INTRODUCTION

This article is cued by Andrew Hartley's provocative discussion of the logical impossibility of performance criticism; he writes that

One's sense of what happened on stage is shaped by perspective, which may be about where in the house you were sitting (to one side, close enough to be spat upon by the cast, peering through opera glasses from The Gods) or it may be about where you happened to be looking at a given moment.¹

It is also, akin to my previous writing on, and wrestling with, the indeterminacy of meanings generated by theatre production,² structured in order to facilitate these multiple perspectives. Thus, somewhat perversely perhaps, I have fixed upon the model of interactive sports coverage, whereby the viewer can, by virtue of the remote control red button, appreciate the spectacle from a number of alternative perspectives. On the football (soccer) pitch these include: regular viewing angle; bird's eye view; goal-to-goal; 'player-cam'; highlights reel; 'fanzone'.³ For the purposes of this close reading⁴ of (a section of) performance, King Lear (3.7, the blinding of Gloucester) at the reconstructed Globe in London (2008), the perspectives upon, or from, which I originally wanted to focus were: the yard – 'front and centre'; upper gallery; the Lord's rooms; production archives; focus on a specific player; groundlings – a focus on the audience; facial expressions; delivery of text – pauses, inflection, emphases. I have incorporated the majority of these perspectives: they, in turn, are followed by alternative readings of the play and production as a whole which are informed by the various perspectives of the (closely read) blinding scene.

I have, albeit too neatly, aligned details of the production with the various viewing perspectives. Thus, watching the production as a 'groundling', front and centre, if such a designation has currency in a circular playhouse, I have focused on the actions and gestures of the actors. From the upper gallery, not quite The Gods as in theatres such as the Olivier (London) or the old Royal Shakespeare Theatre (Stratford-upon-Avon), I have concentrated on the overall blocking and movement of the scene. These descriptions are of the type John Russell Brown labels the 'factual details of staging at particular moments',⁵ the former notes.

³ Player-cam focuses exclusively on one player (for 15 minutes); Fanzone is a commentary on the game by an extremely zealous fan from either side.
⁴ This article was shaped especially by its early contexts of reception: firstly, as a contribution to the 'Shakespearean Close Reading, Old and New' seminar at the 2008 ISC (see note 1, above); and secondly, as part of the Shakespeare in Performance network discussions on theatre reviewing; more of this later.
at testifying to the micro-details of the action and latter to the macro. This part of the article resembles an extended prompt-book. The left side view turned out to be a less than ideal vantage point, at least for the production as a whole. However, not being able to see very well did focus the aural narrative of the production, especially as I was directly beneath the thunder-making machine, so I have here recorded sound effects, vocal inflections, non-textual vocals and audience responses. From the right side view I ignored the action on stage and looked only and more closely at the audience, mainly in the yard, as they watched the scene. I have focused, in particular, on three teenagers leaning against the ‘front’ edge of the stage and have attempted to describe their body language, facial expressions and verbal responses. Susannah Clapp, reviewing the production for the Observer, provides an apposite summary of my intentions here:

The audience’s ultra-audible reactions to all this – gulps and shudders and gasps and sniggers and bleats of encouragement, as if everything were being seen for the first time – are an amplifying layer to the action, an echo-chamber which demonstrates how quick-changing are the moods and incidents before you. If you recorded their reactions you’d hear the beat of the play. The Globe is Shakespeare’s electro-cardiogram.6

The next part of the article attempts to give eyes and ears to these multiple perspectives via four parallel columns spread over two pages each. Column 1 reproduces the text of the scene, including the deletions.7 Column 2 documents the actions, gestures and movements of the scene; column 3 is the aural or soundtrack recording of the scene; column 4 is the description of the audience. The notes in columns 2, 3 and 4 are recorded chronologically and in parallel with the moment that the text is spoken. Thus, the description of the text-in-production is ‘thickened’ by ‘interactive’ cross-references to its delivery, embodiment, staging, acoustic accompaniment and reception. In doing this, I am attempting to at least partially address Pascale Aebisher’s reservations about writing about performance: she argues that Performance is characterised by its ephemerality, spontaneity, productive interaction between spectators and actors, and the subjectivity of its reception... In writing about performance, a physical, three-dimensional medium is flattened into two dimensions, leading inevitably to distortions and misrepresentations.8

My intention, with the full acknowledgement that I may be multiplying these distortions and misrepresentations, is to provide perhaps two-and-a-half dimensions; to raise the flattening, and to grasp or glimpse the ephemeral, spontaneous and subjectively received interactivity.

The most recent publication about London’s reconstructed Globe theatre, Shakespeare’s Globe: A Theatrical Experiment, echoes both Aebisher’s concerns above and my attempts to tackle them via the Red Button structure which follows below. The editors explain that ‘Rather than flattening opposing positions, we have set up a structure that highlights differences in approach in order to propose a new kind of criticism that can incorporate a more complex understanding’.9 Indeed, the structure of the first part of the book on the ‘Original Practices’ Project is organized in a very similar fashion to my parallel columns: Stage action; Stage appearance; Music and sound; Actor/audience interaction. Given that Christie Carson goes on to explain that ‘the volume has been designed to mimic the theatrical process of creation in that it allows each contributor to speak to his or her area of expertise in order to provide an integrated debate’,10 and that I too am attempting to offer an integrated ‘mimic[ry of] the theatrical process’, this synchronicity is perhaps not overly surprising. And lastly on this theme, the Globe has sought, as

7 The deletions are scored by a faded text; the production was based on the Folio text of the play; the quotations hereafter are from the New Penguin edition of the play, edited by George Hunter (1972) and introduced by Kiernan Ryan (2005).
8 Pascale Aebisher, Shakespeare’s Violated Bodies: Stage and Seven Performance (Cambridge, 2004), p. 17.
many professional (Shakespearian) companies do, to archive its productions on video. Unlike most of them, the productions at the Globe have been recorded from three perspectives; the cameras are labelled ‘face-on’, ‘lozenge’ (which refers to a diamond shape; the camera is at 45 degrees from face-on) and ‘side-on’. The intention has been to preserve some of the three-dimensionality which the theatre architecture orchestrates and which this article attempts faintly to replicate. Thus, I have illustrated columns 2, 3 and 4 with screen captures from this archival footage which almost precisely represent the same moment on stage \(^{11}\) from the three various perspectives. The face-on images, which offer a clear view both of the groundlings and of the octagonal stage projection (more of that below), illustrate the column dealing with, appropriately enough, the front and gallery view of the production. The lozenge images, which are closer to the stage and show less of the audience, but also, importantly, the balcony spaces, illustrate the soundtrack column. Finally, the side-on images, which are also from considerably above the stage, illustrate the audience response column.\(^{12}\) You have just finished reading the Introduction; what follows is the Interaction and then the Interpretation, the hermeneutic drive of which will be impelled by the various viewing perspectives.

\(^{11}\) An asterisk marks the textual moment which is represented by the screen captures. The actors featured are: Peter Hamilton Dyer (Cornwall), Kellie Bright (Regan), Joseph Mydell (Gloucester), Kurt Egyiwan, Beru Tsema, Ben Bishop (Servants).

\(^{12}\) Unfortunately every one of the side-on recordings was poorly focused but this does at least preserve the anonymity of those ‘photographed’ as well as figuring the verticality of the space. I am enormously indebted to Globe Librarian Jordan Landes and Archivist Victoria Northwood for their help with these materials.
3.7

Enter Cornwall, Regan, Goneril, Edmund, and Servants

CORNWALL
Post speedily to my lord your husband; show him this letter: the army of France is landed. Seek out the villain Gloucester.

Execut some of the Servants

REGAN
Hang him instantly.

GONERILL
Pluck out his eyes.

CORNWALL
Leave him to my displeasure. Edmund, keep you our sister company: the revenges we are bound to take upon your traitorous father are not fit for your beholding. Advise the duke, where you are going, to a most festinate preparation: we are bound to the like. Our posts shall be swift and intelligne betwixt us. Farewell, dear sister: farewell, my lord of Gloucester.

Enter Oswald

How now! where's the king?

OSWALD
My lord of Gloucester hath convey'd him hence: Some five or six and thirty of his knights, His questrists after him; met him at gate; Who, with some other of the lord's dependants Are gone with him towards Dover, where they boast To have well-armed friends.

CORNWALL
Get horses for your mistress.

GONERILL
Farewell, sweet lord, and sister.

CORNWALL
Edmund, farewell.

Execut Gonerill, Edmund, and Oswald

Go seek the traitor Gloucester, Pinion him like a thief, bring him before us.

Execut other Servants

Though well we may not pass upon his life Without the form of justice, yet our power Shall do a courtesy to our wrath, which men May blame, but not control. Who's there? the traitor?

Enter Gloucester, brought in by two or three

REGAN
Ingrateful fox! 'tis he.

Through the centre doors

DSC, facing outward

At the right pillar

Left pillar

Centre door

Cornwall kisses Gonerill on the cheek.

Cornwall brings forward a chair, slowly and deliberately.

He enjoys a long, sexual kiss with Regan, near right pillar. He continues looking at Regan, not at the brought forth Gloucester.
Drums play

Drums stop. Very fast text. Cornwall has a very deliberate speech pattern. He speeds up and slows down for effect. It is a controlled venom.

This is the last scene before the interval, almost 90 minutes into the production. Concentration is perhaps starting to wander. As Patrick Mariner wrote in the Daily Mail, ‘with the interval held back for nearly two hours, the first half is particularly cruel on the £3 “groundlings” forced to stand in the open top arena’ (Theatre Record 495).

Indeed, a number of people are leaving before this scene, perhaps with sore feet or backs or perhaps delicate stomachs and aware of what is to come.

Cornwall responds ‘ah’

trA-A-Aitor, long pause, Gloucester . . .

bring-him, pause, before-us . . . Then a LONG pause

Sounds of struggle from offstage, including Gloucester’s muffled cries

The audience switch their focus from the kiss next to the right pillar to the centre doors, through which Gloucester is being brought.
CORNWALL
Bind fast his corky arms.

GLOUCESTER
What mean your graces? Good my friends, consider
You are my guests: do me no foul play, friends.

CORNWALL
Bind him, I say.
Servants bind him

REGAN
Hard, hard. O filthy traitor!

GLOUCESTER
Unmerciful lady as you are, I'm none.

CORNWALL
To this chair bind him. Villain, thou shalt find-
Regan plucks his beard.

GLOUCESTER
By the kind gods, 'tis most ignobly done
To pluck me by the beard.

REGAN
So white, and such a traitor!

GLOUCESTER
Naughty lady,
These hairs, which thou dost ravish from my chin,
Will quicken, and accuse thee: I am your host:
With robbers' hands my hospitable favours
You should not ruffle thus. What will you do?

CORNWALL
Come, sir, what letters had you late from France?

REGAN
Be simple-answered, for we know the truth.

CORNWALL
And what confederacy have you with the traitors
Late footed in the kingdom?

REGAN
To whose hands have you sent the lunatic king? Speak.

GLOUCESTER
I have a letter guessingly set down,
Which came from one that's of a neutral heart,
And not from one opposed.

CORNWALL
Cunning.

REGAN
And false.

CORNWALL
Where hast thou sent the king?

GLOUCESTER
To Dover.

Turning to face Gloucester

Gloucester standing behind the chair (slightly USC; locus)

With a thick rope, his arms by his side

Gloucester gestures his innocence with his hands (which should be pinioned).

There are three servants behind Gloucester, Cornwall is
to his left and Regan to his right.

Cornwall stretches his arms theatrically.

Enter the lute player, above right.

Cornwall clicks his fingers to motion the Servants back.

Cornwall clips the back of Gloucester’s head.

Cornwall and Regan semi-circle Gloucester.
Gloucester cries ‘oh’ as he is pinioned.
Gloucester emphasises ‘UNmerciful lady’

‘Come sir’, almost as if to the musician; from above he plays a pleasant tune on his lute. After a considerable pause, Cornwall speaks to Gloucester, ‘what letters . . . ?

Regan stretches the vowel on ‘simple’ . . . trA-A-Aitors

Singing from above accompanies the lute.

This text is done very swiftly.

Bang

Bang

Bang

I suspect many in the audience do not know what is coming next; their attention is wandering.

A young woman is startled by Regan’s venom.
REGAN
Wherefore to Dover? Wast thou not charged at peril-

CORNWALL
Wherefore to Dover? Let him first answer that.

GLOUCESTER
I am tied to the stake, and I must stand the course.

REGAN
Wherefore to Dover, sir?

GLOUCESTER
Because I would not see thy cruel nails
Pluck out his poor old eyes; nor thy fierce sister
In his anointed flesh stick boarish fangs.
The sea, with such a storm as his bare head
In hell-black night endured, would have buoy'd up.
And quench'd the stilled fires.
Yet, poor old heart, he holf the heavens to rain.
If wolves had at thy gate howl'd that stern time,
Thou shouldst have said 'Good porter, turn the key.'
All cruelties subscribed, but I shall see
The wing'd vengeance overtake such children.

CORNWALL
See't shalt thou never. Fellow, hold the chair.
Upon these eyes of thine I'll set my foot.

GLOUCESTER
He that will think to live till he be old,
Give me some help! O cruel! O you gods!

REGAN
One side will mock another, the other too.

CORNWALL
If you see vengeance,-

First Servant
Hold your hand, my lord.
I have served you ever since I was a child;
But better service have I never done you
Than now to bid you hold.

REGAN
How now, you dog!

First Servant
If you did wear a beard upon your chin,
I'd shake it on this quarrel. What do you mean?

CORNWALL
My villain!

They draw and fight

First Servant
Nay, then, come on, and take the chance of anger.

REGAN
Give me thy sword. A peasant stand up thus!

Takes a sword, and runs at him behind

Cornwall, moving from the left pillar to USC takes off
his dark jacket to reveal a crisp white shirt.

[Cornwall gets Gloucester's eye from the upstage ledge
of the right pillar]

Again, Cornwall looks at Regan, not Gloucester, as he
says this.

Cornwall puts his finger 'in' Gloucester's eye, pulls it
out, complete with lengthy eyestalks, and throws it
backstage.

Regan daubs herself with Gloucester's blood so that she
has red eye-shadow.

The servant steps in between Cornwall and Gloucester.

Cornwall takes a sword from the other servant but is
slashed across the belly.

Regan takes a dagger from the unwitting other servant,
and stabs 1st servant from behind.
Regan cruelly sounds the 'Wherefore to Dover' text as if Gloucester is deaf and stupid.

Gloucester's reply separates each word of the first two lines, giving special emphasis to his defiance.

Regan gives a surprised laugh.

He-e-e-e-elpppp... O-o-o-o-o-h... both Cornwall and Regan also wail, simultaneously with Gloucester, though theirs is a triumphant mockery of his pain. Regan lets out an involuntary 'oh' as the eye is produced and then another, more enjoyed and shrieked 'oh'.

The audience are a mixture of laughter and 'eurgh' sounds; mostly laughter, for a good few seconds. This gives way to tittering.

Backing away from the front of the stage and not leaning on it.

Open-mouthed, and moving up and down, as if to protect themselves but still be able to see.

Shrink and turn away; again, hands over mouth and then wringing of hands.
First Servant
O, I am slain! My lord, you have one eye left
To see some mischief on him. O!
Dies

CORNWALL
Lest it see more, prevent it. Out, vile jelly!
Where is thy lustre now?

GLOUCESTER
All dark and comfortless. Where's my son Edmund?
Edmund, enkindle all the sparks of nature,
To quit this horrid act.

REGAN
Out, treacherous villain!
Thou call'st on him that hates thee: it was he
That made the overthrow of thy treasons to us;
Who is too good to pity thee.

GLOUCESTER
O my follies! then Edgar was abused.
Kind gods, forgive me that, and prosper him!

REGAN
Go thrust him out at gates, and let him smell
His way to Dover.

Exit me with Gloucester

How is't, my lord? how look you?

CORNWALL
I have received a hurt: follow me, lady.
Turn out that eyeless villain; throw this slave
Upon the dunghill, Regan, I bleed apace:
Untimely comes this hurt: give me your arm.

Exit Cornwall, led by Regan

Second Servant
I'll never care what wickedness I do,
If this man come to good.

Third Servant
If he live long,
And in the end meet the old course of death,
Women will all turn monsters.

Second Servant
Let's follow the old earl, and get the Bedlam
To lead him where he would: his ragin' madness
Allow's itself to any thing.

Third Servant
Go thou: I'll fetch some flax and whites of eggs
To apply to his bleeding face. Now, heaven help him!

Exit severally*
Again, all three of them scream as the other eye is taken out. 'O-u-o-u-u-u-t-t-i— Gloucester, 'No, no' - y-i-t-t-i-t-l-e j-e-e-l-y.'

'Where / is / thy / he-u-u-stre / now?' Again, there is laughter, not as much as before, and 'eurgh' sounds from the audience.

Regan is panting, sort of post-orgasmic sighing.


A father shields his daughter who, right next to the octagon, turns away from the scene.

Back ing away from the stage again, pointing at the blinded Gloucester.

Looking at one another grinning.

On the kiss the audience cannot help but laugh.

The song and lute continue.

There is muttering in the audience.

Applause

Starting to discuss what happened.
INTERPRETATION

It might be worth briefly explaining my choice of the blinding scene as exemplary of what K. A. Ewert has described as 'a production's inflected moments where we most intensely feel meaning being made'—my metonymic engine driving the play and production as a whole. I should confess that I have arrived at these comments somewhat *ex post facto*, and that my selection of the blinding scene as central and illuminating of the whole was largely intuitive or arbitrary. Nevertheless, J. I. M. Stewart's focus on this scene explores, irrespective, or perhaps even because, of its physical barbarity, the 'disinterested aesthetic concern' which creates a structural, thematic and expressive completeness. Jay Halio, in a brief note, also focuses upon the structural underpinning and importance of the scene, though the structure he appeals to is mythopoetic, the scene's 'profound underlying motivation'. These observations are further underlined by the history of the play in performance, where, in many productions, including the one under discussion here, the blinding of Gloucester immediately precedes, and builds up to, the interval, a fact sometimes explained by the desire to prevent audience members coming back late after the break in order to avoid the violence.

Watching the production from the 'front and centre' of the yard focused a particular kind of response. Indeed, the front and centre of the yard was itself focused by an extra thrust, an outcrop of staging made of a short jetty and an octagonal platform which projected another twenty feet into the yard, and from which steps descended into the yard and facilitated entrances and exits through the groundlings (as well as this, an additional façade was inserted on the 'upstage' wall with sliding doors which removed about four feet of the stage depth). One problem of this imposed architecture, at least from my overall, if not front and centre, perspective, was that it reduced the wooden O into a D or perhaps an arc. Thus, as significant amounts of the action occurred on the projected octagon, in the midst of the spectators, as it were, the staging seemed to treat the pillars as a proscenium arch and to leave most of the stage area closest to the exits largely ignored. This meant that the yard areas to the 'side and back' were mostly unpopulated, even when the production was sold out, and that upper gallery seats to the back and side represented very poor viewing value. I will return to the benefits this afforded me for the aural reading of the play, but, by contrast, front and centre, at £5, if you could stand for the pre-interval 100 minutes, represented excellent value.

The discomfort produced by such a long time standing perhaps encouraged the groundlings to empathize with the pain Gloucester was about to go through: and this is the key to my yard interpretation. Here, front and centre, and so often directly appealed to, this position foregrounded the notion of empathy, sympathy and identification with the dispossessed or those suffering within the play. Like Miranda's viewing of the tempest, the groundlings could proclaim of both the blinding and this play's own storm scene, as well as other moments, 'O, I have suffered / With those that I saw suffer!' (*The Tempest*, 1.2.5–6). Thus, the key lines of the production, in terms of this reading or perspective, were Lear's heartfelt

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,  
That hide the pelting of this pitiless storm,  
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,  
Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you  
From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en  
Too little care of this.  

(3.4.28–33)

This speech was delivered from the octagonal platform and predominantly and directly to the yard audience. The rest of the theatre was still and silent and David Calder's Lear was able to conversationally and empathetically discourse with those just a few feet from him, in stark contrast to the noise

---

of the storm and his almost-doomed attempts to shout above it. Unfortunately, each time I saw the production the weather was perfectly clement and thus any of the unique kinds of new Globe frisson which develop from atmospheric serendipities were absent.\textsuperscript{16}

Though such bad weather was absent (during my visits), the ‘poor naked wretches’ were palpably present. At times they were amongst the yard audience with strange sound devices stressing the atavistic nature\textsuperscript{17} of the play (I cannot seem to keep the aural reading discrete from this one), and they were sometimes also on stage, in particular during the hovel scene (3.6). Benedict Nightingale observed that ‘You won’t see many Lear’s . . . discover such sympathy for the world’s “poor naked wretches”, here a swarm of vermicular men.’\textsuperscript{18} They came up through the trap with a loud crash and then gathered ‘upstage’ on pillows as Lear madly arraigned his elder daughters. That these accusations were offered also to the audience forced an incongruity with the words; as Lear shouted and pointed outwardly it made no sense when the Fool joked and also pointed to the audience, ‘I took you for a joint-stool’ (Q sc. 13.47), when several such stools were on the stage itself. Also up from the trap, and mostly naked and wretched, was Poor Tom and he too did many of his ‘set pieces’ from the added stage projection. Lear identified with Poor Tom: as part of the younger man’s aristocratic disposition was to wave to imagined creatures in the yard and lower gallery, the older man’s genuine lunacy followed suit and mirrored his mad-fellow; he watched him wave and then he, too, waved, comically straining to see at whom he waved. The identification was most poignant after twice (again comically) wondering whether Poor Tom had bequeathed his lands and all to his daughters, Lear understood their common situation and slowly embraced him. Here, the two men were identified as distressfully dispossessed; the groundlings, and the audience as a whole, were invited to sympathize with them and they did on several occasions via an audible ‘aaaah’ response.

Gloucester, of course, was about to be included in this fraternity of distress and dispossession and the audience was similarly invited to sympathize with him. Ironically enough, Joseph Myddell’s Gloucester was presented as so sympathetic that many of the reviewers found it difficult to identify with him. Nightingale thought him ‘a Gloucester so mild that you half-expect him to help out at his own eye extraction’\textsuperscript{19} and Nicolas de Jongh reckoned somewhat heartlessly that ‘Joseph Myddell’s Gloucester suffers minimally’.\textsuperscript{20} Perhaps the actor had read these reviews because later in the run he seemed to have acquired something of an edge, particularly in this scene. Though he looked back and forth at his interrogators as they spat their questions at him, he stared straight ahead into the audience on that moment when perhaps he moved from being, as Julie Carpenter observed, ‘ineffectual’,\textsuperscript{21} to defiant and determined: ‘I am tied to th’ stake, and I must stand the course’ (3.7.52). It was almost as if he was drawing strength from the yard for what he knew was inevitably coming, a baiting, whipping or worse. And then when his eyes were ripped out the audience responded very vocally (see below). As a final moment before the interval of powerful connection, Gloucester staggered with the help of a servant from the chair to the octagonal platform. Arm outstretched and trying to find his newly-blinded way, his first steps toward Dover were down into the yard and through the shocked, amused, entertained and included audience.

From above, the change, in relation to watching the scene and the play from the centre of the yard, was not of inclusion to exclusion but of participant to observer. Thus, whereas the ‘poor naked wretches’ text exemplified the grounding perspective, from this upper gallery point of view the most

\textsuperscript{16} Victoria Northwood alerted me to the remarkable weather for the production on 1 May; the rain began on Lear’s ‘I shall go mad’, the line prior to Cornwall’s ‘Let us withdraw; ‘twill be a storm’ (2.4.281–82), it gathered momentum by the time Cornwall advised ‘Come out o’ the storm’ (2.4.304) and was torrential until Poor Tom was discovered in his hovel.

\textsuperscript{17} Stewart, ‘Blinding Gloster’, p. 265.

\textsuperscript{18} Benedict Nightingale, \textit{Theatre Record} 28, p. 495.

\textsuperscript{19} Nightingale, \textit{Theatre Record} 28, p. 495.

\textsuperscript{20} Nicolas de Jongh, \textit{Theatre Record} 28, p. 497.

\textsuperscript{21} Julie Carpenter, \textit{Theatre Record} 28, p. 496.
resonant part of the play (for me) was Gloucester’s Kottian despair, ‘As flies to wanton boys are we to th’ gods; / They kill us for their sport’ (4.1.37–8). And whilst the production might have cast those on the ground as wretches, this architectural perspective cast the viewers, for their most expensive tickets, as gods watching the action unfold, present but removed. This experience, of witnessing the cruelty at a remove, of watching the movements unfold with far less direct contact or acknowledgement from the actors, reinforced a detached and voyeuristic relation to the merciless on display and made an explicit connection (again, for me) to the horrific images of torture from Abu Ghraib. It would have been possible, of course, to read the scene in the light of those recent abuses without the advantage of the upper gallery perspective but it served to focus several interesting parallels. Firstly, the notion of experiencing the violence at a mediated remove: in the upper gallery this was as a detached god looking down, akin to the film noir overhead camera; in the case of the Abu Ghraib images their availability was not within touching distance, as for a grounding, but by photographs accessed through the Internet. Thus, in both cases was a theatricalized violence moved from a private to a public sphere and, even more disturbingly, a significant aspect of that theatricality was of a masochistic sexuality.

This aberrant sexuality was introduced to the scene by Cornwall. Preparing to torture Gloucester, Cornwall took off his jacket, a gesture half world wrestling and half pornographic film. The kiss he shared with Regan as he rationalized their ‘wrath’ was prolonged and sexual and it was clear that his ensuing violence was a means of proving and igniting his virility and that it would take the form of a sex game. This fantasy was reinforced by his continuing to stare lustfully at his wife as he declared (to Gloucester) that ‘Upon these eyes of thine I’ll set my foot’ (3.7.66). If, as Jay Halio, after the psychoanalysts, observes, the blinding represents a ‘symbolic castration of Gloucester’,22 in this production it also served, albeit briefly, considering Cornwall’s imminent death, as an erotic stimulus, a savage Viagra. Regan was very quick to catch on, such that she confirmed what Aebischer has revealed to be almost a theatrical cliché in the middle daughter’s portrayal, that of ‘féro-cious sexuality’.23 At first – and I am prematurely sampling the aural record of the production again here – Regan’s non-verbal response to the removal of Gloucester’s first eye was of shock and thrilled surprise but the sound almost immediately developed into a kind of pre-orgasmic moan. From the blood of this first eye she perversely daubed herself with eye-shadow but further indulgences were to follow. Spurred on by the thrill of dispatching the servant, Regan joined Cornwall so that she extracted the second eye herself. She raised her knee and Cornwall gripped her thigh as they both screamed in echoed pleasure at Gloucester’s excruciating pain. This time, with the blood on her hands from her own act of violence, she covered her face with it, luxuriating in the bloodlust. When she taunted her victim with, ‘Thou call’st on him that hates thee’ (3.7.86), she fingered his eyeless sockets and offered a brutal enactment of the castration trope. This godless sexuality, with its all-too-contemporary (if also Jacobean) confluence of violence and eroticism, was on view to the gods who were either powerless or simply too disinterested, akin to the majority of western liberal response to Abu Ghraib, to intervene.

I have had some difficulty in deferring the soundtrack reading of the scene and play, so integral has it been to the other perspectives, but here I privilege that particular perspective or, perhaps more accurately, hearing. The sounds I am focusing upon include delivery of text, non-verbal sounds, sound effects, music and audience responses; this last series of sounds also blurs my interpretative categories. As mentioned earlier I was alerted to this reading because of my attempt to watch the play from the ‘back’ and ‘left side’ of the stage. Not able to see much of the action, which was obscured by the stage left pillar when relatively static and on the octagonal platform, and being beneath the thunder and wind machine, I focused

The obvious connection here is between the torture – in particular, the severing of the police officer’s ear in the film and the extraction of Gloucester’s eyes in the play – and also in the way extreme and aestheticized violence uncomfortably juxtaposes with comedy. Stevie Simkin has written similar comparative analyses and observes that ‘Early modern tragedies, like graphically violent horror movies, often walk a fine line between serious and camp, between shock and laughter.’

He goes on to provide examples from The Duchess of Malfi, Tis Pity She’s a Whore, The Atheist’s Tragedy and especially The Revenger’s Tragedy. He also notes, appositely for this discussion, that ‘At the other end of the spectrum, the blinding of Gloucester in Act 3, Scene 7 of King Lear (1604) provokes nothing but shock and horror, unless performed ineluctably, or with parodic intentions.’ These ideas were, and were not, borne out by the new Globe’s staging of the blinding of Gloucester; shock and horror were probably present, although the measuring of such responses might prove difficult, but there was also considerable laughter and the scene was performed neither ineluctably nor with parodic intentions. The laughter was an effect, I think, of the appeal to the Reservoir Dogs culture, where not just Gloucester, but many of the audience themselves, were stuck in the middle with Cornwall and, Miss Blonde, Regan.

The repeated similarities of the two torture scenes beg the question of whether it is more Tarantino, as famous for his creative plagiarism as Shakespeare, who has influenced the new Globe staging of Gloucester’s blinding, or whether he has ripped the scene off, in a demonstration of cycles of violence, from his Jacobean forebear. In any case, the following parallels and juxtapositions may be observed:

---

26 Stevie Simkin, Early Modern Tragedy and the Cinema of Violence (Basingstoke, 2006), p. 192.
1. the victims are both 'tied to a chair' (KL > RD)
2. the torturers both theatrically remove their jackets as if 'getting down to business' (RD > KL)
3. the victims both cue their own torture (KL > RD)
   a. Gloucester's protestations that he 'would not see thy [Regan's] cruel nails / Pluck out his [Lear's] poor old eyes' and that he 'shall see / The winged vengeance overtake such children [Gonerill and Regan]' (3.7.54–5, 63–4) prompts his punishment: 'See't shalt thou never' (3.7.65)
   b. Marvin, the police officer, probably wishes he hadn't defiantly proclaimed, 'you can torture me all you want'
4. the victims are tortured to playful musical accompaniment (RD > KL)
   a. Gloucester's lute player
   b. K-Billy's Supersounds of the Seventies plays Stealer's Wheel tune 'Stuck in the Middle with You'
5. the victims have their faces horrendously disfigured, eyes and ear (KL > RD)
6. the victims wounds are mocked (RD < > KL)
   a. Regan fingers Gloucester's eye-sockets as she reveals Edmund's treachery
   b. Blonde speaks into Marvin's severed ear
7. both torturers are interrupted (and eventually killed) by an appalled spectator
8. the appalled spectators who intervene are both killed by accomplices of the torturers

One moment where the two scenes diverge is the actual viewing of the disfiguring violence: the audience at the Globe can decide for themselves whether to look away; in the film, this decision is made (directorially) for the audience.

There is one detail of this scene, especially well-viewed from the 'left back' position, that I have yet to discuss, and it is akin to the perverse, 'black comedy' described above. The Globe's props department, perhaps striving for anatomical authenticity, provided eyes (both of which were hidden on the 'upstage' side of a pillar ledge) with lengthy and blood-dripping eyestalks. In my view, it was these grotesque, tentacle-like sinews that prompted the audience's prolonged laughter and groaning after each gouging, and so exaggeratedly gruesome were they that I cannot believe that they were not intended to produce a mixture, in what was a constantly funny production, of comedy and horror. Perhaps the ambivalent presentation and reception might be theorized along Bakhtinian lines where the dislocation is produced because the comical grotesque of corporeal materiality properly associated within the 'lower bodily stratum' was here relocated to the eyes, more typically figured as windows to the soul. Stewart cites, in order to contest it, Robert Bridges's argument that Shakespeare's frequent depiction, and, regrettably, seeming celebration, of all kinds of debasement, was more a reflection of the audience than the author; he describes, after Bridges, 'the depraving effect of the playhouse public upon Shakespeare's art'. In this production such depravity was staged in order to provoke and appeal to a playhouse public whose appetite for spectacular violence, both shocking but also comical, was fed not by bear-baiting, whipping and hanging but by parallel representations - maiming, dismemberment and decapitation, in cinemas and at home on DVD.

In moving towards a conclusion, I want to reflect on some critical writings about Gloucester's blinding, especially as they relate to audience reception, and also as they were either consolidated or challenged by the experience of being in, and watching closely, an audience watching that act at the new Globe. Edward Pechter's argument that 'In the main our range of response is limited to mental action - sympathy, antipathy, perhaps judgment; and no other play of Shakespeare's... involves an audience so directly

---
28 The quotations which refer to the scene from Reservoir Dogs are taken from Simkin's description, which highlights parallels with The Revenge's Tragedy, see Early Modern Tragedy, pp. 194–96. Simon Brown made some helpful observations on these parallels.
and deeply with its characters'\textsuperscript{30} sounds like a Hazlitt-like commitment to the play on the page, but he attributes these responses to spectators, not readers. He omits, lacking the advantage of an open-air theatre space, performative responses such as laughter, gasps, groans and chatter or physical movement such as turning away, shifting position or leaving the theatre altogether. However, Stewart, also lacking an approximate reconstruction of Shakespeare's theatre, supposes that 'the physical conditions of the Elizabethan public playhouse... evoked far stronger suggestions of participation on the part of the spectators than a modern theatre allows'.\textsuperscript{31} He also wonders of the 'ruder part of the audience', those in the yard, whether they would respond to the blinding of Gloucester 'with malevolent glee'.\textsuperscript{32} Though the 'ruder part' of the new Globe audience laughed at the blinding I detected not a hint of malevolence. In that three of my closely read subjects were teenagers I might colloquially (and perhaps patronisingly) relate their response as, 'Oh my God, I can't believe they did that; that was so gross.' A measure of this absence of malice was the silence that invariably greeted Regan's callous order, and the best joke of the scene, to 'Go thrust him out at gates and let him smell / His way to Dover' (3.7.92–3). Indira Ghose has written that this line is 'saturated with a savage sense of humour that the play incessantly replays',\textsuperscript{33} but not once in the productions, either live or recorded, which I witnessed, did this line receive even a titter of response. Stewart's surmise about the 'ruder part' of the audience was confirmed to some degree, however, given that the spectators in the upper gallery did not, as far as I could tell, respond with the horrified laughter in the way that their less financially able, and usually somewhat younger, co-audience had. Thus, not only has the new Globe focused further dimensions of audience response, it has also, especially by virtue of the methodology deployed here, revealed the way audience response can be differentiated according to the specific place of reception.

Pascale Aebischer has provided the most recent and concentrated analysis of this scene in the theatre:

It is one thing to know that Gloucester is blinded, but quite another to listen to and, especially, to watch the mutilation, to use our own eyes to watch the removal of somebody else's eyes in a space (the theatre) that is so contained that the audience, if it does not intervene, is made to feel complicit in the violence perpetrated.\textsuperscript{34}

Aebischer to some extent overstates her argument when she writes 'that today theatregoers still find the scene literally unwatchable'\textsuperscript{35} and I feel there are aspects of this complicity debate that require further teasing out. Simkin has similar reservations about Quentin Tarantino's explication of comedy and complicity in the ear-severing scene:

'I kinda defy anybody to watch Michael Madsen do that dance and not kind of enjoy it', he remarks on the DVD commentary, claiming that the comic lead into the torture implicates the audience: 'You are a co-conspirator.' However, Tarantino makes no attempt to analyse any further what this might mean in terms of audience response, or the audience's awareness of its response. Perhaps this lacuna, conscious or not, is simply a recognition that the scene does not have the power to do any such thing.\textsuperscript{36}

I will return to these ideas shortly. There were occasional gestures in the new Globe audience that attested to the scene being 'literally unwatchable', hands in front of faces, turning away and such, but for the most part people looked on, even if between their fingers, with a mixture of shock and fun. I certainly, as a committed researcher, watched closely and much enjoyed the spectacle, even though I decided years ago, after watching David Fincher's brilliant film _Se7en_, that I would

\textsuperscript{30} Edward Pechter, 'On the Blinding of Gloucester', _English Literary History_, 45 (Summer 1978), 181–200; p. 183.

\textsuperscript{31} Stewart, 'Blinding Gloster', p. 269.

\textsuperscript{32} Stewart, 'Blinding Gloster', p. 268.

\textsuperscript{33} Indira Ghose, _Shakespeare and Laughter: A Cultural History_ (Manchester, 2008), p. 198. Ghose lists a number of theories of laughter that pertain to the reaction to Gloucester's torture: 'a strategy of self-defence that enables us to face sources of fear or pain', p. 7; 'a hydraulic safety-valve for the unconscious', p. 9; 'Laughter at horror simultaneously invokes and domesticates precisely those aspects of the world that induce terror in us', p. 200.

\textsuperscript{34} Aebischer, _Shakespeare's Violated Bodies_, p. 159.

\textsuperscript{35} Aebischer, _Shakespeare's Violated Bodies_, p. 159.

\textsuperscript{36} Simkin, _Early Modern Tragedy_, p. 197.
not subject myself to such films, the most recent and joyless incarnation of which has been the torture porn made famous by the Saw franchise. I watched, enjoyed, but in no way felt complicit in the stage violence that I witnessed. I must concede that I probably erred in watching the blinding scene from the upper gallery on my third visit to the production: by this time I was fully aware of what would unfold - de-sensitized, as it were - and thus the potential of the scene to implicate me in its terror was somewhat dissipated. If I had first watched the production from above I might have been appalled not only by the grotesque actions played upon the stage, but also by the barbaric and heartless responses of the £5 'stinkards'.

Perhaps part of the reason for me rejecting the notion of being complicit in the yard (and yet suspecting that I may have felt otherwise in the upper gallery) is explained by Aebischer's use of the word 'contained'; the implication, as I read this, is that the confinement of the theatre space exerts a kind of moral stifling of the ethically compromised spectator. The new Globe, again along Bakhtinian lines, might be thought of as an open and excessive rather than classical and closed space, and one that resists containment in the way that a darkened proscenium auditorium perhaps does not (at least as easily). Accordingly, the upper gallery space might be figured as in between the yard and a darkened auditorium in its capacity to contain (incidentally, sitting in the Gods at the Globe you are protected from the rain but neither can you see much of the sky). Thus, in the least contained yard space the visceral impact of the violence is shared by the collective, visible and unruly audience and made comic. What Simkin describes as 'the audience's awareness of its response' is multiplied by the audience members' awareness of each other, although it might be worth also problematizing the post-modern ironic response as exemplified by, for example, Ricky Gervais's politically incorrect humour. Finally, though, perhaps Aebischer is right about complicity if the laughter and groaning exhibited by the yard audience could be said to represent an intervention. Aware of their own response and unable to silently acquiesce to the horrors they see depicted, even as they know they are fictional, but also reflective of real events they have witnessed through hyper-real representations, the audience resist their implication in the events through groans, giggles, laughter, shielding their eyes or turning their backs.

It is not surprising, I suppose, that my analyses should highlight such contemporary readings of the historically staged text given that my interpretative structure has been inspired by recent developments in viewing technology. Perhaps Dominic Dromgoole's background in directing new writing also emphasizes the contemporary within the historical in his new Globe productions. Though I would probably have identified the specific intertexts without this structure it has certainly focused, in particular, my commentary on identification / sympathy and on complicity / intervention. The metonymic task of reading the play and production as a whole via the closely read part - of using Gloucester's extracted eyes as interactive and interpretative red buttons - has proven beyond the limits of this single article, but I can imagine future 'fanzone' work where the four or more perspectives are contributed by different viewers watching a production at the same time. At a recent meeting of performance-focused Shakespearians in Stratford-upon-Avon, come together to consider the purpose and future of theatre reviews, six separate reflections upon this King Lear production, including the first draft of this article, were discussed. The most striking observation of all, offered by someone who did not see the production, was that the six papers might have described six different productions. I have here attempted to articulate variance, to provide two and a half dimensions, but I forecast and invite more concertedly collaborative, indeed Rashomon-like, tellings of theatrical stories.

37 This is akin – as my students have informed me – to the decrcticization of pornography when viewed publicly, which usually becomes comic.