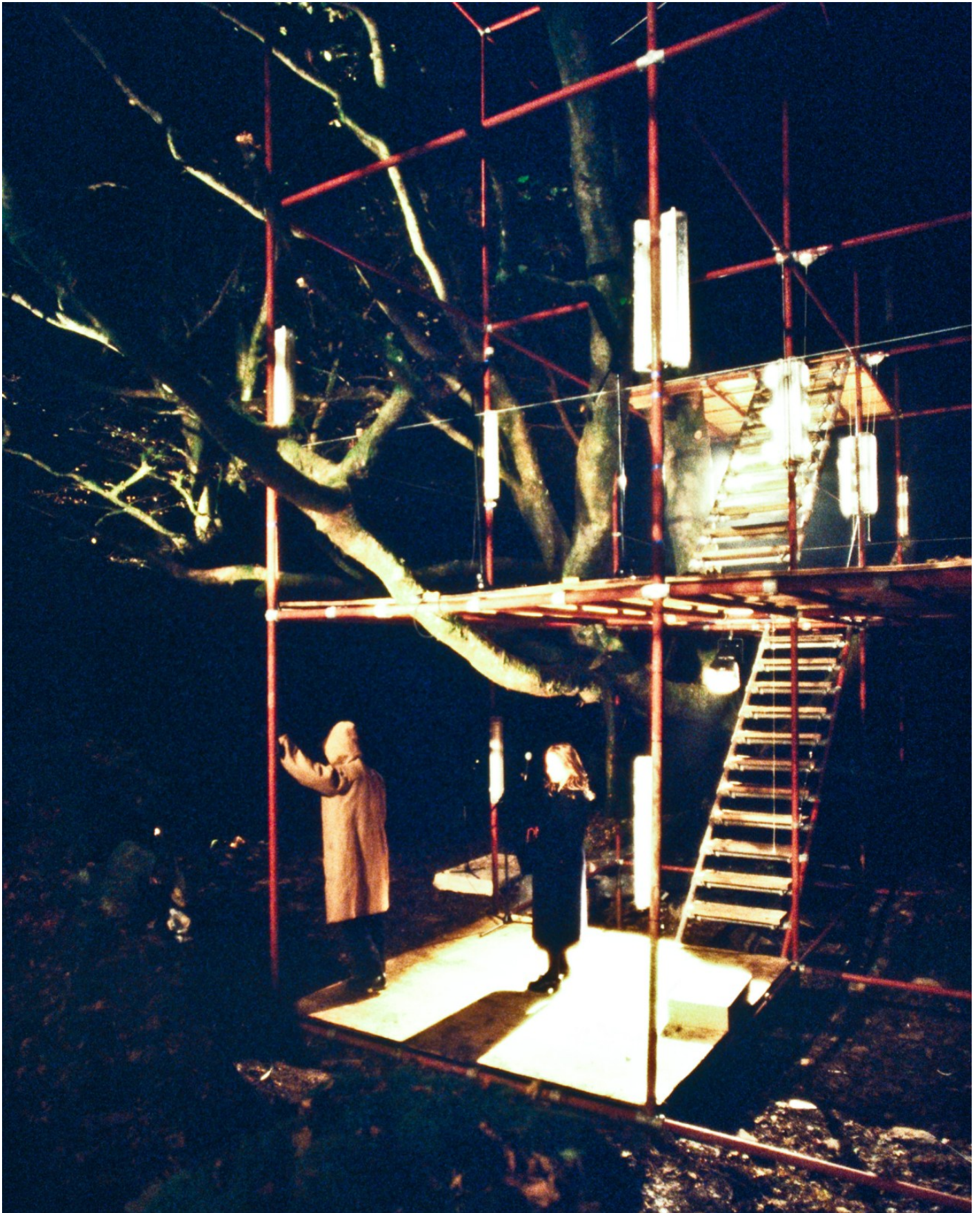
In this regard, Katie wants to use a video in class as a tool to prompt discussion.

So I went to Google and, to my surprise, found a video, uploaded by Maximilian Bickerstaffe in 2016 with the title *Clip 1 H 264 LAN Streaming* [\[Link\]](#). Such rediscovery is of course a common experience in the World Wide Web. It’s an archaeological experience – media archaeology.

The video in 1995 did not document the event with much fidelity, we had thought. It was too superficial, witnessing only minimally the design of the experience, argument and event that was Tri Bywyd. The 25 years since have transformed this video witness. I watch it with fascination as it reminds me of much that I had forgotten. Why? Perhaps because the video is now part of the archive that requires us quite explicitly to work to re-construct, to **return** not so much perhaps to the event, as to the mediation of the event, and, of course, its aftermath.



Eddie Ladd / Sarah Jacob.



Tri Bywyd – encounter.