Mapping Intermediality in Performance

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How to Approach This Book

This volume in the *MediaMatters* series aims provisionally to map territory which is under development, the territory of intermediality in performance in digital culture, which, in Deleuzian terms, is being de- and re-territorialised (1987). The project has developed organically as a network of situated concerns and engagements and thus is more an exercise in mapping, a journey charting a network of selected ideas and practices, than an attempt at exhaustive coverage, let alone fixity. This approach presented the editors with three immediate problems: how to present a network map of interconnected nodes in book form, how to indicate possible lines of flight connecting terms within and beyond the scope of the book, and how to clarify concepts without isolating them inappropriately from a dynamic process of interrelatedness and deferral.

Positionality in a network mapping exercise is problematic for, as Castells has remarked, "a network has no center, just nodes" (2004, 3). The idea of a network, without fixed bearings and entailing recursive loops, which might be entered and exited at any point marks our sense that each aspect of digital culture is best understood in relation to another, which leads to yet another and so on. In Castells's view, "nodes may be of varying relevance for the network. ... However, all nodes of a network are necessary for the network's performance. ... The network is the unit, not the node" (2004, 3). The structure of the book is thus conceived as a global network of multiply inter-connected ideas and practices, and readers are invited to approach the volume accordingly. To assist access following the introduction, **prospective mapping**, and a **network of terms**, we have marked five **portals**, gateways into the network which afford a range of situated perspectives. These are: **performativity and corporeal literacy; time and space; digital culture and posthumanism; networking; and pedagogic praxis.** Finally, a **retrospection** affords a review of the book through the lens of the historical avant-garde. Readers might enter the book through any of the portals which offer access to **nodes: modes of experience, dimensions, actuality-virtuality,** or **interrelations.** Each node is illustrated by a cluster of **terms** and related **instances.** In *Network Culture*, Terranova suggests that "to think of something like a 'network culture' at all ... is to try to think simultaneously the singular and the multiple, the common and the unique" (2004, 1). The structure of the book accordingly invites a dialogic engagement with key concepts and key questions with specific reference to theatre and performance practices after the intermedial turn (→ PROSPECTIVE MAPPING).

A system of arrows points the reader to links across the network. The **network map (→)** affords a structural mapping of terms, and sub-sections extracted from

it group proximal terms around nodes. The key accents of some established terms are changing in contemporary usage and all function in discursive exchange with each other. Transparency (→ TERM), for example, in the European avant-garde theatre tradition denotes making the process visible, whilst in the Anglo-American context of media theory, it typically means the opposite, concealing the process. However, simply to suggest that the key terms of debate are so slippery that no definitions at all can be offered would be unhelpful in a book aiming to assist understanding. But to offer apparently clear and tight definitions of terms would also be misleading. Thus, though provisional definitions are offered, they are unsettled by drawing attention to their origins and histories, or by acknowledging the various accents of their past and current usages. Each term is set against related terms, as noted, and leads into analyses of illustrative instances. This aims to clarify and offer insights, whilst avoiding fixity. We draw attention to the fact that reading a book entails a mode of interactive engagement, but we offer short overviews at each portal to bring out key links as they follow lines of flight between portal, nodal terms and instances. You are encouraged to forge your own pathways but the portals are landmarks and the nodes afford waymarks. You may head directly to any of the portals or you may choose to follow a traditional linear trajectory. The prospective mapping sketches the key concepts and questions that will be encountered. But before you jump to your preferred point of entry, an additional word about the nodes and instances.

Any example of intermedial theatre or performance is likely to be multi-tracked in its principle of composition and likely to evoke a range of intermingled – and possibly conflicting – perceptions and feelings. Thus, although the instances grouped around nodes aim to foreground specific aspects, they are not exclusively concerned with that specific cluster of terms, and inevitably have links across other clusters. These are indicated by the system of arrows. Some instances for discussion are well known, indeed, some have global visibility, whilst others represent the less widely distributed work of practitioner members of the group. Given that contemporary theatre practices and digital culture are considered processual on every level, this book aims to afford insights into the processes of making theatre and performance as well as experiencing it. Thus, alongside external **experiencer** (→ TERM) analyses of established practices, insider insights are also available in the range of instances, and some accounts are offered from 'both-and' positions. The number of perspectives entails a range of voices. Some practitioner-researchers, for example, speak in the first person about how they have grappled with the impacts of media technologies in the production of a piece. In the UK particularly, but increasingly worldwide, 'practice as research' has afforded a means of insight into the processes of artworks and new, less traditionally 'academic', discourses have been developed to convey their relational insights.

The **pedagogic praxis portal** gives access to fresh thinking about modes of study and fresh approaches to acting where new circumstances require new technologies. The concluding **retrospection** may paradoxically offer a good starting point for some since, by tracing the development of pre-digital and the proto-digital arts and media from the 20th into the 21st century, it contextualises the book's claims for a distinctive intermedial moment in digital culture.

This volume comprises contributions from members of the Intermediality in Theatre and Performance research group of the International Federation for Theatre Research (IFTR), and its genesis lies in the collaborative work of that group over a number of years. Thus, whilst editorial consideration has been given to ensuring that significant developments in the field are represented, the terms and instances in the book to some extent reflect the selective and eclectic interests of individual thinkers and practitioners immersed in the domain as they have emerged in a group research context.[1] Most of the contributors are located in Theatre and Performance Studies with an inclination towards media theory and practice rather than based squarely in Media or Intermedia Studies. Our research is thus oriented towards performance in ways that are characteristic of digital culture.

Introduction: Prospective Mapping and Network of Terms

Prospective Mapping

Robin Nelson

This volume is a successor to Chapple and Kattenbelt (eds.), *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance* (2006) in that it has grown, as noted, out of the IFTR group's work. Two aspects follow from this context, which might now helpfully be framed in Elleström's recently constructed "Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations" (2010, 11).[2] The first is an emphasis on the principles of composition of live theatre as a "strongly multimodal media" (Elleström 2010, 38) phenomenon with, in Kattenbelt's formulation, a distinctive capacity to be a hypermedium which "stages" other mediums (see 2006, 37).[3] The second is an established acknowledgement that the relations between different media in a multi-tracked text are ultimately a matter of perception and interpretation, namely Boenisch's sense that intermediality is an "effect of performance ... created in the perception of observers" (2006, 113) because the relational aspect between thing and sign is a matter of experiencing. Ellerström nevertheless contends that, "it is crucial to discriminate theoretically between the material and the perception of the material if one wants to understand how media can be related to each other" (2010, 13). In sustaining a concern with both principles of textual composition and distinctive experiences that new modes of theatre and performance might generate, this volume acknowledges the usefulness of the theoretical distinction between them whilst recognising their praxical proximity.

Building then upon the earlier volume and subsequent publications by IFTR group members, this book affords a tighter focus than the last publication on digital culture and the implications for theatre of what has been called the 'intermedial turn' (see below). A primary concern is with the impact of the "technical media" (Elleström 2010, 12 ff.) of digital technologies, not only as they are used in live theatre, but in how they have challenged the very conception of theatre. In Elleström's terms, the 'contextually qualified' medium of theatre, that is to say, theatre as traditionally understood in a socio-historic context as a live phenomenon in the here and now, may be in the process of being re-qualified contex-

tually as it accommodates an integrated production, recording and storage medium with its digital disposition to interactivity. For as Elleström remarks:

> The defining features of a technical medium are its capacity to realize specific material interfaces and the perceiver's capacity to interact with these interfaces and with other users of the medium (2010, 30).

The material modality – one of four in Elleström's model on all of which theatre operates (see 2010, 24) – does not determine the medium but may be disposed towards some principles of composition rather than others.[4] The capacity of digital technologies multi-modally to integrate sound, visuals, words and temporal dynamics (in respect of the ease of digital editing in both real time and during recording) have, perhaps radically, extended the multimodality of theatre. Moreover, they have invoked the possibility of transformations from the physical to the virtual in additional dimensions of space and time. Peter Brooks's (1986) seminal conception of a physical body knowingly observed in an actual but empty space is troubled by new circumstances.

The domain of theatre has been unsettled by the challenge of digital technologies but also by its expansion into – some would say its appropriation by – the notion of 'performance'. Over the past 30 years, the study of the performing arts has embraced not only a broad spectrum of practices which were formerly categorised under other art disciplines but also a wide range of social activities under the banner of 'performance' that were previously considered aspects of everyday life. Furthermore, disciplines beyond Theatre or Performance Studies have mobilised the concept of 'performance' as a heuristic tool to account for a broad variety of social interactions (see McKenzie 2001; Auslander 2003; McAuley 2007). As McAuley has summarised it:

> [p]erformance, as conceptualised in performance studies can range from the most highly elaborated artistic activity to minimalist examples of expressive behaviour, for organised social events such as a sporting contest or war veterans' parade to the informal gathering of young people hanging out on a street corner, from ceremonial occasions to daily interactions (2007, 1).

McAuley makes an explicit connection with theatre but notes that "performance requires people (or animals or even things) who perform and people who witness the performance" (2007, 1). A book that attempts a mapping of intermediality in performance is thus confronted by a dynamic and rapidly expanding territory and a minefield of contested terms. Not only have former boundaries been transgressed, but there is a danger that all categories might collapse unhelpfully into each other, rendering obsolete the notion of 'intermediality' as a bridge between mediums (broadly understood to include other arts practices and other disci-

plines). Elleström formulated his multimodal model in an attempt to address this problem. Adopting a 'both-and' approach, as favoured in this book, he remarks:

> [i]f all media were fundamentally different, it would be hard to find any inter-relations at all; if they were fundamentally similar, it would be hard to find something that is not already interrelated. Media, however, are both different and similar, and intermediality must be understood as a bridge between medial differences that is founded on medial similarities (2010, 12).

This book does not aim to historicise the term intermediality, nor offer a history of intermediality similar to that which has already been included in other publications (Rajewsky 2002; Schröter 2006), but the **retrospection** will invite a re-positioning of claims for the distinctiveness of intermediality in digital culture by pointing out the pre- and proto-digital in modernism and the critical avant-garde. It is helpful, however, briefly to review the current state of affairs. In a recently published *International Encyclopedia of Communication* (Donsbach 2009), Klaus Bruhn Jensen offers a clear and up-to-date, though multi-level, definition of intermediality. Although the proposition of this collection is that intermediality may now best be understood in relation to performance, and specifically through a dialogic engagement with instances of practice, Jensen affords a relatively neutral and broad account of meanings of the term, which serves to assist an understanding of the "intermedial turn":

> Intermediality refers to the interconnectedness of modern media of communication. As means of expression and exchange, the different media depend on and refer to each other, both explicitly and implicitly; they interact as elements of particular communicative strategies; and they are constituents of a wider cultural environment (cited in Donsbach 2008).

Throughout the history of the arts and media, different disciplines or arts have worked together in a range of combinations. Greek theatre and the Jacobean masque, for example, brought together different combinations of words, visuals, sounds and movement. Some recent approaches to intermediality continue to consider the distinctiveness of art forms and how they might relate to each other or be transposed one to the other. Indeed, transmediality, as a sub-set of intermediality research, addresses the translation or transposition involved, for example, in the musical version of a novel or the poetic rendering of a painting (Wolf 2002, Simanowski 2006, Kattenbelt 2008). But the IFTR research group's current focus on intermediality is rather on 'modern media', their inherent (technological) inter-connectedness and their self-conscious interplay, as marked in Jensen's account. Taking all discourse to be 'mediated', we are interested in the 'mediatised' in the sense of technologically (digitally) wrought, as it functions in performance.

The group's first research activities primarily addressed the impact of new media on live theatre events in what might be called multi-media theatre (Kattenbelt, 2008), but this interest has been extended by new circumstances as they have arisen in a dynamic culture. Jensen's definition again affords clarification:

> Three conceptions of intermediality may be identified in communication research, deriving from three notions of what is a medium. First, and most concretely, intermediality is the combination and adaptation of separate material vehicles of representation and reproduction, sometimes called multimedia, as exemplified by sound-and-slide shows or by the audio and video channels of television. Second, the term denotes communication through several sensory modalities at once, for instance, music and moving images. Third, intermediality concerns the interrelations between media as institutions in society, as addressed in technological and economic terms such as convergence and conglomeration (cited in Donsbach 2008).

Mapping Intermediality in Performance is concerned with all three of the definition levels noted above. On level one, it is concerned, for example, with how a live actor speaking in a performance space, which also projects a live feed image of her on to an on-stage screen (a projection screen or television monitor) engages two means of representation and reproduction, which require negotiations by both the actors and the spectators. On level two, it is concerned with the complexities of work of such practitioners as Robert Lepage (→INSTANCE: *THE ANDERSEN PROJECT*) which may utilise multi-screen video projection (both pre-recorded and live feed), a strong sound score, dynamic machinery that re-configures stage space and various other technological devices as well as live performers, affording a rich and complex sense experience.

Although we are only generally concerned with the economic infrastructure which has brought about new circumstances, on level three we address the capacity for convergence of digital technologies. The process of encoding in 0:1s of all digital media affords convergence between visual, verbal, sonic and gestural encoding and decoding. One advantage, particularly relevant to the perspective of theatre and performance of this aspect of digital culture is the capacity to manipulate data in real time in a way which was not possible with earlier analogue technologies such as film. Thus, whilst the impact of the projection of moving images on pre-recorded film in live theatre events was utilised by predecessors such as Meyerhold and Piscator, the capacity for live feeds and manipulation of imagery in real time greatly extends the possibilities of contemporary theatre practices. In general terms, events do not need to be fixed in advance, but can be more processual in the moment with new practical and aesthetic implications. Work that deploys and manipulates multiple media 'live' requires a response via "several sensory modalities at once" and they may even demand modulations of

the entire human sensorium. This observation leads us to Jensen's summary observation:

> As a term and an explicit theoretical concept, intermediality has perhaps been most widely used in reference to multiple modalities of experience, as examined in aesthetic and other humanistic traditions of communication research (cited in Donsbach 2008).

In this volume, we are explicitly pursuing the idea that there may be something distinctive about the ways in which mediums work together in digital culture to challenge established modalities of experience. To this end, questions need to be formulated in new ways and fresh conceptual frameworks need to be adopted and adapted to new circumstances (→ PORTAL: PEDAGOGIC PRAXIS).

For example, one proposition repeatedly made in *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance* was that intermedial work in some sense inhabits a space 'in-between' media. In subsequent group discussions, this notion of the 'in-between' was considered unsatisfactory because it seemed insufficiently precise, depending on a sort of negative definition (neither this nor that but something in the middle). Accordingly, we now seek to mark the concrete effects of being definitively multiple and interrelational. We have come to see that detailed attention needs to be paid to the range of 'inters' in 'interrelationships', differentiating them in their various functions and effects as Elleström's nuanced model facilitates in detail. Although not entirely abandoning the various conceptions of the 'in-between', we have come to think that the compound 'both-and' better characterises contemporary performance culture.[5] The manifestations of digital culture – the media forms, operational modes of devices, and cultural habits of consumers and users – not only inherently entail a relationship with an 'Other', but are structured according to a necessary interrelation with any number of 'Also-Others'. In the first instance, this may appear to resemble 'in-between-ness', the oscillation between identifiable points of reference. But this very aspect of digital culture – where devices, events and activities are formed out of relationships, necessary interdependencies, and mutually co-relating entities – provides a structuring principle that helps to explain the paradigmatic character of the digital.

Intermedial theatre may be both physically based and on-screen; experiences may be both actual and virtual; spaces may be both public and private; bodies may be both present and absent. Taylor and Harris address "the digital's ... materiality and immateriality. These are not contradictory qualities but rather essential, mutually constituting elements" (2005, 18). The term "glocal" was coined to describe the phenomenon of being both global and local (see Malecki and Moriset 2008, 221). Latham and Sassen note that both "[v]ariability and specificity are crucial dimensions" of digital formations (2005, 6). Moreover, mediums come together in various ways. In some instances, they collide and create a frisson in

the process; in other instances, one medium is imbricated within another so that they are almost dissolved into each other but the form of one remains just visible in the solution of the other. Amy Petersen Jensen argues for hybridity (of the viewer as subject; of media in and for performance) as constitutive of coherence across discrete entities:

> It is possible then that the mind and body of the theatre spectator is one such site – a hybrid subject ... in which the form and content of two mediums, theatre and media, compete and collaborate to form unique receptive interactions with individual texts and their performances. Here, in this hybrid space, the participatory spectator prefigures a new type of performance that develops out of the interaction between two mediums (Jensen 2007, 122-3).

Müller remarks that "the terms 'hybrid', 'hybridity' and 'hybridization' seem to have become almost as fashionable as 'multi or intermediality'" but notes "a rather blurred or unspecific way of handling this term[inology] within the framework of intermedial research" (in Elleström 2010, 245). Indeed, in another context, Becquer and Gatti (2005) have pointed out that 'hybridity' sometimes implies a hierarchical relation privileging an originary term, rather than the combination of media on a basis of equivalence. In their view, 'syncretism' can be usefully differentiated since it avoids reduction to a hierarchical opposition when mediums come together. 'Syncretism', they propose, denotes "a heterogeneous front of distinct [elements] in altered relations to each other" (2005, 447). Thus, with a range of 'inters' in play, this volume aims to present through examples of praxis some of the specificities in the various interrelationships in textual composition and in the modalities of experience generated through performance events in a digital age. As noted, principles of composition are closely related to new perceptions, and our interest is in how – singularly and collectively – intermedial performances may have elicited a new cultural way of seeing, feeling and being in the contemporary world.

The extension of Berger's seminal phrase "ways of seeing" (1972) to embrace feeling and being in the world serves to emphasise a drift away from an eye-mind relation to theatre. A highly illuminated phenomenon (since the advent of the earlier technologies of gas and electric light), the staged performance in Western culture was historically presented in a darkened auditorium where the stage event is typically observed from a significant distance. The spatial relations emerged in their physical arrangement in theatre buildings as developed during the period from the Renaissance to the late nineteenth century. The spectatorial relations inviting the eye to observe and feed the mind likewise arose from the enactment of the Renaissance perspective. In part, we remain interested in performances staged in building-based theatres with such an established spatial organisation but which also embrace new media technologies. It is in this context that Katten-

belt's notion of theatre as a hypermedium that stages other mediums, remains particularly important. But digital culture has generated a widespread interactive engagement and playfulness in environments which require a fundamental reconfiguration of temporal and spatial relationships, since they do not adhere entirely to Kattenbelt's defining characteristic of theatre as "the social meeting between performer and spectator in the live presence of the here and now" (2006, 33).

Müller has argued that "the variety of aspects of the concept of 'intermediality' makes it very difficult or almost impossible to present some sort of general overview" (in Ellesström 2010, 237) but, under these circumstances, Rajewsky (2005, 44) rightly points out that everybody who uses the term needs to define how they are using it. This book uses the concept "with respect to those co-relations between different media that result in a redefinition of the media that are influencing each other, which in turn leads to a fresh perception" (Kattenbelt 2008, 24). Kattenbelt has been persuasive in arguing that theatre is distinctive, among the arts and media, in its capacity to stage other media in a process of theatricalisation, which incorporates them under the conditions of their established media specificity without transforming them (as in transmediality), and without abandoning its own specificity of liveness in the here and now. But in the re-territorialised domain of "intermediality in performance" Kattenbelt's formulation is troubled, for example, by a phenomenon such as virtual theatre, which involves co-presence in time but in virtual, rather than, actual space. Similarly, it is further questioned – though not necessarily undermined – by the fact that 'performance' understood as an extended set of practices in both actual (but not theatre-specific) and virtual spaces (social networking sites, for example) may not be 'theatre'.

If, as Kattenbelt has posited, theatre as a hypermedium is disposed more towards "diversity, discrepancy and hypermediacy ... than to the idea of unity, harmony and transparency" (2008, 24) because, in the process of theatricalisation, "the other media become 'signs of signs' as opposed to 'signs of objects'" (2006, 37), a key question is whether this remains the case in the expanded domain of performance. This volume sets a number of aspects in play rather than offering, at this stage, an overarching meta-theory. It may be, however, as Kattenbelt proposes, that "at the level of the medium, theatre is a physical hypermedium, whereas at the level of the sign system, the Internet is a virtual hypermedium" (2008, 22).

While, historically, theatre audiences observed a constructed world in actual space, immersive environments, actual and virtual, allow us both to see space and move into and through it. In respect of virtual environments, however, the space is not already there, as it is in theatre buildings and actual site-specific environments, but is created in the process of our moving through, and playing within, it. If actual, site-specific environments were created to disrupt established eye-mind relations and the aesthetic of contemplation from a distance, virtual environments have the potential more fundamentally to modulate our sensorium.