# On Amateurs: An Introduction and a Manifesto

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## Introduction

This issue evolved out of our shared interest in different types of amateur creativity. When we came together as a team, we had already undertaken research on different projects.[{note}]1 Approaching the subject from different disciplinary and historical perspectives (Theatre, Social/Cultural Geography, English Literature and Dance), we were excited to find much common ground. We formed the Amateur Studies Research Forum, supported by the Humanities and Arts Research Centre at Royal Holloway, University of London, to open up these interests within our institution and a much wider field. It became clear that we were tapping into hugely diverse networks and communities of amateur practice. The absence of a discourse of the amateur in the academic profession drove us to edit this issue of *Performance Research*. We called for contributions that would explore the geographies and histories of amateur performance, think through the nature and limits of the idea of the amateur in different cultural contexts and help us to develop a new vocabulary to understand the complexity and nuances of amateur performance. We were not disappointed. In the following pages, authors have addressed such subjects as the global reach of amateur performance through new social media, changing work patterns, spaces of performance, amateur participation as political activism and the distinctive aesthetics of amateur performance. At the start of this project we could never have imagined the range of amateur activities from which such ideas were addressed.

This introduction deliberately takes an unconventional form. The tension between the commitment with which amateurs pursue their activities and the indifference they meet in professional and academic circles inspired us to champion the very notion of the amateur in the form of a manifesto. In offering a Manifesto of the Amateur, we aim to capture the passion and force with which we challenge the notion of the amateur as secondary or second rate. We hope too to capture some of the lightness and playfulness that has accompanied this foray into all manner of amateur performance.

## The Amateur: A Manifesto

### 1. Love the Amateur.

Why love the amateur? The more typical framing of these two terms ‘love’ and ‘amateur’ is reversed. Amateurs are lovers, who love the world of activity they have chosen despite the lack of monetary reward. The etymology of ‘amateur’ and a wealth of subsequent narratives assure us all of that. But to love the amateur is to recognise this, and to go beyond to embrace aspects of amateur experience that operate beneath the radar of equivalent professional activities, or that sometimes go hand in hand with them. To love the amateur is also to go beyond comparison with the professional and instead to better grasp what it means to function on limited means, little power and often lack of external appreciation. It is to see what emerges to sustain love: gritty determination, dedicated hours of work, banter, playful experimentation, attention to detail, clever ruses, repurposed materials, moments of pure genius and expert botching.

Edward Said in his fourth Reith lecture cites ‘amateurism’ as one of the ways of countering forces the constraints on independence of thought. In particular he opposes a kind of professional behaviour characterised by ‘not rocking the boat, not straying outside the accepted paradigms or limits, making yourself marketable and above all presentable, hence uncontroversial and unpolitical and “objective”’ (Said 1993 4). Instead he sees the values in ‘amateurism, literally, an activity that is fuelled by care and affection rather than by profit, and selfish narrow specialisation’ (Said 1993 8). These provocations are taken up in the following pages in articles that both support and dispute such distinctions and is so doing prevent ‘care and affection’ becoming equivalent to cosy and safe.

This issue of *Performance Research* rests on the premise that research and reflection on amateur performance practices is timely, chiming as it does with a recent increase in research more widely on the amateur – what might be described as ‘amateur studies’. But there is also an urgency in addressing the imbalance of power of the kind that Said spoke about decades ago. The articles collected here could hardly better illustrate another of Said’s views that independent thinking is reliant on a refusal to adhere to boundaries, whether of disciplinary, geographical or societal structures. To love the amateur is to see, as the authors here make clear, that amateur practices are active and responsive. They travel through time, across nationalities and between corporeal and digital contact. They can bring political awareness and change lives even whilst they are apparently operating within small worlds. To love the amateur is also to come to terms with what is broken, contradictory and flawed.

To love the amateur is to encounter interwoven forms where one medium is inextricable from another, and further, as exhibited in the articles’ involvement with such a diversity of the amateur practices, to be taken into pockets of activity never previously imagined. It is no surprise that in order to enter such worlds, many of the authors in the following pages write from direct experience or from close participation in the form of field work. Fresh voices are heard, whether directly, reported or gleaned from historic records. In listening to this cacophony on the journey from physical or digital transmission to performance, we are reminded why we love the amateur.

### 2. We are all amateur performers.

We all perform roles and identities each and every day. For many of those we receive no direct or indirect monetary or economic reward. In that sense we are all amateur performers for much of our lives. Our manifesto for amateurs embraces this pervasiveness.

From Erving Goffman onwards, however, the performances of everyday life have rarely if ever been thought of as amateur. The word ‘amateur’ doesn’t appear a single time in Goffman’s *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956). Indeed, Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis emphasizes the parallels between the performances of daily life and highly accomplished theatrical productions. And yet within Goffman’s work there is also a sub-text about the everyday plays that go wrong, when we ‘see that the impression of reality fostered by a performance is a delicate, fragile thing that can be shattered by very minor mishaps.’ (Goffman 1956: 36)

Gathered in this issue are rich and varied approaches that think through the parallels and dissonances between the performativity of everyday life and performance that is staged or experienced theatrically. Our manifesto position does more than stress the pervasiveness of amateur performance; it also invites thinking about what the slippery category of the amateur does for ideas about performativity and performance.

One such area is where everyday performance becomes much more overtly theatrical. Stephen Knott unpicks the pleasures and embarrassments of fancy dress, a deliberate re-presentation of self in everyday life. He reflects on his own ambivalent experiences of dressing-up for parties, but also on the history of guidance and advice from Victorian times, and the significance of crafting both costumes and personas in fancy dress. Knott points to the ‘elasticity’ of amateur practice ‘within the structures of everyday life’, indicating a wider range of activities that fall somewhere between social performativity and formal performance. He also emphasises the ambiguities of this range of practices, which he describes evocatively as ‘ambiguous, idiosyncratic, private, conservative, compliant, weird and domestic, with a complex relationship to the acquisition and display of skill’. This suggests that partiality and ‘quasi-commitment’ is perhaps reflective of the amateur condition and challenges any simple notion of amateur performances and practices as examples of ‘genuine self-expression’.

Dress and identity are central to Joe Parslow’s article on drag performance, and particularly on the distinctive challenge that new ‘amateur’ events can pose to the increasingly corporatized formats and expectations exemplified by RuPaul’s Drag Race. In part, Parslow seeks to resist the binary of amateur and professional, instead thinking about how innovative events can resist or ‘drag back’ from the neoliberalization of drag. But he also seeks to recover the power of drag as a queer performance, rather than an activity that exemplifies more general academic theories of gender performativity in everyday life.

We also see the pervasiveness of amateur performance when we highlight activities that have no professional equivalent to work against. Heather Fitzsimmons Frey explores the mass participation associated with the Girl Guide movement, particularly physical drills and gymnastic displays. While some guiding performances such as plays and pageants did have professional counterparts, the physical drills that were characteristic of early twentieth-century Canadian Girl Guide events had no such equivalents, which allowed for creative modification. Their amateurishness could also be celebrated, and they were often enhanced as an experience for participant and spectators by mistakes and ‘good efforts.’

Jonathan Pitches’ consideration of hill-walking is another example of a practice without a professional equivalent to work against. However, he suggests that this is increasingly rare given the recent expansion in mass and social media of professional competition into areas of seemingly ordinary practices. Activities that might once have been thought of not so much amateur as just part of everyday life – such as baking, cooking, sewing, spelling and even hotdog eating – are now contrasted with professional examples and the results of competitive scoring. This has brought the reach of amateur activity into sharper focus and made us think again about ways that we are all amateur performers.

### 3. Amateur performance is everywhere.

We resist the negative association between the amateur and the merely local. The amateur is too often made to seem parochial, closed and insular and set against the spaces of professional performance. The spaces of the amateur are seen as small and often inadequate, particularly when set against the spaces of professional performance. A manifesto for amateurs rejects these associations. We need new geographies of and for the amateur.

Amateurs perform in a wide variety of spaces, from tiny domestic bedrooms to the tops of mountains. Amateurs take their performance into public spaces. Amateur performances are transnational, enacting migration, diaspora and distance alongside familiarity, home and belonging. Amateurs work through stretched networks as well as in small groups or alone. Cultural geographers, particularly Tim Edensor and his co-authors, identified and celebrated the many ‘spaces of vernacular creativity’, shifting the analysis of the geography of creative practice and performance away from the creative clusters and consumption economies of urban boosterism (Edensor et al. 2010).

Even in local amateur theatre, so-often disparaged as parochially conservative and inward looking, we find surprising geographies. For example, recent work on amateur theatre culture in the UK has stressed not just its capacity for active ‘place-making’, but also the organisations and interconnections that work between different theatre groups (Nicholson, Holdsworth and Milling 2018). Those themes are taken up by David Coates who stresses the longevity of such formations. Coates draws upon new archival research to show that pre-twentieth century amateur theatre in Britain took place in a wide range of spaces including town halls, public theatres, mechanics’ institutes, private houses, onboard ships, and in the universities. But he also shows the interconnections between ‘multiple amateur theatrical sites, events and personnel’ worked through a ‘vast interrelated network’ that was stretched across the British Empire and beyond. This transnationalism of amateur performance is another under-researched theme.

Digital media have transformed the geographies of amateur performance. In Jonathan Pitches’ article on hill-walking, the summits of the Lake District fells become performance spaces through digital connections to remote audiences. Domestic spaces have long been important for amateur performance, practice and rehearsal, but digital media both given them new significance, while also altering the nature of performance, particularly in blurring the lines between performer and audience, and in some cases between amateur and professional. Online and offline karaoke performances are contrasted in Kevin Brown’s article, drawing attention to the significance of the bedroom or living room as a space of performance. Both Brown and Pitches draw attention to the ways that digital media alter the nature of amateurism, not just because some amateur digital performances may, like fashion and travel blogs, become sources of income, but because of spatial changes that make new connections between intimate domestic space and the global spaces of digital corporations.

### 4. The Amateur is not shoddy.

Shoddy. Shoddily. Shoddiness. Shoddy is synonymous with second-rate, poor quality. Shoddy behaviour lacks respect and care. Shoddily made things are badly made. Shoddiness is often caused by neglect or lack of repair. The amateur is not shoddy.

A manifesto for amateurs rejects any association with shoddiness. The stereotype as the amateur as shoddy is perhaps the most pervasive of all descriptions, one that sticks. Linking the amateur and shoddiness indicates a set of cultural values - a movement from object or artefact to selfhood – a metonymic sleight of hand that associates the thing made with the maker. This collection demonstrates that over its life history the amateur has acquired multiple identities, each representing different regimes of value, to cite Arjun Appadurai. Amateurs are variously described as experts, enthusiasts, gift-givers, show-offs, connoisseurs, dabblers, perfectionists, hobbyists, dilettantes. Writing about how objects – or ‘things’ – become associated with social status, Appadurai argues that ‘the politics of value is in many contexts a politics of knowledge’ (1986: 6). Associating amateurs with shoddiness thus relates to political perceptions of knowledge, maintaining cultural hierarchies in which judgements of taste are often awkwardly dressed up as assessments of quality.

Amateur enthusiasts acquire knowledge through attention to detail. Sustained interest for highly specialised hobbies means that amateurs have expert knowledge of one activity, as Will Andrews shows in his study of modified Volkswagen cars. Communities of amateur enthusiasts have an emotional commitment to modifying VW cars, Andrews observed, and their ability to undertake the work themselves (without a trained mechanic) is a matter of pride. Their detailed knowledge is a mark of distinction at car shows, where the fruits of their labour are displayed for other VW modifiers to admire. Knowledge, emotion and identity are mutually embedded, Andrews notes. VW modifiers are not shoddy.

Amateurs care about their work and persevere when learning new skills. As a novice printmaker, Clare Daněk in her article maps the processes she undertakes to acquire embodied knowledge of the craft. She begins nervously, reluctant to show her work to others, fearing mistakes. She improvises and mimics others, pretending that she is already a dab hand, striving to ‘present myself as competent’. But as she become more skilful and more comfortable in the studio her confidence grows, and with some trepidation she acknowledges that she is moving from ‘novice’ to ‘amateur’ printmaker. Daněk shows how amateurs take time to learn their craft, through mimicry, self-doubt and persistence. This is not shoddy.

Being an amateur requires effort. Becoming an amateur is not always comfortable, it reveals a lack of skill and sometimes requires disguise. You might be coerced into getting dressed up. You might not know what do to, or how to act. You might feel awkward and self-conscious. This manifesto celebrates lack of knowledge, expert knowledge, know-how, being a dab hand, embodied knowledge, dilettantism, weirdness and idiosyncrasy as part of being amateur. But the amateur is not shoddy.

### 5. The Amateur is shoddy.

Shoddy is a metaphor derived from the woollen industry. Shoddy was a fabric made from leftover strands of yarn from worsted spinning mills, recycling waste from the finest woollen cloth. The idea that shoddy was ‘cheap and nasty’ was a mistake, the Encyclopædia Britannica insisted in 1911: ‘Some most excellent cloths were produced’. The amateur is shoddy.

The amateur celebrates shoddy, recycling it for new purposes. Amateurs find ingenious uses for discarded materials, turning waste and leftovers into something new. They mend, repair, remake and reuse. They make-do and improve. Making, un-making and remaking is a circular process, wasting nothing. Amateurs make shoddy. The improvised qualities of amateur mark a distinction between amateur making and pre-packaged, massed produced, commodified creative products. Its shoddiness brings together political and aesthetic strategies, as Ros Haslett shows in her study of Live Theatre, a company that toured working class communities in Newcastle, UK from 1973 to 1978. Using self-deprecating humour and deliberately low production values, Live Theatre’s shoddiness engaged local audiences in cultural production, described by Haslett as ‘messy idealism’. Without pre-packaged, massed produced, commodified creative products, shoddy can democratise art.

Shoddy is not always used to create equitable worlds. As Archer Porter’s analysis of home dance videos shows, the relationship between amateur and commercial interests can be tense. Porter investigates the work of Toronto-based dancer Colley, who become a ‘micro-celebrity’ via his large Instagram following. Colley uses the intimate spaces of home as a domestic stage, and his authenticity and wide influence caught the eye of commercial advertisers. Porter charts the ways in which Colley’s work changed; comparing his home-made pizza dance in 2018 with the advertisement he made after becoming a Starbucks Ambassador in 2019 in which he dances at home with an oversized virtual image of a Starbucks cup. Porter describes how this video places the Starbucks cup centre-stage, obscuring the domestic setting and sometimes the dancer himself. Porter shows how ‘the amateur’s construction of intimacy and privacy is complicated by commercial interests’, a process of exploitation identified as part of a broader neoliberal agenda. Amateurs’ shoddy can be exploited and sold. This manifesto warns against the exploitation of shoddy and amateur makers of shoddy.

### 6. The Amateur is an Expert.

Gathered in the pages of this issue are experts in set-building, hill-walking, folk-dancing, VW car restoration, drag, circus, drills, karaoke, pizza dancing, queer performance, musical theatre. Their expert knowledge is performed in domestic, civic, virtual and public spaces. Sometimes people pay to see live displays of amateur expertise, and at other times they attend for free. Their expertise must be worth the money, and worth spending the time. They are all experts and they are all amateurs.

Amateurism tests conventions about where expertise is situated, who owns expert knowledge, and who might be described as experts. Historically, experts have been defined according to narratives of power, excluding those with other forms of expertise such as practical know-how, indigenous knowledge, embodied skill passed down from one generation to another. Experts were trained, rational, qualified, and this excluded amateur. It is time to re-think how amateur expertise redistributes political orthodoxies about knowledge.

Amateurs occupied positions of privilege in eighteenth century England and, as Judith Hawley argues, they were often highly educated with a strong sense of their own social superiority. The aristocracy habitually entertained themselves with private theatricals in their grand houses, and their performances had high standards. As Hawley observes, ‘the elite and nobility were the gate-keepers of taste’. She recounts the fate of the Pic Nic Society, founded in London around 1801 by members of a social elite. The Pic Nic Society was unusual in that their performances took place in an unlicensed theatre in London, and this meant that they were perceived as a threat to the commercial interests of city’s patent theatres. They lacked neither talent nor money, Hawley maintains, but this clash of economic and cultural values led to their demise. Though short-lived, The Pic Nic Society’s development of amateur expertise challenged the mainstream professional theatre.

Any acts of gatekeeping have not deterred amateurs from becoming experts. Honing the specific elements of amateur craft or a specific hobby requires attention to detail – a feature of amateur expertise – and this takes time. In his book Amateur Craft, Stephen Knott analyses amateur time in relation to amateur railway modelling. Arguing that amateur time ‘can stretch reality in unexpected ways’ he observes that amateurs often spend a life-time on their projects, using the time to endlessly play, make and remake their models in ways that impose a fluid and absorbing temporal and material structures on the world (105-107).

There is a different kind of expertise on display in the community choruses analysed by Pierre Katuszewski and Stefan Donath. Their conversation centres on professional theatre in France and Germany that invites people from different communities to become an amateur citizens chorus. Their discussion about the work of directors Volker Lösch and Nicolas Stemann in Germany and Romeo Castellucci and Pippo Delbono in France, opens spaces to think through the political implications of productions that invite ‘real people’ on stage. The aesthetic of the untrained body on stage can be affective and moving, particularly when the authentic struggles of their lived reality – as refugees, for example, is invoked. The authenticity of this form of theatre, they argue, destabilises ideas of the ‘real’ and the ‘fictional’ in ways that is politically ambiguous. Their article prompts questions about who the experts are when ‘real people’, perform and how there is expertise valued. Amateurs are expert performers of their own lives.

Society needs more experts, not fewer. Amateur expertise takes time. It destabilises, challenges and sometimes affirms conventional ideas of the expert. Amateur expertise should be valued and celebrated, and amateurs known as experts.

### 7. The Amateur is a worker.

If amateur performance is the fruit of leisure hours, then to be an amateur you must have a day job. Thus, the amateur is a worker. Free time is the product of the capitalist system therefore not really free because owned by the boss class. In an industrial economy, the amateur is a mere hobbyist, consuming products of the commodified leisure industries.

But we resist this construction. We contend that amateur performance is the opposite of work. It is play. It is free. It pays nothing. But it does not cost nothing. Its value is derived from the time, energy and expertise invested in it. And thus, it is work. Amateurs are love labourers.

Against the idea of the dabbler and hobbyist, we set up and celebrate the amateur who is committed to serious leisure, who labours at their craft, who works without being limited to the production of an *oeuvre*. **AMATEURS OF THE WORLD UNITE!**

The articles by Jimena Ortuzar and Cara Gray demonstrate how amateur practice is situated in the work/leisure division but both complicate and even undermine that binary. Gray’s work is located in Letchworth Garden City, UK, an example of an early twentieth century urban experiment designed to create a better life-work balance. Yet, as it was led by philanthropic industrialists, it enshrined a capitalist model of free time as an aspect of work time. Amateur dramatic societies were staffed by workers on their days off or in retirement. Some using skills honed during their professional lives. Nonetheless, they challenge the idea of leisure by demonstrating a commitment to craft and to what one set-builder called ‘a job that needs doing’.

Gray reflects on her own experience of combining the labour of PhD research with voluntary work as an amateur set builder for the Settlement Players. Both were forms of apprenticeship entailing the idea of graduation and progress to professional status. Yet both embody the idea of ‘on-goingness’ which, she argues, is ‘an important characteristic of amateur theatre-making -- where the craft of set building relies on a constant cycle of making, un-making and re-making again.’ The economics of not-for-profit theatre make recycling crucial, but amateur theatre makers, she argues, positively embrace ‘Adhocism’, a concept championed by Jenks and Silver (2013) as a way of resisting the notion of completedness promoted in professional spheres and consumer culture. Amateur set-building is ad hoc, Gray argues, as ‘everything can be something else’. The Settlement Players, like amateurs everywhere, treat the work of theatre-making as a constant process of work in the sense of *working at, working on* and not the mere production of ‘a work’ that is set aside from ongoing life.

Ortuzar’s study of the phenomenon of ‘Maids day off’ in which ‘thousands of Filipina migrant domestic workers turn out *en masse* to socialize with one another’ in the Central District of Hong Kong might also seem to re-inscribe the work-leisure binary. Yet, not only do they work hard at producing a public performance of leisure, they also confront the physical, social and economic structures that confine their play to a circumscribed time and space. Ortuzar describes how, by ‘rehearsing dance routines or transforming themselves into beauty contest participants’, they perform the work of the production of gender difference and cultural identity. They also construct a ‘home away from home’ by ‘building makeshift temporary houses from cardboard boxes’ in the heart of corporate commercial Hong Kong. Thus they compensate for the lack of personal space afforded to them in the private homes where they work to make middle-class life possible for Hong Kong residents. These are expressions of identity, and of connections to a distant culture and homes, but also a political expression of the presence of migrants in the city: ‘a highly visible transgression for a Hong Kong public that would prefer these undesirable bodies remain invisible.’ Their public performances have now become tourist attractions, revitalizing the downtown area. Yet they are barely tolerated by the authorities because they expose the invisible labour that is necessary to maintain the image of power of the Hong Kong elite. Their performance of leisure is at once a source of recreation and self-transformation, a contribution to the local economy and a form of activism. Tragically, it has so far brought no financial or political benefit to themselves. This beautiful spectacle of transgression has also been suspended during the current political protests.

### 8. Everything that is valuable is Amateur.

Amateurs do it for love not money. The energy they invest in a project endows it with value and brings returns in terms of its usefulness to self or society. The amateur resists the notion that professionalisation is a narrative of progress. The slick professional represents the taste of the dominant social group while the amateur exposes how value is created through mastery of a craft. The amateur resists the commodification of talent. A skilful performance is still skilful even if it does not have an exchange value. The professional who loves what they do is an amateur for it is love which renders performance precious.

‘Rather than connoting failure or delusion,’ argues Ben Walters in his article, ‘the figure of the amateur can generatively engage the refusal of normative productivity, the distinctive expression of marginalised subjectivities and the embrace of pleasure.’ The affective relationships created by amateur activity are equally important. By exploring the loving work of Duckie’s Slaughterhouse Club,Walters demonstrates that amateur practice can be aligned with ‘the value of autonomy in anarchist thinking’. In this drop-in arts project produced by the queer performance collective Duckie for people living with homelessness, professional artists invest their energies to enable the participants to make their own self-actualising art. He argues that there is a queer power in the ‘alternative value systems’ at work in the Slaughterhouse Club. It is a power which resists the specialization of the professional and the hierarchical structures of the art and educational establishments. Personal expression is valorised; outcomes are not instrumentalised.

The amateur is worth more by being anti-commercial, as Libby Worth demonstrates in her article on the field of traditional dance. ‘[M]ost traditional dance practices are non-monetised,’ she argues. ‘Instead, therefore, it must be that non-economic reasons determine the values and glue that bind the participants together and keep them practising new and difficult, even dangerous moves.’ The physical dangers involved in rapper sword dancing require a level of skill and expertise that challenge the notion of the amateur as inferior to the professional. Contemporary rapper dance groups take pride in links to the past history of the dance whilst also expanding into new geographical terrains, embracing new groupings (all female, mixed, youth etc.) and inventing fresh choreographies. Worth asserts that the precarity at the heart of the rapper dance form and performance is valued for the excitement it brings both dancers and spectators and for an attitude ‘that is bold, defiant even rebellious’. She argues that ‘amateur status is both a challenge and an incentive’.

### 9. Amateur performance is political performance.

If the amateur is not motivated by financial gain, are they aligned with the anti-political ‘art-for-art’s sake’ movement? Well, no. The very act of rebellion against normative standards is in itself political. There is a radical potential in the disruption of the distinction between performer and spectator which pertains in the theatre industry, a potential which Nicholas Ridout dubs ‘communist’. He champions what he calls ‘passionate amateurs’: ‘those who work together for the production of value for one another (for love, that is, rather than money) in ways that refuse—sometimes rather quietly and perhaps even ineffectually—the division of labor that obtains under capitalism as usual.’ (Ridout 2013, 15).

Jen Speigel’s article examines interrelations between the politics and the economics of amateur performance. She compares two non-profit groups ‘committed to social transformation’ in order to investigate the ‘cultural economy of performance’. The first, Cirque Hors Piste, provides circus training for marginalised youth. While helping them to ‘cultivate “transferable” skills for eventual integration into economically productive systems,’ it actually challenges social and political institutions. The second, Striking Memories Collective, staged an event which reflected on a student strike against a fees increase in Quebec. By creating a manifesto and manifestation of love, the event explored the tension between the cost of education and the value of art and highlighted the inequalities implicit in the prevalence of unpaid internships in the arts. Such ‘social movement performance[s]’ are ‘oriented toward “institutional critique”’ and towards the future.

But what are we to make of middle-aged, middle-class people performing a conservative repertoire? This too is political. It is a political decision to resist the progressive aesthetic and social agenda of the subsidised theatre just as it is political to mount a theatre of the oppressed.

Context matters as well as content, as Laura MacDonald reveals in her essay on Chinese students’ performances of Western musicals. ‘Their amateur experiences are in many ways no different from those of any other amateur theatre performers, but the presence on the campuses of China’s top universities of a popular culture form largely practiced and consumed by the western middle class illustrates the tensions Chinese millennials will be grappling with for the foreseeable future.’ These students are appropriating and adapting Western musical and social conventions and bringing them into dialogue with Chinese values, as MacDonald explains: ‘The student musical theatre clubs are collectives, where everyone is working towards the shared goal of putting on a show. The musicals they produce, whether Sweeney Toddor Legally Blonde, chart the progress of a central character who rises above their peers.’ Thus, they construct ‘complex identities’ as they enter the juggernaut of the Chinese workforce and ‘have the potential to cause and be a part of social and political change in China.’

### 10. There is no such thing as the amateur.

There are no amateurs. Professionals who aim to encourage involvement in activities such as painting, gardening, theatre and different crafts often declare that ‘everyone is an artist’. Supporters of ‘everyday creativity’ favour participants with enthusiasm but no training or craft expertise. Amateurs make these professionals embarrassed or uncomfortable; they are be ignored, overlooked, forgotten. Or they are given another name, because there is no such thing as the amateur.

Throughout this issue there is widespread interest in the ways in which renewed interest in amateurs is recasting the relationship between professionals and everyone else. One of the political questions this raises is whether professionals are guarding their interests too fiercely and hanging on to defunct categorisations out of self-protection? If there is no such thing as the amateur, is there no such thing as the professional? The articles gathered here ask whether it is time to redistribute hierarchies of labour and value. If there is no such thing as the amateur does it means ditching the professional, too?

Notes

1. Judith Hawley co-directs a network called RAPPT: Researchers into Amateur Performance and Private Theatricals ([WWW.RAPPT.org](http://WWW.RAPPT.org) ). Libby Worth as a practitioner and a scholar has a long-standing interest in amateur practices of traditional and social dance. David Gilbert headed the AHRC-funded project, ‘Design, Material Culture and Popular Creativity in Suburban Faith Communities’ (REF number?). Helen Nicholson, with Nadine Holdsworth and Jane Milling undertook research on ‘Amateur Dramatics: Crafting Communities in Time and Space’ and related projects (AHRC AH/K001922/1).

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