

## The Concept of Work in Theater Performances

Johanna Skaug & Trond Aalberg

To cite this article: Johanna Skaug & Trond Aalberg (08 Jun 2024): The Concept of Work in Theater Performances, *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*, DOI: [10.1080/01639374.2024.2357208](https://doi.org/10.1080/01639374.2024.2357208)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639374.2024.2357208>



© 2024 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC.



Published online: 08 Jun 2024.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)





View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

# The Concept of Work in Theater Performances

Johanna Skaug  and Trond Aalberg 

Department of Archivistics, Library and Information Science, Oslo Metropolitan University, Oslo, Norway

## ABSTRACT

The IFLA Library Reference Model (LRM) defines work as an abstract entity that represents “the intellectual or artistic content of a distinct creation.” The work entity enables the grouping of equivalent content in search results and enables connecting and relating resources across databases and documentation practices, independent of media and format. This article explores how the LRM work entity relates to and is understood in the context of theater performance documentation. It presents an analysis of different conceptual models relevant to performance documentation and examines how databases for performing arts refer to or include works. The main part of the article, however, is a user study based on interviews with theater researchers on how they understand the concept of work in relation to theater performances. The main research contribution of this work is the gained insight into how the concept of work is understood in the context of theater performance documentation.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received September 2023  
Revised May 2024  
Accepted May 2024

## KEYWORDS

IFLA LRM; LRMoo;  
theater; performance;  
performing arts;  
conceptual models; work  
concept

## Introduction

The concept of performing arts refers to a broad range of artistic expressions performed live and in front of an audience. This includes theater, dance, music, and opera, among others. Unlike static art forms that can be stored and revisited, performing arts are ephemeral and intended to be experienced in the moment. Although most performances can be recorded, the process of filming or capturing a performance by other means transforms it from a live experience into a recorded artifact, which essentially becomes a different product. Libraries do not have an established practice for the explicit documentation of individual performances but often make references to performances in the description of related library resources, such as programs, recordings, scripts, and photos. Unfortunately, traditional cataloging has often inadequately conceptualized the nature of live performances. As Miller and Le Boeuf noted in 2005, there is a tendency to confuse the live performance with its “pre-text,” such as the script or score used in the production of a performance.<sup>1</sup>

**CONTACT** Johanna Skaug  [johannas@lyse.net](mailto:johannas@lyse.net)  Department of Archivistics, Library and Information Science, Oslo Metropolitan University, Oslo, Norway.

© 2024 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

In the last decades there has been a focus on creating reference models for various domains, among them IFLA Library Reference Model (LRM) for bibliographical material and CIDOC Conceptual Reference Model (CRM) for museum-related resources.<sup>2</sup> Such reference models define the entities of interest in a domain, their characteristics, and how they relate to one another. They provide a framework for shared understanding, system development, and interoperability. Unfortunately, there is no equivalent reference model dedicated to the domain of performing arts documentation, partly because there has been no equivalent agreed-upon organization or institution in charge of the development.<sup>3</sup> Instead, various ad hoc systems and solutions have been developed in different countries by theater museums, national theater libraries, research institutes, documentation centers, etc. Weiberg describes three main challenges for modeling performing arts. Firstly, it is challenging to determine what the work of art is in performing arts. Secondly, the subject of documentation is immaterial and, unlike other cultural artifacts, is no longer physically present, and thirdly, there is often a complex network of objects and persons connected to the performance.<sup>4</sup> This paper explores the first challenge, with a particular focus on how the concept of “work of art” in theater performances relates to the concept of work as defined in the IFLA LRM, which defines their E2 Work entity as “the intellectual or artistic content of a distinct creation.” In LRM, the concept of work is intended for the documentation of material artifacts and not directly applicable to immaterial events of performing arts. A work is realized in one or more expressions, an expression is embodied in one or more manifestations which we find exemplars of as items in the library holdings. But what is the distinct creation that is reflected in a theatrical performance? For example, when a theater group performs Shakespeare’s Hamlet, is the work they are conveying Hamlet as it was envisioned by William Shakespeare? Are all stage productions of Hamlet the same work as is conveyed in the printed books containing the script for the play? Or are they different works of art defined by the performative aspects such as the director’s choices, the actors’ performances, and the lighting?

To explore this question, existing conceptual models and databases tailored to the documentation of theater performances have been studied. Additionally, interviews with theater researchers have been conducted and analyzed.

## **Background**

### ***What are theater performances?***

A wide definition of theater is “any event in which all the participants find themselves in the same place at the same time, partaking in a

circumscribed set of activities.”<sup>5</sup> This definition presents two important characteristics of a theater performance: its immediateness, and its relational nature. A theater performance is something intangible that happens in the meeting between the audience and the actors. The uniqueness of performing arts is that you must be there to fully experience it. A painter does not have to repaint his artwork every time someone wants to see it, but if an actor is not there to perform a performance, it does not exist, even if they have performed the same production endless times before.<sup>6</sup>

### ***What is the work in theater performances?***

The creation, development, and refinement of ideas, knowledge, and artistic expressions are commonly referred to as “intellectual work” and the tangible or intangible product of these intellectual efforts is called a work. For intellectual products that can be reproduced and expressed as variations without losing the common identity as an intellectual or artistic creation, the work is an abstraction reified with many purposes in mind, such as referencing, retrieval, and intellectual property management. Most of the existing literature on work within library and information sciences has been focused on textual resources.<sup>7</sup> Creative products in this context have two components: the intellectual idea, and the carrier that communicates these ideas.<sup>8</sup> The idea is what one calls the work. Even though these two are separate entity types, they are dependent on one another as the work cannot reach its audience without it being communicated through a carrier. Although many library collections nowadays include a large number of multimedia resources including recordings of theater performances, the concept of work for theater performances often derived from what is available as a published script for the play.

In the last decade, however, there has been an increase in literature focusing on the concept of work in relation to performing arts, among them theater, music<sup>9</sup> and dance<sup>10</sup>. Similar to the aforementioned Weiberg, Doty also focuses on the challenges associated with understanding the concept of work in theater. He points out that when you see a performance, you are not experiencing the written text, but rather actors who perform the lines and actions described in the text, as well as lighting, costumes, and movement.<sup>11</sup> Thus, he challenges the idea that what is performed is the written text for the play. He introduces the term Performance-work, which is defined by what is performed, rather than the performance itself. This is an abstract concept that encompasses the dialogue and actions created for the actors to perform, along with elements such as characters and the plot. Doty also highlights the problem of variation. If a work is defined by all the examples (“tokens”) of it, how can we determine whether two examples, that are not identical, are part of

the same work? No two productions of Hamlet are alike, nor are two individual performances of a production identical. He problematizes this “token” idea, saying that a performance of Hamlet will not change the general definition of the work Hamlet.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Existing models for performing arts***

Based on performance-related data models from 12 projects around the world, Bollen identifies four different levels of determination related to theater performances: Performance, Event, Production, and Work.<sup>13</sup> Performance is something that occurs in one place, at one specific time – the specific performance you watch one evening. Event is defined by its title, date range, and place, and can as such be a play performed on one stage every night for a week. A Production is defined as “the creative collaboration of a temporary ensemble of contributors—a creative team, a cast of actors and a production crew—presenting one or more event.”<sup>14</sup> Work is described as it is defined in IFLA LRM: a distinct intellectual or artistic creation that exists as an abstract entity. Bollen presents these four concepts on a linear scale, ranging from actual to virtual, reflecting how we experience them. He points out that information systems usually present users with the widest and most abstract concepts as points of entry, but performances work the opposite way: “When artists and spectators talk about the experience of a performance, the performance comes to stand in for the event, the event for the production, and the production for the work.”<sup>15</sup> The work becomes an extrapolation of the experience that is the performance.

Bollen also mentions another challenge related to performances: How much can you change a production, an event, or a performance before it becomes something else? Can you change the actors, the crew, or the place of the performance? The audience will likely agree that they saw the same production, even if they saw two different performances.

### ***The concept of work in existing models***

In the 1990s, museums and libraries began developing conceptual models to describe the domain covered by their databases.<sup>16</sup> Conceptual models are models that are independent from physical considerations, and they describe entity types and the relation between them.<sup>17</sup>

### ***IFLA LRM***

IFLA Library Reference Model is a conceptual reference model developed for bibliographic information. It is a consolidation of previous independently developed FR-models: FRBR, FRAD, and FRASAD.<sup>18</sup> LRM defines the entity LRM-E2 Work as something abstract: the intellectual or the

artistic content of a creation, and an important point is that the work comes into existence at the same time as the first LRM-E3 Expression is created, which is when the first LRM-E4 Manifestation is created.<sup>19</sup> LRM is not specifically intended for theater performances or performing arts in general. As concluded by Lee in an article discussing how performances are positioned in LRM and FRBR: “the performance itself is a shadow, only captured by what that performance leaves behind through objects, recordings, or similar.”<sup>20</sup> This, however, does not contradict the existence of performance as an abstraction equivalent to the LRM work entity. Any recorded performance may be considered an expression of a preexisting work, such as for recordings of a well-known symphony, or it may reflect a new work that is externalized by the production of the recording such as a movie production. Whether a new work comes into existence depends on changes in genre or form, and partly on the documentation practice and user needs. A movie production of Shakespeare’s Hamlet would be an expression of a new movie work that is an adaptation of the original written play, whereas the audio recording of an opera performance would be considered to directly realize the original opera work. Whether a recorded theater performance would be considered a realization of the preexisting play, or a new work created by the director or other agents involved, is not answered by the LRM model itself. This determination much be made based on the context in which the model is applied.

### **FRBRoo**

FRBRoo is an object-oriented model based on FRBR (the predecessor to LRM).<sup>21</sup> It was designed as an extension of the CIDOC Conceptual Reference Model, but also elaborates on the definitions in FRBR by adding numerous subtypes for the main FRBR entities.<sup>22</sup> Although FRBRoo now is obsolete and replaced by LRMoo, it is still an interesting case to discuss as it defined entity types tailored to the documentation of theater performances: F20 Performance Work, F25 Performance Plan, and F31 Performance. F20 Performance Work was a sub-type in an intricate hierarchy of work types defined in FRBRoo: defined as the overarching idea of the intellectual or emotional content the creators of the performance wanted to convey to the audience – the set of concepts used to create a set of performances.<sup>23</sup> FRBRoo was based on the assumption that a new F20 Performance Work comes into existence when a performance is created, and it is realized as F25 Performance Plan – a subtype under F2 Expression. The actual performances are instances of F31 Performance, a subtype of the CRM class E7 Event. Performance instances are related to instances of Performance Plan, but they can also be related to instances of the CRM class E89 Propositional Object, which is a supertype for the hierarchy of work-types in FRBRoo. Doty points out that it is somewhat

unclear whether F25 Performance Plan makes a distinction between an abstract plan, and a physical representation of such a plan, for example a director's script with notes.<sup>24</sup>

The notion that the work we should identify for a theater performance is the director's intellectual contribution is supported by both Weiberg and Doty in their discussions of challenges in modeling theater. Doty describes something he calls Performance-work which corresponds to the entity type with the same name in FRBRoo.<sup>25</sup> He believes that the written play is not performed because the audience does not experience the written text. At the same time, he is of the opinion that this written play is not a complete work, because the point of it is that it should be performed and that is how it is experienced. Thus, it is only complete as a work when it is performed. This, in some ways, counters the idea of work as something overarching and abstract but emphasizes that it is not the text itself that is performed. When Weiberg discusses the challenge of what the work is in performing arts, none of the alternatives he lists are the textual work.<sup>26</sup> He asks if it is the production or the actual performance, and this makes it clear that he considers that the dominant work is the intellectual creation of the director/choreographer/etc. He also points out that FRBRoo was a satisfactory enough solution for the time being.

### *LRMoo*

LRMoo is a major revision and update of the FRBRoo model.<sup>27</sup> As for FRBRoo, it is an object-oriented implementation of IFLA LRM developed as an extension to CIDOC CRM. It represents a simplification of FRBRoo, by removing many of the subclasses that mainly differed in naming and description. The intricate hierarchy of work types is removed, including the designated Performance Work, as well as other classes and properties that redefined WEMI for various purposes.<sup>28</sup> Whereas FRBRoo tended to encourage defining a work for any intellectual activity, LRMoo is more aligned with the original conceptualization of work as defined by IFLA LRM. F31 Performance is, however, retained to enable more elaborate or explicit documentation of recorded performances. LRMoo allows an instance of F31 Performance to be linked to an instance of F1 Work through the property R80 performed, such as "original play" in one case or a "production work" in another case. However, LRMoo (and LRM) restrict works to creations for which there is at least one expression, potentially limiting the use of F31 Performance when it comes to performances that are not associated with anything that realizes the work in a tangible form. If such a performance is recorded, however, a new work is born to which the performance can be linked. Additionally, instances of F31 can be related to additional resources using the property P16 used specific object, such as a specific translation or adaptation of a play.

LRMoo is rather flexible in modeling performances and their relationships. It is based on the CRM E7 Activity class, which can be used to represent intricate structures of related or composite events, associated agents, and also includes generic properties for associating any kind of physical or immaterial object to the event, such as the property P15 was influenced by. A performance can be explicitly linked to an expression that captures the performance through the F28 Expression Creation event and the property R81 recorded. Alternatively, since both Expression Creation and Performances are subtypes, the performance can be included as a part of the overall expression creation process. In general, LRMoo is intended to be a generic and easier-to-apply model for performance and the intellectual contributions we associate with performances. Relating LRMoo to the levels presented by Bollen, LRMoo has the opportunity to express Work through F1 Work, and aspects such as Performance, Event, and Production through F31 Performance or other subclasses of the CRM E5 Event.

### **SPA**

SPA is the upcoming Swiss performing arts database, which utilizes classes and properties from several existing models, including CIDOC-CRM, FRBRoo, and RiC (a conceptual model for archival records).<sup>29</sup> Among other things, SPA implements the classes F20 Performance Work and F31 Performance from FRBRoo. A main difference from FRBRoo is the distinction between production and performance, which is solved by introducing a new class for production that performances can relate to. In addition, SPA has a designated entity type Series of Performances to express a set of performances within a production that have something in common, such as the venue. By including these additional elements, SPA has the opportunity to more explicitly represent all 4 levels described by Bollen: Performance, Event, Production, and Work. SPA, however, assumes an understanding of work similar to that of FRBRoo's. The performance is primarily related to the director's intellectual creation (Performance Work). Any specific text, music and other elements that are used, are expressions incorporated into the Performance Plan.

### **The concept of work in performance-related databases**

An overview of European databases for performing arts by Baptist et al. was used as a starting point for understanding how the concept of work was represented in existing databases.<sup>30</sup> After excluding databases based on criteria relating to language, website functionality, and content, we identified seven databases that in some way include the concept of work. These are: IbsenStage, Staging Beckett, Sceneweb, Internet UK Theatre



Database, ATI's Theater Productions Database, and APGRD Productions Database.

The fundamental characteristic that all these databases have in common is that they somehow describe the performing aspect (production, event, performance, listing) and what was performed (play, work, original, original work, script). This can be compared to the way Holden describes the notion that creative activity has two components: the idea and the carrier.<sup>31</sup> In this case: what the performance performs and the performance itself.

When the databases represent the performing-aspect, they usually use the production level. Only IbsenStage and ONSTAGE use another entity type, respectively event and performance. Internet UK Theatre Database uses both production and listing (equivalent to event). It seems as if there is no perceived need for an entity-type related to the individual performances in database settings. Instead, they focus on production. If one looks at the conceptual models, FRBRoo, LRMoo, and SPA make it possible to express the individual performances, but only SPA has an entity type reserved for the production. In FRBRoo and LRMoo, the production level can be expressed by using the entity type that represents performance, in that a "performance" can consist of many performances or describe just a single one.

When we look at how databases implement what is being performed, IbsenStage and Staging Beckett come closest to the version of work that IFLA LRM describes. Sceneweb also seems to consider some sort of overarching work, calling it "original work," even if they themselves state it as an entry for the script. Apart from these three databases, the others seem to use the actual text that underlies the performance, such as translations, adaptations, or the original text. This is in fact comparable to LRM's entity type Expression. Whether this can be described as their interpretation of the work concept is uncertain.

The databases are constructed to be able to represent translations or adaptations in different ways. This can be achieved either by having separate entity types, establishing relations between manuscripts, connecting productions directly to the adapted play, or emphasizing the roles of those involved (e.g. "translator"). In order to express both the original work and the adaptation, it would be preferable to link a production to an adaptation that is already connected to a work. In this way, it is possible to get an overview of the productions relating to a work, and productions relating to a specific adaptation. However, the challenge with this solution is that it relies on the production being "based on" a particular textual resource. Consequently, the databases would need to include an entity type representing the original text, which is then further linked to the work - LRM's work and expression entities. However, what if the databases contain improvised performances, for example? Then one would not be able to connect it to something textual, which is the common

practice across databases. Some databases address this issue by including performances that are not linked to anything textual at all and are only being presented as productions without having relations to anything other than the actors involved.

Would this problem have been solved by using a model that designates the director as the creator of the *work* that the performance performs? Then, incorporating a possible textual *work* in some other way, for example through an adaptation relation? This can be done using the models FRBRoo, LRMoo, and SPA, but it could become an unnecessarily complicated solution for many databases.

### **The concept of work from theater researchers' perspectives**

To get a user perspective on what work is in theater performances, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five researchers whose main focus in their research is the famous Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. This selection was made as researchers who focus on theater are likely to use databases utilizing data models including some sort of work/theater-relation. Among the five researchers, there were theater scholars, literary scholars, and historians, all of whom had done research on theater. The researchers' main research focus included both the texts of the playwright, as well as the performances of the plays. The informants will, in this paper, each be referred to by a female name from Ibsen's plays. These names are used regardless of gender identity and have no special connections to the informants. This has been done to preserve anonymity and increase the readability of the text. Five informants were interviewed for this project, hereafter referred to as Gina, Katrine, Rita, Helene, and Agnes. Two of the informants were men, three were women, and the age range spanned approximately thirty years. All the quotes have been translated from Norwegian to English.

### **Method**

The interviews consisted of three main themes. Firstly, the informants' knowledge and use of the theater performance database IbsenStage. Secondly, the informants' research interests, and thirdly, their understanding of the concept of work in relation to theater performances. The latter was discussed using four examples. These four examples were events from IbsenStage and were represented with pictures from the program or webpage of the production:

1. *Peer Gynt ved Gålåvatnet* (2013)
2. *A Doll's House* at Young Vic Theatre in London (2013)

3. *Peer!* at Hålogaland teater in Tromsø (2009)
4. *Enemy of the Duck – Vildanden og En Folkefiende* at Nationaltheatret in Oslo (2016)

The first example is a well-known Norwegian production of Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*. It is regarded as a performance faithful to the original text.

The second example is an English performance of an Ibsen play, which is based on a translated version of the original text. This adds a change that may be interpreted differently by the informants regarding what constitutes a new work.

The third example is a substantially edited version of Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*. It was adapted by Knut Nærum and describes itself as being made "freely based on *Peer Gynt*." It has been shortened, songs have been added, and the plot has been adapted to fit a younger audience. Still, the underlying story remains the same. The script for this version is also published separately with Knut Nærum listed as author in the library metadata.

The last example is a production that combined two of Ibsen's plays. Characters were removed, text was cut, new text was written, and roles were combined. This is an example in which the performances are very far from Ibsen's original plays. It also problematizes the suggestion that a performance can be an expression of one work, as it is based on two separate plays by Ibsen. The text used in this production is also available separately as a digitized manuscript, which in turn has been translated.

The informants were presented with each event in the order presented above, and for each event they were instructed to describe what it was. This was an open question to let them articulate their first impressions of what the events were. This was followed up by discussions on topics such as who the creator of each of the events was, how the events were related to Ibsen, what the work that was performed was, and who the creator of the work was. They were also asked what they themselves think when hearing the term "work," and a more specific question about whether they could reflect on when a production is a version of Ibsen's work, and when it becomes its own work. At the very end, we briefly explained the four main entity types in IFLA LRM and asked for their thoughts on these in relation to theater.

Each interview was transcribed immediately after it was held, and a systematic coding of the transcribed material was done when all interviews were transcribed. This resulted in seventeen themes within five overarching topics. The five topics were adaptation, general understanding of the concept of work, the work concept in theater, creators of the events, and Ibsen's role. In this paper we focus on the topics relating to the informants' understanding of the concept of work and their understanding of the work concept in theater.

### **What is a work?**

Through sorting the codes, three themes relating to the informants' understanding of the concept of work were identified: work as something physical, work as something abstract, and work as intellectual property.

Generally, the informants largely see work as something physical - or at least consider that the work must have something physically published as a starting point. This perspective is shared by Helene, Katrine, Rita, and Agnes. Katrine and Rita relate the use of the term work to their own research, where they describe the original texts as work. Agnes takes issue with the LRM definition of work:

Here, work sounds like a kind of floating idea [...] which can be problematized in many ways. This kind of platonic idea that hovers above and holds all of these other things together. And I don't think one should think that.

When discussing work as an abstract concept, Agnes mentions the database *Henrik Ibsens skrifter* (a digital edition of everything Ibsen wrote) and describes how you cannot reproduce any editions because all editions will be slightly different. Agnes follows up by saying that the idea of a work behind it all can thus be problematized. Helene describes a work as a collective category originating in a text that can live on in various forms, but she "would say that the first edition is the work."

Another aspect of the researchers' perception of works is intellectual property, or "åndsverk" in Norwegian (literal translation: intellectual work). Intellectual property is covered by the Copyright Act and for something to be considered intellectual property - and to have copyright protection - it must have a so-called "verkshøyde" (literal translation: work height), a level of originality. This point is raised by both Gina and Agnes. Gina says explicitly that she thinks of intellectual property when hearing the term work, but that this is a problematic definition because it is difficult to determine what intellectual property exactly is. Agnes is quite sure that all four of the examples would have had problems with copyright related to Ibsen if he had not been in the public domain.

### **What is a work in theater?**

Six themes were identified relating to the informants' understanding of the concept of work in theater, and three of these related to what the work in theater is. Most of the researchers perceived that in the examples given, it was Ibsen who was responsible for the work. Other perceptions identified included the view that the creator of the work was either the person who wrote the specific script or adaptation, or the director who staged the production. Several researchers highlighted that what the creators of the performance communicated was decisive for what they

considered to be the work. They believed that if the creators referred to Ibsen in any way, they wanted the audience to see it with that in mind, and thus the play was Ibsen's work. Others were more concerned with whether the title had been changed and believed that this could determine it was a new work, even if the performance still strongly referred to Ibsen: "I think when it is already reflected in the title of the performance – the title has changed from the original title – they create a clear impression that 'we are inspired by Ibsen, but we have made our own choices.'"

## Discussion

It is unclear what Agnes finds problematic about work as an overarching abstract entity when referring to the fact that all editions differ from each other, as the abstract understanding of work in LRM promotes precisely this. Though all the editions embody the work *Little Eyolf*, none of the editions – manifestation – are identical. Agnes is referring to literature, but this also illustrates to a certain extent the informant's inexperience with this way of thinking. The informants do not have experience with thinking of a work as something abstract, and it can therefore be difficult to immediately grasp what it means and what implications it has for thinking about editions, and the like. This is also something to keep in mind when hearing their opinions on work in theater.

Helene's understanding of work can be compared to LRM's abstract definition of work. Especially if you interpret Helene's perception that the first edition represents the work, viewing it as the creation of the work. A work cannot be created without an expression and a manifestation; thus, the original edition may be perceived as the work's originating point and creation. However, it is not accurate to equate the work and the first edition.

Addressing the notion of work as "åndsverk," the ephemeral existence of a performance complicates the distinction between intellectual property and non-intellectual property. The Norwegian law on intellectual property explicitly states that stage works are protected by copyright, and thus emphasizes that these performances can be intellectual property.<sup>32</sup> However, it does not specify what makes a stage work an intellectual property. The tangible script as a unique intellectual work presents no contention, as it is a physical creation, and neither does the music used in the performance. But what about the director's choices in music, staging, and setting?

Agnes' assertion that all the performances would be met with copyright issues may imply a belief that they are all Ibsen's work. However, does the use of Ibsen's intellectual property negate the possibility that that these performances can be their own intellectual property? The Norwegian law on intellectual property states that adaptations of works (including texts

and stage works) can also be regarded as intellectual property and that “Copyright does not prevent the creation of new and independent works by using existing works.”<sup>33</sup> Agnes’ focus on intellectual property is situated in the belief that it is Ibsen’s intellectual property that is used, while Gina focuses on the fact that a performance itself could also be intellectual property.

The researchers have different thresholds for determining when a work is no longer Ibsen’s, but rather a new work. Here the concept of adaptation comes into play. According to adaptation theory, an adaptation can, for example, be a change of medium or frame/context.<sup>34</sup> This is also supported by LRM, where an adaptation from one art form to another is considered a new work.<sup>35</sup> In Gina’s interpretation of adaptations and understanding of work, an adaptation will automatically become a new work because it introduces new interpretations. Rita agrees that in theater lingo everything would be adaptations, but she still believes that the given examples perform Ibsen’s work. Thus, according to the adaptation theory, what one would consider an adaptation does not necessarily constitute a new work in her eyes. Among those who believe that adaptations are major changes, Katrine establishes the most explicit boundary. She singles out *Peer!* and *Enemy of the Duck* as having undergone major changes and thereby classifies these as adaptations. She attributes this to textual changes, noting that these are the screenwriter’s work. Diverging from the traditional understanding of what constitutes an adaptation, her interpretation does not equate a change in the medium to an adaptation, focusing more on modifications in the content itself.

### ***The researchers’ perceptions of work in theater in relation to existing models and databases***

#### ***The director’s creation***

“In my mind, text is one work, adaptation is one work, and production is another work,” Gina states, asserting that it becomes a distinct work “in the moment it starts living on stage.” Her interpretation of work is supported by her statement that everything is adaptation, and that all performances involve reimagining the original through the artistic choices made in acting and staging.

Rita adopts a similar understanding of work after being explained the IFLA LRM model and compares what in theater studies is called a performance text to the notion that the performance is a separate work. Performance text encompasses everything you experience and see in a performance, extending beyond just the text itself and what is said. A performance can be seen as an expression of a work, where the work is the performance text. Rita allows for the possibility that there may be

an interpretation of the work concept in theater that, to some extent, is supported by theater science. However, she distances herself from this perception by saying “if you think of it like that, there is an equivalent between textual work and theatrical expression as a work.”

The performance as the expression of the original author’s work is a way of thinking that resembles FRBRoo and SPA. These models have the entity type F20 Performance Work, what one wants to convey to the audience - the emotional/intellectual content, and F25 Performance Plan, which includes everything you do on stage. Gina distinguishes this to a certain extent by reflecting on intentionality: “the adaptation is probably further away from Ibsen’s original text, but not necessarily further away from Ibsen’s intention.” This suggests that she makes a distinction between the on-stage manifestations and the motivations underlying them. This could be interpreted to mean that the director’s intention does not need to differ from Ibsen’s intention - which can align her perception of intention with F20 Performance Work. This interpretation of work can also be articulated through LRMoo if we assume that F1 Work can be used in the same way as F31 Performance Work in FRBRoo: that it can be the director’s work. This understanding of work is not evidently presented in the databases. Instead, those who have a work entity type base it either on the script for the performance or on the work that the performance (or the script for it) is based on.

### *The scriptwriter’s creation*

Katrine’s understanding of work is primarily physical and textual but takes into account adaptations and translations to a greater extent than Rita, Helene, and Agnes. She attributes the work in *Peer Gynt på Gålå* and *A Doll’s House* to Ibsen, but this is not the case for the two other examples:

And then Peer! I think that it is based on Peer Gynt, but the play that is performed, that is a play called Peer! which was created by Knut Nærum. [...] And here [Enemy of the Duck] I also think that .... It’s a little more difficult. But here it is really ... neither Vildanden nor En folkefiende is being performed, it is a new play called Enemy of the Duck. [Laughs]. Which has also borrowed characters from two of Ibsen’s plays. Yes. It’s something like that.

Her clear distinction in who the creator of the work is in case of *Peer Gynt at Gålå* and *A Doll’s House*, and *Peer!* and *Enemy of the Duck* implies that for Katrine, the primary responsibility for the script is important to determine who is the creator of the work. In her perspective, a greater change of the textual basis is an adaptation that creates a new work. This perception of work in theater also requires a clear definition of work in relation to the literary texts. The question is whether this understanding

of work, compared to seeing it as the original author's creation, is based on their understanding of works in theater or works in general. All the informants (apart from Gina) believe that it is the script creator's work that is played in the theater. What differentiates them is how they define the textual work. It appears that more significant changes are needed before Rita, Helene, and Agnes consider a textual work to no longer be Ibsen's work. Concurrently, Agnes' description of Ibsen's work as the raw material for all the performances suggests that something has happened to this material – it is no longer the same, and Rita describes the works on which the script is based. In addition, both Agnes and Rita highlight the playwright/adaptor when discussing who the creator of the performance is. They believe that the script that forms the basis of the performances has been adapted, but they still believe that Ibsen is the creator of the work being performed.

Katrine's perception of work as the playwright's creation echoes in several databases. There are, as mentioned, two main elements in the databases: the productions and what the productions are based on. Multiple databases prioritize the script underpinning the production supplementary to, or in place of, the "original version" the production references. However, models such as FRBRoo and SPA do not seem to support this view, as they perceive a performance as always originating from an F20 Performance Work. In FRBRoo's definition, it is pointed out that the expressions included in the performance (the text of the piece being staged, music, etc.) are not included in F20 Performance Work but are included in F25 Performance Plan.<sup>36</sup> Thus, according to these models, one cannot say for *Peer!* that it is playwright Knut Nærum's work that is performed.

LRMoo appears to better harmonize with this understanding of the work by enabling linking an F31 Performance directly to an F1 Work. It rather depends on how one defines Knut Nærum's *Peer!*: as a separate work – bibliographically speaking – or as an expression of Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*? LRMoo does permit expressing that it is Knut Nærum's *Peer!* – the work – that is performed. It also relates this work to the original work by Ibsen as an adaptation.

### ***The original writer's creation***

The respondents Rita, Helene, and Agnes are of the opinion that all four examples are Ibsen's work, implying the work in a theater performance aligns with the foundational text underlying the performance. If we, for example, consider a Norwegian abbreviated production of Hamlet, the work would be Hamlet by William Shakespeare. This view disregarded disciplinary variances as the three informants' backgrounds span across history, literature, and theater studies.



When Helene describes the works in the performances, she does say that they are Ibsen's works, but she uses moderating words. "I would, like usually, say that it is Ibsen's works and that he is the creator of the works." Utilizing "like usually" insinuates that this is perhaps the simple answer and that it could be more complicated in other contexts. Rita states that in a database setting, she would say that *Peer Gynt* is the work in a performance, but that it can be different in a research setting. This insight demonstrates the possibility of inherent nuances, suggesting that the work's definition relies on its application, resulting in distinct interpretations within a database and a research project. In addition, she grounds her perception in IbsenStage's definition of a work. These respondents do not firmly adhere to the idea that the original creators are responsible for producing the work; instead, the present circumstances and settings drive this belief. Given their Ibsen-oriented research, their opinion that Ibsen is the creator of the works is to be expected. They do their research on Ibsen and were asked about performances based on Ibsen's works, taken from an Ibsen-related database they are familiar with.

Agnes is firm on the fact that the first three examples are Ibsen's works but acknowledges that it becomes more challenging when you come across an adaptation with such huge changes as *Enemy of the Duck*. Despite this, she does end up concluding that all the examples are Ibsen's works, attributing this to her belief that they would be considered so legally.

This perception, that the creator of the original version of a theater script is also the creator of the work in performance, can be found in Bollen.<sup>37</sup> He describes that the work *A Doll's House* also includes productions, scripts, and adaptations, without explicitly specifying the threshold for when something would become a new work. Each performance of *A Doll's House* may give the audience a greater understanding and insight into the work *A Doll's House*, but as Doty points out, these performances cannot change the definition of the work.<sup>38</sup>

Rita, Helene, and Agnes' belief that the work in performance is the work of the original author, can also be found in several of the databases – particularly the two databases centered on one specific playwright (IbsenStage and Staging Beckett). This perception of work confronts the same challenges as the belief that the performance is the scriptwriter's work, as both stem from textual works. According to both FRBRoo and SPA, a performance is the director's work - i.e. something that would not exist without the performance. The work *Peer Gynt* can exist without a theatrical performance having been made because it was primarily created textually. LRMoo also covers this understanding of the concept of work, for the same reasons it works for the belief that the performance is the scriptwriter's work: the model permits a performance performing an F1 Work.

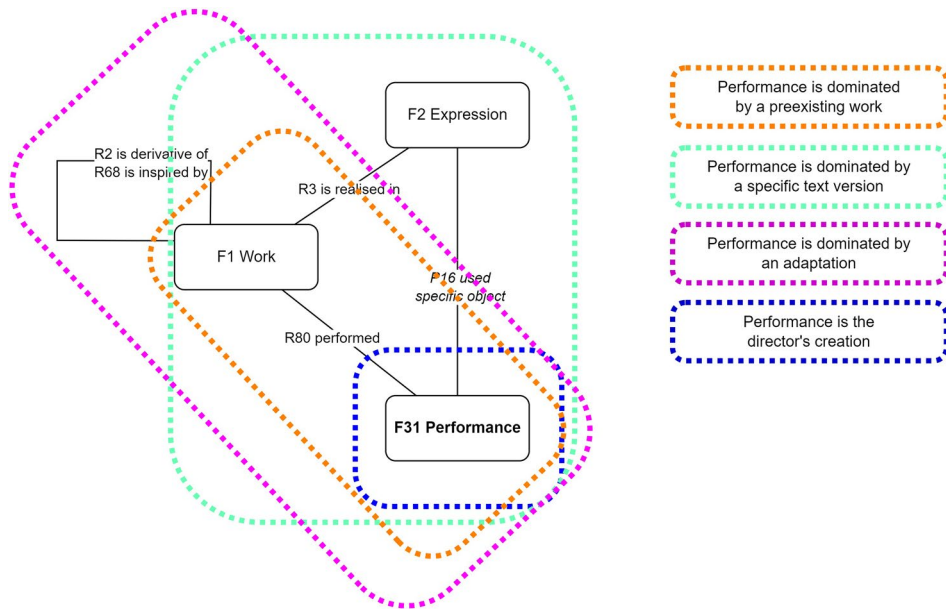
### ***The significant intellectual/artistic contribution***

An important lesson learned from the interviews is that there is no common agreement on how to interpret performances in relation to work. Respondents have different perspectives and make use of different interpretations of the term. In formal models such as the IFLA LRM, however, the work concept is well defined and placed in relation to other concepts such as performance. A main challenge with this solution seems to be the assumption that other entities such as performances or expressions, have lesser intellectual or artistic value. The individual interpretations we have identified can be summarized by presenting what they emphasize as the most significant intellectual or artistic contribution. Using classes and properties from LRMoo and borrowing the phrase “dominated by” to explain the relationship between a performance and whatever is considered the most significant intellectual or artistic contribution, we have illustrated this in [Figure 1](#).

The perspective of performance as dominated by preexisting work is shared by many and is tightly related to the practice of performing already published plays with a well-known identity. A variant of this view is that a performance is dominated by a specific text version, such as translation, abbreviation, or another variant. The examples used in the interviews include adaptations that, using LRM, could be identified as new works. This illustrates the perspective that a performance is dominated by an adaptation. It also implies that the source for the adaptation is recognized. The last perspective identified is that the performance is dominated by the director’s creativity. All these views can easily be depicted with the LRMoo classes and properties, but they represent viewpoints or selections that are fragments in a bigger picture.

### ***What generic model for work and theater performances best corresponds to the various perceptions?***

It is challenging to find one specific model that will cover the different perceptions which have emerged through the models, the databases, and the interviews with theater researchers. Models deal with overarching structures and try to make themselves general enough to include everything that can be described as a performance. They wish to make the concept of work open enough to include intellectual contributions of any form, including improvisational theater and other less traditional forms of theater. In contrast, databases are more definite and give the impression of being more pragmatic. All inspected databases are adapted to a specific intention and purpose but are not intended to be universally generic. The interviewed researchers, on the other hand, often focus on a single famous playwright or author, suggesting that they might consider this author as more important than theater scholars with a broader focus.



**Figure 1.** The relationship between a performance and whatever is considered the most significant intellectual or artistic contribution using classes and properties from LRMoo.

Based on the findings, LRMoo seems to be a model that has the ability to represent the various perceptions of work that have emerged in this research. A possible challenge using LRMoo is that it does not appear to include any specific classes to represent all the levels described by Bollen.<sup>39</sup> This is, however, supported through the classes and properties defined in the core CIDOC CRM. In SPA, on the other hand, you can use the specific “Performing Arts Production” for production and “Series of Performances” for event - in addition to “Performance” for performance. One can ask to what extent it is necessary to have separate entities that can represent these different levels. The databases do not focus on the singular performances in any detail, and instead use production or events. This was not an issue that was raised to any great extent by the informants either. One can still represent these levels in LRMoo and CRM, just less clearly than in SPA.

## Conclusion

This paper has explored various ways in which theater performances can be modeled, with emphasis on how the concept of work is understood and applied in this domain. This was done by using existing models and databases for theater performances, as well as by interviewing theater researchers.

In the existing models presented, there are three different understandings of the concept of work in relation to theater performances: the performance is always related to a performance work that is unique to

the staging production; the performance is always related to an author's drama-text, which is typically preexisting; and finally, the performance can be related to either or both. Regarding databases for theater performances, the vast majority are concerned with documenting the performance itself and what was performed. They have their own ways of linking these two elements together, and different definitions of what underlies the performances. Some describe work similar to LRM's definitions, and some use something more reminiscent of expressions. Choices seem to depend on the database's intent.

Concerning the researchers' understanding of the concept of the work, there are also three main variants: that the work in the performances is the work of the director or production, that the work in the performances is the work of the scriptwriter/adaptor, and that the work in the performance is the work of the original creator. The majority of the researchers promoted the third variant, which can be expected as they do research surrounding the playwright in question and are therefore more focused on Ibsen's contribution.

Of the conceptual models presented, LRMoo can represent all the perceptions of work we have identified. LRMoo allows for performance to be linked to a work - either a kind of literary work (whether it is by Ibsen or another author), or to link it to a work that represents the intellectual endeavor behind the performance production if such a work exists. FRBROo and SPA have constraints in the way that performance always performs the performance's work. Even though they represent a specific modeling of performances, the cost is a solution that is difficult to adapt to alternative views.

### **Further research**

A part of this paper has examined how theater researchers understand the concept of work in theater. Their research is focused on one specific playwright, and it would be beneficial to do a larger study with a broader selection of informants in the future. Interviewing either a general selection of theater scholars about the concept of work in theater, or people within other segments of the theater world, such as musical theater, improvisational theater, or theater that includes audience participation, would be beneficial for future research. This could shed light on even more perceptions of, and challenges surrounding, the work concept in the performing arts. Studies on how these entities support the user tasks defined for the primary users of the data would also contribute to the understanding of what is the best documentation practice.

This paper has dealt with only a small proportion of what can be referred to as arts, and other forms of art will have other challenges.

It could therefore be useful to delve deeper into what place the concept of work has in other types of art, both performing arts, for example opera, ballet, magic shows, as well as other forms of resources such as live streams and video games.

## Notes

1. David Miller and Patrick Le Boeuf, “‘Such Stuff as Dreams Are Made On’: How Does FRBR Fit Performing Arts?” *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 39, no. 3–4 (2005): 151–78, doi:10.1300/J104v39n03\_10, 158.
2. Pat Riva, Patrick Le Boeuf, and Maja Žumer, “IFLA Library Reference Model: A Conceptual Model for Bibliographic Information,” IFLA Publications, 2018, <https://repository.ifla.org/handle/123456789/40>; CIDOC CRM Special Interest Group, “Definition of the CIDOC Conceptual Reference Model,” May 2023, <https://www.cidoc-crm.org/versions-of-the-cidoc-crm>.
3. Martin Doerr, Patrick Le Boeuf, and Chryssoula Bekiari, “FRBRoo, a Conceptual Model for Performing Arts” (paper presented at The Digital Curation of Cultural Heritage ICOM-CIDOC Annual Meeting, Athens, Greece, September 15–18, 2008), 8, [https://cidoc.mini.icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2018/12/29\\_papers.pdf](https://cidoc.mini.icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2018/12/29_papers.pdf).
4. Birk Weiberg, “Modeling Performing Arts: On the Representations of Agency,” *Arti dello Spettacolo/Performing Arts* 6 (2020): 50–6, doi:10.17613/6tsm-4787, 50.
5. Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2014), 18.
6. Doerr, Le Boeuf, and Bekiari, “FRBRoo, a Conceptual Model for Performing Art,” 8–9.
7. Christopher Holden, “The Definition of the Work Entity for Pieces of Recorded Sound,” *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 53, no. 8 (2015): 873–94, doi:10.1080/01639374.2015.1057886, 874.
8. Chris Holden, “The Bibliographic Work: History, Theory, and Practice,” *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 59, no. 2–3 (2020): 77–96, doi:10.1080/01639374.2020.1850589, 78.
9. Holden, “The Bibliographic Work: History, Theory, and Practice”; Kevin Kishimoto and Tracey Snyder, “Popular Music in FRBR and RDA: Toward User-Friendly and Cataloger-Friendly Identification of Works,” *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (2015): 60–86, doi:10.1080/01639374.2015.1105898; Marcos Fragomeni Padron, Fernando William Cruz, and Juliana Rocha de Faria Silva, “Extending the IFLA Library Reference Model for a Brazilian Popular Music Digital Library,” *International Journal on Digital Libraries* 21, no. 3 (2020): 289–306, doi:10.1007/s00799-020-00277-5.
10. Dominique Bourassa, “Library Cataloging Reforms and Their Impact on Choreographic Works,” *Dance Chronicle* 38, no. 2 (2015): 233–42, doi:10.1080/01472526.2015.1042948.
11. Colin Doty, “The Difficulty of an Ontology of Live Performance,” *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 9, no. 1 (2013), doi:10.5070/d49101561, 2.
12. Doty, “The Difficulty of an Ontology of Live Performance,” 6.
13. Jonathan Bollen, “Data Models for Theatre Research: People, Places, and Performance,” *Theatre Journal* 68, no. 4 (2016): 615–32, doi:10.1353/tj.2016.0109, 624.
14. *Ibid.*, 625.

15. Ibid., 627.
16. Patrick LeBoeuf, "... That Struts and Frets His Hour Upon the Stage and Then Is Heard No More ...": The Elements That Should Be Accounted for in a Conceptual Model for Performing Arts and the Information Relating to Their Archives" (paper presented at "De la conception à la survie: comment documenter et conserver les productions du spectacle multimedia?," Paris, January 13, 2006), 1.
17. Thomas Connolly and Carolyn Begg, *Database Systems: A Practical Approach to Design, Implementation, and Management*, 6th ed. (Essex: Pearson, 2015), 505.
18. Riva, Le Boeuf, and Žumer, "IFLA Library Reference Model: A Conceptual Model for Bibliographic Information," 9.
19. Riva, Le Boeuf, and Žumer, "IFLA Library Reference Model: A Conceptual Model for Bibliographic Information," 21–23.
20. Deborah Lee, "Documenting Performance and Contemporary Data Models: Positioning Performance within FRBR and LRM," *Proceedings from the Document Academy* 5, no. 1 (2018); Miller and Le Boeuf, "Such Stuff as Dreams Are Made On."
21. International Working Group on FRBR and CIDOC CRM Harmonisation, "FRBR: object-oriented definition and mapping from FRBRER, FRAD and FRSAD," September 2017, [https://www.cidoc-crm.org/frbroo/sites/default/files/FRBRoo\\_V3.0.pdf](https://www.cidoc-crm.org/frbroo/sites/default/files/FRBRoo_V3.0.pdf).
22. Pat Riva, Maja Žumer, and Trond Aalberg, "LRMoo, a High-Level Model in an Object-Oriented Framework" (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2022), <https://repository.ifla.org/handle/123456789/22172>, 2.
23. Doerr, Le Boeuf, and Bekiari, "FRBRoo, a Conceptual Model for Performing Art"; International Working Group on FRBR and CIDOC CRM Harmonisation, "FRBR: Object-Oriented Definition and Mapping from FRBRER, FRAD and FRSAD."
24. Doty, "The Difficulty of an Ontology of Live Performance," 8.
25. Ibid., 2. [Database].
26. Weiberg, "Modeling Performing Arts."
27. IFLA LRMoo Working Group with the CIDOC CRM Special Interest Group, "LRMoo: Object-Oriented Definition and Mapping from IFLA LRM," September 2023, [https://cidoc-crm.org/frbroo/sites/default/files/LRMoo\\_V0.9.6.pdf](https://cidoc-crm.org/frbroo/sites/default/files/LRMoo_V0.9.6.pdf).
28. Ibid., 79.
29. SAPA Foundation, "SPA Specifications," <https://sapa.github.io/spa-specifications/> (accessed May 5, 2023).
30. Vincent Baptist, Julia Noordegraaf, and Thunnis Van Oort, "Mapping European Performing Arts Databases: An Inventory of Online Historical Theatre Data Projects," *TMG Journal for Media History* 24, no. 1–2 (2021).
31. Holden, "The Bibliographic Work: History, Theory, and Practice," 78.
32. Åndsverkloven, "Lov Om Opphavsrett Til Åndsverk," 2018, <https://lovdata.no/lov/2018-06-15-40>, §2.
33. Åndsverkloven, "Lov Om Opphavsrett Til Åndsverk," 2018, <https://lovdata.no/lov/2018-06-15-40>, §6. Our translation.
34. Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2013), 7–8.
35. Riva, Le Boeuf, and Žumer, "IFLA Library Reference Model: A Conceptual Model for Bibliographic Information," 22.
36. International Working Group on FRBR and CIDOC CRM Harmonisation, "FRBR: Object-Oriented Definition and Mapping from FRBRER, FRAD and FRSAD," 57.
37. Bollen, "Data Models for Theatre Research: People, Places, and Performance," 626.
38. Doty, "The Difficulty of an Ontology of Live Performance," 6.
39. Bollen, "Data Models for Theatre Research: People, Places, and Performance."

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## ORCID

Johanna Skaug  <http://orcid.org/0009-0001-3976-9330>

Trond Aalberg  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5593-0860>