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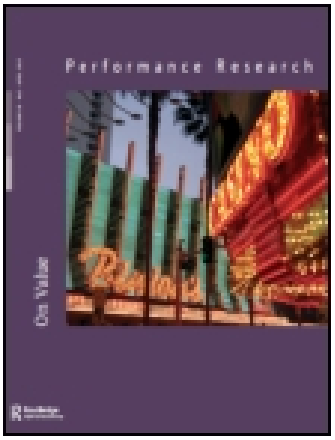

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Scenography of Virtual Sound-Stages

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Scenography of Virtual Sound-Stages

CHARLOTTE GRUBER

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What happens to the weight of a voice, to the actualization of agency in a world accompanied by the World Wide Web? Is the internet just an interactive archive, which oscillates between real-time script and scripted reality, or does it follow an ideal of intervention? How does a society marked by social media sound? Does the increase of communication media cease the creation of communitas? What does the possibility to post the private, to follow the foreigner and the choice between calling the mute or muting a call do to presence, performance, power and public space?

These are some of the questions which performance artists and collectives like Rimini Protokoll (*CallCutta*), Dries Verhoeven (*Sporenonderzoek*), Blast Theory (*Rider Spoke*) and Duncan Speakman (*We Are Forests*), to name but a few, tackle in their audio-aesthetic inquiries of virtual and actual urban realities. Performing outdoors, employing and questioning networking media and making the participants the main performers in their work, these artists address the clash of actual and virtual space in present everyday life. While in 1958 Hannah Arendt conceptualized the main condition of public space and human freedom to be the encounter between people, appearing among each other in action and speech, the mentioned performances face the schism of audio-track and bodily experience, of word and deed, sound and vision. By designing software and creating framework narratives that ask participants for contribution, mostly in form of voice recordings, their virtual sound-stages woven into lived cities raise awareness of the paradox of our simultaneous presence in both virtual and actual space. It is a divided presence, which can either be a halved or a doubled presence, a loss or a gain of encounter. They show that the modern environment is not just a multi-media one but inheres a multi-spatial component too. Taking this into account, these artists who analyze, create, negotiate and play with the different kinds of spatialities are rather scenographers than performers. They do not stage scenes but set up stages of appearance by creating interfaces of digital and urban encounter, which allow participants to perform a public space, reflecting on and hence reconnecting virtual and actual presence. These performances are large-scale scenographic artworks, which actually transform the world into a stage, everyday life into theatrical experience and voice-statements into sound-spaces of disclosure. Pedestrians become background actors, participants become performers and each performance is an unpredictable composition of actual and virtual space, myth and testimony, intention and coincidence, encounter and loneliness just like whispering voices and screaming street noises.

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