Editorial

Christina Papagiannouli, Joanne Scott and Piotr Woycicki

Focusing on the theme of Inclusive Intermedialities, this affiliated issue has grown out of the Theatre and Performance Research Association's (TaPRA)1 Performance and New Technologies Working Group (see http://tapra.org/tapra-profiles/performance-and-new-tech/) that considers the ways in which new and emergent technologies impact upon contemporary theatre and performance practices. The group's work concerns digital technologies specifically, although its focus is not limited to a single technological paradigm. Co-founded by Andy Lavender and Jem Kelly (the first co-convenors of the group), Performance and New Technologies was among the first working groups established following TaPRA's foundation in 2004. Past convenors include Maria Chatzichristodoulou, Eirini Nedelkopoulou, Mary Oliver, Toni Sant and Martin Blain.

Members of the group share research into various technological developments, as well as ways in which theatre and performance adapt existing technologies. Other interests include body-technology interactions in performance, new configurations and extensions of *mise en scène*, as well as theatrical locations and performance sites made possible by telematic and other technologies. Members also research the ways in which theatre and performance are defined by developments in technology, both in presentation and reception, as well as the creative processes and production outputs of practitioners/companies whose work can be seen as 'technological'. The group facilitates a range of approaches, conducting its work through scholarly and practice-based enquiry, with the input of professional practitioners also welcomed.

In particular, this issue looks back at Performance and New Technologies Working Group presentations and discussions from the last two TaPRA conferences at Aberystwyth University (2018) and the University of Exeter (2019), as well as the 2019 interim event at the University of South Wales:

The Digital Performer and Social Media, TaPRA 2018

During the TaPRA 2018 conference, the group explored different modes of interaction and intimacy between performers, social media and audiences/participants, as well as looking at new strategies for performer training, rehearsing and performance documentation for the age of the internet. In making this call we used the term 'social media' in a broad way, to refer to 'any technology that allows two-way interaction between artists and audiences[/participants]' (Hadley 2017: 8). As highlighted by Bree Hadley (2017, see also Blake 2010), the use of social media in theatre has been seen as a 'game changer'. In this context, we explored what new tools and spaces social media offer to theatre and live performance and what opportunities and challenges social media bring to the digital performer/performance-maker, from new forms of audience/participant interaction to new performance training methodologies, to new rehearsal methods and documentation strategies.

The main themes that emerged included optionality and divided attention in social media, the role of performance documentation and archives in live and mediated performances, empathy and inclusiveness in immersive technologies, performer training (through a Joint Session with the Performer Training Working Group), active 'audiencing' and the digital performance of humanity. Presenters discussed practices such as dance and ballet, durational performance, immersive performance, live mixing and walking, flash mobs, popular performance, storytelling, headphone theatre and applied theatre.

Immersive and Interactive Technologies and Live Performance: VR/AR/MR practices, Interim 2019

Co-funded by TaPRA and the Media Music Drama research group at the University of South Wales, the 2019 interim event explored different practices and modes of immersive and interactive technologies in live performance, focusing on new narrative possibilities and audiences' virtual experiences in live performance created using immersive technologies. As Kerry Francksen and Sophy Smith (2018) note, '[t]he use of virtual reality (VR) technologies has seen a significant resurgence in both industry-led and artistic communities in recent times. This re-emergence can be linked to the continuing growth and advancement in smart phone technologies (e.g. developments in accelerometers and gyroscopic chips), as well as a significant interest within the games industry for developing a greater quality gaming experience.'

Inclusive Intermedialities?: engagement, interaction and discomfort in technologically enabled performance practices, TAPRA 2019

During the 2019 conference we turned our attention specifically to new modes of access, inclusion (and exclusion) as performed through contemporary practices engaging with new technologies, as well as the feeling qualities of these practices, through a focus on both empathic and disruptive connections between bodies, devices and computational processes. Our call referenced *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (2004: 109) in which Vivian Sobchak comments on the discrepancy between digitally compressed time and lived embodied experience. She claims that the digital image is 'intimately bound up in a centreless, network-like structure of the *present*, of instant stimulation and impatient desire'. In response to this, it was posited that in a culture saturated with digital imagery, the significance of lived embodied experience is compromised, which was an area we wanted to explore. Presentations and discussions centred on ideas of inclusion and access, as enabled and disrupted by new technologies employed in the making and presentation of performance. There was also a focus on the sometimes uncomfortable intersections between human and machine, particularly the ways in which a form of shapeshifting can happen between human and non-human processes and the types of failure involved in human-machine interactions.

Inclusive Intermedialities

Drawing on the presentations and discussions within our Working Group environments over the last two years, this issue aims to explore and reflect on new modes of engagement in contemporary intermedial practices. The issue invited contributors to think through these themes in an expanded sense, considering them through a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives. The title *Inclusive Intermedialities* refers to a definition of the term 'inclusive', which particularly focuses on the intersection of different forms of human and non-human agency in the intermedial practices considered and the facilitation of new modes of audience participation and inclusion in these events. The contributions reflect a variety of encounters that are emerging through new intermedial modes and their socio-political contexts. The notion of access is addressed through discussion about the nature of immersive theatre practice, the ways in which we experience virtual reality, the synergies and uneasy relations between us and our digital devices, as well as ways of reflecting on historical temporalities through emergent modes of transmedia and cyberformance.

The issue opens with Harry Robert Wilson's 'New Ways of Seeing, Feeling and Being: intimate encounters in virtual reality performance'. Written from a practice-as-research perspective, the article addresses notions of immersion, intimacy and distance in virtual reality performance practices. Drawing on Robin Nelson's extension of John Berger's 'ways of seeing', the author reconsiders ways of seeing, feeling and being with reference to Jordan Tannahill's *Draw Me Close* (2019), Marshmallow Laser Feast's *We Live in an Ocean of Air* (2019) and his own *and our faces, my heart, brief as photos* (2019) practice-as-research explorations. The article highlights some of the challenges and potentials

of embodied spectatorship in VR-enabled live performance through the lens of Immersive Theatre, Intermedial Performance and Installation Art.

Jo Scott's article offers a fresh perspective on contemporary intermedial performances by looking at two recent performances by Javaad Alipoor and Kirsty Housley - *Rich Kids: A History of Shopping Malls in Tehran (2019)* and *The Believers are but Brothers (2017)*. She argues that through their stripped back aesthetics and interrogative modes of intermedial performance these pieces present a departure from practices that employ spectacular digital scenographies as well as from 'sited, active and playful uses of handheld devices and networked engagements in mixed reality performance' (Scott 2020). The article focuses on how these pieces employ platforms such as Whatsapp and Instagram, in order to produce audience interactions, which generate 'productive uneasiness at the intersection of human action and digital process' (Scott 2020). The analysis of these case studies becomes a springboard to critically question and investigate postdigital concepts such as thinking digitally and the possibilities thereof as well as augmenting thinking around discourses of intermediality and critical writing around digital computation. Thus, the article offers an insightful analysis which inspires a critical re-thinking and re-evaluation of some of the recent tenets and postulates of discourses surrounding the post digital.

The article by Laura Gemini and Stefano Brilli considers the transmedial production of *Aldo Morto 54* by Compagnia Frosini/Timpano. The article sets up a robust theoretical framework for the analysis of the transmedial aspects of the piece by first considering a review of the recent critical literature concerning concepts of mediatisation, intermediality and transmedial logics. This elaborate theoretical exposé then becomes the basis for performance analysis, where the authors specifically look at 'the mediatisation of dramaturgy through the concept of transmedia; the mediatisation of theatrical presence, […] and the mediatisation of the theatrical relationship through social media (Gemini and Brilli 2020). The case study is well historicised, and the article convincingly argues that the use of media in the piece functions beyond the remit of a 'tool' or technical platform allowing for a construction of a socio-historical context that online and live audiences can engage with. The article also offers an insightful investigation of the complex performer-audience relationship that the piece entails, exploring the various aspects of its transmedial logic.

In her article 'Bio-camera and Bio Screen', Anna Makrzanowska introduces a set of performer training practices with smartphones, where the performer and the 'bio-object', following Kantor, have the same degree of agency. The exercises themselves, presented in the form of a photo-essay, are accompanied by a discussion of the 'everyday immanent synergy' that exists between us and our devices. This is harnessed and activated through the exercises where the 'unconsciously performed labour' of the smartphone intersects with the actions of the performers to create 'an inclusive non-hierarchical collaboration between performer and smartphone'. As Makrzanowska comments at the end of the article, our new post-Covid19 world is even more reliant on synergy with digital devices and processes and as such, the article acts as a productive prompt to re-form and re-think our relationships with non-human agencies, including those enacted through our smartphones.

This is followed by Christina Papagiannouli's 'Here we are sitting in a room waiting for Waiting for Brexit', a documentation of the performance *Waiting for Brexit*, performed on 6 September 2019 at the 2019 TaPRA Gallery, as part of the annual TaPRA conference in Exeter, by Christina Papagiannouli and Evi Stamatiou. The piece was a semi-adaptation semi-autobiographical cyberformance on UpStage, where 'participants were invited to share their own Brexit stories and messages before and during the live performance, while Breaking News, the Home Office, BOJO, MIGO and POTUS build their Brexit narratives' (Papagiannouli 2020). The documentation is a performative text that gives

insights into the process of developing the piece as well as performing it for online and on-site audiences.

The issue closes with Jorge Lopes Ramos, Joseph Dunne-Howrie, Persis Jadé Maravala and Bart Simon's 'Post-Immersive Manifesto'. The manifesto invites us to take stock of the failures of immersive theatre practice and seize its potential as a tool for social change. Presented at the Performance and New Technologies interim event in 2019, this experimental manifesto draws from five years of partnership between Technoculture, Arts & Games (Concordia University, Montréal) and ZU-UK (G.A.S. Station and MA in Contemporary Performance at University of Greenwich, London). Criticizing the consumerism of 'immersive' events, it suggests that '[w]e should not care about WHAT is immersive, as much as we must care about HOW is immersive, WHO is immersive BY and who is it FOR?'. This manifesto is not final. It is rather an artistic provocation and an invitation for a post-immersive approach centred on the human being.

The diversity of the articles and documents of the issue reflects the variety of technologies, forms and practices of the Performance and New Technologies Working Group members. Although it reflects on practical explorations and discussions before COVID-19, it also coincides with current debates on the use of new technologies for social-distancing purposes. All of the contributions foreground the importance of audience-inclusive engagement and collaboration in technology-enabled performance practices. The issue highlights the complex relationships between performers and audience and between human beings and technologies in intermedial practices, calling for an inclusive approach to audience engagement and participation. It offers new ways of thinking about expanded aspects of inclusion and access and ultimately, their purchase in an ever expansive 'postdigital' age.

References:

Blake, Elissa (2010) 'Geeks Tweets and Bums on Seats: How Social Media is Shaping the Arts in Australia'. *The Sydney Morning Heral.* 10 July. Available at: https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/theatre/geeks-tweets-and-bums-on-seats-20100709-103g8.html (Accessed: 30 April 2020)

Francksen, Kerry & Smith, Sophy (2018) 'Editorial', *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media*, 14:2, 127-129, DOI: 10.1080/14794713.2018.1528739

Hadley, Bree (2017) *Theatre, Social Media, and Meaning Making.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Sobchak, Vivian (2004) In Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture. University of California Press

TaPRA (2017) *About TaPRA: Our History and Ethos*. Available at: http://tapra.org/about-tapra/ (Accessed: 30 April 2020)

[1] TaPRA was formed in 2004 (first conference) by 'a group of senior academics in theatre and performance eager to promote the growth of research in the field by fostering a co-operative and collaborative ethos that would benefit postgraduate students, early career researchers and provide a platform for everyone interested in sharing the diverse discoveries of the discipline' (TaPRA, 2017).