

Volume 1 | Issue 1

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8-8-2017

## Breaking curtain

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### Recommended Citation

Studham, Susan Fenty; Newman, Renée; and Rusak, Helen (2017) "Breaking curtain," *Behind the Scenes: Journal of Theatre Production Practice*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1.

Available at: [https://via.library.depaul.edu/bts\\_journal\\_of\\_theatre\\_production\\_practice/vol1/iss1/1](https://via.library.depaul.edu/bts_journal_of_theatre_production_practice/vol1/iss1/1)

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# BEHIND THE SCENES: JOURNAL OF THEATRE PRODUCTION PRACTICE

Volume 1, Issue 1  
2017

Editorial

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## Breaking curtain

**Sue Fenty Studham, Renée Newman and Helen Rusak**

Edith Cowan University

*After the house opens, actors and crew should be backstage and completely quiet. They should not allow themselves to be seen or heard by the audience. This is called “Breaking curtain,” and it is bad etiquette! (Alamance Children’s Theatre website/ learning the lingo, 2016).*

*Behind The Scenes: Journal of Theatre Production Practice (BTS)* was developed in response to the growing number of practitioner-researchers in the production fields of live performance. Its purpose is to give visibility to and engage current researchers in a dialogue on the many aspects of performance that are seemingly ‘behind the scenes’.

One of the first editorial discussions to ensue was what ‘behind the scenes’ actually means. Who does the term represent and is it the best descriptor for the field? We reassessed the meaning of this concept to address its relevance, dissecting the phrase to expose layers of meaning and nuances that might be perceived and interpreted in several ways, depending on circumstance and perspective.

To clarify, we adopt a definition of ‘behind the scenes’ that includes the multilayers of production, sometimes invisible, that occur during theatrical processes. In doing so, we intend to explore ways in which the production narrative is told or shared, challenge perceptions, assumptions and biases on what is considered ‘creative’, and throw down the gauntlet for discussion on all production aspects of theatre in its broadest sense. We are interested in the seen and the unseen; in uncovering mechanisms, concepts, protocols and practice: giving visibility to the many aspects of production in the development of live performance.

Aiming to complement current scenographic journals, *BTS* provides a platform for international researchers currently investigating new theories in production to contribute to the conceptual discourse, disseminate research and engage with the multiple layers of production and process. It adds to the limited research in this area and fills a hybrid void; not strictly traditional, nor entirely 'industry' in style or conceptual approach.

This journal is a place to share these narratives and perspectives. As such, it signals inclusivity to colleagues and collaborators from the production areas whose work might otherwise be excluded or overlooked. In some ways this might be considered a breaking from tradition, or perhaps even a form of 'breaking curtain', in that it inhabits a space traditionally 'out of sight' for audiences, making the 'unseen' or 'unheard' known.

In initiating this conversation, the call for papers went out with little information regarding the scope of the journal and involving a quick turnaround-time for submissions to elicit recent or current research topics. We were heartened by the number of submissions received. Following rigorous peer review, four papers emerged in the fields of wardrobe, scenography, stage management and production and design student creativity. These articles either begin or continue recent dialogues on production from areas such as the maintenance of art forms, sustainability in design elements, hybridity in process and creativity in the work of technical teams.

We begin with "*You are no longer creative when you give up*": *technical theatre's creative sleight of hand*. This article investigates a specific production and design vocational education training program in Western Australia, tackling the issue of isolation from other creative disciplines and the perception of creativity in the technical fields of theatre. This ongoing battle to justify the creative thinking required in the realisation of a theatrical design "denies the complexity inherent in anything 'technical'." Renée Newman and Maggi Phillips draw on the perceptions of a select and limited number of staff and students involved in these subjects at Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) to highlight a particular point of view at a particular time, providing a snapshot of a region and industry. They argue the merits of addressing a 'hierarchy of value' and encouraging a broader conversation across Australia and internationally, and thus encouraging a pedagogical shift and a movement in cultural paradigm.

The next article explores methods of generating theatrical costumes in Brisbane, Australia. The impact of the evolution from dedicated teams of theatrical costume makers to the currently popular costume shoppers/stylists in Brisbane today is examined by Madeline Taylor. Focusing on changes in the Australian labour market and the Australian fashion industry, Taylor uses a case study in Queensland to engage professional costume makers in a discussion through interview that aims to tease out the relationship between current costume practices and a loss of skills, and in doing so, raises issues applicable throughout Australia. This paper forms the

beginning of an academic and industry dialogue about a shift in practice that should be acknowledged.

This leads us to an ongoing and topical discourse on ecological concerns, innovation and traditional practices in scenography. Tanja Beer and Dominique Hes explore the possibilities of sustainable production practices. Their practice-led research aims to challenge traditional approaches and push intellectual and creative boundaries by following a designer's journey of innovation, efficiency, aesthetics and expectations. Here they consider sustainable strategies along with the opportunities and challenges they present, and discuss how environmental considerations might create new avenues and approaches to how scenographies are realised for sustainability.

The final paper explores notions of hybridity within an intercultural show set in Bali from a stage manager's perspective. Sue Fenty Studham interrogates the processes employed in the mounting of a large-scale production, giving attention to the use and management of the stage space and its supporting environments. Focusing on the backstage management aspects of an intercultural production, Studham shifts the lens of hybridity from content to process; exploring how innovation, negotiation and adaptation of production processes might create a hybrid organisational entity.

The articles comprising this inaugural issue of *Behind the Scenes: Journal of Theatre Production Practice* are a point of departure in an evolving discourse. We anticipate lively discussion, provocations and interrogation. Calls for papers will remain open and ongoing to address what is current in the field. Please join us in these discussions.

This inaugural edition is dedicated to the life of Maggi Phillips. Maggi was fascinated with the movement of bodies, ideas and identities and this journal is indebted to her musings on performance as research. She sadly passed away in 2015 but her words live on in this journal and beyond.

Thanks go to the esteemed list of editorial committee members, the executive team, copyeditor, contributors, PKP publishers and Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts at Edith Cowan University. We, the editorial team, welcome you to this space and to this conversation.

## **References**

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