

**CYBERTHEATRES:
Emergent Networked Performance Practices**

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**Submitted for the Degree of PhD
2010**

The work presented in this thesis is the candidate's own.

Maria Chatzichristodoulou

Abstract

This thesis explores the emergent genre of cybertheatres or networked performance, that is, performance that employs the Internet and/or other types of networking technologies (telecommunication, mobile) and attitudes. I argue that networking technologies produce hybrid spacetimes or heterotopias (Foucault), which function as stages for networked performances, a novel and increasingly popular field of practice and research.

The aims of this project are to a) articulate networked performance as a distinct genre, which is a hybrid between theatre/performance and networking technologies, b) situate this within a lineage of performance practice, c) identify and analyse its principal ontological and dramaturgical elements and, d) explore appropriate curatorial strategies for its presentation to a spectrum of audiences. To achieve these aims I undertake a critical analysis of cybertheatres, starting from 1967 and focusing on current practices. My analysis unfolds through engagement with discussions along two pivotal conceptual vectors, and through applied exploration of two core elements of practice:

The conceptual vectors along which this thesis develops are:

1. *Space*: I examine the spatial nature of the networks that host cybertheatres, employing British group Blast Theory as my case-study.

2. *Presence*: I question the validity of the presence vs. absence dichotomy within networked environments. I investigate this through the work of Belgian duo Entropy8Zuper!, relaunched as Tale of Tales.

Further on, I undertake a practical exploration relating to the subject of the curation of cybertheatres. I reflect upon and evaluate the three-day event *Intimacy: Across Digital and Visceral Performance* (December 2007), which I initiated, produced, co-directed and co-curated, to propose curatorial strategies that are appropriate to emergent practices in general and cybertheatres in particular. I close by a shift of voice from the author to the collective: I join the collaborative project *Deptford.TV* as a method of studying artistic, curatorial and social platforms that demonstrate Web 2.0 attitudes, and argue for the genre's particular potential for new forms of social engagement within a computer-mediated culture.

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Acknowledgements

To the memory of my beloved father Petros and uncle Nikos, both of whom I lost while writing this thesis.

I am grateful to my main supervisor Professor Janis Jefferies for her support and insightful comments, which were instrumental in shaping this thesis. I am also indebted to my second supervisor Gerald Lidstone for his invaluable advice throughout this undertaking. I would like to thank the people who collaborated for the realisation of this project: Rachel Zerihan, Adnan Hadzi, Blast Theory, Entropy8Zuper!/Tale of Tales, and many, many others who supported the work. I am grateful to Arts and Business for supporting the project *Pink Tank*, as well as Goldsmiths, AHRC Methods Network, Knowledge East, British Library, Trinity Laban, The Albany and Home London for supporting the project *Intimacy: Across Digital and Visceral Performance*. Finally, I would like to thank my mother Kety and all my family, the Hadziselimovic family, Richard Osborne, and all my friends and colleagues for providing me with impetus and encouragement during the completion of this thesis.

List of Publications

Extracts of this thesis have appeared in the following publications:

1. Chatzichristodoulou, M. and Zerihan, R. (eds) *Intimacy: Across Digital and Visceral Performance* (forthcoming).
2. Chatzichristodoulou, M. Presence, Pattern, and the Original Body in Networked Encounters, 2008 In: Sunden, J. and Hughes, R. (eds) *Second Nature: Reproduction and the Artificial in Art, Science and New Media*. Washington: Washington University Press, forthcoming 2010.
3. Chatzichristodoulou, M. How to Kidnap your Audiences: An Interview with Matt Adams from Blast Theory, 2009 In: Chatzichristodoulou, M., Jefferies, J. and Zerihan, R. (eds) *Interfaces of Performance*. London: Ashgate, 2009, pp. 107-118.
4. Chatzichristodoulou, M. Telling the Tale of Tales, 2009 In: Hartley, J. and McWilliam, K. (eds) *Story Circle: Digital Storytelling Around the World*. New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, pp. 221-229.
5. Chatzichristodoulou, M. When Presence-Absence becomes Pattern-Randomness: Blast Theory's *Can You See Me Now?*, 2008 In: Bentkowska-Kasel, A., Cashen, T. and Gardiner, H. (eds) *Art History, Curation and Practice after Media. Computers and the History of Arts*. London: Intellect, Vol. 3, 2009, pp. 79-87.
6. Chatzichristodoulou, M. When Presence & Absence Turn Into Pattern & Randomness: *Can You See Me Now?* *Leonardo Electronic Almanac* [online] 16 (4-5), 2009. Available from: <http://www.leonardo.info/LEA/DispersiveAnatomies/DispersiveAnatomies.html> [accessed 25/11/2009]
7. Chatzichristodoulou, M. and Hadzi, A. Strategies of Sharing: The Case-study of the Deptford.TV Project, 2007 In: Yiakoumaki, N. and Karaba, E. (eds) *Feedback 0.4*. London: OpenMute, 2007, pp. 95-111.
8. Chatzichristodoulou, M. Strategies of Sharing: The Case-study of Deptford.TV *Body, Space and Technology Journal* [online] 7 (1), 2007. Available from: <http://people.brunel.ac.uk/bst/vol0701/home.html> [accessed 25/11/2009]
9. Chatzichristodoulou, M. From Entropy8Zuper! To Tale of Tales: Games and *The Endless Forest*. Available from: http://www.furtherfield.org/displayreview.php?review_id=2837/08/2007 [accessed 8/08/2007]
10. Chatzichristodoulou, M. From Entropy8Zuper! To Tale of Tales: Games and *The Endless Forest*. Part 2. Available from:

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11. Chatzichristodoulou, M. Ginger *Stradda Le magazine de la Création hors les Murs 2*, 2007, p. 33.
12. Chatzichristodoulou, M. Strategies of Sharing: Twelve Interviews In: Deptford.TV (eds) *The Deptford.TV Diaries*. London: OpenMute, 2006, pp. 10-27.
13. Chatzichristodoulou, M. Cybertheatres: Emergent, Hybrid, Networked Performance Practices *Sklunk* [online] 2, (February) 2006. Available from: <http://www.sklunk.net/cybertheatres> [accessed 25/11/2009]

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Introduction

Members of the Russian ‘Movement’ Group built in St. Petersburg (then, Leningrad) cyber-creatures, or “cybers” (...). In this theater of artificial creatures, the actors were capable of controlling the color and intensity of the lights, as well as sounds and smells.¹

(...) the virtual is a quality of human (and, more generally, organic) life and can only erroneously be equated with technology. Far from being a synonym of the digital, the virtual must be understood as that capacity, so fundamental to human existence, to be in excess of one’s actual state.²

i. Cybertheatre (1967) – Cybertheatres (2006 -)

My project is engaged with the following questions that connect historical material to debates and artistic practices situated within the contemporary present:

- What practices (and visions) could be approached as cybertheatres?
- Which are their ontologies, dramaturgies and structures?
- Which are the parameters of the emergent, hybrid spacetimes that host such events?
- How do these diverse spacetimes configure the emergence of a new genre?
- How do we experience the presence of the posthuman performing body/self in the hybrid spacetimes of cybertheatres?
- Are notions such as presence and absence pertinent within this context?
- How do these hybrid spacetimes and presences facilitate the creation of non-linear and open-ended performance narratives?
- How do cybertheatres revisit the traditional roles of performer/artist and audiences?
- Can and do cybertheatres facilitate collaborative approaches to creativity?

The title of this thesis is *Cybertheatres*. This term is a ‘ready-made’: it is credited to the Russian kinetic arts group Dvizjenije (meaning Motion or Movement) who first used it in 1967 as the title of an art piece. Dvizjenije’s *Cybertheatre* was a machinic, performative environment that incorporated the audiences by immersing them into a sensual experience of a world both virtual and physical. *Cybertheatre* was responsive to audience engagement: the environment changed in relation to the audiences’ movement.³ Dvizjenije’s aim was “to involve the spectator

¹ Kac, E. Robotic Art Chronology *Convergence* 7 (1), (Spring) 2001, pp. 87-111.

² Hansen, M. B. N. *New Philosophy for New Media*. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2004, pp. 50-1.

³ For more information see Popper, F. *Art – Action and Participation*. London: Studio Vista, Cassell & Collier Macmillan, 1975, pp. 59-61.

both actively and totally in the event”.⁴ Dvizjenije was an interdisciplinary team concerned with constructivism and kinetic art, which “adapted the cosmic ideas of the Malevich tradition and applied them to art-technology”;⁵ they created activities and environments across the fields of visual arts, music, industrial design, education and cybernetics that inform my approach to cybertheatres today.

Lev Nusberg, the initiator of Dvizjenije, describes *Cybertheatre* as: “one model of our man-made world and of the relationship between the Machine and Man.”⁶ *Cybertheatre* was an “aesthetic fantasy”⁷ and a vision of man-machine symbiosis. Its title, and Nusberg’s discussion on the relationship between man and machine, points to the discoveries of cybernetics, defined by Norbert Wiener in 1948 as the science of “control and communication in the animal and the machine”.⁸ Underlying cybernetics was the idea that all control and communication systems, “be they animal or machine, biological or technological, can be described and understood using the same language and concepts”.⁹ Cybernetics, although soon firmly established as a discipline in the Western world,¹⁰ was not favourably received in the USSR: in Stalinist Russia, cybernetics was seen as a philosophical monster –as well as a set of useful techniques which were soon adapted by the Russian military– and an anti-cybernetics campaign was soon launched in the press. Wiener was called a “charlatan and obscurantist”¹¹ and the science of cybernetics itself was considered a pseudoscience, a “reactionary imperialist utopia”.¹² Of course one needs to bear in mind that these were Cold War years, and that cybernetics had originated from Wiener’s and other scientists’ experiences in the military during World War II.

With the death of Stalin in 1953 the Soviet Union entered a new era, and cybernetics was gradually acknowledged as a legitimate field of research. In 1959 a Science Council for Cybernetics was established in the USSR Academy of Sciences and in 1961 a series of papers were published bearing the title *Cybernetics – to the Service of Communism*.¹³ Dvizjenije’s *Cybertheatre*, created in 1967, falls within this period of sociopolitical and scientific developments in Russia that transformed cybernetics from an object of harsh criticism to a

⁴ Ibid, p. 158.

⁵ Nechvatal, J. Origins of Virtualism: an Interview with Frank Popper. Available from: <http://www.eyewithwings.net/nechvatal/popper/interviewww1.htm> 2003 [accessed 11/03/2006]

⁶ Nusberg, L. *Cybertheatre*, 1974 In: Malina, F. J. (ed.) *Kinetic Art: Theory and Practice. Selections from the Journal Leonardo*. New York: Dover, 1974, p. 104.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Apter, M. J. *Cybernetics and Art*, 1974 In: Ibid, p. 176.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Mainly in France where Wiener’s book was first published, the U.K. and the USA.

¹¹ In an article published in *Literaturnaia Gazeta* 1950. Cited by: Gerovitch, S. Russian Scandals: Soviet Readings of American Cybernetics in the Early Years of the Cold War *The Russian Review* 60 (4), (October) 2001, p. 548.

¹² In the *Short Philosophical Dictionary*, 1954 according to: Ibid, p. 561.

¹³ See Holloway, D. Innovation in Science: the Case of Cybernetics in the Soviet Union *Science Studies* 4 (4), (October) 1974, pp. 299-337.

vehicle of scientific reform. This process of development and innovation is reflected in *Cybertheatre*'s visionary character as well as in the name of the group: Motion. A year before the production of *Cybertheatre*, Dvizjenije had published the "Manifesto of the Russian Kineticists" in which they declared their ideal of unity between technology, arts and science.¹⁴ As early as the 1930s, artists throughout Europe had become interested in Kineticism, seeing it as a practice that unifies art with science and technology. According to Frank Popper:

Kinetic art seems to have assumed the role of symbolically representing scientific and technical *progress*. It has shown the way towards the acceptance of electronic and cybernetic discoveries and their incorporation in the work of art. Moreover, it has become increasingly significant on a social level, for the first steps have been taken in the incitement of the public to participate effectively in transforming the existing environment (...). In the sphere of aesthetics, a wholly new relationship has grown up between the artist, the work of art and the spectator. The work loses its materiality, and becomes simply an effect or an event; the artist loses his halo and becomes a researcher; the spectator leaves the domain of cultural conditioning and himself becomes active and creative.¹⁵

These approaches and processes introduced by Kinetic artists and groups shaped Dvizjenije's vision and practice of *Cybertheatre*, an art and technology piece that pointed towards cybernetics as a vision of man-machine symbiosis and invited 'audiences' to take an active part in the formation of their environment. *Cybertheatre* was not an object but an immersive three-dimensional space; it was not constituted of static installations but of semi-autonomous robotic agents, lights, colours, sounds, smells and interactions. The important thing about the piece was not any unified materiality but the way it engulfed its audiences and responded to their actions and reactions; the focus was not on the *Cybertheatre* itself –which, in a sense, did not exist without its audiences– but on the relationship built between the two, and the effects this interactive relationship and the events it generated had on the audiences.

This thesis addresses artistic practices and visions from 1967 to the present, many of which are concerned with the same issues, namely: the merging of art, science and technology;¹⁶ the dematerialisation of the art object which becomes a concept or an action/event; and the shift of roles, which requires the artist to relinquish his/her role as the sole creator of a work of art and become instead a researcher, curator, or mediator, and the audiences/spectators¹⁷ to undertake an active part in the creative process and become co-creators or even co-authors of the work. These issues reoccur in the narrative of this thesis: in Chapter One, through the study

¹⁴ See Haskel, L. Time Machine, 1998 In: *Star dot Star Exhibition Catalogue*. Sheffield: Site Gallery, 1998, n/p.

¹⁵ Popper, F. *Art – Action and Participation*, pp. 7-8

¹⁶ As exemplified by the media arts movement, which incorporates practices concerned with new and emergent technologies such as computational and networking technologies, biotechnologies, virtual reality systems, virtual environments, artificial intelligence systems and agents and so on.

¹⁷ I use both terms here as I refer both to theatre and performance, and visual art practices.

of 20th Century art historical movements as I trace the origins of cybertheatres; in Chapters Two and Three through the study and contextualisation of current artistic practices that I approach as cybertheatres; and in Chapter Four through the practical exploration and evaluation of the projects *Intimacy: Across Digital and Visceral Performance* and *Deptford.TV*.

Dvizjenije's term *Cybertheatre* is adopted as the title of this thesis; cybertheatres are the subject of this thesis. I use the term cybertheatres within a 21st Century context, to describe networked performance practices (and visions), that is, performances that employ the Internet and/or other types of networking technologies and attitudes for the development of dramatic inter/actions and co-creations between their diverse agents. Ontologically, such practices exist as hybrids between theatre, performance and live arts on the one hand, and networking technologies –including the Internet, telecommunication, mobile, wireless, GPS technologies and so on– on the other. I will argue that networking technologies produce hybrid spacetimes or, following Foucault, heterotopias, such as cyberspace, virtual worlds and trans-local environments. Such hybrid environments function as stages for cybertheatres or networked performances, a new and increasingly popular field of practice and research. I further argue that cybertheatres due to their ontologies, which are conditioned by the environments that act as their hosts, challenge established ideas regarding spatial and temporal relations between their agents (and thus established dramaturgical structures): cybertheatres are characterised by the fusion of mediated and unmediated, live and pre-recorded, proximal and distant, synchronous and asynchronous, natural and artificial elements of practice –that is, the merging of forms and processes that have often been considered as oppositional.

Contemporary cybertheatres, like Dvizjenije's *Cybertheatre*, are hybrid practices that trip the boundaries and cross the lines between art and technology. They are events and/or processes rather than objects; they require the same shift of roles that places audiences in the centre of the work as active participants, co-creators or co-authors, and transforms the artists from sole creators to researchers, curators, mediators, facilitators, collaborators, networkers and/or initiators of the conceptual, technical and social circumstances that allow for the shared creation of a piece. By re-introducing a 'found' term, I wish to underline the continuity in the thinking, praxis and imaginary that links together a Russian kinetic art piece of the early 1970s with current practice that is at the forefront of research and experimentation in the fields of theatre, performance and media arts today.

Furthermore, I wish to reclaim the term cybertheatre because, in my view, it points towards issues of cybernetic culture that are as relevant today as they were in 1967. These are issues of:

- coupling and symbiosis between human and machine, which brought forth concepts of the

cyborg and the posthuman, the computer sciences of Artificial Intelligence and Artificial Life, and discourses around self-organisation, emergence and the nature of life;

- the disembodiment of information, thought and consciousness;
- the dematerialisation and hybridisation of space, the foregrounding of new temporalities, and the emergence of new, hybrid spacetimes;
- networks, processes of networking, networked bodies/identities/environments (and performances), which lead to discussions about distributed selves, dispersed anatomies and multiple identities.

Reference to such subjects will weave in and out the narrative of this thesis, as I will be fleshing out the ontologies of case-studies and discuss their dramaturgies, forms and processes of becoming. Finally, by making use of the word ‘theater’ I seek to reclaim this term too, for describing events that are transdisciplinary, networked, collaborative, open-ended and hybrid. I thus propose to disentangle the term, ever so slightly (as it is both impossible and unwise to attempt to disentangle it completely) from its classical roots,¹⁸ and the Aristotelian definition that limits theatre within a central plot, a linear narrative structure, a unified framework of space and time, and a clear distinction between actors and audiences.¹⁹ Through this process I hope to learn something new about what theatre means today and revisit its relation to –networked– performance.

ii. Cybertheatres: a Contested Term

Cybertheatres, or networked performance, is an emergent genre. Though work of this type has been taking place since the late 1970s it is only recently, with the widespread use of networking technologies and the advent of Web 2.0 platforms and ideologies, that a proliferation of practices can be witnessed and approached as cybertheatres. It is no surprise then that the term

¹⁸ The Greek root of the word theatre is ‘θεῶμαι’ and it means ‘to look/see/watch’. It thus implies, as a term, the division between those who act, and those who watch the actions of others.

¹⁹ See: Aristotle *Aristotelous Poiētikē*, 350 B.C. (Tr.: Dromazos, S. I.), Athens: Kedros, 1993. I am not suggesting that Aristotle’s *Poetics* is not an invaluable resource. Nonetheless a definition of theatre that dates back to Greek classical antiquity cannot uncritically apply to current perspectives and practices. A notable example of an attempt to apply Aristotle’s *Poetics* to a current computer-mediated context is Brenda Laurel’s book: Laurel, B. *Computers as Theatre*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1991. Laurel argues that theatre and interface design are similar in that they both deal with the representation of action. It is, in my opinion, unfortunate, that she is compelled to refer to Aristotle’s *Poetics* for a definition of theatre that bears small relevance to current practices or, for that matter, Roman practices such as circus and acrobatics, Medieval practices such as Autos Sacramentales and a big chunk of the 20th Century theatre history. This is not to underestimate the value of her book which, as Howard Rheingold suggests in his review, “continues the tradition of stretching the imagination of computer designers by coming up with a new metaphor for what they are doing”, see: Rheingold, H. *Computers as Theatre – Book Review Whole Earth Review* (Winter) 1991, available from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1510/is_n73/ai_11733671/ [accessed 19/09/2009]. Only to suggest that her comparative study would be more relevant and, possibly, of a longer-lasting influence, had she made an attempt to employ a contemporary understanding of what theatre is today.

'cybertheatres' is, in itself, a contested term. Within the last decade, several practitioners and theorists have employed a variety of terms to signify this cultural phenomenon or a broader field that includes what I term cybertheatres as a sub-category. Prominent examples are:

- *Cyberformance*: New Zealand-based artist Helen Varley-Jamieson introduced this term in 2000 to describe "live performance with remote performers coming together in real time via Internet chat applications".²⁰ Her aim was to provide a term for the new genre she and her group Avatar Body *Collision* were experimenting with, while avoiding the polarisation between the terms real and virtual. In her MA by Research thesis Varley-Jamieson refines and simplifies the definition of cyberformance as "live performance with remote players using Internet technologies" and situates this as a sub-category of the broader field of networked performance, the encompassing field of digital performance and the all-encompassing field of theatre.²¹
- *Digital Performance*: Professor Barry Smith, at the time based at Nottingham Trent University, UK (currently at the University of Bristol) and Professor Steve Dixon, at the time based at Salford University, UK (currently at Brunel University) used the term in 2001 when they launched their AHRB-funded project Digital Performance Archive.²² Smith and Dixon's definition of digital performance was: "performance activity with new digital technologies –from live theatre and dance productions that incorporate digital projections, to performances that take place on the computer-screen via webcasts and interactive virtual environments".²³ The archive provided the material for Dixon's book *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art and Installation* published in 2007. Dixon argues that "the past decade has seen an extraordinarily intense period of experimentation with computer technology within the performing arts. Digital media has been increasingly incorporated into live theater and dance, and new forms of interactive performance have emerged in participatory installations, on CD-ROM, and on the Web."²⁴ His book sets out to trace the evolution of these practices and "analyse the theoretical, artistic and technological contexts of this form of new media art."²⁵ Furthermore, Professor Susan Broadhurst (Brunel University, UK)

²⁰ Varley-Jamieson, H. *Cyberformance*. Available from: <http://www.cyberformance.org> [accessed 20/03/2006]

²¹ Varley-Jamieson, H. *Adventures in Cyberformance: Experiments at the Interface of Theatre and the Internet*. MA by Research, Queensland University of Technology, 2008. Available from: <http://www.creative-catalyst.com/thesis.html> [accessed 17/06/2009]

²² Smith, B. and Dixon, S. *Digital Performance Archive*. Available from: <http://ahds.ac.uk/ahdscollections/docroot/dpa/authorssearch.jsp> 2006 [accessed 16/09/2009]

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Dixon, S. with Smith, B. *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art and Installation*. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2007. Quote from book cover.

²⁵ Ibid.

employed the broader term Digital Practices in her book that came out in the same year (2007) to refer to performance practices that “prioritize such technologies as motion tracking, artificial intelligence, 3-D modelling and animation, digital paint and sound, robotics, interactive design and biotechnology.”²⁶ Broadhurst argues that due to the current prevalence of such practices a “retheorization of aesthetics and perception as a whole is needed.”²⁷

- *Cyber-theater*: Matthew Causey, at the time Associate Professor at Georgia Institute of Technology, USA (currently at Trinity College Dublin) contributed the following definition of the term to the *Oxford Encyclopaedia of Theatre and Performance*, published in 2003 (that is, a year after I first embarked on this thesis): “cyber-theatre, not unlike film and television, does not rely on the presence of a live actor or audience, and an argument can be made that many examples of cyber-theatre might be better described as interactive film/TV, installation art, new media art, or electronic communications.” He asks: “is it necessary that some live element be present in the performance of cyber-theatre to make the genre distinction of theatre a useful model?”²⁸ Causey, in his entry, marked “the variables and possibilities of cyber- or computer-aided theatre”²⁹ identifying strategies that include *digital scenography* (scenography that makes use of 3-D projections), *televisual mise-en-scène* (use of traditional theatre space supplemented with video monitors and projections) and *telepresent performance* (performance that employs telematics through the use of video conferencing and the Internet).³⁰ In a later publication (2006) Causey notes that another possibility of computer-aided performance is “to allow audiences *interactive access* to the performance with hypertextual, image and sound data banks, in which audience members are able to access and to direct the process of a performance.”³¹ Though he suggests this is “a more practical term than cyber-theater or postorganic performance”³² I am not clear which actual term Causey proposes is. He further suggests that:

²⁶ Broadhurst, S. *Digital Practices: Aesthetic and Neuroaesthetic Approaches to Performance and Technology*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 1.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Causey, M. Cyber-theatre In: Kennedy, D. (ed.) *Oxford Encyclopaedia of Theatre and Performance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Vol. 1, 2003, p. 341.

²⁹ Causey, M. *Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture: From Simulation to Embeddedness*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 48. Causey discusses and analyses, in this later publication, his entry to the Encyclopaedia. Note that Causey appears to be using the terms cyber-theater and computer-aided theatre interchangeably.

³⁰ See Ibid. Original emphasis.

³¹ Ibid, pp. 48-9. Original emphasis.

³² Ibid.

Perhaps the most promising potential computer-aided performance site would be a *smart environment* where objects, clothing and the environment itself, through sensor technology, respond to the presence of actors and spectators, triggering image and sound databanks for projections, or activating stage machinery in some manner.³³

- *Virtual Theatres*: Associate Professor Gabriella Giannachi (University of Exeter, UK) made use of the term in her book of the same title, published in 2004, to denote “the theatre of the twenty-first century in which everything –even the viewer– can be simulated”.³⁴ She focused on the concept of remediation as articulated by Bolter and Grusin,³⁵ that is the “representation of one medium in another”,³⁶ to further define virtual theatres as “a form of theatre which remediates –which means that it is always also about other media”.³⁷
- *Networked Performance*: USA-based organisation Turbulence.org³⁸ and Assistant Professor Michelle Riel (California State University Monterey Bay, USA) have used the term since the launch of their Networked Performance Blog³⁹ in 2004 to signify “any live event that is network-enabled, including any form of networking in which computational devices speak to each other and create a feedback loop.” They qualified “networked performance as being live, or experienced at the moment of creation or reception.”⁴⁰ Their definition was purposefully broad as their aim was to document, through the blog, a wide range of diverse, emergent approaches and practices. Green, Thorington and Reil, in a more recent endeavour to define the genre, offer the following: “Networked Performance is real-time, embodied practice within digital environments and networks; it is, embodied transmission.”⁴¹ They quote Christopher Salter to indicate that “Performance involves the moment of action, its continuity, inherent temporality and relationship to the present.”⁴²

These terms and definitions are closely related and often overlap; nonetheless, the terms

³³ Ibid, p. 49. Original emphasis.

³⁴ Giannachi, G. *Virtual Theatres: an Introduction*. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.

³⁵ See Bolter, D. J. and Grusin, R. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 45.

³⁷ Giannachi, G. *Virtual Theatres*, p. 5.

³⁸ New Radio and Performing Arts, Inc. *Turbulence*, 1996-2009. Available from: <http://www.turbulence.org/> [accessed March 2006]. Turbulence.org are Jo-Anne Green and Helen Thorington, co-directors of New Radio and Performing Arts, Inc. See: Green, J. A. and Thorington, H. About networked_performance. Available from: <http://www.turbulence.org/blog/about.html#green> [accessed 19/09/2009]

³⁹ See Networked_Performance blog. Available from: <http://turbulence.org/blog/> [accessed 20/09/2009]

⁴⁰ Green, J. A., Riel, M. and Thorington, H. About Networked_Performance. Available from: <http://www.turbulence.org/blog/about.html> [accessed 11/03/2006]

⁴¹ Ibid. [accessed 20/09/2009]. There is no precise indication as to when this definition was updated (though dated June 29, there is no indication of year). It is certainly posted after March 2006 when I last made a note of the definition offered. It is most likely that the date refers to the June of the current year (2009), thus the omission.

⁴² Salter, C. L. *Unstable Events: Performative Science, Materiality and Machinic Practices*. Available from: http://www.mediaarthistory.org/replace/replacearchives/salter_abstract.htm [accessed 20/09/2009]

presented here are not synonymous.

From the five different terms I have introduced, the original definition of Cyberformance was the most narrow one: it specified the participants' localities as purely remote, necessitated synchronous connections between performers and audiences, and allowed for Internet chat applications as the only option of a cyberstage. The more recent definition of Cyberformance is broader as it allows for the use of Internet technologies in general thus including, other than chat applications, virtual worlds and telematic connections. I should note that Varley-Jamieson does not purport to either contextualise or define an emergent genre; her approach is both defined by and grounded within her own practice. She is a practitioner who aims to articulate her work as well as differentiate it from other (proximal) types of theatre. In this respect, Varley-Jamieson is, possibly, less concerned with the wider relevance of her definition and more in tune with the specificities of a certain type of performance and practical inquiry. Varley-Jamieson's definition of Cyberformance thus successfully describes her own practice and the practice of *Avatar Body Collision*. It also applies to all types of cybertheatres that take place online or use Internet technologies for telematic connections.

Digital Performance is, as discussed, a term initially employed by the Universities of Salford⁴³ and Nottingham Trent⁴⁴ to describe the performance works included in Dixon's and Smith's project Digital Performance Archive (DPA). More recently, other British Universities have also embraced the term: Brunel University and Doncaster College (University of Hull) both offer MA programmes in Digital Performance,^{45, 46} the University of Plymouth offers a BA (Hons) in Digital Performance Arts,⁴⁷ and Queen Mary University of London offers an MA/MSc in Digital Performance (as per 2009).⁴⁸ In 2009 Brunel also launched a Centre for Contemporary and Digital Performance.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the Gertrude Stein Repertory Theatre (New York, USA)⁵⁰ founded the Digital Performance Institute in 2001,⁵¹ the established

⁴³ Specifically, the Media and Performance Research Unit, School of Media, Music and Performance.

⁴⁴ Specifically, the Digital Research Unit, Department of Visual and Performing Arts.

⁴⁵ Brunel University. Digital Performance MA. Available from: <http://www.brunel.ac.uk/courses/pg/cdata/d/DigitalPerformanceMA> [accessed 26/09/2009]. This course is not recruiting students as per November 2009.

⁴⁶ Doncaster College, The University of Hull. MA Digital Performance. Available from: http://www.don.ac.uk/courses/postgraduate_and_professional/postgraduate_and_professional/digital_performance.aspx [accessed 26/09/2009]

⁴⁷ University of Plymouth. BA (Hons) Digital Performance Arts. Available from: [http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/courses/undergraduate/3852/BA+\(Hons\)+Digital+Performance+Arts](http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/courses/undergraduate/3852/BA+(Hons)+Digital+Performance+Arts) [accessed 26/09/2009]

⁴⁸ Queen Mary, University of London. Digital Performance MSc/MA. Available from: http://www.qmul.ac.uk/courses/courses.php?course_id=423&course_level=2&dept_id=4 [accessed 26/09/2009]

⁴⁹ Brunel University. The Centre for Contemporary and Digital Performance. Available from: <http://people.brunel.ac.uk/dap/condip.html> [accessed 26/09/2009]

⁵⁰ The Gertrude Stein Repertory Theatre website. Available from: <http://gertstein.org/> [accessed 29/09/2009]

international computer graphics and interactive techniques conference and exhibition SIGGRAPH (San Diego, California, USA) features a Digital Performance Arts category;⁵² and the event Techne International Digital Performance Platform took place in Istanbul (Turkey) in 2006.⁵³ Dixon and Smith purposefully defined digital performance as an open term in the context of the DPA project, as their aim was to incorporate all types of performance activities (dance, theatre, performance art, live art) that made use of emergent digital technologies. DPA is an online searchable database that lists “virtual theatre performance and related events”⁵⁴ covering the decade from 1990 to 2000, as well as a physical archive that holds items such as CD-ROMs, video recordings and printed matter relevant to the listed events.⁵⁵ I consider this to be an immensely valuable resource for the study of such practice. DPA’s focus clearly is on theatre and live performance practices (‘performance activity’) that make use of new digital technologies, rather than on digital arts. The database records performance works by artists such as Desktop Theater,⁵⁶ Laurie Anderson,⁵⁷ Eduardo Kac,⁵⁸ Motherboard,⁵⁹ Benoit Maubrey,⁶⁰ AlienNation⁶¹ and La Fura Dels Baus,⁶² among many others. It also records works that are performative rather than live performances per se, such as responsive and VR environments. Such examples include Frank Abbott’s piece *Displace* (2000),⁶³ Keith Armstrong’s *transit_lounge1 (The Fantastic Adventures of Ling Change)* (1999),⁶⁴ Brenda Laurel’s and Rachel Strikland’s VR piece *PLACEHOLDER* (1992),⁶⁵ as well as interactive multimedia

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- ⁵¹ Digital Performance Institute website. Available from: <http://www.digitalperformance.org/info> [accessed 29/09/2009]
- ⁵² ACM SIGGRAPH website. Available from: <http://www.siggraph.org/> [accessed 29/09/2009]
- ⁵³ International Istanbul Digital Performance Platform, 2006. Available from: <http://www.techneplatform.org/> [accessed 29/09/2009]
- ⁵⁴ Smith, B. and Dixon, S. Digital Performance Archive. Available from: http://dpa.ntu.ac.uk/dpa_site/ [accessed 26/03/2006]. Note some inconsistency in the terminology employed, especially between the terms digital and virtual performance. I would attribute this to the ‘newness’ of the genre that allowed – and still does – for a ‘relaxed’ use of terms. Slippages between different but similar terms seem inevitable within this context, as none of the terms was yet established (by which I mean, acknowledged by the wider communities of scholars, practitioners and audiences).
- ⁵⁵ The Digital Performance Archive is currently part of the Live Art Archives at the University of Bristol. Available from: http://www.bris.ac.uk/theatrecollecion/liveart/liveart_archivesmain.html [accessed 30/09/2009]
- ⁵⁶ Dekstop Theater website. Available from: <http://www.desktoptheater.org/> [accessed 30/09/2009]
- ⁵⁷ Laurie Anderson website. Available from: <http://www.laurieanderson.com/> [accessed 30/09/2009]
- ⁵⁸ Eduardo Kac website. Available from: <http://www.ekac.org/> [accessed 30/09/2009]
- ⁵⁹ Motherboard website. Available from: <http://www.liveart.org/motherboard/> [accessed 30/09/2009]
- ⁶⁰ Benoit Maubrey website. Available from: <http://www.benoitmaubrey.com/> [accessed 30/09/2009]
- ⁶¹ AlienNation website. Available from: <http://www.aliennationcompany.com/> [accessed 30/09/2009]
- ⁶² La Fura dels Baus website. Available from: <http://www.lafura.com/web/index.html> [accessed 30/09/2009]
- ⁶³ Abbott, F. *Displace* 2000. Available from: http://dpa.ntu.ac.uk/dpa_search/index2.php3?author=843 [accessed 12/03/2006]
- ⁶⁴ Armstrong, K. *transit_lounge1* 1999. Available from: http://dpa.ntu.ac.uk/dpa_search/index2.php3?author=797 [accessed 12/03/2006]
- ⁶⁵ Laurel, B. and Strikland, R. *PLACEHOLDER* 1992. Available from: http://dpa.ntu.ac.uk/dpa_search/index2.php3?author=539 [accessed 12/03/2006]

narratives such as igloo's CD-ROM piece *Windowsninetyeight* (1998).⁶⁶

In my view DPA, through listing a broad range of works under the title of 'digital performance', problematises the notion of performance and manifests the blurred and fluid boundaries between digital performance and media arts.⁶⁷ What I find troubling in this context though is that Dixon and Smith, in their introduction to the project, do not seem to acknowledge this. According to its website, DPA "was a major research project documenting developments in the creative use of computer technologies in performance –from live theatre and dance productions that incorporate digital media, to cyberspace interactive dramas and webcasts."⁶⁸ Though DPA lists all these performance activities under the title of digital performance, I think it fails to raise questions about what digital performance is, how we can approach and define this emergent field, what types of practices should be included in a digital performance archive, and why. At the same time, as I noted earlier, DPA is not consistent regarding the use of the term 'digital performance': in the short description of the project provided on the website, it also describes the listed practices as 'virtual theatrical performances'⁶⁹ without giving reasons for the introduction of a different term, distinguishing between the two or acknowledging the slippage as inevitable within the context of an emergent practice. DPA set out to archive digital performance practices and record the developments in the field within the project's ten-year span. The result of this is an invaluable resource, albeit a resource lacking some clarity in terms of its research questions and the criteria employed in order to distinguish between digital performance and other digital arts practices. In short, DPA created a digital performance archive without ever posing the question: 'what is digital performance?'

Dixon and Smith offer an updated definition of digital performance in their book *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation*, which followed the DPA project:

We define the term "digital performance" broadly to include all performance works where computer technologies play a *key* role rather than a subsidiary one in content, techniques, aesthetics, or delivery forms. This includes live theater, dance, and performance art that incorporates projections that have been digitally created or manipulated; robotic and virtual reality performances; installations and theatrical works and activities that are accessed through the computer screen, including

⁶⁶ igloo *windowsninetyeight* 1998. Available from: http://dpa.ntu.ac.uk/dpa_search/index2.php3?author=44 [accessed 12/03/2006]

⁶⁷ This applies especially to certain types of digital arts that are more performative than others, such as the responsive environments I referred to above. In those types of work one could argue that the audience becomes the performer, and thus the environment turns into a performance piece the moment an audience member embodies it. The same could be argued for interactive installations that invite audiences to undertake action and exercise agency.

⁶⁸ Smith, B. and Dixon, S *Digital Performance Archive*. Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

cybertheatre events, MUDs, MOOs, and virtual worlds, computer games, CD-ROMs, and performative net.art works.⁷⁰

In this more recent definition Dixon and Smith employ as their main criterion the importance that technologies play in the content, techniques, aesthetics or delivery of the technologised practices. If technologies are key in the development of all or any of those performance elements, they argue, those practices can be approached as digital performances. This seems reasonable, and it certainly differentiates between the two ends of the performance spectrum, that is, performance practices that employ technologies simply as a means of distribution or enhancement on the one hand, and those practices that integrate technologies as a key element of their make-up on the other. Nonetheless, this is a definition that inevitably allows for a vast 'grey' area of practice, which can only be identified as 'digital' or not on the basis of a personal judgment regarding the centrality of the role of the technologies employed. Even so, Dixon and Smith go on to specify the types of practices they include in their study thus narrowing down the 'grey' area their definition alone fails to tackle. By including works such as installations, CD-ROMs and performative net.art works, Dixon and Smith offer a definition of digital performance that includes interactive and performative digital/media arts practices.

Matthew Causey's definition of cyber-theater assumes a genre that does not rely on liveness. Though Dixon and Smith's definition, as discussed, also includes practices that are performative rather than performances, the authors certainly approach digital performance as primarily live. Furthermore, they limit the arts that can be approached as digital performance to practices that are interactive. Although the authors do not discuss this further, in my understanding this distinction between interactive and non-interactive practices is directly linked to issues of liveness: an interactive installation invites audience interaction. This audience interaction takes place in real time and is the means by which the potentiality of the installation becomes both actualised and embodied. Thus one can argue that an audience member interacting with an installation piece becomes a live performer, whereas this performance often takes place in front of other audiences who can watch the live action. Causey, on the other hand, suggests that the very term he is attempting to define, that is cyber-theater, might be superfluous, since such practices can be better described as pertaining to other genres (interactive film/TV, installation art etc.). What I find curious in Causey's approach is his apparent reluctance to positively define the term in the first place: instead of articulating a genre, or even a common ground among diverse practices that pertain to differing genres, Causey seems to suggest that there is no need for the use of the term cyber-theater –and thus no need for approaching this as a distinct genre. Despite his unwillingness to commit to a positive

⁷⁰ Dixon, S. with Smith, B. *Digital Performance*, p. 3.

definition of the term/genre, and after he has embarked on the assumption that liveness is not a prerequisite of any cyber-theater performance, Causey goes on to re-pose the very question he has already answered (cyber-theater practices do not depend on liveness) –albeit without providing either evidence or examples of practice in support of his assumption– that is: “is it necessary that some live element be present in the performance of cyber-theatre to make the genre distinction of theatre a useful model?”⁷¹ I think that Causey’s attempt at a definition of cyber-theater is confused and carries inherent contradictions.

Gabriella Giannachi’s book *Virtual Theatres: an Introduction* was published three years after the launch of the DPA project, and is one of the first full-length investigations of the interface between theatre, performance and media arts. In her book Giannachi discusses ‘theatres that remediate’. Marshall McLuhan was the first scholar to introduce the idea of remediation, although he did not use this term. McLuhan suggested that “the medium is the message”⁷² and that “the content of any medium is always another medium”.⁷³ Bolter and Grusin expand McLuhan’s theory by coining the term ‘remediation’ to signify “the representation of one medium into another”,⁷⁴ thereby defining the medium itself as that which remediates.⁷⁵ Thus, Giannachi maintains, it is possible to conclude that, for Bolter and Grusin, “all media remediate other media at the level of both content and form.”⁷⁶ Virtual theatres, Giannachi argues, are metamedial, which means that they are not just mediated (or semi-mediated), but always *about* other media. Virtual theatres also immerse their audiences in synthetic worlds, that is worlds “made of text, mathematical formulae, not a proof, copy or representation of the real world.”⁷⁷ In this sense, virtual theatres are based on Baudrillard’s idea of the simulacrum –a copy without an original– rather than any self-evident ‘realities’.

In *Virtual Theatre: an Introduction* Giannachi looks at a variety of artistic practices from interactive installations and VR environments (e.g. Fujihata, Shaw, Benajoun & Barrière) to net and software art pieces (e.g. Jodi, 0100101110101101.org); from hypertextual novels (e.g. Moulthrop) to CD-ROM art and interactive multimedia narratives (e.g. Forced Entertainment); from cyborgian performances (e.g. Stelarc, Orlan) to robotic experimentations (e.g. Knowbotic Research, Antúnez Roca); from biotechnology art (e.g. Kac) to ALife environments (e.g. Sommerer & Mignonneau); from online web-based theatrical experimentations in MUDs and MOOs to telematic/translocal art events (e.g. Sermon); from

⁷¹ Causey, M. *Cyber-theatre*, p. 341.

⁷² McLuhan, M. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1994, p. 13.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 8.

⁷⁴ Bolter, J. D. and Grusin, R. *Remediation*, p. 45.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 19.

⁷⁶ Giannachi, G. *Virtual Theatres*, p. 4.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 7.

interactive games (e.g. Blast Theory) to motion capture technologies for digital dance (e.g. Cunningham) and media-activist performances (e.g. Gómez Peña). Her definition of virtual theatres covers such a vast range of artistic practices that, to some extent, I fail to see the scope of her project as that of defining and articulating an emergent genre. As I see it, what Giannachi successfully undertakes through this project is to demonstrate the inherent performativity of a broad spectrum of media art practices. Giannachi approaches, studies and presents these works as virtual theatres, foregrounding their performative dimension. She argues that all the diverse works she looks at through her study, whether performances (such as works by Stelarc, Orlan, Gómez Peña, Antúnez Roca and Blast Theory) or performative media art practices (such as works by Jodi, Knowbotic Research, Masaki Fujihata) constitute, together, the theatres of the 21st Century. I see Giannachi's approach as aligned with Dixon and Smith's study. What all three argue, I think, is that virtual theatres/digital performances –that is, theatres of the contemporary cutting edge as well as theatres of the future– include not only works that are clearly performance-based or theatrical, but also works that are performative and closely related to other, non-performance, genres. In short, the boundaries have blurred: theatres of the future still depend on liveness, but they can be media art practices whose potentiality incorporates a coming-to-life through audience interaction/participation or other involvement. Dixon's, Smith's and Giannachi's discourses focus on notions of performativity, interactivity and liveness. The interaction between the viewer and the work of art, argues Giannachi, "is perhaps the most important characteristic of virtual theatre."⁷⁸ This is because this interaction "allows the viewer to be present in both the real and the virtual environment."⁷⁹ I understand Giannachi's, Dixon's and Smith's emphasis on interactivity as an emphasis on liveness.

Giannachi's investigation into the crossovers of theatre, performance and media arts is an important contribution to the study of all those genres. Though I do not think that the book articulates virtual theatres as a distinct genre –thus, possibly reinforcing Causey's concern that such terms are superfluous as they only refer to works that can be approached as pertaining to already established genres– I appreciate Giannachi's strategy of inclusivity in the diverse range of works that she explores (again, Dixon and Smith's approach is very similar). Giannachi, I think, rather than articulating emergent practices, proposes a gentle shift of focus on current cutting edge artistic production that employs new digital technologies: she draws our attention from the visual, conceptual, technological or other aspects of the works to their performative and live elements. Such a strategy showcases the hybridity of digital/media arts and highlights the fact that this genre exists on the borderlines between science, technology and visual arts, as

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 11.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

well as theatre and performing arts. A fact frequently ignored. I would suggest that Giannachi, as well as Dixon and Smith, provide broad definitions for digital performance/virtual theatres that leave certain questions unanswered,⁸⁰ while raising several more.⁸¹ Nonetheless, the inclusivity of their approach means that these authors do not attempt to narrow down a genre that is currently in the process of emergence, something that could impose limits upon our perspectives and imaginary on what this field could come to encompass.

Turbulence.org and Riel use the term networked performance, a term I consider as very close to the practices I identify as cybertheatres. I see networked performance/cybertheatres as sub-categories of digital performance/virtual theatres, since both terms describe one specific type of digital/virtual performance; that is, network-enabled performance activity. Such activity is still inclusive of a diverse range of practices, but it excludes non-networked practices such as, for example: CD-ROM art, interactive art works (such as multimedia narratives, games, hypertexts) that are not networked; VR and responsive environments located in a single physical space that do not incorporate network inputs; performances located in a single physical space that might incorporate digital technologies (e.g. projections, motion capture technologies and so on) but do not support networking activity; VR, ALife and other interactive installations located in a single physical space that incorporate input only from users located in their physical proximity or users immersed within the one system. Turbulence and Riel define networked performance practices as real-time, again pointing towards the notion of liveness. I, on the other hand, suggest that such practices can contain both synchronous and asynchronous connections; that is, aspects of them can unfold in real-time but, unlike performances taking place in proximal theatre settings, not all of the performance activity needs to abide by the real-time rule. Turbulence and Riel, in their more recent definition, refer to embodied practice: networked performance is, they say, embodied transmission. Though the authors do not elaborate on this statement, I think it is important to note that this is the only definition that foregrounds the body in (digital/virtual /networked) performance.

Giannachi also refers to Pierre Lévy's discussion of 'cyberart', in which he identifies two types of virtual worlds: "those that are limited and editorialised, such as CD-ROMs and 'closed' (off-line) installations by artists, [and] those that are accessible over a network and infinitely open to interaction, transformation, and connection with other virtual worlds (on-

⁸⁰ Most importantly, maybe, Causey's question as to whether these practices do constitute a distinct genre.

⁸¹ For example, all authors maintain that interactivity is what makes digital/media art practices performative/performances. Nevertheless, none of the authors embarks upon a study of interactivity to assert whether all interactive practices can indeed be approached as digital performances/virtual theatres. None of the authors distinguishes between interaction and participation. Dixon and Smith do not clearly articulate the relationship between interactivity and liveness, leaving us guessing. Giannachi discusses Auslander's approach to liveness, but does so rather flippantly, without embarking upon a study of liveness in the framework of the practices she approaches as theatrical.

line).”⁸² She suggests that all virtual theatres “share the characteristic of being open works in which the viewer is variously participating to the work of art from within it.”⁸³ Though Giannachi applies Lévy’s notion of openness to works that are also, according to Lévy’s definition at least, ‘closed’ (offline), I see this distinction between openness and closure in relation to the use of the networks as a primary distinction between networked performances (cybertheatres) and technologised performance works that do not integrate networking activity. I suggest that networked practices tend to be constructed as open-ended works-in-progress that are constantly inviting, not only re-action, but also creative input. This quality of openness sustains a permanent ‘movement’ in the work, which is always in the process of becoming. Non-networked practices, on the other hand, tend to aim towards an ‘end’; that is, towards a/the finished version of themselves. Of course there are plenty of non-networked performance/performative practices that involve interaction and user participation; nonetheless, this interaction is more often based on a set of predetermined scenarios that allow the user a set number of choices in his/her interaction with the system.⁸⁴ These (to an extent pre-scripted) actions generate a number of different versions of the finished piece, rather than inviting the user to contribute original inputs, which could potentially reconfigure the actual parameters of the piece. So, whereas Dixon, Smith and Giannachi focus on interactivity, I focus on networking. I stress again though that cybertheatres is one area of practice within the digital performance/virtual theatres spectrum that Dixon’s, Smith’s and Giannachi’s studies provide excellent overviews of.

Although I partly agree with Lévy’s identification of open practices with practices that are network-enabled, I would argue that certain practices that do not use the Internet can also be approached as both networked and open. Here, I am thinking of Roy Ascott’s first networked art events, for example, which preceded the Internet. Those events employed satellite, telefax and other telecommunications technologies to network dispersed participants.⁸⁵ Another such example is Gob Squad’s piece *Room Service: Help me Make it Through the Night* (2003).⁸⁶

⁸² Lévy, P. *Cyberculture*. (Tr.: Bononno, R.) Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, p. 125-6. See also Giannachi’s discussion in *Virtual Theatres*, p. 4.

⁸³ Giannachi, G. *Virtual Theatres*, p. 4.

⁸⁴ Note that offline interactive practices normally invite the user to interact with the system rather than with other users.

⁸⁵ See for example: Ascott, R. *La Plissure du Texte* 1983. Available from: <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/la-plissure-du-texte/> [accessed 30/10/2009]. *La Plissure du Texte* was part of the *Electra* exhibition that took place in Paris and was curated by Frank Popper. *Electra* was looking at the history of electricity across the spectrum of arts. Within this context Ascott set up a “planetary fairytale” with 14 nodes around the world, each of which was ascribed an archetypal fairytale character and was involved in the collaborative development of a narrative over the period of two weeks. A transcript of the piece is available at: http://telematic.walkerart.org/timeline/timeline_ascott.html [accessed 30/10/2009].

⁸⁶ Gob Squad website. Available from: <http://www.gobsquad.com/> [accessed 11/03/2006]

Room Service does not employ Internet technologies; instead, it uses telephony to network performers and audiences. Although performers and audiences are based in the same physical space (a hotel) they are not in physical proximity: each performer is in a separate hotel room, whereas the audiences, located in the hotel lounge, watch live feeds of the performers' actions in a split-screen projection. The performers communicate with each other and the audiences through the phone. This relevant proximity allows for the physical distance between performers and audiences to be challenged and for the audiences to, occasionally, step into the film and have a flesh-and-blood contact with the protagonists. Can this be described as networked performance despite the fact that it does not make use of Internet technologies? Turbulence.org seem to think so, since they link to Gob Squad through their networked performance blog.⁸⁷ I would concur with this view.

All of the definitions I have offered foreground, in different ways, the notion of liveness. Varley-Jamieson, Turbulence.org and Riel talk about real-time encounters; Dixon, Smith and Giannachi focus on interactivity, which produces liveness; whereas Causey first assumes the absence of liveness, and then goes back to question his own definition and ask whether liveness might in fact be the key to defining cyber-theater as a genre distinct from other technologised art practices. Indeed, liveness is one of the most vital characteristics –if not the most vital– of theatre and performance art. Peggy Phelan, in her book *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* approaches theatre and performance as practices whose liveness defines their very ontology, as it means that the performance is created through a process of disappearance.⁸⁸ Its being 'live' entails that theatre 'dies' with its own enactment. Every single moment of a theatrical experience is a moment of death, as it is entwined with the loss of a spacetime-specific, relational experience that cannot be preserved or reproduced. Phelan argues that only embodied, visceral (as opposed to mediated)⁸⁹ performance can be perceived as live, as it is the performer's corporeality that makes the performance bound to the present moment and impossible to reproduce; the embodied, corporeal performer dies a little every minute, along

⁸⁷ Gob Squad. Available from: <http://www.turbulence.org/blog/index.html> [accessed 11/03/2006]

⁸⁸ Phelan, P. *Unmarked: the Politics of Performance*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993.

⁸⁹ Mediated performance is performance that makes use of a medium, that is, an "intervening body or quantity (...); necessary means of motion or action; that through or by which everything is accomplished, conveyed, or carried on". Medium In: Hypertext Webster Gateway. Available from: http://www.BennetYee.org/http_webster.cgi [accessed 07/02/2004]. A medium, in this context, is that which intervenes between performers and audiences and through which the performance is accomplished. McLuhan has suggested that the medium –our extension– is also the message. And "the 'message' of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs." McLuhan, M. *Understanding Media*, p. 8. Following McLuhan, whatever the medium employed by a mediated performance, its role is not just that of a go-between. Instead, the performance depends on its medium for the development of its language, structure, aesthetics, dramaturgy –its very existence. The medium employed defines the nature of the event, and introduces a difference of scale, pace, pattern, or all three, into the audiences' relationship to the said performance event.

with the performance.

Philip Auslander, on the other hand, has argued that mediated/mediatised⁹⁰ performance is also subject to disappearance and can thus also be approached as a live event. The medium, Auslander explains, is bound to deteriorate and eventually disappear as a result of its appearance, its happening, much like the corporeal performer does.⁹¹ Turbulence.org and Riel, by defining live as something experienced at the moment of its creation or reception,⁹² seem to me to be positioning themselves on Auslander's 'side' of the discourse. They clearly approach liveness as a characteristic of mediated/mediatised performance as much as of corporeal, visceral one. I, too, agree with this position and consider that (semi-)mediated and mediatised performances can all be live practices, as long as they incorporate live elements in their make-up. Whereas the discourses I have presented approach liveness as a temporal characteristic, I understand this as the outcome of a relational process. I will examine this more closely in Chapter Three. In the meantime, I want to point out what I perceive as a discontinuity in the meaning of the term live as it is being applied first to an embodied human practice (Phelan), and then to a disembodied technological process (Auslander).

Auslander's strategy is to shift the focus from the performer to the medium, arguing that the quality of liveness applies to the medium itself rather than the performer(s)-audiences encounter (Phelan) or the audiences-as-performers (Giannachi).⁹³ According to Auslander the medium is itself live, since the process of its happening is also the process of its disintegration and 'death'. Thus, every mediated performance, just like every unmediated performance, is a unique experience that cannot be repeated or reproduced, since the medium (re)produces a new, slightly different (because slightly disintegrated), version of itself every time it is activated. I think Auslander's point is important in terms of establishing the unstable, impermanent and vulnerable nature of the media,⁹⁴ which allows for their comparison to live performers. Still,

⁹⁰ I use the term 'mediated' performance to refer to genres such as radio and TV drama, and other forms of performance that depend entirely on (a) medium(s) for their 'being'. I sometimes add the prefix 'semi' as a reference to performances that make use of media but do not depend on them entirely. Many networked performances are semi-mediated since they use networking technologies as an integral element of their dramaturgy and/or development of action while, at the same time, provoke immediate encounters among their audiences, between audiences and performers, or between audiences and their environment. Example of semi-mediated performance works are British group Blast Theory's pieces *Can You See Me Now?* and *Uncle Roy All Around You*, where audiences experience both mediated and immediate encounters. Blast Theory website, available from: <http://www.blasttheory.co.uk> [accessed 12/11/2009]. Finally, Philip Auslander borrows the term 'mediatised' from Jean Baudrillard to refer to performance that is based on technologies of reproduction. Auslander, P. *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1999, pp. 1-9.

⁹¹ Auslander, P. *Liveness*.

⁹² Green, J.A., Riel, M. and Thorington, H. About Networked_Performance.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ As opposed to Phelan's notion of the media in *Unmarked* as a means of producing fixed, stable, permanent, and thus 'dead', reproductions.

Auslander's discourse fails to convince me of the appropriateness of the term 'live' in relation to the mediated events that he examines.⁹⁵ I take this up by asking: Does the pure fact of disintegration, a process of disappearance as Phelan puts it, suffice for the production of liveness? What other criteria, if any, apply to liveness? Finally, does the process of disintegration and disappearance that Phelan refers to remain qualitatively the same when shifted from a human performer to a communication and distribution medium? Again, these are questions that I examine closer in Chapter Three of this thesis.

Finally, in her important book *Digital Practices: Aesthetic and Neuroaesthetic Approaches to Performance and Technology* Susan Broadhurst side-steps all the tensions and discourses outlined above by stating from the outset of her exploration that it is not her intention "to coin a new genre of art and performance".⁹⁶ Broadhurst follows Derrida's view that "every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text (...) yet such participation never amounts to belonging."⁹⁷ Thus, rather than concerning herself with either defining a new genre or providing "an overrarching theorization for performance and technology",⁹⁸ Broadhurst undertakes instead to provide a 'tool-kit' of sorts that can be "useful in articulating the multilayeredness of digital performance practices."⁹⁹ Indeed, Broadhurst delivers what she promises, offering a set of aesthetic and neuroaesthetic approaches to a broad spectrum of digital practices, including live performances, sound pieces, films and bioart projects.

iii. Networks

Art may soon become a meaningless word. In its place, "communications programming" would be a more imaginative label, attesting to (...) our technological and managerial fantasies, and our pervasive electronic contact with one another.¹⁰⁰

What Allan Kaprow foresaw as a development in 1993 has, to a certain extent, occurred: computational and communications technologies, as well as biotechnologies, have become new media for art, and media art practices such as net.art and software art have established computer programming as an artform. The invention of the Internet and the overwhelming possibilities this opened up was an important factor for this development in artistic practice, which I discuss further in Chapter 1.

From a technical point of view, the Internet is a system of interconnected computer

⁹⁵ Auslander focuses his analysis in *Liveness* on cinematic, televised and, in general, recorded events.

⁹⁶ Broadhurst, S. *Digital Practices*, p. 2.

⁹⁷ Derrida, J. The Law of Genre (Tr.: Ronell, A.) *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1), (Autumn) 1980, p. 65.

⁹⁸ Broadhurst, S. *Digital Practices*, p. 2.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Kaprow, A. (Kelley, J. ed.) *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*. California and London: University of California Press, 1993, p. 83.

networks that is publicly available worldwide and consists of thousands of smaller networks.¹⁰¹ Its inventor was the US military,¹⁰² which ensured that Internet technologies serve its needs and interests. Nonetheless, the very notion of what the Internet is –its structure, uses, and values– has changed radically throughout the course of its existence. What was originally meant to be a tool used by scientists in order to run programmes on remote computers has evolved, after a long process of technical, organisational and political restructuring, into a powerful medium for interpersonal communication which is now being used by a big (though not fairly distributed) part of the world’s population. According to Janet Abbate, ARPANET’s planners never anticipated that people would “turn out to be the network’s most valued resources”¹⁰³ –what they had in mind was more akin to expensive pieces of hardware and huge databases. Neither did it cross their minds that ARPANET would evolve into a means for bringing people together in collaborative environments. Accidentally, “email laid the groundwork for creating virtual communities through the network”¹⁰⁴ transforming ARPANET, a single network and an application of military and scientific use, into the Internet,¹⁰⁵ “a system of many interconnected networks, capable of almost indefinite expansion.”¹⁰⁶ This global information and communications system became increasingly accessible through the technological developments that introduced personal computers and private Internet access.¹⁰⁷

As a communications medium, the Internet recognises no professionals or experts in the sense that print media do;¹⁰⁸ no node is hierarchically superior to any other node. Unlike the traditional communications media, which function as arborescent structures dependent on hierarchies, ‘parentage’, homogeneity and control, the Internet is the realisation of a rhizomatic system as described by Deleuze and Guattari in their influential book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.¹⁰⁹ The articulation of this ontological difference between the

¹⁰¹ Internet In: *Wikipedia*. Available from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet> 15/11/2009, 23:59 [accessed 28/11/2009]

¹⁰² The Internet and its predecessor, the ARPANET, were created by the US Department of Defense’s Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA). For more information see: Abbate, J. *Inventing the Internet*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000.

¹⁰³ Abbate, J. *Inventing the Internet*, p. 111.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ This transition took place within the decade 1973 - 1983.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

¹⁰⁷ Originally, only big (and wealthy) Universities and research centres could afford access to the ARPANET.

¹⁰⁸ It is virtually impossible for someone to publish a book with an academic publisher, for example, without boasting certain academic credentials, as well as successfully going through a peer-review process. This does not apply online, where anyone can publish anything, regardless of subject matter or the author’s knowledge and expertise in the field in question.

¹⁰⁹ Deleuze and Guattari used the term ‘rhizome’ to describe research and practice that allows for multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points in data representation and interpretation: “unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple. (...) It is comprised not of units but of dimensions, or rather

Internet and the traditional communications media of newspaper, TV and radio¹¹⁰ unearths another difference, just as major: the Internet is the only communications medium that supports a many-to-many function. Since there is no central system of content control, anyone can input any information s/he wants without having to request permission. This freedom, combined with the Internet's tradition of user involvement and collaborative practice, led to the production of the Open Source software movement for the collaborative creation of free and accessible-to-all social software, the copyleft movement,¹¹¹ art-hack practices and (h)activist initiatives focusing on socio-political agendas. These initiatives are not separate from the media arts movement: many art-hackers, (h)activists and open source programmers produce work that raises social issues and poses questions of ownership, authorship, accessibility and commercialisation of the Internet itself. The Internet's many-to-many function challenges deeply rooted assumptions about the role and status of the producer/artist. If every user becomes a producer of content, then surely the role of the producer must be revisited. If the art piece is the outcome of open-ended collaborative processes that invite everyone to participate, adapt, expand, re-use and co-create the piece, then surely the status of the artist as a creator/author must be rethought. Finally, if by artistic work we do not signify a finished piece but an open-ended collaborative process in a state of flux and perpetual evolution, then surely the nature of artistic work must be reconsidered too. I will explore these issues further in Chapter Four, looking at practices of collaborative creativity through the *Deptford.TV* case-study.

The invention of the World Wide Web by Tim Berners-Lee¹¹² provided even wider connectivity and access to information. Berners-Lee's aim was to make accessible any

directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (*milieu*) from which it grows and which it overflows. It constitutes linear multiplicities with n dimensions having neither subject nor object, which can be laid out on a plane of consistency, and from which the one is always subtracted ($n-1$). When a multiplicity of this kind changes dimension, it necessarily changes in nature as well, undergoes a metamorphosis. Unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, the rhizome is made only of lines; lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature. These lines, or ligaments, should not be confused with lineages of the aborescent type, which are merely localizable linkages between points and positions. (...) unlike tracings, the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entranceways and exits and its own lines of flight." See Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. (Tr.: Massumi, B.) London and New York: Continuum, 2003, p. 23.

¹¹⁰ It is important to note that these media also allow for certain types and degrees of interactivity (such as letters to the editor, audience calling in, audience voting as in *Strictly Come Dancing*), whereas the radio was actually considered a two-way communication medium by Bertolt Brecht, see for example: Brecht, B. *The Radio as an Apparatus for Communication*. Available from: at <http://home.freeuk.net/lemmaesthetics/brecht1.htm> 1932 [accessed 25/20/2009]

¹¹¹ Copyleft is a method for making a computer program or any other work free and accessible to everyone, and requires that all its modified and extended versions are free as well. For more information see GNU Operating System. Available from: <http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/copyleft.html> [accessed 11/02/2006]

¹¹² Tim Berners-Lee, a researcher in CERN, Switzerland, invented the WWW in 1990.

information available on the Internet by the use of a hyperlink that would function as a reference. This way, rather than depending on a complicated set of instructions to access or refer to information on the network, people would only need a simple identifier string –a URI.¹¹³ Berners-Lee claims that his reason for designing the WWW was the wish to facilitate people in working together, rather than the production of one more technical toy. Indeed, the Web is more a social creation than a technical one as its ultimate goal is “to support and improve our weblike existence in the world”.¹¹⁴ This is made possible through the lack of a designed-in central point:¹¹⁵ anybody can input any type of information without having to ask for permission. Berners-Lee saw the Web as a universal resource that should be able to scale up, grow in an unlimited way, and stay ‘out of control’. According to Abbate:

The Web completed the Internet’s transformation from a research tool to a popular medium by providing an application attractive enough to draw the masses of potential Internet users into active participation. It solidified the Internet’s traditions of decentralization, open architecture, and active user participation, putting in place a radically decentralized system of information sharing. On the Web, links between sites were made laterally instead of hierarchically, and each individual could be a producer as well as a consumer of information.¹¹⁶

The characteristics of open architecture, decentralisation, lack of hierarchy and active user participation –which Abbate describes as the “traditions of the Internet”– support accessibility and the practices of networking, data sharing, interaction, and collaborative creativity. These traditions are equally central to the genres of media arts and cybertheatres as both aesthetic processes and ethical choices. Donna Haraway, in her influential *Cyborg Manifesto*, rejects the old dichotomy between public and private spheres in favour of the network as an ideological image, “suggesting the profusion of spaces and identities and the permeability of boundaries in the personal body and the body politic.”¹¹⁷ The practice of networking, being a multifaceted, open practice that can adapt to diverse functions and meanings, suits Haraway’s cyborgs – hybrid creatures who are themselves multiple– signaling some “disturbingly and pleasurablely tight couplings”:¹¹⁸ it seems that networking can be both a feminist practice and a multinational corporate strategy.

These characteristics are not all new or Internet-specific: ideas of decentralisation,

¹¹³ Uniform Resource Identifier (rather than Locator, as in URL). For more information see: Berners-Lee, T. *Weaving the Web: the Past, Present and Future of the World Wide Web*. London and New York: Texere, 2000.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 133.

¹¹⁵ That is, a point from which users would need to ask permission in order to ‘register’ a new server or get approval of its contents.

¹¹⁶ Abbate, J. *Inventing the Internet*, pp. 217-218.

¹¹⁷ Haraway, D. A. *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991, p. 170.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 151.

active viewer participation and distributed creativity as aesthetic procedures of 20th Century art-historical movements will be analysed in Chapter One. Nevertheless, the nature of the Internet as a medium pushed these ideas a step further. Although Happenings, for example, turned their audiences into participants, these participants were still following instructions given to them by an artist. The Internet, on the other hand, was built by its very users who (far from following instructions) challenged the planners' original intentions about the functions and uses of the medium. The multimedia application of the WWW, by supporting the integration of different media and facilitating accessibility, expanded the possibilities of active user participation and telematic or trans-local collaborations.

The phenomenal user production/participation the Internet (and Web 2.0 technologies, which I take up in Chapters One and Four) has spawned presupposes the possibility of interactivity –a function that proved crucial in Dixon's, Smith's and Giannachi's definitions of digital performance and virtual theatres. According to Sheizaf Rafaeli, interactivity is a natural attribute of both face-to-face and mediated forms of communication, present in the operation of both traditional and new media.¹¹⁹ It is generally understood as “the acting upon or being in close relationship with each other”,¹²⁰ which can occur in both direct and mediated forms of communication. Not all artistic media support this function: traditional media such as painting and sculpture are not interactive –they invite the spectator's gaze and, potentially, the development of a conceptual, aesthetic or other relationship with him/her, while preserving their physical distance and self-sufficiency in the production of meaning and affect. They do not invite the viewer to embark upon a haptic encounter with them, adapt them according to his/her liking, or input new parameters. On the other hand, time-based media such as performance and digital technologies often invite the spectator's active involvement as participant, performer, or co-author. As Inke Arns points out: “As the twenty-first century approached, the nineteenth century artist-genius had evolved into an initiator of communicative, and often also social and political, (exchange) processes. In all these ‘opening-up movements’, the notion of interaction plays an important role.”¹²¹ In Chapter One I outline this shift of artistic practice through the movements of Dada, Fluxus, Events and Happenings.

Interactivity is an important element of the majority of media art practices. Interactive art invites the viewer/user to actively engage with the piece. John Ritter compares the difference

¹¹⁹ See Rafaeli, S. *Interactivity: from New Media to Communication*, 1998 In: Hawkins, R.P., Wiemann, J.M. and Pingree, S. (eds.) *Sage Annual Review of Communication Research. Advancing Communication Science: Merging Mass and Interpersonal Process*. Beverly Hills: Sage, Vol. 16, 1998, pp. 110-135.

¹²⁰ As defined in: *Collins English Dictionary*. Glasgow: Harper Collins, Updated Edition, 2004, p. 845.

¹²¹ Arns, I. *Interaction, Participation, Networking Art and Telecommunication*. Available from: http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/themes/overview_of_media_art/communication/1/ [accessed 25/10/2009]. The article provides a detailed discussion into ideas and practices of interaction and participation in the arts through the 20th Century.

between communicating with a non-interactive as opposed to an interactive medium “like the difference in viewing a photograph of a person and having a conversation with that person.”¹²² According to the Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology, ‘interactivity’ is “The relation between two or more relatively independent things or systems of change which advance, hinder, limit, or otherwise affect one another.”¹²³ Thus, interacting with a person or piece is the experience of affecting them/it and being affected in return. In physical performance this interactive experience occurs through the sharing of a joint spacetime and the interaction between physical presences. It can also occur as an element of dramaturgy¹²⁴ –Augusto Boal’s theatre, for example, aims to involve the spectators in the process of creation which, in this case, focuses on bringing into visibility, expressing and discussing socio-political issues of interest to specific audiences. This web of interconnected agents that develops, on different levels, in physical performance practices, is not reproducible as such in mediated performance: performers and audiences of films or TV dramas, although they can influence each other to a certain extent,¹²⁵ cannot develop simultaneous interactions as they share no joint spacetime. This difference is of importance: compared to the web of connections that develop between the performers and audiences of physical theatre, film is, to recall Ritter’s words, “like watching someone’s photograph”. Filmic performers and audiences are separate entities that never meet in a joint present: the performer’s present (what they ‘now’ enact) is the audience’s future (what they will later watch), and the audience’s present (what they ‘now’ watch) is the performer’s past (what they enacted elsewhere, some other time). Between these two entities there is a for ever failure to meet, an eternal time delay, a gap in the spacetime that brings them together while keeping them apart.

Cybertheatres are practices that have the potential to create joint spacetimes between

¹²² Ritter, J. The Intersection of Art and Interactivity, 1996 In: *Ars Electronica Festival Catalogue: Memesis*. Linz: Ars Electronica, 1996. Available from: http://www.aec.at/en/archives/festival_archive/festival_catalogs/festival_artikel.asp?iProjectID=8567 [retrieved 01/03/2003]

¹²³ Baldwin, J. M. Interactivity, 2000 In: Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology. Available from: <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Baldwin/Dictionary/defs/I4defs.htm> [accessed 25/10/2009]

¹²⁴ This case is more rare though. Throughout the history of theatre there have been numerous, diverse practices, which aimed to involve the spectators as active participants. Still, such practices remain part of the artistic ‘avant-garde’ or political/activist/community theatre and performance. The majority of mainstream theatre, as well as a large part of performance and dance-theatre practice remains a show for audiences to watch rather than a participatory experience that invites their active involvement. This is not a judgment regarding the quality of those works –I believe that both types of experience can be enjoyable and valuable. I also believe that, in the current moment, there are not enough opportunities for active audience involvement that can lead to participatory experiences of value (aesthetic, social, political, educational or other).

¹²⁵ Directly e.g. the audience is influenced by watching a film, or indirectly e.g. the performers in a film are influenced by the audiences’ reactions as these are translated through the mass media, the commercial success of the film, and so on.

their participants, and through these, to support simultaneous interactions. They also can, potentially, support a) face-to-face and mediated,¹²⁶ b) synchronous and asynchronous¹²⁷ and, c) limited by duration¹²⁸ and open-ended¹²⁹ forms of connections among their participants. As interactive practices, cybertheatres invite audience participation in varying degrees: some practices are, to a large extent, scripted. Such practices invite active audience participation but limit this through pre-scripted actions or sets of rules the audiences must follow.¹³⁰ Other practices consider collaboration to be the basis of their creative process and invite the audiences to become co-creators and co-authors.¹³¹ The possibility of merging diverse types of practice, combined with the creative dynamics of a many-to-many communications network are, I believe, among the basic characteristics of cybertheatres, which open up exciting new potential for the production of participatory, collaborative work, and work concerned with social and political issues.

Like every other live performance practice, cybertheatres are ephemeral and non-reproducible. Like theatre, they have a strong connection to the 'present' and, for that reason, "continually mark the perpetual disappearance of their own enactment".¹³² Unlike theatre though, cybertheatres are not always made from purely synchronous connections. In terms of the temporal relations between performers and audiences, cybertheatres are a fusion of

¹²⁶ See, for example the work of Avatar Body *Collision*. Avatar Body *Collision* website. Available from: <http://www.avatarbodycollision.org> [accessed 26/02/2006]

¹²⁷ An example is Entropy8Zuper!'s piece *Wirefire*. Entropy8Zuper! *Wirefire* 1999-2003. Available from: <http://www.entropy8zuper.org/wirefire/> [accessed 26/02/2006]

¹²⁸ As many performance pieces are only based on real-time connections between performers and audiences, and thus have a specific, limited duration. See again Avatar Body *Collision* and also the work of Desktop Theater as examples. Desktop Theater website. Available from: <http://www.desktoptheater.org> [accessed 11/02/2006]

¹²⁹ As most performances in MUDs and MOOs and several performances that use social networking sites and virtual worlds, which develop almost as 'parallel lives'.

¹³⁰ Again I will point to the work of Blast Theory as an example: at their performance/installation/game piece *Can You See Me Now?* participants can play together with the artists/'runners' but they have to follow the rules of the game as set by Blast Theory. Audiences are invited to actively participate in the piece and thus radically affect the piece (and the artists) through their actions. Nonetheless, they do not become co-authors of the piece. Blast Theory *Can You See Me Now?* 2001-. Available from: <http://www.canyouseemenow.co.uk> [accessed 7/02/2006]

¹³¹ This open-access approach has been the basis of the Open Source software movement and has initiated a number of artworks that focus on providing access to software and know-how so as to support independent production and collaborative creation. Such is the work of radioqualia, Jaromil (dyne.org) and Adnan Hadzi (*Deptford.TV*). radioqualia website available from: <http://www.radioqualia.net> [accessed 11/02/1006]. Dyne.org website available from: <http://www.rastasoft.org> [accessed 11/02/2006]. *Deptford.TV* website available from: <http://deptford.tv> [accessed 11/02/2006]. Other such examples come from the gaming communities who often collaborate for the production of whole computer games or new elements for existing games. The First Person Shooter game *Counter Strike* is such an example: the first version of the game was created by its community of players. *Counter Strike* website available from: <http://www.counterstrike.org> [accessed 11/02/2006]. I have not come across a networked performance piece that is open to such an extent, though this is something I would be interested to see as the genre evolves.

¹³² Phelan, P. *Unmarked*, p. 120.

performance and cinema, allowing for both synchronous and asynchronous connections and narrative structures. Two different examples are Avatar Body *Collision's* *DTN2* (2004)¹³³ and E8Z!'s *Wirefire*. *DTN2* was a piece of political satire that merged layers of physical and virtual spacetime: the piece was performed in physical space in Glasgow, UK, as part of the Machinista 2004 Festival,¹³⁴ and in cyberspace on UpStage,¹³⁵ a software platform for online performance, theatre and storytelling created by the Avatar Body *Collision* group. *DTN2*, like most performance and theatre plays, was happening 'live', for a specific and limited duration; that is, it had a temporally synchronous relation with its audiences. The performance can be re-staged, and it has been documented. Nevertheless, the exact performance that took place on the night of May 9th, 2004, can never be repeated 'live' in the same way that no theatrical performance can ever take place twice: each play is bound to the present and its performance is an act of disappearance.

Wirefire, on the other hand, was of a transient ontology¹³⁶ that merged synchronous and asynchronous connections. It operated in three different modes: live, random, and replay. The live mode was that of a live, online performance of a pre-determined duration that was taking place once per week, at a specific time. The replay mode was an audiovisual archive of all the past performances, that the audiences could replay and watch as documentations of past events. Finally, the random mode allowed the visitors to 'initiate' endless new versions of *Wirefire*; these were generative events triggered by the visitor and 'performed' by the computer in a real-time random mix of animation and sound files from the *Wirefire* 'library'. By combining these distinctly different operational modes, *Wirefire* provides a useful insight into the different temporal modalities cybertheatres can operate within, and the different types of encounters these can support. *Wirefire* is also a good example of the intersection between randomness and control that characterises many media arts and cybertheatre practices: when *Wirefire* operates in Random mode the computer generates a live 'film' by randomly mixing files. The artists control the piece through inputting selected files into the *Wirefire* database, but the files used to generate each Random version are chosen and mixed by the computer software in a chance operation that is not controlled by the artists. On the other hand, when the artists are performing live they mix the files manually, choosing to combine different files or input new ones, choosing the rhythms and patterns created, and controlling different types of audience

¹³³ Avatar Body *Collision* *DTN2* 2004. Available from: <http://www.avatarbodycollision.org/dtn2/DTN2.html> [accessed 12/02/2006]

¹³⁴ Machinista Festival website. Available from: <http://www.machinista.org.uk/> [accessed 12/02/2006]

¹³⁵ UpStage is an open source web-based venue and tool for artists "to compile different media for textual and audiovisual communication into a live performance, in real time, for online audiences." UpStage website. Available from: <http://www.upstage.org.nz/> [accessed 12/02/2006]

¹³⁶ *Wirefire* was a performance, a net.art piece and an installation.

intervention that are integrated within the piece.

iv. The Structure of the Thesis

In this Introduction I aimed to set the stage for my thesis: I introduced the subject of cybertheatres and situated both the term and my intentions within a body of knowledge concerned with relevant practices. It is now time to embark upon the journey of exploration that is the main body of the thesis.

This thesis includes four Chapters. Chapter One sets out to trace the origins of cybertheatres as an emergent genre focusing on selected art historical movements of the 20th Century. This Chapter investigates the movements of Dada, Fluxus, Conceptual Art and Happenings in relation to their focus on ideas of concept, event and audience participation, rather than on the unified art object. Those shifts of focus have, not only in my view,¹³⁷ deeply influenced the movement of media arts, with which cybertheatres are closely related. Happenings, as introduced by Allan Kaprow in the 1970s, have also challenged assumptions about the nature of theatre and performance, as well as illuminated potentials regarding the future development of these artforms. The Chapter goes on to examine contemporary and current practices that can be framed as cybertheatres by investigating three major types of networked performance: online performances, telematic works and practices that link virtual and physical space (mixed or augmented reality projects).

In Chapter Two I examine the spatiality of cyberspace and augmented environments. Here I investigate the traditional spatial qualities in which the Internet is embedded, and ask a) why it is that we conceptualise and visualise immaterial networks as physical space and, b) what are the social effects of this metaphor or cognitive function (experts are divided as to the reasons of this certainly dominant approach to the networks). Following Lefebvre, I argue that space is not an empty container that pre-exists action, but something we ourselves produce experientially through our actions. In this respect, I investigate how our spatialised notion of the networks affects cybertheatres, performance practices that take place in/on the networks; and the other way round, how those emergent practices produce hybrid spacetimes. I conclude this Chapter with a study of the work of Blast Theory and specifically their game/performance piece *Can You See Me Now?* Here I use Blast Theory as a case-study due to the group's concern with developing work that blurs the boundaries between physical and virtual space, spreading their action(s) and participant(s) across stages of differing spatial coordinates.

Chapter Two, following Lefebvre's claim that 'space is *my* body', moves from a

¹³⁷ A range of scholars have focused on some of those movements in tracing the origins of media arts, contemporary performance and/or digital performance/virtual theatres, such as RoseLee Goldberg, Christiane Paul, Steve Dixon, Gabriella Giannachi, Inke Arns, Victoria Vesna, among others.

discussion of space to a discussion of bodies. Talking about bodies, particularly in relation to performance practice, is bound to bring forth issues of presence. In Chapter Three I discuss notions of presence and absence, questioning the relevance of this dialectic in relation to networked practices of performance as well as everyday life. My investigation into the notions of presence and absence in the networks confronts me with another two binary dialectics, those of materiality vs. immateriality, and originality vs. artificiality. I examine the extent to which notions of presence and absence are entangled with those and ask: are the binaries imposed by those oppositional dialectics relevant within a posthuman context? This Chapter relies heavily on Kathryn Hayles's influential book *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics*, and examines Hayles's proposition that a complementary dialectic is needed in order to discuss issues of presence and absence in virtual reality.¹³⁸ Hayles suggests that we look at pattern and randomness as a dialectic that is complementary to that of presence and absence. I undertake to further Hayles's proposition as a discourse relevant to performance studies and the analysis of networked performance practices. My exploration on notions of presence herein is intertwined with a study of the work of Belgium-based duo Entropy&Zuper!, who have now relaunched themselves as games design studio Tale of Tales. I specifically focus on two of their projects, the performance/net.art/installation piece *Wirefire* and the virtual world/game/performance piece *The Endless Forest*. I chose to study Entropy&Zuper!'s/Tale of Tale's work in relation to the notions of presence and absence due to the intimate nature of the artists' piece *Wirefire*, as well as their personal story –a love affair that prompted their collaboration as well as their early practice.

Whereas the previous two Chapters are primarily theoretical investigations and approach practice from the point of view of the audience/participant, Chapter Four shifts the tone from the participant to the practitioner, undertaking an applied exploration into practices of curation. This Chapter uses two different case-studies for two different purposes: firstly, it looks into issues of curating emergent genres in general and cybertheatres in particular through a practice as research project, the three-day event *Intimacy: Across Digital and Visceral Performance*, which I initiated, produced, co-directed and co-curated with Rachel Zerihan. *Intimacy* took place in December 2007 at Goldsmiths, Laban, The Albany, Home London, the streets of New Cross and Deptford, and Online (Second Life, UpStage and through Skype). The event featured 36 performances, 6 workshops, 4 seminars, a day-long 'show & tell' marathon of presentations and a one-day symposium, attracting approximately 1,500 attendees. *Intimacy* aimed to bridge

¹³⁸ Hayles, N. K. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

across performance practices that are often perceived as being situated at the opposite ends of the performance spectrum: digital/virtual/networked theatre and performance on the one hand, and live art practices on the other. Rachel and I intended to create dialogues, identify common grounds and acknowledge tensions between body-based practices that emphasise the body's physicality, vulnerability and embeddedness within a surrounding materiality, and digital practices that emphasise avatar bodies, dispersed anatomies, mediated encounters and physical lack. Through bridging across those practices, we also wished to bring together communities of artists, theorists, students and social workers who do not often cross paths. Our entry point was the notion of intimacy in performance, our interest around what we identified as its current cultural urgency (through an abundance of practices concerned with such issues both in live art and digital performance) and its social and political implications within a hyper-mediated society. In the first part of Chapter Four I tell the story of the *Intimacy* event and how this came to happen, while discussing issues of curation, presentation and programming of media and live arts. I ask, what is the best way of communicating emergent practices such as cybertheatres to a wide and diverse range of audiences/participants?

The second part of this Chapter follows Hayles's proposal for the introduction of the pattern-randomness dialectic, albeit aiming to address a different set of issues: according to Hayles, pattern- randomness implies a shift of emphasis from ownership to access. Networked practices operate more often than not as open systems that invite users to participate, allowing access to their code, content and/or structures. This shift of control, responsibility and power challenges the traditional roles of creators/producers vs. consumers of content. Here I look at practices of collaborative creativity,¹³⁹ focusing on the collaborative film-making project *Deptford.TV* initiated by UK-based artist Adnan Hadzi. *Deptford.TV* is a project with a double agenda, aiming on the one hand to produce software and technical platforms that can facilitate collaborative film-making, and on the other hand to empower local communities in order to collaboratively document the regeneration of Deptford, Southeast London. This is, possibly, a contested choice of a case-study, as I would not approach *Deptford.TV* as a cybertheatre project. I have chosen to explore this work because it facilitates collaboration, providing a platform for exploration and sharing, bringing together a community of users and aiming at a social impact through its practice. *Deptford.TV* applies Web 2.0 technologies and attitudes by inviting

¹³⁹ According to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi: "Psychologists tend to see creativity exclusively as a mental process [but] creativity is as much a cultural and social as it is a psychological event. Therefore what we call creativity is not the product of single individuals, but of social systems making judgements about individuals' products." Csikszentmihalyi, M. A Systems Perspective on Creativity. Available from: www.sagepub.com/upm-data/11443_01_Henry_Ch01.pdf 2006 [accessed 28/11/2009]. Though Csikszentmihalyi draws attention to the social context out of which creativity emerges, he still views creativity as an 'individual's product'. In this case I am concerned with collaborative practices and products that are created by communities rather than individuals.

participants to become co-authors of the works produced and aspiring to become dispersed, as a project, within its own community of users. I chose to study this work because I think it can provide a useful model for community-based cybertheatre practices. Furthermore, I approach *Deptford.TV* not only as a model for inter-authored practices, but also as a curatorial model. According to Joasia Krysa: “The issue of reorganization of power and centres of control is particularly important for curating because traditionally curatorial processes would be based on exerting almost exclusive control over the production of meaning”.¹⁴⁰ As *Deptford.TV* is a platform that invites content rather than a single piece, I see it not only as an art project with a social agenda, but also as a curatorial project that invites its users to become co-authors but also co-curators of content and meaning.

¹⁴⁰ Krysa, J. Distributed Curating and Immateriality, 2008 In: Paul, C. (ed.) *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond: Curatorial Models for Digital Art*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008, p. 97.

CHAPTER ONE

Cybertheatres:

From Past to Present

Cybertheatres are diverse, contemporary networked performance practices, currently reaching a state of critical mass that confirms their emergence as a distinct genre. While this new genre is still in the process of forming itself, its lineage can be traced but cannot be fixed. Since cybertheatres are interdisciplinary practices that merge live performance with media arts and networking technologies, one could attempt to trace their lineage in the art-historical background of their constituent parts. It is not as simple though: while such practices bring together existing genres, my argument is that they also constitute a new, distinct genre with its own unique lineage, ontology and networked aesthetics. Cybertheatres also relate to other practices such as certain types of theatre (for example, interactive and applied theatre), cinema and videogames. One thing is certain: cybertheatres did not evolve in an art-historical vacuum. In this chapter I set out to a) trace the origins of cybertheatres in certain art-historical movements of the 20th Century and, b) identify a recent history of networked performance practices.

1.1. Tracing the Origins

Interestingly, the origin of both (new) media arts¹⁴¹ and performance art can be traced in the same art-historical movements of Futurism, Dada, Fluxus, Conceptual Art and Happenings. RoseLee Goldberg, in her book *Performance Art: from Futurism to the Present* undertakes the task of situating performance art within this historical lineage.¹⁴² Rather than attempting to repeat Goldberg's well-known thesis, I will just refer the reader to her book in relation to the

¹⁴¹ I define (new) media arts as arts that employ digital technologies (computational and Internet technologies, audiovisual technologies, virtual reality, sensors, biofeedback and so on), as well as biotechnologies and genetic engineering (which often incorporate digital technologies at some stage). In media art practices these technologies are not just used as tools but as media, that is, they are integral to the creative processes, outcomes and aesthetics of such practices, thus defining the nature of media arts as a genre. This being a relatively new and considerably diverse field of practice, the terminologies employed to describe and define it are varied and contested. Other terms used to signify this field are: electronic arts, digital arts and computer (or computer-generated) arts. Terms that refer to sub-categories of digital/media/electronic/computer arts are: net (or Internet) art, networked / telecommunications art, interactive art, software art and more. According to Christiane Paul (currently New Media Curator, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York): "Over the decades, art making use of digital technologies has taken many forms, and even today, the question of how exactly digital or new media art can be defined is still being debated." Paul, C. In: *FotoFest Exhibition Catalogue*. Available from: <http://www.fotofest.org/unstable.htm> 2002 [accessed 11/02/2006]. See also: Paul, C. *Digital Art*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2003; and Paul, C. (ed.) *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond*. It is also worth following relevant discourse in *Wikipedia: Digital Art* In: *Wikipedia*. Available from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Digital_art [accessed 14/01/2006]. Computer-Generated Art In: *Wikipedia*. Available from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Computer-Generated_Art [accessed 14/01/2006]. *Computer Art* In: *Wikipedia*. Available from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Computer_art [accessed 14/01/2006]. Because 'new' introduces a whole set of questions regarding the 'newness' of the media, both as far as the new media arts genre is concerned and in relation to this thesis, I will be using the term 'media arts' in this context.

¹⁴² Goldberg, R. *Performance Art: from Futurism to the Present*. London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 2nd edition, 2001.

art-historical background of performance art practices. Despite scholarly attempts to situate media arts within a similar art-historical lineage,¹⁴³ I would suggest that these have been rather fleeting compared to Goldberg's study. Rightly so, maybe, as curators, theorists and artists have been more preoccupied with pinning down this emergent field rather than tracing its origins in history. Here I refer to four art-historical movements which, as certain theorists have pointed out,¹⁴⁴ anticipated the emergence of media arts. These are: Dada, Fluxus, Conceptual Art and Happenings. I have focused on these specific movements, not because I aim to suggest that they are more important for the development of media arts than other movements – such as Futurism, for example – but because I see them as more relevant to the emergence and practice of cybertheatres. These movements performed a decisive shift from the notion of the artwork as a “unified material object”¹⁴⁵ to emphasise the *concept* or “art as idea”,¹⁴⁶ the *event* or “art as action”,¹⁴⁷ and the *audience as participant*.

1.1.a) Logic is Always False: Dada

Dada¹⁴⁸ was based on the ideas of irrationality, rejection of the laws of beauty and social organisation, and an attempt to dismantle aesthetic standards as outlined in canonical art histories. “Logic is always false”¹⁴⁹ was the movement's motto, and the artists' main task was to move beyond ‘bourgeois’ art,¹⁵⁰ to a type of art that would establish a new relationship with its audiences, express its involvement with current social and political issues, and merge with the praxis of everyday life. Marcel Duchamp, one of the most prominent Dadaist artists, was an extremely influential figure in the field of contemporary visual and media arts. Duchamp's work drastically shifted the focus a) from the *object* to the *concept*: this shift anticipated both art as concept or idea (as in conceptual art) and “the ‘virtual object’ as a structure in process”,¹⁵¹ and b) from *artistic creation* of an ‘original’ piece to *creative appropriation* of an already existing – often in many identical copies– object, through his ‘readymades’ that pointed towards the ‘found’ materials of contemporary art movements.¹⁵² Duchamp repeatedly declared his interest

¹⁴³ Most notably Christiane Paul's book *Digital Art*.

¹⁴⁴ Christiane Paul, Rachel Greene and Charlie Geer among others.

¹⁴⁵ Paul, C. *Digital Art*, p. 11.

¹⁴⁶ Lippard, L. R. and Chandler, J. The Dematerialization of Art *Art International* 12 (2), (February) 1968, p. 32.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ The Dada movement flourished mainly in France, Switzerland and Germany, around 1916-1920. Its artists included Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia and Man Ray.

¹⁴⁹ Tzara, T. Dada Manifesto, 1918 In: Hopkins, D. *Dada and Surrealism: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 98.

¹⁵⁰ ‘Bourgeois’ art was considered to be ‘art for art's sake’, that is art in pursuit of aesthetic pleasure, with no social or political concerns.

¹⁵¹ Paul, C. *Digital Art*, p. 13. Paul refers to categories of digital arts such as net art and software art.

¹⁵² Such as, conceptual art, arte povera, media arts among other movements. The re-appropriation of found

in ‘non-retinal’ art,¹⁵³ that is, art that does not concentrate on what the eye sees –and so on aesthetics of beauty– but rather on the concept behind what is being viewed, “where language, thought and vision act upon one another.”¹⁵⁴

Dadaist artists produced, in addition to art objects such as Duchamp’s readymades, poetry and performance works. Dadaist poetry experimented with the sounds of the words rather than their meanings, as well as with pure sounds that had no linguistic value. It was written to be performed in public, in performances characterised by the aesthetics of *simultaneism*.¹⁵⁵ Annabelle Melzer refers to simultaneism as “a new grasp of structure”, which is the “opposite of narration” in the sense that it aims to “present a plurality of actions at the same time”.¹⁵⁶ Simultaneism is an important reference point for the aesthetics of media arts, as digital practices often merge disparate elements and juxtapose conflicting characteristics in anti-linear (and to an extent anti-narrative) structures, emphasising the ruptures produced from this aesthetic strategy rather than any links between the diverse elements contained in a piece. The juxtapositions of simultaneism often led to unexpected, illogical, obscure and even shocking outcomes.¹⁵⁷ In March 1916, Huelsenbeck, Tzara and Janco performed the first simultaneous poem, *L’ Amiral cherche une maison à louer* (*The Admiral looks for a house to rent*), in which “three or more voices speak, sing, whistle, etc., simultaneously in such a way that the resulting combinations account for the total effect of the work”.¹⁵⁸ This is how the poem starts:

L’ Amiral cherche une maison à louer

Poema simultáneo por R. Huelsenbeck, M. Janco, T. Tzara.

HUELSENBECK Ahoi ahoi Des Admirals gwirktes Beinkleid schnell
JANCO (cantando) Where the honey suckle wine twines itself
TZARA Boum boum boum Il déshabilla sa chair quand les grenouilles

materials is a particularly prominent practice in the field of media arts where artists re-use, sample, re-mix or re-write found materials such as images, sounds and film footage, creating a ‘remix culture’. ‘Remix culture’ is a term employed by Lawrence Lessig and other copyright activists to describe a society which allows and encourages derivative works. See: Koman, R. *Remixing Culture: An Interview with Lawrence Lessig*. Available from: <http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/policy/2005/02/24/lessig.html> 2005 [accessed 3/08/2009], and Lessig, L. *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy*. London and New York: Penguin, 2008.

¹⁵³ See Cabanne, P. *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1971.

¹⁵⁴ Johns, J. *Marcel Duchamp [1887 – 1968]: An Appreciation*, 1971 In: Cabanne, P. *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, p. 109.

¹⁵⁵ Melzer claims that, although Cubist Orphist painters were the first to introduce simultaneism in their work, it was the Dadas, “poets rooted in painting”, who extended simultaneism into the area of performance. See: Melzer, A. *Dada and Surrealist Performance*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2nd edition, 1994.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 34

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*.

HUELSENBECK zerfällt Teerpappe macht Rawagen in der Nacht
JANCO (cantando) around the door a sweetheart mine is waiting patiently for me I
TZARA humides commencèrent à bruler j'ai mis le cheval dans l'âme du¹⁵⁹

All Dadaist practices were the result of “an interplay between randomness and control”.¹⁶⁰ Ideas of controlled randomness and chance, celebrated by the Dadaists, are also among the most fundamental principles of the digital medium and, as such, of media art practices. Instant, random access to the digital medium is seen “as a basis for processing and assembling information”;¹⁶¹ information that can then be reorganised, reshuffled (a chance reorganisation of elements as in the ipod function) and/or redistributed in a seemingly infinite number of ways. Another element of Dadaist (and Futurist) performances relevant to several interactive art projects, was the practice of challenging audiences in direct confrontation. Often the aim of the performers was to surprise and provoke their audiences, making it impossible for them to remain passive spectators and ‘forcing’ them into some kind of re/action. The boundaries between stage and auditorium were thus being challenged by the Dadaists who sought to establish an interactive relationship between performers and audiences by disturbing, provoking, challenging, even attacking their audiences. Shouts, whistles, laughter and singing from the audience were common in Dadaist performances, and sometimes the events would end in uproars and riots, with members of the audience rummaging through the stage and running after the performers.¹⁶² Surrealism, identified as a movement around 1924 with the publication of André Breton’s First Surrealist Manifesto, followed Dada in challenging assumptions, traditions and boundaries in theatre. As John H. Matthews observes: “Tradition marks in Dada and Surrealism boundaries that the playwright –so far as he thinks of them at all– has every intention of casting down. (...) Subversion rests upon the distortion and disruption of inherited theatrical practice.”¹⁶³

1.1.b) The Act of Flowing: Fluxus

Fluxus is a term first introduced by the artist George Maciunas who spearheaded the movement.¹⁶⁴ Maciunas used the dictionary definition of the word ‘flux’¹⁶⁵ as part of his

¹⁵⁹ Huelsenbeck, R., Janco, M. and Tzara, T. *L'Amiral cherche une maison à louer*. Available from: <http://www.merzmail.net/lamirall.htm> 1916 [accessed 17/02/2006]

¹⁶⁰ Paul, C. *Digital Art*, p. 11.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 15.

¹⁶² For more information see: Stevenson, J. *Dada, Theatre*. Available from: http://www.tranquileye.com/theatre/dada_theatre.html 1986 [accessed 22/02/2006]; mital-U Data - Situationist. Available from: <http://www.mital-u.ch/Dada/index.html> [accessed 22/02/2006]. Also: Melzer, A. *Dada and Surrealist Performance*. And: Huelsenbeck, R. (ed.) *Dada Almanac*. (Tr.: Atlas Press), London: Atlas Arkhive One, Documents of the Avant-Garde, 1993.

¹⁶³ Matthews, J. H. *Theatre in Dada and Surrealism*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1974.

¹⁶⁴ Fluxus developed through the 1960s and into the 1970s as an international movement, which started off in

description of Fluxus, a movement based on: “the act of flowing; a continuous moving on or passing by, as of a flowing stream; a continuous succession of changes”.¹⁶⁶ Fluxus promoted artistic experimentation, socio-political activism, as well as ideas of spontaneity and chance. The movement was identified with new music and the artist-composer, mainly developing in response to John Cage’s work and teaching practice.¹⁶⁷ Marcel Duchamp was also influential in relation to the Fluxus perception of what art is: Cage described how, through Duchamp, there developed a new realisation of art as autonomous of its maker –“it [art] exists apart from being made”¹⁶⁸ – and as made through perception rather than material construction –“the perception of it makes it.”¹⁶⁹ Fluxus artists produced mainly mixed-media and collage works, often using found materials; they also produced ‘actions’ (or ‘happenings’ as they were named in the USA) further challenging the definition of the artwork as a physical object, and pointing towards a perception of it as something immaterial, time-based and performative.

Dick Higgins, one of the most influential Fluxus artists, attempted in 1982 (that is, *a posteriori*) to list the “aesthetic procedures common to Fluxus practices”.¹⁷⁰ According to Higgins the nine aesthetic characteristics of Fluxus were: 1) Internationalism, 2) Experimentalism and Iconoclasm, 3) Intermedia, 4) Minimalism or Concentration, 5) Attempted Resolution of the Art/Life Dichotomy, 6) Implicativeness, 7) Play or Gags, 8) Ephemerality, and 9) Specificity.¹⁷¹ How do these aesthetic procedures map onto current media art practices and cybertheatres?

Internationalism (or globalism, a term proposed later by artist Ken Friedman)¹⁷² refers to Fluxus’s utopian vision of a global, democratic, anti-elitist culture. The term reflects Fluxus’s lack of interest in the national origin of people or ideas and the encouragement of dialogue between like-minded people across nations. Paik’s piece *Global Groove* (1973) clearly

Europe and the USA and later spread to Japan. It is based on Dadaist ideas of an alternative, non-authoritarian and, to an extent, anarchist culture.

¹⁶⁵ Flux is a Latin word meaning flow, change and fusion.

¹⁶⁶ Schimmel, P. (ed.) *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949-1979*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998, p. 71.

¹⁶⁷ John Cage taught Experimental Composition at the New School for Social Research in New York in the late 1950s. Dick Higgins, George Brecht, Al Hansen and other Fluxus artists were among his students. See: Kostelanetz, R. (ed.) *John Cage*. New York: Praeger, 1970. Two of the most important members of the movement, Yoko Ono and Nam June Paik, came from a musical background: Ono studied poetry and music at the Sarah Lawrence College in New York, and Paik studied music composition at the University of Tokyo. Both Ono and Paik made the transition from music to visual arts under John Cage’s influence.

¹⁶⁸ Snyder, E. An Interview with John Cage: John Cage Discusses Fluxus *Art & Design Magazine* 23, London, 1993, p. 19.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Stiles, K. Anomaly, Sky, Sex and Psi in Fluxus, 2003 In: Hendricks, G. (ed.) *Critical Mass: Happenings, Performance, Intermedia and Rutgers University, 1958-1972*. Massachusetts and New Jersey: Mason Gross Art Galleries, Rutgers University, Mead Art Museum and Amherst College, 2003, p. 60.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² See: Friedman, K. Forty Years of Fluxus. Available from: <http://www.artnotart.com/fluxus/kfriedman-fourtyyears.html> 1998 [accessed 23/02/2006]

demonstrates Fluxus's vision of an international, democratic community: the piece is a video tape which offers "a glimpse of a video landscape of tomorrow".¹⁷³ Paik envisaged endless choice for every TV user of the future all around the world, to view but also to programme televised events of his/her liking. This "weekly TV festival",¹⁷⁴ Paik suggested, would be made up of music, dance and other cultural events from every country and it would be delivered free of charge. The aim was to provide every citizen of the 'global village' with access to a rich, multi-cultural programme of education and entertainment.

Like Fluxus practices, media arts are also often the outcomes of international collaborations: the interdisciplinary and technically demanding nature of many such works requires collaborations to be forged among experts from diverse disciplines (for example, science, engineering, design, architecture, art) who can be based in different countries. Networking, mobile and telecommunications technologies have made such collaborations possible: the Internet itself is a system of many interconnected networks, with no national origin, and limited by no geographical borders.¹⁷⁵ These technologies of interconnectivity foster telematic collaborations and facilitate the emergence and sustainability of virtual communities. The globally dispersed female cyberperformance group *Avatar Body Collision* is an example of such practice: although its members are permanently based in different countries (New Zealand, UK and Finland), they have worked together as a group since 2001. Helen Varley Jamieson, Vicki Smith and Karla Ptacek¹⁷⁶ rehearse and perform together using the custom-built, web-based platform for online performance UpStage. Their performances either take place online or combine physical and virtual stages, and the group performs to globally distributed audiences.

Experimentalism, the second characteristic identified by Higgins, "means trying new things and assessing the results".¹⁷⁷ This entails that collaborative research methodologies,

¹⁷³ Nam June Paik *Global Groove* 1973. Available from: <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/global-groove/> [accessed 23/02/2006]

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ In theory, that is. In practice, of course, the Internet is limited by geographical borders as several communities do not enjoy equal access to technology and information. According to the Internet World Usage statistics dated March 31, 2009, 74.4% of the North American population are Internet users compared to 17.4% of Internet users in Asia and only 5.6% of Internet users in Africa. Internet World Stats: Usage and Population Statistics. Available from: <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm> [accessed 4/06/2009]. There are also widespread issues of Internet censorship imposed by national governments (North Korea and Cuba, where Internet usage is banned, are just two extreme examples), and issues of corporate control of the Internet by corporations such as Microsoft. See: CorpWatch. Noam Chomsky on Microsoft and Corporate Control of the Internet. Available from: http://www.corpwatch.org/article.php?id=1408_1998 [accessed 4/06/2009]. Furthermore, there are fears associated with the imposition of software patent litigation. See: End Software Patents website. Available from: <http://endsoftpatents.org/home-page> [accessed 4/06/2009]. The Internet is clearly not the utopian, equal, democratic arena envisaged by the first communities of users and Tim Berners Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web.

¹⁷⁶ Leena Saarinen is another founding member who was part of the group till 2007.

¹⁷⁷ Friedman, K. Forty Years of Fluxus.

previously relevant to scientists, are now applied to the creative process of art production. Experimentalism is listed together with the movement's iconoclastic principles, which led to the constant challenging and re-evaluation of traditional forms, concepts and rules. Iconoclasm aimed to nurture a new consciousness that would be able to support the vision of a global, democratic and peaceful community. I believe the parallels with media arts are obvious: the combination of arts and emergent technologies requires experimentation as the basis of the creative process. Media artists often work together with scientists and technologists in a process based on trial and error, evaluation and development; that is, a process underpinned by a scientific approach to practice as/and research, which inevitably adopts (and adapts) certain scientific methodologies. An example of such practice, which is characterised by a heavy reliance on scientific models of research and development, is the work of USA-based collective Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) who have developed works that aim to raise public awareness regarding ethical issues around the use of biotechnologies.¹⁷⁸

Figure 1.1 Nam June Paik *Global Groove* 1973¹⁷⁹

Other characteristics that Higgins lists are those of play and ephemerality. The idea of

¹⁷⁸ Critical Art Ensemble website. Available from: <http://www.critical-art.net> [accessed 23/02/2006]. See also: Critical Art Ensemble Defense Fund website. Available from: <http://www.caedefensefund.org> [accessed 23/02/2006]. This is dedicated to Professor Steve Kurtz's (member of CAE) legal case: Kurtz was brought to trial faced with charges for possession of bacteria related to CAE's artistic practice. He has now been cleared of all charges after a costly four-year legal battle.

¹⁷⁹ Available from: <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/global-grove/> [accessed: 23/02/2006]

playfulness points towards the use of humour, pranks and gags, but also the playfulness of free experimentation. To quote Friedman's humorous explanation of the term: "Art was so heavily influenced by rigidities of conception, form and style that the irreverent Fluxus attitude stood out like a loud fart in a small elevator."¹⁸⁰ Many Fluxus artworks aimed to create unexpected circumstances that would surprise, confuse and/or amuse the spectators. For example, Yoko Ono's *Disappearing Piece* (1965), a steel box the caption of which warned "The object in this box will evaporate when the lid is opened",¹⁸¹ or Ken Friedman's *Fruit Sonata* (1963), which reads (as directions to the audience): "Play baseball with a fruit".¹⁸² Such works are often ephemeral as well as playful: they materialise the moment the spectator accepts the artist's invite to interact with the piece and/or embody his/her directions, while they disappear as soon as this action is over. The rest of the time they exist in the form of an idea or unfinished system, in expectation of the next pregnant moment that will realise their potential. Like a performance, they exist and die in the moment of their enactment. They are, in fact, performatives.¹⁸³

Interactive media art works also employ playfulness as a strategy of audience invitation and engagement.¹⁸⁴ An example is the work of Blast Theory who often model their participatory performance art projects on gaming structures. Greek collective Personal Cinema's¹⁸⁵ piece *The Making of Balkan Wars: The Game*¹⁸⁶ operates in a similar manner, using structures and techniques of Massively Multi-player On-line Role-playing Games (MMORPGs). In both cases the artists invite their audiences to actively get involved in playing a game rather than viewing an art piece. Another, more subtly playful work, is Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau's¹⁸⁷ *Life Spacies* (1997) and *Life Spacies II* (1999).¹⁸⁸ These are two versions of an Artificial Life (AL) environment where remote and local visitors "can interact with each other

¹⁸⁰ Friedman, K. Forty Years of Fluxus.

¹⁸¹ The piece was presented as part of the *Half-a-Wind Show*, Lisson Gallery, 1967. See: Haskell, B. Yoko Ono: Objects, 1989 In: *Yoko Ono: Objects, Films. Half-a-Wind Show Exhibition Catalogue*. New York and Boston: Whitney Museum of American Art and The Institute of Contemporary Art, 1990, p. 4.

¹⁸² Friedman, K., Smith, O. and Sawchyn, L. *The Fluxus Performance Workbook. A Performance Research e-Publication*. Available from: <http://www.performance-research.net/pages/e-publications.html> 2002 [accessed 12/01/2006]

¹⁸³ According to John Austin a 'performative' is a way of speaking that does not simply make a statement but also performs an action: for example, when one christens a ship or takes marriage vows. See: Austin, J. L. (Urmson, J. O. and Sbisà, M. eds.) *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2nd Edition, 1975.

¹⁸⁴ Such as interactive installations/environments, virtual reality projects, works using AI and AL technologies, net art, hyper-literature and digital storytelling works, among others.

¹⁸⁵ Personal Cinema website. Available from: <http://www.personalcinema.org/warport/index.php?n=Main.HomePage> [accessed 11/02/2006]

¹⁸⁶ Personal Cinema *The Making of Balkan Wars: The Game* 2005. Available from: <http://www.balkanwars.org/> [accessed 11/02/2006]

¹⁸⁷ Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau website. Available from: <http://www.iamas.ac.jp/~christa/> [accessed 11/02/2006]

¹⁸⁸ Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau *Life Spacies* 1997 and *Life Spacies II* 1999. Available from: <http://www.iamas.ac.jp/~christa/WORKS/FRAMES/FrameSet.html> [accessed 11/02/2006]

through evolutionary forms and images".¹⁸⁹ People from around the world can create their own artificial creatures which look and behave differently from each other, need to be fed, are in competition over food and need to reproduce in order to survive.¹⁹⁰ People have to care for their creatures (that is, feed them) if they do not want these to become extinct through their struggle for survival and reproduction. Ephemerality, too, is a much-debated characteristic of media arts:¹⁹¹ these are time-based, unstable practices that use fluid electromagnetic waves as their medium; they are, thus, often in risk of disappearance due to the rapid evolution of technology, which brings changes to software and hardware.¹⁹² Ephemerality characterises media arts for reasons other than the instability of the digital medium: like the Fluxus practices I have discussed, several media art works, due to their interactive or participatory nature, depend on the audience's engagement for the fulfillment of their potential.

Intermedia is another of the aesthetic procedures listed by Higgins, as well as a term that he coined in 1966 to describe a hybrid art that does not recognise boundaries between different art forms, between art and other disciplines and, ultimately, between art and life.¹⁹³ Indeed, there aren't many Fluxus works that could be classified under one specific art form as most of them incorporate diverse elements: Paik's events, for example, would merge music, audiovisual (and later satellite) technologies, performance, visual arts and everyday life actions. The same applies to the work of most Fluxus artists, as well as most of the digital artists who work across different art forms, media and disciplines. Friedman, in order to explain the term intermedia, invites us to "Imagine (...) an art form that is comprised 10% of music, 25% of

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ The creatures are made from letters the users type into the system, which translate like a DNA code into their visual representation and behavioural characteristics; to survive, the creatures eat letters, but can only eat the ones they are made of (e.g. Maria could only eat M, A, R and I). As different creatures can be made of the same letters, the creatures often have to compete over food.

¹⁹¹ For a discussion on the ephemeral (and, thus, 'live') nature of media arts see the February 2008 archives of the New Media Curating mailing list, when the subject was "Writing about the Ephemeral". CRUMB New Media Curating mailing list. Available from: <https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A1=ind0802&L=NEW-MEDIA-CURATING> [accessed 3/08/2009]. Also: Auslander, P. *Liveness*, and: Kaye, N. *Multimedia: Video - Installation - Performance*. London: Routledge, 2008.

¹⁹² The instability of the digital medium due to rapid technological developments that render old technologies obsolete also poses major issues regarding the archiving and preservation of media arts. This was the subject of CHArt (Computers and the History of Art) conference's 23rd edition in November 2007, under the title *Digital Archive Fever*. See: CHArt 2007 website available from: <http://www.chart.ac.uk/chart2007/abstracts/index.html> [accessed 3/08/2009]. It also was the subject of *Media in Motion: The Challenge of Preservation in the Digital Age* conference at McGill University, Canada in 2008. *Media in Motion* conference website available from: <http://media.mcgill.ca/en/node/1226> [accessed 3/08/2009], as well as one of the subjects of the DRHA (Digital Resources for the Humanities and Arts) 2009 conference. DRHA 2009 website available from: <http://dho.ie/drha2009/> [accessed 3/08/2009]. Furthermore, this is a constant strand in all DRHA conferences and a common subject in numerous other conferences, seminars and work groups. Finally, see the June 2009 archives of the New Media Curating mailing-list, where the subject of the discussion was "Documentation versus Preservation", CRUMB New Media Curating mailing list available from: <https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A1=ind0906&L=NEW-MEDIA-CURATING> [accessed 3/08/2009]

¹⁹³ Friedman, K. *Forty Years of Fluxus*.

architecture, 12% of drawing, 18% of shoemaking, 30% of painting and 5% of smell.”¹⁹⁴ Friedman’s (fairly random) ‘recipe’ for an intermedia artwork describes a multi-faceted practice that can not only span across, but also bring together seemingly disparate media, disciplines, activities and senses. Media arts are very similar in their interdisciplinary nature, with the difference, of course, that the new ‘recipe’ would include a percentage of digital technologies in its ‘ingredients’.

An intermedia piece does not just question the boundaries between art forms, but also between art and life. This ‘attempted resolution of the art/life dichotomy’ is immediately apparent in Fluxus practices. For example, when Yoko Ono directs you, the viewer, to “walk all over the city with an empty baby carriage”,¹⁹⁵ to “Carry a bag of peas. Leave a pea wherever you go”,¹⁹⁶ or to “watch the sun until it becomes square”,¹⁹⁷ she is not just making a piece of art –she is actually making a *piece of life* by shaping her audience’s (who are now performers) personal time. In fact, Ono is directing a slice of her viewer’s everyday life. Other Fluxus artists employ similar strategies of intervention into their audiences’/performers’ lives: Alison Knowles, for example, advises you to “make a salad”¹⁹⁸ or, as a variation, “a soup”,¹⁹⁹ whereas Milan Knizak invites you to “cut a circle into all parts of your clothing”.²⁰⁰ There are numerous such examples of Fluxus art that does not remain fixed within gallery walls, keeping a ‘safe’ distance from everyday life. Fluxus attempts, instead, to *become* everyday life while challenging the way we live and think of ourselves: it introduces acts of poetry, abstraction and irrationality within the matrix of useful, rational tasks we repeatedly perform as a result of abiding by social rules.

This strategy of blurring the boundaries between art and life is characteristic of media arts as well as Fluxus. Whereas Fluxus artists attempted to break down the dichotomy by bringing their art into the sphere of everyday life as poetic action, media artists often work the other way round, using political, sociological and other issues raised by the praxis of the everyday as a subject matter for their art. Hacktivist²⁰¹ and tactical media projects²⁰² all fall

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Yoko Ono *City Piece* 1961. Ono, Y. *Grapefruit* London: Sphere Books, 2nd Edition, 1971.

¹⁹⁶ Yoko Ono *Pea Piece* 1960. Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Yoko Ono *Sun Piece* 1962. Haskell, B. *Yoko Ono*, p. 3.

¹⁹⁸ Alison Knowles *Proposition* 1962. Friedman, K., Smith, O. and Sawchyn, L. *The Fluxus Performance Workbook*, p. 69.

¹⁹⁹ Alison Knowles *Variation #1 on Proposition* 1964. Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Milan Knizak *Aktual Clothes* 1965. Ibid, p. 64.

²⁰¹ Hacktivism is the fusion of hacking and activism, that is, hacking for a political cause. For more information see: The Hacktivist. What is Hacktivism? Available from: <http://www.thehacktivist.com/> [accessed 9/02/2006]

²⁰² Tactical media is the fusion of art, politics and media. For more information see: Garcia, D. and Lovink, G. The ABC of Tactical Media. Available from: <http://www.ljudmila.org/nettime/zkp4/74.htm> 1997 [accessed 9/02/2006]

under the category of media arts. An example is the work of the group radioqualia who use streaming media software and traditional media such as radio, TV and the Internet to experiment with the concept of artistic broadcasting. radioqualia provide the technical platform and know-how needed for everyone to be able to produce their own public broadcasts, challenging the role of the established TV and radio channels as the sole producers of information and initiating platforms of alternative media distribution. radioqualia's practice is both artistic and social, as it raises awareness in regard to social and political issues and encourages the production of alternative discourses. Other attempts to blur the boundaries between art and life take place through projects that articulate life as art²⁰³ or merge both in layered, augmented experiences.²⁰⁴

Higgins lists specificity as another of the aesthetic procedures inherent in Fluxus art practice. Friedman interprets specificity as a tendency of the Fluxus work to be self-contained in terms of meaning and "to embody all its own parts".²⁰⁵ I would argue that media arts are often characterised by this same procedure which, in this case, has become intensified due to the mediated nature of the work: media art works are not only self-contained but also, often, self-referential in terms of both meaning and media. Of course, post-McLuhan, it is impossible to neatly separate the medium from the meaning/message.²⁰⁶ As previously cited, Bolter and Grusin, in their book *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, attempt to escape McLuhan's technological determinism while acknowledging the agency and cultural significance of new media.²⁰⁷ The authors suggest that new digital media (as is the case with all new media) "are not external agents that come to disrupt an unsuspecting culture."²⁰⁸ Though they promise to reform their predecessors, all new media, in fact, emerge from and are embedded within the same (or similar) social contexts as them, and can only refashion them. So the authors' suggestion is that new media always remediate (and, thus, are also about) older media. Following Bolter and Grusin, Giannachi, as cited earlier, defines 'virtual theatres' as "theatres that remediate", which means that they are always of and about media.²⁰⁹ If we accept Bolter and Grusin's argument (and Giannachi's further exposition of it as applied within the field of performance and digital technologies), remediation needs to be considered as an inevitable process that is inherent within all new media. Furthermore, I suggest that self-referentiality, which has often been

²⁰³ For example, web-cam surveillance projects such as *Eyes of Laura* 2005. Available from: <http://www.eyesoflaura.org> [accessed February 2006]

²⁰⁴ Such as augmented reality projects. A good example is the piece 'Ere Be Dragons' by UK-based group Active Ingredient (2007). Available from: <http://www.i-am-ai.net/home.html> [accessed 11/02/2006]

²⁰⁵ Friedman, K. *Forty Years of Fluxus*.

²⁰⁶ McLuhan, M. *Understanding Media*. See also McLuhan, M. *The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects*. New York: Random House, 1967.

²⁰⁷ Bolter, J. D. and Grusin, R. *Remediation*.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 19.

²⁰⁹ Giannachi, G. *Virtual Theatres*, p. 5.

identified as a problematic quality of (new) media arts,²¹⁰ is an equally inevitable characteristic of the genre, as remediation is self-referential (it mediates mediation).

It is not clear to me what Higgins means by the notion of ‘implicativeness’ as an aesthetic procedure. To my understanding, this points to a tendency by Fluxus artists to extend their work beyond the designated art venues (e.g. art galleries) in order to implicate, relate to, or involve aspects of the everyday life, social phenomena or other practices. Although this can be read as contradictory to Fluxus’s self-contained nature, I understand it more as a potentiality ingrained within certain pieces, such as the ones discussed.²¹¹ Again, this is a characteristic shared by media arts as projects often depend, for their communication with audiences, on a contextual understanding of their language and function. Furthermore, media art projects often implicate social dynamics through challenging and critiquing social structures. This is true, in particular, for tactical media and hacktivist projects as well as works that engage with Web 2.0 technologies and social networking. Finally, minimalism or simplicity²¹² refers to the simplicity of means that distinguishes the work of Fluxus artists, which is often just a dematerialised note, sketch or idea waiting to be embodied. Although media arts are often characterised by minimalist aesthetics, simplicity is not something one would attribute to this genre as a quality: media art projects are often complex, layered, conceptually dense and technically demanding.

1.1.c) Dematerialisation: Conceptual Art

Conceptual Art²¹³ is “not about forms or materials, but about ideas and meanings.”²¹⁴ The movement’s aim was to convey ideas or concepts to its audiences, rejecting the creation of the traditional, unique art object/commodity. Henry Flynt, who coined the term Concept Art in 1961,²¹⁵ defined it as art that uses ‘concepts’ and language –since concepts are closely intertwined with language– as its primary materials.²¹⁶ The actual term Conceptual Art was first used in 1967 by the artist Sol LeWitt who claimed that in this type of art “the idea becomes a machine that makes the art”.²¹⁷ A further definition was offered in 1969 by the artist Joseph

²¹⁰ See, for example: Lovink, G. *New Media, Art and Science: Explorations Beyond the Official Discourse*, 2005 In: McQuire, S. and Papastergiadis, N. (eds) *Empires, Ruins + Networks*. Melbourne: University of Melbourne Press, 2005.

²¹¹ For example, Yoko Ono’s instruction pieces are self-contained in their simplicity of means and their conceptual nature, which anticipates conceptual art as a movement (Ono is recognised as both a Fluxus and a conceptual artist). At the same time, they implicate social structures in the potential of their embodiment.

²¹² Simplicity is a term proposed by Friedman to replace minimalism in order to distinguish this Fluxus characteristic from minimalism as an art-historical movement.

²¹³ The movement emerged around the 1960s as an international phenomenon closely related to Fluxus.

²¹⁴ Godfrey, T. *Conceptual Art*. London: Phaidon, 1998, p. 4.

²¹⁵ Flynt first introduced the term to describe a set of Fluxus activities in New York.

²¹⁶ Wood, P. *Conceptual Art: Movements in Modern Art*. London: Tate Publishing, 2002.

²¹⁷ Le Witt, S. *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art*, 1967 In: *Ibid*, p. 38.

Kosuth: “[Conceptual Art] is an inquiry into the foundations of the concept ‘art’, as it has come to mean.”²¹⁸ The art critic Lucy Lippard though has claimed that neither Flynt through his definition of Concept Art, nor LeWitt and Kosuth through their writings on Conceptual Art, managed to define an art-historical movement that was broader than their own practices. Lippard emphasised the ‘dematerialisation’ of the art object in the practice of Conceptual Art and defined the movement much later herself as: “Conceptual art, for me, means work in which the idea is paramount and the material is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious, and/or dematerialised.”²¹⁹

Lippard identified ideas of dematerialisation and ephemerality as the main characteristics of the Conceptual Art movement. This focus created an environment ideal for fostering performance art and other performative work, and for incorporating this within visual art practices: live performance is dematerialised (it produces actions rather than objects) and ephemeral. Due to its immaterial and ephemeral nature, which places it in a continuous process of disappearing, performance also resists commodification: unlike a unified art object, a performance or performative action cannot be displayed, bought or sold, as it only exists in present time and, once performed, leaves no traces of its past existence.²²⁰ Its immateriality and ephemerality are, of course, ontologically linked to its primary materials: performance rejects the traditional artistic materials, employing the artist him/herself, his/her body, presence and lived experience as its ‘canvas’. Performance also entails live, simultaneous connection(s) between the artist and his/her audiences: this relational quality is another immaterial, time-based element that made the practice popular as a medium for conceptual art.

Conceptual art pieces were often performative. For example, Richard Long’s²²¹ piece *A Line Made by Walking, England* (1967) is a photograph that documents the traces of an action: a walk back and forth across a park, which resulted in the grass being trampled down along the artist’s route producing a clear, straight line of trodden grass. The physical object exhibited in the gallery is the photograph; but is the piece the photograph or the action performed by the artist, which produced this visual outcome?²²² Another such example is a piece by Yoko Ono,²²³

²¹⁸ Kosuth, J. Art After Philosophy II: ‘Conceptual Art’ and Recent Art *Studio International* 178 (916), 1969, p. 160.

²¹⁹ Lippard, L. Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975, 1995 In: Godfrey, T. *Conceptual Art*, p. 14.

²²⁰ Though performance does not leave material traces of itself, it can, of course, be documented.

²²¹ Long is most often described as a conceptual artist though he himself talks about his work as “real, not illusory or conceptual”. See: Paoletti, J. T. *The Critical Eye/I Exhibition Catalogue*. New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 1984, p. 28.

²²² Also see Richard Long’s recent (June - September 2009) exhibition at the Tate, *Heaven and Earth*, which includes several similar works: traces the artist has made on various landscapes during solitary walks, as well as photographic documentation as the sole physical trace of these actions that can be transferred within the gallery. Though conceptual artists such as Long set out to challenge the traditional art market through the dematerialisation of the commodified art object, their work did find its place within galleries

which instructed the viewer/performer to “draw an imaginary map” and “go walking on an actual street according to the map”.²²⁴ Ono’s piece is a set of instructions for an action to be performed by the viewer. Is the piece the written set of instructions exhibited in a gallery, the performance of those by a member of the public, or both?

Other conceptual artists experimented with different methods of dematerialising the artwork: the American artist Ian Wilson, for example, created purely verbal pieces which he spoke aloud in a gallery. This allowed him to avoid materiality and fixity in his work. By using his own voice, also an immaterial medium, Wilson translated concepts into performatives.²²⁵ Robert Barry’s work toyed with the ideas of emptiness and nothingness to challenge viewers’ expectations of art. In 1968 he suggested that: “There is something about void and emptiness which I am personally very concerned with. (...) Nothing seems to me the most potent thing in the world.”²²⁶ In 1969 he put on a show at the Art & Project Gallery (Amsterdam), which consisted of a sign on the gallery’s front door that read “during the exhibition the gallery will be closed”.²²⁷ The exhibition was advertised and the artist asserted that it was taking place –but, for the viewers at least, it was a void, a ‘nothing’. Was the artwork the sign on the gallery’s door? Was it the situation the artist had created for his audiences; that is, the experience of visiting the gallery to find their assumptions of what an exhibition is and where it is taking place overturned? And/or, possibly, meeting other people in a similar situation outside the gallery door with whom to communicate their amusement, perturbation or anger? And/or being left with, say, one hour of free time to make use of? And/or several other alternatives, as numerous as the audiences who went to visit the show.

Goldberg claims that Conceptual Art “implied the *experience* of time, space and

and museums –the photographic traces of Long’s ‘performances’ of walks are such examples. This could be interesting in relation to media arts: media art works challenge the art market due to their immaterial nature (for example, a net.art project has no physical manifestation) as well as their resistance to ideas of uniqueness and originality (a net.art project can be accessed by any computer that has an Internet connection, anywhere in the world). Issues of ephemerality are also pertinent to media arts as much as performance art: though a media art project does not disappear at the moment of its enactment, it runs the risk of becoming obsolete as the technology it is created with and operates on becomes obsolete too. Furthermore, most media art projects depend, to a greater or lesser degree, on the user’s interaction: this live encounter between the piece and its audiences is a performance that, most often, leaves no trace of itself.

²²³ This is very similar to other pieces by Ono (described in Chapter 1: 2.1.b.), which were also formed as instructions to viewers/performers. As mentioned above, movements such as Futurism, Conceptual Art and Happenings were closely related and often overlapping, and artists such as Ono, Paik, Knowles and others have been involved in more than one of those movements.

²²⁴ Yoko Ono *Map Piece* 1962. Ono, Y. *Grapefruit*. The piece was Ono’s contribution to the exhibition *Information at the Museum of Modern Art*, New York in 1970, see: Goldberg, R. *Performance Art*, p. 154.

²²⁵ Godfrey, T. *Conceptual Art*, p. 164.

²²⁶ Lippard, L. R. (ed.) *Six Years: the Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972...* California: University of California Press, 2nd Edition, 1997, p. xx.

²²⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 164-165.

material rather than their representation in the form of objects”.²²⁸ Indeed, one can observe in the examples of works discussed that *experience* is central to each piece, whereas the ‘art object’ as such has become ‘lightweight’ or extinct. Goldberg goes on to argue that this shift of focus from the (static) object to the (live) experience resulted in the body becoming an ideal medium of expression for many conceptual artists. Some artists used their own body as an artistic medium (e.g. Vito Acconci), whereas others concentrated on personality, appearance and memory of their own and other bodies to create ‘living sculptures’ (e.g. Denis Oppenheim, Gilbert & George). Some relied on their presence in temporal simultaneity with their audience (e.g. Joseph Beuys), whereas others gave instructions for actions to the viewers, encouraging them to become the artwork through their own bodily experience (e.g. Yoko Ono, Stanley Brouwn). Conceptual art also involved a generation of women artists, including Carolee Schneemann, Martha Wilson, Yoko Ono and Adrian Piper who, according to Lippard, were encouraged to participate by the “inexpensive, ephemeral and unthreatening character of the Conceptual mediums themselves”.²²⁹ Their work brought forth new issues such as narrative, role-playing, autobiography, issues of the body and the everyday life, as well as a focus on feminist preoccupations such as identity formation and embodied subjectivity.²³⁰

Conceptual artists chose to deal with dematerialisation, ephemerality, ideas, and performativity from a number of different perspectives, creating a rich tradition that has strongly influenced contemporary media art practices. Concepts of immateriality, (dis)embodied presence/absence and processual experience are pertinent today and central for many of the discourses and practices surrounding media arts. The dematerialisation of the art object prepared the ground for the development of artworks that are made not of physical matter, but of information patterns. Such artworks often reject the notion of an object altogether –even a dematerialised one– as this inevitably points towards ideas of originality, fixity and stasis, in favour of open-ended processes and relational experiences.²³¹

²²⁸ Goldberg, R. *Performance Art*, p. 152-3. Original emphasis.

²²⁹ Lippard, L. R. *Six Years*, p. xi. Lippard refers to mediums such as performance, video, photography and text.

²³⁰ I was interested to witness the event *Once More With Feeling: Performing the WAL/Make Archive* by Oriana Fox at Tate Modern in July 2009, which was the outcome of Fox’s residency at the Make archive (Goldsmiths Library, special collections). Fox created a series of re-enactments of works by some of the female artists mentioned above (Yoko Ono, Carolee Schneemann) as well as contemporary female artists such as Bobby Baker. Fox’s contemporary, playful take on the feminist and autobiographical issues raised by these works demonstrated, I think, the currency of their relevance within a post- (or cyber-) feminist context. Oriana Fox *Once More With Feeling: Performing the WAL/Make Archive* 2009. Available from: <http://www.gold.ac.uk/make/events/> [accessed 3/08/2009].

²³¹ For example, open source projects invite intervention and lend themselves to collaborative development, thus remaining in constant flux and offering themselves to anyone in order to reuse, extend or appropriate.

Figure 1.2. Richard Long *A Line Made by Walking*, England 1967²³²

The dematerialised object also prepared the ground for the disembodied performer on the one hand, and the performative artwork, or performance as artwork, on the other. I would argue that the instruction pieces I described earlier exist, while in expectation of being embodied and performed, as disembodied performatives: they are textual gestures that do not depend on embodiment to perform their action. In such cases, while the art object has reduced itself to a simple note on a piece of paper, the performer's body has at the same time become central –since the art object has now turned into a potential action that anticipates embodiment– and been eliminated through the dis-embodied expectation of its very embodiment projected into the future. This is often also evident in media art projects, due to their participatory nature:²³³ they tend to exist both as performatives in present time and as potentialities, through

²³² Available from: <http://www.richardlong.org/sculptures/1.html> [accessed 12/02/2006]

²³³ According to curator Sarah Cook, “Among the features cited repeatedly for their effects on the presentation and exhibition of new media art are interactivity, connectivity, variability, a tendency to represent the “virtual” (as opposed to a physical reality), and the participatory and time-based nature of the works.” Cook, S. *Immateriality and its Discontents: An Overview of Main Models and Issues for Curating New Media*, 2008 In: Paul, C. (ed.) *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond*, p. 27.

their inherent anticipation of an enacted/embodied fulfillment projected into the future. Consequently, I see every participatory or interactive art piece as existing not only in relation to, but also regardless of the user's interaction: the inscription of the system's potential for fulfillment into the unfinished, open artwork is a gesture that performs this expectation regardless of its enactment. Nevertheless, every participatory or interactive art piece constantly carries the anticipation of engagement with a user as the only means of fulfilling its potential.²³⁴ This simultaneous focus on and dematerialisation of the body creates a hybrid state of presence-absence, which I will later discuss in relation to current cybertheatre practices.

Though other movements, such as Futurism²³⁵ and Kinetic Art,²³⁶ have also been influential for the emergence of media arts and cybertheatres, it is not within the purview of this thesis to engage with detailed explorations of all the relevant art-historical movements. I have chosen to focus on Dada, Fluxus and Conceptual Art as it is my belief that these movements had a more direct influence on the emergence of cybertheatres due to the development of discourses and practices around notions of dematerialisation, experience (attached to notions of performativity, enactment and dis/embodiment), interactivity/participation and chance/randomness vs. control. The movements I looked at are precursors of another set of artistic practices I will now discuss, which I consider as the forerunners of cybertheatres: Events and Happenings.

²³⁴ A media art example would be Sommerer and Mignonneau's *Life Spacies*, cited earlier: I suggest that the piece exists both autonomously, as the potential of an AL evolution inscribed within its system as dramaturgy and code, and in constant expectation of interaction with users who will fulfill this potential by generating life forms and affecting their evolution, allowing for a complex artificial ecosystem to emerge.

²³⁵ An Italian movement of literary and poetic origins, Futurism first appeared in 1909 with the publication of Italian artist Tommaso Marinetti's *Founding and Manifesto of Futurism* in the French newspaper *Le Figaro*. Futurism included many artforms other than poetry and literature such as painting, sculpture, architecture and performance. The movement emphasised and was fascinated by the power of the machine, motion and speed as attributes of modern urban life and modern art, as opposed to the 'static' art of the past. With its focus on activity, change and art that finds its components in its surroundings, Futurism challenged the traditional passive role of the audience and used performance as the best means of activating the public. Marinetti, who 'led' the movement, turned his attention to variety theatre as a model for futurist activities due to, on the one hand, its lack of tradition and masters and, on the other, its mixed-media techniques, non-linear narrative and simplicity of means. For more information see: Futurism.org.uk website. Available from: <http://www.futurism.org.uk> [accessed 13/02/2006]. Also: Perloff, M. *The Futurist Movement: Avant-Garde, Avant-Guerre, and the Language of Rupture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003, and: Goldberg, R. *Performance Art*.

²³⁶ Kinetic Art, that is, art that depends on motion and movement for its effects, became a phenomenon of the late 1950s and 1960s. Through this movement, art practice dropped its representational role and, with that, its separateness from the outside world and the spectator. Among the Kinetic Artists was László Moholy-Nagy who aimed, through his art, to replace "the static principle of classical art [with] the dynamic principle of universal life", and Lygia Clark who argued that "today a work of art ought to be alive like an organism". Malina, F. J. (ed.) *Kinetic Art: Theory and Practice. Selections from the Journal Leonardo*. New York: Dover Publications, 1974, pp.23, 7. For more information see: Brett, G. *Kinetic Art: the Language of Movement*. London and New York: Studio-Vista and Reinhold Book Corporation, 1968.

1.1.d) Art that is Closer to Life: Events and Happenings²³⁷

'Event' is a term introduced by George Brecht around 1960, to signify "short, uncomplicated theatre pieces".²³⁸ The term 'Happening' was coined by Allan Kaprow in 1959 for his exhibition *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (Reuben Gallery, New York) and was defined as:

an assemblage of events performed or perceived in more than one time and place. Its material environments may be constructed, taken over directly from what is available, or altered slightly; just as its activities may be invented or commonplace. A Happening, unlike a stage play, may occur at a supermarket, driving along a highway, under a pile of rags, and in a friend's kitchen, either at once or sequentially. If sequentially, time may extend to more than a year. The Happening is performed according to plan but without rehearsal, audience, or repetition. It is art but seems closer to life.²³⁹

Figure 1.3 Allan Kaprow *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* Reuben Gallery, New York, 1959²⁴⁰

According to Brecht's definition, the main characteristic of an Event is its simplicity and short duration. A Happening on the other hand is, as described by Kaprow –who was, in a sense, the originator of the movement²⁴¹– an "assemblage of events". Michael Kirby, in his

²³⁷ Events and Happenings appeared in Europe and the USA during the 1960s and 1970s as practices closely related to the contemporary movements of Fluxus and Conceptual Art. All three movements had a parallel chronological development and an international character with relevant activities taking place in Europe, the Americas and Asia. Often Happenings were the performance or performative practices of Fluxus and Conceptual artists.

²³⁸ Kirby, M. *Happenings: An Introduction*, 1995 In: Sanford R. M. (ed.) *Happenings and Other Acts*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995, p. 10.

²³⁹ Kaprow, A. *Some Recent Happenings*. New York: A Great Bear Pamphlet, 1966, p. 3.

²⁴⁰ Available from: <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/18-happenings-in-6-parts/> [accessed 01/02/2006]. The man in the white shirt is Allan Kaprow.

²⁴¹ Other artists creating Happenings included Claes Oldenburg, Robert Whitman, Carolee Schneemann and

examination of Events and Happenings, considers an Event to be “formally, if not expressively, equivalent to a single compartment of a Happening.”²⁴² It is important to note that, whereas Brecht describes an Event as a ‘theatre piece’ (albeit a short and uncomplicated one), Kaprow stresses that a Happening *is not* a theatre piece because it does not have a plot or structured beginning, middle and end, and there is no distinction between performers and audience.²⁴³ Unlike theatre pieces, Happenings are, for Kaprow, improvisations that the artist can control only to a certain degree since “the action leads itself any way it wishes” and “we do not know exactly what is going to happen next”.²⁴⁴ A Happening depends on chance as a “deliberately employed mode of operating that penetrates the whole composition and its character”.²⁴⁵ Unlike spontaneity, chance, in Kaprow’s understanding, “implies risk and fear”²⁴⁶ and is a key term for his work. The notion of chance is important here, as it has been a key element not just for Happenings, but also for a body of work that preceded them or developed in parallel,²⁴⁷ as well as for media art practices. In fact, chance as a dramaturgical strategy is key to any interactive or participatory art piece that aims to actively engage audiences: by inviting audiences’ contributions, any such piece makes itself (more or less) vulnerable by allowing for a certain degree of unpredictability and randomness.

Happenings evolved out of Kaprow’s Environments: pieces that engulfed the whole of the exhibition space, including the audiences. To experience an Environment audiences had to enter the artwork, rather than view it from a distance. Kaprow’s immersive Environments introduced a new way of relating to the work of art, through becoming part of the piece. Audience immersion entailed that the artwork was never finished or fixed but changed constantly in relation to the people ‘inhabiting’ it. According to Kaprow:

We ourselves are shapes (...). We (...) can move, feel, speak, observe others variously; and will constantly change the “meaning” of the work by so doing. There is, therefore, a never-ending play of changing conditions (...). What has been worked out (...) is a form that is as open and fluid as the shapes of our everyday experience but does not

Dick Higgins. In the same way that the terms and definitions of movements discussed earlier, such as Conceptual Art, Media Arts and Cybertheates have been fluid and contested, the term ‘Happening’ was also debated: the term was not immediately endorsed by all the artists creating such activities. Other terms used to describe relevant practices were: ‘Action Theatre’, ‘Kinetic Theatre’ and ‘Theatre of Mixed Means’. For more information see: Kirby, M. *The New Theatre*, 1995 In: Sanford R. M. (ed.) *Happenings and Other Acts*, p. 29-47.

²⁴² Kirby, M. *Happenings: An Introduction*, 1995 In: *Ibid*, p. 11.

²⁴³ Kaprow, A. (Kelley, J. ed.) *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*. California and London: University of California Press, 1993.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 18.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 19.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid*.

²⁴⁷ Such as, for example: Dada poetry, Fluxus activities, Merce Cunningham’s choreographies and John Cage’s sound pieces. Both Cunningham and Cage employed chance processes in their work in the same way that Kaprow did, wishing to blur the boundaries between art and life.

simply imitate them. I believe that this form places a much greater responsibility on the visitor than they have had before.²⁴⁸

Environments exist solely in relation to their audiences –without them, they are empty containers. For an Environment to become a piece, it has to be entered –not looked at, but experienced. When ‘inhabited’, an Environment is never static: the audiences’ presence and engagement ensures a permanent flux that renders the piece dynamic. The degree of dynamism an Environment possesses depends on the intensity of the audiences’ engagement; it is the audiences’ responsibility to render an Environment active. The Environment itself is a potential the audiences need to fulfill and extend. By entering an Environment, the audiences become performers and are part of the artwork. The quality of their experience depends as much on the relationship they develop with the Environment through their own choices and actions, as it does on the Environment itself for its openness and engaging potential: the responsibility is shared. I see the relationship that develops between an Environment and its audiences as a performative one that resembles the way audiences relate to a performance piece: in both cases the absence of an audience nullifies the piece –the two can only exist in relation to each other. Kirby calls Kaprow’s Environments ‘performer(s)’.²⁴⁹ I suggest that both Environments and audiences have become performers in Kaprow’s work due to the performative nature of their interrelationship, which is based on a live process of interaction and constant change.

Mariellen Sandford describes Happenings as an evolution of Kaprow’s work from Environments to “Environment(s)-with-action”.²⁵⁰ Once both Environments and audiences have turned into performers, introducing action-based elements within these live performances seems like a natural development. Jeff Kelley, who worked with Kaprow at the time, talks of Happenings as “event compositions”²⁵¹ that invited audience involvement and participation. This was of major importance: Kelley argues that the only way for someone to really experience a Happening was to participate in it –“the *doing* of it was the point”.²⁵² Kaprow compares the difference between observing a Happening and actually taking part in it to “the difference between watching an actor eating strawberries on a stage and actually eating them yourself at home.”²⁵³ The audiences were now invited to ‘do it themselves’ and thus undertake responsibility, invest time, collaborate and –most importantly– ‘act’: “Happenings are ‘the art of participation’ and do not allow any voyeurism or exhibitionism. (...) Paralysis is replaced by

²⁴⁸ Kaprow, A. Notes on the Creation of a Total Art, 2003 In: Hendricks, G. (ed.) *Critical Mass: Happenings, Performance, Intermedia and Rutgers University, 1958-1972*. Massachusetts and New Jersey: Mason Gross Art Galleries, Rutgers University, Mead Art Museum and Amherst College, 2003, p. 6.

²⁴⁹ Kirby, M. The New Theatre, 1995 In: Sandford, M. R. (ed.) *Happenings and other Acts*, p.31.

²⁵⁰ Sandford, M. R. (ed.) *Happenings and other Acts*, p. 12.

²⁵¹ Kelley, J. Lecture on Allan Kaprow. Whitechapel Gallery, London, 6/10/2005.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Kaprow, A. (Kelley, J. ed.) *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, p. 195.

action.²⁵⁴

If the Happenings' most important characteristic was the absence of distinction between performers and audiences, another major element was the dispersion of each performance across multiple spatial and temporal units. Happenings do not take place in a unified space(/stage), for a clearly determined, linear and limited period of time. Since their structure is not that of a unified play but an 'assemblage of events', Happenings can take place in many different places at the same time and/or spread over long and loosely defined periods, creating a matrix of events dispersed across diverse, either separate or linked, space-time units. Kirby describes the structure of this type of distributed performance as "insular" or "compartmented".²⁵⁵ Another characteristic of Happenings is the lack of 'acting' from the part of the audiences-performers. Acting, as in classical theatre, requires a matrix of time, place and character, which cannot be created through the Happenings' dispersed and 'compartmented' structure. Traditional acting is thus replaced by what Kirby describes as "nonmatrixed performing".²⁵⁶ Non-unified structure and nonmatrixed performing result in the development of multifocus, non-linear narratives, which break down in fragmented units and can develop towards unexpected (because unscripted) directions. Happenings' lack of structural and conceptual unification, along with the invitation of active audience participation, produce an open, fluid structure that can incorporate randomness and chance as key dramaturgical forces.

Other distinctive characteristics of the Happenings are an interdisciplinary, mixed-media approach and a balance between human and mechanical/inanimate agents for compositions in which "performers become things and things become performers".²⁵⁷ Happenings depend on the agency of an object or a person (a unit), rather than a performance (a whole), in terms of dramatic competence. Like Dada, Happenings are often of non-verbal character: words are not of primary importance. Due to their lack of plot and the linear development of a storyline Happenings do not depend on language as their primary medium; instead, language is just a medium among many others such as sound, space, inter/action, and so on. Like any live performance –and unlike several visual art practices– Happenings are ephemeral and non-reproducible. Nonetheless, unlike a theatre play that can repeat a slightly different version of itself every night, Happenings are bound to their surroundings and participants in a way that makes each event unique and almost impossible to reproduce. According to Kaprow: "Composed so that a premium is placed on the unforeseen, a Happening

²⁵⁴ Berghaus, G. *Happenings in Europe: Trends, Events, and Leading Figures*, 1995 In: Sandford, M. R. (ed.) *Happenings and other Acts*, p. 352.

²⁵⁵ Kirby, M. *Happenings: An Introduction*, 1995 In *ibid*, p. 5.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 7.

²⁵⁷ Sandford, M. R. (ed.) *Happenings and other Acts*, p. 9.

cannot be reproduced”.²⁵⁸ For Kaprow, the main aim behind the production of Happenings was the development of a new, hybrid genre that would exist between life and art, blurring the boundaries between the two by creating unique experiences. Creating a Happening was not doing art, but “doing life”.²⁵⁹ The difference between a Happening and real, everyday life, was but one: a Happening was “doing life, *consciously*”.²⁶⁰ This is an important difference since “When you do life consciously (...) life becomes pretty strange –paying attention changes the thing attended to (...)”.²⁶¹ For Kaprow the aim was not to lose art into life, but to create experiences that would invite people to reflect on “the artificial aspects of the everyday life and the lifelike qualities of created art”²⁶² and learn something about both.

Calling is a Happening by Kaprow²⁶³ that consists of a series of parallel actions: in the city, people stand at street corners and wait. A car pulls up near each one of them and someone calls his/her name; the person gets in the car and the car drives off. During the journey someone wraps the person up with aluminium foil. The car is then parked and locked, and the person is left inside, sitting wrapped up and motionless in the back seat. Later, someone unlocks the car and drives off. The foil is now removed from the person and s/he is wrapped up in cloth or tied in a laundry bag. The car stops at a garage, the person is dumped, the car goes away. Another car picks up the person at the garage, and drives him/her to the Grand Central Station. The person is popped up against the information booth and left there. The person calls out names. The other persons, who are also there, do the same. They unwrap themselves and leave the station. Each of them call a number; someone answers; they ask for a name; the other person hangs up.²⁶⁴

This is an example of a Happening: certain actions take place. Those actions are, more often than not, distributed around various locations. The actions follow no linear storyline or narrative. They are often unfamiliar and unexpected, disrupting the ordinary flow of everyday life. These actions are not performed for audiences: they are performed by and for participants and are witnessed by random passers-by. In creating these unexpected experiences and encounters, Happenings challenge our most deeply-rooted assumptions about what art and theatre are and can be. When I attempt to imagine what it would feel like being the person wrapped up in silver foil in the back seat of a car, or a person driving next to a car carrying someone wrapped up in silver foil, I sympathise with Richard Schechner’s claim that “the

²⁵⁸ Kaprow, A. (Kelley, J. ed.) *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, p. 20.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.* My emphasis.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² *Ibid.*

²⁶³ *Calling* was performed on Saturday 21 and Sunday 22 August 1965 in New York.

²⁶⁴ Kaprow, A. *Calling*, 1965 In: Sandford, M. R. (ed.) *Happenings and other Acts*, pp. 195-201.

multifocus complexity of these pieces [Happenings] is astounding, and offensive to those schooled in theatre's single focus."²⁶⁵ What Kaprow aimed to achieve was the creation of an artistic structure as total, complex, and multifaceted as life itself. He also aimed to create a completely new experience, "something never before done, by a method never before seen, whose outcome would be unknown."²⁶⁶ Happenings were a new experience both for their participants and for the people who happened upon fragments of these poetic interventions as passers-by within the urban matrix.

Kaprow's idea of an Environment, other than leading to the production of Happenings, also found several applications within the field of media arts. Virtual reality and other types of responsive media installations are often environments that function like Kaprow's pieces: they engulf their audiences, and audience interaction affects, if not 'makes' the art piece/environment. A contemporary example of such a piece is *TGarden*,²⁶⁷ a responsive media environment created by fOAM²⁶⁸ and Sponge²⁶⁹ in 2000. *TGarden* is a space for performance and play. Audiences are invited to visit the environment in small groups. Before entering the space they are asked to put on sensor-costumes, which allow them to interact with the environment and each other through their gestures, movements and voices. *TGarden*'s audiences are able to actually shape and modify the environment through their engagement with it in a very tangible (if not linear) manner: colours, lighting, sounds and patterns change in response to the audiences' input. This relationship between the audiences and the environment, as well as with each other, can develop over time: the more familiar the audiences become with the environment, the closer they get to actualising their imagination through playing with it and other audiences. The environment becomes an instrument for a sophisticated audience member who can control its changes. Even so, *TGarden* remains unpredictable: even if a certain member of the audience familiarises him/herself with the environment enough to master its changes, s/he cannot control other audience members.

²⁶⁵ Schechner, R. Cited In: Ibid, p. 217.

²⁶⁶ Kaprow, A. Quoted by: Kelley, J. Lecture on Allan Kaprow. Whitechapel Gallery, London, October 6 2005.

²⁶⁷ fOAM and Sponge *TGarden* 2000. Available from: <http://f0.am/tgarden/> [accessed 11/02/2006]

²⁶⁸ fOAM website. Available from: <http://f0.am/> [accessed 11/02/2006]

²⁶⁹ Sponge website. Available from: <http://www.sponge.org/> [accessed 11/02/2006]



Figure 1.4 fOAM & Sponge *TGarden* 2000²⁷⁰

Media arts, like Happenings, are participatory practices that, more often than not, invite user interaction/participation. This can vary in nature and degree of involvement. Works like *TGarden* depend on audience participation to fulfill their potential. Nevertheless, audiences can only interact with a piece along the lines pre-defined by its author. In *TGarden*, for example, though the audience can affect the environment, the type of input the environment can receive and the changes this input will trigger are important conceptual and aesthetic elements of the piece that have been pre-programmed. Jeffrey Shaw's piece *Legible City*²⁷¹ (1989-1991) offers another such example: the installation allows audiences to navigate a simulated city that consists of three-dimensional letters, which form words and sentences. One audience member/user at a time can 'read the city' by 'cycling' through it. To travel within the virtual city the user actually has to cycle a real stationary bicycle in physical space. The bicycle functions as an interface between the user and the city: through its pedals and steering handle the user can control the speed and direction of the navigation. So, *Legible City* does invite audience participation, but what the audience can and cannot do is to a large extent predefined: s/he can navigate through a virtual city made by text, but to do that s/he has to cycle a bike – s/he cannot walk, run, drive or fly. The city s/he can cycle through is also predefined: *Legible City* has three versions that are constructed using architectural prototypes of the cities of Amsterdam (Netherlands), Karlsruhe (Germany) and Manhattan (USA) as a basis. Furthermore, the user will navigate the version of *Legible City* exhibited on the day of his/her visit: this is a decision made by the museum (ZKM). During his/her interaction with the piece, the user can neither add elements to the *Legible City* nor intervene on the existing ones; *Legible City* exists regardless of his/her interaction and cannot be affected by his/her actions. The only choice that the user can make is of his/her itinerary through the *Legible City*, which, in effect, defines the narrative development for that particular user. Peter Weibel describes Shaw's art as "technical relational art" in that "the arrangement of the technology is simultaneously the shaping of the

²⁷⁰ Available from: http://www.sponge.org/projects/m3_tg_intro.html [accessed 11/02/2006]

²⁷¹ Jeffrey Shaw *Legible City* 1989-1991. Available from: http://www.jeffrey-shaw.net/html_main/show_work.php3?record_id=83 [accessed 11/02/2006]

relationship between image and viewer”.²⁷² In that sense, *Legible City*’s technical dramaturgy, as designed by Shaw, defines the nature of the relationship between the viewer/user and the piece prior to the encounter, and regardless of the user’s engagement with it. These parameters are set by the artist and cannot be challenged, questioned or altered.

Different types of media art practices encourage different degrees of involvement. Contemporary and current practices (especially Web 2.0 works) tend to be more participatory inviting greater degrees of involvement. In some cases the participant becomes a co-author of the piece, raising conceptual, ethical and legal issues of authorship and copyright. Jaromil, for example, is an activist, hacker and software artist who has initiated a body of collaborative work that operates along the lines of the Open Source software movement. Jaromil expresses, through his socio-political and artistic practice, concerns about the implications of treating code as a commercial product that can be patented and controlled. He sees code as a form of knowledge that users should be able to communicate and share freely. Jaromil’s ‘rasta software’ is free and available for everyone to download and adapt, expand, or re-write: this makes every piece a platform for collaboration and exchange, and every participant a co-author of the piece. In Chapter Four of this thesis I look more closely at such practices of collaborative creativity and investigate their relevance to cybertheatres.

All types of interactive media environments, whether they are responsive, immersive, or participatory, share with Environments and Happenings a nature of openness and fluidity, a dependence on randomness and chance, as well as the absence of distinction between performers, audiences, and environments.²⁷³ Furthermore, Happenings’ multi-focus, complex and non-linear narratives have found several other applications in current artistic practices, in genres such as hyperliterature, digital storytelling, digital performance and cybertheatres. Such time-based media practices often use their durational nature to narrate stories whose patterns are not linear, but rather use an arborescent or rhizomatic structure to develop simultaneously in multiple directions. Such practices require that each audience/user navigates him/herself around the story, in effect creating his/her own storyline. In the same way that Happenings used mixed-media techniques, digital storytelling, performance and cybertheatre practices are multimedial: they integrate different media such as text, sound, image, moving image, animation and live streams, expanding traditional story-telling techniques, and shifting the importance from language and/or text to the convergence of various media. Such practices, I argue, also demonstrate a convergence of genres: attempting to identify and distinguish the different genres that merge in order for these hybrid practices to emerge is futile. Whereas attempting to

²⁷² Weibel, P. Cited In: Hansen, M. B. N. *New Philosophy for New Media*. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2004, p. 51.

²⁷³ Since both audiences and environments become, according to Kirby, ‘performers’.

taxonomise these practices on the peripheries of known fields is not only pointless but potentially suppressive to their nomadic and anarchic (at least at this grassroots point of emergence) nature.

Happenings forcefully challenged assumptions about what theatre is and, even today, they challenge perceptions of what it can become. A ‘post-Happening’ theatrical performance is a far cry from what Aristotle first defined as theatre in his *Poetics*:²⁷⁴ it does not take place in one, unified space; it has no beginning, middle, or end; it has no central focus; no linear storyline; no unified structure. It is not theatre as we have known it within mainstream Western tradition but a post-theatrical performance.²⁷⁵ Happenings are an important reference point for this project since cybertheatres are, indeed, very close to this vision and practice of a post-theatrical experience that blurs the boundaries between art and life. Through the next Chapters of this thesis I refer back to concepts and structures for performance introduced by Allan Kaprow and the Happenings movement. I use this recurrent thread to reflect on, analyse, compare and relate systemic and aesthetic models of past, current, and future cybertheatre practices.

1.2 Cybertheatres: A Brief Overview

In the above I introduced a number of 20th Century art-historical movements and indicated how these prepared the ground for the emergence of media arts. At this point I will embark upon an exploration of the effect of these same movements on the genre of cybertheatres, both in its recent and current manifestations. The art-historical movements I discussed are characterised by a shift of focus to a) the immaterial concept or idea rather than the material object; b) the open,

²⁷⁴ Aristotle. *Aristotelous Poiētikē*.

²⁷⁵ I use the term ‘post-theatrical’ as a reference to Hans-Thies Lehmann’s term ‘post-dramatic’ theatre. In his book of the same title, Lehmann summarises stylistic characteristics and tendencies that occur in avant-garde theatre to articulate the relationship between drama and new, ‘no-longer-dramatic’ forms of theatre that have emerged since the 1970s. According to Lehmann: “the new theatre *text* (which for its part continually reflects its constitution as a linguistic construct) is to a large extent a ‘no longer dramatic’ theatre text. By alluding to the literary genre of the drama, the title *Postdramatic Theatre* signals the continuing association and exchange between theatre and text. Nevertheless, the discourse of *theatre* is at the centre of this book and the text therefore is considered only as one element, one layer, or as a ‘material’ of the scenic creation, not as its master.” Lehmann, H. T. *Postdramatic Theatre* (Tr.: Jürs-Munby, K.), London and New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 17. Original emphasis. Lehmann examines works by artists such as Robert Wilson, The Wooster Group and Needcompany, who are perceived as theatrical artists/groups despite their post-dramatic approach to theatre; indeed, these groups create theatre spectacles that take place on a, more or less, spatially unified stage, in front of audiences who retain the fairly conventional role of spectators. Here, I use the term ‘post-theatrical performance’ to indicate that live avant-garde practices of the 1960s and 1970s, such as Happenings, had already radically challenged conventional drama and theatre. This is, of course, the same time that Performance Studies emerge as a discipline, see: Schechner, R. *Performance Theory*. London and New York: Routledge, 3rd Edition, 2004. Admittedly, debating the boundaries and overlaps between theatre and performance within the last 50 years (1960s to now) is a field of research in itself, and cannot be within the scope of this thesis.

dynamic, performative event or action rather than the finished, static object; c) the audience as active participants rather than passive spectators/viewers. Other characteristics that appear in more than one of these movements are:

- creative appropriation of ready-made, found materials,
- interplay between randomness or chance operations and control,
- use of non-linear, multifocus and complex structures that a) break down linear narratives, b) allow for many different actions to evolve simultaneously, and c) challenge traditional spacetime parameters by dispersing an event in more than one time and place settings,
- international approach to creativity,
- focus on multimedia, intermedia or mixed-media techniques,
- interest in performance and performativity, as well as in the ideas of ephemerality, non-reproducibility and experience,
- experimental approach that appropriates collaborative scientific and research methodologies,
- blurring of the dichotomy between art and life,
- playfulness as an approach to both art and life, combined with gaming structures and experiences.

Cybertheatres are diverse practices;²⁷⁶ nonetheless, these characteristics are relevant to the majority of such events. The dematerialisation of the object in the movements discussed introduced ideas of immateriality that have become ubiquitous in current practices, not only of media arts and cybertheatres, but also of everyday life. The focus on the concept rather than the physical object anticipated the move from physical to cybernetic space and from the flesh body to the avatar. In recent and current practices of performance, art and a plethora of everyday life activities (such as commerce, socialising, dating and sex) both the space and the ‘actor’ have become immaterial, code-based systems.²⁷⁷ Several cybertheatre practices take place online, in cyberspace; that is, within a conception (and consecutive visualisation) of immaterial networks as a cybernetic space/stage.²⁷⁸ Performers of such practices do not have a *de facto* presence in cyberspace; they must, instead, manifest and claim their presence²⁷⁹ as cyborgs, “hybrids of machine and organism”.²⁸⁰ Cyborgian performers often employ avatars, that is graphical or

²⁷⁶ One of the reasons cybertheatres are so varied as practices, is that the artists engaged in such works come from various backgrounds in theatre, performance, dance, digital media, web design, visual arts, media arts, music, film, video and so on. Some of the practitioners are also programmers or collaborate with programmers, scientists and technologists.

²⁷⁷ This is not to underestimate the importance of embodiment, which I discuss in Chapter 3.

²⁷⁸ I go on to discuss issues of cyberspace as a social space, as well as a space adequate for performance practice, in Chapter 2.

²⁷⁹ Again, this is an issue I consider further in Chapter 3.

²⁸⁰ Haraway, D. *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, p. 150.

photorealistic visual representations, to manifest their presence online. Similar to the movements I have discussed, cybertheatres are characterised by a transdisciplinary or intermedia approach: they merge performance practices, networking and computational technologies and media arts, and appropriate elements and techniques from diverse fields of artistic practice and entertainment. The practice of working across disciplines to create hybrid systems of transient ontologies was established through movements such as Fluxus (which introduced the term 'intermedia') and Happenings. The examples of work I refer to here are hybrid practices that merge different genres.

1.2.a) Online Performance

Currently, we are witnessing a proliferation of cybertheatre events taking place online in *Second Life* and other virtual worlds. Some of the first examples of such practices were performances taking place in MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons): MUDs were text-based virtual reality environments and the first multi-user virtual environments. Pavel Curtis, a programmer from Xerox Parc, remembers discovering MUDs as a user in the late 1970s. MUDs were already being used to host Dungeon and Dragons-themed computer games. What Curtis found really exciting about them though was not the game element, but the fact that many people could log on at the same time and talk to each other; that is, people could form 'real' communities online for the first time.²⁸¹ Sherry Turkle describes MUDs as:

a new kind of virtual parlor game and a new form of community. (...) MUD players are MUD authors, the creators as well as consumers of media content. In this, participating in a MUD has much in common with script writing, performance art, street theatre, improvisational theatre –or even commedia dell'arte. (...) As players participate, they become authors not only of text but of themselves, constructing new selves through social interaction.²⁸²

TinyMUD was a multi-user environment that followed on from MUDs with some major differences: TinyMUD broke with the Dungeon and Dragons-themed tradition, allowed users access to the code so that they could interact by programming parts of the play themselves, and focused on social interaction rather than gaming. MIT student James Aspnes developed the first TinyMUD in 1989.²⁸³ Allowing users access to the code also had a side-effect: it meant that,

²⁸¹ Curtis, P. Not Just a Game: How LambdaMOO Came to Exist and What It Did to Get Back at Me, 2001 In: Haynes, C. and Holmevik, J. R. (eds) *High Wired: On the Design, Use and Theory of Educational MOOs*. Michigan: Ann Arbor University of Michigan Press, 2001, p. 27.

²⁸² Turkle, S. *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. Phoenix and London: Orion, 2nd Edition, 1997, pp. 11-12.

²⁸³ See: Burk, J. ATHEMOO and the Future Present: Shaping Cyberspace into a Theatre Working Place, 1999 In: Schrum, S. A. (ed.) *Theatre in Cyberspace: Issues of Teaching, Acting and Directing*. New York: Peter Lang, 1999, pp. 109-134. Also, see: Sant, T. A Second Life for Online Performance: Understanding Present Developments Through an Historical Context *International Journal of Performance Arts and*

soon, an oligarchy of good programmers were mastering TinyMUDs. A year later, in 1990, Pavel Curtis developed the first MOO (MUD Object Oriented), LambdaMOO, which used TinyMUD as a basis. MOOs were environments easier to program, with a format closer to natural language. In 1995 Juli Burk, at the time based at the University of Hawaii and Vice President of ATHE (Association for Theatre in Higher Education), created ATHEMOO: the first MOO designed specifically for theatre, initially as a conference-related venture and later on as an environment for meetings, seminars, teaching and performance.²⁸⁴ The first performance to take place in ATHEMOO was designed by Cat Hebert in 1996 in conjunction with the *Crosswaves* Festival in Philadelphia, and was a series of monologues performed in physical space, which were simultaneously being transcribed into the MOO environment.²⁸⁵

The next performance to take place in ATHEMOO was more interesting, in that it was specifically designed for this environment: this was Rick Sacks's project *MetaMOOphosis* (1997), based on Franz Kafka's novel *Metamorphosis*.²⁸⁶ To visit *MetaMOOphosis* from ATHEMOO, one had to type @go Kafka from the main lobby of the text-based VR space in order to arrive at the front door of Gregor Samsa, the main protagonist's, house. Once there, the visitor could investigate Samsa's front yard by typing in commands such as 'look', and/or enter the house by typing 'in' or 'enter'. Once inside, the visitor would first find him/herself at the Foyer, where s/he would also find a closet with 'costumes' for Mrs. Samsa, Mr. Samsa, Gregor, Grete, Herr Doctor, the journalist and observer(s).²⁸⁷ The costumes were not just descriptions of each character's clothing, but also –and most importantly– descriptions of the character him/herself, whereas each costume came with built-in scripts. Thus, selecting a costume meant selecting a character within the play, and 'visiting' the play as an audience also meant entering Gregor Samsa's world as a dramatic character. Each 'costume' had about 30 built-in lines which gave the user some kind of direction in terms of his/her character's axis; it also allowed user(s) to improvise a great deal through both speech and action.²⁸⁸ Once within the house as a character, one could move around from the foyer to the kitchen and living room on the first floor, or take the stairs up to three bedrooms on the second floor; from there, another staircase led to an attic.²⁸⁹ In the same way that each costume had in-built dramatic lines, each space had

Digital Media [online], 4 (1), 2008.

²⁸⁴ See: Burk, J. ATHEMOO and the Future Present.

²⁸⁵ See: Stevenson, J. A. MOO Theatre: More than Just Words?, 1999 In: Schrum, S. A. (ed) *Theatre in Cyberspace*, pp. 135-146.

²⁸⁶ See: Ibid. Also: Sacks, R. The MetaMOOphosis. Available from: <http://www.vex.net/~rixax> [accessed 14/02/2003]

²⁸⁷ As I am describing a text-based environment it is to be understood that all the spaces and objects the user would come across in this virtual journey were text-based as well, that is, literary, interactive descriptions of spaces and objects.

²⁸⁸ Users could also opt for performing through pre-scripted text solely if they preferred.

²⁸⁹ See: Sacks, R. The *MetaMOOphosis*.

in-built characteristics or 'behaviours'. For example, according to Rick Sacks's description-cum-user manual of the *MetaMOOphosis* project:

From Grete's bedroom to Gregor's and vice versa, one can look or talk through the keyhole in the door between their rooms. Using the crack in the door from the hallway to Gregor's room and the keyhole from Grete's to Gregor's room, a conversation much like the one in the early pages of the novel can take place.²⁹⁰

Sacks considered *MetaMOOphosis* successful because it generated rich textual material through improvisations –material that was not only performed online but also in physical space– and was able to accommodate performers from vastly different time zones. Though limited in text, and thus lacking theatre's visual, aural and sensual qualities, he suggested that *MetaMOOphosis* “stands as a vital and thought provoking theatre work” and hoped that “perhaps others will use *MetaMOOphosis* as a model for another play”.²⁹¹

In 1997, the same year that Sacks created *MetaMOOphosis*, New York-based artists Adriene Jenik and Lisa Brenneis established their online performance company Desktop Theatre.²⁹² Desktop Theatre's projects were not dissimilar to the performances taking place in MOOs, but rather than being situated within text-based environments, were making use of the two-dimensional (2D) online chat environment, The Palace.²⁹³ Essentially, The Palace was a hybrid –a cross between an on-line chat area and a multi-player game server. Jim Bumgardner, the director of communities.com that launched The Palace, envisaged it as “a complex networking system” that would allow users the freedom to “make of it what they will” rather than impose a specific plot or game upon them. According to Bumgardner, The Palace “should be a mirror reflecting the self-image of the user and not a predetermined scenario that forced users to adapt themselves to it.”²⁹⁴ As a result of Bumgardner's vision of a virtual space that users could adapt together to suit their particular needs and wishes, The Palace did not become another MMORPG but turned into an online chat environment: “a SOCIAL world where human relationships are the main attraction.”²⁹⁵ Reminiscent of the “imaginary world” concept, Palace users assumed fictional identities via their avatars.

Desktop Theater –which, Jenik suggests, is both the name of the group and a performance genre–²⁹⁶ was the first group to use The Palace environment in order to create

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Sacks, R. *The MetaMOOphosis: A Visit to the Kafka House –A report on the permanent installation of an interactive theatre work based on Franz Kafka's Metamorphosis*, 1999 In: Schrum, S. A. (ed) *Theatre in Cyberspace*, p. 174.

²⁹² Desktop Theater website. Available from: <http://www.desktoptheater.org> [accessed 14/02/2003]

²⁹³ The Palace website. Available from: <http://www.thepalace.com/> [accessed 14/02/2003]

²⁹⁴ Suler, J. On Being a God: An Interview with Jim Bumgardner. Available from: <http://www-usr.rider.edu/~suler/psycyber/jbum.html> 1996 [accessed 14/02/2003]

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Jenik, A. Desktop Theatre: Keyboard Catharsis and the Masking of Roundheads *The Drama Review* 45 (3),

online performances. The Palace was a virtual public space (much like its current 3D equivalent, Second Life) and performing there meant not only performing to audiences who had come specifically to attend the show, but also to numerous passers-by: Jenik discusses how they performed their second show, *Santaman's Harvest*, in The Palace with nightly traffic of between 200 and 300 people.²⁹⁷ The Palace's public nature meant that Jenik and Brenneis approached Desktop Theatre as Internet street theatre. And as street theatre is free and accessible to anybody who happens to come across it, Jenik and Brenneis consciously chose The Palace software, a free, cross-platform application, as a venue for their performances, rather than a more sophisticated 3D environment that would demand more RAM, a bigger hard drive allotment or unlimited bandwidth.²⁹⁸ According to the group: "Making a compelling theatrical intervention or engaging group activity in a virtual public space is an adventure. Here, live theater has new parameters: gestures, emotions and speech are compressed into two dimensions and computer speech."²⁹⁹ Desktop Theater created 30 performances within The Palace from 1997 to 2002.³⁰⁰ In these performances, actors and audience were 'on stage' together as avatars (actors had purpose-built 'costume' avatars, but the audiences often had ready-made ones, especially if they were not frequent users of The Palace). Audiences/chatters were able to engage with the actors through commenting on the action or even joining in the piece, thus creating multiple interferences in the narrative.

(Fall) 2001, pp. 95-112.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Desktop Theater. How to Make Desktop Theater. Available from:
http://www.desktoptheater.org/~ajenik/desktoptheater_content/howto/files/h_fr_01.htm [accessed 14/02/2003]

³⁰⁰ See: Sant, T. A Second Life for Online Performance.

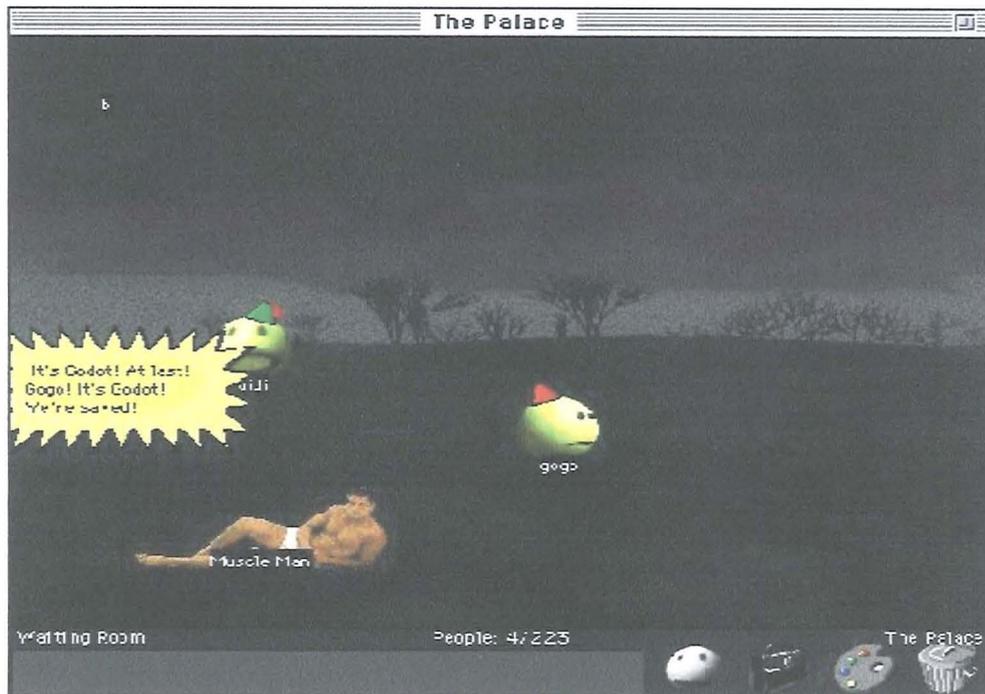


Figure 1.5 Desktop Theater *waitingforgodot.com* 1997³⁰¹

Non-linear, multifocus and complex narrative structures that support the simultaneous evolution of different actions are characteristic not only of movements such as Happenings, Fluxus and Dada, but also of cybertheatres. Cybertheatres often employ hypernarrative structures that offer participants the possibility to create, through their choices, their own version of the piece. In *MetaMOOphosis* for example, different actions evolve in the different areas of the house, whereas each participant can choose his/her own view-point by moving around the text-based VR space. Desktop Theater's plays also evolve simultaneously in different 'rooms' of The Palace, and each participant can move around or stay in the same room throughout the play.³⁰² The aesthetics of simultaneism, introduced by Dada, were fundamental in creating such anti-linear narratives with multiple 'lines of action' unfolding at the same time, while also transversing, influencing and overlapping with each other. Happenings introduced the ideas of fragmentation and dispersion of a piece over many spacetime units. Cybertheatres also

³⁰¹ Available from: http://leda.ucsd.edu/%7Eajenik/archive/files/a_fr_01.htm [accessed 7/02/2006]

³⁰² The religious medieval plays 'Autos Sacramentales' were staged in a similar way albeit in physical space: carriages with performers were placed one next to the other forming a circle around a field (sometimes they were moving through the town one after another). Performers on each carriage were repeatedly enacting one particular scene of the play. The linearity of the play was accomplished through the movement of the audiences from one carriage to the next –but one could choose to watch only one carriage/scene, or stroll towards different directions thus 'devising' one's own story-line. The difference is that, in cybertheatres, the plays are often non-linear to start with: different events happen simultaneously, but without following a 'line' of historical or logical evolution; thus the option of following the play 'linearly' does not necessarily exist.

have the potential to spread across units of spacetime as they are works that often take place in multiple, hybrid spatial layers.³⁰³ Furthermore, they support both synchronous and asynchronous connections, thus allowing for the expansion of the traditional durational limitations of a piece.³⁰⁴

In 1997, the same year that Jenik and Brenneis founded Desktop Theater, Helen Varley Jamieson, a collaborator of both Burk and the Desktop Theater group, coined the term ‘cyberformance’ on her website to describe non-proximal performance that takes place online.³⁰⁵ She is a founding member of Avatar Body *Collision*, another group that experiments with cybertheatre practices. Varley Jamieson describes how the term ‘cyberformance’ emerged:

In discussions with Juli Burk (ATHEMOO), we talked about the importance of naming not only what we are doing, but also what we are not doing. (...) It’s not ‘virtual’, and it’s also not ‘physical’. Juli introduced me to the term ‘proximal theatre’ as a way to describe theater that takes place with close proximity between performers and audience –they are in the same room, auditorium or space. This seemed to me to be a good start in differentiating between performance that is located on the Internet, where participants are distributed around the globe, and proximal theatre, which requires the audience to come to the performance site.³⁰⁶

For her, cyberformance indicated a new type of theatre that did not require the audiences and the performers to meet in physical proximity but could instead “use the internet to bring remote performers together in real time”.³⁰⁷ Originally, Avatar Body *Collision*, like Desktop Theater, performed in The Palace. In 2003 they launched the purpose-built, open source software platform UpStage, which serves as a stage for their cyberformance practice. On UpStage one can create graphical or photographic backdrops, purpose-built avatars (although 2D, avatars can be animated and use a variety of voices through a text-to-speech functionality) and various props (such as graphical objects, speech bubbles etc. that the avatars can manipulate), as well as integrate video conferencing. Audiences, once they have logged on at a specific time to attend a live event, can chat between them (and with the performers) while the performance is taking place. The chat window is positioned on the side of the screen and is visible to everyone who is logged on (both performers and audiences). Unlike The Palace or Second Life, UpStage is not a public space: audiences visit the site specifically to watch a show,

³⁰³ The work of Avatar Body *Collision*, for example, usually unfolds in one or more physical spaces as well as in cyberspace. These different spatial layers are interlinked, creating a multi-layered, hybrid stage. The same applies to many of Blast Theory’s projects, which experiment with the notion of ‘augmented reality’, an experience created from overlaying layers of virtual and physical space.

³⁰⁴ *Wirefire* lasted for four years. The live performances were only happening once per week, for a specific duration; nevertheless, since the piece operated in different asynchronous modes as well, one could claim that *Wirefire* was a four-year long performance evolving across different modes-layers.

³⁰⁵ See Introduction.

³⁰⁶ Varley Jamieson, H. What is Cyberformance? Available from: <http://www.cyberformance.org/> [accessed 16/02/2003]

³⁰⁷ Avatar Body *Collision*. About UpStage. Available from: <http://upstage.org.nz/blog/> [accessed 3/07/2009]

like going to the theatre. This also means that audiences do not appear ‘on stage’ together with the performers: although the performers appear on screen through their purpose-built avatars and can use a variety of computerised voices, audiences can only manifest their presence through the text chat window. Again unlike Second Life, which needs to be downloaded and installed, requires one GB or more of memory and a fast Internet connection,³⁰⁸ UpStage, being web-based, is a low-tech platform for online performance: since it does not need to be downloaded, it requires no RAM or bandwidth –one can access and use UpStage on any computer, using a dial-up connection.

In 2007, Avatar Body *Collision* (ABC) launched the 070707 cyberperformance festival on UpStage, which took place online and was screened in physical space at the National Film Archive in Wellington, New Zealand.³⁰⁹ I had, by then, got to know the group well, as I had invited them to present their work at the international *Medi@terra 2002* festival, which I was, at the time, co-directing in Athens, Greece.³¹⁰ Later, I had selected their work to be presented at the *Machinista* festival in Glasgow (2004), where I was Supervisor for a category of submissions entitled ‘Artists Against Machinic Standards’.³¹¹ I had also met members of the group on other occasions such as conferences and events, as well as online: when UpStage was launched, the group introduced monthly ‘walks’ that functioned like demonstrations of the platform. When the 070707 festival was announced in 2006 I was interested in taking part but was at a loss as to whom I could collaborate with and what type of project I could propose. Being aware that several people, though interested in the prospect of preparing work for the festival, did not have partners for an online performance project, ABC brought together (online, of course) a group of interested parties in order to form collaborations. Through ABC’s initiative I met Marischka Klinkhamer, a visual and media artist based in Amsterdam, Netherlands, and Gabi Schmidberger, an Austrian programmer based in Hamilton, New Zealand. I was, at the time, based between London, UK and Crete, Greece. Marischka, Gabi and I started working together in April 2006, aiming to prepare a performance piece for the festival that was taking place in July 2007. Marlena Corcoran, a member of the online performance group Plaintext Players, also participated in some of the rehearsals.³¹²

Working with Marischka and Gabi to create a networked performance piece for

³⁰⁸ Second Life. System Requirements. Available from: <http://secondlife.com/support/sysreqs.php> [accessed 3/08/2009]

³⁰⁹ Avatar Body *Collision*. 070707 Performances. Available from: http://upstage.org.nz/blog/?page_id=51 [accessed 6/08/2009]

³¹⁰ *Medi@terra* festival website. Available from: <http://www.mediaterra.org> [accessed 14/02/2003]

³¹¹ *Machinista* festival website. Available from: <http://www.machinista.org.uk/> [accessed 3/08/2009]

³¹² The Plaintext Players group was founded by Antoinette LaFarge in 1994. LaFarge was also the ‘digital director’ of the group. Plaintext Players have been creating live online and mixed reality performances and have presented work at events such as Documenta X and the Venice Biennale. Plaintext Players website. Available from: <http://yin.arts.uci.edu/~players/> [accessed 3/08/2009]

our project approach the story of Hamlet from Ophelia's perspective, which led to me composing the piece. The final script for the show was a collage of lines from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Heiner Müller's *Hamlet Machine*, along with fragments of original text.³¹³ I named the piece *Ophelia_Machine* and had a stronger input when it came to conceptual decisions (a loose form of directing). Marischka, as an animator, undertook the responsibility of creating all the purpose-built avatars and props. Gabi created purpose-built voices for the avatars, a task that demanded some programming skills, and was also in charge of the planning (a loose form of production). All the three of us researched visuals for the backdrops, and we all performed. Also, we all fed into each other's organically acquired 'terrain' throughout: for example, Marischka provided some lines of text which I edited and tweaked; I suggested that we use a Barbie as an avatar for Ophelia for part of the play; Gabi uploaded several of the backdrop visuals, and so on. Furthermore, the artistic decisions were never independent of the (severe) technical limitations of the platform, the tight timeframe, and our technical skills (or lack thereof).

Marischka, Gabi and I were performing *Ophelia_Machine* through our avatars and computer-generated voices rather than our corporeal bodies. When we first embarked on this project none of us thought that acting skills were necessary in order to perform those (dis)embodied characters. We were mistaken: the rehearsal period turned out to be intense and demanding, not only in terms of time and commitment, but also in terms of emotional engagement with the piece and each other. The text itself was challenging: even though we were speaking our lines through the computerised, text-to-speech functionality of the platform, some of the more violent lines, such as "Hurt her. Tear off her clothes. Beat her. Bruise her. Fuck her", were causing distress to my partners. Whereas a trained actor would be able to perform those lines without undertaking all their emotional impact through distinguishing between him/herself and the character, my partners in this project were unable to do so. When ordering "Hurt her" Marischka would feel that she was personally responsible for the abuse that Gabi/Ophelia('s avatar) was suffering. As a result, we had to undergo lengthy negotiation processes as to how we should handle this language. Finally, roles were re-distributed for different scenes, and the final script had to be 'toned down' for my partners to feel able to utter those lines through their avatars. The intensity of the text, combined with the long hours we spent together during this period and, I think, the security of the physical distance we had from each other, led to several discussions of a very personal nature, unexpected attachments, tensions, crises and friendships. Creating this piece turned out to be a very intimate and enriching experience despite (or because of) the physical distance between us.

³¹³ See Appendix One, *Ophelia_Machine* for my performance script of the text (it includes 'stage' directions).

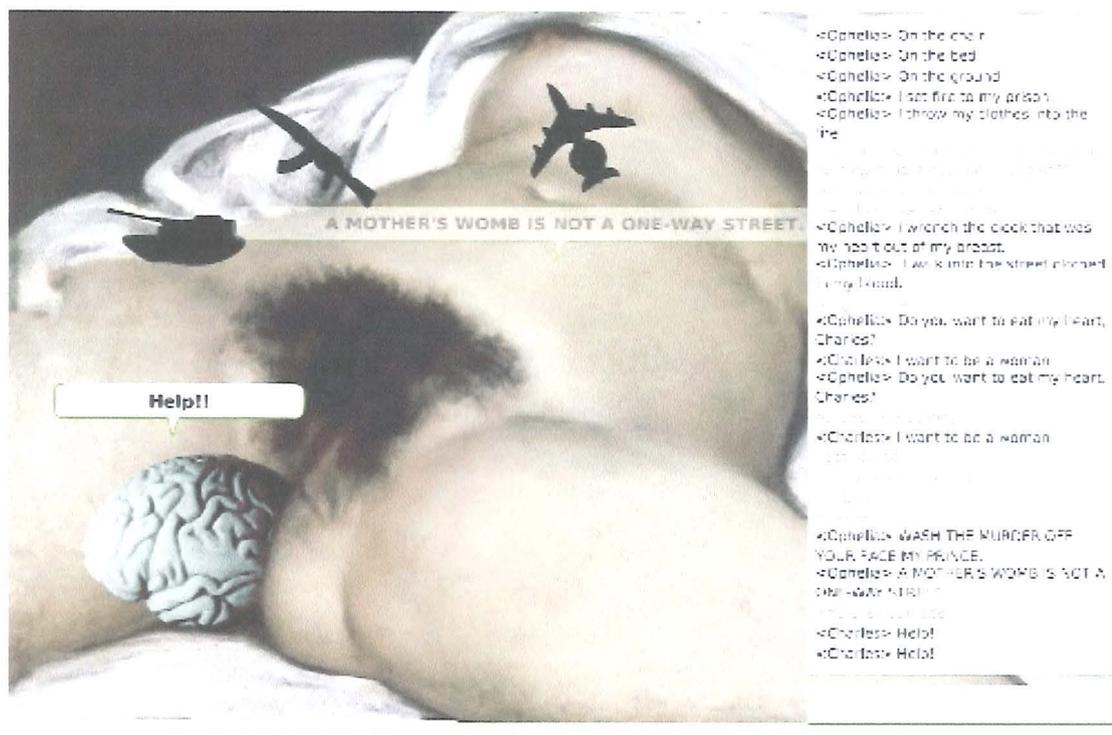


Figure 1.7 Chatzichristodoulou, Klinkhamer, Smidberger *Ophelia_Machine* 2007

Another example of performance taking place online, albeit one of very different dramaturgy and aesthetics, is Entropy8Zuper!'s piece *Wirefire* (1999-2003), which I cover in greater detail in Chapter Three of this thesis.³¹⁴ *Wirefire* was a performance/software/net.art piece the subject-matter of which was the experience of "sex in a virtual world".³¹⁵ The artists/protagonists, Auriea Harvey (a.k.a. Entropy8) and Michael Samyn (a.k.a. Zuper!), who were originally based in New York City and Ghent, Belgium respectively, used the Internet to meet and perform their telematic love-making once per week, for four years.³¹⁶ Far from resembling a photorealistic representation of physical sex, every *Wirefire* performance was a playful real-time composition of digital images, sounds, texts and video-streams, as well as synchronous and asynchronous connections between artists and audiences. All these different

³¹⁴ Entropy8Zuper! *Wirefire* 1999-2003. Available from: <http://www.entropy8zuper.org/wirefire/> [accessed 2/03/2004]

³¹⁵ Harvey, A. and Samyn, M. A Secret History of Wirefire. Available from: http://e8z.org/wirefire/SECRET.HISTORY/A_SECRET_HISTORY_OF_WIREFIRE.txt 2001 [accessed 2/03/2004]

³¹⁶ Harvey and Samyn launched *Wirefire* at the beginning of their business partnership, which soon developed into an erotic relationship. Eventually, Harvey moved to Belgium to live with Samyn, while *Wirefire* was still active as a durational performance piece. See: Chatzichristodoulou, M. From Entropy8Zuper! To Tale of Tales: Games and *The Endless Forest*. Available from: http://www.furtherfield.org/displayreview.php?review_id=287 2007 [accessed 19/06/2007]

files were stored in the *Wirefire* database (which was being constantly updated). Once a week, the artists would mix in real time different files from the database, adding other live elements such as text chat, web-cam streams and visual effects. In effect, Harvey and Samyn were, once a week, performing the database. It is evident that *Wirefire* differs radically from previous examples of online performance that I have offered in this Chapter: as discussed, MOOs and MUDs were text-based environments, which entailed a strong focus on the script, characters and plot. *Wirefire*, on the other hand, was a visually exuberant experience. Though the piece was built on the 'secret story' of telematic love-making, it did not attempt to narrate anything that would require characters or narrative development, either linear or otherwise. *Wirefire*, in fact, resembled more a live online VJing session than a conventional theatrical performance. Text was used, but this was not more important than the visuals and music. Furthermore, text was often used as a visual element within the piece, rather than to generate meaning. It is not accidental that *Wirefire* was launched in the late 1990s when the first commercial live video applications such as Vjamm, Arkaos and Motion were also being released, and VJing was becoming widespread as a practice in clubs and artistic contexts alike.³¹⁷

It is interesting to note that both types of online performance I have referred to in this section, that is, performance in text-based and chat environments as well as the 'database performance' of *Wirefire*, moved in the same direction: performance in virtual worlds. Entropy&Zuper! relaunched themselves in 2002 as Tale of Tales, a games design studio, and created, among other works, *The Endless Forest*: a virtual forest-world which exists as a 24-hour 7-days-a-week live performance through the presence of its users, who appear inworld as deer (often the authors perform there too as Twin Gods).³¹⁸ I discuss this piece, together with *Wirefire*, in Chapter Three. Performances in text-based virtual reality environments and graphical chat environments, on the other hand, also developed into performances in virtual worlds.³¹⁹ the most notable examples are, without doubt, the numerous performances that take place in the virtual world of Second Life.³²⁰

³¹⁷ See: Voskopoulou, A. A Brief History of VJing. Available from: <http://avos.wordpress.com/a-brief-history-or-vjing/> [accessed 5/08/2009]

³¹⁸ Tale of Tales *The Endless Forest* 2005. Available from: <http://tale-of-tales.com/TheEndlessForest/> [accessed 5/08/2009]

³¹⁹ There are, of course, exceptions, the UpStage platform being one of them.

³²⁰ Second Life is not the only social virtual world. It faces competition from other worlds, including: Entropia Universe, designed by Swedish software company MindArk. Entropia Universe website. Available from: <http://www.entropiauniverse.com/entropiauniverse/> [accessed 5/08/2009]. Active Worlds, created originally by developer Jon Britvich as the 2.5D chat environment WebWorlds in 1994. Active Worlds website. Available from: <http://www.activeworlds.com/> [accessed 5/08/2009]. Also, the Finnish teen-focused virtual world Habbo Hotel. Habbo Hotel website. Available from: <http://www.habbo.co.uk/> [accessed 5/08/2009]. For a more inclusive list of virtual worlds see: Virtual Worlds Review. Available from: <http://www.virtualworldsreview.com/> [accessed 5/08/2009]. Second Life is, at the moment, the most powerful virtual economy as well as, possibly, the largest virtual world in terms of user numbers. This is

Second Life (SL) is the creation of Linden Lab, founded by American entrepreneur Philip Rosedale in 1999. It defines itself as “a free online virtual world imagined and created by its Residents”, and it promises users that “from the moment you enter Second Life, you’ll discover a fast-growing digital world filled with people, entertainment, experiences and opportunity.”³²¹ Although ‘free’ to start with (one can open a basic account free of charge, which will provide you with an avatar, some clothing and access inworld), SL has its own currency, the Linden Dollar (L\$). As with every other currency, L\$’s value can fluctuate based on supply and demand. During the last three years its value has been fairly stable at about 250 L\$ to the US Dollar.³²² While inworld, a SL user needs L\$ to buy special features for his/her avatar (such as specially designed skin and hair), designer clothes and accessories, vehicles, artwork and property. A user might also need L\$ in order to attend ticketed events, pay other users’ for their skills and services, or buy various virtual objects. SL, like the 2D graphical chat environment of The Palace before it, is a social world. Users who log onto SL can explore, and interact with, the extensive virtual world; meet and socialise with people from around the globe;³²³ have professional or other meetings; attend events (music gigs, theatre plays, activist actions, exhibitions); develop their appearance and property; rent, buy and sell land, objects and services; attend educational activities; flirt, have virtual sex; and so on.

In launching SL, Linden Lab’s aim was to create “a revolutionary new form of shared experience”, where individuals would be able to build together the virtual world they jointly co-inhabited.³²⁴ Linden Lab was by no means modest in its ambitions: according to the company’s mission statement, “It’s our mission to connect us all to an online world that advances the human condition.”³²⁵ Although it is difficult to say if the company has indeed succeeded in advancing the ‘human condition’ as such,³²⁶ one cannot but acknowledge SL’s (quantitative, if not qualitative) success. According to the quarterly annual report issued by Linden Lab on 16

difficult to verify though: Linden Lab has been accused of including the same users’ multiple accounts, bots and accounts that have been idle for years in its statistics. For more information see: Second Life: Criticism and Controversy: Alternative Accounts In: *Wikipedia*. Available from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Life 2/12/2009 10:28 [accessed 4/12/2009]

³²¹ Second Life. What Is Second Life? Available from: <http://secondlife.com/whatis/> [accessed 5/08/2009]

³²² Second Life. Currency Exchange. Available from: <http://secondlife.com/whatis/currency.php> [accessed 5/08/2009]

³²³ Unfortunately I could not access any current statistics regarding the nationality of Second Life users. According to an analysis published by comScore and announced by Reuters in May 2007, the majority of users at the time, which amounted to the 61% of the total SL population, were European. comScore announced that the most active SL populations were German and American, at 16% each. comScore. comScore Finds that ‘Second Life’ has a Rapidly Growing and Global Base of Active Residents. Available from: http://www.comscore.com/Press_Events/Press_Releases/2007/05/Second_Life_Growth_Worldwide 4/05/2007 [accessed 5/08/2009]

³²⁴ Linden Lab. The Company. Available from: <http://lindenlab.com/about> [accessed 5/08/2009]

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ I could not resist a little irony...

April 2009:

- SL residents collectively logged 124 million user hours (an increase of 42% from the same quarter in 2008),
- Concurrent usage peaked at 88,200 users (an increase of 33%),
- User-to-user transactions reached USD\$120 million (an increase of 65%).³²⁷

These statistics demonstrate that, currently, the virtual world of SL boasts a growing number of active users and a flourishing economy. Although the exact number of active SL users is not known, there is no question that there has been a dramatic growth in users of virtual worlds: according to Castranova, total registrations to virtual worlds were well over 100 million in 2007. He estimated at the time about 30 million actual users, compared to some hundred thousand actual users of the few virtual worlds that existed ten years previously.³²⁸ This activity, as one would expect, has also intrigued several artists who experiment with creating artworks for and exhibitions in SL, as well as with staging events and performances online.

Second Front³²⁹ is a pioneering performance art group that, according to the artists themselves, was the first group to create work for the SL world. Founded in 2006, Second Front now comprises a seven-strong troupe,³³⁰ the members of which are distributed in USA, Canada, UK, Italy and Israel.³³¹ According to the group's website "Second Front creates theatres of the absurd that challenge notions of virtual embodiment, online performance and the formation of virtual narrative."³³² The group trace their lineage to the movements of Dada, Fluxus, Futurism and the group Situationist International,³³³ and take their influences from various sources, including contemporary performance artists Laurie Anderson³³⁴ and Guillermo Gomez-Peña.³³⁵

³²⁷ T Linden. The Second Life Economy - First Quarter 2009 in Detail. Available from: <https://blogs.secondlife.com/community/features/blog/2009/04/16/the-second-life-economy--first-quarter-2009-in-detail> 16/04/2009 [accessed 6/08/2009]

³²⁸ Castranova, E. *Exodus to the Virtual World: How Online Fun is Changing Reality*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 34.

³²⁹ Second Front website. Available from: <http://www.secondfront.org/> [accessed 5/08/2009]

³³⁰ Second Front members as per 2009 are: Fau Ferdinand a.k.a. Yael Gilks, Bibbe Oh a.k.a. Bibbe Hansen, Tran Spire a.k.a. Doug Jarvis, Gazira Babeli a.k.a. Gaz, Man Michinaga a.k.a. Partick Lichty, Lizzolo Mathilde a.k.a. Liz Solo and Great Escape a.k.a. Scott Kildall. Second Front. Who We Are. Available from: <http://www.secondfront.org/About/index.html> [accessed 5/08/2009]

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Second Front. What We Do. Available from: <http://www.secondfront.org/index.html> [accessed 5/08/2009]

³³³ The Situationist International was a group of revolutionaries, which was founded in 1957 and influenced the general strikes of May 1968 in France. The group's ideas were rooted in Marxism and its socio-political-artistic practice in the European 20th century artistic avant-gardes. The most well-known outcome of their theoretical work is member Guy Debord's 1967 book *Society of the Spectacle*. For relevant texts see: Situationist International Archive. Available from: <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline//si/situ.html> [accessed 5/08/2009]. Also: nothingness.org. The Situationist International Text Library. Available from: <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/all/> [accessed 5/08/2009]

³³⁴ American artist Laurie Anderson is one of the most important contemporary experimental performance artists and musicians. Anderson, a classically trained sculptor, has experimented with the use of technologies for her shows and is known for inventing several sonar devices, such as a tape-bow violin

³³⁶ Second Front's performances follow the traditions of civil disobedience and activist action. The group's first piece, performed November 29, 2006, was called *Breaking News*. Second Front members invaded the Reuters headquarters in SL and used the text chat window to shout headlines such as: "BREAKING NEWS: AVATARS IN REUTERS NEED ATTENTION!".³³⁷

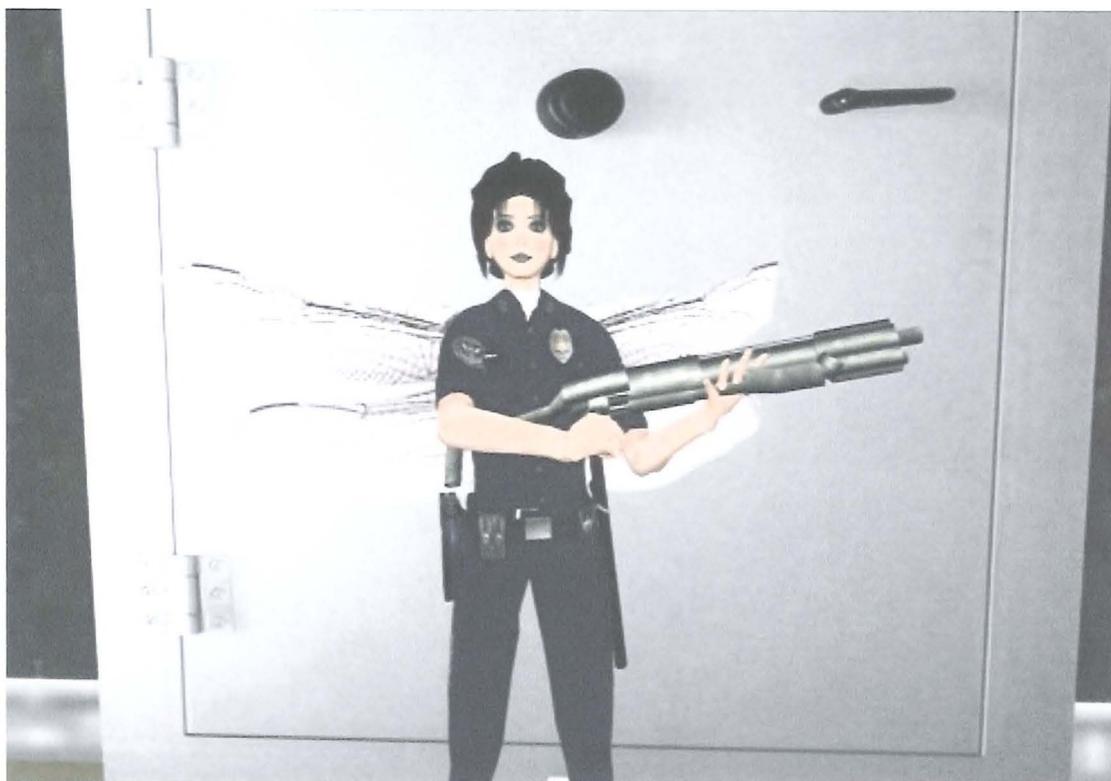


Figure 1.8 Second Front *Grand Theft Avatar* 2008³³⁸

Among the group's recent pieces is *Grand Theft Avatar*, which took place as part of the panel discussion 'From Cinema to Machinima' at the San Francisco Art Institute on 14 April, 2008.³³⁹ During the discussion, Second Front members argued that Linden Lab "owns huge

and a talking stick. Laurie Anderson website. Available from: <http://www.laurieanderson.com> [accessed 5/08/2009]

³³⁵ Artist Guillermo Gomez Peña is co-founder of the activist, interdisciplinary and internationalist performance group La Pocha Nostra. La Pocha Nostra performances often employ new technologies to critique the technological divide between 'first' and 'third' world (sic). La Pocha Nostra website. Available from: <http://www.pochanostra.com/> [accessed 5/08/2009]

³³⁶ Second Front. Artist's Statement. Available from: <http://www.secondfront.org/About/index.html> [accessed 5/08/2009]

³³⁷ Second Front. *Breaking News*. Available from: http://www.secondfront.org/Performances/Breaking_News.html 29/11/2006 [accessed 8/08/2009]

³³⁸ Available from: <http://www.secondfront.org/blog/?p=62> [accessed 8/08/2009]

³³⁹ San Francisco Art Institute. Panel Discussion: From Cinema to Machinima. Available from: <http://www.sfai.edu/Event/Event.aspx?eventID=1754&navID=328§ionID=7> 14/04/2008 [accessed

amounts of land, makes their (sic) own laws and mints their own currency. They are, in effect, a nation-state.”³⁴⁰ As a consequence, Second Front decided to rob the Linden Treasury acting as the ‘currency liberation army’. Furthermore, they disguised themselves by impersonating, through their avatars, other members of the panel: Christiane Paul, Lynn Hershman Leeson, Char Davies, Howard Rheingold and Camille Utterback. Second Front members then went on to rob the Treasury using these ‘stolen identities’. The operation was successful –though a little bloody– and Second Front grabbed the loot, escaped on a helicopter, and freed Linden dollars on the air!³⁴¹ Another recent Second Front performance was *Car Bibbe*, based on a script by Fluxus artist Al Hansen. Al Hansen wrote the piece for his daughter, Second Front member Bibbe Hansen, a.k.a. Bibbe Oh. *Car Bibbe* took place in SL, on 18 October, 2008: one hundred cars arrived at a beach at twilight. They filled up the beach parking lot. According to Dick Higgins, who was present at the Happening:

They flashed lights, and honked horns, drove forward and back again rapidly and jerkily, now ten feet forward, now five feet back, now ten feet forward, now twenty-five feet back, wherever there was room to go. (...) In the midst of the cars there was a single car with twenty-five people on and in it, all singing and having a fine old time. On the roof, one of the people had a broken leg. He fell off the car, cracked his cast and rebroke his leg. There is almost always plenty of physical danger in a Hansen piece as well as intellectual danger.³⁴²

8/08/2009]

³⁴⁰ Second Front. *Grand Theft Avatar* Video. Available from: <http://www.secondfront.org/blog/?p=62> 29/08/2008 [accessed 8/08/2009]

³⁴¹ Second Front. *Grand Theft Avatar*. Available from: http://www.secondfront.org/Performances/Grand_Theft_Avatar.html 14/04/2008 [accessed 8/08/2009]

³⁴² Higgins, D. Cited by: Second Front. *Car Bibbe*. Available from: http://www.secondfront.org/Performances/Car_Bibbe.html 18/10/2008 [accessed 8/08/2009]



Figure 1.9 Second Front *Grand Theft Avatar* 2008³⁴³

For me, Second Front is the most interesting performance group currently active in SL (2009), though there are several other theatre and performance groups producing work within the virtual world. One example is the SL Shakespeare company, who produce Shakespeare's plays in a 3D simulation of The Globe Theatre in SL.³⁴⁴ This, according to the company, is the most accurate rendition of Shakespeare's Globe on the Internet.³⁴⁵ The company, which aims to bring to SL all of Shakespeare's plays, focuses on historical accuracy, remaining faithful to the playtexts and researching historical costumes and hair styles. Ina Centaur, founder and director of the company, states that, despite the possibilities within SL, the company resists the temptation of playing with stage sets, preferring instead a minimal, black-box-theatre-like setting, and a stronger focus on story and acting.³⁴⁶ The group has been active since 2007, and its premier production was *Hamlet*, in 2008. Other theatre and performance groups that are active in SL include the Dutch group Slapelozen³⁴⁷ and the international Diabolus group, which

³⁴³ Second Front. *Grand Theft Avatar* Video.

³⁴⁴ The SL Shakespeare Company website available from: <http://www.slshakespeare.com/> [accessed 8/08/2009]

³⁴⁵ To visit, go to <http://visit.slshakespeare.com/slurl.php> [accessed 8/08/2009]

³⁴⁶ The Second Life Shakespeare Company. About. Available from: <http://slshakespeare.com/pages/about> [accessed 8/08/2009]

³⁴⁷ Slapelozen website. Available from: <http://www.slapelozen.com/> [accessed 8/08/2009]

includes my UpStage collaborator Marischka Kilkhamer (a.k.a. Sca Shilova) as a member.³⁴⁸ Occasionally, you can find me inworld as Electra Cearndow.



Figure 1.9 SL Shakespeare Company - Banner³⁴⁹

1.2.b) Telematics

The spirit of internationalism projected by Fluxus (see for example Nam Jun Paik's *Global Groove* piece, mentioned above) remained pertinent to all networked and telematic work, which aimed to bring together artists separated by physical and geographical boundaries. The work of artists Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz was seminal in this field. Galloway and Rabinowitz created *Satellite Arts Project (SAP)*, "a space with no geographical boundaries" in 1975-7.³⁵⁰ *SAP*, one of the first telematic performances, used a live video satellite link to connect artists performing in different places around the world. The objective of the project was to demonstrate for the first time how artists based in distant physical locations could meet and perform together, in the same "living image".³⁵¹ Through *SAP*, Galloway and Rabinowitz aimed to research the possibilities and limitations of new technologies "to create and augment new contexts, environments, and scale for telecollaborative arts".³⁵² Their experimentations endeavoured to test telematic collaborations in different types of art such as dance, performance

³⁴⁸ Diabolus website. Available from: <http://diabolus.ning.com/> [accessed 8/08/2009]

³⁴⁹ Available from: <http://www.slshakespeare.com/> [accessed 8/08/2009]

³⁵⁰ Electronic Café International. Telecollaborative Art Projects of ECI Founders Galloway and Rabinowitz, 1977 to Present. Available from: <http://www.ecafe.com/getty/table.html#2> [accessed 20/07/2005]

³⁵¹ Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz *Satellite Arts Project* 1977. Available from: Ibid.

³⁵² Ibid.

and music in order to determine which genres could benefit from the new possibilities offered by satellite technologies, as well as identify new genres emerging as a result of such hybrid practices. The artists were looking to challenge the limitation imposed by physical boundaries (between countries and bodies) and Euclidean spacetime, and initiate collaborative practices that would link like-minded people from around the globe.

“On a November evening in 1980 and for three consecutive evenings the unsuspecting public walking past the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York City and The Broadway department store in Century City, Los Angeles, had a surprising encounter with each other”.³⁵³ *Hole-in-Space* was one of the most celebrated pre-Internet telematic installation/performance works or, as the artists themselves described it, a “public communication sculpture”.³⁵⁴ Suddenly, people walking past each of these places were confronted by life-sized, televised images of people on the opposite coast, who they could not just see but also speak to and communicate with. This was not presented as an art installation and no explanation was offered to the passers-by about the phenomenon. According to the artists “*Hole-in-Space* suddenly severed the distance between both cities and created an outrageous pedestrian intersection.”³⁵⁵ At first people were surprised and intrigued; they tried to understand the phenomenon and explore its potential. Gradually people realised that they could arrange to telematically meet friends and relatives living on the opposite coast. Eventually, whole families would meet their distant loved ones through the ‘Hole’, some of whom had not seen each other for several years.³⁵⁶

Galloway and Rabinowitz’s experimentation with satellite technologies was, at the time, funded by NASA and other research and arts councils and corporations –clearly, these were expensive technologies that very few could access. As Steve Dixon suggests, in the 1990s the World Wide Web brought the possibility for telematic connectivity to much broader constituencies.³⁵⁷ One of the most well-respected pioneers working in this field is the New York-based Gertrude Stein Repertory Theatre (GSRT), founded in 1990 to “promote and support innovation in the performing arts.” To achieve its mission, GSRT explores the application of film and Internet technologies to live theatre practices. An example, according to Dixon, is co-director Cheryl Faver’s adaptation of a section from Stein’s *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* (1988, 1995) in which four actors on a physical stage in New York performed together with two actors based at the Paris Opera, who appeared live in a videoconference

³⁵³ Galloway, K. and Rabinowitz, S. *Hole-In-Space*, 1980. Available from: <http://www.ecafe.com/getty/HIS/index.html> [accessed 6/07/2009]

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Dixon, S. with Smith, B. *Digital Performance*, p. 420.

window on stage. Computer-generated figures of a boy and a dog joined the action and an 'unidentified' character also appeared, though only as text in a text chat window.³⁵⁸

According to Steve Dixon telematic performance came of age in the late 1990s. During the years 1999 and 2000 Dixon and Smith's project *Digital Performance Archive* recorded more telematic events than any other form of digital performance.³⁵⁹ In particular, performances that integrated telematic connections flourished in the dance and technology field, where the absence of dramatic text and the focus on movement and visual effects supported such experimentations. Notable examples of such practice are New York-based group Troika Ranch's piece *The Electronic Disturbance* (1996) which linked performers (dancers and singers) situated in remote geographical locations in an attempt to synthesise the corporeal and the electronic into a new, 20th Century body.³⁶⁰ Also several projects by the Houston-based company AlienNation, such as *Migratory Bodies* (1999), *Embers* (2001-2002) and *East by West* (2003-2004), explore the performative potential of telepresence as well as the connections between live performance and digital arts, real time synthesis, electronic music and visual arts.³⁶¹ Last but not least, works by Melbourne-based Company in Space, such as *Incarinate stage 1* (2000), *Incarinate stage 2* (2001) and *CO3* (2001), aimed to "create dialogues between our visual, aural and kinetic perceptions".³⁶² Though telematics possibly favour experimentation within the field of dance, there have also been several theatre projects that employed and still employ Internet technologies to experiment with the in-between space that telematic connections can create. The UK-based Chameleons Group and, in particular, their piece *NetCongestion* (2000), an ambitious live, interactive webcast performance, are one example.³⁶³ In addition, there are the performance projects by Station House Opera, such as *Live from Paradise* (2004-5), *Play on Earth* (2006), *The Other Is You* (2006) and *What's Wrong With The World?* (2008), which link together remote locations (often across continents) using live internet streaming.³⁶⁴

Among the most important artists using telematics in performance practice is Paul Sermon, who, since the early 1990s, has been producing some seminal pieces in the field of live performance and interactive telematic art installations. Making use of videoconference

³⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 421.

³⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 423.

³⁶⁰ Troika Ranch. Works. Available from: <http://www.troikaranch.org/vid-earlierWorks.html> [accessed 5/08/2009]

³⁶¹ AlienNation. Mission Map. Available from: <http://www.aliennationcompany.com/mission.htm> [accessed 5/08/2009]

³⁶² Company In Space. Introduction. Available from: http://www.companyinspace.com/front/cis_fs.htm [accessed 5/08/2009]

³⁶³ Chameleons *NetCongestion* 2000 In: *Digital Performance Archive*. Available from: <http://ahds.ac.uk/ahdscollections/docroot/dpa/authorsdetails.do?project=360&author=&string=S> [accessed 5/08/2009]

³⁶⁴ Station House Opera website. Available from: <http://www.stationhouseopera.com/> [accessed 5/08/2009]

techniques, Paul Sermon has developed a series of celebrated telematic installation/performance projects, including *Telematic Dreaming* (1992) and *Telematic Vision* (1993). According to Sermon, *Telematic Dreaming* was inspired by Jean Baudrillard's essay *Le Xerox et L'Infini* (Xerox and Infinity), in which the writer discusses the celibacy of the 'Telematic Man' in front of his computer. The 'Telematic Man', argues Baudrillard, does not ever target the Other, the interlocutor (whether sexual or cognitive), but only the screen as the point of interface: "La machine (l'écran interactif) transforme le processus de communication, de relation de l'un à l'autre, en un processus de commutation, c'est à dire de réversibilité du même au même. [The machine (the interactive screen) transforms the process of communication, of the relationship between one and other, into a process of commutation, that is, the reversibility of the same into the same.]"³⁶⁵ In Sermon's *Telematic Dreaming*, two double beds are placed within two different locations: one in a blacked out space and the other in a lit space. The lit bed has a camera situated above it, which sends a live video image of the bed and a person lying on it to a video projector situated above the bed in the dark space. This live video image is projected onto the dark bed, where another person is lying. A second camera, which is above the dark bed, sends a live video image of both persons lying in bed together (one as physical presence, the other as a disembodied image) back to a series of monitors that surround the lit bed and the person lying there.³⁶⁶ According to Sermon:

The ability to exist outside of the users own space and time is created by an alarmingly real sense of touch that is enhanced by the context of the bed and caused by an acute shift of senses in the telematic space. (...) The cause and effect interactions of the body determine its own space and time, by extending this through the ISDN network, the body can travel at the speed of light and locate itself wherever it is interacting.³⁶⁷

Telematic Vision, created a year later, functions in a similar manner: two identical sofas are situated in two remote locations. In front of each sofa is a TV monitor. Users can sit on each sofa and, through videoconferencing and a video effects generator, the two images are mixed so that users of both sofas see themselves in their respective monitors sitting together.³⁶⁸ Although Sermon originally described these pieces as installations (rather than performances) it is clear that they are both. *Telematic Dreaming*, for example, did not depend solely on audience members for its performance: for four weeks, dancer Susan Kozel performed as one of the lying

³⁶⁵ Baudrillard, J. *Le Xerox et L'Infini*. Available from: <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/baudrillard/baudrillard-le-xerox-et-linfini.html> 1987 [accessed 5/08/2009] My translation.

³⁶⁶ Sermon, P. *Telematic Dreaming* – Statement. Available from: <http://creativetechnology.salford.ac.uk/paulsermon/dream/> [accessed 5/08/2009]

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Sermon, P. *Telematic Vision*: Artistic Statement. Available from: <http://creativetechnology.salford.ac.uk/paulsermon/vision/> [accessed 5/08/2009]

bodies within the installation.³⁶⁹ Kozel was not the only performer in the piece: although she was the only professional performer in this telematic one-to-one encounter, Kozel was performing with (rather than for) individual members of the audience, who were becoming performers as a result of entering the piece/encounter. In the same way that audiences inside Kaprow's environments were no longer audiences but performers, the users of Sermon's interactive works undertake their role in the drama, often regardless of their intentions. Indeed, in the same way that Kaprow's environments (and most of the interactive pieces I have discussed) were dependent on audiences in order to come to life, Sermon's pieces "simply wouldn't function without their [the audiences'] presence and participation."³⁷⁰ My own memory of experiencing *Telematic Vision* in 1999 at the ZKM in Karlsruhe, Germany, is of performing for audiences –though this had not been my intention: sitting on the blue sofa in front of the monitor, I remember performing for and with the user(s) of the Other sofa (at the time situated also within the ZKM but on a different floor and with no direct visual communication between the two), as well as for all the other visitors of the Museum who happened to be passing by at that time, several of whom would stop and watch the 'show'.

Sermon is also interested in studying his telematic installations as performance spaces. He has identified through his practice that audiences often fall into two broad categories: those who, when thrown into the role of the performer, are quick to take control of the piece and choreograph their own image/avatar, and the off-camera members of the public who either prefer to retain their role as spectators of the drama offered, or are waiting for the next available slot in order to undertake a more active role themselves. Sermon points out that, often, audiences find themselves watching an action which they think has been choreographed and performed for them by a professional, only to gradually realise that this person is, in fact, just another audience member. He sees the active audiences/performers as puppeteers who manipulate their own avatar, and himself as the designer of the environment and the 'director' of the narrative, which he determines through the social and political milieu that he chooses to play out in these encounters.³⁷¹

Although I consider these works of great importance to the field of networked performance, it is not my intention to provide information on the numerous performance projects that employ telematic technologies. For further information on artists and groups

³⁶⁹ This was in Amsterdam, during the exhibition *I + the Other*. Kozel has discussed in depth her experience of performing in virtual space, as part of the *Telematic Dreaming* installation. See, for example: Kozel, S. Spacemaking: Experiences of a Virtual Body *Dance Theatre Journal* 11 (3), 1994, pp. 12-47.

³⁷⁰ Sermon, P. (Dis)Embodiment: Seminar Report, 2008. This is from Paul Sermon's report on the seminar that he led during the event *Intimacy: Across Digital and Visceral Performance* (December 2007). The report is not publicly available (2009) but an updated version of it will be published as a chapter in the forthcoming volume *Intimacy: Across Digital and Visceral Performance*.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

employing such technologies one can refer to Dixon and Smith's *Digital Performance Archive*³⁷² as well as Dixon's book *Digital Performance*.³⁷³ I have chosen not to focus on telematic practices in this thesis since, although telematic performances clearly fall within the category of networked performance practices (cybertheatres), I approach them more as precursors to current networked practices and less as emergent forms. As I have discussed, the first telematic performances took place in the late 1970s, before the invention and widespread use of Internet technologies and the World Wide Web. Since then, their use has spread widely within the fields of media arts and contemporary performance and the new dramaturgies and aesthetics such practices introduced have been broadly studied and discussed.³⁷⁴

1.2.c) Linking Physical and Virtual Space

Oudeis – a world wide odyssey through space and time was an ambitious theatrical event based on Homer's *Odyssey*.³⁷⁵ *Oudeis* was one of the first attempts to link physical and virtual space within a single theatrical performance by using multiple stages in both 'worlds'. Behind the *Oudeis* project was an international group of collaborators (Gernot Lechner and Monika Wunderer directed the piece) who aimed to "explore the frontiers of new technologies by the use of the Internet as both a tool for collaborative development and as a performance space."³⁷⁶ The intention was for *Oudeis* to follow the journey of Odysseus across seven international stages based in USA, Brazil, Argentina, Austria, Italy, China and Australia, and utilise the Web as the eighth stage which would link the internationally distributed community of actors and audiences. *Oudeis* would be performed by both real and virtual actors, and it would actively involve the audiences as the 'choros': this follows the format of ancient Greek tragic dramas, where the chorus represents the people who can comment on the action and/or advise the protagonists. Despite (or possibly due to) its ambitious nature, *Oudeis* was never fully realised:

³⁷² *Digital Performance Archive* website available from:

<http://ahds.ac.uk/ahdscollections/docroot/dpa/authorssearch.jsp> [accessed 4/12/2009]

³⁷³ Dixon, S. with Smith, B. *Digital Performance*. See in particular Chapter 17: "Telematics: Conjoining Remote Performance Spaces", pp. 419-435.

³⁷⁴ See, for example, other than Dixon's book: Ascott, R. and Shanken, E. A. *Telematic Embrace: Visionary Theories of Art, Technology, and Consciousness*. California: University of California Press, 2003; Kac, E. *Telepresence and Bio Art: Networking Humans, Rabbits and Robots*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2005; and Zapp, A. (ed.) *Networked Narrative Environments* Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University and FACT, 2004. There are also plenty of references in Johannes Birringer's books, among others: Birringer, J. *Media and Performance: Along the Border*. Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1998; Birringer, J. *Performance on the Edge: Transformations of Culture*. London: Continuum, 2000. See also the very useful website created for the travelling exhibition *Telematic Connections: The Virtual Embrace*, which includes a 'telematics timeline'. The exhibition was curated by Independent Curators International (ICI) in 2001. *Telematic Connections: The Virtual Embrace* website. Available from: <http://telematic.walkerart.org/overview/index.html> 2001 [accessed 5/08/2009]

³⁷⁵ *Oudeis* website. Available from: <http://www.oudeis.org/> [accessed 3/02/2003]

³⁷⁶ Lechner, G. Inventing *Oudeis*. *Status Quo: The Oudeis News* [online] Reference Edition, (April) 1997. Available from: <http://www.oudeis.org/status/statref.rtf> [accessed 3/02/2003]

the project was presented as a work-in-progress on several occasions, including the 1997 Ars Electronica Festival (Linz, Austria) and the ATHE Conference of the same year. In 1997 *Oudeis* was put on hold, and this is how it still remains.

Recent examples of networked performance practices that link virtual and physical spaces often make use of mobile technologies. The UK-based group Blast Theory is one of the most innovative groups producing work of this type. Often, Blast Theory use gaming structures to develop their work. Rather than creating console or MMORP games, however, Blast Theory create games that expand outside the computer screen or other screen-based interface to take place within ‘real’, physical cityscapes. This expansion of the gaming terrain and experience from the virtual to the physical world turns Blast Theory’s projects from video or computer games into live, networked, participatory performance practices. *Can You See Me Now?*³⁷⁷ is an example: a (fairly traditional) chase game, it takes place simultaneously online and in the streets of a ‘real’, physical city. The players are globally dispersed, but by logging on the group’s website they find themselves ‘re-located’ within a virtual city, together with other players and members of Blast Theory. The artists or ‘runners’ are located in the streets of a physical city, which they use as their game terrain/stage.³⁷⁸ Through wireless and mobile technologies runners and players can communicate and chase each other within this hybrid city, which is made from layers of physical and virtual spacetime. I study Blast Theory’s work in greater detail in Chapter Two.

Another group that produces work which attempts to link physical and virtual space is the UK-based arts company Active Ingredient.³⁷⁹ Aiming to “explore the edges of people’s experiences in the world”, Active Ingredient employ the Internet and networking technologies, web broadcasting, artificial intelligence and interactive TV.³⁸⁰ Like Blast Theory, Active Ingredient collaborates with the Mixed Reality Lab (University of Nottingham) to create mobile phone projects using biosensing, text messaging and interaction between the players. One such project was *Ere Be Dragons* (2006), a multiplayer mobile phone game/performance piece. The game required that players take a walk in the city. While walking, their journey was being mapped through GPS and their heart rate was being tracked through a heart rate monitor. An ‘enchanted’ virtual map of the journey was being created live on the mobile phone screen; the healthier their heart rate, the more points the players scored through their journey. The aim of

³⁷⁷ Blast Theory *Can You See Me Now?* 1999– Available from: <http://www.canyouseemenow.org> [accessed 10/09/2008]

³⁷⁸ Unfortunately, I think, there is a clear distinction between the artists/‘runners’ on the streets and the players who can participate online but cannot become runners, and so cannot involve their corporeal bodies in the game.

³⁷⁹ Active Ingredient website. Available from: <http://www.i-am-ai.net/> [accessed 8/08/2009]

³⁸⁰ Active Ingredient. About Us. Available from: <http://www.i-am-ai.net/home.html> [accessed 8/08/2009]

the project was to raise awareness about the health benefits of walking and encourage people to explore their environments. The ‘real’, physical space in this case was ‘translated’ into a virtual space the player could enter only through the physical activity of walking.³⁸¹ One of Active Ingredient’s latest pieces, *Love City* (2009), was a game that merged the people and places of three real UK cities (Nottingham, Leicester and Derby) with an imaginary virtual city through SMS, GPS tracking, a website and a series of live events in physical spaces.³⁸²

I have already referred to Paul Sermon’s work. More recently, he has created a number of projects for the SL world, one of which, *Liberate Your Avatar*, links the virtual world with a section of ‘real’ physical space.³⁸³ *Liberate Your Avatar* took place on 12 October 2007, as part of the *Urban Screens* festival in Manchester.³⁸⁴ The installation/performance piece took place in physical space at All Saints Gardens on Oxford Road, Manchester and in SL, at its online 3D counterpart. The aim of the piece was to allow ‘First’ and Second Life visitors of the park to coexist and interact with each other through sharing the same park bench. Another work by Sermon that links physical and virtual space through SL is *Peace Games*. *Peace Games* took place in Vienna, Austria, daily from 28 May till 6 July 2008, as part of the exhibition *GAMES: Kunst und Politik der Spiele [Games: the Art and Politics of Playing]*.³⁸⁵ During this piece, ‘First’ and Second Life citizens converged in a peace talks charade that aimed to reflect upon the absurdity of global politics. According to Sermon, the piece was inspired by an incident that took place in the SL world in January 2007, when the Front National, Jean-Marie Le Pen’s far right French political party, became the first European political party to open its headquarters in SL. SL avatars embarked on prolonged virtual mass protests and succeeded, within the period of one week, to make Front National’s headquarters disappear, “leaving only a few protest placards showing Mr Le Pen –who made it through to the final round of the last real-world French presidential election in 2000– wearing a Hitler moustache.”³⁸⁶ Sermon argues that this incident indicates that SL residents are “far from complacent avatars wondering around a virtual landscape” and that they possess “a far greater degree of social conscience than the consumer aesthetics of SL suggests”. He goes on to ask whether SL could be a platform for potential

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Active Ingredient *Love City* 2009. Available from: <http://www.lovecity.tv> [accessed 9/08/2009]

³⁸³ Sermon, P. *Liberate Your Avatar* 2007. Available from: <http://creativetechnology.salford.ac.uk/paulsermon/liberate/> [accessed 8/08/2009]

³⁸⁴ *Urban Screens* Manchester website. Available from: <http://www.manchesterurbanscreens.org.uk> [accessed 8/08/2009]

³⁸⁵ Kunsthalle Wien: Project Space Karlsplatz. Ausstellung *Games: Kunst und Politik der Spiele*. Available from: <http://www.creativegames.org.uk/Games2008/exhibition.htm> [accessed 8/08/2009]

³⁸⁶ Burkeman, O. Exploding Pigs and Volleys of Gunfire as Le Pen Opens HQ in Virtual World *The Guardian*. Available from: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2007/jan/20/news.france.20/01/2007> [accessed 9/08/2009]

social and cultural change.³⁸⁷

At the Georgia Institute of Technology (Atlanta, USA), The Digital Performance Initiative Group³⁸⁸ is also experimenting with performance practices that could link virtual and physical spaces and, with them, actors and avatars. One such example is the performance *Club Verona*, a hip-hop competition that took place simultaneously in SL and in physical space within Georgia Tech. *Club Verona* was loosely based on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*: a couple in love; two families in battle. In *Club Verona* though, the Montague and Capulet families fought each other through a break-dance battle in front of live audiences. This was not just a battle between the two families, but also a battle between two worlds: SL was the world of the Capulets, whereas the physical space was the world of the Montagues. SL was projected at the back of the physical stage aiming to provide a sense of continuity for the audiences following the action move from virtual to physical space. A DJ, an MC and a rapper ensured narrative continuity throughout the piece.³⁸⁹

In this Chapter I have traced the historical lineage of cybertheatres and discussed a range of diverse networked performance practices, dividing them into three main categories and describing a number of such works. I will not be looking at telematic performance practices as part of this thesis. Instead, I will focus on online performances and practices that link virtual and physical spacetimes which, though (constantly) emergent,³⁹⁰ have, I think, already demonstrated both their strength as cultural practices and their potential as developing trajectories.

³⁸⁷ Paul Sermon *Peace Games* 2008. Available from:
<http://creativetechnology.salford.ac.uk/paulsermon/peacegames/> [accessed 9/08/2009]

³⁸⁸ Bolter, J. D., Farley, K., Nietzsche, M. and Vandagriff, J. Theorising Performance in Virtual Spaces. Lecture that took place at The Thursday Club, Goldsmiths, London, 18/06/2009. Thursday Club website. Available from: <http://www.thethursdayclub.net> [accessed 20/06/2009]. The Digital Performance Initiative (DPI) are: Kathryn Farley, Jay David Bolter, Michael Nietzsche, Jenifer Vandagriff, Melissa Foulger, Blair MacIntyre, Rebecca Rouse and Shashank Raval.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ I suggest that these practices are constantly emergent because, though not necessarily novel in some of their manifestations (online performance has been happening for a good twenty years), they are clearly still at the forefront of experimentation and innovation in performance practice, constantly developing to embrace and appropriate new technological, cultural and social developments.

CHAPTER TWO

Cybernetic Stages:

Where Can You See Me Now?

In Chapter One I described and discussed cybertheatre practices that employ networking technologies not only as a distribution medium but also as an integral and vital element of their ontologies, dramaturgies, and structures. Through my investigation into practices that do not solely reside in physical locations (or, when they do, these locations have been enriched with embedded data and/or augmented with layers of virtual space) questions of space inevitably emerge: where do cybertheatres take place? Which are the performance stages of these practices?³⁹¹ The purpose of this Chapter is to examine the spatial coordinates of cybertheatres and ask how do these define, shape or affect cybertheatre practices. What impact do those virtual or augmented stages have on cybertheatres' dramaturgies? And in reverse, how do new practices develop in response to the emergence of new spatial contexts that can be used as performance stages? In this chapter I will explore the use of hybrid spacetimes as cybernetic stages for emergent, networked performance practices and focus on the spatial contexts that are being generated through/with the use of networking technologies, that is: a) cyberspace and, specifically, online multi-user environments and; b) networked augmented spaces. Since my research is concerned with networked performance, virtual spaces that are not networked, such as off-line virtual reality and other 3D environments, will not be discussed. The chapter is framed by the writings of Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault and Internet law scholars, and concludes with a discussion of the work of Blast Theory, which links virtual and physical spacetimes.

2.1 Where is the There of Cybertheatres?

2.1.a) Lefebvre's Discussion of Space as Social Morphology

Where does performance take place? The answer is, potentially everywhere. Whereas a lot of more traditional theatre practice is based in purpose-built theatrical venues, theatre, performance and live art also take place in non-theatrical spaces such as galleries and other cultural venues, public spaces, active or disused industrial and/or commercial sites, urban or rural environments, night clubs and more. Performance has often surprised audiences through its use of unexpected locations as sites of practice and experimentation. It is naïve to consider that these sites, which act as hosts to performance practices, are just the passive recipients of pre-determined actions. Far from being the neutral settings within which actions can unfold unaffected, performance stages of every type can deeply affect the structure and form of the pieces they contain.

³⁹¹ When I use the term 'stage' in this Chapter, I consistently refer to 'performance stage'. By that, I do not mean the 'stage' as an architectural feature of any traditional theatrical venue, but any stage that, as Peter Brook has argued, can be any empty space: "I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all I need for an act of theatre to be engaged." Brook, P. *The Empty Space*. New York: Touchstone, 3rd Edition, 1996, p. 9.

Lefebvre has argued that space is not just a frame for lived experience; far from it, space is ‘social morphology’, that is, space shapes lived experience:

Vis-à-vis lived experience, space is neither a mere ‘frame’, (...) nor a form or container of a virtually neutral kind, designed simply to receive whatever is poured into it. Space is social morphology: it is to lived experience what form itself is to living organism, and just as intimately bound up with function and structure. To picture space as a ‘frame’ or container into which nothing can be put unless it is smaller than the recipient, and to imagine that this container has no other purpose than to preserve what has been put in it –this is probably the initial error.³⁹²

Lefebvre goes on to consider whether this ‘initial error’ is actually an error, or whether it is an ideology. He suggests the latter. This ideology, he argues, stems from the only absolute space –which is not a space at all– the political space, “which seeks to impose itself as reality despite the fact that it is an abstraction”.³⁹³ Consequently, Lefebvre urges us to conceive of space primarily through our lived experience and to reject concepts imposed by the political space and the holders of knowledge (the experts of space, be it urban planners, architects or theorists). Once we focus on our personal lived experience we all become experts of space, because we all live in space and produce space by doing so. Furthermore, he argues that if everyone were to look at the space around them, what they would see is *time* because we “live time”, we are “*in time*”. Thus Lefebvre conceptualises space as the inscription of time.³⁹⁴ In my view, Lefebvre’s discussion of spatial theory, with its strong focus on lived experience and, consequently, its articulation of ‘space as time’, is of particular importance to performance practice. This is because performance is a *time-based* art form; furthermore, performance is of and about lived experience, *liveness* being at the core of its ontology.

How, then, does Lefebvre’s conceptualisation of space apply to performance practice in general and to cybertheatres in particular? Firstly, it establishes space, that is, the stage, as an active element of every performance practice. Following Lefebvre, I argue that it is an error to perceive the stage as a mere frame of actions, as a container that will only preserve (and therefore not affect) the actions situated within it. Instead, if we accept Lefebvre’s thesis, a(ny) stage is bound with and shapes the structure and form of live(d) performance.³⁹⁵ This is particularly obvious in practices such as site-specific performance and performance that takes place in public spaces or historical sites.³⁹⁶ In more traditional theatre contexts, it is the

³⁹² Lefebvre, H. *The Production of Space*. (Tr.: Nicholson-Smith, D.), Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 3rd Edition, 1991, pp. 93-94.

³⁹³ Ibid, p. 94.

³⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 95.

³⁹⁵ And the other way round of course, the development of performance practice shapes theatrical architecture and design.

³⁹⁶ On July 20, 2008 I was watching Pina Bausch’s *Orfeo ed Euridice* (based on Gluck’s opera) at the ancient theatre of Epidaurus in Peloponnese, Greece. This is a big open-air theatre, built in the 4th century BC,

architecture of the venue along with the set design that become the specific spatial settings of the performance. If the stage of any performance is an element of the piece as essential for its structure, dramaturgy and form as any other (actors, director, text etc.), it follows that cybertheatres, which take place in emergent loci of hybridity generated through the use of networking technologies, are practices very different (in their structure, dramaturgy and form) from practices that reside in physical spaces. Secondly, although space is, on occasions, approached as a passive container for dramatic action,³⁹⁷ this is often more an ideology than an error. Ideology can involve the financial viability of a piece: when there is lack of means (as is often the case in theatre and performance practice) the priority is to cover vital costs such as the actors' salaries, while in-depth consideration of the spatial coordinates of the piece is often considered secondary. For example, touring performances need to be 'light' and adapt easily to fit various venues; there is often not enough time to adapt a piece to new settings, and so on. This refers back to political space (money is politics) and the imposition of certain commands on the way we experience and conceptualise (our) space, in life as well as in theatre.

I would suggest that financial concerns and limitations are not the only reason (/ideology)³⁹⁸ why space is often approached as a passive container in theatre practice: Lefebvre argues that any revolution, in order to realise its full potential, needs to produce a new space. A revolution that does not achieve this, he explains, might have changed "ideological superstructures, institutions or political apparatuses" but has failed to change life itself.³⁹⁹ "To change life, however, we must first change space."⁴⁰⁰ Thus, Lefebvre claims that preserving a 'still' (as a process of change in time) space, preserves a certain established social order, a *status quo*. I suggest that this applies in theatre practice as much as in life: the theatre and performance

situated on a hilltop, amongst pine trees. The ancient stones were warm from the day's sun, while the air was fresh. The performance started in the 'magical hour' just after the sunset and went on into the night. Once dark, the sky was full of stars and, every now and then, some shiny little insects were catching the eye. Being within a quiet rural setting, the noise of the occasional airplane crossing the sky was excruciatingly loud. It was impossible not to think how major a part the space was playing in this context, and the inscription of time was very clear in this 24-century-old theatre.

³⁹⁷ This, to my experience, has often adverse results for the artistic outcomes of such works. Such an example would be the same, aforementioned, performance of *Orfeo ed Euridice*: this was a 1975 production that had been created for an entirely different (enclosed) space. Although I described how the specific setting of the ancient theatre of Epidaurus was a very active element –an actor– in the performance, I thought that not enough consideration had gone into the adaptation of the piece for this environment: the voices of the sopranos were often lost in the open-air theatre that has excellent acoustics for speech but not necessarily for opera; neither the intrusion of environmental noise nor the scale of the venue (12,000 capacity) had been taken into consideration, making the solo performances difficult to follow as a result; finally, the set design seemed out of place and in acute contrast with the ancient stones and pine trees that surrounded (and, I think, annulled) it.

³⁹⁸ I here suggest that reason and ideology are often (intentionally or not) confused and presented as one and the same.

³⁹⁹ Lefebvre, H. *The Production of Space*, p. 54.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 190.

practice of specific spatio-social contexts⁴⁰¹ are the product of, and serve, certain social systems and their established hierarchies.⁴⁰² Such social systems preserve the spaces they have produced not as a heritage, but as an active social space. This, in turn, helps preserve the social hierarchies themselves. In this way, approaching space as a passive container proves, once again, to be an (conservative) ideology rather than an error of judgement.

Cybertheatres however take place in emergent, networked environments that have not, as yet, become fixed in their representations of social systems and hierarchies. This is purely a matter of time and does not imply that these spaces are beyond social representations and reproductions of established power systems: it is now evident that networked spaces are not the utopian, egalitarian environments fantasised by many pioneers of the Internet and virtual communities.⁴⁰³ Furthermore, the Internet as a medium is already heavily controlled by corporate giants such as Microsoft and AOL that, to an extent, shape networked environments and their uses through the imposition of restrictions and commands (political space).⁴⁰⁴ Bearing these conservative powers⁴⁰⁵ in mind, as well as the fact that technologised spaces are to a great extent Western, and thus elitist, phenomena, I ask: what does the 'newness' of these spaces mean for cybertheatres as *artistic* activities? Also, what does the lack of accumulated social signifiers mean for cybertheatres as *social* activities?

Finally, Lefebvre conceptualises space as the inscription of time. Space *is* time, he argues, because we can only experience it as such: that is because *we are in time, we live time*. By conceptualising space as (the inscription of) time Lefebvre shifts the focus from the materiality of space, to space as a time-based, experiential process. He does so while placing a strong focus on the materiality of the (my) body that produces and experiences space. This space is never absolute, empty, or concrete; it is never the frame that pre-exists bodies and things, and within which these are situated. Space is not about the '*materiel*' as such, but the bodily senses that experience it and the gaps and tensions generated in-between these bodies. What does this mean in terms of the spatiality of cyberspace and other networked virtual

⁴⁰¹ I do not mention 'time' here, as space implies that already.

⁴⁰² Audiences that attend the London West End commercial theatre, for example, are primarily white and middle class. The London West End theatre audience survey conducted by MORI on behalf of the Society for London Theatre in 2004 confirmed that: the survey was carried out at 44 different productions and examined data collected from 6,615 theatregoers. The report findings showed that 92% of these audiences were white, 55% were in full time employment and 41% had an annual income that exceeded £30,000. These demographics are not accidental: the proscenium stage has been the product of bourgeois theatre. The Society of London Theatre. Summary of West End Theatre Audience Survey 2003/2004. Available from: http://www.solt.co.uk/about/audience_stats.html [accessed 10/10/2008]

⁴⁰³ See, for example: Rheingold, H. *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2nd Edition, 2000.

⁴⁰⁴ For a fuller discussion see: Doruff, S. Collaborative Culture, 2003 In: Brouwer, J., Mulder, A and Charlton, S. (eds) *Making Art of Databases*. Rotterdam: V2 and NAi Publishers, 2003.

⁴⁰⁵ Conservative in that they reproduce similar sets of hierarchies.

environments, many of which are being generated through, or integrate, time-based media?

If physical space is *in* and *about* time because we experience it as such, then cyberspace's lack of a tangible material quality does not necessarily entail a great shift in our perception of spatiality within the networks. I suggest that this emergent, networked space is even more dependent on time: not time as a measure of distance between physical locations, but time as the inscription of change.⁴⁰⁶ Thus networked space highlights the instability and changeability of space, and my body as it experiences/produces space. I would thus argue that networked space is, as of its ontology, a performative space, that is, a space that exists as the outcome of relations, interactions and interconnections in-time. These can be mapped, documented and traced but, just as in live performance, they fade away as soon as they have happened. Often, the space itself also fades away, as it exists solely in its performance.⁴⁰⁷ Considering that every performance practice is time-based as an act-in-time that fades away the very moment it/now ceases to exist (now), I suggest that networked space is not only a fertile performance environment, but also an environment that *is* in itself *performed*.⁴⁰⁸ It follows from this discussion that cybertheatres are performances whose spatial contexts disappear (or, more precisely, lose their spatiality even though the graphics remain) as soon as the performance ceases. By extension, I want to suggest that cybertheatres are performance practices that generate their own spatial coordinates through their performance of space in-time.

2.1.b) Embodying/Enacting Social Heterotopias: Cyberspace – Space or Metaphor?

Stages of all types are social spaces, where relationships develop between the performers themselves, as well as between the performers and their audiences. One could argue that, on the one hand, every social space (that is, every space where relationships develop) is performative, in that it provides a 'stage' for the performance of ritual, culture, identity, gender, power, class and so on. A performance stage, on the other hand, is a social space for the enactment of fictional, documentary or other narratives. As I have discussed, Lefebvre argues that space is not an empty container that pre-exists actions, things and embodiment but, instead, it is us –our bodies and the gaps between them– that produce space experientially. Furthermore, he argues

⁴⁰⁶ This is most obvious in collaborative environments such as wikis, where space is mapped as time (each change contributed is being recorded 'on top' of all previous changes, whereas the whole of this process is being archived).

⁴⁰⁷ For example, *The Endless Forest* is, in itself, a static 3D 'painting' of a forest (static because the space becomes produced, explored and expanded through the point of view of the moving deer), which becomes performed as a space by the deer-avatars. In the absence of all deer the forest loses its spatiality and becomes a fixed-in-time collection of graphics.

⁴⁰⁸ As per the example of *The Endless Forest*, its very architecture changes (flattens) when the environment ceases to be inhabited and thus performed. The same can be said for a theatre setting (which does not exist as a space outside of the specific performance piece it has been designed for) but not for the architecture of a physical venue such as the ancient theatre of Epidaurus, for example.

that as space is a product, so social space is also a social product.⁴⁰⁹ As a(ny) stage is a social space, it becomes apparent that, following Lefebvre, a(ny) stage is also a social product: it is a space produced by social interactions and interrelations; by my body, your body, and the tensions and ruptures between them.

Networks are spatial phenomena: the term 'cyberspace' itself is indicative of the traditional spatial qualities in which the Internet is embedded, and much of the language used to describe activities taking place online is also spatial. There are many such examples: 'visiting' a 'web site', 'web architecture' and 'navigating cyberspace' are only a few. Mitra and Schwartz suggest that examining any one of the various 'cyber' phenomena such as cybercommerce, cybersex and cybercommunities (I would also include cybertheatres) while failing to acknowledge the importance of the essential spatial qualities of cyberspace can offer only a partial insight on these subjects.⁴¹⁰ A great deal of discussion and debate has taken place regarding the spatiality of the networks: how can it be that such abstract conceptualisations can become embedded in essential qualities of spatial theory and practice?⁴¹¹ Why is it that users experience a set of immaterial networked connections in a way that is similar to how they experience 'real', physical space? The consequences of such a realisation are crucial for our society's understanding and use of the networks and of the various 'cyber' phenomena these have generated, including cybertheatres.

It is my belief that what drives users to articulate networks as spatial phenomena is their *social* character. This very social character of any space as discussed by Lefebvre, as well as every space's dependence on social practice for its very production, becomes more clearly manifest once networks (cyberspace) are introduced in this study of spatial theory and practice. Once the focus shifts from the materiality of physical space to the physical abstraction of networked space, it becomes evident that what pushes these spaces into existence is social practice: me and you –the gaps and tensions between us, our interactions and exchanges, our conflicts and love affairs– are what make cyberspace a space. This social exchange is often based on the enactment of fictional identities and narratives; nevertheless, this does not make it any less 'real' than the social practice of everyday life. What it does make it is performative:

⁴⁰⁹ Lefebvre, H. *The Production of Space*, p. 26.

⁴¹⁰ Mitra, A. and Schwartz, R. L. From Cyber Space to Cybernetic Space: Rethinking the Relationship between Real and Virtual Spaces *Journal of Computer Mediated Ccommunication* [online], 7 (1), (October) 2001. Available from: <http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol7/issue1/mitra.html> [accessed 4/02/2003]

⁴¹¹ For discussions on the spatiality of cyberspace, other than Mitra and Schwartz's article cited above, see also: Benedikt, M. (ed.) *Cyberspace: First Steps*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999; Crang, M., Crang, P. and May, J. (eds) *Virtual Geographies: Bodies, Space and Relations*. London: Routledge, 1999; Bryant, R. What Kind of Space is Cyberspace? *Minerva - An Internet Journal of Philosophy* [online], 5, 2001. Available from: <http://www.ul.ie/~philos/vol5/cyberspace.html> [accessed 10/10/2008]. Finally: Flachbart, G. and Weibel, P. (eds) *Disappearing Architecture: From Real to Virtual to Quantum*. Basel, Switzerland: Birkhäuser, 2005.

cyberspace is a space where people create and perform versions of their other selves as well as versions of the lives they (/we) could be living. This performative social space is as ‘real’ as any physical space, though it exists on a different layer of reality. It is a ‘heterotopia’, defined by Foucault as “a counter-site, a site of effectively enacted utopia”.⁴¹² Networked space resembles a stage: another heterotopia,⁴¹³ produced through the social need to enact, and thus materialise and experience, fantasies (both utopic and dystopic) that have no place (topos) in everyday life. If we accept that networked space is a heterotopia, and that any stage is also a heterotopia, then a cyberstage must be a double heterotopia, a heterotopia folded in upon itself to create a layering of spatial otherness upon otherness. Consider, for example, a performance site (stage) in Second Life: the heterotopia of Second Life becomes enfolded into the heterotopia of the virtual stage that exists inside the virtual world. When inworld, one perceives a single heterotopia –that of the stage. For the observer though, this is a stage within a stage, a double stage, or a heterotopia enfolded upon itself. In this way, as in Deleuze’s notion of the ‘doubling’,⁴¹⁴ the ‘outside’ dimension (of the heterotopia of networked space) becomes interiorised as it is enfolded upon the heterotopia of the networked stage.

Despite the fact that networks have been perceived, articulated and fantasised as spatial from the very beginning,⁴¹⁵ the use of spatialised language to describe networked practices has often been criticised: certain law scholars have argued that theorising ‘cyberspace’ as a space rather than a communications network is problematic, in that it duplicates a whole set of power issues, particularly to do with ownership and copyright litigation.⁴¹⁶ According to Dan

⁴¹² Foucault, M. Of Other Spaces. Available from: <http://www.foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html> 1967 [accessed 13/01/2006]

⁴¹³ As described by Foucault in: Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ See: Deleuze, G. *Foucault*. (Tr.: Hand, S.), London: Athlone Press, 1998, pp. 94-123. Deleuze suggests that the theme that has always haunted Foucault is that of the double: “But the double is never a projection of the interior; on the contrary, it is an interiorisation of the outside. It is not a reproduction of the Same, but a repetition of the Different. It is not the emanation of an ‘I’, but something that places in immanence an always other or a Non-self. It is never the other who is a double in the doubling process, it is a self that lives me as the double of the other: I do not encounter myself on the outside, I find the other in me (...).” In: *ibid*, p. 98.

⁴¹⁵ See, for example, the iconic cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer*: Gibson, W. *Neuromancer*. New York: Ace Books, 1984.

⁴¹⁶ See: Cohen, J. E. Cyberspace as/and Space *Columbia Law Review* 107 (210), (January) 2007, pp. 210-256.; Yen, A. C. Western Frontier or Feudal Society? Metaphors and Perceptions in Cyberspace *Berkeley Technology Law Journal* [online], 17 (1207), 2002. Available from: http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=322522 [accessed 9/08/2009]; Lemley, M. Place and Cyberspace *California Law Review* [online], 91, 2003. Available from: http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=349760 [accessed 3/08/2003]; and Hunter, D. Cyberspace as Place and the Tragedy of the Digital Anticommons. Available from: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=306662> 2002 [accessed 3/08/2008]. See also: Lessig, L. *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace, Version 2.0*. New York: Basic Books, 2006, pp. 83-156, where Lessig attempts to differentiate between the Internet and cyberspace and discusses issues of control as mechanisms or potential functions built within the architectures of both.

Hunter.⁴¹⁷

Cyberspace was once thought to be the modern equivalent of the Western Frontier. It was a place, albeit an abstract place, where land was free for the taking, where explorers could roam, and communities could form their own rules. It was an endless expanse of space: open, free, replete with possibility. No longer. As with the Western Frontier, settlers have entered this new land, charted the territory, fenced off their own little claim, and erected “No Trespassing” signs. Cyberspace is being subdivided. Suburbs and SUVs cannot be far off.⁴¹⁸

Hunter, Yen, and Lemley claim that the spatialisation of online networks is a socially constructed fantasy, rather than an ontological characteristic of the networks themselves. They suggest that the term ‘cyberspace’, as well as the use of spatial language to describe several cyber-phenomena, are metaphors that help users, on a cognitive level, to understand and manage the networks. They do so through a process of mapping the networks onto familiar physical space, and thus familiar cognitive territory. Hunter, Yen, and Lemley maintain that such metaphorical use of language is problematic, because it encourages the tendency to perceive networks as spaces similar to physical environments. This, they argue, validates the duplication of restrictions and litigation that apply to contexts of physical space. Such an approach cannot be productive for networked practices, the scholars contend, as it both monetarises and privatises cyberspace.⁴¹⁹ In attaching a monetary value to the networks, spatialised language provides the ground for litigation that restricts some of the networks’ potential (and, indeed many would argue, inscribed) usages, such as peer-to-peer file-sharing networks.⁴²⁰ Furthermore, it threatens certain freedoms (for example through digital copyright litigation and software patents),⁴²¹ bearing the risk of creating a digital anti-commons where space, as a resource, becomes mis- or under-used.⁴²²

⁴¹⁷ Dan Hunter is an expert in Internet law, intellectual property, artificial intelligence and cognitive science models of law. He is currently (2009) Professor of Law at New York Law School. Dan Hunter website. Available from: http://www.nyls.edu/faculty/faculty_profiles/dan_hunter [accessed 9/08/2009]

⁴¹⁸ Hunter, D. *Cyberspace as Place and the Tragedy of the Digital Anticommons*, pp. 4-5.

⁴¹⁹ The logic goes that since this is a space it must have some monetary value attached to it, which makes it possible to buy and sell parts of it, restrict its uses etc., as is the case with physical space. Though the concerns raised in the writings I quote date from 2002-3, within the last three or so years we have seen these concerns concretise in the virtual world of Second Life. As discussed in Chapter 1, SL is conceived and represented as a virtual world with monetary value attached to its ‘land’. It is common practice for SL residents to rent, buy and sell virtual property online.

⁴²⁰ A renowned example of a peer-to-peer network was Napster, a music file-sharing service that operated between 1999 and 2001, which allowed people to share their MP3 files bypassing the established market. This led to the music industry accusing the network of massive copyright violations and the website being shut down by court order. Nonetheless, Napster paved the way for a future generation of decentralised peer-to-peer distribution networks. For more information see: Napster In: *Wikipedia*. Available from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napster> 3/12/2009, 01:44 [accessed 4/12/2009]. Also: Napster website. Available from: <http://www.napster.co.uk/> [accessed 10/08/2009]

⁴²¹ See the website of the Free Software Foundation for further discussion on these issues and links to articles and debates. Free Software Foundation website. Available from: <http://www.fsf.org> [accessed 6/07/2008]

⁴²² According to Hunter “Anti-commons property occurs when multiple parties have an effective right to

These Internet law scholars argue that, in order to avoid (or manage, as they might by now be unavoidable) the dangers of litigation that approaches communication networks as physical space, users should, rather than map networks onto physical space, highlight the radical ontological (and thus legal) differences between the two. Yen recommends that we consciously resist the use of spatial metaphors in our theorisation of the networks, while Hunter suggests that we could “abandon metaphors altogether”. Instead, he argues, we could decide to conceptualise networks and legislate their usage on the basis of “some other principle such as ‘fairness’”.⁴²³ Nonetheless, Hunter (and Lemley following him) accept that “as seductive as these ideas might appear they are just not sustainable”.⁴²⁴ Hunter claims that since, according to Joseph Singer,⁴²⁵ property is one of society’s strongest ordering systems, “the social life we want should determine the type of property we admit”.⁴²⁶ Following on from this, he stresses that we must first determine what type of networked environment we want before we choose what type of legal regime should apply to it. At the moment, Hunter points out, ‘real’ world property assumptions are being forced onto the online environment.⁴²⁷

I think that Hunter, Lemley and Yen’s concerns are of critical importance and should be carefully considered. The imposition of restrictions on the use of networks and networking practices is a crucial issue that contemporary society cannot afford to ignore. Internet law scholars such as Lawrence Lessig,⁴²⁸ Internet activists, and supporters of the Free, Libre and Open Source Software movement have long argued that these developments are threatening the open and democratic use of the networks. The primary concern of Internet law scholars and activists alike is that such developments can only result in the duplication of conservative power structures that will benefit the already wealthy and powerful, while disadvantaging communities that cannot afford to compete with the interests of multinational corporations. Lessig foresees a number of “code-based environmental disasters” such as the loss of privacy, censorship, and the disappearance of an intellectual commons due to the “emerging architecture of the panopticon”.⁴²⁹ He also foresees that we will be treating these disasters as if they were “produced by gods, not by Man”, “forgetting that here, we are nature”.⁴³⁰ I share the concerns raised by the above-mentioned legal theorists regarding the effects that our conception of the

preclude others from using a given resource and, as a result no-one has an effective right of use”. Hunter, D. *Cyberspace as Place and the Tragedy of the Digital Anticommons*.

⁴²³ Ibid, p. 111.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Singer, J. W. *Entitlement: The Paradoxes of Property*. Yale: Yale University Press, 2000.

⁴²⁶ Hunter, D. *Cyberspace as Place and the Tragedy of the Digital Anticommons*, p. 114.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Lessig is Professor of Law at Stanford Law School and founder of the School’s Centre for Internet and Society. Lawrence Lessig website. Available from: <http://www.lessig.org/> [accessed 10/08/2009]

⁴²⁹ Lessig, L. *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace, Version 2.0*, p. 338.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

networks as space and the employment of spatial language for their articulation can have on their use (and misuse).

Nonetheless, I consider any suggestions (such as Yen's) that we should consciously abstain from the use of spatial language in our descriptions of the networks and networked activities as unrealistic. Hunter and Lemley too, though they consider this to be the ideal solution, acknowledge that it is not a sustainable one. The main argument employed by this school of thought is that the spatiality of the networks, inherent in the ways we conceptualise and articulate them as cyberspace, is not an ontological characteristic of the networks *per se*, but a social construction that has been imposed upon them due to our cognitive functions. I suggest that, in claiming that the social origin of this particular spatial practice (networked space) renders it any less valid as space, or that it proves the spatial character of the networks to be a fantasy rather than a 'reality', this cyberlaw school fails to acknowledge the social character of *every* spatial practice. Hunter, Lemley, and Yen do not appear to share Lefebvre's belief that physical space itself is a social product. Specifically, Lefebvre asserts that "space is neither a 'subject' nor an 'object' but rather a social reality –that is to say, a set of relations and forms."⁴³¹ If we accept the premise that space is of and about relationality, then it follows that networks – that is, complex webs of interrelations and connections– are spatial, not in a physical, but in a social sense.

I would go further to argue that it is simplistic to consider spatial language as an external theorisation that has been imposed upon the networks. On the contrary, I propose that the networks themselves have been produced through social practice. Indeed, though the first version of the Internet (ARPANET) was intended for military use, from the early stages of its application to non-military purposes it was envisioned as a community infrastructure: Lawrence Roberts, manager of the ARPANET project, stressed early on that "a network would foster the 'community' use of computers", and aimed to stimulate "cooperative programming".⁴³² Moreover, Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web, claims that the Web is a "social" rather than a "technical creation". He argues that he designed it "for a social effect", in order to help people work together. "The ultimate goal of the Web", explains Berners-Lee, "is to support and improve our weblike existence in the world." Finally, he urges us all "to ensure that the society we build with the Web is of the sort we intend."⁴³³ I propose that the spatiality of the networks (as a conceptual and experiential phenomenon) emanates from their social character, which is deep-rooted in the conception and realisation of both the Internet and the WWW. I thus

⁴³¹ Lefebvre, H. *The Production of Space*, p. 116.

⁴³² Abbate, J. *Inventing the Internet*, p. 46.

⁴³³ Berners-Lee, T. *Weaving the Web: the Past, Present and Future of the World Wide Web*. London and New York: Texere Publishing, 2nd Edition, 2000, p. 133.

advocate that communication networks are spatial realities because they are social realities.

However, I do not wish to propose that cyberspace and online virtual environments should be considered as similar or analogous to physical spatial realities. I concur with Hunter, Lemley and Yen that the differences between physical and networked space must be investigated, ascertained and foregrounded rather than ignored. Our society's need to map the virtual onto the physical is the need to make the intangible tangible. We strive to expose and concretise networked space by casting it into familiar molds. While the emergence of cyberspace was coupled with excitement about a utopia that was above and beyond the powers of governmental bodies, commercial corporations and legal restrictions,⁴³⁴ it also provoked anxiety about this unknown, unmapped territory and all the dangers it held. Mapping out cyberspace as similar to physical space brings us back to familiar territories we know how to handle –and how to litigate for. I agree that such use of spatial metaphors is not productive in order to perceive and describe emergent networked space: mapping cyberspace on physical space is imposing upon it foreign geographies. The answer lies not in the rejection of the inherent spatiality of the networks, but rather in allowing this new space –that is, the social tensions that produce it– to unearth its otherness. The aim is for us to invent appropriate languages and methodologies in order to describe and manage emergent networked spaces through lived experience and everyday practice. I would suggest that the same applies to cybertheatres: the most compelling networked performance practices are the ones that are neither oblivious to the spatiality of the networks, nor attempt to duplicate familiar theatre forms that belong to physical space-based performance.

In closing, I refer to the work of cyberlaw theorist Julie E. Cohen.⁴³⁵ Cohen's article *Cyberspace As/And Space*⁴³⁶ discusses various cyberlaw theories of cyberspace as a spatial phenomenon, looking at a) theories that contest the use of spatial 'metaphors' for the description and conceptualisation of the networks like the ones mentioned above (see Hunter, Lemley, Yen), as well as b) theories that accept the spatiality of the networks. Cohen goes on to argue that either b.1) cyberspace is different from physical space, and thus requires different patterns of litigation or b.2) cyberspace is similar to physical space, and thus the same laws that

⁴³⁴ See, for example, John Perry Barlow's famous Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace, which starts: "Governments of the Industrial World, you weary giants of flesh and steel, I come from Cyberspace, the new home of Mind. On behalf of the future, I ask you of the past to leave us alone. You are not welcome among us. You have no sovereignty where we gather." Barlow, J. P. Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace. Available from:

http://w2.eff.org/Censorship/Internet_censorship_bills/barlow_0296.declaration_1996 [accessed 10/08/2009]. Barlow's Declaration was published online from Davos, Switzerland, as a response to the passing into law of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 in the USA.

⁴³⁵ Julie E. Cohen is Professor of Law at Georgetown University Law Centre. Julie E. Cohen website. Available from: <http://www.law.georgetown.edu/faculty/jec/index.htm> [accessed 10/08/2009]

⁴³⁶ Cohen, J. E. *Cyberspace as/and Space*, pp. 210-256.

apply to physical space can be extended to cyberspace. While examining and discussing these varied, indeed conflicting cyberlaw theories, she points out that:

What is missing from cyberlaw's narratives about 'cyberspace' as a catalyst for fundamental change (or as simply more of the same old thing) is a sense of the body in cyberspace: of cyberspace as produced by and producing embodied experience. Cyberlaw scholars have largely ignored the bodies in which selves and groups reside, and therefore have overlooked literatures that might help to illuminate networked space as experienced space.⁴³⁷

I consider Cohen's contribution to be of importance because she foregrounds the body⁴³⁸ to argue, following Lefebvre and Foucault, that space –any space, physical, networked, or otherwise– cannot be discussed without reference to the bodies that produce it. Nothing sort of a “methodological revolution will suffice”, she argues, “if cyberlaw is to grapple adequately with (...) the interpolations of networked space into embodied space”.⁴³⁹

2.1.c) My Body's Other: Looking Into Foucault's Mirror

Lefebvre's analysis, which Cohen also invokes in her argument for a “networked embodied space”, underlines the importance of perceiving space not as an abstract, absolute matter (space *per se* is an absurdity, he says),⁴⁴⁰ but as an occupied reality. “What, then, occupies space?” he asks. And he answers: “A body –not bodies in general, nor corporeality, but a specific body, a body capable of indicating direction by a gesture, of defining rotation by turning round, of demarcating and orienting space.”⁴⁴¹ What occupies space then, according to Lefebvre, is the body –and that is not any body, but *my body*, the one specific body through which I experience myself (my-space and myself-in-space), space, and the other. Thus he concludes that:

Space –*my* space– (...) is first of all *my body*, and then it is my body's counterpart or 'other', its mirror-image or shadow: it is the shifting intersection between that which touches, penetrates, threatens or benefits my body on the one hand, and all other bodies on the other. Thus we are concerned, once again, with gaps and tensions, contacts and separations. Yet, through and beyond these various effects of meaning, space is experienced, *in its depths*, as duplications, echoes and reverberations, redundancies and doublings-up which engender –and are engendered by– the strangest of contrasts: face and arse, eye and flesh, viscera and excrement, lips and teeth, orifices and phallus, clenched fists and opened hands –as also clothed *versus* naked, open *versus* closed, obscenity *versus* familiarity, and so on. None of these oppositions and conjunctions has anything to do with a logic or formal system.⁴⁴²

⁴³⁷ Ibid, p. 243.

⁴³⁸ As has previously been achieved by feminist and cyberfeminist discourses, and writers such as Donna Haraway and Kathryn Hayles. Again, it takes a woman to do so.

⁴³⁹ Ibid, p. 255

⁴⁴⁰ Lefebvre, H, *The Production of Space*, p. 181.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 169-170.

⁴⁴² Ibid, p. 184.

Until now, following Lefebvre, I have argued that cyberspace is spatial due to its social nature: I have approached space as relational process, either this is physical or cybernetic. What of *my* space though? If social space is a social product, what about private space? Lefebvre argues that (my) space is, first of all (my) body. If my space is my body, then how is my space produced, experienced and conceived in the networks that lack the material specificities, the “face and arse, eye and flesh” of (my) body? What is my body in the networks? Where are its limited singularity, its vulnerability to pain, its ability to experience pleasure, its inevitable inscription of time in the process of ageing, its incumbent death? If our space is produced by our gaps and tensions and all the duplications and strange contrasts these generate, what is my space produced by?

Media scholar Anne Balsamo defines the (networked) body as a “social, cultural and historical production”. She goes on to explain that ‘production’, in that context, means both product and process: as a product, the body is the embodiment of identities (ethnic, racial, gendered) as well as the performance of a personal identity. As a process, the body is a way of knowing and marking the world, as well as a way of knowing and marking a ‘self’.⁴⁴³ If the body is what Balsamo claims it is, then my body in cyberspace is not that different from my body in physical space: though my physical specificities and limitations are not embodied by my avatar(s), my avatar(s) are certainly “social, cultural and historical production(s)” that (dis)embody social identities and perform one or more personal identities. Furthermore, my avatar(s) are doing that through the process of exploring and marking networked space,⁴⁴⁴ as well as knowing⁴⁴⁵ and marking a ‘self’ (one/many/multiple). I am asking, though: does Balsamo, in her discussion of *the* body, tell us anything about the concrete materialities of *my* body? What does she have to say about the “face and arse, eye and flesh” of Lefebvre’s (my) body? I would argue that Balsamo, in her discussion of the body as production, ignores the body’s changeable and vulnerable materiality. She fails to acknowledge the body as the bearer of the inscription of lived time. She excludes *my* body: *my* body’s lived experience and its (my) incumbent death.

Though Lefebvre argues that space is, first of all, my body, he does not specify which type of space his analysis is pointing at. He refers to space in general, without specific reference to the spaces or non-spaces of utopias, dystopias or (Foucault’s) heterotopias.⁴⁴⁶ He proposes a

⁴⁴³ Balsamo, A. Forms of Technological Embodiment: Reading the Body in Contemporary Culture, 1995 In: Featherstone, M. and Burrows, R. (eds) *Cyberspace / Cyberbodies / Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment*. London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995, pp. 217-8.

⁴⁴⁴ That is, the space which my body produces on the first place –Balsamo’s notion of the body as a process of knowing and marking space hints that space pre-exists embodiment.

⁴⁴⁵ I would add, producing.

⁴⁴⁶ That is, despite Lefebvre and Foucault’s contemporaneity, common French origin and the fact that

conceptual triad of different types of space: spatial practice (concerned with production and reproduction), representations of space (concerned with the relations of production) and representational spaces (concerned with the symbolic and coded spaces of art and the underground side of social life)⁴⁴⁷ but does not discuss space as *otherness*. Networked spaces though are not ordinary spaces: they are an Other space, a heterotopia.⁴⁴⁸ To explain the meaning and function of a heterotopia, Foucault offers the example of the mirror:

In the mirror I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror exists in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes the place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.⁴⁴⁹

Networked spaces, like Foucault's mirror, enable us to see ourselves there, where we are absent, as well as discover our absence there, where we are, since we see ourselves elsewhere. The myself I see elsewhere is not always a photorealistic representation of my body: it can be that, but it can also be my fantasy of myself (like many Second Life avatars) or my agency manifested through my words, actions, interactions and connections. This myself that I see elsewhere, sooner or later, refers me back where I am and I am not, back to my bodily self that carries skin-limits, obsolescence, pain-pleasure and ageing-death. When in the heterotopia of networked space,⁴⁵⁰ I reason, we need to acknowledge that space is *not* my body. I disagree with analyses like Balsamo's,⁴⁵¹ which discuss my body as production, process, product, or other, failing to mention what my body is first and foremost: my teeth and lips and clenched

Foucault wrote his article *On Other Spaces* in 1967, and Lefebvre followed with *The Production of Space* in 1974. Edward W. Soja went on to cross-examine the two works in his book in: Soja, E. W. *Thirdspace*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996.

⁴⁴⁷ Lefebvre, H. *The Production of Space*, pp. 32-33.

⁴⁴⁸ This is an argument that Julie E. Cohen also takes up in her article *Cyberspace As/And Space*.

⁴⁴⁹ Foucault, M. *Of Other Spaces*.

⁴⁵⁰ When talking about networked spaces here I am referring to immaterial networked environments such as cyberspace. As mentioned at the beginning of the Chapter, networked spaces can also be augmented physical realities, but as these bear more resemblances to physical space I take the liberty of side-stepping them in this part of the analysis.

⁴⁵¹ For analyses which forget the material specificity of (my) body –and there are plenty of those around, albeit the recent /current trend in media theory requires that we shift our focus ‘back’ on bodily materialities– see, among others: Heim, M. *The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993; and, Kirby, V. *Telling Flesh: The Substance of the Corporeal*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

fists; my wounds, my odour, my pain; my disability, my daily deaths. I think that Balsamo's discussion confuses what the body *is* with what the body *does*. The body performs identities and marks space, that is what the body *does*. What *my* body *is* though? It is all the strange, often embarrassing contrasts, all the material specificities that Lefebvre describes. *My* body is the mark on my skin, the spot on my face, the chipped tooth that are mine and not yours, nor anyone else's. My body is also my death, and this too is mine only.

Here, I return to Lefebvre. For him, space is first of all my body, "and then it is my body's counterpart or 'other', its mirror-image or shadow". So Lefebvre argues that space is not just my body, but also my body's *other*. I ask: Is this not my body's other that I see in Foucault's mirror? And is this not my body's other that I see in networked space as my avatar (representation/fantasy) and/or agency (effect/affect)? Is this not my body's other⁴⁵² that refers me back to my physical/mortal body because I can only see it while situated in my body's limited, material specificity? I want to suggest that Lefebvre's notion of 'my body's other' is analogous to Foucault's notion of the "shadow that gives my own visibility to myself". If we accept that 'my body's other' is this kind of reflection that makes my own body visible to myself, then it follows that Lefebvre, in his analysis of the production of space, includes, though he does not diversify,⁴⁵³ heterotopias as spaces. I extend these ideas to argue that if space is produced by my body, heterotopia is produced by my body's other: a shadow, reflection or representation (for example, an avatar, video image or moving pov)⁴⁵⁴ that situates myself there where it is not, thus making me discover my absence from the place where I am. At the same time, my body's other refers me back to the place where I am (and I am not), and to my body – the vantage point from which I perceive and experience my body's other.

In her essay *Embodied Utopias: The Time of Architecture*⁴⁵⁵ feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz questions the validity of the very term she uses as her title, that is: "embodied utopia". She wonders whether this might be an oxymoron, and argues that embodiment is "that which never had its place within utopias".⁴⁵⁶ It is not so much that utopian discourses have not dealt with the question of bodies, says Grosz, as the fact that utopias, due to their direction

⁴⁵² My body's other which, before I saw in cyberspace or in the mirror, I had seen as my reflection on the water (Narcissus) or in the other's (your) eyes?

⁴⁵³ This could be because Lefebvre is concerned with the analysis of the production process (of space as a social phenomenon), whereas Foucault, in what is a very short article that formed the basis of a lecture, discusses the dynamics between a triad of 'space-products': topos (space), utopia (non-space) and heterotopia (other space). Foucault's primary focus is not the process of production of these different sites, but the tensions and dynamics generated between them (i.e. utopias and heterotopias, says Foucault, are related to and contradict all other sites).

⁴⁵⁴ POV stands for Point Of View in films and virtual environments.

⁴⁵⁵ Grosz, E. *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001, pp. 131-150.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 131.

towards a goal and their neglect of process (and thus time), seek “a future that itself has no future, a future in which time will cease to be a relevant factor, and movement, change, and becoming remain impossible”.⁴⁵⁷ Considering that utopia means non-space, a space that does not exist, Grosz’s suggestion seems directly related to Lefebvre’s definition of space as the inscription of time. If space *is* time, then there is a logic to the idea that non-space (u-topos) is the absence of time: a place (vs. space)⁴⁵⁸ fixed in some never-existent moment; a place that is frozen like a still image. That place necessarily excludes embodiment: my body can only be in time as my body *is* time (the time marked by the two radical –to me– acts of my birth and death). Grosz, in her essay, is concerned with space (topos) and utopias, but does not broaden her analysis to develop a conceptual triad in the way that both Foucault and Lefebvre consciously do:⁴⁵⁹ she does not refer to heterotopias. Heterotopias are clearly embodied spaces in the same way that they clearly are social spaces: what embodies a heterotopia though is not my body, but my body’s other. My body’s other, in the heterotopia of cyberspace, is my avatar or pov. In cybertheatres, my body’s other is doubled upon itself (see Deleuze) to become my other body’s other: it is not my own avatar (fantasy/agency) but my role’s avatar. In cybertheatres, what refers me back to my body is my body’s other in an-other body.

2.2 Blast Theory

16 August 2007: I am in Portslade (Brighton, UK) to interview Matt Adams, spokesperson for the internationally renowned British group Blast Theory. I have encountered Blast Theory several times through my avatar but this is my first flesh-body encounter with the group. Founded in 1990 and led by Matt Adams, Ju Row Farr and Nick Tandavanitj, Blast Theory create projects that merge different technologies and dramaturgical structures, converging disciplines such as live performance, media arts and games. Their work explores the relationship between notions of real, virtual and fictional with a focus on the socio-political aspects of technology and how these affect social dynamics. According to Adams, the group has been interested in integrating technology in their practice from the very beginning of their explorations, investigating ways of creating “a fully immersive performance environment in which several things can compete simultaneously for the audience’s attention”.⁴⁶⁰ For Blast

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 143.

⁴⁵⁸ I consider space as broader than place, and as encompassing several places. See also Cohen, J. E. *Cyberspace As/And Space*, p. 231.

⁴⁵⁹ They both insist on avoiding an analysis based on binary dynamics.

⁴⁶⁰ Adams, M. Cited by: Chatzichristodoulou, M. How to Kidnap Your Audiences: An Interview with Matt Adams from Blast Theory, 2009 In: Chatzichristodoulou, M., Jefferies, J. and Zerihan, R. (eds) *Interfaces of Performance*. London: Ashgate, 2009, p. 108.

Theory, placing their performances within rich, immersive environments is about enabling audiences to construct individual performance experiences through making their own decisions on how to deal with multiple stimuli (and, often, a sense of overload). Through this private decision-making and filtering process that each audience member has to undertake in a Blast Theory performance, audiences develop an individual understanding of the work and construct their own, unique experience of each piece.

Adams suggests that Blast Theory's work, though "incredibly divergent from traditional theatre practice" from its very beginning, is still, in its essence, deeply performative.⁴⁶¹ Early projects like *Gunmen Kill Three* (1991), *Chemical Wedding* (1992) and *Stampede* (1994) were promenade pieces taking place at non-theatrical venues such as nightclubs. These, though employing audiovisual technologies and interactive elements, were physical performances where performers and audiences met in 'real' space. Recent projects such as *Day of the Figurines* (2006), on the other hand, are interdisciplinary pieces of work that situate themselves at the crossovers of different genres, featuring strong gaming and interactive installation art elements. Even so, Adams argues, *Day of the Figurines* is a performative piece: "an improvisational theatrical process where people are invited to create characters, represent those characters and act out with other people interactive improvisational narratives".⁴⁶² Other recent Blast Theory projects, Adams argues, are more easily identifiable as performance works: "*Rider Spoke* (2007) invites people to record things at a particular time, in a particular place, and then gives them the opportunity to cycle around to find other people's recordings".⁴⁶³ Whatever the form of each project—and Blast Theory's work is exceptional in that the group experiments with form in such a way that their projects can be radically different from each other—Adams insists that Blast Theory "are still incredibly engaged with the idea of performance, the idea of a performer and an audience member having a live exchange or interaction in a particular moment in time and place—this is the animating principle behind much of the work that we want to make."⁴⁶⁴

From the very outset of their practice Blast Theory approach their audiences not as physically passive spectators, but as integral, active components of the work, who have the power to construct their own narratives as well as affect the piece (not only for themselves but also for everybody else) through their involvement in/ enactment of it. Adams says:

There was always an interest in the relationship between audience and performer, and how we can dismantle that. (...) We were interested in how we can have a complex, subtle, nuanced exchange with our audience: they come, they sit in the dark, they

⁴⁶¹ Ibid, p. 107.

⁴⁶² Ibid, p.108.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

watch and we present... But what else can happen, which other methods might we use? This is partly to do with an interest in communication systems and in how these can potentially be socially and politically transformative. So we are looking at what role technology might play in opening up new terrains in theatre practice.⁴⁶⁵

In this chapter, I discussed Lefebvre's notion of space as 'social morphology' that shapes lived experience –and thus, I argued, performance practice as well. It is interesting then to observe that one of the main methods Blast Theory employ in order to achieve this process of 'dismantling' the traditional roles and dynamics between performers and audiences, is a spatial shift from the traditional theatrical venue to non-theatrical spaces. According to Adams: "One of the reasons we were so fascinated by clubs was the sense that this was a completely fluid environment in which the centre of attention was constantly shifting and entirely subjective."⁴⁶⁶ By locating their early work in nightclubs Blast Theory succeeded in freeing their practice from the constraints of a single unified location (stage) where the action unfolds and where the attention of the audience must be concentrated. In so doing, they spread the action around the space and situated the audiences within it, and within the narrative of these works. They went further in asking their audiences to actively engage with and undertake part of the action,⁴⁶⁷ thus blurring both the spatial and structural (dramaturgical) boundaries between performers and audiences.

Adams suggests that the piece *Kidnap* (1998) marks a critical moment in a lineage of work that attempts to redefine the roles and dynamics between performers and audience through –among other things– reconfiguring their spatial coordinates. In *Kidnap*:

Blast Theory launched a lottery in which the winners had the chance to be kidnapped. Ten finalists around England and Wales were chosen at random and put under surveillance. Two winners were then snatched in broad daylight and taken to a secret location where they were held for 48 hours. The two winners were Debra Burgess, a 27-year-old Australian working as a temp and Russell Ward, a 19-year-old from Southend working in a 24-hour convenience store. The whole process was broadcast live onto the Internet. Online visitors were able to control the video camera inside the safehouse and communicate live with the kidnappers.⁴⁶⁸

Blast Theory approach *Kidnap* as a piece "about giving up control. The questions were: In what

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 109.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ In the first piece by Blast Theory for example, *Gunmen Kill Three*, an audience member who had never fired a gun before was asked to come forward and fire a pinball gun at one of the performers. In their second piece, *Chemical Wedding*, there were three pools of light on the floor and audiences were invited to move into different coloured light pools in order to indicate their answers to different questions. Then Blast Theory added up the numbers of people in each pool to do a quick opinion poll with all of the audience members during the show. By the time of their third piece, *Stampede*, the group was inviting their audiences to trigger audio and video samples by standing on a pressure-pad. Interview with author [16/08/2007].

⁴⁶⁸ Blast Theory *Kidnap* 1998. Available from: http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/bt/work_kidnap.html [accessed 19/01/2009]

ways do audience members give up control to the performers on stage? Why do they do that and how can we expose this? How can we play with this boundary?"⁴⁶⁹ *Kidnap*, like most of Blast Theory's work, takes place both in physical space and online. Although the action was taking place in physical space (the safehouse), it was clearly designed for online audiences: as this was a surveillance piece audiences were able to witness the developments without being physically present in the same space as the audiences/performers. On this occasion, as in most of Blast Theory's work, the notion of a 'stage' as a single, unified physical location where the action unfolds, becomes irrelevant. At the same time, the notion of a stage is still relevant if perceived as a web of fragmented, distributed segments of both physical and virtual spaces. In that sense, Blast Theory's work resembles Happenings, performance practices that did not contain themselves within a single unified space/stage, but were distributed on several locations (and often, several temporal units). In *Kidnap*, Blast Theory's 'lottery winners' became the protagonists of the piece by handing control of their lives over to the group. Blast Theory, in turn, made this a spectacle by broadcasting the winners/victims' 24 hours in captivity to live online audiences. In the same way that the 'lottery winners' became the spectacle for us to watch, surveillance technologies (CCTV cameras, satellite imagery, computer surveillance, RFID tagging) daily turn us into spectacles for the people we yield control to. It is interesting to note that *Kidnap* took place before the first *Big Brother* series was launched in 2000, anticipating the surveillance spectacle that *Big Brother* culture celebrates.

⁴⁶⁹ Adams, M. Cited by: Chatzichristodoulou, M. *How to Kidnap Your Audiences*, p. 109.



Figure 2.1 Blast Theory *Kidnap* 1998⁴⁷⁰

While Blast Theory's projects successfully target wide and diverse audiences by operating on a usually simple, accessible and playful first layer, they also often consist of multiple layers one can 'peel off' to engage with increasingly deep, more nuanced and subtler aspects of the work. Gabriella Giannachi argues that Blast Theory have consistently challenged their audiences through shifting, questioning and redefining the boundaries within which the audiences are implicated.⁴⁷¹ Giannachi not only refers to the boundaries between performers and audiences –which Blast Theory hardly ever fail to challenge by situating audience members in the centre of their practice– but goes on to identify key aspects of the group's performance work that consistently provoke audience expectations. These are: dramaturgy, liveness, collaboration and mediation. Though I am interested in all the four aspects of Blast Theory's practice that Giannachi identifies as key in terms of 'redefining the boundaries', I want to focus on the fourth, 'mediation', as it is the aspect most relevant to this Chapter. Giannachi suggests that "not only are the fictional spaces and times set up in their work the result of complex processes of remediation but also they generate an entirely new perspective, that of a mixed reality,

⁴⁷⁰ Available from: http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/bt/press_pages/press_kn.html [accessed 11/08/2009]

⁴⁷¹ Giannachi, G. Response on How to Kidnap Your Audiences: An Interview with Matt Adams from Blast Theory, 2009 In: Chatzichristodoulou, M., Jefferies, J. and Zerihan, R. (eds) *Interfaces of Performance*, p. 117.

through which to experience both the artwork, and the everyday life context within which this is set.”⁴⁷²

Which are those ‘fictional spaces and times’ set up in Blast Theory’s work that Giannachi suggests generate a new, mixed reality? Since 2000, the group has collaborated with the Mixed Reality Lab (University of Nottingham) in order to explore the convergence of Internet and mobile technologies and create “new forms of performance and interactive art mixing audiences across the Internet, live performance and digital broadcasting”.⁴⁷³ Blast Theory’s exploration of convergence goes beyond the merging of different technologies and media; the group succeeds, through their innovative practice, in merging different genres,⁴⁷⁴ audiences⁴⁷⁵ and, I would suggest, spacetimes. Starting with *Kidnap*, much of their practice has brought together physical and virtual, real and fictional space, creating emergent, hybrid spaces that function as the stages for their performance works. Here are some examples:

- In *Can You See Me Now?* (2001-) audiences play a chase game with the artists. *Where?* The artists are situated within a real city; the audiences are a) flesh-bodies, distributed around the world, b) avatars, situated within a virtual city, which maps out the real city but is not its exact replica. I will discuss this piece in greater detail below as, I believe, it initiates a ‘mixed reality’ trajectory within the body of Blast Theory’s work.⁴⁷⁶
- In *Uncle Roy All Around You* (2003) audiences play a ‘treasure hunt’ with the artists – though in this case the ‘hidden treasure’ is the (fictional? real?) character of Uncle Roy. *Where?* Some audiences are situated within a real city, as is Uncle Roy whom they are trying to locate. Other audiences are (like in *CYSMN?*) a) flesh-bodies, distributed around the world, b) avatars, situated within a virtual city, which maps out the real city but is not its exact replica. Online players⁴⁷⁷ and street players collaborate (or not) to find Uncle Roy’s

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ Blast Theory. About Blast Theory. Available from: <http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/bt/about.html> [accessed 13/11/2008]

⁴⁷⁴ Many of their pieces are situated in-between the genres of live performance, interactive/media/digital arts and gaming.

⁴⁷⁵ The group attracts both media-savvy and less technologically sophisticated audiences of all ages, although the majority of their audiences/participants are female (unlike the majority of computer gamers and MMORPG participants, who are male). Interview with author. [16/08/2007] (Information based on research undertaken by the group. Statistics available on request.) Through their pervasive gaming practice the group also succeeds in involving and, often, engaging involuntary audiences such as passers-by.

⁴⁷⁶ Blast Theory *Can You See Me Now?* 2001– Available from: http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/bt/work_cysmn.html [accessed 10/08/2009]

⁴⁷⁷ Blast Theory regularly refer to their audiences as players. I generally use the term ‘audiences’, in order to preserve coherence throughout the thesis. It is clear though that, in many of the pieces I am discussing, audiences have turned into something else as their roles have been challenged and redefined. Here, I use the term ‘players’ on occasions where it is clear that audiences’ are asked to participate in the action as players in a game.

office.⁴⁷⁸

- In *Day of the Figurines* (2006) audiences ‘become’ characters within a fictional city. *Where?* This city exists in physical space as a model town, installed in public space. Each of the audience members (1,000 in total) is represented by a small plastic figurine, which is moved by hand every hour for the duration of the game. In effect, this figurine becomes the player’s avatar while s/he is taking part in the game. The game lasts for 24 days, each of which represents one hour in a day within the city. Audiences are ‘stalked’ by the fictional city for those 24 days, as they are sent a minimum of one SMS daily, updating them on the progress of their figurine and inviting them to make decisions over the fate of themselves (their character/avatar) and other players.⁴⁷⁹
- In *Rider Spoke* (2007), a performance game for cyclists, audiences are invited to answer questions about their life and find other people’s hidden answers. *Where?* Audiences are located within a real city. They have to find an out-of-the-way place within the city to hide their answers, thus augmenting the urban landscape with personal narratives. Throughout their journey, they discover other people’s narratives, which have also been hidden within the specific locations where they were recorded.⁴⁸⁰

2.2.a) [Where] Can You See Me Now?

For me, the award-winning piece *Can You See Me Now? (CYSMN?)* exemplifies Blast Theory’s practice of the convergence of different spatial ontologies.⁴⁸¹ *CYSMN?* is a game that happens simultaneously online and on the streets of a ‘real’, physical city. The piece was launched in 2001 in Sheffield (UK) and has since taken place in other cities around the world, including Brighton and Preston (UK), Rotterdam (Netherlands), Banff (Canada), Tokyo (Japan), Chicago (USA), Barcelona (Spain), Oldenburg and Köln (Germany), Dublin (Ireland) and Donau (Austria).⁴⁸² In this piece, Blast Theory operate a dramaturgy of layering: layers of physicality and digitality overlap and interweave to generate hybrid spaces; layers of past and present come together to confuse linear timelines; layers of actuality and virtuality combine to generate hybrid presences. In so doing, Blast Theory open up ‘lines of flight’⁴⁸³ towards dimensions outside the

⁴⁷⁸ Blast Theory *Uncle Roy All Around You* 2003. Available from: http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/bt/work_uncleroy.html [accessed 10/08/2009]

⁴⁷⁹ Blast Theory *Day of the Figurines* 2006. Available from: http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/bt/work_day_of_figurines.html [accessed 10/08/2009]

⁴⁸⁰ Blast Theory *Rider Spoke* 2007. Available from: http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/bt/work_rider_spoke.html [accessed 10/08/2009]

⁴⁸¹ *CYSMN?* is winner of the Golden Nica for Interactive Art at *Prix Ars Electronica*, Linz, Austria, 2003. The piece was also nominated for an Interactive Arts BAFTA Award, UK, 2002. Blast Theory. About Blast Theory. Available from: <http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/bt/about.html> [accessed 10/08/2009]

⁴⁸² Blast Theory *Can You See Me Now?*

⁴⁸³ I borrow this term from Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of the rhizome. ‘Asignifying rupture’ is one of

system of the performance (memory, urban landscape, involuntary audiences) that divert, interconnect and disappear to disrupt the unity of the performance *per se*, as well as unified concepts of space, body, self, and presence.

As is the case with most of Blast Theory's projects, the piece verges on the edge of several genres such as gaming, interactive art and live performance, and spreads its participants (runners, players, involuntary audiences) across these spacetimes and their unlike ontologies. In *CYSMN?* the players can be physically located anywhere in the world; by logging on the group's website they find themselves 're-located' within a virtual city together with other players and members of Blast Theory, called 'runners'. The presence of both the players and the 'runners' in the virtual city is avatar-mediated. At the same time, the 'runners' are located within the streets of a physical city, which they use as their game terrain/stage. Each runner is equipped with a handheld computer connected to a GPS (Global Positioning System) tracker. The handheld computer sends the runner's location from the tracker over a wireless network to people playing online, while the positions of players online are passed back the other way and displayed on the screen of the runner's computer. Alongside this, online players can communicate with each other through text messaging, and runners can communicate with each other through walkie-talkies. An audio streaming of the runners' walkie-talkies allows the online players to eavesdrop on the runners' discussions.⁴⁸⁴

On the surface this is a straightforward chase game, a game most of the participants would have played at some point of their lives: the aim of the game is, simply, for the runners to chase and 'catch' the online players, while the players try to escape the runners' avatars online. While the runners chase the players, and the players try to escape the runners, the two cities, real and virtual, meet and merge into one hybrid city built from overlapping layers of physical and digital spacetime, each characterised by different qualities and behaviours. As Blast Theory put it:

The virtual city (which correlates closely to the real city) has an elastic relationship to the real city. At times the two cities seem identical; the virtual pavement and the real pavement match exactly and behave in the same way. At other times the two cities diverge and appear very remote from one another. For example, traffic is always absent from the virtual city.⁴⁸⁵

the principles of the rhizome: "There is rupture in the rhizome whenever segmentary lines explode into a line of flight, but the line of flight is part of the rhizome. These lines always tie back to one another."

Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 10.

⁴⁸⁴ Blast Theory *Can You See Me Now?*

⁴⁸⁵ Blast Theory *Can You See Me Now?*



Figure 2.2 Blast Theory *Can You See Me Now?* 2001–⁴⁸⁶

I suggest that this process of merging and diverging, bringing together and tearing apart of the two cities in any *CYSMN?* game produces a new space which is neither physical nor virtual. It is, instead, hybrid and relational,⁴⁸⁷ that is, a space that pertains and belongs to the connections between physical and virtual, as well as a space created from the players' interactions with each other and their game terrain. This hybrid city cannot exist outside the relations that occur between the different layers of spacetime and the different people who 'inhabit' them through their involvement in the game.

On their website, Blast Theory describe the conceptual background of the piece as drawing upon their fascination with the ubiquity in many 'developed' (sic) countries of

⁴⁸⁶ Available from: http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/bt/press_pages/press_cy.html [accessed 11/08/2009]

⁴⁸⁷ 'Relational' has become a loaded term within the disciplines of art history and aesthetics since Nicolas Bourriaud (co-founder and former co-director of Paris art gallery Palais de Tokyo) published his book *Relational Aesthetics*. In this book, Bourriaud defines relational art as "an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space" (original emphasis). Bourriaud, N. *Relational Aesthetics* (Tr.: Pleasance, S. and Woods, F. with Copeland, M.) Paris: Les Press du Réel, 2002, p. 14. Though aware of this analysis, I use the term here purely to signify the dependence of this process of production of space on the relations that develop between different people and spatial ontologies.

handheld electronic devices such as the mobile phone.⁴⁸⁸ The group is particularly interested in the penetration of the mobile phone into demographics that are usually excluded from new technologies, such as poorer and rural users.⁴⁸⁹ Blast Theory explore how such mobile devices change and ‘augment’ urban environments: the mobile phone, for example, blurs the boundaries between private and public space by ‘broadcasting’ fragments of private information into the public arena, thus staging little private dramas. The presence of (involuntary) audiences alters the actual nature of these private instances by transforming them into public spectacles, while the people involved in these become performers who ‘act out’ their everyday lives. Through this exploration of the merging of private and public spaces, Blast Theory ask: “In what ways can we talk about intimacy in the electronic realm?”

I have discussed how networks, like Foucault’s mirror, enable us to see ourselves there, where we are absent. This translocation becomes very apparent in *CYSMN?* as the players see themselves (their avatar-selves, that is) there, in the streets of the city, together with the runners. Where is this ‘there’, though? In *CYSMN?* the players see themselves in the virtual city, which functions as an uncanny mirror of the ‘real’ city: the virtual city maps the real city in all its essential manifestations. The streets, squares, big buildings and other city landmarks are all there; nevertheless, this is not a photorealistic mirroring, but rather a schematic, minimalist, two-dimensional mapping of the urban environment. As Blast Theory point out, the virtual city sometimes coincides with the ‘real’ city, whereas other times the two cities appear disparate, distant from each other. They behave in different ways, each hiding its own secrets to be discovered only through ‘being there’. What marks the virtual city is an absence or lack of the smearing effects of physical reality. In this sense, the virtual city is similar to an urban designer’s plans or 3D models of a new, unblemished, uncluttered (and un-lived-in) urban space. While the runners in the real city have to face all sorts of traps and obstacles –broken or slippery pavements, traffic, reversing trucks, noise, bad weather conditions, physical exhaustion– the players in the virtual city face none of these. Their city is clean, though unmanned; their pavements hide no treacherous holes; their streets are free, though deserted; bad weather conditions don’t exist, but neither does sunshine; their parks hide no dog shit under dead leaves, void of either dogs or trees; their avatar bodies can keep running without losing their breath, spraining their ankles or falling over discarded crisp bags and beer cans; nobody looks at them suspiciously or stops them to ask questions, and no bunch of kids will ever follow them merrily around the streets either...⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁸ Blast Theory *Can You See Me Now?*

⁴⁸⁹ According to Blast Theory, “some research has suggested that there is a higher usage of mobile phones among the homeless than among the general population.” Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ As occasionally happened to the runners situated within the real cities, see Figure 2.3.



Figure 2.3 Blast Theory *Can You See Me Now?* 2001–⁴⁹¹

So whereas the runners are ‘out there’ in the streets battling rain and traffic, the players are physically within the gallery space or their own home and, online, within the pristine virtual realm. This clean and neat virtual cityscape is where runners and players meet. What happens next is typical of Blast Theory’s work: through the live audio stream, players online can eavesdrop on the runners’ conversations. Together with fragments of conversations, online players can also hear the runners’ environment: street noise, horns, loud traffic, passers-by talking to the runners; they can also hear the runners themselves running out of breath, panting, gasping, groaning, making sounds of pain, surprise, fear and exhaustion. A player from Seattle says: “I had a definite heart stopping moment when my concerns suddenly switched from desperately trying to escape, to desperately hoping that the runner chasing me had not been run over by a reversing truck (that’s what it sounded like had happened).”⁴⁹² Through the live audio stream, Blast Theory ingeniously allow the noisy, unpredictable physical reality of the city’s performance of everyday life to penetrate and ‘infect’ its virtual mirror, smearing its unblemished purity and injecting it with life ‘out there on the streets’. This leaking of reality into virtuality can have a powerful affective impact on the online players who, safe within the virtual realm, can be shocked to realise the physical vulnerability of the runners’ bodies and the risk they potentially have to face during the game.

To me, the leaking of reality into virtuality (and the reverse) is one of the strongest elements in Blast Theory’s work. To quote Brian Massumi,

Concepts of the virtual in itself are important only to the extent to which they contribute to a pragmatic understanding of emergence, to the extent to which they enable triggerings of change (induce the new). It is the edge of the virtual, where it

⁴⁹¹ Available from: http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/bt/press_pages/press_cy.html [accessed 11/08/2009]

⁴⁹² Blast Theory *Can You See Me Now?*

leaks into the actual, that counts. For the seeping edge is where potential, actually, is found.⁴⁹³

Through their complex, carefully designed and developed dramaturgies, Blast Theory position their participants at this very ‘edge of the virtual, where it leaks into the actual’. Often, this edge is troubling, unexpected: it shakes their audiences by highlighting elements of the actual world that they manage (or choose) to ignore. It unsettles their audiences by foregrounding a synergy of the two, virtual and real/actual, which reminds them that they cannot situate themselves in one *or* the other, because they are always already situated within a hybrid zone of ‘interspatiality’.⁴⁹⁴ Within urban environments our spatial contexts are always enriched, interlinked and augmented through technologies that bring together distant locations or physical and virtual spaces, from the phone and TV, to mobile phones, wireless Internet, GPS and locative media. In *CYSMN?* the virtual city is by default linked to the ‘real’ city, as it exists only as the ‘real’ city’s other. The links between the cities are evident: when a runner runs after a player, in the ‘real’ city (and for the involuntary audiences following the game there) s/he is running after a ghost, as the player is not physically manifested in this spatial context. From a ‘real’ city pov, each runner is a Don Quixote ‘tilting at windmills’.⁴⁹⁵ From a virtual city pov, on the other hand, though the presence of both runners and players is manifested through avatars, the very city within which they come together does not exist –it is the city itself that is the ghost.⁴⁹⁶

In *CYSMN?* Blast Theory succeed in foregrounding the limitations and vulnerability of the physical body –their own bodies (runners are members of the group)– and ‘my’ body. They achieve this through placing us, the players, in the safety of the virtual mirror-city as avatars,

⁴⁹³ Massumi, B. The Autonomy of Affect, 1996 In: Patton, P. (ed.) *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*. Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996, pp. 235-236.

⁴⁹⁴ I am using the term ‘interspatiality’ following Julia Kristeva’s semiotic notion of ‘intertextuality’. According to Kristeva, a text can be read on an horizontal axis, which connects the author with the reader, and a vertical axis, which connects the text with other texts. Kristeva argued that these two axes are united by shared codes, as every text, and every reading of every text, is dependent upon codes acquired *a priori*. See: Kristeva, J. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980. I am using the term ‘interspatiality’ to suggest that our spatial contexts are always, by now, linked to ‘other spaces’ (see discussion on Foucault’s heterotopias at Chapter 2, 2.1) that augment and condition them, in the same way that a text is always, inevitably and, to an extent, unwittingly, linked to other texts, which condition its meaning.

⁴⁹⁵ See Miguel de Cervantes novel *The Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quixote De La Mancha* (1605-1615). The protagonist, Don Quixote, is a fanciful idealist who often imagines things that do not exist. The phrase ‘tilting at windmills’ derives from a scene in the book and is used to describe the act of attacking imaginary enemies. Here I use this phrase to highlight that, from a ‘real’ city pov, the runners are chasing imaginary players, players who do not exist –within the physical city, at least. de Cervantes, M. *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote De La Mancha*. (Tr.: Ormsby, J.). Available from: http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/996_27/07/2004 [accessed 10/08/2009]

⁴⁹⁶ This is because the virtual cities in *CYSMN?* games do not exist in their own right (like Second Life, for example) but only as reference and in relation to the ‘real’ cities. At the same time, they do not exist as reflections of the ‘real’ cities either, as they often divert considerably from their ‘original’ sources.

then assaulting our sense of safety through flooding the quiet, peaceful virtual space with the often disturbing noise of the urban environment and the intimate sounds of the runners' (running out of) breath. The contrast between the tireless, risk-free avatars and the runners' exhausted, risk-taking physical bodies, is what strikes me in this work. As is the contrast between the two cities, 'real' and virtual, accentuated by the fact that they are, in fact, one and the same.

I have outlined that the heterotopias of the networks are embodied not by our bodies, but by our bodies' others. When it comes to cybertheatres, this distinction can become even more layered, as our bodies' others are often not our avatars, but the avatars of the personas we have assumed as part of the role-playing game or performance. This element of layered identity/presence is posed, in *CYSMN?*, from the very beginning of the game. When you (the player) log online to 'meet' the runners, you find the following information: a photo and the name of each runner, as well as a text introducing a person each one of them hasn't seen for a long time but still thinks about. For the presentation of *CYSMN?* at the Chicago Museum of Modern Art, for example, Runner 1, Matt, talks about Lucy, a girl he was friends with when she lived in Birmingham but hasn't seen for many years. Matt says that, although friends, their lives were very different and never overlapped. He doesn't know where Lucy lives any more, but he thinks of her every now and then and he misses her.⁴⁹⁷ Runner 2, Simon, talks about Dwielio, a man he met while basking in Spain. Dwielio was a man without nationality who was illegal in every country. Simon thinks about him and would like to speak to him again.⁴⁹⁸

When I log on to *CYSMN?* as a player I am also asked to identify the name of a person who is absent from my life (someone I haven't seen for a long time) but present in my mind (someone I still think about). Once this person is identified (becomes 'virtually' present), no other reference is made about him/her (considered absent) till the end of the game, when I am caught by a runner. To signify his/her victory, the runner says: "Runner 1 has seen -----" speaking loud not my name, but the name of the person I have identified (thus signifying a presence which contradicts an apparent absence). I wonder: does the speaking out loud of my long lost friend's name in connection to a concrete fragment of space virtually situate him/her within the urban landscape? In this way, not only is this person called back into my present moment, but s/he is called back *in lieu* of myself, that is, as my avatar. So I, the player, embody the hybrid heterotopia of a *CYSMN?* city not only as my body's other (my digital avatar online), but through an extra layer, that is, through the identity of a long-lost friend who, paradoxically, is the one 'seen' and 'captured' in the 'real' city instead of me.

⁴⁹⁷ Blast Theory *Can You See Me Now?* Chicago, 2-5 November 2006. Available from: <http://www.canyouseemenow.co.uk/chicago/en/runner01.php> [accessed 4/11/2006]

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

When a player is caught the runners take photos of the exact physical location where each player was ‘spotted’; that is, the location of the real cityscape correlating to the virtual spot where the player was seen/caught. These photos, called ‘sightings’, are then uploaded on Blast Theory’s website, functioning as an abstract, minimal but also poignant documentation of each game. What do these fragmented, empty spaces stand for? I see these sightings (both their picture-taking and their sharing) as a powerful, poetic act of interweaving the digital, virtual and abstract into physical, ‘real’ specificities. At the same time, they augment the physical –and thus limited– space, with layers of abstraction (in relation to site-specificity) and relationality. While weaving physical and digital (a bit like Benjamin’s understanding of aura weaves space and time),⁴⁹⁹ these sightings forever link both myself (the player) and the person in my mind to a fragment of a cityscape, which maybe none of us has ever physically visited. Thus the sightings interweave different identities (my own with that of a person I have lost), absence (my own from the ‘real’ city, my long lost friend’s from my life) with presence (my avatar’s in the virtual city, my long lost friend’s name sounding in the streets of the ‘real’ city), and physicality (bodies, cities) with digitality (bodies’ others/avatars, virtual/mirror cities), creating unique, hybrid heterotopias. To my eyes, these sightings are succinct, poetic manifestations of space as a process created by my body and my body’s other... The player is there, in the picture, can you see her now?

⁴⁹⁹ I discuss this in Chapter 3.



Figure 2.4 Blast Theory *Can You See Me Now?* 2001— A sighting photo from Sheffield: Kathy was seen here in 2001.⁵⁰⁰

⁵⁰⁰ Available from: <http://www.canyouseemenow.co.uk/sheffield/sightings.html> [accessed 11/08/2009]



Figure 2.5 Blast Theory *Can You See Me Now?* 2001— A sighting photo from Tokyo: Yohei Tomiku was seen here in 2005⁵⁰¹

⁵⁰¹ Available from: <http://www.canyouseemenow.co.uk/tokyo/en/sightings.php> [accessed 11/08/2009]

CHAPTER THREE

Presence, Pattern, (A)liveness:

*“A Romance in the Wires”*⁵⁰²

1. Pour parler de la présence et de l’absence (je dis bien: parler) je n’oublierai pas les épreuves vécues: les terribles présences de l’adversaire dans les luttes à mort –les terribles absences de l’ “être” aimé dans l’amour...⁵⁰³

⁵⁰² Entropy&Zuper!, referring to their piece *WireFire*. Email communication with author, 2006.

⁵⁰³ Lefebvre, H. *La Présence et l’Absence: Contribution à la Théorie des Représentations*. Tournai: Casterman, 1980, p. 225. [To talk about presence and absence (I say, right: let’s talk) I will not forget the lived ordeals: the terrible presences of the opponent in the battles with death –the terrible absences of the loved “being” in love... (My translation)]

In Chapter Two I explored the emergence of hybrid spacetimes that function as stages for new performance practices, and discussed Blast Theory's piece *Can You See Me Now?*, which, in addition to issues of space and temporality, brings forth issues of presence and intimacy. Through *CYSMN?* Blast Theory explore the blurring of the boundaries between private and public space that occurs in the electronic realm due to the capacity of information to penetrate every space, be it public or private. Blast Theory, like Enrtopy8Zuper!, the Belgium-based duo I will be addressing in this Chapter, ask: "In what ways can we talk about intimacy in the electronic realm?"⁵⁰⁴

Intertwined with intimacy are issues of presence and absence, and these are brought forth from the very beginning of the *CYSMN?* game, when the player is asked to identify her/himself with an absent-present person (someone s/he hasn't seen for a long time, but who is still present in his/her mind). When they player is caught by a runner, s/he is identified not as him/herself, but as this long-lost other, who has become his/her 'avatar' of sorts.⁵⁰⁵ The sightings demonstrate the presence-absence paradox one has to grapple with in networked and virtual environments by mapping it out and pinning it down in 'real' space. Furthering the issues raised in Chapter Two, I ask: What is the status of this other within the world of *CYSMN?* Is s/he present or absent? Which layers of spacetime and memory is s/he present within? How is his/her presence manifested? Can s/he appropriate the player's distributed anatomy (spread across virtual and physical space) to re-emerge as present? Can the player's avatar appropriate the long-lost other's physical absence to claim a presence that is independent of him/herself? Does the speaking out of his/her name in connection with a concrete fragment of space – virtually– situate him/her within the urban landscape?

This Chapter examines how the emergence of cyberstages transforms ideas of presence and absence in networked performance and performative encounters. In the first instance I use the notions of presence and absence to describe the condition and experience of situating (for presence) or excluding (for absence) one's corporeal body and 'aura'⁵⁰⁶ within/from a specific spatio-temporal context, and a set of relationalities that include (the) other(s). My project here is to suggest that the conceptual dichotomy of presence-absence is not appropriate for an analysis of the hybrid states-of-being that a cyborgian, posthuman creature finds him/herself in.⁵⁰⁷ I

⁵⁰⁴ Blast Theory *Can You See Me Now?*

⁵⁰⁵ See Chapter 2, 2.2.a.

⁵⁰⁶ 'Aura' is, according to Walter Benjamin: "A strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance...". Benjamin, W. *A Small History of Photography*, 1931 In: Benjamin, W. *One-Way Street and Other Writings*. (Tr.: Jephcott, E. and Shorter, K.), London: Verso, 1979, p. 250.

⁵⁰⁷ According to Sarah Kember, the terms cyborg and posthuman are not synonymous since, although they share similar ontologies and epistemologies, they do not necessarily share the same politics, history or

argue that concepts of presence and absence depend on a series of polar opposites, central to which are the binaries of materiality versus immateriality, and originality versus artificiality. More specifically, I argue that the notion of presence is bound with the assumption that the corporeal body is an ‘original’, whereas all its representations, reproductions and/or extensions are ‘artificial’. I suggest that the materiality of the physical, carnal body is what ‘safeguards’ its *corpo-reality*,⁵⁰⁸ and assumed ‘originality’. I then go on to argue that ideas of originality and artificiality in relation to the body are not pertinent within a posthuman context. Furthermore, I discuss and elaborate on N. Katherine Hayles’s proposal for the introduction of a new dialectic of pattern-randomness, as complementary to the existing one of presence-absence.⁵⁰⁹ Hayles argues that the pattern-randomness dialectic could provide a useful framework for the analysis of encounters that occur between hybrid bodies made of information and flesh. Finally, I argue that the only criteria that can be safely employed to distinguish between what I call ‘pattern-presence’ and emptiness or nothingness are those of relationality, as pattern-presence is not a formal but a relational quality or state.

Throughout this Chapter, I explore the work of the artists’ group Entropy8Zuper!,⁵¹⁰ who in 2002 relaunched themselves as the Belgium-based games design studio Tale of Tales.⁵¹¹ I will particularly focus on their performance/software/net.art piece *Wirefire* (1999-2003),⁵¹² and the MMORPG/performance piece *The Endless Forest* (2005–).⁵¹³ Through *Wirefire* I explore the experience of bodily desire in virtual, networked encounters, where physical presence and absence are paired with informational pattern and randomness. By becoming a deer in *The Endless Forest* I seek to investigate relations and practices of liveness in virtual worlds.

3.1 How Entropy8 and Zuper! became one: Entropy8Zuper!

3rd April 2007, 7pm: I am standing outside a tall, narrow building in the centre of Ghent, Belgium, waiting for Entropy8Zuper! to let me in. Entropy8Zuper! are Auriea Harvey and Michael Samyn constituting a web design studio and interactive art duo, who aim to produce

ethics. Kember, S. *Cyberfeminism and Artificial Life*. London and New York: Routledge, 2003, p. vii.

⁵⁰⁸ The very term emphasises the quality of the *real* in relation to the *corpus*, that is, the carnal aspect of the body. In my view, the term corporeal hints that representations, reproductions and extensions of the body that are not carnal, are also not ‘real’.

⁵⁰⁹ Hayles, K. N. *How We Became Posthuman*.

⁵¹⁰ Auriea Harvey was Entropy8, and Michael Samyn was Zuper!. Entropy8Zuper! Website. Available from: <http://www.entropy8zuper.org> [accessed 12/11/2004]

⁵¹¹ Tale of Tales website. Available from: <http://www.tale-of-tales.com> [accessed 12/11/2004]

⁵¹² Entropy8Zuper! *Wirefire* 1999-2003. Available from: <http://www.entropy8zuper.org/wirefire> [accessed 12/11/2004]

⁵¹³ Tale of Tales *The Endless Forest* 2005– Available from: <http://www.tale-of-tales.com/TheEndlessForest> [accessed 20/08/2006]

“emotionally engaging multimedia presentations”.⁵¹⁴ Harvey and Samyn started working independently as web designers in 1995, Harvey based in New York City and Samyn in Ronse (Belgium). In 1999 they created the art collective Entropy8Zuper! Soon, Auriea Harvey opens the door: a tall black woman with long rasta locks, she invites me in to what is both their house and studio. Michael Samyn is standing behind her: he is of about the same height, white, with greying hair and a massive beard. Both seem to be in their late thirties or early forties. Soon, we are sitting around a long dining table, on some funky, squeaky chairs. There, over a few glasses of Bordeaux, Harvey and Samyn talk to me for three hours about their art, life, and love affair (which has a lot to do with both...).⁵¹⁵



Figure 3.1 Auriea Harvey and Michael Samyn at home during our interview, Belgium, 2006. Photo: Catherine Alvés.

⁵¹⁴ Entropy8Zuper! About Entropy8Zuper! Available from: <http://www.entropy8zuper.org> [accessed 20/08/2006]

⁵¹⁵ All the quotes from Auriea Harvey and Michael Samyn in this Chapter are, unless otherwise stated, from the interview with the author, as described above, on 3/04/2007. The interview was commissioned by *Furtherfield* and was published on their website in two instalments: Chatzichristodoulou, M. From Entropy8Zuper! to Tale of Tales: Games and *The Endless Forest*. Available from: http://www.furtherfield.org/displayreview.php?review_id=283 7/08/2007 [accessed 8/08/2007]. And: Chatzichristodoulou, M. From Entropy8Zuper! to Tale of Tales: Games and *The Endless Forest*. Part 2. Available from: http://www.furtherfield.org/displayreview.php?review_id=287 16/10/2007 [accessed 17/10/2007]

I have always been fascinated by Entropy&Zuper!'s love-story, which clearly was the inspiration for much of their early work. What I already knew was that they met and fell in love online while based in different continents, that they started working together while physically afar, and that they eventually decided to move in together.⁵¹⁶ Harvey gave up her life in New York City and moved to Belgium to live with Samyn. But I did not know all the details: Where and how did they meet? Did they fall in love at first (virtual) sight? How difficult was it for both of them to decide to give up their lives for each other? Why is it that their work is so intrinsically interlinked with their love-affair? "I guess it starts in Hell", says Harvey. "I mean, in hell.com", she laughs.⁵¹⁷ What a semantically rich beginning to a career soaked in symbolism! Entropy&Zuper! have based a lot of their work (*Godlove Museum*, *Wirefire*) on allegory, and have used 'grand narratives' such as the Bible and folk fairytales as sources of inspiration. Harvey explains how she joined hell.com while Samyn was already a member, how she knew and admired his work, and how they met there in January 1999 during a rehearsal for a collaborative, online video-performance using iVisit.⁵¹⁸ Exactly how this happened, Harvey says, "is shrouded in mystery":

I had a web-cam running all the time –this is why I was interested, I had a streaming web-cam online. It was black and white and I used to do sort of informal online performances. So anybody who came to my web page would see me sitting at my desk but sometimes I would do fun things with the camera. So when I showed up I was talking to Lia⁵¹⁹ (...) and Michael didn't have a web-cam so I remember he was broadcasting images of fruits and vegetables, ha ha! (...) Yeah, that's when we started talking and, I don't know, it became sex-chat more or less instantly (...) which was odd because, you know, we don't do that! Ha ha!

So it was love at first sight –despite the fact that Samyn looked like a cauliflower! That is how the roller-coaster of their relationship started: the next day, Harvey says, Samyn sent her an html page: "I was very excited and so I made one in return. It went back and forth like that, and that's how *skinonskinonskin* got made." *skinonskinonskin* is E&Z!'s first piece. Unsurprisingly, it talks about love, desire, and fantasies of sexual encounters. Originally, the piece was only meant for each other. Then the hell.com server operator found the directory, 'fell in love' with the project, and suggested that they open it up to audiences. Eventually, E&Z! presented the piece during the hell.com pay-per-view event (September 1999): they charged audiences for

⁵¹⁶ Since 1999 Harvey and Samyn live together in Ghent, Belgium.

⁵¹⁷ "HELL.COM is a private non commercial project devoted to establishing an alternative reality. It has absolutely nothing to do with theology, religion, cults, adult content, entertainment, or art. HELL.COM is not associated with any business nor organization." HELL.COM website available from: <http://web.archive.org/web/20040611142545/www.hell.com/3/vip/info.html> [accessed 28/4/2007]

⁵¹⁸ iVisit is a free, cross-platform video-conferencing software. iVisit website. Available from: <http://www.ivisit.com/> [accessed 4/12/2009]

⁵¹⁹ Lia is a software artist. Lia website. Available from: <http://www.liaworks.com/category/theprojects/> [accessed 4/12/2009]

admission to the *skinonskinonskin* website. Any income generated was split between the hell.com collective.

After *skinonskinonskin* came *Genesis* (1999), chapter one of the *Godlove Museum*. This was while they were trying to suppress their online passion and just work together. *Genesis* was supposed to be their business website –“this totally animated crazy thing, you know?” shouts Harvey– and it was launched the same day they physically met for the first time:

AH: when we finally met in person, this occasion was complete fate in some ways. He was going to be in San Francisco, and I had to be in San Jose and I thought, this is ridiculous, we are going to be there in the same week, you know... So I went to San Francisco, and that is where we met in person. We launched *entropy8zuper.org* the same day that we met! We met, we launched the site, and then we sat and...

MS: ...talked! Ha ha! Amongst other things...

AH: At the Triton Hotel in San Francisco (...). We were very big on doing these kind of symbolic acts, like meeting in Hell for the first time and then launching the website the first time we met in person.

A lot of E8Z!’s work is autobiographical (*skinonskinonskin*, most of the *Godlove Museum*, *Wirefire*) as it is centred around their private lives, their remote love affair, and their dramatic get-together. “I think it was based on that very heavily”, says Harvey, “but we tried to get away from that after a while”. It seems that their love affair, while romantic, was also traumatic for both of them: they were both in relationships, Samyn had two kids, they lived in different cities, they had different lives. Within a period of just a few months they decided to abandon their separate lives to start a joint one. This was beautiful, but it was also painful, says Samyn. This is why their work of that period is so self-referential: to them it functioned partly as therapy. Some of it was too personal or too painful to publish.

E8Z! decided that it was time to move on from their personal story and reconnect their work with the world around them while they were creating *Numbers* (2002), chapter four of the *Godlove Museum*:

AH: We have a little desert scene and there are these bubbles that you can click on. And that is basically us saying goodbye to this, goodbye to that...

MS: The bubbles contain pictures of memories.

Harvey’s moving to Europe in May 1999 coincided with a politically unsettled time and the NATO ‘intervention’ in former Yugoslavia. The political situation of the time shook them up and reminded them that they were not alone; they had to start making art for audiences rather than for each other. As Samyn explains: “An American coming to Europe while Clinton is bombing Yugoslavia... The world started linking with our relationship.”

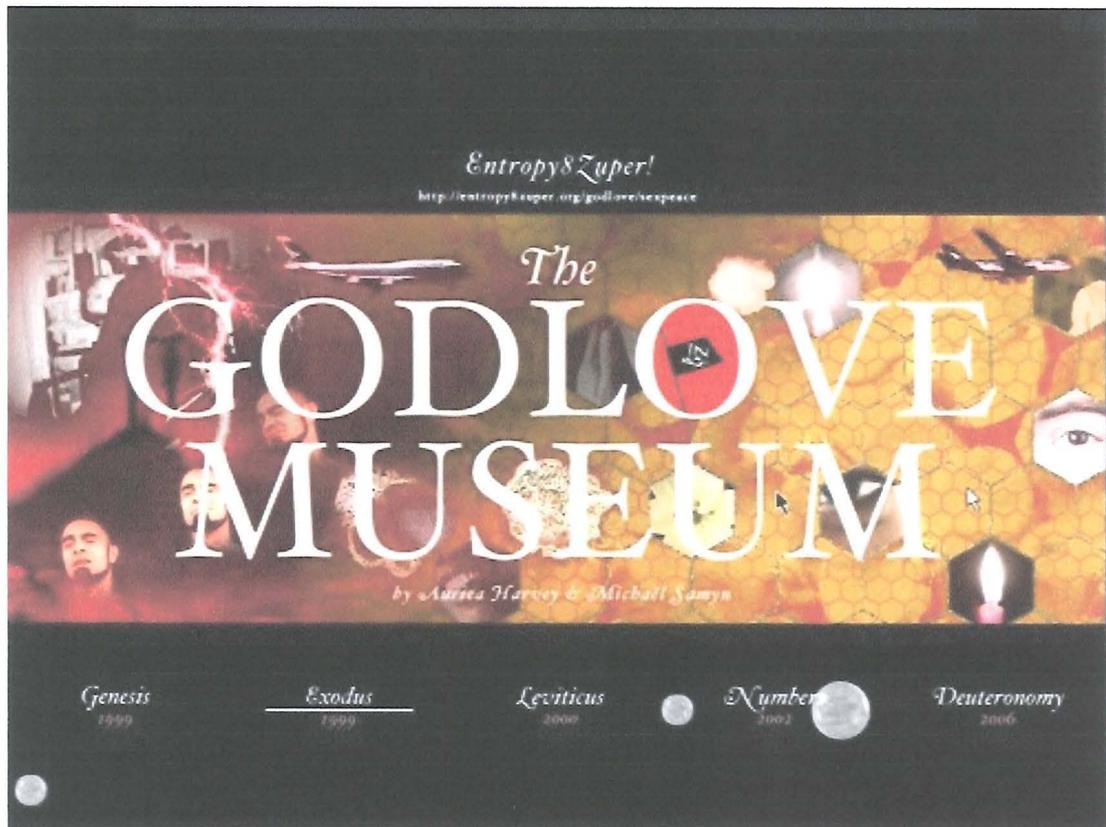


Figure 3.2 Entropy8Zuper! *The Godlove Museum* 1999-2006⁵²⁰

Wirefire started in 1999 as a continuation of *skinonskinonskin*; like *skinonskinonskin*, this was an environment for them to meet and ‘make love’. But *Wirefire* was much more than that. It operated in three different modes: Random, Live, and Replay. The Random mode meant that audiences were invited to initiate unique *Wirefire* ‘events’, generated by the computer, through a random mix of the audio and visual files on the *Wirefire* database in real time. In the Live mode E8Z! performed live, engaging with each other, the *Wirefire* database, and their audiences in real time, once per week, for four years, every Thursday night at midnight (Belgium time). The live audiences were visible on the screen as specs of dust, and could also contribute text through the chat, which E8Z! would integrate into the audiovisual landscapes. Finally, the Replay mode was a documentation of the live performances, albeit not a very accurate one, as any live elements such as web-cam streams, chat and special effects could not be archived for technical reasons.

⁵²⁰ Available from: <http://entropy8zuper.org/godlove/> [accessed 12/12/2009]

Wirefire was, in a way, the performance of the *Godlove Museum*, as it recycled all the imagery made for it. So, as the *Godlove Museum* is based on the Bible, *Wirefire* also used allegorical imagery of bees and sheep, raw meat and fire, to narrate the biblical story of Moses' search for the Promised Land among war and all the monstrosities that come with it. E8Z! stress that *Wirefire* was a technically complex piece for the time, strong on visuals and sound. Indeed, I see it as a sensually luxurious piece, with explosive bursts and luscious mixes of colours, textures and sounds, like a grand baroque fête. This feast of the senses that is characteristic of E8Z!'s work is unlike other net.art works of the time, which are generally more conceptual than visual. Works like Heath Bunting's *Identity Swap Database* (1999)⁵²¹ for example, or Vuk Cosic's *History of Art for Airports* (1997)⁵²² are minimal, dry, with a sense of subtle humour and lots of irony. Harvey and Samyn are sceptical about this type of work, and they seem to be both melancholic and slightly bitter about the net.art movement. To start with, although they were working on the net at the same time as Cosic, Bunting and other people now considered as 'net.artists', E8Z! were never classified by art historians as part of this movement. Which is fair enough, they say, as they never saw themselves as part of it either:

AH: We had some issues with that at the time, 'cause we weren't considered net.artists at all, and we didn't really consider ourselves that either.

MS: We felt part of the community I think, but not necessarily part of the genre. I remember us being angry at all their flashing pixels (...), and they were always making art about the Internet.

There has been some discussion about the net.art movement lately, particularly since the publication of Rachel Greene's book *Internet Art*.⁵²³ According to Greene, the core ideas related to net.art were "a serious engagement with popular media, a belief in parody and appropriation, a scepticism towards commodified media information and a sense of the interplay of art and life."⁵²⁴ I read this quote to E8Z! and ask them whether they think that their work fits this description. Harvey says yes and attempts to explain why –but it is not obvious. She talks about appropriating the Bible and fairytales as the subjects of their work. Samyn intervenes, suggesting that this is "more recuperation than appropriation (...) because we come from a Christian society, so it's not appropriation when we talk about Christian mythology." So do they fit Greene's description? I think not: their art is romantic and epic rather than sceptical; there is no parody in it –E8Z! tend to take things seriously; they do not engage with popular media in

⁵²¹ Heath Bunting *Identity Swap Database* 1999. Available from: <http://www.teleportacia.org/swap/> [accessed 27/04/2007]

⁵²² Vuk Cosic *History of Art for Airports* 1997. Available from: <http://www.ljudmila.org/~vuk/history/> [accessed 27/04/2007]

⁵²³ Greene, R. *Internet Art*. London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 2004.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 26.

any critical manner –in fact, they probably engage more with baroque paintings; and yes, there is an interplay between art and life but this is mostly because their art is about their lives. Net.art is often related to tactical media practices, hacking, activism and hactivism, socially engaged systems, and community-building. I think that net.art has been more directly critical of politics, the society, the art system and itself than the work of E8Z! which, though not devoid of social commentary, is poetic, romantic, and timeless –thus lacking in the specificities of time and space that characterise political work. I ask them what they think about this and whether they consider their art to be ‘political’ in any way?

MS: I think both of us have always been very critical of people who are critical! So activism was always very suspicious for us. It was, I think, because it always seemed so trendy and insincere.

MC: Why insincere?

MS: Because I find it very easy to sit there and be an activist artist. If you really want to do something there are better ways of doing it...

E8Z! approach art as communication and entertainment more than anything else. This is not to say that they are not concerned about the social conditions they live in. Indeed, they make clear that the last chapters of the *Godlove Museum* were made as a reaction to the political situation of the time. They compare George Bush’s speech during the declaration of the war against Afghanistan to God’s speech in the Bible: “when the Israelites had already left Egypt and were approaching the Promised Land, God was encouraging them to take this land by force, kill and rape the people who lived there, or make them their slaves. All justified by the fact that the Israelites were The Chosen People.”⁵²⁵ It seems to me that E8Z! feel let down by both the net.art community, for accepting offers to present their work in galleries and museums, thus duplicating traditional power hierarchies of the art system that, originally, net.art set out to criticise; and by the art historians, for failing to acknowledge their work because it doesn’t neatly fit into what later became known as the ‘net.art movement’. E8Z! point out their practice is interdisciplinary, merging art, design and other applied arts. They stress their disbelief in conceptual art, which they see as ‘smart’ art. They argue that a lot of net.art is conceptual –and thus, according to E8Z!, elitist– while pretending to be otherwise. For E8Z! art should address and involve audiences in a two-way communication, something they consciously set out to achieve since they emerged from their love affair, realising that they had been producing art not for audiences, but for each other.

⁵²⁵ Michael Samyn, email communication with autor, 2006.

3.2. A “Romance in the Wires”⁵²⁶ and the Presence-Absence Paradox

I want to see how people without bodies make love.⁵²⁷

3.2.a) My Body in (Wire)fire

The year is 2002. The month is February. I’m at home. It’s a Thursday night, about 1am Athens’ time (Greece). I sit on the sofa, holding my laptop. I log on to Entropy8Zuper!’s website to watch the net performance piece *Wirefire*. *Wirefire* is all about sex: the story behind each performance is about a couple, dispersed –she in New York City, he in Ronse (Belgium)–⁵²⁸ who meet once per week to make love online, for and with audiences. Indeed, *Wirefire* grew out of this very physical necessity: Harvey and Samyn’s online love affair that stretched, through wires, across two continents. Entropy8 and Zuper!’s act of online, virtual love-making is no porn-stream: no photorealistic documentations of sexual encounters are available on this website. What I witness is an act of love translated into visual poetry: Harvey and Samyn mix still images, flash movies, animations, sounds, live streams and text files in real time to create “compelling and seductive narratives”⁵²⁹ that evolve through visual and sonar landscapes, all of which narrate the same story: “being digital and being in love”.⁵³⁰ E8Z! describe *Wirefire* as: “sex in a virtual world. The loss of physicality –but let me not call it a loss– because of what is gained (...). What one can gain through *Wirefire* is a new sense of touch, an enhanced fantasy, a glimpse of a personal utopia.”⁵³¹ *Wirefire* was created as a result of the couple’s need to express their love and desire telematically, as well as their frustration with the limitations of commercial software. Technically, the piece is a combination of files (animations, sounds, images) pushed into motion with an engine of scripts. During the *Wirefire* performances these files were combined with live chat and web-streams, and built layer upon layer to form complex visual poetry as a collaborative act of live improvisation. As E8Z! put it, *Wirefire* is their “personal

⁵²⁶ E8Z!, email communication with author, 2006.

⁵²⁷ Stone, A. R. *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age*. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1995, p. 38.

⁵²⁸ This is indeed how *Wirefire* started, and also the impression I had for as long as I followed the piece as an audience/participant. Nevertheless, during my 2007 interview with the couple I realised that Harvey moved in with Samyn less than a year after the *Wirefire* piece was launched. This means that the artists were actually performing most of the live events while in physical proximity. I don’t think that this is obvious on their website which, purposefully or not, sticks to the romantic story of the physically dispersed lovers.

⁵²⁹ According to the SFMOMA Webby Prize 2000 Jury comprised of, among others, Machiko Kusahara, Gary Hill, and Benjamin Weil –Entropy8Zuper! were awarded the 1st prize for the body of their work to that date. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Webby Prize 2000. Available from: http://www.sfmoma.org/press/press/press_webby.html [accessed 13/03/2004]

⁵³⁰ Entropy8Zuper! About *Wirefire*. Available from: <http://entropy8zuper.org/wirefire/> [accessed 13/03/2004]

⁵³¹ Harvey, A. and Samyn, M. A Secret History of *Wirefire*. Available from: http://e8z.org/wirefire/SECRET.HISTORY/A_SECRET_HISTORY_OF_WIREFIRE.txt 11/10/2001 [accessed 13/03/2004]

remixer of emotions and graphics”: “A thin wire strung between the camera images, fingers on keyboard like fingertips on each other’s skin, letters on a monitor screen, whispers”.⁵³²

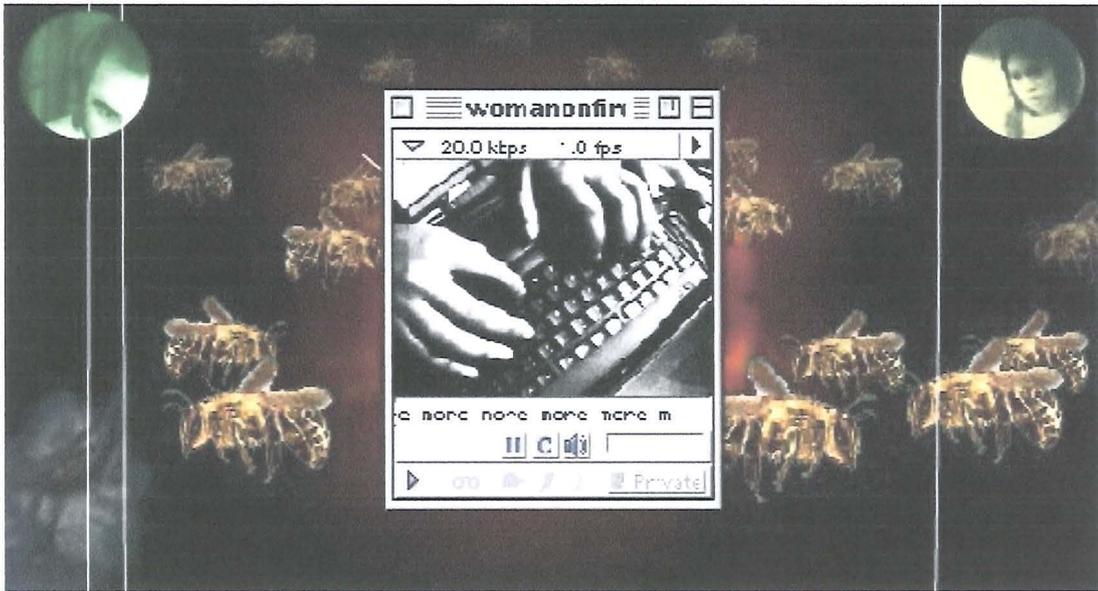


Figure 3.3 Entropy&Zuper! *Wirefire* 1999-2003⁵³³

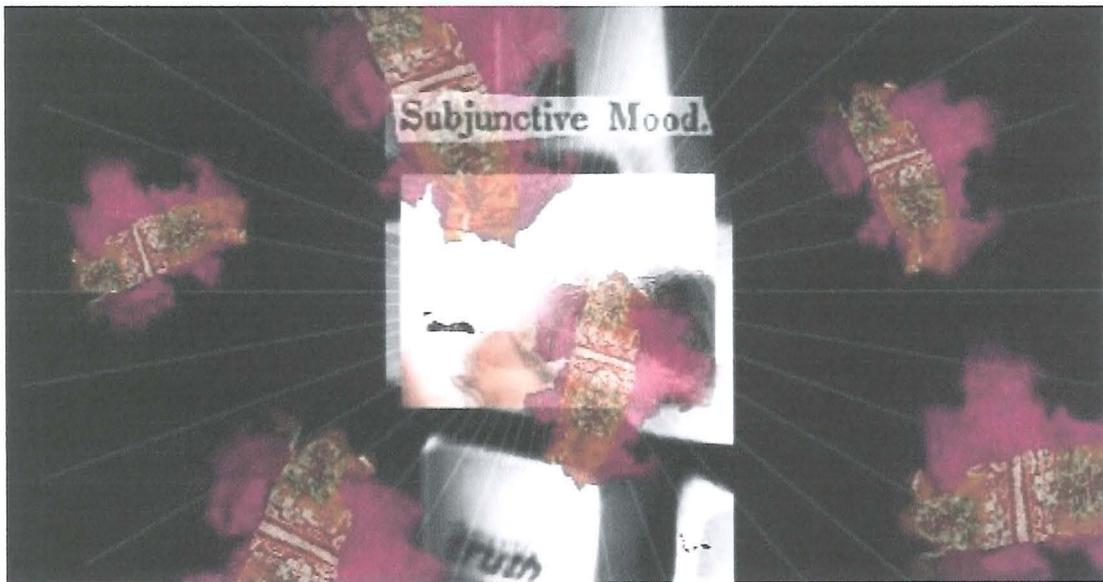


Figure 3.4 Entropy&Zuper! *Wirefire* 1999-2003⁵³⁴

⁵³² Ibid.

⁵³³ Available from: <http://www.entropy&zuper.org/wirefire/images/large/> [accessed 23/08/2006]

⁵³⁴ Available from: <http://www.entropy&zuper.org/wirefire/images/large/> [accessed 23/08/2006]

While I'm logged onto the website I can just 'lurk' and watch the performance unfold: images, movies, texts and sounds are mixed live from E8Z! into a magnificent, 'baroque' composition.⁵³⁵ Live video streams of the authors appear in bubbles and integrate within the audiovisual mix. Abstract, fragmented narratives emerge: E8Z!'s performance talks of romance, love, desire, passion, eroticism, and sex. It also talks about broader, more politicised notions of love and hatred: E8Z! use symbols such as flocks of sheep and bees, fire, and the Bible to question the way conditions of love and hatred are created on a larger scale as global phenomena. *Wirefire* touches upon issues of religion, fanaticism, violence and war; but also peace, tranquility, physical and spiritual love, beauty, the (futile?) search for paradise. While I am logged on for the live performance, the artists and other audiences can see that someone is watching: every audience member that logs on the website to attend a live *Wirefire* performance appears on everybody else's screens as a spec of dust. That is all they know about me: that I am, somehow, 'present'. And that is all I know about other audiences: I can find out how many people are watching by counting the specs of dust on my screen, but I don't know who these people are, what they look like, or where they are physically located. I know nothing about them other than the fact that they are, somehow, 'there', on/in⁵³⁶ the screen, and that we are watching this performance together.

If I want, I can expose myself a little further by contributing my own fantasies, and all the audience members can do the same: *Wirefire* audiences can contribute text that E8Z! mix, together with their own files from the *Wirefire* database, to create their seductive audiovisual landscapes. These are anonymous contributions, and the artists have complete control over whether, when, and how these audience inputs appear on screen. I type in 'Be with me'. The text appears on the bottom of the page as an anonymous chat input, along with lines other audiences have typed. In the meantime, the performance is moving on: brightly coloured sunflowers burst open across the screen. I type in 'Feelings float'. This never appears as there is no text on screen now –only the yellow flowers that speedily multiply, covering the whole of the screen on the sound of an operatic voice. By now, I'm not just sitting on the sofa –I'm also lying in a field of sunflowers, floating aboard the wings of a bird, sitting in front of a raw steak, burning in hell. While my corporeal body is at home, as a viewer I am transported within Entropy8Zuper!'s performance of love-making. My aura is stretching across two spaces, one physical, one virtual: I find myself in a hybrid space that is a mixture of reality and fiction,

⁵³⁵ This is along the lines of Anna Munster's comparative analysis of baroque and digital art. Munster argues that "Both baroque and digital spaces engage the viewer visually, seductively and affectively." Munster, A. *Materializing New Media: Embodiment in Information Aesthetics*. Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press, 2006, p. 6.

⁵³⁶ As Sherry Turkle asks, "Are we living life *on* the screen or life *in* the screen?". Turkle, S. *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. London: Phoenix-Orion Books, 1997, p. 21.

involved in intimate encounters with strangers who are present on/in my screen.



Figure 3.5 Entropy8Zuper! *Wirefire* 1999-2003⁵³⁷

Wirefire has its roots in the genre of ‘virtual sex games’. As the artists explain in the Secret History of *Wirefire*⁵³⁸ Samyn, inspired by the computer game *Virtual Valerie*, came up with the idea of creating a virtual sex game. The game was never finished but it formed the beginning of what later became the *Wirefire* system. In this first version of the piece there were only two players (with the plan to also accommodate voyeurs) connected together through a modem. Everything was text-based. Each player would take turns to choose and perform an action on him/herself or the other. Nevertheless, the programme only offered the players two options each time, and they could only choose to perform one of those options. Once the artists fell in love telematically and started meeting on a more frequent basis, as well as working together, they felt the need for a joint virtual space that would allow them to do so in privacy. Up to that point they had been meeting in chat rooms; it was time for them to develop a sort of a virtual office space for just the two of them. This is how *underyourdesk*,⁵³⁹ a precursor of *Wirefire*, was produced. To E8Z! this virtual space, their virtual projects, and their telematic collaboration and love affair, “was and still is the most real thing which has ever happened. (...)

⁵³⁷ Available from: <http://www.entropy8zuper.org/wirefire/images/large/> [accessed 23/08/2006]

⁵³⁸ Harvey, A. and Samyn, M. A Secret History of *Wirefire*.

⁵³⁹ Entropy8Zuper! *underyourdesk* 1999. Available from: <http://www.entropy8zuper.org/underyourdesk/> [accessed 23/08/2006]

it takes desire to create one's own paradise."⁵⁴⁰ *underyourdesk* was a one-to-one communication space, where E8Z! could meet to work, play music and chat to each other. *Underyourdesk*, and E8Z!'s next piece *skinonskinonskin*, were important in terms of the development of *Wirefire* as they were not just net.art works but also (a)live communication environments. Pay-per-view audiences of *skinonskinonskin* commented at the time:

The most intimate and moving experience I have ever had on the net...
(206.172.202.161, 09/02/99 00:25:39 GMT)
Passionate. Provoking. Beautiful. Erotic (...) I yearn for more. (206.31.106.195,
06/14/99 21:51:29 GMT)
Like nothing I've ever seen on the web. (216.119.26.248, 06/13/99 06:11:27 GMT)⁵⁴¹



Figure 3.6 Entropy8Zuper! *The End of Wirefire* 2003⁵⁴²

Wirefire built upon this success by bringing together a (small but consistent) group of fans that would meet every Thursday night at midnight Belgium time to take part in the live performance. This piece, which was maintained for almost five years, was multifaceted in its manifestations: a both private and public space; a net.art as well as a (a)live performance piece; a real-life love story; a fairytale; an allegory; an online communications environment; a virtual sex engine; a sensual technology that fulfilled E8Z!'s aim to "touch through the wires".⁵⁴³ The currents that run through *Wirefire* are the same raised by *underyourdesk* and *skinonskinonskin*:

⁵⁴⁰ Harvey, A. and Samyn, M. A Secret History of *Wirefire*.

⁵⁴¹ Entropy8Zuper! *skinonskinonskin* Viewer Exit Comments. Available from:
<http://www.entropy8zuper.org/skinonskinonskin/index.html> [accessed 23/08/2006]

⁵⁴² Available from: <http://www.entropy8zuper.org/wirefire/images/large/> [accessed 23/08/2006]

⁵⁴³ Harvey, A. and Samyn, M. A Secret History of *Wirefire*.

“What does one do when you fall in love with a 160x120 pixel image? How is it to be a digital being in love? What is ecstasy like in the network?”⁵⁴⁴

For four years E&Z! performed the same story: being digital and being in love. Their performances meant perpetually reproducing themselves as sound and image data, and the force that pushed these data into motion. Their digital selves became abstract audiovisual ‘bodyscapes’, and their engagements became rhythmic, colourful –both figurative and abstract, both carefully designed and random– patterns. They themselves became a-centered and distributed: by networking their love-making they invited audiences to ‘become’ them, to inhabit and expand their bodyscapes, to ‘hijack’ their love story and turn it into a globally distributed community in “telematic embrace”.⁵⁴⁵ Throughout this performance, E&Z! never met their audiences in physical proximity, never encountered each other through corporeal bodies. I believe that their mutual physical absence was a *sine-qua-non* for the performance. It was also the basis on which *Wirefire* could be built as an (unfinishable) performance piece, and a constantly in-flux, distributed, networked community ‘in love’.

I was first introduced to E&Z!’s work through *Wirefire* in 2001: the artists had submitted the piece for inclusion in the international *Medi@terra* festival which I was co-directing at the time. Watching live *Wirefire* performances during the one and a half months that the traveling *Medi@terra* ’01 exhibitions lasted for, I became hooked:⁵⁴⁶ I remained a fan and frequent audience member till E&Z! stopped developing and performing the piece in 2003. As an audience/participant of *Wirefire* during the last two years of its performance I asked myself: What becomes of my corporeal body and aura once I enter this virtual performance space? Where is desire located within the networks? How is it constructed and experienced? How do the networked *Wirefire* encounters affect *my body*⁵⁴⁷ –and do they? *Wirefire* ended on 9 January 2003:

AH: *Wirefire* just ended because... Well, we decided to end it, haha! We decided ‘this will be the last one’ while we were doing it... Because I think we could see which way the wind was blowing on the Internet and we thought, the net is not the same place as when we started. (...) We had been feeling like that for a while, that *Wirefire* was a relic in some ways, and we should sort of pack it away a little bit... And also our private meetings to work things out and connect with each other in that way was not something we needed any more I think –we had already been living together for three or four years. So we decided that we were not going to expand the project –which is

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁵ I refer to Roy Ascott’s article: Ascott, R. Is There Love in the Telematic Embrace? *Art Journal* 49 (3), 1990, p. 241.

⁵⁴⁶ *Medi@terra 2001* featured exhibitions and events in Athens and Lavrion (Greece), Sophia (Bulgaria), Belgrade (Serbia), Maribor (Slovenia) and Frankfurt (Germany) during a road-travel edition of the festival under the title *De-Globalising/Re-Globalising*.

⁵⁴⁷ See my discussion on Lefebvre’s notion of ‘my body’ in Chapter 2, 2.1.c.

what it needed– and so we should stop doing it and make something else. That’s why we made *The Endless Forest*.

3.2.b) The Presence-Absence Paradox

Peggy Phelan in *Unmarked* claims that, in performance, “the body is metonymic of self, of character, of voice, of ‘presence’”.⁵⁴⁸ What happens though when it comes to mediated, networked performances such as *Wirefire*, where the physical bodies of both performers and audiences are distributed around the world? Or semi-mediated performances like *CYSMN?*, where the runners’ corporeal bodies are dispersed across the urban landscape rather than concentrated within the proximity of the audiences/players? Does Phelan’s claim entail that *Wirefire* and *CYSMN?* performers are ‘absent’ because their corporeal bodies are not physically present in the proximity of the audiences/players? And, following Phelan’s argument, does the absence of the performers’ bodies entail the absence of the performers themselves (since the body is metonymic of self)?

When it comes to the analysis of networked and other forms of technologised performance practices, I ask, which body is Phelan referring to? Would it be Harvey’s and Samyn’s corporeal bodies, originally based in New York City and Ronse, striving to meet weekly in a transcontinental love-making? Or the ‘translation’ of those bodies into visual and sonar landscapes? Is Phelan alluding to the *CYSMN?* runners’ corporeal bodies embedded within the urban landscape, or their digital bodies manifested as avatars online? Are these intrinsically interlinked body-manifestations distinct from each other? When it comes to the audiences/players, is Phelan talking about their corporeal bodies dispersed around the world, or their digital avatars? Which of these bodies –if any– can be considered as ‘metonymic of self’? Are analyses of the body as a humanist site of identity and self still pertinent? Can one afford to ignore the multiple discourses on post-humanist bodies, cybernetic conceptions of the body as a communications network,⁵⁴⁹ cyborgian “hybrids of machine and organism”,⁵⁵⁰ or notions of the post-human that is seen, according to Giannachi,

(...) as an entity able to participate in distributed cognition dispersed throughout the body, the environment, and possibly other bodies. (...) the body becomes a distributed virtual community. Although agency still exists, it becomes a ‘distributed function’ (in Mitchell and Thurtle, 2004: 245-6) whereupon my body could become yours and ‘I’ really could become ‘you’.⁵⁵¹

⁵⁴⁸ Phelan, P. *Unmarked*, p. 150.

⁵⁴⁹ Wiener, N. Cited by: Thomas, D. *Feedback and Cybernetics: Reimagining the Body in the Age of the Cyborg*, 1995 In: Featherstone, M. and Burrows, R. (eds) *Cyberspace / Cyberbodies / Cyberpunk*, p. 25.

⁵⁵⁰ Haraway, D. J. *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, p. 150.

⁵⁵¹ Giannachi, G. *The Politics of New Media Theatre: Life^{®TM}* Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2007, p. 83.

Are (any of) these bodies metonymic of presence –or not?

Additionally, I ask: do these augmented/expanded/displaced/dispersed/shared bodies differ that radically from our corporeal ones? The question is, to an extent, a rhetorical one, and the answer is rather obvious: yes, they do. Their differences are perceptual/conceptual, ontological and physiological/proprioceptive, phenomenological and metaphysical to say the least. I do not intend to argue that corporeal and cyborgian bodies coincide. What I want to ask though is, where do these bodies meet? Where do they overlap? Are flesh-bodies to be reduced to actualities? Do cyborgian ones need to be rooted within humanist analyses for them to be defined (and celebrated or demonised) as counterparts of *the* sacred-versus-obsolete body? Is it productive to operate within such binaries, which are always constructed, according to Lefebvre, as logical and linguistic phenomena, and thus away from body-centric discourses?⁵⁵²

When it comes to networked and other forms of technologised performance, as Hayles points out, “questions about presence and absence do not yield much leverage”.⁵⁵³ How could they, when the corporeal body is not there to ‘stand’ for presence? Phelan’s discourse refers to visceral performances staged in physical space, where the performer’s body exists “in the plenitude of its apparent visibility and availability”.⁵⁵⁴ Hayles, on the other hand, discusses situations where “the avatar both is and is not present, just as the user⁵⁵⁵ both is and is not inside the screen.”⁵⁵⁶ I want to argue that the ambiguous state that Hayles’s avatar occupies, that is, the state of presence-absence, is due to its separation from materiality through the ‘loss’ (“but let me not call it a loss”⁵⁵⁷) of corporeality. Such is the case –to an extent and in different ways– in both *CYSMN?* and *Wirefire*.

Along with this qualitative ambiguity of the presence-absence state, Hayles raises a further ambivalent point in the spatial coordinates of the user: is she or is she not *inside* the screen? Hayles is not the first to articulate this spatial (as well as ontological) ambiguity that emerges in the experience and analysis of virtual reality technologies as well as networked performance practices. As cited earlier, Sherry Turkle, in her exploration of online communication environments such as MUDs and MOOs, wondered whether we have not altogether migrated *within* our computer screens: as we become “increasingly intertwined with

Original emphasis.

⁵⁵² Lefebvre, H. *La Présence et l’Absence*, p. 227.

⁵⁵³ Hayles, N. K. *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 27. Hayles specifically refers to the technologies of virtual reality rather than any technologised performance practices. Nevertheless, I consider that the problematics these technologies raise around issues of presence and absence apply to most emergent, hybrid forms of performance that employ networking and/or other digital technologies.

⁵⁵⁴ Phelan, P. *Unmarked*, p. 150.

⁵⁵⁵ Hayles employs the term to refer to the user of a VR environment. In networked and other technologised performance practices the term ‘user’ could apply to both performers and audiences.

⁵⁵⁶ Hayles, N. K. *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 27.

⁵⁵⁷ Harvey, A. and Samyn, M. *A Secret History of Wirefire*.

technology and with each other via the technology”, she asked, are we living our lives *on* or *in* the screen?⁵⁵⁸ Turkle suggested in 1995 through *Life On The Screen* that our enmeshment with technology has made us cyborgs, “transgressive mixtures of biology, technology, and code.”⁵⁵⁹ Hayles, too, has demonstrated how this binary has long become obsolete, since we have all become post-human. Even before our bodies(/selves) became post-human though, were they not both actual –that is, tangible and concrete in their corporeal presence– and virtual –in their *potentiality*? Brian Massumi has argued that:

The body is as immediately virtual as it is actual. The virtual, the pressing crowd of incipencies and tendencies, is a realm of *potential*. In potential is where futurity combines, unmediated, with pastness, where outsides are infolded, and sadness is happy (...). The virtual is a lived paradox where what are normally opposites coexist, coalesce, and connect (...). The body is as immediately abstract as it is concrete; its activity and expressivity extend, as on their underside, into an incorporeal, yet perfectly real, dimension of pressing potential.⁵⁶⁰

Let me return to Phelan’s statement: following her discussion, the notion of presence appears to be fairly straightforward. The reason it is straightforward is that Phelan’s discussion of presence is (naively, unbearably and inspirationally) purist. It follows that presence is simple, as long as the performance encounters are *purely physical*. Within such visceral encounters staged in physical space, the performer’s body(/self) is *corporeal*: it is the one-and-only, ‘original’, auratic, humanist body that exists “in the plenitude of its apparent visibility and availability”⁵⁶¹ –a physical body that you, as an audience, can perceive with your senses and intellect in proximity to your own; a body that you can see, smell, touch within the present moment. In *Wirefire* and *CYSMN?*, though, there are no ‘original’ bodies in proximity to the audiences/players. The original bodies have been replaced by digital ecologies. Nevertheless, I would like to suggest that the bodies engaged in *CYSMN?* are metonymic of both self and presence. This is not because cyborgian bodies prescribe to humanist qualities and values. Rather because, following Massumi, the ‘apparent’ flesh-bodies in Phelan’s discourse are as virtual as the cyborgian ones that networked performers and audiences/players (dis)incarnate. And the other way round: Harvey and Samyn’s bodies, as well as the *CYSMN?* runners’ bodies, become actualised –though they are often neither visible nor available–via their performance. I argue that, what these bodies have in common is, as Massumi points out, a “perfectly real dimension of pressing potential”. And this is where performance comes into play: performing bodies, whether visceral or virtual, proximal or dispersed, or otherwise, are bodies attaining to this dimension. Bodies on stage are bodies striving to fulfill a little of this ‘pressing potential’.

⁵⁵⁸ Turkle, S. *Life on the Screen*, p. 21.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁰ Massumi, B. *The Autonomy of Affect*, p. 224. Original emphasis.

⁵⁶¹ Phelan, P. *Unmarked*, p.150.

If one accepts that the performing bodies of Harvey, Samyn and Blast Theory are metonymic of self and thus presence, one also has to ask: what is presence within this context? In networked encounters, as Hayles, Turkle and others have observed,⁵⁶² ‘presence’ is *not* straightforward. When it comes to such encounters, the bodily presence, self-evident in its corporeality –the pure, ‘absolute’ presence-as-we-know-it from the physical world (that is, the opposite of absence)– mutates into something else. This new morphing of ‘presence’ is no more situated within a single humanist subject and is no more distinct from, let alone opposed to, absence. Within this context presence can be plural; it can also be perceived as absence and the reverse. Instantiations of presence and absence become multiple and interwoven, impossible to disengage: they become ‘*presence-absence(s)*’. These paradoxical *presence-absence(s)* are hybrids between relative physical absence⁵⁶³ or dislocation (of the corporeal body in relation to other corporeal bodies), and relational presence (distributed moments of presence as dynamic connections rather than material engagements). I believe that these paradoxical, hybrid states of being, call for new understandings of presence in performance. Once the self exceeds and expands the limits of the corporeal, humanist body to exist as a cyborg, “a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction”,⁵⁶⁴ physical proximity/distance no more constitute the sole criteria for presence and absence. Hence presence and absence can neither be safely identified as conditions nor attributed as qualities any more. Certainties dissolve, as presence-absence(s) are based on doubt: presence needs to be manifested in order to be perceived; and it needs to establish the validity of its manifestation(s) for it to be accepted as an ‘authentic’ condition or quality. Even so, it incorporates and coexists with (physical) absence. Absence, on the other hand, also needs to be secured, as it can no more be safely assumed to be pure, vacant of any presence.

At this point of ambiguity there is nothing to ensure that what we perceive as presence is not, in fact, an absence; and what we consider as absence does not ‘leak’ traces of presence. I wonder though: is the notion of presence as doubt, as an ambiguous condition or quality that co-exists with –rather than opposes– absence something new, introduced exclusively by the networking and VR technologies? Phelan herself suggests that, in his plays, Samuel Beckett “makes clear that presence is doubt; presence is impossible without doubt; doubt is the signature of presence.”⁵⁶⁵ Indeed, Beckett’s characters often find themselves situated in the same paradoxical state of presence-absence as Hayles’s VR users and Turkle’s MUD players. Take

⁵⁶² Such as Allucquère Rosanne Stone, Eduardo Kac and Machiko Kusahara, among others.

⁵⁶³ I discuss this physical absence as ‘relative’, as I consider that physical presence depends not just on the corporeal body but also on a socially constructed self, situated within a specific social and spatio-temporal context, which overlaps with but also exceeds and expands the body.

⁵⁶⁴ Haraway, D. A Cyborg Manifesto, p. 150.

⁵⁶⁵ Phelan, P. *Unmarked*, p. 115.

Not I, for example: the main character in this play is a mouth on stage. According to Beckett's notes: "Stage in darkness but for MOUTH, upstage audience right, about 8' above stage level".⁵⁶⁶ The body is missing. Is it absent? Invisible? Non-existent? We don't know. The only thing we do know is that it is not there. In that instance, the 'MOUTH' is all that the body has been reduced to; and that makes it "metonymic of self, of character, of voice, of 'presence'".⁵⁶⁷ But since the body as a whole is missing, can the MOUTH really 'stand' for presence? Or could it actually be metonymic of absence? Could it signify both? Could the MOUTH be approached as a presence based on doubt, a presence-absence?

Furthering Phelan's report on the –as it seems, always already there– ambiguous nature of presence, Hayles quotes Roy Walker, who was doing tape-recordings for the BBC in the 1950s, on his experience of "the disconcerting effect (...) in the disjunction between voice and presence (he can no longer call himself his own)".⁵⁶⁸ Moreover, Susan Sontag considers a photograph to be "both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence",⁵⁶⁹ linking presence and absence within its "thin slice of space (...) and time."⁵⁷⁰ Finally André Bazin, in his exploration on the ontology of cinema, argues that "it is no longer as certain as it was that there is no middle stage between presence and absence."⁵⁷¹ I think Bazin is right: indeed there is a middle stage between the two. In the same way that bodies have always been virtual as well as actual, the presence-absence dialectic has never held much leverage as a binary within either performance analysis, or life. Indeed, Lefebvre has argued that the two terms cannot be seen as oppositional and, as such, are not sufficient on their own. He has deemed necessary the introduction of a third term, and has suggested 'other':

La présence et l'absence ne peuvent se concevoir comme la double face, le recto et le verso, d'un même fait mental (ou social ou naturel). (...) Au surplus, comme deux termes ne se suffisent pas, il faut introduire un troisième terme: l'inconscient, l'imaginaire, la culture. (...) La troisième terme, ici, c'est l'*autre*, avec ce que ce terme implique (*altérité*, rapport avec l'autre présent/absent –*alteration-aliénation*). [Presence and absence cannot be conceived as the two sides, front and back, of the same mental (or social or natural) phenomenon. (...) Furthermore, as the two terms are not sufficient, we must introduce a third term: the unconscious, the imaginary, culture. (...) The third term, here, is the *other*, with everything this term implies (*otherness*, relationship with the present/absent other –*distortion-alienation*).]⁵⁷²

The introduction of Lefebvre's uncanny 'otherness' in Phelan's equation (body equals

⁵⁶⁶ Beckett, S. *Not I*. London: Faber and Faber, 1973, p. 6.

⁵⁶⁷ Phelan, P. *Unmarked*, p. 150.

⁵⁶⁸ Hayles, N. K. *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 210.

⁵⁶⁹ Sontag, S. *On Photography*. London: Allen Lane Penguin, 1978, p. 16.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 22.

⁵⁷¹ Bazin, A. *What is Cinema?* (Tr.: Grant, H.), Berkeley and London: University of California Press, Vol. 1, 2005, p. 97. Original emphasis.

⁵⁷² Lefebvre, H. *La Présence et l'Absence*, p. 225. My translation.

self equals presence) opens up a conceptual space where analyses of performances like *Wirefire* and *CYSMN?* can unfold beyond the constraints of oppositional discourses. Following Lefebvre, body/ies equal(s) self *and other*, presence-absence *and otherness*. As well as introducing a welcome complexity into the discourse, otherness also introduces a relational dynamic into the presence-absence dialectic that is particularly useful for the analysis of networked performances. Harvey and Samyn in *Wirefire*, as well as the runners, players and long-lost others in *CYSMN?* are, during the performances, present-absent, not as pure states of being (such as the ones that Phelan propagates in *Unmarked*), but in relation to an-other. It is this relationship with the other that defines one's state of being –in cybertheatres as much as in 'real' life.

3.3) The Third Man's Aura

Aristotle had a great argument called the Third Man (...). It goes like this: how can I know that something is an original unless I have another original to compare it to? And how do I know that *that* one is an original without still another to compare *it* to? And so on, forever. The original is dissolved in an infinite regress, for the idea of the original is bound to the idea of the finite. (...) One function of the idea of the original is to close off a proliferating series, to provide a final term that will keep it finite and manageable, because we need finite series on which to make our projections of meaning and value.⁵⁷³

As Lefebvre suggests, the presence-absence dialectic depends, as a binary, on oppositional tactics. Thus, it can only be considered in relation to other dialectical oppositions such as: life-death, self-other, white-black, male-female and so on. Such binary systems normally operate on the basis of a privileged term, usually the first part of the binary, for example: presence, life, self, white, male, followed by a second term that is loaded with negative meaning, for example: absence, death, other, black, female. Although I have already introduced Lefebvre's otherness in the presence-absence dialectic, I want to further examine, and attempt to undo for the purpose of this thesis, another two binary oppositions which are, I believe, fundamental in preserving the status of the presence-absence dialectic as dominant today. These are:

- a) materiality –as opposed to immateriality
- b) originality –as opposed to artificiality and/or simulation.

My question is: how pertinent are these discourses within a postmodern and posthuman context?

3.3.a) On Materiality

⁵⁷³ McEvelley, T. Marginalia, 1985 In: *Origins, Originality + Beyond* Sydney: The Biennale of Sydney, 1986, p. 30.

Can anyone tell me how to /join #real.life?⁵⁷⁴

Firstly, let us establish the dominance of immateriality as the epistemic discourse of the information era. This has formed recent and current discourses on materiality, which seek to understand how it happened that “information lost its body” and came to be conceptualised as “an entity separate from the material forms in which it is thought to be embedded.”⁵⁷⁵ The dominance of immateriality was the outcome of the computer age that brought forth research on artificial intelligence and established the science of cybernetics. Claude Shannon and Norbert Wiener, founders of cybernetics, are generally deemed responsible for spreading a disembodied notion of information, conceptualised as distinct from context and matter.⁵⁷⁶ Hayles argues that cybernetics initiated the process of the “erasure of embodiment” across a broad field of disciplines, and that it facilitated the equation between humans and machines, which led to the conception of the cyborg.⁵⁷⁷

Does the dominance of immateriality as an epistemic discourse entail that discourses on materiality are not pertinent today? I think that the opposite is true: the quest for disembodiment –and, effectively, immortality– through the sciences of cybernetics and AI, as well as science fiction and popular culture, has produced dystopic fantasies, which some of us now strive to escape. Escape how? By bringing back into focus embodiment and materiality – though not as nostalgic visions of the past, but as inscribed within a current, posthuman context. This is Hayles’ project in *How We Became Posthuman*. In this book Hayles undertakes to foreground embodiment and materiality by demonstrating that thought depends “on the embodied form enacting it.”⁵⁷⁸ She proposes that the current historical moment provides us with an opportunity to “put back into the picture the flesh” and “keep disembodiment from being rewritten (...) into prevailing concepts of subjectivity.”⁵⁷⁹ Supporting Hayles, Mark B. Hansen’s *New Philosophy for New Media* approaches embodiment as inseparable from the cognitive activity of the brain.⁵⁸⁰ Hansen’s project is to embrace the materiality of technology that makes it contextual and dependent on specificities of location, space and time, while restoring the link between affectivity and body (of flesh), by foregrounding the body as the ‘coprocessor’ of information. Furthermore, Anna Munster, in *Materializing New Media*, undertakes the task of unearthing the relationalities between human matter and technological materialities, and

⁵⁷⁴ Internet Relay Chat (IRC) enthusiast in: Turkle, S. *Life on the Screen*, p. 186.

⁵⁷⁵ Hayles, N. K. *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 2.

⁵⁷⁶ See: Wiener, N. *Cybernetics or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*. New York and Paris: The Technology Press, 1948.

⁵⁷⁷ Hayles, N. K. *How We Became Posthuman*, pp. 1-13.

⁵⁷⁸ Hayles, N. K. *How We Became Posthuman*, p. xiv.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 5.

⁵⁸⁰ See: Hansen, M. B. *New Philosophy for New Media*. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2004.

suggests that we need to treat both as “open-ended propositions (...) continually in the process of being made and unmade.”⁵⁸¹

Hayles, Hansen and Munster approach their subjects from different viewpoints and follow varied methodological paradigms.⁵⁸² Nonetheless they all attempt (successfully, I think) to foreground ideas and practices of materiality and embodiment within the current historical context of the information era, postmodernism, and posthumanism. Within this context, they argue, the challenge is that we do not leave our bodies behind in the quest of a utopian (dystopian?) disembodied future where, by being able to become the information we have created, we will achieve immortality. Instead, as Hayles puts it, the challenge is to remember that “information (...) cannot exist apart from the embodiment that brings it into being as a material entity in the world.”⁵⁸³ Munster further suggests that we need to shift our attention from the tension between information and matter towards what she calls ‘digitality’: “a virtual ecology of bodies, technologies and socialities.”⁵⁸⁴

This does not mean that materiality, as the first term of the (materiality vs. immateriality) binary, gets to keep all the positive connotations, and that immateriality is rectified as the negative counterpart. I should point out that Hayles’s, Hansen’s and Munster’s discourses come from the viewpoint of the ‘flesh that has been left behind’, a viewpoint that was brought forth by cybernetics during the 1950s and 1960s, and has been dominant ever since. I suggest that it is Hayles who initiated an all-important shift in the materiality vs. immateriality discourse with her book *How We Became Posthuman* in the late 1990s. Following Hayles’s suggestion that it is time to re-foreground embodiment, Hansen and Munster, amongst others, joined this discussion, arguing against idealised notions of immateriality and disembodiment, and aiming to shift our focus back on the materialities of the body-of-flesh. This discussion, as well as Hayles’s own argument, purposefully steers clear of the reconstruction of yet another binary that would foreground the body, pushing immateriality and information into the background; instead, it argues for a co-existence, a complementarity of the two, or as Munster puts it, a “virtual ecology” that can endorse “bodies, technologies, socialities” and any hybrid species that (will) evolve in their pairing. In that sense, I argue that the materiality-immateriality opposition is not pertinent within a posthuman context, not because any one term has made the other redundant, but because they have ceased to be a

⁵⁸¹ Munster, A. *Materializing New Media*, p. 13.

⁵⁸² Hayles has an English literature background, Hansen is a philosopher, and Munster a media theorist. Regarding their methodology: Hansen aims to propose a phenomenology specific to new media, Hayles positions her arguments on a combined analysis of history, theory and fiction, and Munster focuses on the aesthetics and ethics of ‘digitality’.

⁵⁸³ Hayles, N. K. *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 49.

⁵⁸⁴ Munster, A. *Materializing New Media*, p. 155.

binary. I suggest that, from a posthuman perspective, materiality and immateriality have become a hybrid '(im)materiality', in the same way that presence and absence have merged into a 'presence-absence'.

3.3.b) On Originality

The term one doesn't hear so much any more is "original". (...) We've begun to wonder what it might mean.⁵⁸⁵

I believe that the conceptual dichotomy of presence-absence as we know it depends on the binary of originality vs. artificiality. This binary opposition, like the materiality-immateriality opposition, is neither productive nor pertinent within a posthuman context. The assumption that the corporeal body is an 'original', whereas all its representations, reproductions, transformations and/or extensions, are artifacts or 'artificial' is, I think, central in these oppositional dialectics. Accordingly, our culture often approaches materiality as the bearer of truth, and immateriality (or its impression) as a potential trickster. Kusahara's discussion on telerobotics is representative of this attitude:

Our culture is undergoing a truly drastic change in terms of our physical and psychological relationship with space and other bodies. Digital technology (...) has brought us the notion of disembodied presence. We can no longer simply believe what our eyes see and our ears hear. Telerobotics makes it possible to represent oneself in far-away places through a network. But how do others know that the robot is operated by a real person? And how do we know that the robot is representing the world accurately back to us?⁵⁸⁶

Kusahara's questions "how do we know?" and "how do others know" exemplify the confusion that follows the loss of our material tokens of truth. In telerobotics, the robot becomes, for us (its operators) on the other side of the screen/world, its reproduction –so how do we know that the robot actually exists? And how do other people know that we –and not someone else, somewhere else– are the robot's operators, or that the robot does not follow a set of built-in instructions?

In virtual worlds the questions multiply. Take *Wirefire* as an example: How do we know that Harvey and Samyn are performing live every Thursday night at midnight? How do we know that the performance is not a random remix of files generated by the *Wirefire* database? How do we know that they are really based in USA and Belgium respectively?⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸⁵ McEvelley, T. *Marginalia*, p. 30.

⁵⁸⁶ Kusahara, M. *Presence, Absence, and Knowledge in Telerobotic Art*, 2000 In: Goldberg, K. (ed.) *The Robot in the Garden: Telerobotics and Telepistemology in the Age of the Internet*. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2000, p. 200.

⁵⁸⁷ This, as I mentioned earlier, proved to be only part of the story as they moved in together less than a year after they launched this piece.

How do we know that the 'live' streams are not prerecorded? How do we know that the specs of dust on our computer screens are not random and that they represent audiences? What's more, how do we know that Harvey and Samyn actually exist? That they are two and not one or many? That they are humans and not bots? Maybe we don't. According to Turkle, "traditional ideas about identity have been tied to a notion of authenticity that such virtual experiences actively subvert. (...) the self is not only decentered but multiplied without limit."⁵⁸⁸ In current paradigms of augmented and virtual environments, this decentralisation and multiplicity does not only apply to questions of identity but also to the subject's actual existence as a (post-)human entity. The question is not so much 'who are you?' but 'what are you?'.

Walter Benjamin, in his influential essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, discusses aura in relation to presence.⁵⁸⁹ He argues that aura is tied to the presence of an original (artistic, historical, or natural) object, and its "unique existence" at the specific (physical) spatial and temporal frame within which this is situated.⁵⁹⁰ Concerning the artistic object Benjamin argues that, although the object itself can be reproduced, thus substituting "a plurality of copies for a unique existence", its aura cannot.⁵⁹¹ What reproduction does, according to Benjamin, is cause the decay of the aura and, along with it, the decay of the original, unique object or situation. "Contemporary masses", he argues, in their urge to bring things 'closer' to them, are "overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction."⁵⁹² In so doing, they are replacing uniqueness and permanence by transitoriness and reproducibility.

Benjamin's analysis focuses on the reproduction of both the art object and the performer's body on the screen in film. He quotes Pirandello as expressing his concern that the film actor feels: "as if in exile –exiled not only from the stage but also from himself. With a vague sense of discomfort he feels inexplicable emptiness: his body loses its corporeality, it evaporates".⁵⁹³ Consequently, says Benjamin, the aura that envelopes the actor as well as the character s/he incarnates, vanishes along with the corporeal body: "for the first time –and this is the effect of the film– man has to operate with his whole living person, yet forgoing his aura. For aura is tied to his presence; there can be no replica of it."⁵⁹⁴ But if aura is tied to the performer's presence the question is, what constitutes 'the performer's presence' today, since, as discussed, in networked and other mediatised performances presence has merged with

⁵⁸⁸ Turkle, S. *Life on the Screen*, p. 185.

⁵⁸⁹ Benjamin, W. (Arendt, H. ed.) *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, 1955 In: Benjamin, W. *Illuminations*. (Tr.: Zorn, H.), London: Pimlico, 1999.

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 214.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 215.

⁵⁹² *Ibid*, p. 217.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid*, pp. 222-223.

⁵⁹⁴ Benjamin, W. *Illuminations*, p. 223.

absence?

In Benjamin's analysis presence appears to be tied to the one-and-only, 'original', corporeal human body, and thus to be situated within a specific, unique and non-reproducible framework of space-time. Since Benjamin considers presence as unique and impossible to reproduce, and aura as tied to the presence, it follows that aura is also non-reproducible. If one accepts Benjamin's argumentation it follows that a) all reproductions, representations, transformations and/or extensions of the corporeal body are artifacts or 'artificial' (as opposed to 'original'), since they are often situated within networked, distributed space-times and b) presence *cannot* be experienced through or attributed to such reproductions, representations, transformations and/or extensions, since presence is tied to the 'original', corporeal body. This discussion suggests that what *can* be experienced through such manifestations of the body/self is either absence (as the opposite of presence), or nothingness (as absence still relates to physicality, albeit through an oppositional dialectic). Moreover, it suggests that, since there is only one 'original' body, all hybrid bodily manifestations can only be conceived as artificial versions of this one-and-only, auratic, corporeal human body. I wonder what happens though if one does accept, as I have argued throughout this Chapter, that Benjamin's notion of presence no more exists as such –that is, as a pure quality or state– but, instead, it has been replaced by presence-absence and otherness. What does this make of the 'original' human body and the aura tied to it? As I see it, Phelan is approaching the issue of presence along the same lines when she argues that the (performing) body is metonymic of 'presence' and self.⁵⁹⁵ Phelan, like Benjamin, assumes the presence of the one, auratic, 'original' human body in the specific, physical spatiotemporal frame of the theatre stage. This body she considers as a reassurance not only of the performer's presence, but also of his/her actual existence, both in relative (in relation to us, the audience's) and absolute (in relation to life and death) terms. Being fully –almost excessively– visible and available, this body, says Phelan, promises the "lack of Being" as the performer disappears to represent someone/something else.⁵⁹⁶

This is all well as long as one assumes that 'presence' is of auratic, humanist bodies only. When it comes to networked encounters and performances, though, there are no humanist bodies and no auratic originalities to be assumed. Networked encounters take place in cyberstages that are made, more often than not, through a layering of physical and digital, actual and fictional elements. Humanist bodies/selves do not have a place in such environments. To exist in such environments, they become enmeshed "at all levels of materiality and metaphor with information, communication and biotechnologies, and with other non-human actors"; they

⁵⁹⁵ Phelan, P. *Unmarked*, p. 150.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 150-151.

become hybrids of “organic and inorganic forms and processes.”⁵⁹⁷ The emergence of such hybrid space-times along with the creatures that inhabit them –us, already post-human–⁵⁹⁸ introduces a pov of the world where the binary opposition between the ‘original’ or ‘natural’ on the one hand, and the ‘simulation’ or ‘artificial’ on the other, becomes meaningless. Within this context, Anders Michelsen calls for a study of the ‘artificial’ “as something not *primarily* divided by the inherited dichotomies of man-machine, mechanism-organism, etc., but rather *imagined*, thus created, from the standpoint of an organizational *novum* with an *ontological contingency beyond inherited determinations and constraints*.”⁵⁹⁹

Michelsen thus encourages a view of the ‘artificial’ as something that is not dependent on an ‘original’ through a set of inherited, oppositional dialectics. This imagined artificial cannot be described as non-original or non-authentic, since it does not copy, duplicate or otherwise relate itself to any original. Instead, it exists on its own accord; its ontology is novel and thus, at the current moment, ambiguous, un-predefined and undetermined. Michelsen’s call to look at the artificial “from the standpoint of an organizational *novum*” makes me think of it as yet another ‘original’: what else is not defined by “inherited determinations and constraints” – that is, these of the ‘original’ in relation to which the ‘artificial’ can only exist?

3.4 Pattern - Randomness

[W]hat was being sent back and forth over the wires wasn’t just information, it was bodies.⁶⁰⁰

One might speculate that the boundaries of our bodies will continue to dissolve and that the question “Who am I?” will become less relevant in the future, replaced by “What is all that I can be?”⁶⁰¹

The first assumption of a posthuman pov, as articulated by Hayles, is “the privileging of

⁵⁹⁷ Kember, S. *Cyberfeminism and Artificial Life*, p. vii.

⁵⁹⁸ Hayles in *How We Became Posthuman* argues that ‘the posthuman’ is a historically specific construction, which we already have become.

⁵⁹⁹ Michelsen, A. The Imaginary of the Artificial: Automata, Models, Machinics –On Promiscuous Modeling as Precondition for Poststructuralist Ontology, 2006 In: Chun, W. H. K. and Keenan, T. (eds) *New Media, Old Media: A History and Theory Reader*. New York and London: Routledge, 2006, p. 235. Original emphasis.

⁶⁰⁰ Stone, A. R. *The War of Desire and Technology*, p. 7. Stone refers to phone sex.

⁶⁰¹ Paul, C. Cyborg as Cyberbody. Available from: <http://www.artlab23.net/issue1/Cyborg.html> 2002 [accessed 11/03/2006]

informational pattern over material instantiation”.⁶⁰² Hayles argues that information is pattern rather than presence. This does not entail that non-information is the absence of pattern, that is, randomness: scientific developments such as the chaos and complexity theories have shown that information can be identified, paradoxically, with both pattern and randomness. Pattern and randomness do not form a binary opposition, and thus do not follow the same set of oppositional strategies as the binaries of presence-absence, materiality-immateriality, and originality-artificiality. Unlike the binary structures that are criticised by Lefebvre for their logo-centrism (and which, I have argued, do not form a productive basis for performance analyses, partly due to their linguistic rather than performative origin) pattern and randomness are bound together in a dialectic that makes them complementary to one another.⁶⁰³ Such systems are not comprised by one privileged and one negative term: randomness is not seen as the absence of pattern, but as the ground for pattern to emerge. “If pattern is the realization of a certain set of possibilities”, explains Hayles, “randomness is that much, much larger set of everything else”.⁶⁰⁴ Since pattern and randomness are complementary rather than oppositional, we do not need to distinguish between one or the other: a system can –and normally does– integrate both in variable degrees and combinations.

Hayles goes on to examine how notions of pattern and randomness apply not just to formal theory, but also to ‘everyday life’ situations such as virtual environments.⁶⁰⁵ She concludes that, in such environments, the focus shifts from questions of presence and absence – which are impossible to answer in any satisfactory way due to the presence-absence paradox– to questions about pattern and randomness, such as: “What patterns can the user discover through interaction with the system? Where do these patterns fade into randomness? What stimuli cannot be encoded within the system and therefore exist only as extraneous noise? When and how does this noise coalesce into pattern?”⁶⁰⁶ Hayles suggests that we look at notions of pattern as the outcome of our interactions with the system and other users, as complementary to presence; and at notions of randomness as the outcome of the noise created by stimuli that cannot be encoded within the system, as complementary to absence. Randomness can turn into pattern when extraneous stimuli merge together, whereas pattern can gradually fade into

⁶⁰² Hayles, N. K. *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 2.

⁶⁰³ For a more detailed analysis see: *Ibid*, p. 25.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p. 286.

⁶⁰⁵ Hayles primarily looks at VR environments (which are not exactly ‘everyday life’ situations); nevertheless, I believe that similar issues are raised through other types of virtual or hybrid environments that have become part of our everyday lives, such as various types of online multi-user environments (including virtual worlds), telematic connections (for example, teleconferencing that has become a casual activity through protocols such as skype), and augmented reality environments. Indeed, since Hayles’s book was published in 1995 there has been a massive development in terms of the integration of such practices into our everyday lives. See also the discussion about Second Life in Chapter 1, 1.2.a.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 27.

randomness.

Further on, Hayles argues that pattern-randomness systems evolve towards an open future marked by unpredictability, unlike presence-absence systems that evolve towards a known end. She explains that, in presence-absence systems, the metaphysics of presence have front-loaded meaning into the system by assuming the existence of a stable origin.⁶⁰⁷ Although deconstructionist approaches exposed the instability of these systems, Hayles reasons that in order to do so they required a metaphysics of presence, which kept them within the compass of the presence-absence dialectic. She goes on to claim that pattern-randomness systems, unlike presence-absence systems, have not been front-loaded with meaning, as they are not based on any coherent origin. Instead, meaning is made possible –though not inevitable– by evolution.⁶⁰⁸

As discussed above, one of the reasons I consider the presence-absence dialectic as insufficient within a posthuman context is its dependence on notions of originality and artificiality, since presence has been articulated as a quality of the auratic, and thus ‘original’, humanist body/self. The introduction of Lefebvre’s ‘otherness’ helps deconstruct presence-absence as a binary opposition and is invaluable in terms of bridging notions of presence-absence with liveness, as I will go on to argue. Nonetheless it is not, I think, sufficient as a discourse for the analysis of posthuman presences. Here I want to propose that pattern-randomness systems are necessary for the analysis of networked, posthuman encounters as well as cybertheatres, exactly because they are not based on a coherent origin that would entail a pre-loaded set of meanings. Since they start as free of meaning and oppositional strategies, pattern-randomness systems are also free of any pre-loaded sets of moral judgments. This makes any distinction between ‘original’ and ‘artificial’ meaningless in the context of such systems: as pattern-randomness systems do not recognise origins, they also do not recognise originals. The very notion of originality becomes devoid of meaning, and thus value. This absence of pre-loaded meaning/judgment creates a conceptual space that is vacant in terms of pre-imposed values –which is exactly the ground needed for an “organisational *novum*”⁶⁰⁹ to occur. Pattern-randomness systems thus come with a metaphysical and moral ‘emptiness’, which allows for the unforeseen, unfamiliar, and novel to emerge and manifest itself as such (rather than patenting itself on ‘origins’ and ‘originals’ in order to justify its existence). This vacant conceptual space is useful for the analysis of phenomena that are emergent and still in-flux, and could thus profit from this positive ‘lack’ –such as posthuman bodies, hybrid spacetimes and networked encounters.

⁶⁰⁷ Hayles refers to the work of Jacques Derrida on the metaphysics of presence in *Of Grammatology*, where presence is allied with Logos, God and teleology. Ibid, p. 285.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁹ See Michelsen as cited above.

I have suggested that changes in theatre and performance's spatial coordinates (e.g. hybrid and trans-local environments/cyberstages) and embodied experiences (e.g. decentralisation and multiplication of the self through the use of prosthetics, extensions, and avatars) demand a re-evaluation of the presence-absence dialectic as this applies to the performer/audience relationship and, following Hayles's discourse, I have introduced pattern-randomness as a complementary dialectic within the field of networked performance analysis. This is because physicality evokes presence, whereas information evokes pattern. Immateriality (as an epistemic discourse) and cyborgian existence (as our current state-of-being) challenge purist notions of presence, while they endorse information, and to that extent, pattern. Within the information era, established notions of presence and absence cannot but lose their meaning as they merge into an, often a-signifying, state of presence-absence. Within this context, the difference between presence and absence becomes a difference of *degree* rather than of *nature* or *status quo*. Thus, a posthuman creature can be described at any given moment as 'more present than absent' or the reverse, which can also be articulated as 'producing more pattern than randomness' through his/her connections and engagements with the system and other users.⁶¹⁰ Through these encounters develop patterns, which gradually fade into randomness, which again coalesces into pattern, and so on. Hayles warns us though that this shift from presence-absence to pattern-randomness has had –and could continue to have– a serious implication, namely, the “*devaluation of materiality and embodiment*”.⁶¹¹ In her treatise, she repeatedly stresses that these two sets of dialectics should not be approached as antagonistic, but as “mutually enhancing and supportive”.⁶¹² I want to reiterate the importance of approaching the dialectics of presence-absence and pattern-randomness as complementary rather than antagonistic or, worse, mutually exclusive, in particular within the frame of performance analysis. My engagement with systems, networks and socialities, even though extended beyond my material body, is still situated within and depends upon this very body of flesh.

Another manifestation of the shift of focus from presence-absence to pattern-randomness is, according to Hayles, the shift of emphasis from ownership to access.⁶¹³ Ownership, says Hayles, implies presence (something must be tangible or identifiable for someone to wish to own it), whereas access implies pattern recognition (as, for example, when someone breaks into a computer system tracing patterns to access information). This transition means a reconfiguration of the private-public distinction: whereas possession (linked to

⁶¹⁰ According to Munster, who quotes Steven Shaviro, connection is to the network (and away from sociality), whereas engagement is an active and ongoing social confrontation. Munster, *A Materializing New Media*, p. 152.

⁶¹¹ Hayles, N. K. *How We Became Posthuman*, pp. 43-49. Original emphasis.

⁶¹² *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

presence) implies the existence of a private life, access (linked to pattern) implies the penetration of information in all private spaces. *Wirefire* is an example of such reconfiguration, as the performance challenges notions of private and public space by providing access (through observation and participation) to a very 'private' moment of E8Z!'s lives: their act of virtual love-making. Harvey and Samyn do not perform their love-making as physical bodies/presences within a private space; instead, love-making becomes the act of producing patterns (and randomness) via their engagement with each other, the *Wirefire* technical platform, and their audiences. This presence, made of pattern/randomness, provides the relational circumstances that allow for audiences to access an intimate encounter, while this remains intimate.

3.5 (A) Liveness

the single most important point to make with respect to the continued attractiveness of live performance in a mediatized culture is that, like liveness itself, the desire for live experiences is a product of mediatization. "[I]t is possible to see how the proliferation of reproductions actually intensifies the desire for origin, even if that origin is increasingly sensed as an erotic lack rather than a tangible and satisfying presence".⁶¹⁴

In summer 2005 I took part in the PARIP (Practice As Research In Performance) conference (UK).⁶¹⁵ I was attending a workshop led by Professor Johannes Birringer,⁶¹⁶ an artist and theorist who explores the convergence of contemporary performance, dance and new media. This particular workshop addressed practices of telematic dance. The plan was to engage in telematic improvisation with Birringer's colleagues in the States but due to a technical problem we had no Internet access. As we had to make this work locally, we ended up dancing with each other in the following way: four people went on stage, two of them performing, two of them recording.⁶¹⁷ Each 'cameraman' was focusing on one performer. The video recordings were fed into Birringer's computer systems and projected onto two screens in real time (a minor delay was perceptible). As the two performers should have been miles apart, an attempt was made to avoid physical contact and, instead, interact with each other's screen image. The aim was for the two performers to dance together on the screens. Workshop participants who did not want to get actively involved formed the audience.

Birringer explained that, as in cinema, the camera's movement over the performer's

⁶¹⁴ Connor, S. *Postmodernist Culture: an Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary*. Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989, p. 151. Cited by: Auslander, P. *Liveness*, p. 55.

⁶¹⁵ PARIP conference website. Available from: <http://www.bris.ac.uk/parip/> [accessed 12/08/2006]

⁶¹⁶ Birringer is Chair in Drama and Performance Technologies at the School of Arts, Brunel University West London, as well as artistic director of the multimedia ensemble AlienNation. Johannes Birringer website. Available from: <http://www.brunel.ac.uk/about/acad/sa/artstaff/drama/Johannes> [accessed 24/08/2006]. AlienNation website available from: <http://www.aliennationcompany.com/> [accessed 24/08/2006]. See also Chapter 1, 1.2.b.

⁶¹⁷ This exercise took place twice to accommodate eight participants. I participated as a performer on stage.

body is as important in this practice as is the movement of the performer. During this exercise, the camera would often focus on details of one's body and movement that the audiences would not normally be able to discern in a physical performance with no digital elements; such as close-ups of the face (eyes, ears, mouth), small imperceptible movements of the body (bending a finger, tightening a fist, small movements of the neck or toes), close-ups of the fabric and its entanglement with the performer's body. The camera was clearly performing as much as the performer was. The result was certainly –if nothing else– beautiful, sensual and aesthetically pleasing. The audiences were watching both the performers on stage and the mediated performance on the screens. If the workshop had functioned as intended, UK-based audiences would be watching only one of the two performers as a physical presence on stage, along with his/her interaction with the digital image of the second performer on the screen; and the same would apply for audiences based in the US. At the same time, online audiences around the world would be able to watch a live stream of both performers on their computer screens at home.

Once the workshop was over a woman in the audience, the artist and scholar Mary Agnes Krell,⁶¹⁸ expressed an objection. Krell's (and others') objection was the following: if one were to be watching the live stream of the performance at home, Krell argued, this would not be called a performance any more –it would be called cinema. She suggested that whether the stream was live (that is, distributed in real time, i.e., at the time of its production) or not, had nothing to do with the experience of the audiences watching from home. For, as far as these audiences were concerned, the experience of watching the 'live' stream of an event with which they could not interact in real time was exactly the same as the experience of watching the recorded documentation of a past event. That is exactly what cinema is, Krell and others argued, an uninterrupted, non-interactive flow of image and sound data that lasts for a specific duration.

I will extend Krell's argument by suggesting that an issue raised by the type of telematic performance Birringer demonstrated is the following: for audiences who are neither 'here' nor 'there' (that is, at any one of the physical locations where the event is partly taking place) but are, instead, 'everywhere' (that is, on-line), the event, albeit 'live', is not –in Lévy's terms– "infinitely open to interaction, transformation, and connection".⁶¹⁹ Instead, it remains "limited" and "closed",⁶²⁰ like any off-line digital arts piece (e.g., CD-ROMs, off-line installations). Since the use of the term live performance implies some kind of presence, and through that, openness (a corporeal presence is always, as a potentiality, open to interaction), I

⁶¹⁸ Mary-Agnes Krell is a media artist and Senior Lecturer in Media Practice and Theory at the Department of Media and Film, University of Sussex (as per 2006). Mary-Agnes Krell website. Available from: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/Users/mak23/> [accessed 24/08/2006]

⁶¹⁹ Lévy, P. *Cyberculture*, p.126.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid*, p.125.

can see why Krell and other audiences were questioning the use of that term for the on-line outcome of Birringer's piece. On the other hand, Birringer and others argued that there is indeed a difference between a live and a pre-recorded stream in terms of audience experience, which has to do with the audiences' awareness of synchronicity: because audiences know that they are watching the performance while this is happening, they relate to it differently, developing stronger feelings of intimacy and sharing than they would be able to experience with a film. This debate refers me back to Kusahara's questions, posed earlier in this Chapter:⁶²¹ if the audiences are not interacting with the performance in any way, how do they *know* that this is a live and not a prerecorded stream? What 'proves' this –apparently so important as to differentiate among genres– quality of liveness? Which, in fact, points again to Krell's argument: if the audiences cannot *know* the difference between a live and a prerecorded stream (and this knowledge should be experiential and not an –often unverifiable– piece of information), then *is there a difference* between this kind of live performance and cinema?

I seem to be going round in circles, falling within the gaps between liveness and mediatization... At this junction, let me put these questions on hold and return to my discussion on presence.

I have up to now argued that, in networked performance and performative encounters, traditional, humanist ideas of presence and absence do not hold much leverage. I have argued, following Hayles and others (Lefebvre, Turkle, Stone, Munster) that, within this context, presence has become multiple (presence(s)) and impregnated with absence (presence-absence(s)). Following Lefebvre, I have suggested that, as this is no longer a binary opposition, the notion of 'otherness' must be introduced into the discourse. Furthermore, following Hayles, I have proposed that the dialectic of pattern and randomness must be approached as complementary to presence-absence. Nonetheless, the PARIP experience demonstrated the following: even if we agree that, within this context, a) presence is always, also, absence, b) presence-absence is in relation to an other, c) presence-absence does not depend on either materiality or originality but is instead produced through pattern and randomness, we still need the criteria that will allow us to identify these presence-absences as such.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, presence is a number of things, among others: "the state of being with or in the same place as a person or thing", "company", "self", "embodied personality", "person or thing physically present", and finally "spiritual or incorporeal being or influence felt or conceived".⁶²² It is interesting then to observe that presence has always been defined not only in relation to self and physicality, but also as a

⁶²¹ See Chapter 3, 2.b.

⁶²² Brown, L. (ed.) *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 3rd Edition, 1993.

relational and even immaterial quality. What is becoming increasingly apparent through this discussion is the need for otherness –as introduced by Lefebvre– as the main key to understanding and experiencing presence-absence. Within the networks, there is no type of presence that can manifest itself as a self-sufficient, self-proclaiming quality or state. This entails that any type of networked presence both involves and depends upon a witness. To act as a witness of presence within this context though one cannot be a passive observer: presence must be experienced and acknowledged by an interactor who cannot coincide with the subject that claims it. I suggest that this is due to the close relationship between presence and availability, already pinpointed by Phelan in her discourse on the use of body as metonymy in performance.⁶²³ Presence signifies availability: it is a social phenomenon, linked with practices of integration, interaction, interrelation and communication –in sum, with all ways of relating to an-other. I thus propose that in our discussion of presence(-absence) –any type of presence, but even more so, presence in the networks– it is *the encounter proper that matters*: the coming together, the being with, the relating to, is what constitutes presence. Consequently, I argue that issues of presence cannot be explored without reference to relationality as a key to ‘linking presences’. Moreover, presences need to be ‘compatible’ for these links to occur.

I can now return to the PARIP incident to suggest that what Krell and others identified in Birringer’s exercise was a lack of compatibility between the presence-absences of the performers online (the live stream of the performance) and the audiences situated in physical space, in front of their computer monitors. The issue here is not whether the stream is ‘live’ or not, but whether the encounter between performers and audiences is ‘alive’. This *living* quality –that differentiates performance from visual and other time-based arts such as cinema– depends not only on synchronicity, but also on relationality. I believe that Krell’s concern was raised through the lack of compatibility between the different types of presence-absence(s) enjoyed by performers and audiences. In effect, these presences were not compatible because their substrates (physicality on one case, digitality on the other) never crossed. On this occasion, performers and audiences remained rooted within different spacetimes that did not merge to produce a hybrid cyberstage where an encounter could potentially occur. Because the two different spacetimes remained enclosed each within its own separate (im)material substrate, the two different types of presences enjoyed by performers and audiences remained incompatible. In this context, the lack of relationality rendered the notion of presence-absence irrelevant.

Let me compare this to the two pieces I have discussed in this thesis, *Wirefire* and *CYSMN?*. As discussed, in *Wirefire* the audiences, based ‘everywhere’ (online), could not just watch the visual performance generated by E8Z! but also interact with it. This interaction was

⁶²³ Phelan, P. *Unmarked*, p. 150.

minimal: all it comprised of was audiences inputting text which was often, but not always, integrated by the performers within the audiovisual landscape. In my view, though minimal, this possibility of interaction was crucial as it rendered the presences between performers and audiences compatible: *Wirefire* audiences could influence, to some extent, the performance while this was taking place, and E&Z! could engage with their audiences' input in real time. This 'opening' of the piece to its audiences, small and simple though it might have been, was what made *Wirefire* *alive*: that is, not just simultaneous (i.e., 'live', a term defined by formal –temporal– criteria), but *relational in present time*. Another factor, which I think was important in terms of sustaining *Wirefire*'s 'aliveness', was the repetitive nature of the live performance as well as the multiple manifestations of the piece. As *Wirefire* existed in different modes (live, random and replay), the audiences could learn for themselves, experientially, to distinguish between the three different ontologies of the piece. Moreover, because the live mode did not take place once but dozens of times, the audiences could gradually develop a trusting relationship with the artists. Furthermore, *CYSMN?* is a 'live' performance/game in the sense that audiences are invited to play together with the runners, in temporal synchronicity. It is also 'alive' because the audiences, in order to play the game, cannot but engage in an intimate relationship with the runners in present time. Not only are the audiences in direct contact with the runners and each other, but they also can see the outcome of their online engagement directly inscribed on the virtual city, where they coexist with the runners and other players. Finally, audiences can witness the outcome of their engagement with the game reflected in the physical city as well, where the runners are situated, through the sightings.

I thus conclude as follows: Kusahara's questions "how do we know", "how do others know" are impossible to answer, and unnecessary to ask. The fact is: we don't know. Not only do we not know, but we do not need to know. And since we don't need to know, we also don't need to prove. Kusahara seeks 'proof' of presence, but she is missing the point: there *is no point in trying to 'prove' presence*. Any such attempt would effectively translate, once more, into "the desire for origin" that Connor describes, which would inevitably be associated with a purist notion of materiality (e.g., a physical, 'auratic', humanist body, situated in physical substrates that have not become 'infected' with digitality), and experienced as "lack" (Connor). I have reasoned that the different types of presences that occur within the electronic realm –presences that are impregnated with absences, presences that are made out of patterns and randomness– are all relational, dependent on otherness and experienced as encounters. Thus, I have argued that we need to shift our attention towards the *encounter proper*. Only through this shift of focus can we appreciate presence for what it really is –encounter– rather than becoming absorbed into futile attempts to prove or disprove it. Focusing on the encounter proper also

entails focusing on *affect*⁶²⁴ rather than perception.⁶²⁵ I further suggest that, when it comes to the discussion of cybertheatres and other networked encounters, the qualitative analysis of the encounter itself, based on criteria of relationality and aliveness, is a valid and effective analytical approach. In short: let us not forget to engage in our attempt to understand. Because presence does not exist if we don't make it happen: as a 'being together', networked presences require a movement towards, an attempt at engagement from all parts. To quote Lefebvre: "La présence n'advient qu'au prix d'un effort (...). Pour rencontrer quelqu'un ou quelque œuvre, il faut aller à la rencontre (...)." ⁶²⁶ [Presence does not occur without the price of an effort (...). To meet a person or a piece, one has to move towards the encounter (...).]

3.6 From E8Z! to Tale of Tales: Games and *The Endless Forest*

"Who are you?" I ask: although I know them as Entropy8Zuper!, their most recent pieces, such as *The Endless Forest*,⁶²⁷ are created by Tale of Tales. "E8Z! is just the two of us" says Samyn.

It has always been like that, our little personal corner of the web. But with Tale of Tales we really took a step towards an audience, in the sense that we wanted to actively make things the wider audience could enjoy (...).

In 2002 E8Z! founded Tale of Tales (ToT), a games design studio based in Ghent, Belgium. ToT's brief is to produce alternative commercial video games for a niche market that does not enjoy the competitiveness, violence and blood shedding involved in most mainstream games. According to their website, their aim is to design and develop "multimedia environments with a strong emphasis on narration, play, emotion and sensuality."⁶²⁸ Through the creation of "elegant and emotionally rich interactive entertainment", ToT target audiences who are, like them, sceptical about gaming.⁶²⁹ The first piece produced by ToT was a demo for 8,⁶³⁰ a single player PC game inspired by different versions of the folk tale *Sleeping Beauty*.

In 8 the main character is a young girl trapped into a palace, which is surrounded by a thick forest. All that the player knows about her is that she is eight years old, deaf and mute, and

⁶²⁴ Brian Massumi defines affect as unqualified intensity, and differentiates it from the qualified intensity of emotion. As such, Massumi claims, affect is not recognizable or ownable, and thus it is resistant to critique. Massumi, B. *The Autonomy of Affect*, pp. 217-239.

⁶²⁵ Here I have to point at Hansen's claim that "perception is necessarily anchored in the activity of the body via the modality of affect." Hansen, M.B.N. *New Philosophy for New Media*, p. 266. Though I agree with Hansen's neo-Bergsonian analysis I want to suggest that, despite being 'anchored in' the body 'via affect' –that is, despite being closely related to affect– perception is a separate, mental, if also bodily, process. I thus consider the shift of focus I argue in favour of to be of importance despite Hansen's claim.

⁶²⁶ Lefebvre, H. *La Présence et l'Absence*, pp. 225-226. (My translation.)

⁶²⁷ Tale of Tales *The Endless Forest* 2005– Available from: <http://tale-of-tales.com/TheEndlessForest/> [accessed 24/082006]

⁶²⁸ Tale of Tales. Tale of Tales. Available from: <http://tale-of-tales.com/information.html> [accessed 24/082006]

⁶²⁹ Ibid.

⁶³⁰ Tale of Tales 8 2003-2005. Available from: <http://www.tale-of-tales.com/8/> [accessed 24/082006]

wears a white dress. The girl is not an avatar –although the player can give her instructions she has a will of her own. Everyone in the palace has been asleep since the Wicked Fairy cursed the Princess to die in her teenage years. A good fairy converted the curse to a hundred years of sleep, and made a thick forest materialise around the palace to protect the Princess and her court during their sleep. Nevertheless, helped by the Wicked Fairy, eight Princes managed to access the palace. This caused a disruption to the spell and, as a result, the Princess and her court have been sleeping for half a millennium. The Wicked Fairy also succeeded to enter the forest in the form of poisonous branches that are threatening the security of the palace’s walls. Only the player and the little girl have the ability to undo the damage done by the Wicked Fairy, and return the Princess and her court back to life and the palace to its former glory. To achieve this, the player and the deaf-mute girl have to collaborate. The girl’s behaviour is influenced by both the player and the environment; so it can often be unexpected. If the player treats her well, the girl will help him/her out. But if s/he neglects her, the girl will find other ways to amuse herself. As well as her behaviour, the girl’s abilities also change as the game evolves: she gradually acquires magical powers that enable her to interact with her environment in new ways. *8* is non-linear, so the player can access the palace at different, non-consecutive points within the 500-year span. The design of the game is inspired by the paintings of 19th Century Orientalists, “a blend of exotic curiosity and self-indulgent fantasy.”⁶³¹

Through *8*, ToT aimed to create an interactive environment that would engage and involve their audiences (now clearly turned into players) giving them a more central role than *Wirefire* ever did. The interface of the game is both sophisticated and easy, targeting novice players, while the game itself is peaceful, non-competitive, non-violent and non-goal-oriented. *8* differs from *Wirefire* in that it is not designed to integrate elements of live performance: it is an off-line single-player PC game. Although the player interacts with the little girl, s/he is still on her own. Unlike *Wirefire*, which offered its audiences a unique performance experience once per week for four years, *8* is designed as a ‘finished’, ‘closed’ piece. A player could potentially engage with the title several times but, as is the case with other single-player games, the game would gradually become predictable as its ‘closed’ form entails a finite number of narrative possibilities. As a single-player game though, I think that *8* could form an important contribution –intervention?– in the genre of computer games. Unfortunately, the gaming industry did not think the same: on May 20, 2005 (three years after the development of the title first started), Samyn posted the following news on the Tale of Tales Forum:

⁶³¹ Tale of Tales. While Beauty Sleeps... Available from: <http://tale-of-tales.com/8/index.html> [accessed 22/08/2006]

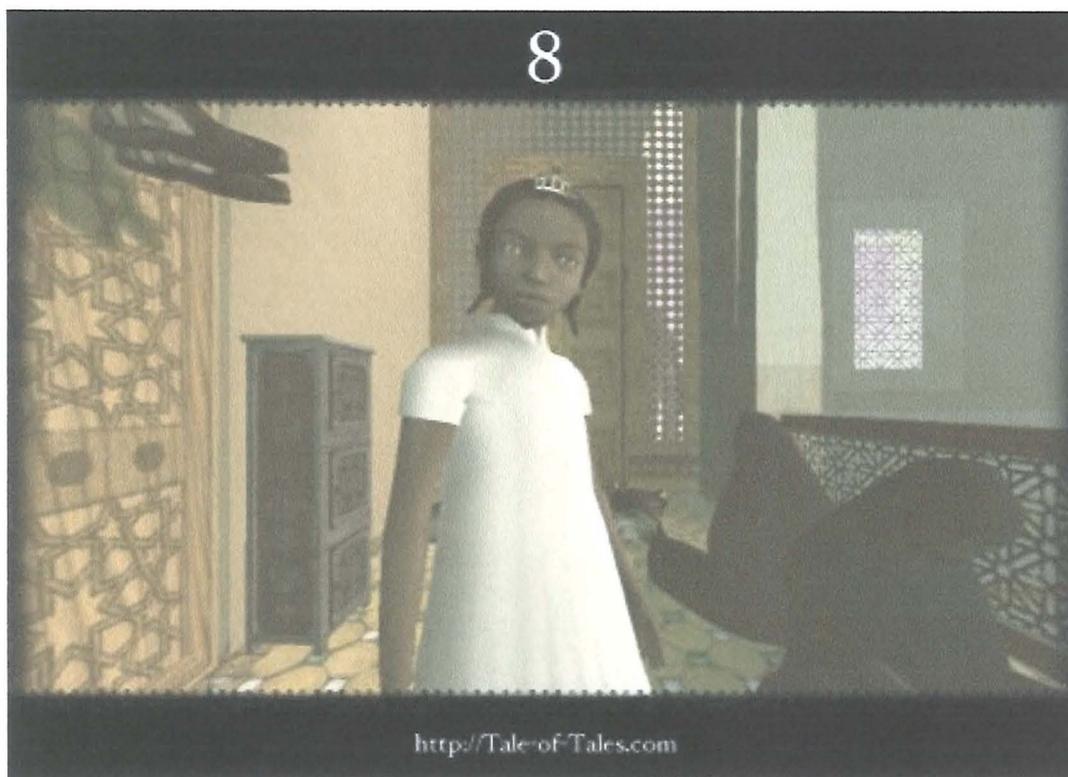


Figure 3.7 Tale of Tales 8 2002-2005⁶³²

Development of 8 frozen due to bad climate in games industry

In spite of virtually unanimous positive response to the design of the game from public, press and publishers alike, Tale of Tales has been unsuccessful in acquiring the necessary funding for the production of 8 (...). There seem to be three reasons for this failure: the refusal of games publishers to support games that do not fit in a specific genre; the worryingly growing trend towards shrinking the PC games market to exclude all people except hardcore gamers; the gender-biased preference for entertainment that contains violence.⁶³³

8 did not manage to persuade the gaming industry about its potential to target new audiences. Arty, sophisticated, peaceful, non-obvious and elegant, 8 was clearly not what the industry associated with commercial success, and no game publisher was prepared to take the risk. Despite its failure to generate funds for 8, Tale of Tales continued to develop interactive entertainment that moved “away from traditional gameplay and towards a more mature interactive art form.”⁶³⁴

The Endless Forest (TEF) was commissioned by the Musée d’Art Moderne Grad-Duc

⁶³² Available from: <http://www.tale-of-tales.com/8/> [accessed 23/08/2006]

⁶³³ Tale of Tales. Forum. Available from: <http://tale-of-tales.com/8/index.html> 20/05/2005 [accessed 23/08/2006]

⁶³⁴ Ibid.

Jean (Museum of Modern Art of Luxemburg) in September 2003.⁶³⁵ This means that *TEF* and *8* were, for a period of two years, being developed as parallel projects. ToT explain that, though different from other computer games, they considered *8* as traditional because it was based on action, had a clear-cut narrative and the player had to perform certain tasks in order to achieve the game's aim. *TEF* emerged as a reaction to these sets of rules about how a game should function. ToT came up with the idea on a train-ride back from Luxemburg: the train was driving through the Ardennes forest and they could see deer roaming in it. It was a bit of a joke to start with, says Samyn: "So next to that [*8*] was *The Endless Forest*, which was sort of an anti-game. It was like, you play a deer, in a forest, and you can't talk, and you can't level up, ha ha! And there's lots of things you can't do, and that's, like, cool!"

One of the reasons ToT (then E8Z!) decided to stop *Wirefire* was that they found its liveness both limited and limiting. *Wirefire* could only be (a)live once per week, while Harvey and Samyn were performing (in) it. According to Samyn:

It only lived an hour per week, while there were still people who were very valid and active participants there. They could probably do a performance themselves (...). So that's where the idea of a persistent world came from. Everybody could have a presence in the environment, and there's not this division between artist and audience.

During the last *Wirefire* performance E8Z! discussed online, with their audiences, the need for a new piece focusing on three main elements: a) like *Wirefire*, the new piece should be personal and emotionally rich, b) it should involve the audiences to a much greater degree than *Wirefire* did, giving them roles of their own and, c) it should be continuous, that is, free from the restrictions the *Wirefire* system imposed in terms of its (a)liveness.⁶³⁶ So the idea was to create *TEF* as a persistent world depending for its (a)liveness on its audiences turned players/inhabitants, rather than its creators. *TEF* was launched in September 2005 as ToT's second project and their first fully developed title. Like *Wirefire*, *TEF* is a multifaceted piece that crosses genres manifesting itself in different ways: as an online multiplayer game, a social screensaver, a live performance environment, a virtual world, and a collective fairytale.

Log on to *The Endless Forest* <http://www.tale-of-tales.com/TheEndlessForest>. You are a fawn, a baby deer, which will grow up to become a stag –a beautiful male deer. You live deep within an idyllic, peaceful forest. You spend your time roaming around the forest with other deer. There are a lot of things to do in this forest: everyday things like eating, sleeping under the shadow of the trees, drinking fresh water from the pond, resting by the ancient ruin, picking up flowers, or rubbing against a tree. There are also things you cannot do in the forest: you cannot

⁶³⁵ Museum of Modern Art of Luxemburg website. Available from: <http://www.mudam.lu/> [accessed 27/04/2007]

⁶³⁶ Entropy8Zuper! The Death of *Wirefire*. Available from: <http://www.entropy8zuper.org/wirefire/the.death.of.wirefire.html> 9/01/2003 [accessed 23/08/2006]

speak, for example. Language is replaced by body language, actions, and sounds. But this is not just any forest... In *The Endless Forest* magical things can happen: animals can fly, all the flowers can bloom at once, stones can fall from the sky, the rain can be made of gold –nobody ever knows what the Twin Gods will come up with to entertain themselves. The Twin Gods are Harvey and Samyn who, through a system called Abiogenesis, are able to “to play god”⁶³⁷ by making real time interventions (live performances/happenings) into the forest world. ToT explain that *Wirefire* is the origin of Abiogenesis:

So rather than having some computer-controlled system to regulate day and night, the growth of plants, and so on, these things will be taken care of by humans (albeit with divine pretensions). Every time such a thing happens, you know that the gods are here. This will enhance not only the capacity of *The Endless Forest* to surprise and delight its players, but also increase the warm feeling of community. In *The Endless Forest*, your god is near.⁶³⁸



Figure 3.8 Tale of Tales *The Endless Forest* 2005– A fawn.⁶³⁹

Deer can also perform magic and cast spells on other deer. Though players can maintain their anonymity ToT encourage them to name (and in a way register) their deer. Only named deer can

⁶³⁷ Tale of Tales. *The Endless Forest*.

⁶³⁸ Ibid.

⁶³⁹ Available from: http://tale-of-tales.com/TheEndlessForest/images/gallery_index_screenshots.html [accessed 23/08/2006]

grow to perform magic and cast spells. While in *TEF*, there are no goals to achieve or rules to follow. Being there, together, is what the experience is about. *TEF* is an online virtual world, where people meet and interact through their deer-avatars. As there is no language you cannot speak with other deer, but there are other ways to communicate and express your feelings: you can express sadness, confusion, anger, merriment, respect, or amazement. You can also express yourself through actions such as hopping, standing on your back legs, shaking your head, dancing, or being affectionate to another deer.

When I ask ToT whether they consider *TEF* as similar to other popular virtual environments such as Second Life, they reply positively. They explain that both are social worlds where people meet to spend time together in an unstructured manner.⁶⁴⁰ The main aim of both *TEF* and SL is to provide people with a virtual world that exists in parallel to Real Life (RL). There, like in RL, they can spend time together with others within a social environment that lacks the central attributes of MMORPGs, such as specific rules, tasks, targets, violence and competition. Here ToT point out that they have both been keen game-players –Harvey says that *Tomb Raider* “was a huge inspiration” for *TEF*. They discuss how many MMORPGs are being sustained around strong communities, which reminds the artists of the early days of the Internet, when “it [was] about communication, exchange, and limited hierarchy”. This blurring of the boundaries between RL and the game-world is an important element of the gaming experience. For many game-players, playing becomes interwoven within the fabric of their everyday lives; it is not a one-off activity, like going to the theatre: the game-world is an ongoing, parallel life narrative. This is an element ToT want to harness for their work: the blurring of the boundaries between reality and fiction, when the fairytale becomes part of one’s everyday life. This, they say, is how they experienced *Wirefire* while it was still active: as another space, always available, where they could withdraw together once per week. They hope that *TEF* will be a similar experience not just for them, but for all audiences who inhabit it as deer:

So you go in the forest and play for five minutes and then you go off and do whatever you want. Or you come back to your machine, you notice that it’s playing, you run around for a little while and then you stop. And so it becomes a part of your life, you know... Something that you play for a few minutes, but then it stays with you for the rest of the day. Or something you think about every now and then. Or you want to go back and visit a certain place...

On the other hand, ToT explain, *TEF* differs from Second Life because it is an authored environment. Whereas SL duplicates elements of RL within a virtual context, *TEF* is a world that places its users within a specific narrative. Although *TEF* does not have a plot as such, it is

⁶⁴⁰ In SL inhabitants can of course structure their time or attend specific events but whether and how they do that is up to them and not imposed by a grand narrative. The Palace, which I discussed in Chapter 1, was similar to both *TEF* and SL in this respect, as its primary aim was also to function as a social environment.

a narrative environment that transports its inhabitants from their everyday lives into a fairytale world of narrative possibilities; a context which is open-ended (no outcomes specified), (a)live (interactions with other deer take place in real time whenever you log onto the forest), and relational (the forest is a public space, and while you are there you are with (an)other(s)).

Janet H. Murray, in her book *Hamlet in the Holodeck*, argues that early experiments in digital storytelling, such as websites and shooting games, have aroused appetites “for participatory stories that offer more complete immersion, more satisfying agency, and a more sustained involvement with a kaleidoscopic world”.⁶⁴¹ She later coined the term ‘cyberdrama’ to describe such stories, “emphasizing the enactment of the story in the particular fictional space of the computer”.⁶⁴² Several elements stand out in Murray’s discourse: firstly, she talks about participatory stories and agency, which implies that the storyteller (if there is one) is no longer the single author of the story; secondly, she calls for a more sustained involvement with the story-world, which would require that audiences have (the possibility of developing) a durational rather than a one-off experience; thirdly, she places the story within a kaleidoscopic world, which suggests that the story-world is not one but multiple, constantly changing, or seen through multiple perspectives; fourthly, she approaches the story as enacted –and thus dramatic– as opposed to narrated, situating the audiences at the very heart of the story (immersion), as its protagonists.

Though Murray uses the term ‘cyberdrama’ rather than ‘cybertheatres’, I believe that the two terms are similar in their intentions. Interestingly, Murray’s discussion about digital storytelling and ‘cyberdrama’ focuses on elements that coincide with some of ToT’s expressed intentions for this piece as detailed above, that is: the reconfiguring of the role of the audiences, who have now become the protagonists of the piece (immersion, participation, agency); and the consistency of the piece which is now constantly (a)live as the community of players inhabit it. Nonetheless, Murray’s argumentation introduces a new element to this discussion: she argues that, once audiences have become participants, immersed themselves into the story/performance/world, acquired agency and developed a durational relationship with the piece, the story/performance/world is not one, but multiple (kaleidoscopic).

While writing this, I am in the forest. It is late, and it’s snowing. The forest is dark and looks slightly sinister, but I am sleeping under the moonlight, next to a bed of purple flowers. Earlier on, while lying in a sunny spot enjoying the warmth, I suddenly found myself surrounded by three massive mushrooms. I tried nibbling on one of them, but it wasn’t edible;

⁶⁴¹ Murray, J. H. *Hamlet in the Holodeck: the Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2nd Edition, 1999, p. 251.

⁶⁴² Murray, J. H. From Game-Story to Cyberdrama, 2004 In: Wardrip-Fruin, N. and Harrigan, P. (eds) *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance and Game*. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2004, p. 4.

the mushrooms disappeared within a few minutes. I also made a new friend: a black deer with red flowers on its antlers. I woke up at 6pm UK time on October 6, 2007, to find out that the Twin Gods had gone wild: I could hear loud operatic music and, running towards the Gods (they appear in the forest as two white statues) I found myself at a spectacular deer festival. There was bunting on the trees, colourful lights, massive light-reflecting bubbles, and disco balls hanging from the sky. I saw a deer turning into a pigeon, and I had spells cast on me that turned me white. Several deer were hopping around, dancing, casting spells on each other and showing their respect to the Gods.

This is the micro-narrative of my life as a deer on October 6, 2007, which I created for myself through my presence within and interaction with the virtual world created by ToT. As Murray points out, “In a procedural world, the interactor is scripted by the environment as well as acting upon it”.⁶⁴³ My micro-narrative is, to an extent, defined by the narrative context created by ToT (a forest with deer), the degree of agency they have allowed their audiences/inhabitants (for example, you can act but cannot speak; only named deer can cast spells), and the interventions they made in the virtual world on that specific date (deer-festival, which was a live Abiogenesis performance). Nevertheless, my own choices and actions created my unique, personal narrative for the day. Celia Pearce has called for a “play-centric” approach to gaming narratives, that is, one that concentrates on play and the player experience as opposed to telling a story. Pearce argues that “the function of narrative in games is to engender compelling, interesting play”.⁶⁴⁴ She has identified “the emergent narrative that develops out of (...) the game (...) as experienced by the players themselves”, as the one narrative “operator” that is a component of all games.⁶⁴⁵ According to Pearce, the one fundamental characteristic of all games, when it comes to the development of their narrative, is the fact that this emerges experientially, through the player’s active engagement with the game and their specific inter/actions. If we accept Pearce’s proposition we also accept the emergent aspect of any gaming narrative as one that is constantly in the process of becoming. Since each player generates their own narrative through their own unique personal experience, any gaming narrative is always personalised and subjective. In this sense, we do not talk about one ‘grand’ narrative, but a number of micro-narratives, which are as many as the players of any single game.

Murray uses the term “multiform story” to describe “a written or dramatic narrative that presents a single situation or plotline in multiple versions, versions that would be mutually

⁶⁴³ Ibid, p. 6.

⁶⁴⁴ Pearce, C. Towards a Game Theory of Game, 2004 In: Ibid, p. 144.

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 145.

exclusive in our ordinary experience”.⁶⁴⁶ I want to suggest that, in discussing the narrative contexts of MMORPGs and cybertheatres, we need to revisit the expectation that the narrative itself presents a single situation in multiple versions. What *TEF* and other social games do is to create the (shared) conditions that provide players with a sufficient degree of agency for them to each enact one (or, often, more) of these versions. The important difference is that each and all of these versions are –to refer back to Pearce’s discourse– emergent and unexpected, rather than predetermined paths of action and, thus, narrative possibilities. In that sense, a game/cybertheatre piece like *TEF* provides a single narrative platform for the emergence of multiple micro-narratives that converge to generate a multi-narrative system: a system where the stories narrated are at least as many as the stories enacted in any single time.



Figure 3.9 Tale of Tales *The Endless Forest* 2005–⁶⁴⁷

I discussed the suggestion that micro-narratives are subjective, unique, and personal. How, though, are they generated? What would my day as a deer have been like had I been alone in a private endless forest? I would have still been able to enact a personal micro-narrative through my interaction with the virtual world, but my story would have been very different and, I think, considerably less exciting. I could have had a degree of agency to do with my

⁶⁴⁶ Murray, J. H. *Hamlet in the Holodeck*, p. 30.

⁶⁴⁷ Available from: http://tale-of-tales.com/TheEndlessForest/images/gallery_index_screenshots.html [accessed 23/08/2006]

interaction with the world itself, and the world could still be changing as a result of commands built within the system. Nevertheless, I believe that a private forest would not have been able to sustain my long-term engagement. I could have gone back a few times to look for new developments and would have probably interacted differently with the system each time, but the narrative generated by these visits would have been more predictable and less emotionally engaging. What made my micro-narrative rich, surprising, enjoyable, and emotionally engaging (to me at least), were the others: deer and gods crossed my path several times, and I never knew what to expect. My personal narrative was shaped by those of others, and vice versa.

Living in *TEF* is a relational experience. *TEF*'s narrative as a performance piece is partly scripted by the system, and partly determined by the patterns generated by the inhabitants' interactions with the system and other players. What I argue is that, in certain forms of cybertheatres –and this applies to both *TEF* and *CYSMN?*– narrative(s), to an extent, coincide with presence(s). This does not apply to pieces such as *Wirefire*, some of Blast Theory's earliest work such as *Kidnap*, or Birringer's exercise: these pieces are more linear as the artists are still, clearly, the sole authors of the works, and thus in control of the works' narrative development. I suggest that, as networking technologies evolve along with our familiarity with those technologies, a new generation of cybertheatres emerge, such as *TEF*, *CYSMN?*, *Uncle Roy All Around You*, *Day of the Figurines* and more. Those projects experiment with dramaturgical structures that integrate audiences not just as 'interactors', but as protagonists and –in varying degrees– co-authors of the works. Indeed, in many of these current cybertheatre practices, one does not have the option to remain passive or interact with the piece in a responsive manner: to experience the piece one has to fully immerse oneself in it –one has to become it.

I close this Chapter by recalling fading memories of *Wirefire* encounters in which, as I experienced them, performers and audiences had ceased to be identifiable as self *or* other, present *or* absent. These were engagements with shared 'bodyscapes' –informational data and expanded materialities– constituted by the entanglement between self *and* other, and manifested through fluctuating patterns and randomness. In this context, as Amelia Jones points out, "The body/self is understood as a kind of *social space*." Artists' re-articulations of their bodies as networked pieces rather than 'authentic' or 'owned' materialities, suggests Jones, "produce and relate to new kinds of 'enfleshed' and embodied social space."⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴⁸ Jones, A. Survey, 2000 In: Warr, T. (ed.) with Jones, A. *The Artist's Body*. London: Phaidon Press, 2000, p. 42. Original emphasis.



Figure 3.10 Tale of Tales *The Endless Forest* 2005—⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁹ Available from: http://tale-of-tales.com/TheEndlessForest/images/screenshots/20060212_twingods3.jpg [accessed 12/08/2006]

CHAPTER FOUR

Curating Live Media: Practice as Research and as Method *The Case-studies of Intimacy and Deptford.TV*⁶⁵⁰

⁶⁵⁰ Parts of this Chapter that specifically examine the function and aims of *Deptford.TV* have been co-authored with Adnan Hadzi. Parts of this Chapter that refer to the *Intimacy* Call for Project and outputs have been co-authored with Rachel Zerihan.

Entering

This Chapter shifts the tone of the thesis by choreographing a movement from the voice of the theorist to that of the practitioner. Whereas Chapter One sought to situate cybertheatres within an art-historical lineage, and Chapters Two and Three embarked on the analysis and theoretical framing of cybertheatre case-studies, this Chapter is concerned with practice. Specifically, it is concerned with two types of practice: a) action-based research (that is, the exploration of my own curatorial practice within the fields of cybertheatres, digital performance and live arts) and, b) collaborative practice as a method of studying Web 2.0 practices.

Chapter Four sets out to explore issues related to the curation of emergent genres, with a focus on curating cybertheatres in particular and live media (live arts and media arts) in general. Here, I look at curation as the practice of proposing and/or establishing conceptual, aesthetic, dramaturgical, historical, social or other connections and exchanges between emergent and contemporary artistic practices (of the same or different genres), as well as communicating those practices to audiences. I am not concerned with other aspects of curation related to issues of acquisition, collection, preservation, conservation, archiving and so on. Like Chapters Two and Three, Chapter Four is also structured around case-studies. I look at two projects: a) the curatorial project *Intimacy: Across Digital and Visceral Performance*, which I initiated, produced, co-curated and co-directed with Rachel Zerihan and, b) *Deptford.TV*, a collaborative filmmaking project initiated by Adnan Hadzi, which I actively studied by joining as a collaborator.

This Chapter's approach necessitates a radical change of viewpoint: until now, I have (mostly) positioned myself 'outside' the pieces I have examined, as an observer, audience member, or participant. I now take up a new vantage point, situating myself 'inside' the two projects as a creator or co-author. This change of perspective entails further shifts relating to my engagement with the works and my collaborators (creative, active, personal), the methodologies employed (action, practice, collaboration), the language utilised (often descriptive of practices and experiences), and the frameworks applied (primarily practical rather than theoretical). Finally, this Chapter introduces one more shift of voice, as it moves from the 'I' to the 'We', and from individual to collective practices.

4.1) Framing: Thoughts on Curating Media Arts

In 1997 I co-founded, with Manthos Santorineos (Associate Professor, Athens School of Fine Arts), the 1st *Hellenic Art and Technology Festival (HATF)* in Athens, Greece. A year later the festival expanded to become international with a focus on the area of Southeast Europe and the Mediterranean, and was renamed *Medi@terra*. Its aim was to showcase the (at the time)

emergent field of media arts. This was the first time a large-scale event in Greece had brought together arts and emergent technologies. The festival embraced a range of artistic practices, which, until that time, had no place within the Greek contemporary art scene. *HATF* did not have an overarching theme: it simply invited, through a call for projects, artistic practices that integrated digital technologies, and it/we commissioned works along the same lines. The fields under which we invited works for submission were defined in relation to the different formats the projects could take, such as: interactive installations (for interactive projects which manifest themselves, in one way or another, as objects or environments within physical space), animation and video art (for screen-based works), net.art (for projects that exist solely online), CD-ROM art (for digital projects that exist off-line), digital photography and print (for digital imaging works) and sound art (for digital sound/music works). At the time several 'media/digital art' festivals were taking place, such as *Ars Electronica* (Linz, Austria),⁶⁵¹ *Inter-Society for Electronic Arts* (international organisation based in Canada, nomadic event),⁶⁵² *Transmediale* (Berlin, Germany),⁶⁵³ *European Media Art Festival* (Osnabrueck, Germany),⁶⁵⁴ *Dutch Electronic Arts Festival* (Rotterdam, Netherlands),⁶⁵⁵ *Next 5 Minutes* (Amsterdam, Netherlands),⁶⁵⁶ *VIPER* (Basel, Switzerland)⁶⁵⁷ and *Multimedia Arts Asia Pacific*⁶⁵⁸ among others. Several of these festivals, such as *Ars Electronica* and *Transmediale*, still thrive today (2009).

The approach favoured by the 1st *HATF*, that is, inviting works on the basis of their format and media rather than content or subject-matter, was in accord with the international media arts community: all the above mentioned festivals also did (and still do) invite works on a similar basis, thus generating taxonomies within which the emergent artistic practices we were aiming to showcase could be 'neatly' categorised. Throughout the (brief) history of the genre, these taxonomies have primarily focused on the format of the work, the way the work manifests itself within the physical domain, and the technologies employed, rather than the qualitative issues of concept, content, and dramaturgy (in relation to interactive artworks which are performative in their nature). Such taxonomies were, I think, strengthened when Christiane Paul's book *Digital Art* was published in 2003.⁶⁵⁹ Paul argues:

⁶⁵¹ *Ars Electronica* website. Available from: <http://www.aec.at> [accessed 20/04/09]

⁶⁵² *ISEA* website. Available from: <http://www.isea-web.org/> [accessed 20/04/09]

⁶⁵³ *Transmediale* website. Available from: <http://www.transmediale.de/> [accessed 20/04/09]

⁶⁵⁴ *European Media Art Festival* website. Available from: <http://www.emaf.de/> [accessed 20/04/09]

⁶⁵⁵ *DEAF* website. Available from:

http://www.deaf07.nl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=11&Itemid=1 [accessed 20/04/09]

⁶⁵⁶ *Next 5 Minutes* website. Available from: <http://www.next5minutes.org/> [accessed 20/04/09]

⁶⁵⁷ *VIPER* website. Available from: <http://www.viper.ch/2006/content/main.php> [accessed 20/04/09]

⁶⁵⁸ *Multimedia Arts Asia Pasific* website. Available from: <http://www.maap.org.au/> [accessed 20/04/09]

⁶⁵⁹ Paul, C. *Digital Art*. London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 2003.

It is problematic to claim that all digital artworks can be neatly categorized according to different forms: most of the time, these works combine various elements (...) and defy a purely formal classification. Nevertheless, it is important to be aware of the formal aspects upon which the art is based. Ultimately, every object –even the virtual one– is about its own materiality, which informs the ways in which it creates meaning. Among the forms that a digital artwork can take are installation; film, video, and animation; Internet art and software art; and virtual reality and musical environments.⁶⁶⁰

The forms that Paul identifies are not identical to the ones identified by the *Ist HATF*. Indeed, such discrepancies have been common across the field, as formal categories are subject to constant change, updating and revisiting (following new practices but also signifying differing curatorial approaches). For example, the *Ist HATF* did not include ‘film’ as a form in its call: we considered film to be an older medium that was already being showcased elsewhere. It did not include virtual reality environments either, but this was due to the technical requirements of such artworks: in order to showcase a virtual reality environment we would have needed to acquire and install a VR system (such as a CAVE, for example). These were particularly costly at the time, and people with the technical knowledge and expertise required to install and operate this technology were few and far between.⁶⁶¹ Despite discrepancies in formal categories, one thing was consistent across the international community of media arts festivals: they all invited works invested in emergent technologies –other, non-technologised types of artworks did not normally have a place within these contexts– and they mostly did so through categorising the works on the basis of formal rather than conceptual, aesthetic, social or other criteria.⁶⁶²

In 2002 Sergey Teterin (director), Olga Goriunova (curator) and Alexei Shulgin (consultant, curator) launched in Moscow (Russia) the *read_me festival 1.2* on software art and software art games. *Read_me 1.2* was the first festival “dedicated to the artistic contemplation of software: its creation, modification and deconstruction.”⁶⁶³ The organisers of *read_me 1.2 festival* went on to develop *Runme.org*: an open, moderated database where people were invited to submit software art projects.⁶⁶⁴ The next edition of the festival, *read_me 2.3*, took place the

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 70.

⁶⁶¹ *Medi@terra 2000* did include VR in its CfP. The works were presented in the newly-built CAVE system of the Hellenic Institute, which was, in that year, supporting the event.

⁶⁶² I should point out that this positive discrimination was possibly justified at the time, as media arts were rarely represented within more mainstream contemporary arts contexts.

⁶⁶³ *Read_me festival 1.2* website available from: <http://readme.runme.org/1.2/abouten.htm> 2002 [accessed 21/04/2009]. *Read_me festival 1.2*. Organizers. Available from: <http://readme.runme.org/1.2/feeden.htm> 2002 [accessed 21/04/2009]

⁶⁶⁴ *Runme.org* was a collaborative, open project developed by Amy Alexander, Florian Cramer, Matthew Fuller, Olga Goriunova, Thomax Kaulmann, Alex McLean, Pit Schultz, Alexei Shulgin, and The Yes Men. *Runme.org* website. Available from: <http://runme.org/about.tt2> 2003 [accessed 21/04/2009]

following year (2003) in Helsinki, based on the *Runme.org* database.⁶⁶⁵ At the time I found *Runme.org* and *read_me 2.3* striking due to their exceptional structure: *Runme.org* was structured both “taxonomically/rationally (category list) and intuitively (keyword cloud)”.⁶⁶⁶ The category list was more expansive than most and ran as follows (numbers in parenthesis indicate the amount of projects submitted under each category/sub-category):

algorithmic appreciation (2)

- > non-code-related (1)
- > pseudo-quinaes (0)

appropriation and plagiarism (5)

- > stealing (0)

artificial intelligence (10)

artistic tool (39)

- > audiovisual (28)
- > narrative (4)
- > useless (2)

bots and agents (15)

browser art (19)

code art (21)

- > code poetry (7)
- > minimal code (3)
- > obfuscation (3)
- > programming languages (6)
- > quines (1)

conceptual software (31)

- > without hardware - formal instruction (4)

data transformation (34)

- > data collage (11)
- > multimedia (5)
- > sonification (4)
- > visualization (7)

digital aesthetics r&d (9)

- > disfunctionality (3)
- > low tech (5)

digital folk and artisanship (18)

- > ascii art (2)

⁶⁶⁵ *Read_me* festival 2.3 website. Available from: http://www.m-cult.org/read_me/ 2003 [accessed 21/04/2009]

⁶⁶⁶ *Runme.org*. About. Available from: <http://runme.org/about.tt2 2003> [accessed 21/04/2009]

- > audio-visual (1)
- > gimmicks (6)
- > screen savers (2)

- existing software manipulations (7)
 - > artistic re-packaging (1)
 - > cracks and patches (0)
 - > instructions (1)
 - > software plugins (2)

- games (15)
 - > deconstruction and modification (8)
 - > public games (3)

- generative art (48)
 - > algorithmic audio (10)
 - > algorithmic design (7)
 - > algorithmic image (18)
 - > algorithmic multimedia (8)

- hardware transformation (7)

- installation-based (6)

- institutional critique (7)

- performance-based (10)

- political and activist software (25)
 - > cease-and-desist-ware (5)
 - > illicit software (2)
 - > software resistance (13)
 - > useful activist software (3)

- social software (5)

- software cultures - links (15)

- system dysfunctionality (10)
 - > denial of service (3)
 - > virus - security (5)

- text - software art related (47)
 - > aesthetics of software art (7)
 - > cultural critique of software (13)
 - > history of software art (12)
 - > weblog (1)

- text manipulation (36)
 - > text editors (4)⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁶⁷ *Runme.org*. Categories. Available from: <http://runme.org/categories/2003> [accessed 21/04/2009]

Read_me was targeting works of a very specific genre, that is, works that could be approached as artistic software. Nonetheless, what this list of categories makes clear is that taxonomies, though ‘rational’, were generated on the basis of not only formalist but also conceptual criteria: for example, the categories ‘political and activist software’ and ‘social software’ taxonomise works in relation to their social and political agendas and impact, rather than the technologies employed or the way projects manifest themselves in space. Even more intriguing to me at the time was the intuitive approach (word cloud), which existed side by side with the taxonomical one. This was as follows:

keywords

1960s collaboration film junk open_source psychiatric surreal
 1980s collaborative flash knitting outsource python surveillance
 1990s community folk labor P2P radio symbiosis 1996
 conceptual formalist lawyer_resistant paranoid random symmetry
 1997 consciousness found_object lingo parodyware realtime
 synesthesia
 3d constraints fractal linux pascal realworld system
 abstract copyright fragile lisp passionate relaxing talking
 abuse corruption free_software literary patterns religious taskbar
 active countercultural friendly live performance remix telematic
 aesthetics crash frustrated live_coding performative representation templates
 algorithmic criticism gadgety love perl robot terrorism
 amiga cute generative lowtech philosophical RSS text_manipulation
 anachronistic cyborg genetic mac photography sampling trash
 anti_information dada glitch manifesto PHP scary trivial
 antropomorphic dangerous goofy Mapping pixel scientific turing
 apocalyptic database Google market plagiaristic screensaver tv
 archetype death hackerly marxist playing semantic typing
 archive debate hardware mathematical pocket_pc seminal unix
 ascii deconstructive HCI meme poetry serendipitous unnoticeable
 atari decorative historical messaging political serial useless
 audiovisual design hoax metaphorical pop_culture sexy utility
 authorship desktop html metaphysical porn sharing vectorial
 automata dhtml identity MIDI positive simulation video
 automation disturbing illegal mindware posix sinclair violence

backwards dos illustration minimalistic post-dotcom sing virtual
 BBS drugs imagery mobile postscript smiley virus
 beos dysfunctional information modal power social visual
 binary eccentric installation montage pragmatic sound voice
 blog ecological instructive multiuser presence spam voyeur
 body educational interactive musical privacy speech war
 c efficient interface network probability stimulation windows
 c64 email intuitive neural_net process storytelling xxxxx
 capitalism error irc news productivity stream
 chaos evangelist ironic noisy programming subjectivity
 chat feedback iterative nude propaganda subversive
 code feminist java obfuscated provocative supernatural
 coding filesharing javascript on-line psychedelic superstitious⁶⁶⁸

I consider *Runme/read_me*, from a curatorial perspective, as revolutionary in its approach: it constituted the first attempt to question rigid formal categories in media arts and challenge the way curators and, possibly, artists thought about their works; at the same time, the festival did acknowledge the necessity and functionality of taxonomic systems and the near impossibility of abandoning them completely. *Runme/read_me*'s approach is a playful and pertinent criticism of the long-standing attempts of curators and event organisers to neatly classify and formally categorise emergent fields of practice. The festival's intuitive structure succeeded in exposing the rigidity (and often absurdity) of such formal categories as well as the lack of engagement with issues of content, social value and affect in the way festivals and showcases invited works for submission or commissioned new work. Despite its attempt to question and unsettle formal categories for studying and presenting media arts, *Runme/read_me* remained firmly rooted within the tradition of presenting this emergent field of practice as independent from (peripheral to?) more mainstream contemporary art practices. As a result, although formal categories within the field were imaginatively challenged, the festival itself remains classified as a media arts festival, without any attempt to shake this (formalist) distinction.⁶⁶⁹

⁶⁶⁸ *Runme.org*. Keywords. Available from: <http://runme.org/keywords/> [accessed 21/04/2009]

⁶⁶⁹ I do not intend this as a judgment on the cultural value and success of the event.

4.2) Curating Live Media, Part One: *Intimacy: Across Digital and Visceral Performance* (London, December 2007)⁶⁷⁰

4.2.a) *Intimacy*, Act One: The Dinner Party

It was in early 2006, over dinner with Johannes Birringer and Rachel Zerihan that this exploration began to take shape. I invited Johannes and Rachel to my flat for food and discussion after attending the *Digital Cultures Symposium on Performance, Dance and Technology Art*, which Johannes organised at Nottingham Trent University in December 2005.⁶⁷¹ While eating, we embarked on a discussion about what we perceived as an intense quest for intimacy in contemporary performance practice. Rachel pondered over her ongoing interest in One to One or ‘Audience of One’ performance works and argued that the significant rise in the number of such works over the past few years “throws up some interesting questions in terms of our demand for together”.⁶⁷² She pointed out that “the queue to book One to Ones at performance festivals such as the National Review of Live Art is undoubtedly getting longer with each passing year”⁶⁷³ and she asked why this might be. Rachel went on to detail her own experiences as an audience of one in such works and stressed the intensity of those ‘exclusive’, intimate encounters with the artist-Other.

I had not, at the time, experienced a One to One performance and was fascinated by Rachel’s account. Interestingly, Rachel’s intimate performance experiences did not sound alien to me. Although I had not been the audience of one in such works, I had the strong feeling that I had experienced something very similar somewhere very different: on the Internet. Though Rachel’s narrative focused strongly on the physical contact of the performer and his/her single audience member, the experiences that she described made me think of Entropy&Zuper!’s *Wirefire*, discussed in Chapter Three –to me, one of the most intimate performance works that I have encountered. I shared with Rachel and Johannes my experience of it as a distinctly private, intensely intimate and sensual connection between myself –in the protected surroundings of my

⁶⁷⁰ All available footage of *Intimacy* events has been acquired by and is accessible through the British Library Sound Archive, as well as the Live Art Development Agency study room. This comprises the majority of performances and the symposium. The *Intimacy* website is available from: <http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/intimacy/> [accessed 12/12/2009]

⁶⁷¹ *Digital Cultures* website. Available from: <http://www.digitalcultures.org/symp.html> [accessed 10/2/2009]

⁶⁷² Zerihan, R. Intimate Inter-actions: Returning to the Body in One to One Performance *Body, Space and Technology Journal* [online] 6 (1). Available from: <http://people.brunel.ac.uk/bst/vol0601/home.html> [accessed 10/2/2009]. This article developed after our dinner discussion (though not necessarily as a result of it). An earlier version of it was presented at the Thursday Club (Goldsmiths University of London, 16 March 2006), at the event *Intimacy: In Telematic and Proximal Encounters and/or Relations, in Performance and Performative Environments*.

⁶⁷³ Ibid.

home, sitting on my sofa, in front of my laptop— and the performers behind it, our presence manifested through interactions translated into visual and sonar patterns/randomness that both substituted physicality and intensified physical lack. While reminiscing of my *Wirefire* experiences I reasoned that, like Rachel in One to One performances, I had also been an audience of one (though networked with others) witnessing and taking part in an intense, ‘exclusive’ exchange between myself and other(s), my body and other (cyborg) bodies.

I then referred to a lecture given by David Ross, at the time director of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMoMA), at the San Jose State University on 2nd March 1999.⁶⁷⁴ In this, Ross set out to identify the “21 distinctive qualities of net.art”, one of which was “the intimacy of this medium” (quality number 8).⁶⁷⁵ He argued: “It’s directly in your face. There’s rarely someone else with you. (...) the real space is intimate and that intimacy lends itself to a variety of aesthetic manipulations. (...) the computer monitor as (...) a kind of connector, surrogate sexual link in the ultimate safe sex.”⁶⁷⁶

Ross is not the only person who identifies intimacy as a distinct quality of the networked computer. Artist Igor Štromajer has established his net.art practice through his (home-based) institute for contemporary arts Intima Virtual Base in Ljubljana, Slovenia.⁶⁷⁷ Štromajer’s background is in theatre: he worked as a theatre director from 1989 to 1995, before turning to net.art in a quest for intimacy. Being dissatisfied with the degree of intimacy he was able to achieve with his audiences as a theatre director, Štromajer experimented with different formats that could facilitate a qualitatively different, more personal and thus more intense (he reasoned), connection with audiences. Štromajer’s practical research into “tactical emotional states”⁶⁷⁸ eventually directed him towards a radical shift in his practice:

I found out that theatre is not the right medium for me. I wanted my work to be more intimate. I wanted to be very personal. I wanted to go one to one in artistic communication and I couldn’t do it in the theatre. Maybe I did not know how, or the theatre is just not the right place for this. (...) Here [on the Internet] I can talk one to one: me as a creator of something on the net, and the person sitting behind the computer somewhere is usually sitting there alone.⁶⁷⁹

Štromajer now describes himself as an “intimate mobile communicator”,⁶⁸⁰ while he has

⁶⁷⁴ Ross, D. Transcription of Lecture by David Ross. San Jose State University, 2/03/1999. Available from: <http://switch.sjsu.edu/web/v5n1/ross/index.html> [accessed 10/2/2009]

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁷ Intima Virtual Base was founded by Igor Štromajer in 1996. Intima Virtual Base website. Available from: <http://intima.wordpress.com/> [accessed 11/2/2009]

⁶⁷⁸ Štromajer, I. Intima Virtual Base. Available from: <http://intima.wordpress.com/intima-virtual-base/> [accessed 11/2/2009]

⁶⁷⁹ Štromajer, I. Interview with Igor Štromajer. Available from: <http://laudanum.net/cgi-bin/media.cgi?action=display&id=971771270> [accessed 1/2/2003]

⁶⁸⁰ Štromajer, I. Igor Štromajer. Available from: <http://www.intima.org/is.html> [accessed 11/2/2009]

shifted his practice to produce net.art works and multimedia guerilla performances. He argues that “the Internet is the most intimate media that ever existed” due to its ability of “reduc[ing] the public to complete intimacy and launch[ing] it to the public orbit.”⁶⁸¹ By ‘reducing the public to intimacy’ Štromajer refers to the physical dislocation of net.art/performance audiences who, not having to present (perform) themselves in public, can receive the work in a state of utter abandonment (can you visit a play naked? can you masturbate in a theatre auditorium?). Online audiences can thus explore the piece in their own space, time and pace, making individual choices and developing a singular, private relationship with it.⁶⁸² The second part of his argument concerns the Internet’s ability of ‘launching’ private instances into the ‘public orbit’, through opening a public window on one’s private world.⁶⁸³ Štromajer, through his practice, demonstrates how the physical distance between himself and his audiences enhances, rather than hinders, intimacy. Though this might sound like a paradox several theorists, artists and curators have also argued Ross’s and Štromajer’s case. Both Blast Theory and Entropy8Zuper!/Tale of Tales address questions of intimacy through their practice, while Sherry Turkle, in *Life on the Screen*,⁶⁸⁴ talks about the computer as an “intimate machine”: “We have sought out the subjective computer. Computers don’t just do things for us, they do things to us, including our ways of thinking about ourselves and other people. (...) Computer screens are the new locations for our fantasies, both erotic and intellectual.”⁶⁸⁵ Furthermore, Sadie Plant argues that, in spite of the impersonality of the screen –or perhaps, due to it– the digital zone facilitates spontaneity, affection, intimacy and informality, exposing the extent to which older media are subject to inhibitions, barriers, and obstacles: “Face-to-face communication (...) is not at all the most direct of all possible ways to communicate.”⁶⁸⁶

Back in Finsbury Park, Rachel, Johannes and I are still having dinner. Our discussion has taken us from One to One performances to net.art. This trajectory has brought forth some tension: Rachel is resistant to the idea that mediated, often asynchronous, forms of performance can produce the same effect of intimacy as the visceral work that she studies. Johannes

⁶⁸¹ Štromajer, I. and Vujanovic, A. Love Without Mercy: Ana Vujanovic interviews Igor Štromajer (Tr.: Pelevic, M.) *KONTROL* [online] 1, (June-July) 2004. Available from: <http://nomad-tv.net/kontrol/vujanovic.htm> [accessed 13/2/2009]

⁶⁸² The development of a unique, individual relationship between the piece and each of its audience members was also very much Blast Theory’s concern, as discussed in Chapter 2.

⁶⁸³ People publicise and broadcast their privacy through networking technologies in myriads of ways, through mobile phones, blogging, online chat-rooms, web-cams and social networking sites such as MySpace, FaceBook and YouTube. One of the first examples of such work is *JenniCAM* (jennicam.com, site no longer available), begun by Jennifer Ringley in 1996. Ringley placed web-cams in her flat and broadcast herself 24/7 for eight years. Pop17. *JenniCAM Invented RealityTV*. Video. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ii0gLK3meM> 29/05/2008 [accessed 5/11/2009]

⁶⁸⁴ *Life On The Screen* was published in 1995, a year before Štromajer’s shift of practice from theatre /physical performance to net.art.

⁶⁸⁵ Turkle, S. *Life on the Screen*, p. 26.

⁶⁸⁶ Plant, S. *Zeros + Ones: Digital Women and the New Technoculture*. London: Fourt Estate, 1997, p. 144.

intervenes. His practice as a dancer and choreographer who has worked for several years with telematics and other mediated forms of performance functions as a bridge in this discussion. Johannes's focus is on the dancer's body, on corporeal boundaries and physical textures (he collaborates with Michele Danjoux, experimenting with costumes and fashion). Nonetheless, as the Artistic Director of AlienNation, Johannes has also been "exploring the connections between live performance and interactive digital art, devising new processes of composition that combine choreography with real time synthesis, video, acoustic and electronic music, telepresence, and visual arts/plastic processes."⁶⁸⁷ He discusses the cinematic intimacy of the close-up image, blown up fragments of skins, body parts, fabrics and micro-movements that telematic performance and, more broadly, performance that integrates cinematic techniques, can achieve.⁶⁸⁸

4.2.b) Intimacy, Act Two: the Thursday Club

After Johannes and Rachel left I kept musing on our conversations and decided that they made for an interesting debate. I invited them at Goldsmiths to have this debate in public, as part of the Thursday Club series of events, on 16 March 2006.⁶⁸⁹ The title of the event was "Intimacy: In Telematic and Proximal Encounters and/or Relations, in Performance and Performative Environments".⁶⁹⁰ The event posed a number of questions that we set out to address. These were:

How is intimacy experienced in telematic, disembodied relationships? How is intimacy experienced in proximal, physical, and increasingly mediated environments? What constitutes presence and absence in such relationships, and how can these concepts be revisited to fit our mediated and mediated praxis of contemporary performance and performative encounters? How is proximal intimacy different from telematic intimacy? How do both states of intimacy inform and redefine one another?⁶⁹¹

The Thursday Club on intimacy was particularly well attended. Following the event I received several emails from audiences who declared their interest in this line of inquiry and were asking for more. It became apparent that the question of intimacy was a pertinent one, at

⁶⁸⁷ AlienNation. Mission Statement. Available from: <http://www.aliennationcompany.com/mission.htm> [accessed 17/2/2009]

⁶⁸⁸ Other examples of such work would be director Katie Mitchell's productions of *Waves* (2006) and *...Some Trace of Her* (2008) at the National Theatre, London. Mitchell uses live video feeds to create performances that triple the boundary between theatre and live cinema, with a strong focus on intimate close-up shots of the actors.

⁶⁸⁹ Thursday Club website. Available from: <http://doc.gold.ac.uk/~ma701pt/thethursdayclub/> [accessed 17/2/2009]. The Thursday Club is organised by Goldsmiths Digital Studios and convened by Professor Janis Jefferies.

⁶⁹⁰ Chatzichristodoulou, M. Thursday Club: Intimacy. Available from: http://doc.gold.ac.uk/~ma701pt/thethursdayclub/?page_id=7_2006 [accessed 17/2/2009]

⁶⁹¹ Chatzichristodoulou, M. Intimacy. Available from: http://cybertheatre.org/blog/?p=16_2006 [accessed 17/2/2009]

least among students, scholars, artists and cultural professionals working in the fields of live art, performance, theatre, dance, sound and media arts. What is it though that makes intimacy as a subject of conceptual and aesthetic exploration so prevalent today?

At this point in time I had to retrace my steps, and ask myself the first question the subject raises: what is intimacy? Intertwined with feelings of closeness, trust and familiarity, intimacy occurs through effective communication between people in some kind of relationship. Intimacy enables two sentient beings who feel comfortable enough with each other on an emotional and/or physical level, to reveal something about themselves and connect in some form of meaningful exchange. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, 'intimate' is defined as "Inmost, most inward, deep-seated; hence pertaining to or connected with the inmost nature or fundamental character of a thing; essential; intrinsic" and "pertaining to the inmost thoughts or feelings; proceeding from, concerning, or affecting one's inmost self; closely personal." The term 'intimate,' the dictionary instructs, is a euphemism of "sexual intercourse"; or it can be said "Of a theatrical performance (...) that aims at establishing familiar and friendly relations with the audience."⁶⁹²

On first impression, the notion of intimacy and figurings of socio-political processes do not appear a close pairing. When Julia Kristeva approaches 'the intimate' etymologically in her book *Intimate Revolt*, she refers to the Latin root of the word: 'intimus' from the superlative of interior, meaning 'the most interior'. Kristeva articulates 'the intimate' as an interiority that includes the unconscious, but warns that it should not be reduced to it, arguing that 'the intimate' is "that which is most profound and most singular in the human experience". Kristeva goes on to claim that intimacy is "similar to the life of the mind, that is, the activity of the thinking ego (...) in opposition to social or political action".⁶⁹³

Grappling with Kristeva's proposal that the intimate works in opposition to social or political action, I refer back to the artistic practices of Igor Štromajer and Blast Theory. Both stress that their interest in staging, framing or otherwise provoking intimate encounters between artist and other –or often between members of the public themselves– springs from socio-political concerns regarding the practice of everyday life within a hyper-mediatised, super-urbanised, ultra-technologised social context.⁶⁹⁴ According to Bojana Kunst, "in Štromajer's projects intimacy (...) is always playfully associated with political confidentiality, guerrilla tactics and the relation between public and private, politics and desire."⁶⁹⁵ Furthermore, Matt

⁶⁹² Simpson, J. A. and Weiner E. S. C. *The Oxford English Dictionary Vol. VIII*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd Edition, 1989.

⁶⁹³ Kristeva, J. *Intimate Revolt*. (Tr.: Herman, J.), New York: Columbia University Press, 2002, p. 45.

⁶⁹⁴ Discussions with author, 1999-2008.

⁶⁹⁵ Kunst, B. Affective Connection, 2009 In: Chatzichristodoulou, M., Jefferies, J. and Zerihan, R. *Interfaces of Performance*, p. 174.

Adams explains that

our interest in locative media and work with mobile devices (...) is partly about how we can negotiate our relationship with strangers in the city (...) and what the political ramifications of this might be. And I think that they are very strong. Over time we came to an understanding that politics is actually within everything, it is infused in our behaviour. How we relate to someone who asks us directions is a political act. This is how we create a body-politic, through that type of inter-relationship.⁶⁹⁶

It seemed to me that my own and Rachel's interest in intimate performance encounters, and our observation with regards to their current prevalence within artistic practice and intellectual inquiry, was centered around an understanding of those practices that directly opposed Kristeva's approach to intimacy as an internalised state that cannot claim any degree of socio-political agency. Quite the opposite, Rachel and I, like Štromajer and Adams, believe that 'the intimate', "that which is most profound and most singular in the human experience" can, once performed –that is, once given a public status or been launched back into the 'public orbit'– be invested with both political agency and social potency. Indeed, it is this strong belief that led us in our conceptual and aesthetic explorations through co-curating and co-directing the event *Intimacy: Across Digital and Visceral Performance*.

4.2.c) *Intimacy, Act Three: The Event*

Intimacy was successful and important on so many levels and registered significantly and marvellously. Congratulations on your vision, huge efforts and those successes. (Kira O'Reilly)⁶⁹⁷

The event *Intimacy: Across Digital and Visceral Performance* (December 2007) –initiated and produced by myself, co-directed and co-curated by myself and Rachel Zerihan– emerged as a result of the discussions, exchanges, tensions and collaborations documented herein.

⁶⁹⁶ Adams, M. Cited by: Chatzichristodoulou, M. How to Kidnap your Audiences: An Interview with Matt Adams from *Blast Theory*, 2009 In: *Ibid*, p. 113.

⁶⁹⁷ Email communication with the author, 2007.

Goldsmiths | Laban | The Albany
7-9 December 2007

Intimacy

across visceral & digital performance

Ang Bartram
Johannes Birringer
Body>Data>Space
Elena Cologni
Kelli Dipple
Adrian Heathfield
Dominic Johnson
Amelia Jones
Simon Jones
Mine Kaylan
Mary Oliver
Kira O'Reilly
Anita Ponton
Sam Rose
Thecla Schiphorst
Paul Sermon
Tale of Tales
Atau Tanaka
Tracey Warr
and many more



Figure 4.1 *Intimacy* Postcard

Rachel and I started shaping *Intimacy* in December 2006 –that is, four years after *Read_me 1.2* was launched in Moscow, Russia. We both approached *Intimacy* as a study and interrogation of performances that create situations for intimate encounters, irrespective of their means or format. This thematic focus led us to create an event that brought together and bridged across fields of practice that might appear to inhabit two extreme ends of the performance arts spectrum. As genres, digital/networked performance and live art do not often intersect in public outputs, such as exhibitions and performance festivals: digital performance practices are most often programmed as part of media arts festivals/seasons, such as those mentioned earlier (e.g. *Ars Electronica* and *Transmediale*); live art practices, on the other hand, are seen at live art festivals such as the *National Review of Live Art* (Glasgow)⁶⁹⁸ and *SPILL Festival of Performance* (London).⁶⁹⁹ How were we going to bring those different genres and communities together while avoiding polarisations? Most importantly: what benefits could be had from bringing together practices and communities that do not often intersect or cross-pollinate, under

⁶⁹⁸ *National Review of Live Arts* website. Available from: <http://www.newmoves.co.uk/national-review-of-live-art> [accessed 2/05/2009]

⁶⁹⁹ *SPILL Festival of Performance* website. Available from: <http://www.spillfestival.com/> [accessed 2/05/2009]

the overarching theme of intimacy?⁷⁰⁰

I have discussed that media arts have primarily been approached and presented as a genre separate from other contemporary art practices. Media arts have not always benefited from this curatorial approach of positive discrimination:⁷⁰¹ to date, the movement has remained fairly separate from, some would claim peripheral to, contemporary visual arts.⁷⁰² Though in 1997 I believed that the *1st HATF*'s approach was necessary in order to bring a new field of practice into visibility, inform opinions and raise public awareness, today I argue in favour of a different approach: I no longer believe that digital and networked performance practices would benefit from being presented to the public as a field of practice that is distinct from other performance and live art practices. Such an approach, as demonstrated by media arts events, inevitably entails focusing on the formal aspects of the works and the technologies per se. Though experimentation with new technologies as an integral element of these projects is indeed what defines digital and networked performance as a genre, as well as the main premise upon which this thesis has been constructed, I suggest the medium *is not* the message. Yes, the medium informs the message; yes, the two are interlinked in the same way that form and content are always linked together, often inseparably. The message cannot be without the medium, nor can it be the same if delivered through a different medium. Current thinking and practice though has moved on from McLuhan's techno-deterministic approach:⁷⁰³ the message *cannot* and *must not* be reduced to the medium; the medium cannot be held responsible for or attributed the contents it delivers. Indeed, techno-determinism has caused several problems in the field of media arts, where the medium has recurrently been perceived as the message. Often,

⁷⁰⁰ Another event with similar concerns is *(re)Actor*, launched at Queen Mary University of London in 2006. *(re)Actor* is "the international forum exploring the emerging field of Digital Live Art (the intersection of Live Art, Computing and Human-Computer Interaction)" and has, by now, featured three editions in London (2006), Leeds (2007) and Liverpool (2008). *(re)Actor* has successfully showcased work that spans the disciplines of live art and digital technologies. Like *Intimacy*, *(re)Actor* was launched and has been based within academic contexts (Queen Mary, University of Leeds and HCI 2008 conference in Liverpool). The forum is also concerned with reaching out to wider communities, which it achieves mainly through hosting events in nightclubs and party circles. *(re)Actor* website. Available from: <http://www.digitalliveart.co.uk/> [accessed 2/05/2009]. The initiators and co-directors of *(re)Actor*, Alice Bayliss and Jennifer Sheridan, both sat on the *Intimacy* Advisory Board.

⁷⁰¹ This is not intended as an accusation of digital/media arts curators. Indeed, I count myself as one of them and my approach was no different; while there have been curators who attempted to focus more on thematic strands and content rather than the formal elements of the works presented. I should point out that any positive discrimination of such practices was, to an extent, the result of discrimination that artists working in this field suffered –and still do– from the mainstream contemporary artworld. One does not want to over-simplify the reasons for this separation, which are many and diverse, and include the very nature of media art works per se. These can, on the one hand, be technologically-heavy, demanding in expertise, and costly to present, and on the other, immaterial, and thus elusive, unsuitable or awkward to handle as commodities within the arts market.

⁷⁰² Though such works are still presented within the framework of specialised events, the genre is rarely represented adequately in high-prestige international art events such as the Venice Biennale.

⁷⁰³ As argued by Julian Stallabrass, Jay David Bolter, Paul Virilio and Manuel Castells, among others.

the message wasn't even there: if media arts have frequently come under fire over one thing, this is the field's preoccupation with (enchantment by) technology to the detriment of content. Media art works have often been accused of being prone to self-referentiality which, when devoid of criticality and/or affect, is the outcome of a romantic –and deluded– technophilia.⁷⁰⁴

In this thesis, I have argued that cybertheatres constitute an emergent and distinct genre of performance practice and have defined this through the use of networking technologies as an integral element of their ontologies, dramaturgies and structures. I have thus focused on the use of specific technologies within performance practices, which I have approached as a catalyst for change. When it comes to presenting cybertheatres to audiences though, the approach must consider issues of audience reception, social relevance and accessibility. From my perspective, there were two ways of approaching this festival: the first involved curating a festival of cybertheatres or, more broadly, digital performance practices. This would be following on the path of the 1st HATF, *Medi@terra* and other such events by focusing on the technologies and their use within performance practice. At the same time, it would clearly differentiate the works from other forms of performance and live art practices that do not concern themselves with new technologies, drawing a line between this 'new, emergent' genre and other 'older' practices. This was not what I wanted to achieve. The experience of a plethora of media arts festivals has shown that, though positive discrimination in curatorial practice can have its uses, it also has clear disadvantages, such as a stronger focus on the formal rather than the conceptual and aesthetic elements of an emergent genre. Also, the exclusion of those genres from mainstream platforms and markets, running the risk of establishing them in the long-term as peripheral to other, more mainstream, practices. As a result, artists and professionals active in genres that are framed by curators and critics as idiosyncratic, and by the media and market world as peripheral, can find themselves isolated or indulging in practices that are introspective and elitist. This in itself acts as a barrier to further developing the genre, targeting new audiences and widening participation.

The second option was to present cybertheatres alongside other performance practices, focusing on the content of the works. The Thursday Club event had confirmed that digital/networked performance and live art practices and communities can indeed converse when approached from this angle. It had also confirmed that the subject matter of intimacy was pertinent to both genres and could provide fertile ground for discussion, debate and practical experimentation. This shared quest for intimacy, Rachel and I agreed, should function as a

⁷⁰⁴ Richard Coyne undertakes a comprehensive exploration of “the spectrum of romantic narrative that pervades the digital age, from McLuhan’s utopian vision of social reintegration by electronic communication to claims that cyberspace creates new realities”. Coyne, R. *Technoromanticism: Digital Narrative, Holism, and the Romance of the Real*. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1999, cover.

bridge across visceral and digital performance. We also agreed that any tensions between the different genres and communities should not be avoided but acknowledged as part of a dialogical exchange. I could see several advantages in this curatorial approach: firstly, rather than presenting cybertheatres/digital performance practices as distinct from other types of performance, we could situate such works within a wider body of practice and research, targeting a broader spectrum of audiences. Secondly, the thematic approach offered a specific line of inquiry, which demanded a focus on issues of content, potency and affect rather than formal elements, and helped side-step any technophilic attitudes that could be attached to the technologised performances we were planning to programme. Thirdly, the subject-matter of intimacy, evocative to all, provided an entry point for diverse audiences that were neither familiar with emergent technologies nor specifically interested in works that employ them.

I considered this last advantage as particularly important. While Rachel and I were developing *Intimacy*, *NODE.London* 2006 (London's first distributed media arts season) published its evaluation report, which suggested that "*NODE.London* should develop more comprehensible and effective language and communication tools to explain both what media arts practitioners and *NODE.London* seek to achieve to a wide audience."⁷⁰⁵ Moreover, some of the participating artists argued on the *NODE.London* wiki that the season was elitist and over-contextualised, thus targeting only media-savvy, sophisticated audiences.⁷⁰⁶ This did not come as a surprise: elitism is something media arts have often been accused of.⁷⁰⁷ The *NODE.London* evaluation, though acknowledging the season's failure to reach out to wider audiences, did not go on to suggest how this could be achieved. In developing *Intimacy*, I felt confident that the evocative potency of the event's thematic focus would provide the "comprehensible and effective" language that the *NODE.London* evaluation report called for. So, the 'banal'⁷⁰⁸ subject of intimacy was to be our entry point to both digital/networked performance and One to One live art practices.

Intimacy was framed as a "culturally urgent series of events designed to address an aesthetically and formally diverse set of responses to the notion of 'being intimate' in emergent and hybrid performance practices."⁷⁰⁹ Rachel and I argued that practices of intimacy are becoming prevalent both as methodological paradigms and as desired outcomes amongst

⁷⁰⁵ Jones, T. *Node.London*, The March 2006 Season of Media Arts in London, and Related Activity: Evaluation Report Dec 2004 – June 2006, p. 13. Available from: http://wiki.nodel.org/index.php/NODE.London_2006#Evaluation_and_analysis_2006 [accessed 30/10/2008]

⁷⁰⁶ *Node.London*. Evaluation. Available from: <http://eval.nodel.org/> [accessed 20/10/2008]

⁷⁰⁷ See, for example Lovink's discussion of the new media arts scene's (of which he doubts the very existence) fascination with the 'cool obscure' in: Lovink, G. *Zero Comments: Blogging and Critical Internet Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.

⁷⁰⁸ As argued by Dominic Johnson during the *Intimacy Symposium*.

⁷⁰⁹ Chatzichristodoulou, M. and Zerihan, R. *Intimacy: Call for Projects*, 2007.

performance and live artists who wish to address social issues of disparity and isolation that breed within urban environments. Furthermore, we suggested that the current quest for intimacy in performance and media art practices derives from a cultural climate of acute (in)security that artists wish to address and tackle through their work. Though urban environments are characterised by extreme closeness and heightened connectivity, we find ourselves increasingly isolated and distanced from our communities. Reiterating Matt Adams we asked: “How do you exist in an urban space, how do you find the strength or the mechanism that enables you to have relationships with other people or with strangers?”⁷¹⁰ Slavoj Žižek suggested in the past that the abolition of distance through networking technologies would also be the abolition of neighbourliness; universal availability would induce “unbearable claustrophobia”; excess choice would breed an inability to choose.⁷¹¹ Although Žižek’s fear of a totalitarian web is as exaggerated as utopian visions dreamt up by technophiles such as Howard Rheingold, aspects of it do ring true today: the Internet is a medium that both liberates (through providing immediate access to information, services and communities) and enslaves (through constant surveillance). It comes with a plenitude of both expectations for new experiences (social networking sites, virtual environments) and security threats (identity theft, viruses). Telecommunications technologies pose similar dangers: mobile phones make us constantly accessible –but do we want to be reachable at every moment? They make us feel more secure (we can instantly communicate emergencies) but they also pose threats (terrorists have used mobile phones to detonate bombs). Albeit the message of consumerism is that we can find security through surrounding ourselves with (often unwanted, unnecessary) goods, working conditions toughen, together with a loss of any sense of permanence or stability. The current financial crisis has highlighted the fragility of the global economy, increased unemployment and intensified insecurity. Rachel and I suggested that within this climate of political, social and financial insecurity and unrest, at a time infused with a sense of global fear, artists demonstrate through their work the human desire for intimacy and closeness with the other.⁷¹²

Intimacy was situated within, and partly designed for, Southeast London, as it was mainly based at Goldsmiths. My background as a Community Participation Officer at The

⁷¹⁰ Adams, M. Cited by: Chatzichristodoulou, M. How to Kidnap your Audiences: An Interview with Matt Adams from *Blast Theory*, 2009 In: Chatzichristodoulou, M., Jefferies, J. and Zerihan, R. *Interfaces of Performance*, p. 113.

⁷¹¹ Žižek, S. *The Plague of Fantasies*. London: Verso, 1997, p. 135.

⁷¹² I should highlight that *Intimacy* was designed and took place during the time of Bush administration and while the ‘war on terror’ was still prominent in America’s (and Britain’s) foreign policy. It will be interesting to witness any changes the Obama regime and its foreign policy are bringing forth to that matter. The event also took place prior to the current recession, but the signs of economic crisis were already on the horizon.

Albany, a cultural and community centre in Deptford,⁷¹³ and my collaboration with the *Deptford.TV* project (see Chapter Four, 4.3), meant that I was aware of social issues pertinent to communities situated within this specific locality –one of the most multicultural and most deprived areas of the country. Diverse ethnic minority groups (such as Vietnamese, Chinese and African-Caribbean) still live in relative isolation from each other and the wider Deptford community, and tensions are ripe amongst local youth.⁷¹⁴ The impending regeneration of the area has brought forth even more tensions: between local residents, construction companies and corporations, and the local council. Local communities fear that Deptford, like other areas of London (such as Hackney) will gradually become gentrified, resulting in new developments and their middle-class residents eventually supplanting local working class populations and artists.⁷¹⁵ According to our brief, *Intimacy* aimed to target local communities as well as “live artists, digital artists, other performers/artists, technologists, scientists, theorists, academics and students”.⁷¹⁶ This was not a funding requirement: our funding bodies (AHRC Methods Network, Knowledge East, Goldsmiths) were content for the event to be branded as academic and to target primarily academic audiences. Nevertheless, Rachel and I wished to actively reach out to a wider and more diverse audience base, as we were certain that this would enrich rather than compromise the event. It was clear that in order to achieve this aim we had to ‘open up’ the event to non-academic environments that could facilitate our contact with communities that we could not access through Goldsmiths. This concern brought us to The Albany, which proved to be an ideal context for housing some of the *Intimacy* events: its history as an active community centre for more than a century means that it is strongly embedded within the local cultural and social context. The Albany, by supporting *Intimacy*, gave us access to a much more diverse demographic than we would have been able to attract through Goldsmiths. A similar negotiation was made with Home Live Art, a live art organisation in Camberwell,⁷¹⁷ which could host performances that needed domestic environments as well as reach out to its networks of live artists and performers.

Our starting point for designing *Intimacy* was a set of questions posed by Allucquère Rosanne Stone in *The War of Desire and Technology*: “How are bodies represented through

⁷¹³ The Albany website. Available from: <http://www.thealbany.org.uk/> [accessed 12/12/2009]

⁷¹⁴ Though I speak from my experience as a community and youth worker in Deptford, this can be easily verified by the amount of violence reported in the area. Making a search today revealed that another shooting has recently taken place: Deptford: Police Appeal After Saturday Night Shooting *This Is Local London*. Available from: http://www.thisislocallondon.co.uk/news/4516130.DEPTFORD__Police_appeal_after_Saturday_night_shooting/29/07/2009 [8/08/2009]

⁷¹⁵ See: Seetzen, H. The Production of Place: The Renewal of Deptford Creekside, 2006 In: Deptford.TV *Deptford.TV Diaries* London: MetaMute, 2006, pp. 29-44.

⁷¹⁶ Chatzichristodoulou, M. and Zerihan, R. *Intimacy*: Report, 2008. See Appendix Two.

⁷¹⁷ Home Live Art website. Available from: <http://www.homeliveart.com/> [accessed 12/12/2009]

technology? How is desire constructed through representation? What is the relationship of the body to self-awareness?”⁷¹⁸ *Intimacy* employed these questions to explore performance practices that engage in intimate encounters, raising issues around bodies of data and flesh; presence as aura and representation; desire as embodied condition and disembodied fantasy; the human and posthuman self. At the same time, the event wished to explore technologies that can enhance ‘closeness’: networking technologies such as the Internet, wireless networks, telecommunications technologies and Web 2.0, sensor technologies, virtual reality and other digital multi-user environments. We argued that these technologies of inter-subjectivity generate heterotopias (Foucault, see Chapter Two, 2.1.c), which potentially function as the settings for encounters both affective and threatening. Such encounters can also be had in physical space, through visceral exchanges: along with intimate digital performance practices the event was also held to explore One to One performances, looking at risk-taking within extremely intimate environments. One to Ones, argued Rachel, negotiate trust “through exposure to motifs such as taboo and otherness” and push the boundaries of one’s self to manage “self-giving” and “self-losing”.⁷¹⁹ Moreover, the *Intimacy* event was open to all types of digital, visceral and hybrid performance and performative practices and discourses that aspired to interrogate and explore notions of intimacy. In designing the event, Rachel and I endeavoured to avoid polarisations between practices and experiences of proximal versus telematic, or corporeal versus disembodied. Instead, we sought “to elucidate contemporary culture’s intense and specific concern with our relationship with intimacy”⁷²⁰ through a range of intellectual and experiential approaches.

Intimacy aimed to enable the interrogation and creative exploration of formal, aesthetic and affective modes of performing intimacy, through showcasing as well as providing a platform for the discussion of sub-cultural practices concerned with displaying intuitive, intimate and visceral relationships between artists and others. Furthermore, the event set out to enable some degree of hands-on exploration of various technologies of connectivity as a means for intimate (inter)actions in digital and hybrid performance practices. Through *Intimacy* we intended to afford contemporary practitioners, theorists and students the opportunity of practical and critical engagement with present co-ordinates that define these practices. The event was constructed as a three-day interdisciplinary programme of activities designed to elicit connectivity, induce interaction, and provoke debate between makers and witnesses of works that explicitly address proximity and hybridity in performance. Digital and live art performance practices were used as agents to further practical exploration of, and vibrant discourse into,

⁷¹⁸ Stone, A. R. *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age*, p. 17.

⁷¹⁹ Zerihan, R. *Intimate Inter-actions*.

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.*

intimate inter-actions. The event was comprised of a programme of 36 performances, six workshops, four seminars, a day of show-and-tell presentations and a one-day symposium. *Intimacy* was framed as a forum for artists, scholars, community workers, performers, cultural practitioners, researchers and creative thinkers.

A major concern in designing *Intimacy* was striking a balance between theory and practice. Both Rachel and I considered artistic practice as the core of this event. Our aim was to produce a showcase of emergent performance practices framed by critical analysis and practical interrogation. As a result, our Call was open to performances, papers, performance lectures, screenings and demonstrations. In response to the Call we received more than 200 submissions from around the world. We finally put together a programme of 36 innovative performance works across genres, inviting both established and emergent practitioners. In selecting and programming these performances, as well as commissioning some new works, we wanted to question assumptions about rigid disciplinary boundaries and provide inspiration, cross-disciplinary dialogue and cross-fertilisation for the development of new works that push boundaries in performance practice and research. Moreover, we wished to initiate dialogues concerning issues of presence, intimacy and affect in and across physical, digital and hybrid environments, hoping to expand and enrich our understanding of what constitutes performance practice today. Finally, we aspired to initiate collaborations among practitioners working in different disciplines, as well as among theory and practice, through a strong focus on practice/action-led research. The programme was curated with an aim of providing a platform for cutting edge performance works that explore notions of intimacy in live art and digital performance. The curatorial approach focused on creating bridges by highlighting overlaps and recurring subjects, concerns and strategies across visceral and digital practices.⁷²¹ The performance programme not only situated practice at the core of the event, but also contributed to making the event accessible to non-academic audiences.

⁷²¹ The majority of performance work showcased was submitted through the Open Call and peer-reviewed by our Panel and Board. Some works were commissioned to specifically address issues raised by *Intimacy* through their form or subject-matter.



Figure 4.2 SUKA OFF *transSfera* at *Intimacy*, 2007

Intimacy was intended to provide a creative space for discussion and critical inquiry, as well as practical experimentation and hands-on exploration. To achieve this we programmed six workshops, each dealing with a different set of ideas and/or technological innovations from an integrated performance art perspective. The workshops were designed to involve audiences as active participants in a practice-based and practice-driven research process. Three of the workshops aimed to explore specific technologies as platforms, instigators or integral elements of live performance practice. These workshops researched: a) Wearables and close-to-the-skin interfaces: the *Bodies of Colour* workshop, led by Johannes Birringer, invited participants to explore “the contemporary (technologically augmented and supported) wearable sensorial interface for performance (...) touching upon the erotics of materials and feedbacks, (and) interacting in a tactile sensorial manner within the mediated environment.”⁷²² b) Analogue and digital bodies: The *Avatar Paste and Code Soup in First and Second Life* workshop, led by Associate Professor Charles Baldwin (University of West Virginia) and artist Alan Sondheim, used “a range of technologies to remap the solid and obdurate real of bodies into the dispersions and virtualities of the digital, and then back again into real physical spaces.”⁷²³ The workshop attempted to unpack issues of sexuality, power and emotion in the avatar body through “a choreography of exposure and rupture, modelling and presenting inconceivable and untenable data, within which tensions and relationships are immediate and intimate.”⁷²⁴ c) Intimacy and presence in the recorded image: the *Intimacy and Recorded Presence* workshop, led by Kelli Dipple (webcasting curator, Tate), approached the camera as “an interface between performer,

⁷²² Birringer, J. *Bodies of Colour* at *Intimacy*. Workshop Abstract. Available from: <http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/intimacy/workshops.php> 2007 [accessed 5/11/2009]

⁷²³ Baldwin, C. and Sondheim, A. *Avatar Paste and Code Soup in First and Second Life* at *Intimacy*. Workshop Abstract. Available from: <http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/intimacy/workshops.php> 2007 [accessed 5/11/2009]

⁷²⁴ Ibid.

action and technology” as well as “a key element in the relationships between kinaesthetic forms and digital outputs”, inviting participants to use cameras “as a basis for form, instruction-based action and one-to-one performance.”⁷²⁵

The other three workshops focused on methodologies for the production of intimacy and affect in performance through: d) Dispersed, elaborated and localised intimacies: the *Intimate Details Only* workshop, led by artist Kira O’Reilly, asked participants to practically explore “how to occupy some of the pauses, lapses and moments within this conflicting and confusing concept of intimacy” by creating intimate encounters with strangers in New Cross.⁷²⁶ e) Urban intimacies: The *Do-Not-Move Urban Workshop*, led by artist/curator/producer Pierre Bongiovanni (France) and voice artist Camille Renhard (Canada), ran over two days and resulted in a collaborative performance that was created and performed by both artists and participants. The workshop invited participants to experience the urban environment of New Cross and Deptford through their senses, raw emotions, risky interactions and live, unexpected encounters, posing all-important questions about our cities, lives, loves, and the world we live in. f) Durational participatory performance as instigator of intimacy: the *Intimacy as Event* workshop, led by artist/curator Lauren Goode, invited participants to engage in a choreographed exercise of slowness in public space (Goldsmiths’ campus corridors). The “movement-device” was designed to activate a meditative proximity between the participants through a montage of movement durations, as well as disrupt the usual movements occurring in those corridors in order to render visible simultaneous intimacies in public space.

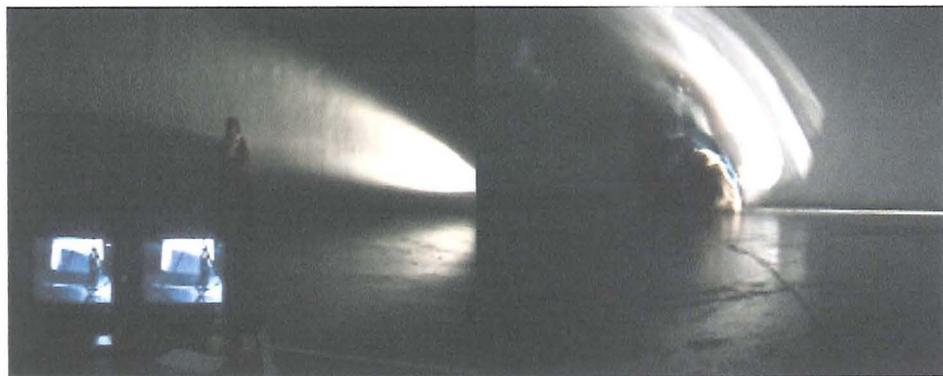


Figure 4.3 *Recorded Intimacy* Workshop with Kelli Dipple at *Intimacy*, 2007

⁷²⁵ Dipple, K. *Intimacy and Recorded Presence* at *Intimacy*. Workshop Abstract. Available from: <http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/intimacy/workshops.php> 2007 [accessed 5/11/2009]

⁷²⁶ O’Reilly, K. *Intimate Details Only* at *Intimacy*. Workshop Abstract. Available from: <http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/intimacy/workshops.php> 2007 [accessed 5/11/2009]

Regarding the design of the critical aspect of the event, a concern that Rachel and I shared was how to challenge the traditional conference format. Our focus was on allowing enough space for discussion, debate and cross-fertilisation of ideas, foregrounding both theory and practice, and consistently creating pathways for the involvement of non-academic audiences. Aiming to initiate encounters and debates amongst diverse communities we decided to restrict the more traditionally formatted symposium to the last day of the event and schedule activities that could provide a fertile ground for such encounters to occur. These were four seminars and what we named a ‘show-and-tell marathon’. The seminars, like the workshops, aimed to provide a space and a time for active, meaningful and in-depth engagement in theoretical and discursive processes of exploration and exchange. Two of the seminars explored the effect of specific technologies in performance practice in relation to notions and experiences of intimacy, focusing on: a) Issues of (dis)embodiment in telematic/telepresent art installations: the *(Dis)Embodiment* seminar, led by Professor Paul Sermon (University of Salford), examined a number of interactive, telematic artworks, addressing “fundamental existential questions concerning identity, the self, the ego and the (dis)embodied avatar.”⁷²⁷ b) The poetics of live interaction in telematic and virtual environments, with particular attention to time as a significant vector in establishing ‘meaningful’ exchanges. *The Time it Takes to True* seminar, led by Mine Kaylan (Lecturer, University of Brighton) asked: “What can we learn from cinema makers about structures of time and visual rhythm in interactions through tele-motion?”⁷²⁸

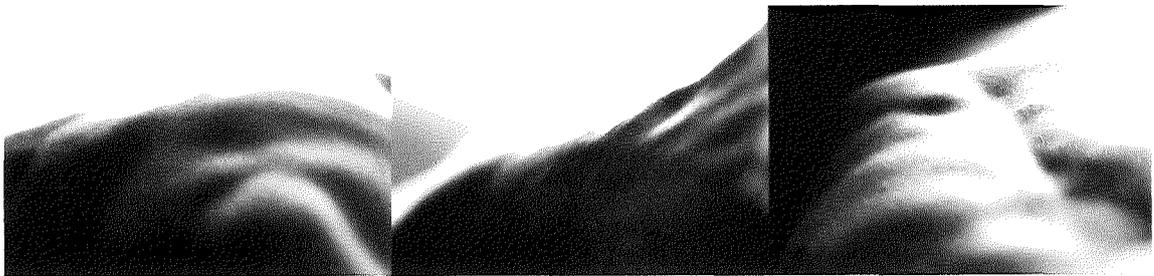


Figure 4.4 Jaime del Val *Microdances at Intimacy*, 2007

A further two seminars explored issues pertinent to both live art and digital performance practices, namely: c) Being human and being humane, specifically as these notions are formally and conceptually addressed through Live and Body Art: the seminar *At Risk*, led by researcher/writer Tracey Warr, invited participants to examine their own “responses,

⁷²⁷ Sermon, P. *(Dis)Embodiment at Intimacy*. Seminar Abstract. Available from: <http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/intimacy/seminars.php> 2007 [accessed 5/11/2009]

⁷²⁸ Kaylan, M. *The Time it Takes to True at Intimacy*. Seminar Abstract. Available from: <http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/intimacy/seminars.php> 2007 [accessed 5/11/2009]

responsibilities and complicities in relation to a range of (...) artists' works (...) (and) to differing modes of proximity".⁷²⁹ Furthermore, participants were encouraged to consider digital technologies as "a key influence in bringing the embodied consciousness and a metaphysics of the body back into focus" and were asked: "Can we play responsibly with each other in the digital domain?"⁷³⁰ d) Representations of erotic and sexual intimacy in performance, exploring performance "as a staging of forbidden or otherwise troubled intimacies".⁷³¹ the *Intimacy and Pornography* seminar, led by Dominic Johnson (Lecturer, Queen Mary University of London), attempted to approach diverse performances of "difficult intimacies" setting up critical frameworks through Emmanuel Levinas's idea of the 'infinite intimacy', William Haver's imagining of 'the pornographic life' and George Bataille's writings on the threat of intimate interiors as a 'scandalous eruption'.⁷³² Moreover, a 'show-and-tell' marathon was designed to provide a platform for the presentation of work-in-progress, featuring presentations, screenings and demonstrations.

A one-day Symposium was programmed for the last day of the *Intimacy* event. The Symposium aimed to provide a platform for the presentation of the findings/outcomes of the workshops and seminars as well as original papers, and generate discourse across disciplines. As several of the audiences attending the Symposium had taken part in the workshops and seminars, we reasoned that they were, in some way, shareholders in the discussions to be had regarding the outcomes of those events. We hoped that their experience as participants would empower audiences to take an active part in those discussions. A number of one-to-one performances and happenings were programmed to take place in parallel with the Symposium and during the breaks. Both practice-led examinations and seminar discussions explored the diverse environments that play host to digital and visceral artworks, converging to produce dialogue that sought to grapple with this inherently conceptual framework and to play in the seam where the two states meet.

The Symposium opened with a keynote presentation by Professor Amelia Jones (Manchester Metropolitan University) entitled: *Screen Eroticism: Contrasting Intimacies in the work of Carolee Schneemann and Pipilotti Rist*. Jones proposed that "a profound technological and ideological shift" occurred "in the visualisation and conceptualisation of eroticism (as a mode of intimacy) from the 1960s to the 1990s",⁷³³ and provided evidence through a

⁷²⁹ Warr, T. *At Risk at Intimacy*. Seminar Abstract. Available from:
http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/intimacy/seminars.php_2007 [accessed 5/11/2009]

⁷³⁰ Ibid.

⁷³¹ Johnson, D. *Intimacy and Pornography at Intimacy*. Seminar Abstract. Available from:
http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/intimacy/seminars.php_2007 [accessed 5/11/2009]

⁷³² Ibid.

⁷³³ Jones, A. *Screen Eroticism: Contrasting Intimacies in the work of Carolee Schneemann and Pipilotti Rist*.

comparative analysis of Carolee Schneemann's *Fuses* (1964-7) and Pipilotti Rist's *Pickelporno* (1992), two "major feminist screen-based projects". Through her keynote Jones sought to point out "broad transformations in beliefs about identity and embodiment in the contemporary period"⁷³⁴ through

cast[ing] light on three major and interrelated shifts in the following areas: feminist and broader social conceptions of eroticism and sexual agency; the articulation of a vital female erotic power through screen-based media (16mm film and video, respectively), each having its own potential to render the human subject differently; and artistic strategies for exploring the relationships among the body, the camera, the resultant screen image and space.⁷³⁵

The Symposium featured seminar and workshop leaders Paul Sermon, Tracey Warr, Dominic Johnson, Mine Kaylan, Kira O'Reilly and Kelli Dipple, each contextualising the seminars/workshops they led during the previous days and presenting the outcomes of those critical and practical explorations. Furthermore: a) Artist Ang Bartram (Senior Lecturer, Lincoln University), in her paper *Meeting Grounds and Collisions*, discussed performative actions that inhabit "in-between" spaces by "transgressing the boundaries that divide and legislate". Such actions, Bartram argued, create "a vibration to occur in how the work is mediated" –a vibration that is both "liminal and potent", as it generates an "intimate meeting space where meaning is understood without rules."⁷³⁶ Bartram examined the 'art/life gap' (Gunter Brus) as "the driving force behind an artistic practice involved with abjection, intimate exchange, and the liminal."⁷³⁷ b) Artist Anita Ponton, through her paper *Eye to I*, offered "a philosophical consideration of the impact of digital technologies on the intersubjective and interobjective dynamic generated by body and performance art."⁷³⁸ Ponton argued for a "reassessment" of the notion of proximity through an analysis of the presence-absence dialectic within the context of virtual worlds. Seeking to unpack the way we experience "virtual presence", Ponton addressed the issue of "selfhood" and re-examined "the limits of the 21st Century body".⁷³⁹ Drawing upon Amelia Jones's concept of 'technophenomenology', Ponton went on to argue that "digital and virtual technologies change our understanding of the limits of body and of consciousness and uncover the intersecting desires that underpin the performance of 'self' as an art action."⁷⁴⁰ c) Simon Jones (Reader in Performance, Bristol University) presented his paper *De-Second-Naturing*:

Keynote, *Intimacy Symposium*, Goldsmiths, London, 9/12/2007.

⁷³⁴ Ibid.

⁷³⁵ Ibid.

⁷³⁶ Bartram, A. *Meeting Grounds and Collisions*. Paper, *Intimacy Symposium*, Goldsmiths, London, 9/12/2007.

⁷³⁷ Ibid.

⁷³⁸ Ponton, A. *Eye to I*. Paper, *Intimacy Symposium*, Goldsmiths, London, 9/12/2007.

⁷³⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid.

Performance's Intimate Work in a World of Terror, through which he invited audiences to explore “the current, often indirectly expressed anxiety in experimental performance over the re-emergence of geo-politics as a central issue in everyday life in western societies.”⁷⁴¹ Jones argued that performance is “a unique site within which personhood can be set against and alongside citizenship” to suggest that we approach performance “as an interstices of in-betweens exposing the aporia between our senses (...), our embodied and discursive practices and their relation to the everyday and its ongoing politicisation.”⁷⁴² d) Finally, artist Jess Dobkin (Canada) presented her performance project *The Lactation Station Breast Milk Bar* (2006), for which she invited audiences to sample small quantities of human breast milk donated by new mothers. The performance came out of Dobkin’s own experience as a new mother, which awoke her to “cultural issues and taboos surrounding breast feeding”.⁷⁴³ The piece aimed to challenge “a wide range of issues around intimacy, curiosity, social discomfort, and women’s bodies” by inviting audiences to partake in the intimate act of drinking someone’s bodily fluid, thus “transgressing our knowledge and comfort in relationship to bodies, biology and social practices.”⁷⁴⁴

Intimacy attracted approximately 1,500 attendees/participants from the UK, Canada, USA, Japan, China, Colombia, France, Switzerland, Spain, Finland, Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, Slovenia, Serbia, Romania, Greece, Turkey and New Zealand. The *Intimacy* event, as well as the pre- and post-*Intimacy* online discussions (on fora such as the www.arts-humanities.net, for example) developed communities across which dialogues emerged and the use of digital technologies in performance was re-examined. The inter-disciplinary, international cross-section of artists, scholars and attendees who physically or virtually took part in *Intimacy* demonstrated the significance of the subject matter in contemporary culture. The event suggested that emergent technologies are being broadly employed by artists who seek to examine and explore their potential in contemporary performance-making. It equally suggested that the genre of digital and networked performance is strongly establishing itself as a major contemporary field of practice and research, which is being articulated and critically examined not in opposition but in relation to visceral performance practices. The diverse range of performances showcased in *Intimacy* opened up such dialogues across and between visceral and digital performance practices, several of which also integrated or experimented with sound and wearable technologies in order to create, disrupt or problematise intimate environments.

⁷⁴¹ Jones, S. *De-Second-Naturing: Performance's Intimate Work in a World of Terror*. Paper, *Intimacy Symposium*, Goldsmiths, London, 9/12/2007.

⁷⁴² Ibid.

⁷⁴³ Dobkin, J. *The Lactation Station Breast Milk Bar*. Paper, *Intimacy Symposium*, Goldsmiths, London, 9/12/2007.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid.

Artists, researchers and participants taking part in *Intimacy* appreciated the time and space made available for in-depth exchanges between the different stakeholders of the event, which in turn allowed for the generation of cross-fertilisations, alliances and collaborations, as well as the expression, articulation and –occasional– resolution of tensions and conflicts.

As well as opening up discussions and providing the shared ground for those to develop, *Intimacy* also resulted to some tangible outputs:

- Two £500 bursaries were offered to proposals from workshop participants who submitted project ideas emerging from their workshop experience in *Intimacy*;
- Rachel and I were invited to the Central School of Speech and Drama (2007) to discuss the relationship between digital and live art practices. The *Intimacy* event and the discussions this brought forth have since been presented in a number of conferences, sessions and research meetings, including a research meeting at Yale University (2009).⁷⁴⁵
- The practice of digital and live art performance was brought to the foreground in mainstream and specialist arts press during and following the *Intimacy* event (*The Guardian*, *Velvet*, *Hallmark*). Such writings serve to publicise the relationship between the fields, encouraging readers to experience this terrain.
- The British Library acquired all *Intimacy* footage, which is now available through the British Library Sound Archive. Documentation of the event has also been acquired by the Live Art Development Agency and is available through its Study Room. Inclusion of such materials in these widely accessed resources means makers, scholars and researchers of live and digital arts practices have access to the diverse range of conceptual, theoretical and practical examinations that made part of *Intimacy*.
- Finally, we hope that an edited collection of writings that emerged from the *Intimacy* event will be published, and we are in discussions with publishers to this end. The suggested volume will serve to document the impact of the event as well as maintain and further artistic and critical interest and discourse around the subject matter of intimacy, reflecting on its significance across performance environments.

4.3. Intimate Patterns

As discussed, *Intimacy* was not a festival of cybertheatres *per se*. Instead, it aimed to bridge across a spectrum of emergent and established performance practices, such as digital and contemporary

⁷⁴⁵ I was invited to present *Intimacy* and my research on cybertheatres at the Digital Dance Summit in Yale University, organised by Professor Thomas F. DeFrantz (MIT) on 16/10/2009.

performance, cybertheatres and one to one performance events, all invested in intimacy as a subject matter, methodological paradigm, or desired outcome. As such, the theoretical framework I set up in Chapters Two and Three in relation to cybertheatre practices is not relevant to all of the events presented within the *Intimacy* showcase, many of which unfolded in physical space with or without the use of digital and networking technologies. Nevertheless, one of the aims of this event was indeed to showcase performances that can be framed as cybertheatres, as well as other digital performance practices, and interrogate their relevance within the field of contemporary performance practice.

One of the most interesting cybertheatre events that took place during *Intimacy* was the workshop *Avatar Paste and Code Soup in First and Second Life* that was led by Charles Baldwin and Alan Sondheim within the Second Life world. During the workshop, Baldwin and Sondheim demonstrated “their approach to re-mapping live bodies into Second Life performances”.⁷⁴⁶ The artists use video and motion capture technologies to capture the movement of flesh-bodies in physical space; they then process those files editing bvh data⁷⁴⁷ or working with the Blender software.⁷⁴⁸ The resulting works, some of which were presented at the workshop, are cybertheatres (performances taking place in Second Life, where the movements of the avatars have been built through this process), as well as their re-mappings back into ‘First Life’ spaces, with live performers. Baldwin and Sondheim’s explorations at *Intimacy* were the result of their long-term collaboration at the Virtual Environments Laboratory at West Virginia University, where Baldwin is a Faculty member and Sondheim has been an artist in residence. Their explorations are body-centric, focusing on the physical body, its behaviour and limitations -that is, what the body can and cannot do. Baldwin and Sondheim

deconstruct bodies by reassigning nodes (such as knee, arm, leg, and neck) across topographies. For example, the assignments may be inverted –leg to neck, neck to knee, etc.– or divided among several bodies/performers, or arranged in geometrical patterns. (...) The result of all of this is the creation or re/creation of bodies as avatars which behave in literally inconceivable ways.⁷⁴⁹

Thus Baldwin and Sondheim’s experimentations de/construct bodies that exist

⁷⁴⁶ Baldwin, C. and Sondheim, A. *Avatar Paste and Code Soup in First and Second Life at Intimacy*. Workshop Report submitted to the author, 2008.

⁷⁴⁷ BVH stands for “Biovision Hierarchical Data”, a format developed by the motion capture company Biovision. This file format is used for the representation of movements in the animation of humanoid structures, and it describes movement in terms of joints, hierarchy and angle constraints.

⁷⁴⁸ Blender is a free and open source 3D editing suite suitable for modelling, animation, editing and so on, for the creation of interactive 3D applications such as computer games. See: <http://www.blender.org/> [accessed 4/07/2010]

⁷⁴⁹ Baldwin, C. and Sondheim, A. *Avatar Paste and Code Soup in First and Second Life at Intimacy*. Workshop Report.

between the analogue and the digital –between flesh and digital flesh. Within the real world, they are obdurate, inert, and more or less solid (...); within the virtual, they are digital, dispersed, and capable of reassembling and disassembling on every level, from the individual bit to the gestalt as a whole. This has led, and continues to lead, to a deep analysis of the relationship between dispersion and the digital, and location and the analogical. (...) Through mapping data into bvh files, it becomes possible to produce representations which appear organic, within which tensions and relationships are immediately read, vis-à-vis our ability to read bodies in the real world. One might imagine, then, data as a form of organism itself: as part of a natural world or a world already given; out of this we might think through new ideas of landscape, wilderness, hard ecology, the earth itself.⁷⁵⁰

I find Baldwin and Sondheim’s cybertheatre experiments utterly fascinating, primarily due to their body-centric focus. In Chapter Three, I asked whether “augmented/expanded/displaced/dispersed/shared bodies differ that radically from our corporeal ones” and argued that Phelan’s ‘apparent’ flesh-bodies are as virtual, in their potentiality –their “dimension of pressing potential” that Massumi pointed out– as the cyborgian and/or posthuman bodies I discussed through my case-studies of *Entropy&Zuper!&Tale of Tales* and *Blast Theory*. Furthermore, in Chapter Two I argued that the avatar body that I see in the virtual mirror, there where I am not, is not *my* body, but my body’s other, as it does not –it *cannot*– carry my pain, pleasure and incumbent death within its digital substrates. At *Intimacy*, Baldwin and Sondheim demonstrated an even closer link between my body and my body’s other, where my body’s other, my avatar, is mapped upon my flesh-body, my movement, my physical limits and unique materialities. My avatar is then uniquely mine, organically linked to my physical body. But it is also yours, as the bvh files can be dispersed and disassembled, shared amongst a plurality of avatars and virtual communities. As in the case of *Wirefire*, the performers’ bodies online are no more singular, distinct, defined by skin-limit; instead, they are dispersed, distributed and shared bodyscapes in a performance where, as Paul pointed out, the question is no more “Who am I?” but “What is all that I can be?”.⁷⁵¹ As the files that map out the movement of Baldwin’s, Sondheim’s and their performers’ bodies are being processed and turned into their bodies’ others, those others are formed as a result of strange couplings and exchanges: my movement becomes yours, and the posthuman performer is “able to participate in distributed cognition dispersed throughout the body, the environment and other bodies”.⁷⁵² Mappings of my body’s movement, my unique materiality, become multiple and shared and, as Giannachi proposed, “my body could become yours and ‘I’ really could become ‘you’”.⁷⁵³

I suggest that Baldwin and Sondheim’s performances demonstrate the relevance of my

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁵¹ Paul, C. *Cyborg as Cyberbody*.

⁷⁵² Giannachi, G. *The Politics of New Media Theatre: Life*, p. 83.

⁷⁵³ Ibid.

discussion on the presence-absence paradox, in Chapter Three of this thesis, in relation to cybertheatre practices. In their performance experiments, the artists claim a ‘presence’ for themselves and their bodies’ others (avatars) through the patterns and randomness that they generate as a result of their involvement (interaction/relation) with the virtual world (system/environment) and other users (co-performers, audiences). In fact, their performances could be seen to further this argument: not only do they claim their *presence* through the generation of pattern/randomness and relationality; they also claim their *bodies* through the same process. Baldwin’s, Sondheim’s and their performers’ avatar bodies are, actually, representations of patterns generated by flesh bodies through their movement in physical space. Unlike a lot of the Second Life world, which strives to imitate real/first life, the artists take advantage of the heterotopia of cyberspace to create avatars that appear, behave, move and interact in ways that are untenable, or even unimaginable, to our physical body-selves. There, space is experienced as “duplications (...), redundancies and doublings-up which engender (...) the strangest of contrasts”.⁷⁵⁴ Those contrasts further Lefebvre’s doublings of “face and arse, eye and flesh, (...) lips and teeth (...)”⁷⁵⁵ to map out space experientially through uncanny anatomies of “leg to neck”, or “neck to knee” pairings. In Baldwin and Sondheim’s cybertheatre practice, the heterotopia of cyberspace and, specifically, the virtual world of Second Life, is being experienced, made and performed for what it is –an ‘other’ space, upon which the artists have *not* inscribed foreign topologies to accommodate familiar cognitive functions. Since, following Lefebvre, space is “first of all *my body*”, the artists’ de/reconstructed, unique, organic, digital bodies push into existence novel, hybrid spacetimes that look and feel like nothing ever seen or experienced before. The introduction of Artificial Intelligence in the artists’ cybertheater practice further confuses the boundaries between flesh bodies and digital flesh, generating uncanny patterns of being there and being (a)live.

Johannes Birringer who, as discussed, was present and influential from the very beginning of discussions on the *Intimacy* event (as well as a member of the Advisory Board) also took part in *Intimacy* in three capacities: as leader of the workshop *Bodies of Colour*; as director/choreographer of the piece *Suna No Onna (Woman of the Dunes)*, which was commissioned by Intimacy and co-produced by Birringer’s company Dans Sans Joux and *Intimacy/Laban*; and as chair (together with Professor Lizbeth Goodman) of the open forum discussion at the end of the *Intimacy* symposium. As discussed in Chapter Three, Birringer’s work cannot always be framed as cybertheatres: the digital performance pieces that he creates, though often networked, feature presences that, despite their temporal synchronicity, are not always (a)live –that is, open to the possibility of interaction and (ex)change. On this occasion, the *Bodies of Colour* workshop was relevant to current

⁷⁵⁴ Lefebvre, H. *The Production of Space*, p. 184.

⁷⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

cybertheatre practice, because it examined the relationship between the user (performer/participant) and his/her augmented environment.

In his Report Paper on the workshop Birringer discusses digital performance practices and cybertheatres from the point of view of the performer on stage. He refers to Dawn Stoppiello of Troika Ranch, who speaks of her “entwinement” with the projected images in the group’s performances. Stoppiello talks of the video images, which her body manipulates through sensors, “not [as] an external object (to which she was linked by some interface) but (...) like “a hand or a torso or some other part of my body.” (...) [T]hey become like phantom limbs.” Such sensorial human-computer interaction” Birringer concludes, “is therefore immediate and visceral.”⁷⁵⁶ Birringer goes on to ask how our perception of our environment (social space) can influence our “social interaction within that very environment –interaction in terms of the ‘intimate’, the ‘personal’ and the ‘social’.” Through the workshop he led during *Intimacy*, as well as the *Suna No Onna* performance, Birringer and his collaborators aimed to create networked –that is porous, penetrable and ‘open’– real-time environments, in order to instigate and interrogate such processes of social interaction, and to examine “how patterns of consciousness, perception and identity emerge in such settings and engage our sensorial experience.”⁷⁵⁷ Birringer’s interrogations of the heterotopic space of cybertheatre practices and the bodies that generate this social (relational) space operated in a way that was relevant to, but different from, Baldwin and Sondheim’s experiments. Whereas Baldwin and Sondheim translated data collected from physical space and bodies of flesh into the virtual world of Second Life, Birringer’s work was concerned with augmenting the visceral body and the physical space, adding layers of digitality into ‘First Life’ topologies and anatomies. In that sense, Birringer’s explorations in *Intimacy* related to Baldwin and Sondheim’s work in a way that is analogous to how my two main case-studies have mapped out throughout this thesis: on the one hand Entropy&Zuper!/Tale of Tales translate physical presence, proximity and sensual desire into distributed, cybernetic patterns; on the other hand Blast Theory introduce layers of digitality into the physical terrain, creating digital doppelgangers (as in the case of all *CYSMN?* cities) and enfolding the digital back into the visceral, material specificities of bodies and environments.

Interestingly, other participants who presented or discussed cybertheatre practices during *Intimacy* were also concerned with issues of social and political space, and our interactions with and within it. Paul Sermon led a workshop on *(Dis)Embodiment* starting from the discussion of his own performance work in Second Life. Through this seminar Sermon aimed to critically investigate how online participants in three-dimensional worlds, and Second Life in particular, “interact with innovative creative environments and appropriate these cultural experiences as part of their

⁷⁵⁶ Birringer, J. *Bodies of Colour*. Workshop Report submitted to the author, 2008.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid.

everyday lives as a vehicle for social and cultural change.”⁷⁵⁸ Sermon pointed at the consumer aesthetics and ethics of Second Life to ask whether this expanding community “has become ambivalent and numbed by their virtual consumption.”⁷⁵⁹ Though at first glance this might appear to be the case, and whilst the shopping malls, nightclubs, bars, beaches and adult content areas certainly are the aspects of Second Life that attract the most media attention, Sermon described the prolonged mass virtual protests that took place inworld when Jean-Marie Le Pen’s Front National opened its Second Life headquarters in January 2007. As a result of the protests, Front National’s headquarters were removed from Second Life within a week. Responding to those events Sermon asks:

Is SL a platform for potential social change in the virtual world? Moreover, does SL mirror our first life, as Linden Labs (...) advocate? And therefore could our first life existence start to reflect our SL conscience (...)? As the landmass and population of SL expands at an ever-increasing rate it is clear that further consumer manifestations of first life will continue to proliferate and colonise the landscape, be it shopping malls, casinos or political headquarters; this consumption and colonisation phenomena signals a need to identify alternative and innovative practice that engages with all SL residents at a greater intellectual level, defining new paradigms of socialinteraction through artistic intervention.⁷⁶⁰

Issues of ethics and responsibility were also relevant to Tracey Warr’s discussion of bodies –whether visceral, digital or hybrid– in her seminar *At Risk*. In this Warr argued that artists use their bodies “to tell us something about the human condition (...); to ask what is it to be human and what is it to be humane.”⁷⁶¹ Furthermore, Warr suggested that the body is “the meeting-place of the individual and the collective. (...) it is the site par excellence for transgressing the constraints of meaning or what social discursivity prescribes as normality (Richard, 1986: 65).”⁷⁶² Warr went on to voice her concerns around media saturation and its results on our perception of ‘other’ bodies as remote and distant images, objects separate from our material corpo-realities. Raising the issue of personal responsibility in our interaction with (dis)embodied avatars and telepresent streams, she asked: “What is the quality of interaction and community enabled through digital technologies?”⁷⁶³ The second part of this Chapter grapples with this question.

⁷⁵⁸ Sermon, P. *(Dis)Embodiment*. Seminar Report submitted to the author, 2008.

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁶¹ Warr, T. *At Risk*. Seminar Report submitted to the author, 2008.

⁷⁶² Ibid.

⁷⁶³ Ibid.



Figure 4.5 Jess Dobkin *Fee for Service at Intimacy*, 2007

4.4. Curating Live Media, Part Two: Deptford.TV⁷⁶⁴ and Strategies of Sharing

Deptford.TV is...

- “An audio-visual documentation of the urban change of the Deptford area”. (Adnan Hadzi)⁷⁶⁵
- “A platform for collaboration with a focus on Deptford communities.” (Elvira)⁷⁶⁶
- “A collaborative environment for the filmmaking of the Deptford regeneration that accommodates different levels of participation and engagement.” “A community project.” (Bitnik media collective)
- “A pool of clips.” (Stephen Oldfield)
- “A grassroots media project.” (Camden McDonald)
- “A public access media project that investigates new areas such as collaborative film editing.” (James Stephens)

⁷⁶⁴ *Deptford.TV* website. Available from: <http://www.deptford.tv> [accessed 1/08/2009]

⁷⁶⁵ *Deptford.TV*. About. Available from: http://watch.deptford.tv/blog/?page_id=4 [accessed 20/11/2009]

⁷⁶⁶ *Deptford.TV* participants, interviews with the author, 2006.

- “A project that aims to generate shared resources by uploading materials which people are able to share.” (Gordon Cooper)
- “A collaborative filmmaking project that looks at issues of regeneration.” (Amanda Egbe)

4.4.a) On Sharing: From ‘I’ to ‘We’ – From Ownership to Access

In Chapter Three I presented Hayles’s argument that the presence-absence dialectic is not sufficient for the discussion of virtual and networked environments, demonstrating the need for the introduction of a complementary dialectic of pattern and randomness. Hayles proposes that the shift of focus from presence-absence to pattern-randomness implies yet another shift from ownership to access. Whereas ownership requires a presence (something tangible one would wish to own) claims Hayles, access implies pattern recognition.⁷⁶⁷ Applying Hayles’s proposition (materiality implies presence, thus invites ownership – information implies pattern/randomness, thus invites access) to the artistic evolutions discussed in Chapter One – which shifted understandings of art from the material object to immaterial concepts, open-ended processes, distributed systems, and networked environments⁷⁶⁸ I deduce that material art objects call for someone to own them, and immaterial, distributed, data-enriched and/or networked concepts, systems and processes call for people to access them.⁷⁶⁹

How can people access such works? By (dis)embodying, inhabiting or ‘becoming’ them, as is the case with *Can You See Me Now?* and *The Endless Forest* (see Chapters Two and Three); or by co-curating and co-authoring them, as is the case with Web 2.0 platform *Deptford.TV*. As Hayles points out, such works cannot be owned by a single person: they are of and about exchanges, relations and communities. Here I discuss *Deptford.TV* as a model for a Web 2.0 platform that can enhance access, exchange, collaboration and community in practices of cybertheatres, online curation and other artistic and social applications. What is Web 2.0 beyond the hype though? O’Reilly Media and MediaLive hosted the first Web 2.0 conference in 2004, describing Web 2.0 as “an attitude rather than a technology”.⁷⁷⁰ The term, as described by Tim O’Reilly and John Batelle, does not refer to any technical upgrade of the World Wide Web,

⁷⁶⁷ Hayles, N. K. *How We Became Posthuman*, pp. 39-40.

⁷⁶⁸ I do not imply that traditional artforms such as painting and sculpture are not valid, and valuable, today. I only indicate that art practices have expanded to include processes and systems, often immaterial or contextual, that would not have been perceived as art before the advent of these movements.

⁷⁶⁹ Though there is such thing as collective ownership I think that, in general, access implies a more democratic negotiation of information: one person’s access, more often than not, does not render the information out of reach for all others, as ownership often does. For example, if someone buys a painting, his/her ownership of the piece prevents others from owning it too. If someone accesses a net.art piece though, his/her access does not prevent others from accessing the piece too, which would not only be possible but also enriching for both the piece and its audiences.

⁷⁷⁰ O’Reilly, T. Cited by: Lanchester, J. A Bigger Bang *The Guardian*. Available from: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/weekend/story/0,,1937496,00.html> 4/11/2006 [accessed 9/04/2007]

“but rather to cumulative changes in the ways software developers and end-users use the Web.”⁷⁷¹ O’Reilly and Batelle discussed the Web as platform rather than application, “where software applications are built upon the Web as opposed to upon the desktop.”⁷⁷²

A year later, O’Reilly went on to argue that the clash is no more between platform and application, but between two radically different platforms: “On the one side, a single software provider, whose massive installed base and tightly integrated operating system and APIs⁷⁷³ give control over the programming paradigm; on the other, a system without an owner, tied together by a set of protocols, open standards and agreements for cooperation.”⁷⁷⁴ O’Reilly contrasts Windows, “the pinnacle of proprietary control via software APIs”⁷⁷⁵ to open source software platforms such as the Apache Software Foundation,⁷⁷⁶ suggesting that “a single monolithic approach, controlled by a single vendor, is no longer a solution, it’s a problem. Communications-oriented systems, as the internet-as-platform most certainly is, require interoperability.”⁷⁷⁷ Companies that succeed in the Web 2.0 era, claims O’Reilly, are those that understand the new rules of the game and play the system to its strengths, rather than attempting to preserve the rules of the PC software era. The unique aspect of this migration and one of the key lessons of the Web 2.0 era is that “users add value”.⁷⁷⁸ This, explains O’Reilly, can happen in three different ways: a) users can be paid to add value to an application, b) users can voluntarily add value to an application (this is the case with the open source communities) or, c) users can add value as a side effect of their ordinary use of the application. For O’Reilly, the third way of harnessing user generated content/value is the main characteristic of a Web 2.0 application: it is a system that gets better the more people use it, and people use it to pursue their own interests rather than add value to the system.⁷⁷⁹ These projects, O’Reilly suggests, “can be seen to have a natural architecture of participation.”⁷⁸⁰

This architecture of participation is apparent throughout a range of Web 2.0 applications such as blogs, vlogs (video blogs), wikis, social networking sites (e.g. MySpace,⁷⁸¹ Facebook⁷⁸²

⁷⁷¹ Web 2.0 In: *Wikipedia*. Available from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2.0 16/11/2009, 17:39 [accessed 16/11/2009]

⁷⁷² Ibid.

⁷⁷³ Application Programming Interfaces. For more information see: Application Programming Interface In: *Wikipedia*. Available from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Application_programming_interface [accessed 6/09/2007]

⁷⁷⁴ O’Reilly, T. What Is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software. Available from: <http://oreilly.com/pub/a/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html?page=1> 2005 [accessed 6/09/2009]

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁶ Apache Software Foundation website available from: <http://www.apache.org/> [accessed 6/09/2009]

⁷⁷⁷ O’Reilly, T. What is Web 2.0.

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁸¹ MySpace website. Available from: <http://www.myspace.com> [accessed 9/04/2007]

and Twitter⁷⁸³) and file-sharing platforms (e.g. Del.icio.us,⁷⁸⁴ YouTube,⁷⁸⁵ Flickr⁷⁸⁶). Such applications allow anyone –privileged enough to enjoy access to new technologies– to publish their own content, which others can access, share, edit and remix; as well as access and appropriate other people’s content (to varying degrees and subject to authorisation). Acknowledging this shift from the ‘author’ to the user/participant *TIME* magazine declared ‘You’ as a Person of the Year in 2006: “You. Yes, You. You control the Information Age. Welcome to your world.”⁷⁸⁷ Though warning against over-romanticising Web 2.0 by reminding us that it “harnesses the stupidity of crowds as well as its wisdom”, Lev Grossman, author of the *TIME* cover story, also suggests that “It [Web 2.0] is a story about community and collaboration on a scale never seen before.”⁷⁸⁸

Deptford.TV, as a Web 2.0 platform, embeds connectivity and relationality in its make-up as ontological, rather than aesthetic, traits. Because of those inherent traits *Deptford.TV* operates as an open system. This renders the project porous and penetrable, constantly ‘open’ to new inputs and –unexpected– change. Audiences turned co-authors, co-producers and co-curators are invited to engage with the platform and produce content as a side-effect of documentanting their locality: Deptford, its past and present, and the changes happening to its communities as a result of the regeneration process. Attempting to own a project such as *Deptford.TV* in the traditional sense of acquiring an art object would be like attempting to impose rules of the PC software era upon Web 2.0 systems. Though it cannot be owned in that manner, *Deptford.TV* can be accessed. It is a platform that depends upon its participants to make it meaningful. Without user-generated content, *Deptford.TV* would remain an empty shell, the potential for a community that did not materialise.

Deptford.TV considers all participants as co-authors. Since the project does not concern a single piece (e.g. one film) but brings together a variety of works, I suggest that participants are also co-curators of the platform.⁷⁸⁹ Though it operates on a set of guidelines (for example,

⁷⁸² FaceBook website. Available from: <http://www.facebook.com> [accessed 6/09/2009]

⁷⁸³ Twitter website. Available from: <http://twitter.com/> [accessed 6/09/2009]

⁷⁸⁴ Del.icio.us website. Available from: <http://www.del.icio.us> [accessed 11/04/2007]

⁷⁸⁵ YouTube website. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com> [accessed 9/04/2007]

⁷⁸⁶ Flickr website. Available from: <http://www.flickr.com> [accessed 9/04/2007]

⁷⁸⁷ Grossman, L. Time’s Person of the Year: You *TIME*. Available from: <http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,20061225,00.html> 25/12/2006 [accessed 6/09/2009]

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁹ All cybertheatres I have discussed depend upon audience participation, offering varying degrees of access and control to their audiences/participants. For example: Blast Theory’s pieces *Can You See Me Now?* and *Rider Spoke* invite participants to enact the work and generate content by so doing, and each piece initiates its own community of players. Though both pieces are platforms that place the audiences/players ‘centre-stage’, they also “set very particular parameters in place, so that the nature of both the freedom and the rules that you as an audience have been given when interacting with a piece are articulate and invite you to think in certain ways. (...) the parameters that you are able to play with (...) are the building components on which the work generates meaning and emotional impact.” Adams, M. Cited by: Chatzichristodoulou,

materials uploaded should have some local reference and should be made available to re-use), these do not form (an) overarching narrative(s), as is the case in the work of Blast Theory and Entropy8Zuper!/Tale of Tales. *Deptford.TV* is a project more clearly aligned with Web 2.0 attitudes, operating as an open platform that does not impose upon users any pre-determined narrative(s), but only a set of guidelines that are primarily put in place to ensure interoperability. Moreover, Adnan Hadzi does not appear as an ‘author’, ‘curator’, or ‘artist’, but as the ‘initiator’ of the piece. As no single person claims authorship for *Deptford.TV*, its community of users can and does claim joint authorship of the project.⁷⁹⁰ This shift of authorship/curatorship from the ‘I’ to the ‘We’ entails a further shift of the power, responsibility, and –conceptual, aesthetic, technical or other– control over the outcomes from the ‘creator(s)/producers’ to the ‘audiences/consumers’, challenging traditional dichotomies between creators/producers vs. consumers of content and context, and calling for the rethinking of such distinctions.⁷⁹¹

Open projects that challenge the producer vs. consumer dichotomy demonstrate the emergence of the new paradigm of ‘commons-based peer production’. The term was coined by Legal Studies Professor Yochai Benkler to describe a new model of economic production in which the creative energy of large numbers of people is coordinated, usually with the aid of the Internet, into large projects without traditional hierarchical organisation or financial compensation.⁷⁹² The Free and Open Source Software movement along with collaborative projects such as wikis are the best-known examples of such practice. In the cultural sphere a growing number of projects invite the audiences’ involvement, participation and contribution,

M. How to Kidnap Your Audiences: An Interview with Matt Adams from Blast Theory, 2009 In: Chatzichristodoulou, M., Jefferies, J. and Zerihan, R. (eds) *Interfaces of Performance*, p. 111. *The Endless Forest* operates in a similar manner: the participants are invited to inhabit the virtual forest, but their interaction with the environment and other deer has been restricted through the authoring decisions made by the artists (e.g. deer cannot use language). This is why Tale of Tales do not describe *TEF* as a platform, but as an authored environment (see Chapter 3). *Deptford.TV* differs: it abandons all dramaturgies attached to notions of single authorship or curatorship to provide an open platform that allows all participants an equal degree of access and agency. I do not consider *Deptford.TV* a ‘better’ project because of that. Indeed, the lack of authorship/curatorship could mean that the project does not generate ‘emotional impact’ for its participants. Nonetheless, *Deptford.TV*’s aims are different: its strength lies in its ability to initiate, support and empower local communities whose collaboration revolves around specific social agendas.

⁷⁹⁰ Indeed, the two publications that have resulted from the project, called *Deptford.TV Diaries*, appear to have been edited by the *Deptford.TV* community itself, rather than by individual authors.

⁷⁹¹ In the case of *Deptford.TV* Adnan Hadzi did initiate the project, and he functions as a spokesperson, producer and initiator of several live events and developments. There are other examples of collaborative networked practice where projects have in fact been initiated by the communities themselves. Such is the case of the First Person Shooter game *Counter Strike*, for example, which, according to Celia Pearce, was created entirely by its players who used the level-builders in the *Half Life* game engine. Pearce, C. Emergent Authorship: the Next Interactive Revolution. Available from: <http://www.cpandfriends.com/writing/computers-graphics.html> 2002 [accessed 3/02/2003]

⁷⁹² Benkler, Y. *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. New Haven: Yale Press, 2006. Also available from: http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/wealth_of_networks/Main_Page [accessed 12/12/2006]

and/or use open source software providing their users with access to content and know-how, as well as the possibility of developing or recycling the project for the production of their own work.⁷⁹³ Sher Doruff employs the term “collaborative culture” to describe cultural practices of collaboration and inter-authorship that shift the focus from conventional inter-disciplinary exchanges “towards a synergy that marginalises individual contribution over the relational dynamics and emergent possibilities of the collective.”⁷⁹⁴ The Internet, being a decentralised peer-to-peer environment, provides a good infrastructure for projects that favour open access and collaborative creativity over ownership and authorship.⁷⁹⁵ Web 2.0 technologies, which focus on collaboration and communities, offer invaluable tools for the experimentation with and enhancement of collaborative, inter-authored practices.⁷⁹⁶

4.4.b) About Deptford.TV

In studying *Deptford.TV* I set out to explore strategies that employ Web 2.0 systems and attitudes in order to share creative content and develop collaborative curatorial methods. *Deptford.TV* is a networked project that uses open source software to build a video database for collective filmmaking. It is also a community project that attempts to collectively document the regeneration process in the area of Deptford, Southeast London.⁷⁹⁷ *Deptford.TV* was initiated in September 2005 and is managed by London-based media artist and filmmaker Adnan Hadzi in collaboration with the SPC.org media lab (UK);⁷⁹⁸ Bitnik media collective (Switzerland);⁷⁹⁹ Boundless network (UK);⁸⁰⁰ Liquid Culture community (UK);⁸⁰¹ and Goldsmiths, University of

⁷⁹³ Such examples are the UK-based group radioqualia (cited earlier), Danish collective Superflex and programmer/artist Jaromil (cited earlier). Superflex website. Available from: <http://www.superflex.net> [accessed 12/12/2006]

⁷⁹⁴ Doruff, S. Collaborative Culture, 2003 In: Brouwer, J., Mulder, A. and Charlton, S. (eds) *Making Art of Databases*. Rotterdam: V2 /NAI Publishers, 2003, p. 73.

⁷⁹⁵ Though it is clear that the Internet is, by now, heavily controlled by corporate giants such as Microsoft and AOL. To quote Doruff again: “There is no guarantee that the self-organisational innovation commons of the Net will continue under the potentially crippling controls of wireless protocols, perhaps dead-ending the future of proliferating communities.” Ibid, p. 77.

⁷⁹⁶ This is not to say that collaborative practices do not exist beyond the field of networked practice and do not precede Web 2.0. See, for example, the work of Suzanne Lacy as well as her edited collection: Lacy, S. *Mapping the Terrain: New Public Genre Art*. Washington: Bay Press, 1995. Also: Suzanne Lacy website. Available from: <http://www.suzannelacy.com/index.htm> [accessed 6/09/2009]

⁷⁹⁷ Deptford is one of Southeast London’s oldest industrial areas and one of the most underprivileged areas of the country. According to Heidi Seetzen, “Deptford is now the site of a number of high-profile buildings and cultural projects, to the point that there is now talk of the emergence of a ‘Deptford Riviera’ and a limited amount of media speculation that the area may finally emerge as ‘Britain’s answer to Left Bank.’” Seetzen, H. The Production of Place: The Renewal of Deptford Creekside, 2006 In: Deptford.TV (eds) *Deptford.TV Diaries*, pp. 29-44.

⁷⁹⁸ SPC.org website. Available from: <http://www.spc.org> [accessed 9/04/2007]

⁷⁹⁹ Bitnik media collective website. Available from: <http://www.bitnik.org/en> [accessed 9/04/2007]

⁸⁰⁰ Boundless network website. Available from: <http://www.boundless.coop> [accessed 9/04/2007]

⁸⁰¹ Liquid Culture website. Available from: <http://www.liquidculture.info> [accessed 9/04/2007]

London.⁸⁰² *Deptford.TV* started assembling audiovisual materials about Deptford and the regeneration process taking place in the area by inviting anyone who lives or works locally – community members, filmmakers, artists, activists and students– to contribute diverse types of work. Contributions range from edited films and raw footage to archive materials and live performances staged locally, documented, and uploaded on the database. All the media content that participants have contributed to the project is available on the *Deptford.TV* database. The platform allows artists, filmmakers and other interested parties not only to store audiovisual material and share this collectively generated media content, but also to re-edit and redistribute it, as well as discuss and interact with each other through the database. *Deptford.TV* is a form of television, since participants are able to choose edited ‘timelines’ they would like to watch; at the same time they have the option to comment on or change the actual content. The project makes use of alternative copyright litigation such as the Creative Commons⁸⁰³ and GNU General Public License⁸⁰⁴ to allow and enhance this politics of sharing.

The aim of *Deptford.TV* is to research new forms of filmmaking with a focus on developing technologies and platforms that can support collaborative post-production. This, according to Hadzi, is the most difficult aspect of collaborative film production as it normally takes place in a controlled environment directed by experts (director, editor). One of the project’s aims is to create a virtual platform for collaborative editing with the use of new and alternative media and technologies like file-sharing, as well as social and professional editing software. In order to produce a ‘collective film’, participants can collaborate through the use of the virtual editing platform, which enables for multiple processes of shooting, editing and viewing of the media contents to take place in parallel. In the same way that the Open Source and Free Software movements share the source code of programs under a copyleft license, Hadzi proposes that collective filmmaking web interfaces share the film ‘source code’, that is, the rough material plus the meta-data created by logging and editing this material. He argues that such web interfaces challenge established notions of broadcasting by merging the production and distribution processes,⁸⁰⁵ and inviting audiences to undertake the active role that

⁸⁰² *Deptford.TV* was initiated by Adnan Hadzi as a practice-as-research PhD project (Goldsmiths, University of London). Unlike other file-sharing platforms such as YouTube, *Deptford.TV* aims to provide not only a database of videos that everyone can access, but also a technical platform that can support the collaborative processing and post-production of these filmic materials. Additionally, *Deptford.TV* is a thematic project, which collects videos that relate to the area of Deptford and the regeneration process currently taking place there.

⁸⁰³ Creative Commons is a non-profit organisation that offers flexible copyright licenses for creative works. Creative Commons website. Available from: <http://creativecommons.org> [accessed 13/11/2006]

⁸⁰⁴ The GNU General Public License aims to guarantee freedom in sharing and developing free software. GNU General Public License website. Available from: <http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/gpl.html> [accessed 13/11/2006]

⁸⁰⁵ This is because collaborative film production does not necessarily entail a linear process of production and

has consistently, within the frame of traditional media production, been exclusively reserved to producers. These changes challenge expectations of both film as a finished, linear product, and audiences as consumers of culture and/or entertainment.

Deptford.TV, explains Hadzi, aims to raise awareness about individual responsibility in the way we relate to mass media. The focus lies on shifting the role of film audiences from consumers to participants/producers who can share, discuss, and develop culture. According to Hadzi, the project aims to function as an open interface for the process of communication through the use of many-to-many media. New media and alternative technologies are employed to allow participants the possibility of re-editing and remixing filmic materials –that is, of controlling the interpretative matrix in order to construct their own meanings. The outcome of *Deptford.TV* is an online, locative ‘television’ connected to existing archives of film, sound, animation, code and so on. The project also aims to produce media content that defies easy categorisation as fictional or non-fictional. Hadzi approaches *Deptford.TV*’s content as simply multiple documentations of a process, in which the viewer is invited to make his/her own interventions. He sees *Deptford.TV* as generating an online public space where contributors can discuss the regeneration process in Deptford and the transformations this brings to specific, physical public spaces. *Deptford.TV* is a work in progress: Hadzi hopes to develop the *Deptford.TV* technology and expertise further in order to make the project readily accessible to wider, not necessarily media literate, communities. His aim is to develop a model for a collaborative, community TV project that can be applied to different social, geographical or thematic contexts.⁸⁰⁶

In Chapter One I referred to Paik’s piece *Global Groove* (1973), which aimed to offer “a glimpse of a video landscape of tomorrow”.⁸⁰⁷ I described how Paik envisaged endless choice for every TV user of the future to view but also programme televised events of his/her liking, free of cost. In my view, *Deptford.TV* realises this democratic vision by aiming to offer participants the possibility to program their own entertainment/educational materials, free of charge. Indeed, *Deptford.TV* goes further, by giving participants the possibility of generating the content themselves, as well as accessing available content in order to develop new projects. The difference between Paik’s vision and *Deptford.TV*’s practice is that the latter does not aim to reach out to international communities as much as to become relevant and beneficial to

post-production that results to a single, fixed, final outcome. Instead, different versions of the same project may be distributed while participants may still be working on developing the project further. Open source software is released in the same way: a piece of software may be released while still in progress for users to test, report, and/or fix bugs.

⁸⁰⁶ All references to Hadzi from discussions with author, 2006-2007.

⁸⁰⁷ Paik, N. J. *Global Groove*. Available from: <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/global-groove/> [accessed 20/02/2006]

communities based in the specific geographical context of Deptford, Southeast London. While preserving Fluxus's (possibly utopian) vision of a democratic and anti-elitist culture that encourages dialogue between like-minded people, *Deptford.TV* also seeks to situate itself, as a project, within the social, economic and political specificities of a single locality. In this sense, one could describe *Deptford.TV* as a 'glocal' project:⁸⁰⁸ a project of local interest (the regeneration of Deptford) whose content is available to global users (all the audiovisual material is uploaded on an online database that is available to anyone, anywhere in the world) and which, potentially, is of interest to global users as a model of practice that could be applied elsewhere.

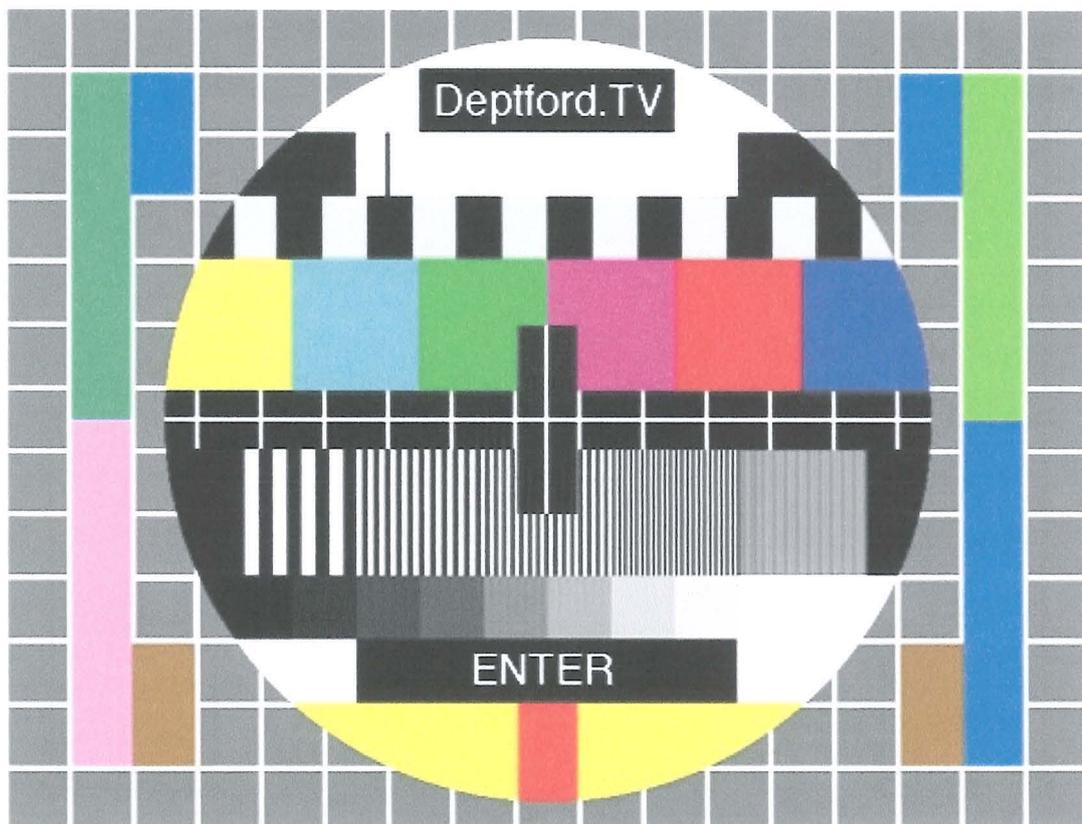


Figure 4.6 Adnan Hadzi (initiator) *Deptford.TV* 2005.⁸⁰⁹

4.4.c) The Who-Is-Who of *Deptford.TV*

As a collaborative project, *Deptford.TV* is as much about the people who make it, as it is about the platform and its contents. In order to study *Deptford.TV* I want to know who are the people

⁸⁰⁸ Hampton and Wellman, following a study of the virtual community 'Netville' in 2002, concluded that "Computer-mediated communication can foster "glocalization": increased local as well as distant social contact." Hampton, K. N. and Wellman, B. The Not So Global Village of Netville, 2002 In: Wellman, B. and Haythornthwaite, C. (eds) *The Internet and Everyday Life*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002, pp. 345-371.

⁸⁰⁹ Available from: <http://www.deptford.tv/> [accessed 8/12/2009]

behind the database: who are the *Deptford.TV* participants? What attracted them to the project? Why do they choose to share their work and what kind of work are they prepared to share? Why do they allow anyone to access their materials and use it for his/her own purpose? What strategies might they employ in this process of sharing? How do they tackle the challenges such practices involve? What do they consider as the benefit of offering their own creative and intellectual labour to wider communities? At the beginning of this Chapter I discussed a shift in my approach that entailed a movement from the outside to the inside. In studying *Deptford.TV* I decided that the best way to approach a collaborative project is on its own terms –that is, through collaboration– so I joined the *Deptford.TV* community. Together with Adnan Hadzi, I filmed a series of interviews with other *Deptford.TV* participants and uploaded the footage and transcripts onto the database. Hadzi and I edited those interviews into a video-essay, which is also available online.⁸¹⁰ The interviews resulted in publications, all of which were copylefted and shared in the same manner.⁸¹¹ This means that anyone can access and re-edit, re-write, or otherwise reuse those materials.

Currently (September 2009) *Deptford.TV* involves 120 co-authors, some of which are groups. When the interviews took place (June-July 2006) there were 54 co-authors involved in the project, most of them living and/or working in Deptford and other areas of Southeast London (e.g. New Cross, Greenwich, Peckham, Brockley). They all shared, to some extent, three main interests: a) Filmmaking, b) Practices of file-sharing and remix culture and, c) Issues concerning Deptford and the regeneration process taking place in the area.⁸¹² Hadzi and I interviewed twelve *Deptford.TV* co-authors aiming to understand their reasons for contributing their work to the shared database. We asked what collaboration means to them, and how they feel about their work being shared, remixed, re-edited, re-used and redistributed. Sher Doruff suggests that “There is no single methodology, no general description, that aptly depicts the making of a collaborative tool by a collaborating team. The process is as variegated as the personalities of the contributors and as fluid as the dynamic socio-cultural-economic ecology it inhabits.”⁸¹³ Hadzi and I agreed with Doruff’s discussion: collaborative projects, we reasoned, are co-shaped by the people who take part in them. The co-authors’ fields of interest and expertise, their cultural backgrounds, personal agendas, personalities and temperaments, are all

⁸¹⁰ Chatzichristodoulou, M. and Hadzi, A. *Strategies of Sharing* video-essay, 2006. Attached.

⁸¹¹ See list of publications at the preface of this thesis.

⁸¹² Hadzi, A., interview with the author, 2006.

⁸¹³ Doruff, S. *Collaborative Praxis: The Making of the KeyWorx Platform*, 2005 In: Brouwer, J., Mulder, A. and Nigten, A. (eds) *aRt&D: Research and Development in the Arts*. Rotterdam: V2_/NAI Publishers, 2005. Available from: http://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:JNGYn_V2WLYJ:spresearch.waag.org/images/CollabPraxis05.pdf+Collaborative+Praxis:+The+Making+of+the+KeyWorx+Platform&hl=en&gl=uk&sig=AHIEtbSUAAdBSvxXUEL19LuLYpwtw17s99A [accessed 13/07/2009]

elements that influence collaborative creative endeavours. As a result, we were both interested in how the co-authors identified their personal contribution to the project not only in terms of inputs/outputs (e.g. film, software and so on), but also in terms of visions, personal agendas and unique viewpoints that co-shape the project as a whole.

The first issue we had to tackle was how to select co-authors for the interviews. Should our interviewees be a 'representative sample' of the project's co-authors, or could they be randomly selected? What constitutes a 'representative sample' within this context? Should we undertake to label, count and recruit interviewees on the basis of their gender, ethnic background, age range and postcode? Or should we select people in relation to their fields of expertise and contribution to the project? Hadzi and I decided that a quantitative approach was not appropriate: as we did not need to report back to funding bodies we were not concerned with collecting statistical data.⁸¹⁴ In any case, this was not the main purpose of the project at that stage: though Hadzi aims to develop *Deptford.TV* as a model for community practice that can be both accessible and applicable to diverse communities, this was not yet the case. Hadzi's primary research aim as per 2006 was the development of an open source platform for collaborative filmmaking. As a result, the project required that participants had some degree of media literacy, which compromised inclusivity. As the community of users was primarily professionals (students, artists, creative industries), we selected our interviewees on the basis of their contribution to the project. We interviewed the following people who contributed film (both new materials and archive footage) as well as software, technical infrastructure, expertise, live events, and physical venues for live encounters:

- **Janine Lái:** local resident, filmmaker, MA student (Goldsmiths). Janine had previously experienced and documented the regeneration process in Peckham, during which her family was re-housed and her neighbourhood underwent a dramatic change.
- **Gordon Cooper:** local resident since 1978, filmmaker, local activist and popular historian.
- **Elvira:** local resident, student, filmmaker.
- **Bitnik (Zurich, Switzerland):** media collective. Bitnik produce artworks and software applications that raise awareness about and facilitate open media practices.
- **Stephen Oldfield:** local resident since 1986, sound artist.

⁸¹⁴ As mentioned earlier, I spent two years (2003-2005) working as a Community Participation Officer at The Albany in Deptford. As The Albany was funded by the Arts Council London among other sponsors, we had to collect this type of data of all our audiences and users in order to demonstrate the diversity of the people accessing the venue and its resources. Though I could see the purpose of this exercise, I could also see its absurdity in the way it sought to label people in relation to their ethnic background and postcode. I also had, on several occasions, complaints from users who did not wish to fill in the questionnaires and disliked being categorised in that manner. I am aware of the complexity of these issues though, and do not suggest that such exercises are altogether futile.

- **Camden McDonald:** local resident, performer, initiator of the Mindsweeper project –a floating venue (on a boat) that aims to showcase independent, grass-roots social and cultural initiatives.
- **Nik Hilton:** local resident, architect. Nik’s interest lies in the intersections between architecture and film.
- **James Stevens:** initiator of the projects Boundless (Deptford) and Deckspace (Greenwich). James has a history as the initiator of projects concerned with open spaces and public access media, such as Backspace.⁸¹⁵
- **Raw Nerve Design Collective:**⁸¹⁶ Deptford-based Raw Nerve work on community-focused projects aiming to build up the connectivity between different creative people in the area.
- **Amanda Egbe:** filmmaker, MA student (Goldsmiths). Amanda is interested in the political and technical issues raised by practices of collaborative filmmaking.

Janine, Elvira, and Amanda shot videos especially for *Deptford.TV*; Gordon and Raw Nerve contributed videos from their archive material; Bitnik wrote software for *Deptford.TV*; Stephen performed a live music gig at the Mindsweeper, which was documented and uploaded on the *Deptford.TV* database; Camden offered the Mindsweeper as a venue for live events; Nik contributed a video from his perspective as an architect; and James contributed the technical infrastructure for the project through Deckspace and Boundless.

4.5. Open Discussions

4.5.a) Collaboration

Over the past fifteen years artists have clearly become increasingly interested in collective work. The nature of group work has also changed fundamentally. More and more frequently, artists are co-operating with one another (...) in order to exploit shared strengths and talents but also in order to depart from well-trodden paths that are dependent on the subject.⁸¹⁷

The first issue we raised with the co-authors of *Deptford.TV* is the notion of collaboration, a characteristic of several Web 2.0 practices. In asking the interviewees what collaboration means to them we intended to investigate each co-author’s personal take on collaboration as a methodology for creative practice. All co-authors discussed collaboration as a practice of sharing that is not just about working together, but most importantly, about sharing resources

⁸¹⁵ Backspace website. Available from: <http://bak.spc.org/> [accessed 9/04/2007]

⁸¹⁶ Raw Nerve website. Available from: <http://www.raw-nerve.co.uk/> [accessed 2/12/2006]

⁸¹⁷ Block, R. and Nollert, A. (eds) *Collective Creativity*. Kassel and Munich: Kunsthalle Fridericianum and Siemens Art Program, 2005, p. 8.

and expertise in order to co-create an output that no single author would have been able to create individually. They all described collaboration as a rich, enjoyable and productive experience that involves discussion and negotiation, bringing together people from diverse backgrounds, disciplines and fields of expertise. Kieran McMillan (Raw Nerve) described collaboration as “jamming together”, whilst Rebecca Molina (Raw Nerve) defined it as “empowerment achieved through the exchange of knowledge, expertise, and resources.” Stephen identified collaboration with the willingness to explore new ideas and, in so doing, abandon any predefined structures that might prove rigid or inappropriate.

While in favour of collaboration as a creative practice, *Deptford.TV* co-authors also described it as a complex process that requires the investment of time and energy. Everyone stressed the importance of allowing time for a collaborative process to evolve organically. James pointed out that lack of time could lead to formal systems, such as committees, which people often consider as more time-effective platforms for collaboration. Such systems, argued James, run the risk of becoming formalised, hierarchical and rigid, resulting in the suppression of communication, creativity and individuality. Everybody agreed that, despite the difficulties involved, collaboration is a process worth investing in, in terms of the quality of both experience and outcomes.

An issue that kept resurfacing is the tackling of hierarchical systems of organisation within collaborative practices. We asked *Deptford.TV* co-authors whether they considered leadership to be necessary in the framework of such practices. Can members of a group operate on equal footing without a leader? If leadership is necessary, can it shift between collaborators rather than being identified with one fixed leader? Most of the co-authors declared their preference for collaboration within flexible schemas where roles can shift, and individual leadership –if this emerges as a necessity– can be distributed rather than centralised. Elvira and Janine declared that, though leadership might be necessary in certain group situations, they are not interested in collaborating within traditional hierarchical scenarios where one leader undertakes overall control. Bitnik agreed, but pointed out that leader-free groups run a higher risk of ‘failure’ as things can easily go wrong when the responsibility is dispersed. Still, Bitnik consider the process of equal collaboration as being of such major importance for certain artistic practices, that they see this as a risk worth taking. Raw Nerve, on the other hand, think that leadership is necessary in terms of vision and drive –without (a) fixed leader(s), they argued, there is no overall vision (although there can be many clashing ones) and collaboration can lead to chaos and frustration.⁸¹⁸

⁸¹⁸ It is worth observing that, as a design collective that collaborates with the industry, Raw Nerve are more consumer-oriented compared to the rest of the co-authors, and thus have a stronger interest in securing effective product delivery.

Throughout these interviews the idea of ‘equal footing’ was repeatedly identified as an important aspect of a healthy collaboration. It soon became apparent though that diverse collaborators should not be expected to contribute ‘the same’ –in terms of quantity, quality or type of work– or participate in the same way. Bitnik argued that, within a group, there are always people who need more time than others to produce work because they might be less articulate, vocal, confident or motivated. Equally, they might not be clear as to what it is they want to achieve and/or how to act in order to produce the desirable outcomes. Bitnik stressed that a group should actively try and involve such people rather than conveniently push them aside to get on with the work. Nevertheless, they also emphasised that no member of a group should be expected to sacrifice or suppress their personality or ideas in order to facilitate the function of the group as a whole, as this is bound to eventually lead to dissatisfaction and conflict. Gordon also insisted on the importance of collaboration based on equal footing, particularly within the context of any community project. He described his experience of involvement in community projects where an ‘outsider’ was put in place as the ‘leader’, and stressed that this practice can be patronising towards the very community it purports to benefit. James, meanwhile, discussed the danger of projects being closely ‘guarded’ by their initiator or core group of participants who have invested too much in them to be able to let go. He suggested that the ownership of a community project should be dispersed rather than concentrated in a single leader/core group, as the aim should always be for the project to eventually be taken over by the community itself.

All co-authors agreed that collaborative projects are not only rich and enjoyable experiences, but often boast better outcomes due to the possibility of combining diverse backgrounds, talents, insights, and fields of expertise. Raw Nerve stressed the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration for their practice which, they thought, improved the quality of their work. They argued that collaborative and interdisciplinary creative processes can result in outcomes of greater quality and complexity than a sole artist/professional is able to deliver when working in isolation. Bitnik, on the other hand, discussed their interest in producing work as a collective. They pointed out that interdisciplinary collaborations are often the norm within the field of media arts and activism, necessitated by the need to bring together diverse fields of expertise for the production of a single project. Finally, Janine and Gordon both indicated that collaborative work often brings longer-lasting results, as it is the outcome of more organic, grassroots (rather than top-down) processes.



Figure 4.7 Adnan Hadzi (initiator) *Deptford.TV* 2005- The Deptford creek. Photo: James Stevens.

4.5.b) Authorship

There is a tradition that includes Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, the Comte de Lautréamont, and Jorge Luis Borges that rejects the originality of the author, characterises the author as producer, and identifies a collective authorship: Individuals are the ensemble of their social and cultural relationships. They compile and arrange knowledge and act as mediators of an idea, and ergo exist as a subject in the plural.⁸¹⁹

All co-authors have contributed content to the *Deptford.TV* database by using alternative licensing systems such as the Creative Commons and GNU General Public license, thus allowing for the materials' re-distribution, remix, re-edit and reuse. We ask: Why? How do they feel about other people potentially re-using their work for their own purposes? Do they think that personal attribution is important? Why did they decide to abandon or share control over their own work?⁸²⁰ Everyone agrees on the importance of personal attribution in terms of

⁸¹⁹ Nollert, A. Art is Life, and Life is Art, 2005 In: Block, R. and Nollert, A. (eds) *Collective Creativity*, p. 25.

⁸²⁰ I should stress that *Deptford.TV* co-authors do not, at any point, disclaim copyright of their work through uploading it to the database. According to the Berne Convention (1886) copyright for creative work is automatically in force upon the creation of the work without the need that the author asserts or declares this. An author does not need to apply for copyright of his/her work within the states adhering to the

protecting their identity as creators of content or context,⁸²¹ as well as the work itself (which can be tracked down and monitored). Having said that, most of the co-authors also agree that once their work is in the public domain, it ceases to be (only) theirs as intellectual property. Elvira feels that once people watch her films they ‘own’ them too. Stephen, who works with sound improvisation, considers his work as the outcome of specific social circumstances. In this sense, his performances are never his own –they belong to everyone present at the time of their creation. Bitnik are happy for their code to be re-authored. They think that this threatens neither their software nor their identity as artists, as long as they are being attributed as the first authors of the piece.

Many of the participants pointed out that “nothing is new”: they suggested that we all re-use ideas, concepts and forms, using as the basis of our work previous works in the field, but also folk stories, music, crafts, common cultural references, and everything else that constitutes our collective cultural ‘baggage’.⁸²² Through our work we all develop and reproduce references, or use them as stepping-stones to get somewhere else. What an author actually does, argued Bitnik, is to give form, identify, make emerge and/or attribute specific meaning to something that is already there, rather than produce something new from scratch. Since our work is already based on the recycling of culture and ideas, many of the co-authors argued, why be so protective of it? Why not allow for our work to be recycled and for other people to use it as their stepping-stone? Why shouldn’t this work belong to the whole community as well as to a single author?

Re-using existing work and allowing for one’s own work to be re-used enhances creativity –this is something everybody agreed on. Elvira argued that mainstream litigation often limits creativity through blocking what is a natural process of sharing and re-appropriation. Bitnik discussed re-appropriation as a process that is liberating to both content and practice. Other interviewees, such as Stephen and Janine, suggested that sharing is beneficial to the work itself, as it allows it to achieve its highest possible impact. Janine argued that one either has to trust that one’s work will not be used inappropriately or ‘bury’ the work

Convention (including the UK). As soon as the work is ‘fixed’, that is, written or recorded, the author is automatically entitled to all copyrights over this and any derivative works. The full updated text of the Berne Convention and its summary are available from: <http://www.wipo.int/treaties/en/ip/berne/index.html> [accessed 8/09/2009]. Nonetheless, through using Creative Commons and other alternative licenses, *Deptford.TV* co-authors can decide to waive all or some of their rights over their creative work, thus enabling all recipients to legally re-use and share them. Note that *Deptford.TV* co-authors can still decide to reserve certain rights for themselves.

⁸²¹ By ‘context’, regarding materials contributed to *Deptford.TV*, I mean software systems/platforms and infrastructure (hardware, physical venues).

⁸²² Julia Kristeva has introduced this idea in the field of literature through her notion of ‘intertextuality’, which refers to the vertical connection of a text to other texts, in: Kristeva, J. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, p. 69. This notion is very much associated with poststructuralist theory. See also Chapter 2 where, following Kristeva, I propose the notion of ‘interspatiality’.

for fear of misuse that might never occur. Gordon made the same point: one has to either take a risk as a creator and liberate his/her work, or else cling to it thus hiding it away from public view and debate.⁸²³

Raw Nerve suggested that their designs acquire a life of their own once allowed to keep developing in the hands of other people – a life that they themselves would not have anticipated. They nevertheless distinguished between sharing their work with communities and being ‘ripped off’ by corporations, which might appropriate designs for commercial exploitation without paying a fair fee. Gordon was also sceptical about releasing all of his film archives to the public domain: although he happily shares some of his works, others are too important for him to release to the public domain and prefers to preserve full rights over them. He proposed that this balance between sharing and holding on to, opening up to public usage and keeping for oneself, is very important in terms of safeguarding one’s individuality as an artist as well as any particularly precious (in terms of either monetary or emotional value) piece.

Among the people we interviewed, James was the most sceptical regarding issues of authorship and the use of alternative copyright licenses. He pointed out that there currently is a lot of confusion and contradiction around these issues. James argued that this confusion deters many artists from taking part in collaborative projects and making their work freely available. He described alternative licensing systems as attempting to explore and map ‘open spaces’ in media production and usage. James explained that such systems support a policy of restrictive openness as an alternative to the current copyright policy of absolute restriction and total control. However, he suggested that as alternative licensing systems are extremely complex, creators who use them should be prepared to defend themselves and/or their work in case of misuse or misrepresentation. He anticipated that the wider exploitation of alternative licenses will unavoidably bring forth such issues in the future.

4.5.c) Community

To me, collaboration invokes the notion of a community that emerges from the very practices of sharing, whether this is the sharing of time, space (physical or virtual), views, resources, content, skills, knowledge, information, and/or support networks. We asked *Deptford.TV* co-authors what does the term ‘community’ signify to them, inviting personal and experiential –

⁸²³ The interviewees’ suggestion that all cultural artefacts are, to some extent, derivatives and appropriations of previous cultural artefacts and should thus be made legally available to share (to some extent, subject to authorisation etc.) echoes Lawrence Lessig’s notion of ‘remix culture’ which he defines as “a rich, diverse outpouring of creativity based on creativity.” Koman, R. *Remixing Culture: An Interview with Lawrence Lessig*. Available from: <http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/policy/2005/02/24/lessig.html> 2005 [accessed 8/09/2009]. I also refer to remix culture in Chapter 1. For a more in-depth discussion into Lessig’s ideas see: Lessig, L. *Remix*.

rather than academic and/or ‘politically correct’– responses. Furthermore, we asked whether the *Deptford.TV* project initiates, shapes, or awakens a community, and whether it includes or excludes existing communities or individuals. In approaching people with this question we were aware of how broad the term community is, and of the weight it carries in terms of political and social agendas. Terms such as ‘community’ and ‘collective’

Recall[s] communist forms of work and production as well as socialist social systems in which all members –independently of individualistic and egoistic motives– are supposed to act in a solidaristic way in pursuit of common goals for an ideal life and allow their individual achievements to be assimilated by the whole group. Hence the term collective has a political implication that even today often causes it to be received negatively.⁸²⁴

Media collective Bitnik reported problems with the use of the term ‘collective’ in their practice, which could be explained by Block and Nollert’s argument that the term is often received negatively due to its political implications. Bitnik explained that they prefer to work under the name of their collective rather than their individual names in order to stress the collaborative nature of their projects. However, they find that critics and journalists are often resistant to this attitude and insist on attributing their projects to individuals within the collective. Design collective Raw Nerve, on the other hand, explained that they operate under a traditional hierarchical system –the Directors are the collective’s spoke-persons– which attributes different projects, or elements of projects, to different members of the group.

Block and Nollert argue that, unlike the term ‘collective’, ‘community’ –particularly when used within the artworld– has “a thoroughly positive connotation” because it implies a system of collaboration initiated through free will rather than a state controlled apparatus.⁸²⁵ Block and Nollert are based in Germany; so we had to ask whether the same notion of community applies in the UK. How culturally specific are the connotations such loaded terms carry? I suggest that in Britain the term is not “thoroughly positive”, mainly due to the Labour party’s multifaceted focus on communities in recent years. Labour declared its wish to engage communities in urban regeneration, support entrepreneurship within underprivileged communities and witness the representation of diverse ethnic communities within state-funded organisations/initiatives.⁸²⁶ Though these are all positive initiatives, one could argue that the term community has been, on occasions, employed to trumpet Labour’s own political agenda. This is an opinion offered to me by individuals and communities I met in Southeast London while working at The Albany.

⁸²⁴ Block, R. and Nollert, A. (eds) *Collective Creativity*, p. 25.

⁸²⁵ Ibid.

⁸²⁶ I am not an expert in this field so will not attempt further analysis. For a more in-depth discussion I would recommend the volume: Imrie, R. and Raco, M. (eds) *Urban Renaissance? New Labour, Community and Urban Policy*. London: Policy Press, 2003.

The political implications of the term community in the UK are also reflected within the arts and arts funding. According to the Arts Council England's race equality scheme "To promote artistic expression is to help build communities and understanding, enriching society as a whole." The scheme explains that ACE-funded organisations need to consider, among other issues, "how to establish partnerships with Black and minority ethnic artists and organisations".⁸²⁷ Though Labour's focus on diversity, community cohesion, and support of disadvantaged and under-represented communities in and through the arts is a noble aim (and one I whole-heartedly support), my work experience made me aware that certain communities consider this agenda as a marketing tool that enables organisations to access funding and claim benefits on their behalf. Several of the under-represented communities I liaised with resented having to complete 'diversity questionnaires' and being labelled 'ethnic minority groups'. I am aware of the complexities of this issue, which this thesis cannot even commence to unpack. Setting this in context though is useful in relation to the *Deptford.TV* project. Since the notion of relationality as both ideology and praxis permeates this thesis, my own use of the word community is more in line with French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy's definition of existence as relational per se. Nancy has argued that "Existence is *with*: otherwise nothing exists."⁸²⁸ In this sense, I see community as one's natural habitat, the habitat one co-exists with and within. Still, I was interested in how *Deptford.TV* participants understood the term as formed by their own cultural background, social status and political views, among other parameters.

Elvira defined community as "a group of people that feel close to each other and have something in common: they can be living or working together, or they can be related by shared values and ideas." Bitnik also approached community as "a group of people that collaborate towards a common aim." Through collaborating with *Deptford.TV* they became perplexed by the baggage the term carries in the UK –they explained that in German the term is often used in relation to collaborative media arts practices. Bitnik pointed out that a community is something 'alive': it cannot be fixed or static as it is always in the process of shifting, changing, developing, adapting to new circumstances, and re-defining itself to fit new configurations of members and the personal development of the existing ones. Stephen described community as a positive and supportive social context: "the people one wants to have around him/her". Raw Nerve argued that "community is about coming together, collaboration, and sharing". For them, as well as Amanda, community should be a "safe and familiar environment where people can both offer and ask for support". Janine described community as "a group of people that has

⁸²⁷ Arts Council England. Information: Engaging with Communities. Available from: http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publications/information_detail.php?sid=21&id=63 2004 [accessed 8/09/2009]. This Information sheet is specifically written for the North West of England.

⁸²⁸ Nancy, J. L. *Being Singular Plural*. (Tr.:Richardson, R. D. and O'Byrne, A. E.), Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 4.

similar beliefs, values and concerns”, and is no more defined by locality or geographical boundaries as networking technologies allow for the migration of communities from local to global ‘neighbourhoods’.

Camden, on the other hand, approached the term negatively, as a homogeneous group of people that can suppress individuality and eccentricity. He argued that, within consumerist societies, communities become people who look, think and behave like each other, and are actively discouraged from meaningful forms of collaboration and sharing. Stephen, though positive towards the term community, was sceptical about ‘community arts’: he suggested that the term has been stigmatised within the UK due to poor quality artistic initiatives that have succeeded in receiving public funding through employing a well-calculated social inclusion policy. For Stephen, art should be judged on its artistic rather than social merits, and should not be concerned with ticking boxes in relation to social and political agendas. Other interviewees were more positive, although equally aware of the social and political implications the term might carry. Nik defined community as “people living or working together as a sustainable unit”: he stressed the importance of sustainability in relation to every system, be it human, mechanical or other. Gordon argued that the term is often used as a euphemism for something that does not exist. He was wary of defining community as anything other than “the [social] here and now”, and the individuals that make it.

The co-authors had different ideas regarding the social function of the *Deptford.TV* project in relation to community involvement and community building. Elvira suggested that *Deptford.TV* brings together a loose community of like-minded people who seek to network and collaborate. Stephen thought that the project has initiated a community that is sure to grow. James proposed that *Deptford.TV* can only be considered successful once/if its ownership passes on to the community, and the project transforms to suit its users’ needs. He pointed out that this can be a challenging process for the initiator(s) and core groups of such projects. Bitnik perceived *Deptford.TV* as a container for meta-discourses on issues of community, diversity, and filmmaking. Raw Nerve argued that projects such as *Deptford.TV*, *Boundless*, and *RSVP*⁸²⁹ bring together existing communities by creating common platforms for communication, exchange and networking. They indicated that such projects should develop organically and be easily accessible by clearly communicating their aims and objectives, as well as pathways for people to get involved. Camden suggested that projects like *Deptford.TV* and the *Mindsweeper* have the potential to initiate small, flexible communities, thus providing members with alternative venues and activities, as well as information that is not controlled by mainstream

⁸²⁹ *RSVP* is a networking project initiated by Raw Nerve. *RSVP* website. Available from: <http://www.rsvplondon.co.uk/welcome/> [accessed 11/04/2007]

media. Janine reckoned that *Deptford.TV* awakens an existing community of people by raising awareness about the potential of this togetherness and providing a platform for collaborations that help solidify the community.

Furthermore, we asked co-authors what kinds of communities *Deptford.TV* succeeds in initiating, awakening or including. Would they describe these communities as diverse and how do they make this judgement? The reactions were mixed, but everyone agreed that diversity is important for every community project. Elvira argued that *Deptford.TV* did not, at the time, succeed in including diverse communities as it mostly addressed a homogeneous body of students and professionals. Nonetheless, she suggested that the project has the potential to include diverse communities in the future if this becomes a priority. Elvira thought that the project could benefit diverse communities long-term, by providing a platform for collaboration and distribution that people can use on their own terms. Amanda also suggested that *Deptford.TV* should invest added energy to ensure that the project is and remains open for everyone who wishes to join.

Bitnik, on the other hand, argued that *Deptford.TV* includes diverse communities, as their experience of collaborating with the project meant working with people from diverse backgrounds, which enriched both the creative process and the project's outcomes. Stephen pointed out that most people he met and collaborated with through *Deptford.TV* were non-British, of a wide age range, and of both sexes. Nik expressed his surprise at how diverse *Deptford.TV* participants are: he explained that, due to the project being research-driven and initiated from within an academic context, he had expected the participants to be mostly student populations, whereas this is not the case. Nik suggested that diversity is particularly important for a project that attempts to document an urban regeneration process, as a multiplicity of viewpoints is crucial for the effective documentation of such a social and economic phenomenon. He saw *Deptford.TV* participants as a community in their own right, and he thought that the project also includes and connects people across existing communities. Raw Nerve agreed that diversity is important, not just in terms of age, race and sex, but also cultural background, skills and talent.

Janine pointed to her own identity as a Chinese woman as a positive indicator for the diverse nature of the project. She considered diversity as an important aspect of any community project and suggested that inclusivity should be a matter of concern and conscious endeavour – particularly in relation to communities who are frequently under-represented in the cultural sphere, as “it is quite easy to forget about them”. Amanda reiterated that diversity, which she described as “a way of improving each other's lives, dealing with issues of poverty, inequality and homophobia”, should be a conscious concern. She went on to highlight that diversity should

be understood within a context that is broader than statistics. Amanda, a Black British woman, argued that the British art scene continues to be under-representative of Black and Asian communities –something she sees as a permanent struggle. She suggested that grass-roots projects like *Deptford.TV* are more inclusive than most institutionalised practices because they work on the same level as the communities they aim to include. Amanda also discussed diversity in terms of different fields of expertise and interdisciplinary collaborations.

Like Amanda, Gordon and James also expressed concerns about linking the notion of diversity to statistics: they argued that diversity has become mainly a funding preoccupation that aims to measure success. James reminded us how diverse Deptford is and proposed that, realistically, a white middle-class male (like himself or Hadzi) could not necessarily access all the diverse communities. From his work experience with local communities in council estates he suggested that some communities prefer to guard their privacy. James asked, “is it right to try to include participants who do not want to be included?” and expressed his concerns around effective methods of measuring inclusivity. He argued that, to ensure diversity, one must create the circumstances for the participants to take the project over by adapting it to their needs and developing it their own way. James suggested that the aim of a project such as *Deptford.TV* should be to expose participants to the equipment, tools, and opportunities that will allow for and support their own decisions. He stressed that this is a huge ambition for any project and one that requires the investment of time.

Gordon agreed that diversity cannot be measured and quantified, nor can it be imposed by a funding body. To Gordon, diversity means “whatever comes on board”. Aiming to include “2.5 male versus 2.5 female, 2.5 white versus 2.5 black” is, Gordon argued, a manipulative approach that, rather than accepting what is organic, tries to impose its own agendas about what diversity should be. He thought that *Deptford.TV* is diverse in those terms because its participants are White, Black, Asian, male and female, local residents, students, permanent inhabitants and transitory populations. Nevertheless, he argued that institutions and funding bodies hide problems of racism, poverty and inequality, behind constructed, measurable accounts of diversity. This strategy, Gordon suggested, creates tensions and dissatisfaction among communities. Gordon also warned against academic rhetoric that uses language as a control mechanism, attributing to certain terms connotations related to governmental and/or institutional socio-political agendas. He offered the terms diversity and community as such examples. Approaching social issues in this way, said Gordon, is patronising for the communities involved.

Finally, we asked *Deptford.TV* co-authors whether the project might exclude certain communities. Many of the participants were concerned about *Deptford.TV*'s focus on

technology. They argued that this could exclude people who are not media literate, and who are likely to be underprivileged, of low income and educational status. Other participants thought that this is unavoidable as no single project can involve everyone. James suggested that a project is inclusive as long as it is open to all those who want to get involved in it. Bitnik argued that every project that has certain aims and operates on specific formats could lead to the exclusion of individuals or communities, since productivity as an objective unavoidably excludes certain people. Nevertheless, they pointed out that *Deptford.TV* can include people on different levels, for example as documentary subjects and/or audiences, thus accommodating different communities' varied skills, interests and needs. Stephen agreed that allowing for different levels of involvement is a good strategy for inclusion as it encourages people to undertake more active roles gradually, through familiarity with the project and increased confidence. Elvira thought that a project with specific aims and format like *Deptford.TV* can only include people who are familiar with or willing to study the technologies involved; she also pointed out that, as there are opportunities for inclusion, those not willing to make the effort are ultimately excluding themselves.⁸³⁰

Raw Nerve argued that it is important for projects heavily dependent on technologies, such as *Deptford.TV*, to consciously aim to be accessible by investigating and communicating easy routes for people to get involved. They suggested that, even if not everyone can actively contribute to a project, everyone should still be able to fit within the broader picture. Gordon argued that a factor of exclusion could be the attitude of certain artists, academics and professionals towards local communities and local activists. He also stressed the complications of attracting and including communities that are more difficult to reach, such as people living in poverty. He suggested that any project concerned with local communities should develop organically as a grass-roots initiative rather than being dictated top-down from some institution, funding body or artist. Bitnik agreed that it is difficult to involve a community as a whole, and that *Deptford.TV* does include members of every ethnic, religious or other community based in Deptford. Like other participants, they also suggested that diverse groups or individuals could be reached gradually, through different levels of participation. Finally, Elvira and Nik argued against the very use of the term 'exclusion'. Elvira maintained that this is a problematic term used to guard political correctness. Nik on the other hand felt that the term is inappropriate within the context of a socially positive project such as *Deptford.TV*.

4.5.d) Open Conclusions

⁸³⁰ Elvira refers to opportunities such as workshops and access to equipment and free software platforms, which *Deptford.TV* provides to its members (membership is free).

The individual and the group cannot avoid a certain existential plunge into chaos. This is already what we do every night when we abandon ourselves to the world of dreams. The main question is what we gain from this plunge: a sense of disaster, or the revelation of new outlines of the possible?⁸³¹

In order to draw some conclusions from these interviews I attempted to identify some points of consensus within the group (including Hadzi and myself), to form a manifesto of sorts:

- *Deptford.TV* co-authors recommend sharing one's creative work as this bears positive outcomes for everyone involved: the artist can communicate his/her practice to wider audiences; the communities benefit from being able to legally appropriate creative practices as stepping-stones for furthering creativity; the work develops and evolves in ways its creator(s) may have not anticipated. Nonetheless, we also suggest that releasing one's work into the public domain and waiving certain rights over one's creative outputs must be done with careful consideration regarding the type and amount of works released, the type of rights one might wish to reserve, and the awareness that alternative copyright litigation is in its infancy and might harbour complications.
- We consider collaborative, interdisciplinary practice as a rich and rewarding experience, which nonetheless carries difficulties related to group dynamics and the time investment required for the organic and inclusive development of any such project.
- We argue that the ownership of a community project must rest with the communities the project purports to serve rather than with an artist or institution, even if this artist/institution is the initiator of the project and has invested time and energy into the work.
- We consider diversity as an important aspect of all collaborative practice: "collaboration is about diversity". Nevertheless, we are sceptical about the adequacy or appropriateness of quantitative methods for measuring diversity within the context of community practice. We are committed to representing disadvantaged communities as much as possible, but we are also aware that no project can attempt to include everyone. We suggest that in order to be inclusive, a project must become dissipated within the communities it serves and transform itself to reflect the interests, needs, skills and talents of those communities.
- We support the idea and practices of remix culture: we are prepared to accept that our work does not emerge from a cultural vacuum, but has developed by appropriating other practices. As a result, we are willing to waive certain rights over our creative outputs in order to benefit communities and enhance collaborative approaches to creativity.

Through these interviews it became clear that *Deptford.TV* co-authors perceive the project not only as a deposit of shared content where they can source materials, revive archived

⁸³¹ Guattari, F. Pour Une Refondation Des Pratiques Sociales *Le Monde Diplomatique*, October 1992 Cited by: Block, R. and Nollert, A. (eds) *Collective Creativity*, p. 1.

projects, and curate contents, but also as an opportunity to produce new work (film, performance, software, other) that has social relevance and impact. We discussed *Deptford.TV* as a ‘living’ database. According to Sharon Daniel:

A ‘conception’ of the ‘beauty’ of a database is not located in the viewer’s interpretation of a static form but in the dynamics of how a user inflects the database through interaction with its field or frame. A database incorporates contradiction (...). The aesthetic dimensions of the database arise when the user traverses this field of unresolved contradictions.⁸³²

Indeed, my involvement with the *Deptford.TV* project and its community unearthed this dynamic “field of unresolved contradictions” that Daniel describes. Hadzi and I talked with other co-authors about our wish to share our creative outputs with like-minded people, but also our fear that the work might become vulnerable to misuse and misappropriation. We discussed our interest in exploring alternative copyright litigation that can support openness, but also our scepticism regarding the legal complexities those licensing systems are bound to bring forth. We shared our feelings of ownership and protectiveness towards our work, but also our desire to see the work evolve and acquire a life of its own. Hadzi has suggested that one of *Deptford.TV*’s aims is to raise awareness about individual responsibility in the way we relate to mass media, through providing a multiplicity of accessible standpoints which await for us to select and possibly shape into potential ‘news-feeds’. I believe that *Deptford.TV* succeeds in generating an open, flexible and dynamic pool of contradictions that demands its spectators to create their own ‘spectacles’ (thus negating the notion of a spectator in the first place). How many people will actually take the challenge? We’ll have to wait and see.⁸³³

4.6. “To Change (...) We Must First Change Space”⁸³⁴

The second part of this Chapter, in its discussion of *Deptford.TV*, mused on the question posed by Tracey Warr at her seminar in *Intimacy*, namely, what is the quality of interaction and community that digital technologies can facilitate or enable...

As I pointed out in the Introduction to this thesis, I do not consider *Deptford.TV* to be a cybertheatre project; rather, I approach it as a robust model for collaborative creativity and community-based practice. I suggest that this model of creative collaboration can be applied to

⁸³² Daniel, S. Database Aesthetics: Issues of Organization and Category in Online Art *AI & Society*. Available from: http://vv.arts.ucla.edu/publications/publications/98-99/ai_society/daniel.html [accessed 27/07/2007]

⁸³³ The edited video essay *Strategies of Sharing* is available from: <http://www.deptford.tv/bm> [accessed 27/07/2007]. The complete transcripts of the interviews are available from: <http://www.watch.deptford.tv> [accessed 27/07/2007]. To access those materials as well as more than 2,500 clips that are available through the *Deptford.TV* database, one needs to register as a *Deptford.TV* co-author. This also allows members to use the technical platform for collaborative filmmaking.

⁸³⁴ Lefebvre, H. *The Production of Space*, p. 190.

cybertheatre practices that are concerned with issues of social relevance and wish to meaningfully engage with local communities. In Chapter Two I argued, following Lefebvre, that space is produced by, and in return shapes, lived experience and, thus, bodies. As an embodied and lived social phenomenon (rather than an ideological abstraction), space is time because our bodies live in time –we are time.⁸³⁵ I further argued that the conceptualisation and experience of space as time is particularly relevant to networked space, which though lacking in material specificities is produced by social interactions. *Deptford.TV* is a project that is partly concerned with the very subject of production of space through social interactions. Though not an (a)live cybertheatre project as such, one could approach *Deptford.TV* as a social performance –a digital storytelling project that uses the area of Deptford as its stage, as well as its subject matter. Lefebvre argues that “to change life we must first change space”, and the *Deptford.TV* project is concerned with exactly that: change –the change designed and implemented upon the spatial (and thus social) context of Deptford. The project aims to document the changes taking place in Deptford as a result of the regeneration of the Deptford Creek, and its reinvention as the more marketable ‘Creekside’. As a result, *Deptford.TV* is concerned with (the almost impossible task of) documenting space as the inscription of time. Though this can only be achieved partially and for a set period of time, *Deptford.TV* is well set to tackling this task due to its durational nature (the project develops over a period of several years), and its organic, grass-roots local presence.

As discussed, *Deptford.TV* is not an archival database, as it does not aim to gather and preserve ‘fixed’ materials. Instead, it is a ‘living’ database⁸³⁶ as it allows open access to its contents. Moreover, the filmic materials themselves are being constantly reconfigured by the addition of new materials and the development of the existing ones (through re-appropriation). Thus, the database remains open, unfinished, and constantly in the process of becoming. *Deptford.TV* is also concerned with generating a heterotopia, an alternative space –an ‘other’ Deptford. This is a Deptford that can be produced through lived experience, through personal and local narratives; and differentiated from (occasionally opposed to) the narratives of developers, commercial interests and experts of space (architects, urban planners). This virtual representation of the Deptford area is unlike Blast Theory’s digital doppelgangers: it does not trace the physical space and is not concerned with re-mappings of the urban environment. Instead, it aims to *narrate* Deptford –but the story of Deptford told through this project is not one, but many, narrated from the different perspectives of its co-authors/curators. Thus, *Deptford.TV* offers not just an archive of filmic materials, but also a participatory storytelling experience.

⁸³⁵ See Chapter Two, 2.1.a.

⁸³⁶ This sense of liveness is more relevant to cinematic rather than performative instances, as it is not concerned with synchronous and compatible connections between its users.

In Chapter Three I analysed Murray's discussion of digital storytelling –or, as she calls it, cyberdrama– in relation to *The Endless Forest*, and pointed at four main elements which, I suggested, stand out in her discourse: 1. The authorship of such stories is multiple and/or shared, 2. The user's involvement with the story/world is sustained through his/her durational (rather than one-off) engagement with it, 3. The story-world is not one but multiple, or seen through multiple perspectives, 4. The audiences/users become the protagonists of the story.⁸³⁷ Here I suggest that, though *Deptford.TV* does not frame itself as cybertheatre or cyberdrama, it shares all the characteristics of such practices as identified by Murray: 1. The authorship of the project is both multiple (many different authors contribute materials) and shared (the project belongs to the collective, and certain individual projects within it are also of shared authorship as contributors re-appropriate materials found on the database); 2. The *Deptford.TV* co-authors/curators develop a sustained, durational engagement with the project, which develops over a period of several years; 3. The story-world –which in this case is Deptford as an alternative digital commons– is not defined by a single narrative, but by many, as seen by the different povs of the project's co-authors; Finally, 4. The project's co-authors/curators become the protagonists of the story: unlike virtual worlds such as *The Endless Forest* where users become protagonists through enacting their micro-narratives online, *Deptford.TV* invites its co-authors to hold the camera, that is, to contribute their povs rather than their enacted presence/pattern.

The heterotopic version of Deptford thus produced by *Deptford.TV* is made of a multiplicity of interconnected narratives that are personal and local. As a result, it offers to its users (co-authors/curators), what Murray suggests is a “satisfying agency, and a (...) sustained involvement with a kaleidoscopic world.”⁸³⁸ *Deptford.TV* thus sets out to re-produce Deptford as a heterotopia; an alternative (virtual) public space upon which multiple, personalised, often fragmented, non-linear narratives can be inscribed. A public space that is not defined by an overarching grand narrative imposed by developers, but by micro-narratives its citizens have experienced and produced through their engagement with the space, and with others. This digital commons is not utopic: it is not an idealised conception of Deptford fixed in time. The narratives contributed are not all ‘happy’ ones. Deptford appears to be a vibrant, multicultural community; but also one that is disaffected and underprivileged, with urban pockets that are infected by violence and crime. Unlike urban developers, the co-authors of *Deptford.TV* do not attempt to erase those narratives in favour of more marketable alternatives, telling stories of waterside middle-class urban bliss.

⁸³⁷ See Chapter Three, 3.6.

⁸³⁸ Murray, J. H. *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, p. 251.

In *Intimacy*, Paul Sermon asked whether our first life existence could start to reflect our Second Life conscience; whilst Tracey Warr interrogated issues of personal responsibility in the virtual arena. I suggest that *Deptford.TV* provides a model for a responsible digital existence, and art/performance-making, where the heterotopias we can create there, where we are not, can be reflected in, affect, and possibly change, first life spaces. *Deptford.TV*, through its socially engaged practice that links specific local communities to distributed resources, expertise, and a glocal audience base willing to interconnect with people's personal stories, facilitates the 'leaking of the virtual into the actual'. Because, to reiterate Brian Massumi, "the seeping edge is where potential, actually, is found."⁸³⁹

⁸³⁹ Massumi, B. *The Autonomy of Affect*, p. 236.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I set out to articulate the emergent genre of cybertheatres or networked performance practices. I aimed to identify hybrid practices that can be approached as such, and explore their ontologies, dramaturgies and structures. In order to do so, I focused on two notions that are central in every performance practice: a) space, looking to study the stages that play hosts to such events and, b) presence, asking what constitutes presence in the networks and how is this manifested and experienced. I then looked into ways of communicating emergent practices in general and cybertheatres in particular to diverse audiences through action-based research (curatorial practice). Finally, I joined a community of practitioners and local activists in order to study whether and how networked practices can facilitate and enhance collaborative creativity and ‘curation’, shifting power dynamics and challenging distinctions between producers and consumers of content and context.

I opened this thesis by revealing the ‘found’ origins of its title, which links the practices in question to a lineage of 20th Century art-historical movements. I then went on to provide a literature review of sorts aiming to situate this study within a body of knowledge and writings that, chronologically, developed in parallel with my research. As this study looks into an emergent field of practice and research that is not yet either ‘named’ or defined, I considered this contextualisation necessary in order to ‘set the stage’ for further in-depth discussions of such practices. The writings I referred to in this part of the thesis, the definitions and terms I provided, all span from 2000 to 2009. As this thesis started in 2002, it is evident that a body of bibliographic references directly related to the subject at hand developed while I was engaged in this research. I suggest that this growing body of knowledge that is currently developing around hybrid experimentations that combine theatre, live performance and digital and networking technologies, and which is directly concerned with identifying, defining, framing, reflecting upon and analysing such practices, demonstrates the relevance of this study within today’s cultural landscapes. As my research developed in parallel with the field it undertakes to study and articulate, my analysis emanated from dialogues and exchanges with scholars and practitioners currently engaged in such work, and embodied three different ‘povs’: those of the scholar, the audience/participant, and the practitioner.

A brief overview of the historical development of the Internet and the World Wide Web follows the literature review. The aim of this narrative is not to elaborate on the history of the Internet, but to demonstrate the reasons I chose to focus my study on *networked* –rather than other types of technological or technologised– performance practices. Here, I discussed the

Internet's traditions of "decentralisation, open architecture, and active user participation" (Abbate) as well as the medium's many-to-many function. I argued that these ontological characteristics of the Internet as a popular medium can support collaborative practices that raise social issues and pose questions about authorship, ownership, accessibility and control, challenging traditional roles, hierarchies and dynamics in the creation and production of content and meaning. Following Inke Arns, I proposed that networks require from the 'author' (artist/curator) to operate as an initiator of communicative and relational processes and exchanges for the collaborative production of meaning and affect, rather than as the sole producer of content.

Chapter One of the thesis was concerned with tracing the origins of cybertheatres within certain art-historical movements and practices of the 20th Century. The analysis focused on the movements of Dada, Fluxus, Conceptual Art and Happenings. This selection did not intend to suggest that those are the only movements which anticipated the emergence of cybertheatres as a genre, but to stress the importance of the shift of focus from the notion of the artwork as a unified material object to the concept or "art as idea", the event or "art as action" and the audience as participant. Indeed, those are threads that spread throughout the thesis. The focus on concept or "art as idea" pointed towards issues of dematerialisation not only of the artwork, as in practices of Fluxus and Conceptual Art, but also of the very space one inhabits and of one's body in space. The focus on event or "art as action" entails presence and liveness: the artwork is not a 'thing' that exists as independent of the viewer/audience but an 'act' that can only 'happen' (Happening) through becoming embodied and performed. Finally, practices that engage the 'audience as participant' are integral not only to the Internet as a many-to-many medium, but also to all types of networked practices, media arts, and cybertheatres.

The second part of Chapter One presented an overview of recent and current practices that can be framed as cybertheatres, and pinpointed links between the art-historical movements discussed and networked performances. Here I proposed that cybertheatres can be divided into three main types of practices: a) Online Performances that take place in multi-user virtual environments and virtual worlds such as Second Life, b) Telematic Performances that connect dispersed physical locations and performers/audiences separated by physical or geographical boundaries and, c) Performances that merge physical and virtual spacetimes, synthesising ontologies and presences through the use of mobile and pervasive technologies, and locative media. I pointed out that this thesis is not concerned with telematic performances, as practitioners and scholars have been developing and analysing such practices since the 1960s. The case-studies I proceeded to discuss in the following Chapters fall within categories A and C: Blast Theory's work is most often concerned with layering physical and virtual spaces,

whereas Entropy8Zuper!/Tale of Tales's projects take place online. The three different categories of cybertheatres proposed herein reflect the different ways in which practitioners employ networking technologies as a means of generating spaces that play hosts to such events –that is, cybernetic stages. I argue, through Chapter Two of this thesis, that the spatial nature of the networks is absolutely crucial to the development of cybertheatres as a genre. To put this plainly: I argue that cybertheatres emerged/are emerging as a genre *because* people conceptualise, experience and visualise *networks as spaces*.

Chapter Two undertook to discuss, debate and demonstrate the spatial character of the networks. Framed by the writings of spatial theorist Henri Lefebvre, this Chapter argued that space (whether physical or virtual) is never a passive container for action but an active force that shapes the action(s) it contains. Following Lefebvre, I suggested that cybertheatres are, to a great extent, shaped and defined by the nature of the cybernetic, augmented or other spaces they employ and which contain them. Furthermore, Lefebvre argues that space does not pre-exist action but is produced by action. He articulates space as “lived experience” and suggests that it is produced by bodies (*my* body) and social interactions. One of the primary concerns of this Chapter was to engage with Lefebvre's discussion of space as social morphology in order to argue that *networks are spaces*: accepting Lefebvre's thesis that space is produced through lived experience, social practice, interactions and interrelations I deduced that, since networks are of and about connectivity (that is, they exist solely as social phenomena), networks are inherently spatial rather than just conceptualised as such. Moreover, Lefebvre argues that we can only experience space as time because “we live in time, we are time”. Furthering this argument I aimed to emphasise the extreme dependency of immaterial networks on time: networked spaces, I argued, *are spaces only when performed* (through live/d experience).

Whilst Chapter Two argued that networks are spaces, it also ventured to present the views of certain cyberlaw scholars who question this. Those scholars suggest that the networks are not spatial –rather, users conceptualise the networks as spaces in an attempt to map abstract, immaterial patterns of connectivity into concrete, familiar cognitive functions. They air their concerns in regards to this ‘impositon’ of spatial concepts upon the networks as they suggest that conceptualising networks as spaces leads to the duplication of established hierarchies, and traditional dynamics of power and control. This, they argue, acts counter to the nature of the networks as decentralised systems that can support practices such as peer-to-peer file sharing, and threatens to create a digital anti-commons. To manage this danger, some of the scholars in question suggest that we should avoid the use of spatial metaphors in relation to the networks. I presented those views as I consider them of the utmost importance –indeed, I share the concerns of those scholars in relation to the threats imposed upon the digital commons and decentralised,

social networking practices of sharing. Nevertheless, I suggested that those scholars fail to grasp the importance of the study of social practices for the production of space –physical space as well as networked space– and thus the inherent spatial character of the networks. I argued that their suggestion to ‘drop’ spatial metaphors in our discussions of networks is simplistic and unfeasible. Furthermore, I emphasised Julie Cohen’s suggestion that cyberlaw scholars need to drastically alter their methodological approach in order to start discussing networks as embodied and experiential practices. Returning to Lefebvre’s claim that space is, first and foremost, (my) body, I asked: what is (my) body in the networks? In order to address this, I invoked Foucault’s discussion on heterotopias. Having established that networks are spatial I here suggested that networks are ‘other’ spaces, that is, heterotopias. Heterotopias, claims Foucault, enable us to see ourselves there, where we are absent. I went on to argue that, when in the heterotopias of the networks, we need to acknowledge that space *is not* my body (whose physical materiality, vulnerability and incumbent death I lack therein), but my body’s counterpart or other manifested as my avatar or pov. This is as inextricably linked to my body/self as my body’s other is in the (Foucault’s) mirror.

Chapter Two concluded with a study on the work of Blast Theory, focusing in particular on their game/performance piece *Can You See Me Now?* I chose to explore this piece in relation to the concepts and ideas discussed earlier in this Chapter as I consider it exemplary in its practice of merging physical and virtual spacetimes to generate hybrid heterotopias. Moreover, this is a piece that invites players to experience and reflect upon their body’s/selves’ networked counterparts through constructing layers of otherness upon otherness. In my analysis of *CYSMN?* I discussed how virtual cities map upon ‘real’/physical cities whilst also diverting from them, and how selves are expanded through being identified with others and pinned down as ghostly presences there, where they are absent.

In Chapter Three I set out to examine what constitutes presence in the networks. In discussion with Auriea Harvey and Michael Samyn of Entropy8Zuper!/Tale of Tales I considered the couple’s telematic love affair, which led to the launch of Entropy8Zuper! and their early works. I then described my experience of attending *Wirefire* performances on an almost weekly basis for two years. Inspired by the intense sense of presence and togetherness that I carried from those distributed encounters, I undertook to study the notion and experience of presence in the networks. I began by taking up Phelan’s claim that, in performance, “the body is metonymic of self, (...), of ‘presence’” to ask: within the context of cybertheatres (and other networked encounters), which body does Phelan refer to? Does the absence of the corporeal body from the networks entail absence of the self? To answer, I employed N. Katherine Hayles’s writings on the posthuman. Hayles deliberates on the ambiguous state of the

avatar that both “is and is not present” or, as argued in Chapter Two, is there, where s/he is not. In Chapter Two I suggested that one’s avatar is one’s counterpart or other. Here, following Brian Massumi, my argument circled in the opposite direction, proposing that one’s corporeal, carnal body is as virtual as one’s avatar: Massumi argues that bodies are “as immediately virtual as they are actual”, re-introducing a definition of the virtual as a potentiality rather than something ‘fake’ or synthetic. I thus argued that Phelan’s corporeal performing bodies are as virtual as E8Z!’s performing avatars, povs or “digital ecologies” (Munster). Consequently, if corporeal performing bodies are metonymic of self and presence, I proposed that all performing bodies are metonymic of self and presence, as all performing bodies are virtual.

Once I established that *lack of corporeality does not entail absence of self*, another question was posed, that is, what is presence within this context? I went on to argue that, in the networks, presence is no more the opposite of absence, as it is no more situated within a single, humanist body/self. When the corporeal body ceases to ‘stand’ for presence, I reasoned, presence is based on doubt: rather than being the opposite of absence, presence becomes multiple and interwoven with absence(s). It thus needs to be manifested in order to be perceived as a quality or state; furthermore, it needs to establish the validity of its manifestation(s) in order to be perceived as ‘authentic’. Demonstrating the dissolution of the presence vs. absence binary within this context (as Hayles says, “it doesn’t hold much leverage”), I argued that this conceptual dichotomy is neither appropriate nor sufficient for the analysis of the hybrid states of being a cyborgian creature finds him/herself in. To disentangle this line of thought from paradoxical ‘dead-ends’, I returned to Lefebvre who proposes the introduction of otherness within the presence-absence binary. The introduction of the Other in Phelan’s equation $\text{Body} = \text{Self} = \text{Presence}$ led me to propose that presence in the networks is not a pure, self-evident quality or state, but a relational one: that is, one is always present in relation to an-Other.

Lefebvre argues against binary oppositions, which he considers logo-centric. Following his thesis I pointed out that such discourses are not useful for the analysis of performance and performative, body-centric practices. After introducing the notions of otherness and relationality into the presence-absence binary, I went on to show that ideas of presence as a pure quality that is the opposite of absence are based on another two sets of oppositional binaries: materiality vs. immateriality and originality vs. artificiality. I suggested that none of those binaries are pertinent within the posthuman context of cybertheatres. I demonstrated that, in the networks, the two terms of the materiality vs. immateriality binary merge, as avatar bodies are both immaterial and bound to the materiality of their counterpart or other. I gestured towards the materiality of information itself which, as Hayles argues, “cannot exist apart from (...) embodiment”. I further argued that originality can no longer be perceived as bound to matter, as

is the case in Benjamin's discussion of the aura. Following Michelsen, I called for the artificial to be approached as independent from the original and from "inherited determinations and constraints."

To conclude my examination of the notions of networked presence-absence, I pointed to Hayles's argumentation in favour of the introduction of a complementary dialectic for the study and analysis of networked phenomena: Hayles suggests that we introduce the dialectic of pattern and randomness as complementary to the one of presence and absence. She stresses that pattern-randomness is not a binary because the two terms are not mutually exclusive but complementary to one another (pattern fades into randomness, randomness is the ground for pattern to emerge). I proposed that pattern and randomness, as a dialectic complementary to presence-absence, can be of great use for the study of networked and emergent practices such as cybertheatres because: a) it is not based on logo-centric binary discourses, b) it allows for a range of nuances to be introduced into understandings/experiences of presence and absence, as well as for their co-existence, c) it does not come with pre-loaded sets of meanings and moral judgments, thus allowing for a conceptual and aesthetic 'vacuum' that can provide fertile ground for novel practices and concepts. Finally, I discussed notions of (a)liveness, referring to my experience of taking part in a choreographic workshop led by Johannes Birringer. Here, I suggested that the dramaturgy of this telematic exercise encompassed a number of incompatible presences that cancelled each other out, if not on a factual, then on an experiential level. I argued that (a)liveness is not just a temporal quality but a relational one that depends on the compatibility of connected presences.

Chapter Three closed by returning to Entropy&Zuper!/Tale of Tales who narrated the 'death of *Wirefire*' and the production of another multifaceted piece as a result: the MMORPG/virtual world/live performance environment/social screensaver *The Endless Forest*. The artists explained that *The Endless Forest* aimed to preserve the personal and emotionally intense nature of *Wirefire* whilst providing audiences with a much more central role, which would sustain the world's constant aliveness. Here I touched upon functions of narrative in virtual worlds to demonstrate a shift in the role of the artists from producers of content and grand narratives to producers of contexts and platforms, which audiences turned participants/players/inhabitants can appropriate and embody to generate their own unique, personal micro-narratives. Closing, I stressed that those micro-narratives result not only from formal interactions with the system, but also, and most importantly, from practices of relationality and (a)liveness.

Chapter Four closed the thesis by shifting the vantage point from that of the scholar and audience member/participant, to that of the practitioner. I discussed and analysed my hands-on

exploration and engagement with two different practices, both concerned with the subject of curating live media. The first part of this Chapter offered an account of the action-based component of the thesis, namely the initiation, co-directing and co-curation of the three-day event *Intimacy: Across Digital and Visceral Performance*. The second part of the Chapter documented my involvement with the collaborative film-making project *Deptford.TV*. I framed my discussions with my experience as a media arts curator since 1997, introducing *Medi@terra*, an international media arts festival I co-founded and co-directed from 1997 till 2002 (Athens, Greece). I discussed *Medi@terra*'s and other such festivals' focus on taxonomising media arts in relation to the works' formalist characteristics and the types of technologies or media employed. I then pointed to *Runme.org* and the *Read_me* festivals, which, I suggested, provided a different model of curation through applying intuitive taxonomies and introducing social agendas.

In documenting the development of *Intimacy*, I described how the event came to happen through a process of exchange, which acknowledged and harnessed the creative power of tensions as well as common grounds. Comparing *Intimacy* to media arts festivals such as *Medi@terra* I argued that its unique contribution came from proposing a shift of focus from idiosyncrasies of genres, formalist concerns and techno-deterministic attitudes to a thematic exploration that emerged organically through observation of contemporary practices and cultures. *Intimacy* aimed to address contemporary issues of social anxiety, insecurity and unrest through an identified quest for intimacy in contemporary performance practices, and to explore their sociopolitical implications. This quest, I observed, was/is shared amongst live art and digital/networked performance practices and communities. I suggested that this thematic strand functioned as a pathway for diverse audiences to engage with emergent and cutting edge practices. Here, I argued against the approach of positive discrimination in curatorial practice that can see emergent genres being presented as separate from or peripheral to other, more widely established, accessible or mainstream practices, arguably resulting in elitism and the exclusion of such practices from cultural contexts, discourses and markets. I proposed that the emergent fields of cybertheatres and digital performance could turn to recent histories of media arts curation in order to avoid duplicating approaches that proved unfavourable to the long-term development of this genre. I pointed to *Intimacy*'s success in creating bridges and initiating cross-pollination across communities and practices that are considered to be situated at extreme ends of the performing arts spectrum and do not often cross paths in public outputs. Moreover, *Intimacy*'s design balanced theory and practice in an event that was equally concerned with both, and invited audiences to actively participate in in-depth explorations of both a scholarly and practical nature. Finally, I discussed my concern with situating *Intimacy* in its specific

geographical and social context in order to target local communities thus diversifying the event's audience base and enriching the experience for all participants.

I closed Chapter Four's section on *Intimacy* by briefly examining three cybertheatre events that were programmed during the festival: Charles Baldwin's and Alan Sondheim's workshop in Second Life, Johannes Birringer's workshop and performance (with Dans Sans Joux) at the Laban, and Paul Sermon's seminar. In discussing Baldwin's and Sondheim's practice, I argued that the *Avatar Paste and Code Soup* workshop demonstrated the relevance of the pattern-randomness dialectic, introduced in Chapter Three, within cybertheatre practice. Specifically, I suggested that Baldwin's and Sondheim's practice supports, if not furthers my argument: the artists employ pattern(s) and randomness in order to claim for their avatar-selves not only presence and (a)liveness, but also their very existence. This is because their avatars are built through the collection and processing of patterns generated by movement data that have been produced by visceral bodies in physical space. Here I pointed out that the main cybertheatre events that were programmed during *Intimacy* fall within the two main categories of cybertheatres I studied in this thesis, that is online performances (Baldwin and Sondheim, Sermon) and performances taking place in augmented, networked environments (Birringer). I concluded this section by introducing questions posed by Paul Sermon and Tracey Warr, regarding issues of responsibility, consciousness, and the quality of interaction and community facilitated by digital media, which I went on to address in section two of this Chapter, *Deptford.TV*.

In the case of *Deptford.TV* I employed practice as a methodological approach for studying collaborative processes of production of meaning, and community initiatives. I discussed *Deptford.TV* as a Web 2.0 platform with a "natural architecture of participation" (Batelle) that invites users to become co-authors of content, as well as co-curators of the platform itself and the broadcasted timelines that this generates. Though *Deptford.TV* is not a networked performance *per se*, I pointed to its function as a networked platform that can facilitate collaborative creativity, enhance strategies of sharing, and address socio-political issues of glocal interest. I thus approached *Deptford.TV* as a model that could be applied to cybertheatre practices that are concerned with socio-political agendas and the collaborative development of content and context.

To study the collaborative nature of *Deptford.TV* I joined its community. Thus, the project was discussed and debated not from a singular perspective (of the author), but from a pluralist perspective (of co-authorship). The discussions I had with the *Deptford.TV* community focused on three main issues: collaboration, authorship and the notion of community itself. *Deptford.TV* co-authors approached collaboration as a rich but complex experience that can bear

high quality outcomes, and stressed its demands in terms of time and togetherness. We addressed issues of equality in terms of participation and contribution, and asked on which (and whose) terms can equality be defined within collaborative contexts. Furthermore, we discussed ideas of remix culture that encourage the reappropriation of content, but also expressed our concerns regarding the complications that alternative copyright laws could harbour. We grappled with the loaded term ‘community’, which we found entangled in social and political agendas, and which brought forth issues of diversity and exclusion. Those discussions led me to suggest that *Deptford.TV* is a ‘living’ database whose aesthetics and meaning are constructed (and contested) as a process of constant negotiation between co-authors, the community as a single-plural author and their “field of unresolved contradictions” (Daniel).

The analysis of *Deptford.TV* demonstrated that, though the project is framed by its initiator as ‘collaborative film-making’ it, in fact, meets all the criteria that Murray identified in her book *Hamlet in the Holodeck* as essential to digital storytelling practices, or ‘cyberdrama’: its authorship is multiple and shared; the engagement of its participants/co-authors is sustained (durational); the stories narrated are not one but multiple, and seen from multiple perspectives; and its co-authors become protagonists –though not through enactment, but through storytelling. I argued that, through its multiple, personal, local and interconnected narratives, *Deptford.TV* re-produces Deptford as the heterotopia of a virtual public space, a digital commons, where things are possible. This is because the grand narrative imposed upon the physical public space by commercial interests and experts of space (see ‘Creekside’) can be interpolated by and inscribed with multiple micro-narratives generated by people’s experiences and the way they produce space for themselves, through social interactions. Thus, I suggested that *Deptford.TV* offers a glimpse of digital existence, and art/performance-making, that can positively affect ‘first life’ spaces through a ‘leak’, or a folding, of the virtual into the actual.

This thesis has been a long journey: It started in 2002 and it finishes in 2009, under a different main supervisor. I undertook it as a part-time endeavour while earning a living in London, and had to interrupt the project twice due to personal circumstances. This is life taking over, and it is to be expected when one undertakes a project as long-term as a part-time PhD. Nonetheless, when one’s PhD thesis aims to articulate an emergent genre, life taking over might well affect the task at hand. The thesis itself also underwent complications and changes of form and content, though the subject matter never shifted: When I first embarked on this project I was Resident Researcher at the CICV (Centre International de Creation Video) Pierre Shaeffer in Belfort, France; at the time one of the most important production and residency centres in Europe for experimental film, video, and media arts. The centre closed, unexpectedly, in 2004,

leaving me without the technical infrastructure and expertise required to proceed with the practice as envisaged. Following this, I had to revisit and re-structure the project, moving from a practice-based thesis to a written one. In 2005 I transferred from Goldsmiths Drama Department to Goldsmiths Digital Studios, which, I felt, was a more appropriate context for the interdisciplinary nature of this project. This move meant that I had to re-integrate a practical component in the thesis, which led to developing *Intimacy*. Coming close to completion, I had to ask myself: If cybertheatres/networked performance practices were emergent, as a distinct genre, in 2002, can they still be called emergent seven years later?

In October 2009 UK audiences were bombarded with press coverage about the new series *Girl Number 9*.⁸⁴⁰ *Girl Number 9* differs from other TV series in that it has not been developed for regular TV screens; instead, it has been exclusively made for the web. The mini-series, dubbed a “web thriller”, tells the story of a suspected serial killer. It consists of six five-minute episodes released almost daily over the period of one week, starting 30 October 2009. According to journalist Anna Pickard, writer James Moran and director Dan Turner approached the story format, plot developments and so on from scratch, aiming to create a series specifically tailored for the medium of the Internet.⁸⁴¹ Indeed, *Girl Number 9* has a distinctive format, particularly due to its bite-sized episodes that resemble audiovisual ‘tweets’. The series uses social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter for promotional purposes, but also as a dramaturgical element, featuring in-role updates by the characters.⁸⁴² *Girl Number 9* is not immediately identifiable as a cybertheatre project, nor does it purport to be one: the creators of the series prefer to identify it with Internet TV rather than theatre or performance. The series primarily consists of six filmed episodes that do not invite interaction (and thus, as discussed earlier, liveness). Nonetheless, it is interesting to note how *Girl Number 9* spans a variety of spacetimes: the protagonists appear not only in the pre-recorded episodes streamed through the series’ website, but also on social networking sites, where interactions take place outside and beyond the temporal constraints (including lack of synchronicity) of the pre-recorded image. Thus, the series ‘leaks’ outside its frame; the fiction infects everyday life; and the pastness of the pre-recorded image is recalled to the present, to the here-and-now, to synchronous connections between performers and audiences, and compatible presence(-absence)s. *Girl*

⁸⁴⁰ *Girl Number 9* website. Available from: <http://www.canyousaveher.com/press.html> [accessed 31/10/2009]. The series, starring two former East Enders’ stars (Tracy-Ann Overman and Joe Absolom) has attracted coverage from GMTV, ITV1, BBC News, Jonathan Ross’s show at BBC Radio 2 and *The Guardian*, among other media outlets.

⁸⁴¹ Pickard, A. *Girl Number 9: Tell Us What You Think of Made-for-Web TV Show Here* *The Guardian TV & Radio Blog*. Available from: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/tvandradioblog/2009/oct/30/girl-number-9-made-for-web-30/10/2009> [accessed 31/10/2009]

⁸⁴² One can find promotional tweets regarding forthcoming interviews on radio and TV, together with tweets and (mysterious) photographs sent/uploaded, apparently, by the characters of the series. Available from: <http://twitter.com/girlnumber9> [accessed 31/10/2009]

Number 9 might be or it might not be a cybertheatre piece, depending on one's viewpoint. Whichever way one chooses to approach this, one cannot fail to recognise that *Girl Number 9* is an Internet-specific piece that 'flirts' with established markets and mainstream audiences.

In this project, I set out to articulate an emergent genre. Berkenkotter and Huckin, in their study of genre as a cognitive and social function, propose a framework that summarises the prevalent aspects of current concepts of genre; those are: dynamism (genres are dynamic forms that serve to stabilise experience and which change over time); situatedness (genres are situated cognition); form and content; duality of structure (in engaging with genres through professional practice we both constitute/enact and reproduce social structures); and community ownership ("genre conversations signal a discourse community's norms, epistemology, ideology, and social ontology"⁸⁴³).⁸⁴⁴ Following Berkenkotter and Huckin, I suggest that articulating emergent genres (in this case, cybertheatres) as distinctive from other manifestations of practice is necessary and beneficial to the practices concerned, as much as it is an 'evil'.

By setting out to articulate cybertheatres as a distinct genre I wish to: contribute to framing and 'stabilising' experience of a body of practice which, I suggest, has reached a critical mass in terms of its manifestations, in order to help develop appropriate languages, understandings and approaches to those emergent practices; inform the ways we, practitioners and scholars engaged in networked performance practices, conceptualise, discuss, theorise, situate and, in general, manage our body of work; enhance a sense of community ownership amongst people active in this field; encourage and, possibly, initiate alliances between communities of practice and research (through events such as *Intimacy*, for example); contribute in bringing emergent practices into visibility, and situating them in relation to established discourses, practices and markets; consider audience engagement with and investment in such practices (through co-authorship, for example). Whilst aiming to 'stabilise' experience so as to talk about it, I have done so while approaching this emergent genre as dynamic and in flux. However, studying practices that are emergent, changeable and indeterminable is not an easy task. There are the 'evils' that I referred to earlier: Attempting to frame and 'stabilise' experience can lead to fixity, rigidity and stasis; attempting to enhance a sense of community ownership can highlight unresolved contradictions in an unproductive manner, and can consequently lead to exclusion; attempting to forge alliances between communities can lead to accentuating assumptions about the boundaries that keep those communities apart. In this thesis I have strived to keep these dangers at bay through avoiding, as much as possible, to taxonomise

⁸⁴³ Breure, L. Development of the Genre Concept. Available from: [http://people.cs.uu.nl/leen/GenreDev/GenreDevelopment.htm#Reproduced%20and%20Novel%20Genres 2001](http://people.cs.uu.nl/leen/GenreDev/GenreDevelopment.htm#Reproduced%20and%20Novel%20Genres%202001) [accessed 6/12/2009]

⁸⁴⁴ Berkenkotter, C. and Huckin, T. N. *Genre Knowledge in Disciplinary Communication: Cognition / Culture / Power*. Hillsdale: Erlbaum, 1995, p. 4.

practices. Thus, I undertook a juggling act of balancing between stability and change; mutual territories and unresolved contradictions; framing practices and allowing them to leak off the frame.

I suggest that my research constitutes a unique contribution to the fields of performance studies and media arts through proposing a discreet framework one can employ in order to approach, study and analyse cultural phenomena such as cybertheatres. There is no need for me to argue for the current relevance of this research: The proliferation of cybertheatres today –in virtual worlds such as Second Life, MMORPGs such as *World of Warcraft*,⁸⁴⁵ through pervasive and mobile technologies, and through mainstream entertainment ventures such as *Girl Number 9*– propagates the relevance and, indeed, cultural urgency of such research, and points to the need for further study within this area of practice. A new generation of students and practitioners honed in networking technologies, mobile communications and virtual worlds is bound to generate an even greater expansion of such practices.⁸⁴⁶ Furthermore, the current proliferation of cybertheatres has indeed occurred within the broad areas I identified, in Chapter One, as the most relevant today; that is, online performances in virtual worlds, social networking sites or other networked spaces; and pervasive technologies that merge virtual and physical spacetimes.

Although it is apparent that cybertheatres –as a set of practices that take place in networked stages and are thus ontologically distinct from physical space-based performance–are proliferating, the question of whether those practices constitute a distinct genre remains. In this thesis I set out to argue that this is indeed the case. I framed and contextualised cybertheatres as a genre, provided examples of practices that can be approached as such, theorised their core ontological traits through discussions on the main conceptual vectors of space and presence, and analysed the case studies of Entropy8Zuper!/Tale of Tales and Blast Theory. I then moved on to an analysis and evaluation of my own practice, through the projects of *Intimacy* and *Deptford.TV*. And this is where logic falters: *Intimacy* is a project that encompasses cybertheatre practices but consciously refuses to limit its scope to a genre-specific approach, selecting to concentrate on a thematic strand instead; whilst *Deptford.TV* is framed, by its initiator and its community, as a ‘collaborative fim-making’ project. Whereas my theoretical discourse was concerned with the question of genre, my practice persisted in

⁸⁴⁵ *World of Warcraft* Community site. Available from: <http://www.worldofwarcraft.com/index.xml> [accessed 15/12/2009]

⁸⁴⁶ My students in the School of Arts and New Media, University of Hull (Scarborough), for example, produce work on UpStage and in Second Life as part of their curriculum. Many of them are avid players of MMORPGs, all of them use social networking sites and, in short, they lead networked lives. I have no doubt that several of our graduates will go on to engage actively with cybertheatres as practice and/or research.

challenging the framework I was myself setting out to construct. Like *Girl Number 9*, both *Intimacy* and *Deptford.TV* are practices that ‘leak’ outside of their frame, seeking to blur disciplinary boundaries and to complexify any attempt at situating and ‘stabilising’ cognition and experience –never mind how discreet this might be. Though the articulation of genres might be relevant –even crucial– as a strategy within the context of the political space we occupy as theorists and makers (and which, as Lefebvre argues, is a construct that seeks to impose itself as a reality), genre as a cognitive and social function is not, in the first instance, necessarily relevant to the processes of imagining, conceiving, and making work. I thus propose that cybertheatres can be approached either as a distinct genre, or as a fairly cohesive, though particularly diverse, catalogue of practices, depending on one’s vantage point, as well as one’s strategic concerns. The Live Art Development Agency takes a similar approach, in offering the term Live Art as a “cultural strategy to include experimental processes and experiential practices that might otherwise be excluded from established curatorial, cultural and critical frameworks.”⁸⁴⁷ Whether approaching cybertheatres as a distinct genre or a set of practices, the important thing is to ensure that those hybrid practices are *not* “excluded from established curatorial, cultural and critical frameworks.”

The next question that inevitably comes up at the end of this thesis is: are cybertheatres still emergent? I suggest that this, again, depends on one’s vantage point. They are emergent as far as mainstream culture is concerned, as demonstrated by the press coverage of *Girl Number 9*, which generated a hype around the novelty of the piece. And, even if ‘emergent’ may not be quite the right term any more for the status of those practices within contemporary performance practice, they are still certainly cutting-edge. Matt Adams, when asked how he envisages the theatre of the future, told me: “We are trying to make it.”⁸⁴⁸ Of course, the theatre of the future is not one but many; and here I argue that cybertheatres, as a trajectory of practice, is one of its manifestations. Emergent or cutting-edge, those are practices that, here and now, are challenging, questioning and furthering our understanding of, and expectations from, theatre and performance. They are what the future holds.

⁸⁴⁷ Live Art Development Agency. What Is Live Art? Available from:

http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/about_us/what_is_live_art.html [accessed 7/07/2010]

⁸⁴⁸ Adams, M. Cited by: Chatzichristodoulou, M. *How to Kidnap Your Audiences*, p. 117.

APPENDIX ONE

OPHELIA_MACHINE

By Maria X

Textual collage based on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Heiner Müller's *Hamlet Machine* and original text. The last phrase is borrowed by Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*. Performed as part of the UpStage 070707 Festival for Online Performance on the 7th of July 2007, online (UpStage) and at the National Film Theatre of New Zealand. The dialogue is intercepted by commands, and broken down in fragments as it is meant to be typed.

This is Maria X's performance script with stage directions.

Pre-performance Directions

a)

<<M - **Backdrops** (Change of Backdrops)

G – **Anim Ava** (Animated Avatar)

MX – **Name Ava** (Named Avatar)

b)

G – **Invi Narrator** (Invisible Narrator)

MX & M – **Audience Chat**

Act One

M – **Narrator**

MX – **Ophelia**

G – **Charles**

<<M – **Backdrop: Ocean**

MX – **Ophelia on Stage, Swimming.**

Narrator: /a 0 [command]

N 1: We are in Denmark dear friends

N 2: Yeah I know this looks like Hawaii, don't ask me why...

N 3: by the beach of Helsinore...
N 4: Wild sea and this beautiful girl bathing herself is...
N 5: ...who else? Lovely Ophelia! /a 3 Yes!
N 6: She is enjoying the cold water on her body.
N 7: She is feeling every wave...
N 8: The salt on her skin, the sun on her lips
N 9: The water in her eyes, in her mouth...
N 10: She licks the salt from her lips, lost in thoughts... /a 2 No!
N 11: Oh look who's here...

G – Enters Charles

N 12: Charles!

Charles:

C 1: The fair Nymph, in thy orisons
C 2: Be all my sins rememb' red.

Ophelia:

O 1: My lord
O 2: How does your honour for this many a day?

Charles:

C 3: I humbly thank you well, well, well.

Ophelia:

O 3: My lord
O 4: I have remembrances of yours
O 5: that I have longed long to re-deliver.
O 6: I pray you now receive them.

Charles:

C 4: No, not I!
C 5: I never gave you naught!

Ophelia:

O 7: My honour'd lord, you know right well you did!

- O 8: And with them, words of so sweet breath compos'd as made the things more rich.
O 10: Their perfume lost, take these again.
O 11: There, my lord.

Charles: (G - hahas earlier as well)

- C 6: Ha, ha!
C 7: Are you honest?

Ophelia:

- O 12: My lord?

Charles:

- C 8: Are you fair?

Ophelia:

- O 13: What means your lordship?

Charles:

- C 9: That if you be honest and fair,
C 10: your honesty should admit no discourse to your beauty.

Ophelia:

- O 14: Could beauty, my lord
O 15: have better commerce than with honesty?

Charles:

- C 11: Ay, truly

<<MX – Ophelia Beauty Prop

- C 12: For the power of beauty will sooner transform honesty from what it is to a bawd
C 13: than the force of honesty can translate beauty into his likeness.
C 14: I did love you once. (Repeat)

Ophelia:

O 16: Indeed, my lord
O 17: You made me believe so.

Charles:

C 15: You should not have believ'd me.

<<M – BACKDRP Storm

<<MX– Ophelia Drops Beauty Prop

C 16: I loved you not. (Repeat)

<<MX – Chorus Starts to Appear on Stage: Plane and Tank come in first.

<<M – Chorus: 2 Pistols, Barb Wire

((Chorus NOT blinking /a 1

Charles:

C 17: Women should be sewed up

C 18: a world without mothers.

C 19: We could butcher each other in peace and quiet

C 20: and with some confidence.

MX – Ophelia Ava Drops

Chorus: (Repeat All)

M – Barb Wire: Sentences 1, 4, 7

G – Pistol: Sentences 2, 5, 8

MX – Plane: Sentences 3, 6, 9

A CH 1: Give us this day our daily murder Charles

A CH 2: The humiliated bodies of women

A CH 3: Hope of generations

A CH 4: Give us this day our daily murder

A CH 5: Hope of generations

A CH 6: The brutalized bodies of women

(Army Anims on when Backdrop Colour Full)

A CH 7: Hail Coca Cola

A CH 8: A kingdom

A CH 9: For a murder

<<M – BACCDRP Explosion

MX – Barbie Ophelia

MX – Moves All Army (M holds Barb and Pistol at beginning)

M – Barb and Pistol

ACT TWO

((Chorus Blinking /a 0

Charles:

C 21: What are you waiting for?

C 22: Tomorrow morning has been cancelled.

C 23: Take her now.

C 24: Make her what she really is.

C 25: A slut.

C 26: A maneater. An evil snake.

C 27: Make her eat mud.

C 28: Hurt her. Tear off her clothes.

C 29: Beat her. Bruise her.

C 30: Fuck her.

C 31: Fuck her.

C 32: Shake her.

C 33: Cover her face in her menstrual blood.

C 34: Treat her for what she really is.

C 35: Give her your sperm. And again.

MX – Moves All Army

C 36: Don't kill her. No!
C 37: We want her alive.
C 38: Dead can't suffer. I want her pain.
C 39: Her pain is my victory.

Rape

<<M-CURTAIN first transparent and then gets darker till it gets black
//m drop any weapon you have before taking off curtain!

MX – Drops Ophelia Ava

// DROP YOUR AVA!! In case of emergency: /wh *=all drop!! when curtain full

<<G – CLEAR

<<G-BACKDRP Destruction

ACT THREE

Chorus Witches – 3 Witches only, players bring their witch themselves; appear on scene on top and wander down

MX – Witch 3

// In case of emergency /wh *=witches don't blink ever always black /a 1

M sentences 1, 4, 7 twice

G sentences 2 & 5 twice

MX sentences 3 & 6 twice

Chorus:

W CH 1: Come home Ophelia the world awaits you.

W CH 2: Bring us your willingness to please.

W CH 3: Bring us your flowers of joy.

W CH 4: Bring us your womb to plant our infancy.

MX – Ophelia Ava comes on stage as Barbie

Chorus:

W CH 5: AH THE WHOLE GLOBE FOR A REAL SORROW

W CH 6: OH OPHELIA WHAT HAVE I DONE UNTO THEE

W CH 7: SOMETHING IS ROTTEN IN THE AGE OF HOPE

<<M – curtain light blue transparent

<<G – BACKDRP Barbie

Ophelia:

O 18: I am Ophelia.

O 19: The one the river didn't keep.

O 20: The woman dangling from the rope.

O 21: The woman with her arteries cut open.

O 22: The woman with the overdose

O 23: The woman with her head in the gas stove.

Chorus: *M says it twice others only once

W CH 9: SNOW ON HER LIPS. (Repeat)

G – takes her witch off herself

M – takes off the witches for her and for MX off

<<M – BACKDRP flash of white

MX – Ophelia Barbie Ava Drops.

Ophelia comes in as a Womb and YOU Fire

MX – YOU Fire

M &MX alternate lines starting at M O 24. YOU Fire drops straight after O 42.

G –Heart-Clock enters O 42.

Ophelia:

O 24: Yesterday I stopped killing myself.

<<M – BACKDRP room

O 25: I am alone with my breasts

- O 26: My thighs
- O 27: My womb.
- O 28: I smash the tools of my captivity
- O 29: The chair
- O 30: The table
- O 31: The bed.
- O 32: I destroy the battlefield that was my home.
- O 33: I fling open the doors so the wind gets in and the scream of the world.
- O 34: I smash the window.

<<M – BACKDRP COKE

- O 35: With my bleeding hands I tear the photos of the men I loved
- O 36: And who used me
- O 37: On the bed
- O 38: On the table
- O 39: On the chair
- O 40: On the ground.
- O 41: I set fire to my prison.
- O 42: I throw my clothes into the fire. **(DROP ASAP!)**

MX – Fire Burning /a 0

<<G – BACKDRP Kitchen

M – Heart Ava appears /a 0

- O 43: I wrench the clock that was my heart out of my breast.

<<MX brings in Army

- O 44: I walk into the street clothed in my blood.

/G – Charles appears on stage.

Ophelia:

O 45: Do you want to eat my heart, Charles?

Charles:

C 40: I want to be a woman. (Repeat)

MX – Ophelia Drops

Ophelia:

O 46: WASH THE MURDER OFF YOUR FACE MY PRINCE.

O 47: A MOTHER'S WOMB IS NOT A ONE-WAY STREET.

//mX – Ophelia drops = off stage

<<M – BACKDRP women

G - Charles moves into correct position then

M – waits for Charles to be in position and puts leg on stage

G – puts Army on stage; only 4; NO Barb Wire on stage

MX – puts Tank and Plane on stage and makes them disappear into the womb

M - Invi Charles on stage right over leg (Invisible Avatar)

G - Charles disappears into womb shouting for help

Charles and Invi Charles say some of those:

Help! Heeeelp! Help! Au secours! Hilfe!

G & MX – 2 witches appear, blinking

MX & M – make all weapons disappear in womb

W CH 8: What thou killed thou shalt love. (Repeat)

W CH 9: What thou killed thou shalt love. (Repeat)

<<M – CURTAIN light blue transparent

MX – DROP YOUR AVA NOW!

<<G – Clear

<<G – BACKDRP mount Airport

MX – Ophelia back on stage as Fire Burning /a 0; is the only one on stage now

ACT FOUR

Ophelia Cyborg:

O 48: In the solitude of airports

O 49: I breathe again

O 50: I am

O 51: A privileged person.

O 52: I don't want to eat

O 53: Drink

O 54: Breathe

O 55: Love

O 56: A woman

O 57: A man

O 58: A child

O 59: Any more.

O 60: I don't want to die any more.

O 61: I don't want to kill any more. (Repeat)

<<M – BACKDRP white

O 62: I want to be a machine.

O 63: Legs to walk on.

O 64: No pain. No thoughts.

O 65: I eject all the sperm I have received.

O 66: I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess. (Repeat as thought)

M – CURTAIN

MX – THE END

M – Ava for next performance

APPENDIX TWO

Report on the event *Intimacy: Across Digital and Visceral Performance* by Maria Chatzichristodoulou [aka Maria X] & Rachel Zerihan, Co-directors

As submitted to the AHRC Methods Network and Knowledge East, 2008. Reports on individual workshops and seminars are available on request.

a) Intimacy: Across Digital and Visceral Performance

Intimacy: Across Digital and Visceral Performance took place on **7, 8 and 9 December 2007** across **Goldsmiths, Laban, The Albany, Home London** and **online**. The event was a success, attracting large numbers of audiences from diverse disciplines and intersecting interests in a programme that boasted enthusiastic participants and well-attended activities. *Intimacy* was organised by **Goldsmiths Digital Studios** and funded by the **AHRC ICT Methods Network, Knowledge East, Goldsmiths University of London** (Graduate School, Departments of Drama, Computing, Music, Media & Communications, Visual Cultures and the Centre for Cultural Studies), and Canada Council. The event was also supported in kind by Goldsmiths, Trinity Laban, The Albany, Home London, DosTias Caffee & Tapas Bar as well as many volunteers who kindly offered their time and expertise.

Intimacy featured a digital and live art programme consisting of six workshops, four seminars, 36 performances /happenings, an eight-hour marathon of 'show & tell' presentations and screenings, and a day-long symposium. The programme was designed to address a diverse set of responses to the notion of 'being intimate' in contemporary performance –and, as such, in life. Practice-led examinations and seminar discussions explored the diverse environments that play host to digital and visceral art works, converging to produce dialogue that sought to grapple with this inherently conceptual framework and to play in the seam where the two states meet.

Highlights of the *Intimacy* event included the Launch, which featured digital, live art and sound performances, the Show and Tell presentations, nine One to One performances, an urban workshop and a keynote address by Amelia Jones leading a sold-out Symposium. Seminars led by esteemed scholars Dr. Tracey Warr, Prof. Paul Sermon (University of Salford), Dr. Dominic Johnson (Queen Mary University of London) and Mine Kaylan (Sussex University) and workshops facilitated by experts Kelli Dipple (Tate), Prof. Johannes Birringer (Brunel University), Kira O'Reilly, Prof. Charles Baldwin (University of West Virginia) and Alan Sondheim, provided rare

opportunities for discursive and hands-on inquiries into all things intimate in contemporary performance practice.

Intimacy was co-directed and co-curated by **Maria Chatzichristodoulou [aka Maria X]**, PhD Candidate Goldsmiths, Curator, sessional Lecturer (Goldsmiths, Birkbeck) and **Rachel Zerihan**, PhD Candidate Roehampton, sessional Lecturer (Brunel, Queen Mary). On the Board were *Prof. Janis Jefferies* and *Gerald Lidstone* (Goldsmiths), *Prof. Johannes Birringer* (Brunel), *Prof. Adrian Heathfield* (Roehampton) and *Hazel Gardiner* (Methods Network).

Intimacy Advisory Panel: *Daisy Abbot* (AHDS Performing Arts Glasgow); *Sylvette Babin* (Artist, Editor, Canada); *Gavin Barlow* (CEO The Albany); *Dr. Alice Bayliss* (School of Performance and Cultural Industries, University of Leeds); *Prof. Lauren Berlant* (Department of English, University of Chicago, USA); *Ghislaine Boddington* (Performer, Co-director Body>Data>Space); *Prof. Susan Broadhurst* (School of Arts, Brunel University); *Brian Brady* (Head of Programme LABAN); *Dr. Teresa Dillon* (Polar Produce); *Simon Donger* (Central School of Speech and Drama); *Anna Furse* (Drama Department, Goldsmiths University of London); *Marc Garrett* (Artist, Co-director Furtherfield); *Prof. Gabriella Giannachi* (Centre for Intermedia, University of Exeter); *Prof. Joe Kelleher* (School of Arts, Roehampton University); *Dr. Roberta Mock* (Faculty of Arts, University of Plymouth); *Morrigan Mullen* (Re-Write); *Dr. Chris Salter* (Artist, Hexagram; Department of Design and Computational Arts, Concordia University, Canada); *Prof. Thecla Schiphorst* (School of Interactive Arts and Technology, Simon Fraser University, Canada); *Jennifer Sheridan* (Director BigDog Interactive); *Igor Stromajer* (Artist, Slovenia); *Dr. Bojana Kunst* (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia); *Tony Thatcher* (Choreographer, LABAN); *Helen Varley Jamieson* (Performer, New Zealand).

Intimacy Volunteers include: Owen Parry, Judy Li, Adnan Hadzi, Ben Muller, Richard Osborne, Jennifer Spiegel, Rory McSwiggan, Sophia Kosmaoglou, Ryan Jordan, Rachel Steward, Ben Craggs, Nicole Tattersall, Clare Goodridge, Nanda Khaorapapong, Bridget Atkinson, Ricarda Vidal, among others.

b) Conceptual Strategy

Intimacy emerged from a dialogue between the co-directors that mused over the notion that digital performance and live artists appear to be making work, which addresses the disparity and isolation that breeds throughout communities facing direct and indirect conflict. Maria and Rachel considered how current digital and live art practice could be responding to the cultural climate of acute (in)security by explicitly addressing our relationship to one another in environments of extreme closeness and heightened connectivity. As such, *Intimacy* was designed to provide a platform for the discussion of sub-cultural practices concerned with displaying intuitive and

intimate relationships between artist and other.

Intimacy explored performance practices that engage in intimate encounters, raising issues around bodies of data and flesh; presence as aura and representation; desire as embodied condition and disembodied fantasy; the posthuman self. At the same time, it endeavoured to explore technologies that can enhance 'closeness': networking technologies such as the Internet, wireless networks, telecommunications and Web 2.0; sensor technologies; virtual reality and other digital multi-user environments. *Intimacy* encouraged a hands-on exploration of such technologies as a means for intimate inter-actions in digital and hybrid performance practices. The event aimed to elicit connectivity, induce interaction and provoke debate between cutting-edge artists, performers, scholars, researchers, students, creative thinkers and local communities, in order to enable the interrogation and exploration of formal, aesthetic and affective modes of *performing intimacy now*.

The co-directors were concerned with issues of methodology: how to create bridges across disciplines that are not just different, but are often considered oppositional within the performance spectrum? How to initiate encounters and debates amongst diverse communities, e.g. live artists, digital artists, other performers /artists, technologists, scientists, theorists, academics, students and local communities? How to link and create space for exchange between theory and practice? How to curate an event (i.e. undertake research, exercise some degree of control) while at the same time opening it up to unexpected inputs and interactions?

Following these concerns, *Intimacy* was designed as a three-day event, which featured a number of diverse activities: workshops, seminars, show & tell presentations, screenings, a one-day symposium, performances and happenings.

- Six workshops were designed to involve audiences as active participants in a practice-based research process.

Four of the workshops aimed to explore and research specific technologies as platforms, instigators or integral elements of live performance practice. These workshops researched: a) sensor, motion capture and wearable technologies used in movement and dance performance, b) performance taking place in 3D virtual environments such as Second Life, c) performance that employs audiovisual and cinematic technologies and d) performance and biotechnologies. Another two workshops focused on methodologies for the production of intimacy /affect in performance through: a) the use of the urban context and the theatre of everyday life, b) the disturbance of the body's 'normal' rhythms to produce extreme slowness and, through that, affect.

- Four seminars were designed to involve audiences as active participants in a theoretical and discursive process of exploration and exchange.

Two seminars explored the effect of specific technologies in performance practice in

relation to notions and experiences of intimacy, focusing on a) telematic and virtual environments and b) the effect of technologies on temporal structures (issues of speed and slowness) within performance and everyday life. Another two seminars explored seminal issues of live art and digital performance practice, namely a) bodies at risk in both digital and physical performance contexts and b) the relationship between (digital, live art) performance and pornography.

- A Show & Tell Marathon with presentations and screenings was designed to provide a platform for exchange primarily amongst practitioners, for the presentation of work-in-progress. All speakers submitted work through an Open Call for Projects and Proposals, and were peer-reviewed by a 23-strong international Advisory Panel of experts, the Intimacy Board and the Curators.
- A programme of 36 performances taking place over three days was curated with an aim to platform cutting edge performance work that explores notions of intimacy in live art and digital performance. The curatorial approach focused on creating bridges by highlighting overlaps and recurring subjects, concerns and strategies across visceral and digital performances. The majority of performance work showcased had been submitted through the Open Call for Projects and Proposals, and was peer-reviewed by our Panel and Board. A small number of the works were commissioned to specifically address issues raised by Intimacy through their format or subject-matter.
- A one-day Symposium was curated with an aim to provide a platform for the presentation of the findings /outcomes of the workshops and seminars and generate discourse across disciplines. The Symposium was comprised by a keynote presentation, two panels and an open forum discussion, whereas a number of one-to-one performances and happenings were programmed in parallel or during the breaks.

c) Findings

Over 1,500 participants are estimated to have taken part in *Intimacy: Across Visceral and Digital Performance*. Workshops, seminars, proposed/accepted performances and pre/post event online discussions developed communities across which dialogues emerged and the use of digital technologies in performance was re-examined. What follows are conceptual, aesthetic and practical developments, observations and discoveries that emerged from *Intimacy*:

- The inter-disciplinary, international cross-section of artists, scholars and diverse audiences who physically or virtually took part in Intimacy demonstrates the **significance of the subject matter** in contemporary culture.
- Live and digital performances proposed, seen, talked about and devised took on a **range of**

responses to the notion of intimacy, either explicitly addressing intimate encounters or displaying a more subtle use of its potency and affect.

- **ICT are being broadly employed by contemporary artists** to use, showcase and examine the efficacy and affect of their potential in making interdisciplinary performance works; equally, **digital and networked performance is strongly emerging**, and it is being articulated and critically examined as a major contemporary field of practice and research not in opposition, but in relation to visceral performance practices.
- The diverse range of artworks opened up dialogues across and between visceral and digital performance, sometimes **exceeding the aims and objectives** as detailed in our original proposal.
- **Conceptual findings emerged** in relation to notions of intimacy that were also tangential (but significant) to our original proposal – such as, for example, Intimacy as banal, exclusive and obscene...
- **Sound technologies** are being integrated in the work of digital and live arts for the creation/maintenance/disruption/problematisation of intimate environments
- **Dance/movement relational aesthetics** are being practically adopted, manipulated and interrogated by movement and live artists.
- **Wearable technologies** are being experimented with to enhance phenomenological analysis in audience reception.
- Issues of **affect in technological performance** is a particularly engaging and lively area of debate discovered both in the symposium and in post-performance discussions.
- Intimacy made time and a space for the **fertilisation of relationships between participants**, audience members, artists, theorists, as well as across and between these groups of individuals providing ground for the generation of cross-fertilisations, alliances, collaborations and also (productive) conflict.
- Two £500 **bursaries were offered** to proposals from workshop participants who submitted project ideas emerging from their workshop experience in *Intimacy*. These show clear formal working relationships that have already emerged from *Intimacy*.
- See individual **reports for a more detailed analysis** of seminar/workshop findings together with breakdowns of symposium attendees.

d) Research significance/potential of the constituent parts and of the event as a whole

- *Intimacy as a Research Project*

Intimacy was a research-driven project as it formed part of Maria X's PhD research into networked and digital performance practices. Specifically, *Intimacy* will be analysed and

evaluated as a curatorial project (action-led research) aiming to generate discourse about issues surrounding the curation of digital performance. Digital/networked performance being an emergent field of practice, there is currently very little investigation into the curatorial approaches and strategies required in order to articulate, communicate, support, showcase, contextualise and further develop the field. The analysis, which will form part of Maria X's PhD thesis, will explore a niche of curatorial practice located on the borderlines between media/digital arts, performance and live art practices.

- *Intimacy Performance Programme*

Intimacy put together an exciting programme of innovative performance works across genres, inviting both established and emergent practitioners. These performances were innovative in different ways through exploring a) new formats in performance practice – for example, one-to-one performance, performance in virtual environments, telematic performance using both new and old technologies (web-conferencing, purpose-built software, telephone); b) the integration of ICT and other state-of-the-art technologies in performance – for example, wearable technologies, sensors, motion capture technologies, sound manipulation technologies, virtual environments, online communities, web-conferencing, audiovisual technologies, VJing, Web 2.0 technologies such as social networking sites and YouTube, micro-cameras attached to the body etc.; and c) the use of ICT as means of heightened connectivity, intimate interaction and affect.

Through programming 36 performance works, each innovative in its own right, *Intimacy* aimed to a) question assumptions about rigid disciplinary boundaries; b) generate dialogues concerning issues of presence, intimacy and affect in and across physical, digital and hybrid environments; c) expand our understanding of *what constitutes performance practice today*; d) provide inspiration, cross-disciplinary dialogue and cross-fertilisation for the development of new works that push boundaries in performance practice and research; and e) initiate collaborations among practitioners working in different disciplines, as well as among theory and practice through a strong focus on practice/action-led research.

- *Intimacy Workshops*

The workshops programmed in *Intimacy* provided the possibility for hands-on exploration and research into:

a) Wearables and close-to-the-skin interfaces. *The Bodies of Colour* workshop invited the participants to: (...) explore the contemporary (technologically augmented and supported) wearable sensorial interface for performance, by playing with fabrics and cameras, self-

portraits and animations of others, wearing cloth and special garments with sensors, touching upon the erotics of materials and feedbacks, interacting in a tactile sensorial manner within the mediated environment (images, sounds, colours).” (Johannes Birringer);

b) Dispersed, elaborated and localised intimacies. The *Intimate Details Only* workshop invited participants to explore “how to occupy some of the pauses, lapses and moments within this conflicting and confusing concept of intimacy.” (Kira O’Reilly);

c) Intimacy and presence within the context of the recorded image. The *Intimacy and Recorded Presence* workshop invited participants to use cameras “as a basis for form, instruction-based action and one-to-one performance.” (Kelli Dipple) The workshop approached the camera as an “interface between performer, action and technology”, as “a key element in the relationships between kinaesthetic forms and digital outputs.” (K. Dipple) Participants were encouraged to “explore the power of cinematography in the creation of intimacy and presence.” (K. Dipple)

d) Analogue and digital bodies. The *Avatar Paste and Code Soup in First and Second Life* workshop used “a range of technologies to remap the solid and obdurate real of bodies into the dispersions and virtualities of the digital, and then back again into real physical spaces.” (C. Baldwin & A. Sondheim) The participants were encouraged to explore “the pasting of viewpoints together, the suturing of the subject into the avatar”, “the body matrix that is less a framework than a smearing of paste” and “projection and dreaming through the avatar, the inhabitation of avatar bodies and the emptying of real bodies into the avatar.” (C. Baldwin & A. Sondheim) The workshop attempted to unpack issues of sexuality, power, emotion, and other projections in the avatar body that “tends towards collapse and abjection”, through “a choreography of exposure and rupture, modelling and presenting inconceivable and untenable data, within which tensions and relationships are immediate and intimate.” (C. Baldwin & A. Sondheim)

e) Intimacy within urban life. *The Do Not Move - Urban Workshop* that run over two days and resulted in a collaborative performance invited the participants to commit to experiencing the urban environment of New Cross and Deptford through their senses, raw emotions, risky interactions and live, unexpected encounters. The workshop posed all-important questions about our cities, lives, loves and the world we live in through initiating urban happenings and involving passers-by as involuntary audiences.

f) Durational participatory performance as instigator of intimacy. The *Intimacy as Event* workshops invited the participants to take part in a choreographed exercise of slowness in public space (Goldsmiths campus corridors). The ‘movement-device’ was designed to activate a meditative proximity between the participants through a montage of movement

durations. “The usual movements along a corridor will be disrupted and register their intimacy into a co-appearance that is striking against the participants imposition of intimate realms. It is intended to realise a rendering visible of co-simultaneous intimacy in public space. Also other layers of reading will be generated that suggest questions of the possibility and impossibility of subjective shared intimacy relating to representation and identity.” (Lauren Goode)

- *Intimacy Seminars*

The seminars programmed in *Intimacy* provided the participants with an opportunity to actively participate in discussions around issues of:

a) The poetics of live interaction with particular attention to time as a significant vector in ‘meaningful’ exchange. *The Time it Takes to True* seminar asked “Within the context of proximal and of telematic /virtual environments, how does the play of time work in what we might identify as poetic exchange? What is ‘intimacy’ within these terms? What can we learn from cinema makers about structures of time and visual rhythm in interactions through tele-motion?” (Mine Kaylan)

b) Being human and being humane, specifically as these are formally and conceptually addressed through Body Art. The seminar *At Risk* invited participants to examine their own “responses, responsibilities and complicities in relation to a range of historical and contemporary artists’ work”, as well as consider their “responses in relation to differing modes of proximity – as viewers of live performances, photographic documents and on screen images.” (Tracey Warr) The participants were encouraged to explore and discuss “a range of theoretical positions on the issues of empathy and responsibility” and consider digital technologies as “a key influence in bringing the embodied consciousness and a metaphysics of the body back into focus.” (T. Warr) The seminar asked “What qualities of human interaction are enabled or disabled by digital technologies? If our contemporary co-existence in both real and digital habitats is increasingly removing the distinction between real and fictional or simulated, fantasy and fact, how is that affecting our values? The computer or TV screen turns the live human into a digital object, an avatar. The digital tends to the specular, the solitary, the pornographic, the onanistic, the commodity. Can we play responsibly with each other in the digital domain?” (T. Warr)

c) Representations of erotic and sexual intimacy in performance, exploring performance “as a staging of forbidden or otherwise troubled intimacies” (Dominic Johnson). The *Intimacy and Pornography* seminar attempted to approach diverse performances of “difficult intimacies” setting up critical frameworks through “deploying Emmanuel Levinas’s idea of

the infinite intimacy that is the epiphany of the face-to-face encounter; William Haver's imagining of "the pornographic life" lived within the proximate horror of intimate risk; and Georges Bataille's writings on the threat of intimate interiors as a "scandalous eruption". (D. Johnson)

d) Embodiment and disembodiment in relation to the interacting performer in telematic and telepresent art installations. The *(Dis)Embodiment* seminar asked "At what point is performer embodying the virtual performer in front of them? And have they therefore become disembodied by doing so?", looking at a number of interactive telematic artworks and establishing case-study examples to address "fundamental existential questions concerning identity, the self, the ego and the (dis)embodied avatar." (Paul Sermon)

- *Intimacy Symposium*

The *Intimacy Symposium* provided a platform for the discussion of the findings and outcomes of both workshops and seminars, as well as the cross-fertilisation of ideas among participants from different disciplines. It featured a keynote presentation by Prof. Amelia Jones entitled *Screen Eroticism: Contrasting Intimacies in the work of Carolee Schneemann and Pipilotti Rist*, which addressed "a profound technological and ideological shift in the visualization and conceptualization of eroticism (as a mode of intimacy) from the 1960s to the 1990s through a comparative analysis of two major feminist screen-based projects: Carolee Schneemann's *Fuses* (1964-7) and Pipilotti Rist's *Pickelporno* (1992)." (A. Jones) Jones's essay sought to "cast light on three major and interrelated shifts in the following areas: feminist and broader social conceptions of eroticism and sexual agency; the articulation of a vital female erotic power through screen-based media (16mm film and video, respectively), each having its own potential to render the human subject differently; and artistic strategies for exploring the relationships among the body, the camera, the resultant screen image and space", pointing "to broad transformations in beliefs about identity and embodiment in the contemporary period." (A. Jones)

Other speakers at the Symposium were Prof. Paul Sermon, Dr. Tracey Warr, Dr. Dominic Johnson and Mine Kaylan – each contextualising the seminars they led the previous days and presenting the findings of these discussions; Kira O'Reilly and Kelli Dipple, each contextualising the workshops they led the previous days and discussing their outcomes. Also: Ang Bartram presenting a paper entitled *Meeting Grounds and Collisions: boundaries, objects, actions, and spaces in-between*. Bartram's paper discussed the "imposition of boundaries" as a means of "providing clarity for making decisions based on what can be considered culturally right or wrong." (A. Bartram) She went on to argue that

“Inhabiting the spaces in-between by transgressing the boundaries that divide and legislate creates a vibration to occur in how the work is mediated. This vibration is liminal and potent: it creates an intimate meeting space where meaning is understood without rules. The ‘art/life gap’ (as Gunther Brus called it) is the driving force behind an artistic practice involved with abjection, intimate exchange, and the liminal.” (A. Bartram) Bartram's paper offered “an explanation of the complexities, anxieties and interests of a practice that relies on boundaries being violated.” (A. Bartram)

Dr. Anita Ponton presenting a paper entitled *Eye to I* in which she offered “a philosophical consideration of the impact of digital technologies on the intersubjective and interobjective dynamic generated by body and performance art.” (A. Ponton) Ponton argued that “the issue of proximity needs reassessment, through an analysis of absence and presence. (...) The creation of avatars, alternate and often multiple personae in cyberspace is (...) an articulation of the desire to extend our finite physical boundaries. (A. Ponton) Ponton, in a quest to understand the way we experience mediated representations and virtual presence, addressed the issue of visibility, thinking of “the look as a touch, a gaze as palpation”. (A. Ponton) Drawing on A. Jones’ concept of ‘technophenomenology’, Ponton further argued that “technologised body/performance art demands a new understanding of how selfhood is shaped and a reassessment of how we comprehend the limits of the 21st century body. (...) Digital and virtual technologies change our understanding of the limits of body and of consciousness and uncover the intersecting desires that underpin the performance of ‘self’ as an art action.” (A. Ponton)

Dr. Simon Jones presenting a paper entitled *De-Second-Naturing: Performance's Intimate Work in a World of Terror*. Jones’s paper explored “the current, often indirectly expressed anxiety in experimental performance over the re-emergence of geo-politics as a central issue in everyday life in western societies by positing a model of performance’s unique contribution to the contemporary debate – *de-second-naturing*.” (S. Jones) Jones described performance “as a unique site within which personhood can be set against and alongside citizenship, in a potentially radical face-to-face encounter” and argued that “This model is predicated on performance as an interstices of in-betweens exposing the aporia between our senses, particularly hearing and seeing, and between our embodied and discursive practices and their relation to the everyday and its ongoing politicization.” (S. Jones)

Finally, Jess Dobkin presented and theorised her project *The Lactation Station Breast Milk Bar*, a performance art work which she created inviting audiences to sample small quantities of human breast milk donated by six new mothers. The performance came out of Dobkin’s own experience as a new mother, and “an interest in cultural issues and taboos

surrounding breast feeding.” and aimed to “invite a dialogue about this challenging and most intimate of motherhood rites.” (J. Dobkin) Dobkin suggested that her performance “challenges a wide range of issues around intimacy, curiosity, social discomfort, and women’s bodies”, taking the very intimate act of drinking someone’s bodily fluid and “disrupting the experience, challenging and transgressing our knowledge and comfort in relationship to bodies, biology and social practices.” (J. Dobkin)

e) Audiences /Participants

Intimacy attracted approximately 1,500 audiences and participants, mainly from the UK (London, Exeter, Manchester, Brighton, Bristol, Glasgow, Edinburgh and more) and internationally with participants from: Canada, USA, Japan, China, France, Switzerland, Spain, Finland, Belgium, Germany, Slovenia, New Zealand and more.

Our original Call for Projects and Proposals, which was launched in June 2007, attracted 203 submissions from around the world. We invited a Committee of 21 international experts to peer-review the proposals together with our 5-strong Board of UK-based scholars and Methods Network representative, whereas we were also part of the peer-review process.

During the three days of the event *Intimacy* attracted estimated audiences of 400 for the Launch (7/12/07), 450 for performances and the Show & Tell Marathon (8/12/07) and 200 for the Symposium (9/12/07), as well as the people who took part in workshops and seminars. International audiences and participants also took part in an online discussion forum (Arts Humanities website), a workshop in Second Life, two online performances using the UpStage software platform, a phone piece and a distributed performance that used web-conferencing software. Some of the participants who took part in the online events were based in the UK (outside London), Spain, Finland, Netherlands, USA and New Zealand.

The audiences and participants involved were a mixture of scholars, artists, performers, researchers, students and local residents. *Intimacy* made a conscious effort to engage with diverse communities such as the Goldsmiths, Trinity Laban and Knowledge East communities of students and scholars, communities of cultural practitioners, live artists and digital artists (through the Home London mailing list and other outlets), local South London communities (through the Albany membership), the academic communities on the Arts Humanities online platform and virtual communities through Second Life and UpStage.

Many of the events programmed for *Intimacy* were fully booked or sold out. For example, sold out were the workshops led by Kira O’Reilly and Kelli Dipple, the seminars led by Tracey Warr and Dominic Johnson, the Symposium and Suna No Onna’s performance at the Laban.

We are happy to report that the feedback we received from audiences and participants was overwhelmingly positive. Here we quote some of the comments we received:

“I really appreciated being involved with intimacy and definitely learned a lot. I especially liked the one-to-one performances as I had never experienced that before.”

Jennifer Spiegel, PhD Candidate Goldsmiths; *Intimacy*: seminar rapporteur and volunteer (UK)

“Thanks for your comments. It is really helpful to get feedback on unsuccessful submissions -a lot of places don't give any feedback.”

Owen Parry, MA student Queen Mary; *Intimacy*: volunteer. Comment in relation to his application for an Intimacy /Knowledge East bursary (UK)

“Thank you all very much for the opportunity you gave us to develop our projects by providing the finances.”

Artemis Papageorgiou, MA student Goldsmiths; *Intimacy*: workshop participant, holder of *Intimacy*/Knowledge East bursary (UK/Greece)

“I had such a great time taking part in *Intimacy* and the piece has moved forward considerably having taken on board the feedback I received.”

Samantha Rose, Artist; *Intimacy*: performer (UK)

“Thank you for running such a great initiative

Martin Davies, Director Knowledge East (UK)

“Thanks so much for a really valuable and enjoyable event. I got a lot from it. ”

Dr. Tracey Warr, Scholar; *Intimacy*: seminar leader, symposium speaker (UK/France)

“Great conference, congratulations!”

Andy Wood, Artist; *Intimacy*: workshop participant (UK)

“I really appreciate your generosity and your engagement in this work. I had a great time and a big creative energy. I learned about myself and about my own capacities to work. I feel nourished and I want to thank you for your ambition and your internal fires...”

Camille Renarhd, Artist; *Intimacy*: workshop leader (Canada)

“I was very happy to take part in *Intimacy*. I was impressed by the programme, old contacts I rekindled, and new people I met. I had some nice reactions to my performance.”

Atau Tanaka, Artist, Chair of Digital Media, Culture Lab - Newcastle University; *Intimacy*: performer (UK/France/Japan)

“Thank you so much for inviting me to take part in the *Intimacy* - Show and Tell session. My presentation got a great response with lots of people coming up after saying how interesting they'd found it and asking to come to future events, which was really nice. I also enjoyed the other presentations very much.”

Anna Dumitriu, Resident Artist, Centre for Computational Neuroscience and Robotics, Sussex University; *Intimacy*: show & tell speaker (UK/Romania)

“*Intimacy* was successful and important on so many levels and registered significantly and marvellously. Congratulations on your vision, huge efforts and those successes.”

Kira O'Reilly, Artist; *Intimacy*: workshop leader, symposium speaker (UK)

“Thank you for a very impressive event...and very well done. It was a great opportunity to focus my mind on a set of questions which is what I hope for in such gatherings.”

Mine Kaylan, Artist, Lecturer Sussex University; *Intimacy*: seminar leader, symposium speaker (UK/Turkey)

“Thanks again for such a great event. I enjoyed it to excess.”

Dominic Johnson, Artist, Lecturer Queen Mary University of London; *Intimacy*: seminar leader, symposium speaker (UK)

“I just wanted to send a note to thank you again for organizing such a wonderful event. I've been thinking and chatting about it a lot since returning to Toronto. It was great to meet up with you and have the opportunity to participate.”

Jess Dobkin, Artist, Lecturer University of Toronto; *Intimacy*: performer, symposium speaker (Canada)

“Thank you for such a fantastic event - I really enjoyed it and got a lot from it.”

Vickie Wood, PhD candidate; *Intimacy*: workshop participant (UK)

“I want to say a HUGE thanks again for your work on the conference and for inviting me. It was a

really impressive event and I was glad to be part of it.”

Prof. Lizbeth Goodman, Director SmartLab Digital Media Institute & MAGICGamelab, University of East London; *Intimacy*: symposium moderator (UK)

“Congratulations on the conference, everyone I spoke to said it was a great event and they enjoyed it very much!”

Sophia Kosmaoglou, Artist, PhD candidate Goldsmiths; *Intimacy*: volunteer (UK/Greece)

“I loved the code soup and avatar paste workshop!!!!!!”

Marischka, Artist; *Intimacy*: workshop participant (Netherlands)

“The Avatar Body *Collision* performance was an amazing experience. This networked theatre provides the possibility of participation to audiences all around the world, which really expands the notion of theatre. We, the audiences, were like a chorus commenting on the action. (...) It was a fantastic interactive experience!!!”

Stefanos Mondelos, Student; *Intimacy*: audience (UK/Greece)

“I thought it was a great event. Well done to you both.”

Ang Bartram, Artist; *Intimacy*: symposium speaker (UK)

“So much work... So many diverse, pertinent and interesting performances, events and engagements... Well done, this was a huge undertaking and we were very very pleased to play a part in it.”

Avatar Body *Collision*, Artists; *Intimacy*: performers (UK/Finland/Netherlands/NZ)

“It was great working with you on such an interesting project.”

Cis O’Boyle, Lecturer Goldsmiths University of London; *Intimacy*: staff (UK)

“I wanted to thank you both for giving me the opportunity to perform Spank within the *Intimacy* programme. The whole event was stimulating and exciting and the feedback about the Sunday conference was great. It's some feat to pull off three days of an ambitious and timely symposium and performance series, so hats off.”

Ann Smith, Artist, Senior Lecturer Greenwich University; *Intimacy*: performer (UK)

“I wanted to say that attending the *INTIMACY* conference was a great experience and it seemed

very well organised!! I would be highly interested in future projects/events/discussion groups about performance and digital-media.”

Krystallia Grigori, Artist; *Intimacy*: audience (UK/Greece)

“I just wanted to congratulate you both on a very coherent, stimulating and successful event, it was great. I enjoyed performing at *Intimacy* and the symposium was super!”

Helena Walsh, Artist; *Intimacy*: performer (UK)

“I’m just writing to congratulate you on a wonderful event. You should be incredibly pleased and proud of the outcome. I enjoyed myself immensely.”

Dr. Roberta Mock, Lecturer University of Plymouth; *Intimacy*: advisory panel, show & tell moderator (UK)

“I just want to congratulate you... I think you’ve tackled a mammoth and delicate area with sensitivity and allowed further debates to unfold! Thank you so much for having the insight and determination to allow this event to happen (I can only imagine how hard you’ve worked!)”

Sarah-Louise Spies, Lecturer University of Chester; *Intimacy*: audience (UK)

“The symposium was great and thought provoking.”

Lauren Goode, Artist; *Intimacy*: workshop leader (UK)

“Thanks again for all your hard work to make the Festival happen, I enjoyed performing for *Intimacy* a lot and the Sunday conference was an interesting gaze into what other participants and performers had to contribute.”

Martina von Holn, Artist; *Intimacy*: performer (UK/Germany)

“Thank you for the *Intimacy* weekend – it was a great event and obviously a mammoth task of organising.”

Rachel Gomme, Artist; *Intimacy*: performer (UK)

“I just wanted to say thanks for inviting me to do my paper at *Intimacy* this weekend. It was a fabulous group of artists and academics and well done for putting it all together and, of course, many thanks!”

Dr. Anita Ponton, Artist; *Intimacy*: symposium speaker (UK)

“Thank you and bravo for putting up such a high-profile event on so little money and for all the work you have put in it!”

Branislava Kuburovic, PhD candidate Roehampton University of London; *Intimacy*: show & tell speaker (UK/Czech Republic)

“Well done, congratulations. It looks like you succeeded in organising a wonderful event you should be proud of.”

Prof. Johannes Birringer, Artist, Chair of Performance and Digital Technologies, Brunel University; *Intimacy*: member of Board, workshop leader, symposium moderator (UK/USA/Germany)

f) Outcomes

Several outcomes emerged that practically demonstrate the impact of *Intimacy* across fields of academic research and artist-led practice.

Before the event, the co-directors were invited to the Central School of Speech and Drama to speak about the relationship between digital and live art practices and chose to address the various notions, questions and dilemmas that were emerging from our study into *Intimacy*. The students were engaged, receptive and inquisitive and the talk stirred provocative debate in thinking about making work that spans across visceral and digital performance.

The practice of digital and live art performance was brought to the foreground in mainstream and specialist arts press during and following the live event. For example, Lyn Gardner, Arts Correspondent for *The Guardian* recommended *Intimacy* through her blog; Daphne Dragona wrote an article about the event which was published in the magazine *Velvet*; and Goldsmiths invited Maria X to write an article that was published in magazine *Hallmark*. Such postings serve to publicise the relationship between the fields, encouraging readers to examine, explore, experience and experiment in this terrain.

The British Library has acquired all footage from *Intimacy* events (Performances, Symposium, extracts from Workshops). This is available for study and research through the British Library Sound Archive. The Live Art Development Agency has also requested AV documentation and texts to include in its specialist library on contemporary cross-disciplinary arts practice. Inclusion of such material in these established and widely accessed resources means makers, scholars and researchers of live and digital arts practices will have open access to the diverse range of conceptual, theoretical and practical examinations that were part of *Intimacy*. The archive frames *Intimacy* in performance, cultural and historical terms that invite readings by international members of the cultural community.

Finally, *Intimacy* co-directors received interest from publishers regarding a proposal to co-

edit a collection of writings and reflections about the event. The book will contain essays from workshop and seminar leaders together with key texts from the symposium. It will also contain photographs from the performances together with artists' reflections on their experiences and use of Intimacy: Across Visceral and Digital Performance. This suggested volume will serve to document the impact of the event, critically framing and artistically reflecting the significance of the subject matter across performance environments.

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