

Confrontation and Contradiction: The Site of Encounter in Live Intermedial Performance

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This paper examines live intermedial performance practice as an active re-routing of performing presence through and within mediatised forms, producing a complex and contradictory performance encounter. Opposing elements of fixity and fluidity characterise the experience generated in this mode of performance, which invites proximity, while offering distance, filtration and obfuscation; which encourages a fluid engagement with the site of intermediality, while the fixed source of that site remains a contradictory presence in the space.

Live intermedial practice is a mode of performance which emerged from my practice as research and which now operates as the subject and vehicle of my PhD thesis. It involves the live mixing and merging of sound, image, object and body in real time and the presence of the 'experiencers' (Nelson 2010: 45), who are encouraged to inhabit the intermedial space generated as they choose. As the solo performer, I am also the activator of that intermedial space; a dual role which lends me diverse forms and levels of presence onstage.

The key elements of fixity and fluidity within the performance practice which will be the focus for this paper are firstly, its operation as 'comprovisation'. This term is employed by Grayson Cooke, an interdisciplinary scholar and media artist, to acknowledge 'the intricate interweaving of the com-posed with the im-provised' (2011: 11) in live media work. It encompasses the predetermined elements of the practice, which are the material I bring to it and the fixed presence of the 'technical mediums'¹ (Elleström 2010: 17) on stage. It also acknowledges the improvised mode in which I operate within the practice and that the intermediality generated is always a real time response to the moment of performance. This response is in turn, re-routed through the technical mediums present and the triangulation between my improvised response to the material and the capacity of the technology I have available in the space represents a key collision of the fixed and fluid within the work.

Secondly, the presence of my fixed actual body in space forms a counterpoint to its fluid representations and manifestations, which I generate as part of a live intermedial performance and can take the form of live feed images of my face and hands, the sound of my voice, looped and amplified, and less directly,

¹ Elleström defines a 'technical medium' or '*actual* material medium, the 'form', that realizes and manifests the latent properties of the media' (2010: 17). Within live intermedial practice, the technical mediums include a laptop computer, projector, loop pedal and microphone

through the choice of images and words which I place in the intermedial space. I term the composite body generated by such interactions the live intermedial body, which is comprised of the actual, physical presence of the performer/activator on stage and the mediated representations of that body through sound and image. These aspects are brought together into a concurrent and layered entity within the performance through my interaction with the onstage technical mediums to generate intermediality.

Finally, the technical mediums on stage occupy a particular static space (see Figure 1), representing a fixed physical state and positioning in the site of performance, which contrasts with and contradicts the fluidity of intermediality which is constructed through my interaction with them.



Figure 1: The technical area in a live intermedial performance. Image taken by Matt Taylor at *re-cite*, 6/10/12

My argument in this paper is that because of these co-present dualities, a contradictory ‘site of encounter’ is generated for those who experience the work – open and fluid on one hand and closed and fixed on the other. This is indicative of the way this performance mode operates as a whole; generating a series of collisions, where each element in play is interrogative of the other. In analysing live intermedial performance through this lens, I will also focus specifically on the ways in which my presence is re-routed through interaction with the technical mediums and the intermediality generated. I will also examine the nature of how the fixed and fluid elements of the performance mode interact in the moment of performance, through placing the practice in relation to a conceptual framework of ‘nomadism’, as theorised by Rosi Braidotti.

Feminist philosopher, Braidotti characterises the nomadic subject as ‘a nonunitary and multi-layered vision, as a dynamic and changing entity’ (2011: 5). Her argument, in opposition to what she sees as a sedentary liberal humanist conception of self and identity, is that the nomadic subject can ‘identify lines of flight’ and ‘a creative alternative state of becoming’ (2011: 7). Braidotti’s notion of nomadism views the subject as ‘an affective, productive and dynamic structure’ (2011: 17), which clearly relates back to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of ‘becoming’. Like Braidotti’s nomadic subject, becoming is not a unitary vision but a ‘multiplicity’ which is ‘*continually transforming itself into a string of other multiplicities*’, with ‘self’ defined as ‘a becoming between two multiplicities’ (1987: 249).

Such theories certainly resonate with key aspects of live intermedial practice. The ‘live’ construction of the intermedial body in performance renders it a subject constantly in process, through a diverse set of forms and manifestations. It could be argued that through the process of live intermedial activation nothing distinct or fixed is produced as a singular performing presence or body and that both remain in play and in process throughout the duration of the performance.

However, an alternative viewpoint is that despite the shifting and transient manifestations of the live intermedial body generated within the space, that the actual body, as a whole, stable and present physical entity mitigates against the notion of constant fluidity and a ‘nomadic becoming’. Despite its confrontations within and through the technical mediums present and its diverse manifestations within the virtual space of the performance, which evolve and constantly flicker, the actual body always remains. Its whole and definite occupation of space, its activity within that space with the fixed onstage technical kit is without doubt a counterpoint to the idea that the performer/activator is ‘nomadic’ and in a constant state of ‘becoming’.

Rather, the concurrent modes of presence generated through my dual role as performer and activator are interrogative of each other in the moment of performance. It is not that all is unstable and there is nothing definite or fixed within the space, but rather that the dialogue between the fixed and fluid enacts composite modes of presence and manifestations of the live intermedial body, which invite apprehension and contemplation of both. The specific ways in which interaction with media and the generation of intermediality re-routes performing presence will be dealt with in the examples below.

In order to explicate such ideas further, I will turn to two interactions, which are recurrent within the practice and therefore represent key aspects of how I generate intermediality in real time. The first and reiterating instance is my manipulation of the VJ software Modul8 to mix pre-recorded excerpts of video

footage with live digital writing. This is a significant element of this performance mode and can be seen in action through this montage of instances from different iterations of live intermedial performance (see [Clip 1](#)).

The affordance of the VJ software, firstly to mix pre-recorded images and secondly to allow me to write 'on' these images prompts this specific interaction in performance. In each case, the video footage has been captured prior to the performance by me and then looped so that it runs continuously. The text which is written on screen is an improvised response to that image, in combination with other elements in the space, which can include a prompt from an experiencer or indeed the sonic elements which I have already put in place and which can be heard within the clips.

The laptop keyboard I use requires me to position myself close to the technical area and to focus my attention on both the keyboard interface and the screen opposite me. I am compelled by this choice of activation to maintain a static positioning in the space as I write and to fix my attention in these two areas. However, the act of writing itself is fluid, in that the improvised text is undetermined until my fingers hit the keys and produce it on screen. This results in mis-spelt words and awkward linguistic constructions which have to be corrected and exist as signs of the liveness of the act in the space.

The fluid 'becoming' of the text is actively counteracted by the fixity of that actual body. In addition, as an 'extension' of my actual body, the keyboard interface, in combination with the projector, serves to 're-route' my responses, with the performance of my fingers on the keys existing in dialogue with that of the words appearing on the screen. The performing presence in these instances and therefore the encounter produced for an experiencer is dispersed across the 'close up' action of the performer/activator in relation to the keyboard and the more 'open' result of such actions on the screen which can be apprehended in the moment.

The act of typing requires a focus on the technical mediums, rather than turning out to address or include the experiencer. However, the text itself is also a signifier and contradicts this form of actual presence on stage. The words which are written, in many instances, are written in the second person, and could be seen to represent a direct address to the experiencers who are positioned through reading the words as 'you' and, as such, are invited to place themselves within the space generated through the combination of text and image on the screen. There are therefore two distinct forms of presence in this instance, which are generated through the performer/activator's interaction with the technical medium and the intermediality produced. One is seemingly fixed, focused and turned inwards towards the machine and

intermediality. The other, as made manifest in the text, is a direct address to those in the space, which counteracts and contradicts the physical presence of the performer/activator in space.

Though the actions of the performer/activator can clearly be connected in their effect to the intermediality generated, the forms of presence in this dispersed amalgamation are contradictory and actively work against each other to produce composite presencing which results in a form of 'distant proximity' with those in the space. This collision is highlighted by the fact that the mediatised presence is the one that displays a more direct and 'personal' address, while the actual body of the performer/activator in space, though present, is in practice, closed off and turned towards interaction with machines. This represents a very deliberate subversion and re-routing of the ways in which presence can operate within multiple forms, modalities and spaces, as an intermedial composite. This is not a composite whose components slot into place easily in a complementary fashion. Rather, the different forms of presence generated through the live intermedial amalgam operate in a divergent or interrogative way, where one interrupts or probes the other and neither 'fit' easily together.

The second recurring interaction within the practice is the creation of live soundscape using a microphone and loop pedal to layer, mix and amplify my voice. Again, a montage of instances from different iterations of live intermedial performance demonstrates how this technical medium is employed (see [Clip 2](#)). Through singing into a microphone attached to the loop pedal, the equipment captures, 'remembers' and plays out that vocal phrase repeatedly. I can then 'overdub' this track with further layers of sound, which allows me to harmonise with and counterpoint my own voice. I can also play with and mutate this sound using effects which the pedal offers, such as varying the pace, pitch and reversing the live composition.

This act connects to notions of 'becoming' and 'nomadism' in that the building of the soundscapes represents a 'multiplicity' of both layers of sound and aspects of the live intermedial body; a multiplicity which is '*continually transforming itself into a string of other multiplicities*' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 249) as the layers of sound develop and accrete. Again however, the actual body in space represents a counterpoint to the notion of limitless nomadic becoming through this act. Indeed, in this reiterative interaction in particular, it is the play between the fluidity of this mode of constructing sound and the fixed aspects of the actual body and mechanisms of the technology which form part of the distinct way it operates as a technical medium on the live intermedial body and modes of presence constructed in performance.

The loop pedal generates a disembodied and amputated sonic 'extension' of myself, which is an instant record of my actual body, in that it accurately records and amplifies my breath and voice, but also any errors in pitching or shift in tone, which were present in my original delivery. I create what Steve Connor refers to as the 'voice body', a secondary body which 'may contradict, compete with, replace or even re-shape the actual, visible body' (2000: 31). Connor argues that voice is 'not simply an emission of the body', but a 'body double' which is not 'inert', but 'tensed and braced with a kind of life' (2013). This secondary and, on Connor's terms, 'lively' sonic body can be experienced in relation to the physical body and once 'released', it exists independently of me and therefore represents a dislocated aspect of my onstage presence, which sustains beyond the moment of its inscription. The 'life' of the sonic 'body double' I generate through singing and speaking into the microphone is sustained in the space through the loop pedal technology and as such, this sonic 'double' 're-shapes' and 're-routes' the actual presence of the body in space.

Interacting with the pedal requires focus on mechanics and timing to get it right and therefore demands my complete attention in the moment. Similarly to typing on the keyboard, this close and intent interaction could arguably lead to an exclusion of the experiencers in that moment of interaction. However, the microphone acts as a counterpoint to the pedal. The outward motion of singing is therefore contradicted by the intense focus needed on manipulating the loop pedal.

Finally, this interaction generates multiple 'presences' in the space, in the form of the amputated sonic parts of me or 'voice bodies' which are created and distributed within the space. The amplified, mediatised and combined 'beings' of my voice form a counterpoint in form and nature to the actual body which produces them. A contrast and contradiction is generated between the fixed actual presence of the body and technology and the dancing, shifting, constantly reconstructing presence of the 'voice bodies' in space, between the static actual body and the mediatised, fluid modality of the sound which it has produced. In encountering this performance mode live, these forms of presence are not drawn apart but rather pushed insistently together by their simultaneous existence in the moment; they exist, in concurrent, layered format, with each operative on the other in the live moment of constructing intermediality.

In conclusion, live intermedial practice enacts a play between the fixed and the fluid, the actual and the virtual. The 'comprovising' aspect of the performance practice represents a deliberate instability at the heart of the practice, which is often counterpointed by the stable positioning on stage of the performer/activator and her seeming 'control' of the technical mediums. As in much live media performance, a heightened performing presence is not generated through the repeated interaction with

the technical mediums. Rather, the presence of the actual performing body is often characterised by an intent, inward facing movement toward the medium in question which arguably excludes the experiencers. However, in this particular performance mode, the inward movement is counterpointed by distinct and more open presencing which is 're-routed' through the intermediality generated.

Live intermediality explores the capacity for media to open out and open up the actual presence of the performer/activator on stage, through enacting a 're-routing' or displacing of that presence through the interaction with technical mediums to a mediatised manifestation which 'presences' more distinctly than the actual body itself. Mediatisation therefore, though it disperses the body, separating it from itself, also brings it closer in a more insistent form of presencing to the experiencer, generating a collision and contradiction at the heart of the performance practice as it is encountered.

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