

## Catching my Drift: On the Influence of Paul Edwards

Lyndsay Michalik Gratch

I have drifted in and out of, under, over, and through performance, generally through adaptation.<sup>1</sup> I have used and re-used the works of others (with permission, when possible) to make things I believed were new or different. I have collaged with abandon, without shame, and at times with a “trash aesthetic,” either because I was new to the media I was working with and I just wanted to create (i.e. “*just do it*”), or because I truly enjoy this aesthetic and find much value in the “smooth rough draft,” as Paul Edwards calls it.<sup>2</sup>

I have made creative messes on purpose, and only sometimes have I cleaned them up properly. I have loved my creative works unequivocally and unequally. My inspiration often comes from unlikely, surprising, and strange sources: stories, songs, and experiences I vaguely remember from my childhood, abstract images to which I am drawn, anonymous quotations, sea creatures, creepy dances, abandoned landscapes, popular culture (sometimes from decades passed), disintegrating video, and anything that echoes or reflects. Then, of course, there are the many creative people with whom I have worked in concrete physical and digital scenarios, and through more abstract scholar-artist-y encounters, who have influenced my work in myriad ways.

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<sup>1</sup> For more on creative “drift,” see Paul Edwards, “Drift: Performing the Relics of Intention,” *Theatre Annual* 56 (2003): 1-53.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Edwards, “Up the River: A Video Mystery in Three Parts,” in *Paul Edwards: Selected Video Essays, 2004-2016*, Curator: David P. Terry, *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 13.1 (2017): 166-67.

The two videos that accompany this artist's statement are reflections of/about the recent *Liminalities* issue on the work of Paul Edwards,<sup>3</sup> along with some of Edwards's other published writings. Edwards's influence on my own creative and scholarly work seems both obvious and likely, given my interests and experiments in theatrical, multimedia, and digital adaptation, and indeed both videos were originally created years before *Liminalities* 13.1 was published. I have, of course, cited Edwards's work in my own work intentionally. Even still, I find places and moments, years later, where his work seems to accidentally echo in mine, sans citation.<sup>4</sup> I think about academic and creative lineage, citation, and politics. I think about my tendency (read: *need*) to find happy accidents wherever I turn. I think about how performance studies feels like a fun house hall of mirrors and simultaneously like a galaxy slowly spinning its way apart. I re-center, and try to make something new. Again, again, again.

And I think about how I don't believe in the concept of an "original" work.

And sometimes I smile.

And I sledge on through the elements.<sup>5</sup>

"Performing Inside the (Sand)Box"<sup>6</sup> is a video essay that explains my creative processes, discoveries, and frustrations in terms of designing video projections for performances using dynamic projection surfaces between 2011 and 2014 in Louisiana State University's HopKins Black Box Theatre.<sup>7</sup> For these productions, I was often using both technology and performance devising methods that were new to me. I embraced technological and aesthetic learning by doing (or what I term *techno-play*<sup>8</sup>) as I created video projections for multimedia

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Edwards: *Selected Video Essays, 2004-2016*, Curator: David P. Terry, *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 13.1, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Though I have never worked on a project with Edwards, these findings also seem both obvious and likely, in retrospect, as my dissertation adviser (Patricia A. Suchy) was his advisee.

<sup>5</sup> I am not entirely certain, but after a bit of reflection I believe this phrase drifted into this writing via my work as assistant director with Patricia Suchy on her production about Antarctic travel, *Beyond The Utmost Bound*, in Louisiana State University's HopKins Black Box, Oct. 2010.

<sup>6</sup> 0:00-17:00 in the accompanying video file.

<sup>7</sup> "Performing Inside the (Sand)Box" was originally presented during the panel "Experimental Media in/as Performance" at the National Communication Association's Convention in Washington D.C., Nov. 2013. This version of the video essay has been updated with new audio and performance footage from *Grave of Medusa* (2012) and *centre/fugue* (2014). A reworked version of the video footage from *Transadaptation* was also published in full as: Lyndsay Michalik Gratch, "a hole in the light," *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 12.1, Special Issue on Cartographies (2016).

<sup>8</sup> For more about "techno-play," see Lyndsay Michalik Gratch, *Adaptation Online: Creating Memes, Sweding Movies, and other Digital Performances*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books (2017).

performances over the course of several years. My creative processes are framed in the video essay by Paul Edwards's notion of "drift," or the "unused or discarded ideas from [my] past that drift unconsciously into [my] present work."<sup>9</sup> Issues of past and present, however, are complicated in and by the video. What I could see in 2014 when I created this video is different from what I see in 2017 (particularly as one of the works I discuss, *centre/fugue*, was still in its nascent stages, and has since been created, staged, and reflected upon). While I have kept the essence of the "original" video essay largely intact, I have updated it to reflect all of this *reflection*.

As someone once said, hindsight is 20/40.<sup>10</sup>

"Legal: A Counterhistory of Turning THIRTY,"<sup>11</sup> meanwhile, is a remix of several of Paul Edwards's video essays, which I solicited from him with the explicit intention of adapting the videos. The remix I created from his video essays was first presented on the panel "A Process of (Non)Linear Inquiry: Adaptation, Collaboration, and Digital Media," at the National Communication Association's Convention in Chicago, in November 2014. The panel used processes of long-distance collaboration and digital adaptation to experiment with the idea of the internet as stage, and complicated traditional notions of authorship and adaptation. To begin our work, each panelist chose an influential performance studies text to adapt, and then passed our adaptations on to the other panelists to adapt further in whatever manner and digital medium they chose.<sup>12</sup>

Of the six panelists, I was the only one who began my adaptation process with video. I was also the only panelist to begin with more than one text, though I did stick to one "source," as Paul Edwards mailed me three videos (burned to DVD) in response to my email request to adapt his work.<sup>13</sup> I simply could not choose just one of his videos. The remix I created with all three video essays plays with my memories of my first encounter with Edwards's work: watching his presentation of "Bridging Vertigo" at the National Communication Associa-

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Edwards, "Drift: Performing the Relics of Intention," *Theatre Annual* 56 (2003): 15.

<sup>10</sup> I think this phrase is another instance of drift, though I do not yet know where it has drifted from. As Edwards states, "It is as succinct as a quotation, but it is not a quotation since it has broken off contact with its source." (Edwards, "Drift": 15.)

<sup>11</sup> 17:00-22:48 in the video file.

<sup>12</sup> Panelists/adaptors included Ariel Gratch, Jonathan M. Gray, Lyndsay Michalik, Nichole Nicholson, Joshua Potter, and Samuel Sloan.

<sup>13</sup> The videos Paul Edwards mailed to me included "Legal: A Counter-History of Turning Twenty-One" (2005), "The Video Essay: Performing Beyond Liveness" (2010), and "Bridging Vertigo" (2010). Edwards's video essays were later published as part of *Paul Edwards: Selected Video Essays, 2004-2016*, Curator: David P. Terry, *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 13.1 (2017).

tion's annual convention in 2010, and briefly speaking to him after the panel.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, I was creating this remix about six months after earning my PhD, and during my year of teaching about film production, video art, adaptation, and remix culture as a Visiting Assistant Professor of Cinema Studies at Oberlin College. Thus, my own existential crisis about what performance studies *was* and *is* (for me, personally, and specifically in 2014) sneak in through Edwards's performances that I chose to remix, along with the earworm I create out of Edwards's use of Mr. Bill's "Oh Noooooo!"

At the same time, I find peace in the video by remixing the ideas that we build both knowingly and accidentally on the works of others, and that performance can "transcend the body," as Edwards states—in this instance, through video adaptation and serious play.<sup>15</sup> Both concepts, in the larger picture of my life, work, and art, allow me to feel comfortable being *interdisciplinary*. (In my experience, interdisciplinary is a mode of being and creating in the world that many express positivity toward. Yet few seem to want or have the time to welcome the interdisciplinary *person* into their inner [i.e. discipline/d] circles.) Finally, working and playing with Edwards's videos reminded me that very little (if any) of my own work would have been possible without the generosity of so many other artists saying, "Yes, do make something from what I've made."

Yes, do make something from what I've made.

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<sup>14</sup> For perspective, this was also the first panel I ever attended at an academic conference.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Edwards, "The Video Essay: Performing Beyond Liveness" (2010).



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