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Remote Encounters:

**Connecting bodies, collapsing
spaces and temporal ubiquity in
networked performance**

<http://remote-encounters.tumblr.com/>

The following paper has been published as part of *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 10 (2); a special issue based on a selection of papers and performances at *Remote Encounters: Connecting bodies, collapsing spaces and temporal ubiquity in networked performance*, a two-day international conference (11th - 12th of April 2013) exploring the use of networks as a means to enhance or create a wide variety of performance arts.

Editorial

Body, Space and Time in Networked Performance

Proceedings from Remote Encounters: Connecting bodies, collapsing spaces and temporal ubiquity in networked performance conference 2013

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This special issue of *Liminalities* arises out of a conference event from April 2013. *Remote Encounters: Connecting bodies, collapsing spaces and temporal ubiquity in networked performance* was a two-day international conference with performances held at the *University of South Wales* (formerly the *University of Glamorgan*) on the 11th and 12th of April 2013. Since the Internet entered the public domain in the early 90's there has been an explosion in its artistic application as a means, site and context for creative practice. In many respects, much of this practice is performative in nature and as a result has attracted artists from performance backgrounds to what can be considered as a new 'site' for performance. The Internet is however only one of many network technologies that have enabled networked performance and as such the conference set out to explore the use of any form of network as a means to enhance or create a wide variety of performance arts.

The conference was initiated to present the breath of interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary practice that can be considered as networked performance and it was anticipated that this may include performance employing live video, stage-based performance, performance in virtual worlds, mixed-reality performance, sonic arts, performance with pervasive and/or wearable technologies. Through featured papers and performances the conference offered a context for current networked performance themes and issues both historically and across the spectrum of different types of networks. It aimed to investigate the diverse opportunities the network offered

for performance and to give an indication of future directions for networked performance.

A principle conference objective was to provide a unique opportunity for those engaged in networked practice and research to gather, and share and discuss their work within a dedicated context not currently catered for within other academic conferences. Through the discussion of what are typically considered separate disciplines defined by traditional boundaries such as practice, media or purpose and the differing methodologies of practice each entails, contributors were invited to broadly address the following questions regardless of form or content:

1. How do networks as a site for performance provide opportunities for artists and performers?
2. How can artists/performers remotely collaborate, merge geographically separate places and times, and reconfigure the space of performance and the relationship between artist and audience?

In this editorial, we set out to bring the conference alive for the reader of this special issue of *Liminalities*. With this in mind, we include an overview of the conference presented in Cardiff in the hope that this will give the reader a broader context for the performances and papers published here. The consideration of networks as site or space, as a virtual space that can be superimposed or juxtaposed with real space and in turn affect our understanding of place, time and identity, was anticipated to be a common underling subject in many contributions to the conference. This was the case resulting in a multitude of differing interpretations of the terms real and virtual which have been maintained within this issue. As such the editors wish to clarify how these terms are predominantly employed within by referring the reader to the *International Encyclopedia of Systems and Cybernetics* (François 2004). The majority of contributors have equated real with physical or concrete, what Russell Ackoff terms as objects or Mario Bunge as being material (*ibid*, 584) and the virtual as the opposite of this; the non-material. Where interpretations differ, real is instead proposed as that which is experiential while virtual is considered fictional, dream or hallucination-like.

Throughout the conference a clear emphasis emerged concerning the visual and this is also present in this issue. It was for example expected that video would be a significant part of how artists performed with networks and as such artist, Annie Abrahams, foregrounded this emphasis as the invited keynote performer for the conference. Use and discussion of streaming video was a reoccurring topic throughout the conference. Performers employed streaming services such as Bambuser, VOIP (Voice Over IP) and videotelephony services such as Skype, video streaming through Adobe Flash and hi-jacked Motion JPEG webcams. Artists also employed video as a means to see, synchronise, collaborate and create at distance, working

through various networks and protocols across simultaneous sites locally in Wales, and at a distance in England, France, Belgium, Italy and the United States.

Jérôme Joy performed *Synema* from France, which involved composing video and sound from webcams situated all over the world that were then streamed to the audience in Cardiff. The performance demonstrated the artist's concept of "extended music for expanded and expanding auditoriums" (Joy 2014, 3) where the network is considered a means for coordinating and presenting a globally sited performance. Part of ongoing sonic arts research, the artist aspires to a future of performance which may be interplanetary. Within a sensitively constructed documentation of his work, *Synema: Expanses through Connected Environments* (2014), Joy unpacks his artistic and scholarly explorations that cross music and sound production. *Synema* premiered at Remote Encounters in Cardiff, demonstrating the idea of the "auditorium" (*ibid*) or music 'by' environment. That is, "when music and environment are intermingled, collaborate together, and both oscillate [...and where the listener can] explore an idiomatic music and new aesthetic experiences both based on properties of sound propagation in acoustic networked, tuned and connected spaces" (*ibid*, 2).

Near and far, or the relationship between the local and distant, was also explored in detail in *make-shift* (2014), the work of Paula Crutchlow and Helen Varley Jamieson. Crutchlow gave a lecture performance on stage incorporating the audience, in collaboration with Helen Varley Jamieson in France. This presentation aimed to demonstrate and explain the *make-shift* performance platform. Working with UpStage¹, a browser-based platform for live performance and audio-visual streams from 2010-2013, the series of networked performances known as *make-shift*, has emerged as an exploration of democratic participatory art for disparate spectators exploring themes of ecology, plastic marine pollution and personal behaviour.

Action in one location impacting directly and immediately on another is highlighted in *disDance 11054.80* (2014) by Heidi Saarinen and Ian Willcock which saw Saarinen dance on stage at the conference venue in Cardiff while synchronising her choreography with dancers performing live in Singapore. At both locations dancers were choreographed by a networked application which provided vocal commands and each remote dancer was projected to a screen at eye level creating the illusion of a continuation of the stage space. The statement accompanying the video documentation discusses the collaboration between Willcock and Saarinen and their investigation of the possibilities when working on networked, physically separated, interdisciplinary dance performance, while incorporating interactive media and architecture.

¹ UpStage: <http://www.upstage.org.nz/>.

Choreographing interactions within ‘network as performative *location*’ was central to the work of Rea Dennis and Magda Miranda who presented autobiographical re-presentational piece *Presents//Presence* (2014). This work sought to exploit the aesthetic and dramaturgical leverage of the iPad as networked device linking Cardiff and São Paulo. Exploiting the intimate nature of networked video within personalised smart devices the performance interrogates notions of intimacy, closeness, touch, remoteness and absence through the story of lovers separated by distance. Together (on Skype), apart (distanced by almost 10,000km) and alone (one eating at 16:00 the other at 20:00) they perform looking through the screen to one another. Engaging with lived experiences of live and remote, absence and presence, the play between embodied transmission and live performance, and the perception of absence, the pair investigate spectator reception of the perceptual interaction of the live and the virtual in real and delayed time through the simple re-staging of a dinner conversation in which they celebrate their anniversary.

The theme of relationships, specifically love, also underpinned Annie Abrahams networked installation style performance *On LOVE*; a collaboration from the live stage at the conference incorporating eight other performers located in different locations around the globe, such as England, France and Belgium. The work showcased the nine performers in a simultaneous screen-captured performance showing their individual interpretations and improvisations on the common theme of love. This innovative art practice is explored in depth in Elena Pérez’s essay, *Meaningful connections: exploring the uses of telematic technology in performance* (2014). Researcher, theatre practitioner and experimental game designer, Pérez discusses Abraham’s *ON LOVE*, as an example of a current trend in the field of telematic performance. Pérez sets out to problematise the notion of telematic performance as genre and in so doing constructs a comparative analysis of the way in which low-tech telematics feature in the performances of Annie Abraham who uses telematics to create visual and dramaturgical juxtapositions in *ON LOVE* and of Helen Varley Jamieson and Paula Crutchlow who use telematics to engage remote audiences in active collaboration in *makeshift*. Through the articulation of the different ways in which *ON LOVE* and *make-shift* use telematic technology in performance, the essay asks how the purpose of the technology within a piece becomes part of the dramaturgical intention. In *ON LOVE* the technology is purposed to blur the boundaries between a real and a theatrical conversation, while *make-shift* positions the technology to identify the degree of active participation on-site and on-line, seeking to extend the performativity beyond mere connection into meaningful collaboration. *ON LOVE* uses visual, dramaturgical and performative juxtaposition strategies, which affords the creation of layers of meaning. *make-shift* gives us a taste of the possibilities of the genre for meaningful collaboration and yet it also shows how hard it actually is to make happen.

Alongside the practice-led exploration of the theme, Remote Encounters aimed to enhance the visibility of academic and conceptual discussions for this emerging field of artistic practice through a combination of paper presentations and roundtable discussions. A selection of these has been included in this issue. A principle theme amongst the papers is the consideration of how remoteness or distance between various combinations of performers, audience and sourced material is experienced.

In her paper, *Dramaturgy of a Networked Dance Performance: a new temporality* (2014), Ivani Santani writes about a series of projects that she has undertaken over eight years as part of the Technological Poetics Research Group at her university in Bahia, Brazil, in partnership with a range of local, national and international partners, including Spain, Korea, Thailand, and Prague. Exploring networked time from a dance perspective, Santana asks how remote performers can coexist in the same performative time while being physically located in different time zones. The paper discusses how the dual stage/screen environment impacts on a dancer in real time performance, drawing on seminal cognitive and perceptual theory including Alva Nöe, Andy Clark, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. She plots the atypical perceptual and cognitive experiences of the dancer who is engaging with the additional stimulus that arises when the dancer is being filmed, can see she is being filmed, understands the perspective of the audience in relation to the filmed output, and is simultaneously dancing with others, live in the room with her, and remotely (at another site). In a beautifully illustrated essay, where photographs map key findings across the performances under discussion, Santani describes the way that dancers must engage their sensorimotor systems within the dance, and how this results in new dance configurations in which “choreographic ideas and improvisational dance strategies [are] implicated within the [dancer’s] embodied mind” (2014, 5). The author presents the way in which networked environments evoke a new temporality within dance, re-ascribing the way in which time delay, time lapse and time zone differences are seen as problems and interruptions to claim them as aesthetic elements within a new configuration of dance in a networked multi-site performance.

Networked Migrations: Listening to and performing the in-between space (2014) is a paper from new media artist Ximena Alarcón which incorporates video files, sound files, and a series of photographs to support a discussion about her sonic arts practice across the network. Presenting the experience of participants in two collaborative internet-based sonic performances, one between Leicester and Mexico City, and the second between London and Bogotá, Ximena investigated Bhabha’s (1994) ‘in-between’ space conception in relation to the network. She characterises the network as an in-between space that becomes inhabited and travelled through. Her research examples challenge participants to engage in the possibilities of travelling in time and space, expressed through the vocalisation and sonification of feel-

ings associated with ideas of migration. Working within understandings of virtual and real travelling – in time, in space, the performances drew on autobiographical moments to express migration stories through vocal and deep listening practices with the aim of reflecting on new auditoriums for the expression of migrants’ experience of the ‘in-between’.

Occupying the network is further explored in Giulia Ranzini’s essay, *I’ll be your mirror: Identity reflections on the two sides of a computer screen* (2014). Drawing on Erving Goffman’s 1959 concept of the presentation of self in everyday life, Ranzini adopts a sociological approach to analysis, leading the reader through a consideration of the digitisation of self emerging within social media and Second Life environments. She examines the emergent constructs of digitally facilitated narrative identity, self-representation and the ways in which online environments have begun to impact on our understanding of self-perception. Exploring the vast territory of social media, Ranzini cautions that despite the feeling of control over narrative-based identity constructions, and how personal information is published, impression management is by no means straightforward. Online self presentation challenges behavioural norms, rules of engagement, and the ethics of social interaction with issues such as cyber bullying cited as one extreme example. Shifting gears from the social media trail, where concepts like truth and fact are fraught with ambivalence, Ranzini considers Second Life, where invention is central. Cited as a boundless space for creative self presentation, the paper celebrates the way Second Life equips users to play, to fashion themselves and to invent multiple identity narratives; therefore becoming multiple selves. The Second Life body is a digitised one, yet Second Life experiences are re-connecting us to a state of play where the body is central and players develop *felt* emotional attachment to their avatars rendering them almost human companions. The paper accounts for the way in which online spaces both expand and reduce the potential for dynamic user self perception, where the edges between the real and virtual are irreversibly blurred.

It is this very blurring that Elif Ayiter sets out to unpick in her keynote paper, *From 'Autographic' to 'Allographic': Proliferating the Visually Embodied Self* (2014). In the playful approach to deconstructing the intangible that is the virtual world, Ayiter resurrects Huizinga’s Homo Luden thesis from which to consider events within the “live visuals of three dimensional online virtual worlds” (*ibid*, 3). Placing the agency fairly and squarely in the hands of the players, Ayiter’s presentation takes a journey through the creative zone that is Second Life arguing that through participation, players become active real-time authors of expressive cinematic products. Placing the computer as the central mechanism of new innovations in art, the essay considers the way in which the Second Life experience, leads the human to suspend reality and to begin to play. Such playing populates worlds vast with imagination and alternative identities, where avatars are no longer mere objects of play but are projections or personifications of players desires, imaginations,

and more. Ayiter reminds that play pre-dates culture (where intrinsic in any conceptualisation of culture is an organised society) and Second Life resuscitates our primitive instinct for playfulness and invention.



Figure 1: Alan Sondheim performing *Pain Dance* in Second Life.

The conference featured additional performances and papers that are not included in this issue of *Liminalities*, a number of which are worthy of mention here. Alan Sondheim performed *Pain Dance*², a multi-media Second Life performance (figure 1), in collaboration with Sandy Baldwin a long-time distant network collaborator. The performance, exploring death, sex, and pain in virtual worlds, employed live sound, video and text, and involved the choreographed distortion of the artist's avatars within an abstract constructed environment. Cassandra Tytler explored the "true self" in reference to the "projected self" in a performance titled *It's Not You, It's Us*³ where she literally performed with her own projected image on screen (figure 2). The performance served to pull together many threads from the conference including the use of video in performance, the representation of identity as well as ideas of what is and isn't real.

² Alan Sondheim: sondheim@panix.com.

³ Cassandra Tytler: cass@cassandratytler.com.



Figure 2: Cassandra Tytler performing *It's Not You, It's Us* on stage at Remote Encounters.



Figure 3: Stahl Stenslie (centre) demonstrating his wearable wireless haptic performance system.

Stahl Stenslie presented both a paper and demonstration of his wearable wireless haptic performance system (figure 3), the latest version of haptic suits he has designed over the last twenty years. *Towards Telehaptic Performativity*⁴ explored how “multisensory experience based on real time, visual, auditory, and haptic communication over networks” (2014) can be achieved. Erik Geelhoed presented the *Vconnect* system, an immersive system for networked video collaboration, in his paper, *User requirements in immersive mediated performance spaces*⁵. With reference to the work of Paul Sermon⁶ and how it connects spaces, *Vconnect* was explained as a room based system where each room connected is given a place on a two-dimension grid. Wall projections become windows to ‘adjacent’ rooms in the grid, creating a visual continuation of space, and in this manner a modular system is constructed allowing rooms to connect to up to four others at any one time.

Tina Mariane Krogh Madsen’s paper *Identities and Bodily Presence in Online / Networked Performance Art*⁷, considered networks as a space and as such parallels could be made with Ximena Alarcón’s presentation. The space discussed here however was less a space to inhabit than a space of informational flows and suggested that in turn those flows were an extension of ourselves; combining distinct but not incompatible concepts from Manuel Castells (2000) and Marshall McLuhan (2002). Complementary to this, Sander Veenhof in his paper *Locally Global*⁸ discussed mobile augmented reality as “a merger of our physical environment and the omni-

⁴ Stahl Stenslie: stenslie@gmail.com.

⁵ Erik Geelhoed: erik.geelhoed@falmouth.ac.uk.

⁶ *Telematic Dreaming* (1992) by Paul Sermon.

⁷ Tina Mariane Krogh Madsen: info@tmkm.dk.

⁸ Sander Veenhof: sander@sndrv.nl.

present geo-data reality” (2014) through the presentation of a number of the author’s artistic works. Here the network was viewed as a data-space layered on top of real space changing our understanding of space.

In his keynote paper *Networked Performance and contemporary forms of Hack Value*⁹ Marc Garrett spoke about the hackaesthetic in networked art practice. Exploring the emergence of transdiscipline and transborder related practices such as net art, media art, networked performance and activism, Garrett examined how combinations of technology provide “new territories” of creative opportunity which can be applied to contemporary social contexts. In many ways Garrett's paper provided a framing statement on artistic approaches employed within several of the conferences performances. It contrasted the exploitation of proprietary and consumer communication technologies employed in unorthodox ways as an alternative to their orthodox use or the need to resort to custom built technologies, pre-empting discussions in the closing round-table of the conference.

The transcript of the roundtable, *Performance systems: making vs. exploiting*, is the final included component of this issue. It featured a panel composed of keynote speaker Marc Garrett and other contributors to the conference, Paula Crutchlow, Stahl Stenslie, Erik Geelhoed and Ian Biscoe¹⁰. Chaired by Garrett Lynch, the purpose of the roundtable was to explore, largely through reflection on the conference, performance systems used by artists and to comparatively discuss making custom technologies versus exploiting or hacking pre-existing technologies. The discussion, once again highlighted key themes from across the two-days including the dominance of the visual, i.e. streaming video. This was initially discussed with contrasts of methodologies and priorities made between Paula Crutchlow’s and Erik Geelhoed’s research. Discussion concerning artist-made systems then moved to a wider consideration of networked performance with Stahl Stenslie commenting on electronics, the influence of the Maker movement¹¹ and the growth in mobile, pervasive, wearable and haptic technologies used in performance. It was considered that we are currently seeing a change in how hardware is made and used similar to the software revolution of the 90’s and how this may be a shaping influence in the future of networked performance.

The contributions in this special issue have addressed the theme of Remote Encounters in diverse ways giving the reader a multiplicity of potential points of engagement. While some have focused on the emergence of mobile, pervasive, wear-

⁹ Marc Garrett: marc.garrett@furtherfield.org.

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¹¹ The maker movement is a technology-based extension of DIY culture where individuals make or modify technologies for personal use. It takes its name from the magazine Make and is a grass roots movement sharing some similarities to hacking culture.

able and haptic technologies as a performative opportunity, that is the technologies have enabled combinations of existing and/or new spaces, for practice, others have considered how a range and application of techniques and configurations enabled by networked technologies have augmented traditional site-specific performance. Practice which explores the artist's location, including how artists are now frequently composing, choreographing, facilitating and performing from globally dispersed webcams and streaming live to audiences, featured alongside a diverse array of simultaneous performances conceived as combinations of remote and networked; e.g. from globally dispersed participants – some collaborative, some call and response and others as parallel solos – to lecture and workshop style approaches, installations and participatory performance.

Across the eclectic array of papers and performances other thematic considerations have also emerged including the network as: an in-between space that became inhabited or traveled through; a space where information flows – where this information is an extension of us; and a place where performers co-exist in performative time, while perhaps being physically located in different time zones. Time was also a preoccupation in discussions of bandwidth limitations – with considerations of speed, time lapses and delay in general. For some, this was seen as an opportunity to artistically explore, for others a design dilemma that needed to be overcome.

The Remote Encounters conference has contributed to the groundwork for new networks, collaborations and opportunities enabling more visibility, academic or otherwise, for an emerging field of practice. In publishing the work in this special issue, the editors hope that the dialogue, negotiation and insights from the conference reaches a wider audience and extend the invitation for comment and response beyond the conference. In addition it is hoped that this special issue of *Liminalities* will afford a wider, perhaps uninitiated, readership a better understanding of networked performance and that the work included here inspires others to pick up some of the loose ends and follow them into new practice as research explorations bring additional perspectives to bear on this exciting field of practice.

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Rea Dennis is an Australian artist and scholar with a particular interest in relational dramaturgy, performed memory; and the body in performance. She lectures in Drama and Performance at Deakin University. Previous publications include essays on refugee performance, autobiography and performance writing and playback theatre.



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