

DOCUMENT D:

DETAILED BOOK DESCRIPTION

The methodology adopted by *Performing Academia* is unique in the way that it connects a specialised area like theatre and performance studies with more over-arching aspects of academic performance – these include teaching and its links with research processes, interdisciplinary connections with other scholars and disciplines, and community engagement. Its initial foundational layer develops the author's interest in modern theatre and performance, on which he has developed a substantial publication profile. Scholars interested in modernism will therefore find much that is valuable in the book, including expositions on canonical names like Konstantin Stanislavsky and more obscure figures like Sofia Belaia. This contribution to modernist studies is not an end in itself, however, but rather an opportunity to extract more generalised and transferable strategies aimed at the facilitation of academic performance. In other words, the book shows how a core research interest can inform and contribute towards meeting other forms of academic expectations. In an academic context which is increasingly marked by performance metrics, student satisfaction, added admin duties, pressure on work schedules, budget cuts, etc., this book therefore argues that a more holistic approach to academic work is necessary for academics to negotiate the contemporary challenges posed by their work environments. The book supports academics, especially Early Career Researchers, who are in the initial stages of building an international academic profile and who therefore might be looking for guidance and examples of good practice to follow, though it is certainly also hoped that its narratives are of interest to more seasoned academics looking to revitalise some aspect of their work.

A contextualising introduction, where pertinent theoretical ideas are presented and unpacked, opens each chapter. A number of cases-studies are then presented (typically two), rooted in the author's own experience as an academic, but with a clear 'how to' dimension that allows for maximum application by the readers and impact on their own academic performance. That these case-studies arise from the disciplines of theatre and performance makes them immediately relevant to readers working in those fields; attention is however also given to a broader audience. Every chapter, in fact, includes a substantial amount of action points – conveniently presented as snippet points between two lines and spread across the text – where references to theatre and performance are rescinded so that colleagues from other disciplines can also find value in the book (see also section about the Market). These inserts can be treated as real-life choices of academic performance which the author has pursued and which a reader can experiment with. In stating that the experience of a theatre and performance scholar is relevant to others operating in varied disciplines underlines that academics have a lot that is in common, and that it is worth giving attention to these commonalities while respecting what makes academic roles disciplines different and unique. In other words, while academia is certainly driven by expertise and framed by specific departments and faculties, this should not preclude from looking at possible career and work intersections. The book also uses textboxes to link a particular point being addressed to relevant literature or to signal a broader discussion. A series of audio-visual materials have also been created in support of the case-studies presented. These are available here: www.ctatt.org/performing-academia. (Currently, the site shows about 40% of the audio-visual materials that are planned for the project.)

By relying for its starting point on the personalised voice of the author, and on his own experience as an academic and scholar, the project reads as an instance of autoethnographic research. Rather than the detached observation and analysis of data, and its subsequent expression in an impassive and emotionally-neutral language, autoethnography comes from a more personal and therefore subjective engagement with a field of enquiry. Its objective is ‘to create ground-level, intimate, and close-up perspectives’ (Adams et al 2015: 23) on a reality or theme, in this case, academic performance. To the uninformed, autoethnography might appear as little more than an indulgence. Crucially, however, it does not pander to personal experiences – it is not a memoir or a diary entry – but rather strives to connect one’s narratives to a particular field of study and its community of scholars, academics, and practitioners. In this sense, autoethnographical research is a space where ‘the self [has] an active and situated place in [a particular] field’ of study (Adams et al 2015: 10). These connections are at the foreground of the proposed book, in the ways that (i) the author’s experience in teaching, research, outreach, etc. is contextualised within pertinent literature and therefore problematized and (ii) the case-studies are presented to speak directly to communities of scholars and academic peers.

A key concern running through the first three chapters of the book is an amplification of the potential teaching has to go beyond straight transmission-of-knowledge scenarios. In the proposed volume teaching will be treated as that space where diverse academic responsibilities are brought together, where teaching becomes research, where contact with students also facilitates community engagement, and where a lively mix of practice and theory empowers students to become research collaborators. In its problematisation of teaching, the book thus carries symptoms of Action Research processes. Action Research implies the transformation of the classroom into a reflective space where the teacher can ask questions about his or her teaching, with an eye on improving pedagogical practices and methods. *Performing Academia* adopts the reflective attitude that is synonymous with Action Research, but expands it markedly: it still uses teaching as a dynamic locus for enquiry, but articulates broader questions about the academic profession at-large, questions in other words that go beyond strict pedagogical concerns.

Performing Academia, therefore, is a multi-layered book that treats academic performance as a holistic endeavour. The book is partly a reaction to and reflection on where I currently am in my university career: ten years from my PhD, and having invested significant effort to develop an international academic profile (evidenced in 6 book publications, positions as Editor-in-Chief of the peer review journal *Stanislavski Studies*, Co-Director of the Stanislavsky Research Centre, and recipient of several fellowship), I have started to feel some complacency creeping into my work, especially my teaching. The *Performing Academia* project, therefore, starts from my own story but, through autoethnography and Action Research, it connects to experiences and challenges that are typical of academia. Examples of questions that it raises include: how do teaching and research connect together? How do I safeguard my research interests? In a context where managerial and admin duties seem to be encroaching on my research, how do I maximise my time? How do I expand the impact of my research beyond the immediate community engaged in my field? How do I develop an international profile, one that facilitates mobility and promotion? Through concrete examples and clearly-elicited strategies, the volume is intended as a guide book to navigate the often fraught waters of academic performance.