

On Intermediality

One of the delights of guest editing the journal *Culture, Language and Representation* on the concept of *Intermediality* has been the privilege of reading the rich response to the call for papers, which presented different perspectives «on intermediality» from many countries around the world. The feature that is common in all articles presented here is a shared interest in what happens when traditionally ascribed, ontologically separate art forms and a variety of different media meet, merge and cross-over into the territory of another. In their different ways, the authors assess the implications of the concept of intermediality and present an analysis of emergent academic frameworks and new fields of knowledge-making. Through their analysis of intermediality in literature, theatre, music, dance, art and digital technology they explore how intermediality impacts on learning, teaching and research about and into our cultural industries and heritage. Taken together, the articles reveal the potentially radical intermedial forces that are in play as a result of intermedial exploration across disciplines, academic areas, art forms, media and modes of learning.

Underpinning all of the articles, whether explicitly addressed or implicitly acknowledged, is digital technology – the new media – and its relationship to contemporary life. Whether it is through a practical exploration of the impact of new media applications on traditionally ascribed art forms, or through theoretical and historical insights into definitions of media and the inter-relationships of «new» and «old» media; the driving concern of the journal is the application and reception of digital technology into our lives – and the political and educational consequences of its arrival on our cultural consciousness.

For ease of reference, the content of the journal is divided into two sections: theory and practice, but, of course, they are inter-related and readers are invited to make the connections. The theoretical perspectives on intermediality, although written independently and from different perspectives, share a common interest in «change» – change in the ways that intermediality is conceptualised

in relation to existing paradigms of knowledge; exploration of the medial changes that happen through the process of creating intermedial work; the change in perspective that is achieved by the way that artists and audiences participate in intermedial practice; and the potential for radical change that is encompassed in the concept of intermediality, which has within its conceptual framework the idea of «becoming» – of moving into something else – of deconstructing existing paradigms and therefore of perceiving (and acting upon) the structures that control us, differently.

The journal begins with a concise overview of the terminology and conceptual field of intermediality in performance as interpreted by CHIEL KATTENBELT in «Intermediality in theatre and performance: definitions, perceptions and medial relationships». Kattenbelt provides clear definitions of multi-, trans-, and intermediality set in the discourse of the arts and media relationships. He locates intermediality in the then «new technologies» of the early twentieth century and the work of the Avant-garde, which was fundamental in breaking the illusions of reality established by nineteenth century art perspectives. Kattenbelt relates the Avant-garde fracturing of reality and manipulation of time and space to the work of contemporary theatre directors. Working at the book-ends of the twentieth century, both sets of artists, Kattenbelt argues, create artistically exciting intermedial performances where the mutual relations between materiality, mediality and aesthetic conventions of making and perceiving theatre are changed: redefined through performance that carries within it a «conscious striving for a breaking open of the cultural spheres and action domains».

The relationship of media definition and perception is expanded and set in a historical context by KATI RÖTTGER in «*F@ust vers. 3.0*: A (Hi)story of theatre and media». Acknowledging first that «there is a problem inherent in any useful and widely applicable definition of media» Röttger is impressive in her exploration and critique of a largely European discourse on media. Setting her contribution amongst the literature of Paech, Luhmann, McLuhan, Fiebach, Meyer, and the German philosopher Sybille Krämer, Röttger moves from preliminary reflections on media theory *per se*; to media theory in relation to theatre; then towards an intermediality of theatre; and finally to define theatre as an intermedial event and cultural practice. In her definition, Röttger proposes that intermediality in theatre has three important aspects. The first is embodiment; the second is performative; and the third is intermediality as an «epistemic condition of media perception». Röttger argues that media do not produce anything but they do restructure and stage new inter-relations, new perspectives and new viewpoints on the world; and that the most important thing about «a definition of theatre as a medium of vision is that it is a temporal event». She sets her ideas in the historical context of Goethe's use of the Faust-

legend to highlight two competitive orders of knowledge and media by presenting, on the one hand, «the romantic, electric, and Mephistotelian ways of seeing and, on the other hand, the classic, literal and scientific order of knowledge». She then applies her ideas through an analysis of how the Catalan theatre group Fura dels Baus transfer this conflict to the contemporary stage in a synthesis of text, music, video clips, the internet, lighting and actors. The manipulation of the actors to perform with and in the technology, and a remediation of the Faust legend, culminates in the performing bodies of the Fura dels Baus theatre group becoming enmeshed, literally and in a virtual sense, «in the net» on the stage. As the audience view the scene and actively play with the new media at the same time, so actor and audience all become players in an open cultural event, which leads to a reconceptualization of theatre as non-hierarchical and inter-active performance space.

The problematic place and space of «the body» of the actor in mediated performance is explored in greater detail by RALF REMSHARDT in «Beyond Performance Studies: mediated performance and the posthuman». Remshardt's aim is to set the discourse around intermedial performance within a larger context because «the discipline of performance studies has yet to find a coherent approach to the type of performance that is not grounded in the presence of the body». His position is that distributed performances, immersive virtual realities, televisual presence, digital avatars and computer generated images all demand that we think through the theoretical paradigms that have served us well in the past, but need now to be reconsidered. In his first section, he provides a very persuasive account of the current performance studies debate, from which he moves to argue that «the view that ties performance to individual human agency, to the performer and the body of the performer is a liability in the study of mediated performance».

In his second section, Remshardt considers «digital doubling» and the «presence of the body» on video and suggests that video repositions performance in the margins where «one mediated mode adjoins and creates tension with the other» and he asks what happens when personal agency is reduced, for example, when control of the performance is given to the computer programme or cybernetic system – as with Stelarc's *Fractal Flesh* and *Exoskeleton*, or through the deployment of an avatar. Remshardt considers that the categorical difference of computer generated images (CGI) is that it is «the performance of no-body emanating from no-space in no-time» and argues that as the body was the locus and raison d'être of performance theory, so the locus and raison d'être for posthuman performance theory is consciousness. Thus, Remshardt foregrounds the need for new theoretical and methodological modes of understandings about mediated posthuman performance in the context of the work of Gibson, Ascott, Hayles, Hofstadter, Birringer, Murphie, and Melrose. In

a short coda, Remshardt notices that theorists writing in the posthuman digital debate seem to hanker for categories that are tinged with nostalgia, such as «body», «presence» and «narrative». However, he concludes: «You can go back, they seem to say, only as long as you understand that there is no going back» and I think that many will agree with him.

In the final theoretical article, «Towards Intermediality in contemporary cultural practices and education» ASUNCION LÓPEZ-VARELA AZCÁRATE and STEVEN TÖTÖSY widen the debate by turning to negotiations of culture and education, and they explore how inter-cultural and educational practices employ new media. They argue that intermediality raises a number of issues that include social and cultural practices, education, aspects of globalization and the cultural industries. Considering intermediality from the perspective of comparative cultural studies – a theoretical and methodological framework built on tenets of (radical) constructivism, inter-disciplinarity, and the contextual and empirical study of culture –, Azcaráte and Tötösy look to fill the gap that exists in the social and humanities discourse relating to multimodal culture, where intermediality may be analysed as a relationship set in-between the employment practices of multimodal media in contemporary cultural practices and in education. Thus, they take us into the location and spaces where «intermediality and interdisciplinary study touch and then withdraw themselves from definite territorial demarcations as their points of encounter constantly shift». They argue that there is a need for a more complex theoretical understanding of intermedial processes and on the practical cultural implications of intermediality based in new media for its users. For them, intermediality is related to critical literacy, where intertextuality is defined as a first level intermediality through its narrative structures transgressing medial boundaries. They draw on McLuhan, Bolter and Grusin, Lehtonen, Muller *et al.*, to argue that «the sense and practice of agency and the very notion of mediation implies that media studies and related disciplines, such as comparative cultural studies, cannot continue to be seen as isolated monads but need to become part of more complex research networks, which work both in scholarship and education as well as in cultural practices in general».

Their idea of bringing together scholarship, education and cultural practices is witnessed in the development of web technology, which leads to issues around copyright, open access publishing, media literacy, knowledge management, the preservation of heritage and national objectives of cultural co-operation, which they identify as being located in historical and artistic patrimony, the strengthening of national identities and the expansion of their markets, which need to be orientated towards inter-cultural co-production. Azcaráte and Tötösy provide examples of intermedial practice by web users that are particularly pertinent at this moment of mass immigration and emigration within and outside

the European countries. Their research findings include those who are using web technology to create their own intermedial communities, and who are looking to find a space in cyberspace in which they can voice and express their identity and they conclude that «Both resistance and participation should replace resignation. Intermediality and the supplementary relations between subject and media always hinges on the notion of becoming. Becoming holds an “in-between” space, a gap between absence and presence that invites an analysis to the process of intermediality in terms of philosophies of difference (Derrida, 1967), as an opening up but also a crossing-over. Comparative bridges to cross over from the theoretical development, with its contingent application of intermediality to cultural remediation and back towards inter-culturality would advance society in all its contexts and processes». Thus, the radical potential of intermediality as a concept of change is expressed clearly and related to the need for social change in the global community, which digital technology brings together for all those who have the economic means to access it.

The links discernable in the theoretical contributions are mirrored in the practice-based articles. For example, LOUISE LEPAGE continues Remshardt’s theoretical discussion on consciousness and presents an extended exploration of Katherine Hayles’s work on posthuman ontology in her own article «Posthuman perspectives and postdramatic theatre: the theory and practice of hybrid ontology in Katie Mitchell’s *The Waves*». In an intriguing article that explores the intermedial implications of digital technology and the human body sharing central stage, Lepage suggests that there is a need to interrogate changing models of theatrical forms and subjectivity. Through her analysis of Katie Mitchell’s 2006-2007 National Theatre production she comes to the conclusion that «consciousness is specific to experiences of embodiment. There is no reality “out there”. *The Waves*, in effect, in its precise use of forms, argues that the production, the subject, and, by implication, the world, are formed of specific organisations which alter the very terms of cognition or consciousness. Such ways of perceiving ourselves and the world are challenging because traditional ontology is turned on its head. *The Waves* suggests that the subject is posthuman, a specifically and materially instantiated hybrid being, whose ways of thinking, perceiving, and being, are consequent of physical and emergent processes. In Mitchell’s world, there is no transcendental subject formed of mind and body».

In «Bound to Honour: the detention of David Hicks as performance» SANDRA GATTENHOF examines the relationship of theatrical performance to the actual real life detention of the Australian citizen David Hicks in Guantanamo Bay as exemplified in the production of *Honour Bound* (2006). Gattenhof assesses a combination of set, sound and lighting with dance, aerial work and the extremes of physical theatre which work to «symbolically communicate the confronting aspects of imprisonment and incarceration and raises questions

about human rights, justice and the role of politics in the war on terrorism». Referencing Chapple and Kattenbelt's analysis of intermediality as being «in-between realities», Gattenhof concludes that «This mirrors the reportage of David Hicks' incarceration. Somewhere in-between the mediatic portrayal and Hicks' personal experience lies the truth. This is what *Honour Bound* does. It asks the audience to question the nature of truth. It is not an Aristotelian narrative in structure with a neatly packaged resolution. Instead, it asks questions, poses problems and then invites the audience to juxtapose their lived experience of events, with the images, soundscapes and voices of David, Terry and Bev Hicks».

It is the aesthetics of interdisciplinary and intermedial work that is at the heart of the matter in three articles written by practitioners who are also academic researchers and teachers. They explore what happens when the traditionally ascribed art forms of dance, music and painting meet and mingle with the hard wires of digital technology.

In «Remediation of moving bodies: aesthetic perceptions of a live, digitised and animated dance performance» PAULINE BROOKS sets her research project amongst the philosophical and aesthetic debates of dance and technology in performance, with its focus on the tension between «the acceptance or rejection of “unnatural” remediated bodies and “natural” live bodies moving in the stage space». A professional choreographer and currently collaborating on an international teaching and learning project on choreography and technology, Brooks discusses her own dance performance project *Interface 2*, which involved live student dancers, animated computer projections – a remediated creation of the live section – and the interface of live dancers with dancers on film undertaken as part of an undergraduate module. She presents a fine analysis and discussion of the responses and perceptions of an invited audience to the staging of the performance, and in tandem with this, she reflects on the opportunities that the use of digital technology in dance presents for student learning as well as some of the likely impact on teaching and research.

In contrast, EMILIE CRAPOULET brings the perspective of a combined interest in the relationship between music and literature, and as a solo pianist who has given piano recitals in Europe, Australia and the United States, as well as being a member of chamber and orchestral ensembles. In «From intermedial music to interactive multimedia event: the performance of Ravel's *Miroirs*: The aesthetic consequences of a move towards multimediality in contemporary music performance practice» Crapoulet discusses the intermedial ontology of music: «the acoustic (or musical) medium; the visual medium; and the linguistic (or literary) medium», all of which, she argues, contribute equally to the effect of the performance as a whole, but which are not always visible to the audience. Her discussion of the influence of poetry and the art of Monet to Ravel's music

make for a fascinating insight into the unseen areas of intermediality. In exploring the move from implicit intermediality to explicit multimediality in the performance of Ravel's collection for piano solo, Crapoulet seeks «to redefine the artistic function of the performer and sow the seeds of a theory of the multimedia piano recital».

KAREN SAVAGE, on the other hand, works from the perspective of a film practitioner, academic and Director, with Dr Garrett Monaghan, of the International *Sixty Second Film and Video Festival* who has a particular interest in intermedial space. Here she examines the intermedial spaces created by performance practitioners Liz Aggiss and Billy Cowie in their film/video/performance piece «Men in the Wall», which is located in the space of an Art Gallery. In «Black to White: The fading process of intermediality in the gallery space» Savage conceptualizes intermediality as «the relationships *in-between* the media and practices (creation, presentation and reception) and how the media communicate with each other and the participants». In her key image of the mollusc, which leaves a slither of a trace behind itself with every movement it makes, Savage suggests that the mollusc functions as a metaphorical and architectural analogy for the process and practice of interdisciplinary work in intermedial spaces.

Interdisciplinary work that was both creative and operative in a digital network drew together students and staff for the intermedial project «Convergence and creativity in telematic performance: *The Adding Machine*», which is discussed by GEORGE H. BROWN and GERHARD HAUCK. Their article analyses the artistic, dramaturgical, and technical discoveries made during the production process, and offers theoretical insights about convergent telematic performances. That the project allowed them to explore, in theatrical terms, the range of communicative choices provided by digital technology and its associated media (video, sound, etc.) was clearly hugely beneficial for the theatre departments involved, but it also offers a way forward for intermedial analysis. As they report «Multi-point telematic productions like *The Adding Machine* have the potential to be interactive on a global scale that is truly inter- and cross-cultural. [...] In conjunction with some of the latest developments in computer-generated special effects, telematic performances facilitate the real-time co-existence of live performers, with mediated performers and digitally generated avatars; they can be streamed live onto the web to audiences counting in the millions; and they enable theatre researchers to access an unprecedented amount of data to back-up their theoretical meditations on as yet unresolved questions in performance and reception studies, and thus lead to the advancement of a truly global approach to theatre and performance research».

We can see here how digital technology and the concepts of intermediality come together to provide a potentially global network that may incorporate

world wide learners in a new performative intermediality that includes radical potential within an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural intermedial form.

What this collection of articles has revealed is that intermediality is about the process of becoming something else. It is about questioning our artistic practice and how we teach it; it is an exploration of new intermedial performance practices; it is about moving to inhabit different philosophical and aesthetic spaces that reside, touch and are located in-between media. Crucially, intermediality as explored in this edition of the journal, presents intercultural and intermedial ways «of becoming», as well as learning in and about digital society. I hope that this special edition, which has been made possible by the support of José Ramón Prado-Pérez and the Universitat Jaume I, will provide a platform – a benchmark – from which others can and will take the debate further.

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