

**Misha Myers, Dane Watkins, and Richard Sobey**

Conversive Theatres:

Performances with/in Social Media

What does the use of social media offer in terms of participation in theatre, where audiences are invited to interact with and contribute to content of narrative worlds played out live within *transmedial participatory communications landscape*? Who is creating these worlds? How are participants' own lived experience, personal worlds, narratives, and content involved in the creation of those worlds? Does participation and interaction via social media within such theatre lead to new forms of authorship and of authored work? Do particular methods of participation and interaction within transmedial theatre problematise what might constitute active or productive engagements? Do they prioritise some content contributions over others? Considering these questions, this paper explores how the 'logic of sharing' (Artieri 2012) that is implicit within participatory media may be understood within transmedial theatre and performance works that employ social media generally, and Twitter specifically, as an arena of performance and for building or extending narrative worlds of a performance to multiple, dispersed and simultaneous arenas or beyond the space and time of a physically located event.

Firstly, we will consider what constitutes participation in transmedial theatre that takes place in and through social media and participatory media. Secondly, we will consider the logic of exchange mediated by participatory platforms (i.e. what is shared and how it is shared) and its implications for audiences' behaviour and how they experience theatre. Particular attention will be given to how the mechanics and adopted practices of the social media platform challenge notions and practices of artistic production and reception of content in a performance of *Romeo and Juliet* by six actors tweeting from their own Twitter accounts over five weeks in *Such Tweet Sorrow* (2010), a collaboration between Royal Shakespeare Company and digital product agency Mudlark. Finally, focusing on practical experiments using tweeting in character as part of WildWorks theatre performance of *100: The Day Our World Changed* (2014), we will investigate social design and dramaturgical strategies that use social media to engage audiences not only in the performance, but in the devising, development, rehearsal and build up to a performance taking place at a specific time and physical location. How do such strategies develop what Alston has referred to as 'participatory expertise' (2016)?

## The Role of Social Media for Participation in Theatre

For our purposes, transmedial theatre refers to performance that takes place across and incorporates multiple media platforms and participatory communications landscapes, which may be understood as social networking environments facilitated through social media technologies. By social media we refer to a group of technologies that have been termed web 2.0 (O'Reilly 2005), 'participatory media' (Jenkins 2006) or mass self-communication (Castells 2007: 246). These technologies encourage different forms of participation when engaging with authored content, ranging from liking and following (clicking a button that associates the user's profile with the content) to commenting, actively altering content or entering into a dialogue with the author and generating new content. In transmedial theatre that takes place across participatory communications landscapes, an extra-everyday space intervenes within a space of everyday social interaction. Merging the boundaries of these spaces raises questions about how the interactions of performer and participants, aesthetic conventions and everyday social conventions are perceived and produced.

The circulation and construction of narrative digital content within a networked communications landscape has enabled new methods of interaction, participation, experience design and storytelling for transmedial theatre and performance. Indeed, it has been argued that these complex media environments afford 'more opportunities to engage in public speech, and an enhanced ability to undertake collective action' (Shirky 2011: 29), all of which are changing audiences' expectations of and engagements with theatre. This is demonstrated by the emergence of 'tweet seats' in theatres (Ahmed 2011; Adler 2013) whereby theatre companies are increasingly encouraging audiences' inclination to reflect on their immediate experiences on and in the performance, by using sms texting, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LINE, Vine, WhatsApp and other social media platforms. Not only are audiences bringing the 'experience of networking into the theatrical space' (Wagner and Ernst 2010: 172), but they are also doing the networking within theatrical spaces and performances.

Gareth White suggests 'All audiences are participatory ... [they] laugh, clap, cry, fidget, and occasionally heckle' (White 2013: 3). White offers a simple definition of participation in theatre as 'the participation of an audience, or an audience member, in the action of a performance' where that action is conceived of as 'action within the extra-everyday space (often but not always conceived as a fictional space) of the performance' (White 2013: 4, 9). But how is participation to be understood when the action of the performance takes place in the everyday space of social communication, where theatrical script is merged or interacts with networking behaviour, which is 'uncontrolled and self-generating' (Wagner and Ernst 2010: 176)? These networking actions have additional implications for the outcomes of the events in terms of how they alter artistic intentions and authorship and therefore, what might be understood as the event itself. Indeed, incorporating theatrical script and networking into the actions that constitute a theatrical event induces a reciprocal alteration of the performance process as demonstrated by Wagner and Ernst's analysis of Christoph Schlingensiefel's

performance *Ausländer Raus! Bitte liebt Österreich!* (Wagner and Ernst 2010: 181). Coalescence of social media channels with the theatrical space and time in Schlingensiefel's performance prompted Wagner and Ernst to call for a conceptual shift in thinking 'from rather static ideas of time, space and subjectivity toward dynamic ideas of formation and process', and from 'traditional notions of actor, beholder and art-work' to considering 'networking as performance' (Wagner and Ernst 2010: 176).

While further attention needs to be paid to the normalisation of networking practices as part of audiences' response to theatrical performances, this essay is primarily concerned with theatre performances that have been intentionally scripted and staged within and for a social network. Social media platforms may either be exclusive sites of the performance, or be transmedial, i.e. considered part of a network of disparate media channels that play out or contribute to the work's narrative worlds, which extend beyond the specific duration and location of a live event. For example, in New Paradise Laboratories' *Fatebook* (2009), a performance mediated through 13 fictional Facebook accounts, audiences 'friended' characters and thereby became collaborators in the performance. In Mechanical Heart Theatre Company's live stage performance *#Hashtag* (2013), audiences were invited to take photos, videos or live-tweet characters, and in *The Passion*, created by National Theatre Wales and WildWorks with Michael Sheen, audiences interacted and participated by adding further layers of narrative to the work and sharing experiences of the work through live streaming, YouTube and tweets (WildWorks, 2011). This latter performance which took place over a duration of three days across the town of Port Talbot (UK), is particularly significant in that it generated a world-wide following using a group of young people trained as 'citizen bloggers' that sent rough videos to an online portal and Twitter.

Joseph Pine and James Gilmore refer to "the experience economy" (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) as a fourth paradigm of economic production (after industrial, manufacturing and services), whereby the staging of memorable events and experiences is commodified as producers become consumers and vice versa. Some argue such a form of economic production is exemplified by immersive theatre where audiences become co-producers (Alston 2016: 147). Indeed, audiences contribute to atmospheres (or actions) in the experience of a *world* that is happening live and in a collective moment, or through an intimate dialogue with a responsive and improvising performer. Rather than delivering a fully completed programme of actions for audiences to consume, artists may design an infrastructure and dynamic story-world with space for audiences to participate collectively or individually. While Alston argues that all audiences are productive, in that watching, listening and thinking produce meaning, he suggests that their productivity intensifies in immersive theatre as they are asked 'to interact, to roam freely through a space, or set of spaces, to speak with others' (Alston 2016: 9). The *intensifications of productivity* that are of interest to us here are those that invite speaking, communicating and roaming freely in the space of everyday networked communication and that of an evocative narrative.

Alvin Toffler's original term 'prosumer' (Toffler 1971) has been used by theatre and performance scholars to define audiences' role and action within participatory theatre (see Harvie 2013: 50), and Alston's 'producing consumer' further articulates the boundaries of productivity that may exist within 'an assigned scheme of production' or the way that an audience may be cast into the 'moulding of a subject position' (Alston 2016: 153). These terms however, do not provide definitive characterisations of the roles audiences play in participatory performances that take place within social network environments and may involve performance content creation. Such user-led content creation is better defined through Axel Bruns' term 'producers' which accounts for post-industrial and informational economic models where it is intangible ideas that are produced, exchanged and used by all participants within collaborative and participatory environments (Bruns 2007). According to Bruns, 'produsage' (the activity of producing and consuming by producers) contains four key characteristics: (1) content is generated and distributed by a wider community of participants rather than by dedicated teams and individuals; (2) it involves a fluid movement between roles and levels of expertise from professional to amateur; (3) its products are iterative, always incomplete and unfinished; (3) it is based on regimes of permission that are predicated more on merit than ownership. Although produsage and the artefacts it creates are exploited commercially in pursuit of corporate profitability, it also challenges the very notion of individual ownership of intellectual property by introducing new models of sharing copyright communally.

### **Participatory Communications Landscapes**

Presence within a social network environment is defined more by the sharing of communication than of the physical and temporal space (Fewster 2010: 47). However, with Twitter, communication happens in real-time within a temporally defined space, which is one of the most distinctive attributes of this particular micro-blogging media and a reason for the focus of this article. Furthermore, Twitter is designed for broadcasting thoughts or collaborative conversation through time-stamped posts limited to 140 characters and that can be relayed and received synchronously or asynchronously, which means that audiences are constantly re-positioned from objects to subjects of conversation (and vice versa), from watching to actively following, commenting, elaborating on and enriching content with social media (Artieri 2012). Twitter involves participants' skillful ability to (1) write expressively and asynchronously in an extremely constrained form and (2) deploy the media's conventions of hashtags (#'s) to mark tweets topically for others to follow, 'RT @user msg' to retweet or forward a message on to create a sense of a shared conversational context or infrastructure (boyd, Golder and Lotan 2010), and "@user" syntax to establish more directed conversations or 'talk lines' and 'face engagements' (Goffman 1963: 161) in a communications landscape that is multi-focused and not necessarily coherent or cohesive.

The multi-channel and multi-voice affordances within participatory landscapes promote forms of that may exert influence over content or decision-making.

Additionally, because of its interactive and conversational nature, boundaries between everyday and theatrical space are obscured when staging performance within and through this media. Therefore, questions arise around the types of conventions used to distinguish the activity from the everyday, and the forms of engagements and participation that are welcomed and invited in these events. Which forms of engagement might be promoted and which ones regulated? How are welcome engagements maintained and unwelcome ones repelled? How is the activity perceived and maintained as an aesthetic event? How much do participants' own actions or contributions influence the direction and outcomes of such performances?

Misha Myers refers to participants as *percipients* within modes of performance where the locus of meaning or content creation is shared amongst participants and shifted away from being the exclusive control of conventional performers or authors (Myers 2006: 2–3; 2008: 172–73; 2009: 25, 40). Where the mode of participation is not pre-directed or pre-determined, but develops into a mode of conversation, percipients alter the performance process and its outcomes through a shared embodied and sensorial engagement with the performer. The locus of expression of the event depends upon the percipients' perceptual, imaginative and bodily sensitivities, skills and contributions. Myers goes further in arguing that even in performances utilising recorded media such as audio walks, where participants may not be directly interacting with the performer or may not be able to 'talk back', percipients' physical and sensorial engagement and skillful wayfinding are critical to the production of the event as a performance. This is reinforced by interactive forms of address, such as, when the percipient is acknowledged directly as 'you', such as in Mike Pearson's *Carrlands* or Platform's *And While London Burns* (Myers 2011: 73). The percipients' presence is thereby acknowledged as co-participants and a conversants. Following Casey, Myers suggests this form of participation involves a kinaesthetic, synaesthetic and sonaesthetic mode of perception and knowledge production whereby the audience is placed within, not without the performance (Myers 2011: 78). Indeed, this sense of interiority may extend to an experience of an internalisation of the performance within the percipient's body, such that it is felt as if emanating from within (Myers 2010: 75).

Since Twitter conversations are dispersed throughout 'a network of interconnected actors' rather than being constrained within bound spaces or groups, a particular conversation can happen simultaneously to such an extent that 'others have a sense of being surrounded by a conversation, despite perhaps not being an active contributor' (boyd, Golder and Lotan 2010). While the term *immersive* has been used to refer to the sense of sensorial submersion in a mediated environment or of being surrounded by the performance and controlling the viewing position within it (Vanhoutte and Wynants 2010: 47), *conversive* theatres refer to those that are structured or led by a conversation, that happen within a conversational space. As such, performance in and of social networks is *conversive*, as its structure enables, instigates and depends upon conversation and the variation or alteration of content through that conversation. The conversational aspect of this communications landscape presents a challenging arena for aesthetically directed events because it is unconstrained by spatial face-to-face

conventions, such as turn-taking, references to previous statements or spatially defined 'talk lines'. When spatially bounded social parties are transformed into performances, modulations of volume and character are necessary to maintain the focus of the main event as the dominating one against the side involvements, furtive and subordinate byplay that increasingly occur as the number of persons included in the encounter grows (Goffman 1963: 164–65). These side involvements and byplay are what creates the sense of a shared conversation in Twitter's conversational context. Indeed, as messages spread with re-tweeting, the message's referents and authorship are often lost and shift. These mechanics create particular challenges for any performance staged within this communications landscape to maintain distinctions between the 'main event' and the byplay, or the author and the bystander.

Aesthetic events organised around the social conventions of interactions and conversations have become accepted forms of contemporary art (Heim, 2003; Kester, 2004; Bishop, 2006). It is useful to first look at some of the discourses on participation related to such events before analysing modes of engagements within the context of performances organised around the social conventions of social networks.

Claire Bishop argues that art works that are organised around participation involve a 'sacrifice of authorship' that subsumes aesthetics with an 'ethical imperative' (Bishop 2006: 181). Bishop refers to a body of work beginning with the Dada 'excursion' to the church of Saint Julien le Pauvre in Paris, continuing with Fluxus' 'Happenings' and including Jeremy Deller, Phil Collins and others who have created 'highly authored situations that fuse social reality with carefully calculated artifice' (Bishop 2006: 183). Instead of approaching inter-subjective relations as an end in itself, Bishop argues that these artists are not driven by ethical choices, but by their own artistic vision, concerns and desires. She suggests these works create new narratives for participants and reinforce a social bond (Bishop 2006: 182). However, this bond is determined by a narrative that is authored for the participant, as with Alston's sense of being cast into a mould of a subject position discussed above. The participant may share the values of the artist and find meaning in that bond, but the participant's presence in the work serves to reinforce the meaning constructed by the artist. Bishop suggests that best collaborative practices have addressed a contradictory tension between the autonomy of art and social intervention both in the work's structure and conditions of reception (Bishop 2006: 183).

With performances and events that are organised around conversational or dialogical modes of participation, inter-subjective relations are ends in themselves or indirect means to affect change in perceptions and behaviours. Conversation becomes a method of activism, performance and social intervention in work such as that of Ultra Red, Platform or Wochenklausur. Wallace Heim suggests the 'social practice art' created by these groups 'not only display an ethical capacity, but manifest it' (Heim 2005: 200–01). The notion of the 'highly authored' work in the context of this practice requires a different understanding of what it is that is authored and how that authoring comes about. Hans-Georg Gadamer suggests that:

a genuine conversation is never the one that we wanted to conduct ... a conversation has a spirit of its own ... the language in which it is conducted bears its own truth within it — i.e., that it allows something to “emerge,” which henceforth exists (Gadamer, 1975: 383).

There is a skilfulness involved in conversation, a negotiation of the conventions of conversation that sustain it.

### **Intensities of Content Interaction and Co-Creation**

Developments in communication technologies have offered new forms of participation and ways for audiences to interact with performers and transform what was once perceived as content. Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford and Joshua Green suggest that content evolves as it is delivered across spreadable media (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013). As content spreads across diffuse networks organised around conversational logic, or a logic of sharing, this content becomes uncontained or transformed.

Four modes of engagements or categories of interactions afforded by the use of social media can be described. Viewing and reading of pre-prepared content delivered intact and unalterable may be understood as a form of *passive consumption*. However, as noted previously in relation to the example of the audiowalk, there may be contexts where the consumption of content requires modes of engagement that demand more activity, or what Alston refers to as an ‘investment of energy – for instance, by walking, interacting, dancing and even running – in excess of that involved in sedentary, end-on theatre scenarios’ (Alston 2016: 8). Many forms of social media require some form of acknowledgement of, subscription or commitment to the dialogue or conversation in order to access the social network, even if only to view its content and not actively contribute to it. These acts of acknowledgement fit within a second category of ‘phatic communion’ (Ogden and Richards 1923) and include actions such as clicking a ‘like’ button, starring, retweeting, folksonomy (tagging), following, friending, and favoriting content. All these aim to establish connection to a network rather than transmit data (Miller 2008), which Artieri argues makes them ‘weak’ in terms of production (Artieri, 2012: 453), but ‘active’ (Baran and Davis 1995) as acknowledgements of dialogue. The third category is a contribution-driven participation or an *annotative dialogue*, for example commenting on posts in blogs, timelines, or replying to a tweet. Although comments might be considered as ‘phatic posts’ (Radovanovic and Ragnedda 2012) and tweets content ‘babble’ (Kelly 2009), we consider these as distinct from ‘phatic communion’ as they create new content by communicating and/or annotating authored content and personal data. Additionally, as some retweets can involve a modification of the original message along with an original take or comment on it, they may be understood as annotative dialogue in these cases. Retweeting may also be understood as a form of curation of content directed at entertaining or informing a specific audience (boyd, Golder and Lotan 2010). Where this curation effects changes to the original content, it may be considered a fourth form of engagement, *re-mix production*,

which includes modes of ‘design-driven participation’ (Artieri 2012; Radovanovic and Ragnedda 2012). These involve the alteration, reuse, repurposing, modification or curation of content in ways that effect changes to the original content.

What constitutes activity or the intensification of activity amongst these different modes of interaction is difficult to define and these forms of productivity potentially disturb a dichotomisation of active and passive forms of participation. As social media applications are designed to stimulate the visibility of these different interactions, their success depends upon increased participatory opportunities and intensification of the sharing of content. Developments in communications technology have changed the relationship between performer and audience to such an extent that the term audience can once again be questioned as a label for describing the receivers of content. How do social media platforms affect the behaviour of audiences to authored work, and how is the authored work affected by the behaviour of social media audiences? What new collaborative and responsive modes of performing, devising, writing and presenting of content are required to work within the conversational infrastructures or ecologies of social media? These questions will be explored below through two different creative approaches to using Twitter.

### **Riffing Narrative**

In 2010, the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) reinterpreted *Romeo and Juliet* for the social media platform twitter with cross-platform production company Mudlark, funded by 4iP, Channel 4's digital investment fund, Screen West Midlands and the Arts Council. Mudlark ran a series of workshops in 2008 that introduced the RSC to game design and social media as ways of engaging young people in Shakespeare. Twitter had only launched in 2006 and by 2008 it was still an emergent and relatively unknown social media platform. Mudlark's Co-founder and Managing Director Charles Hunter suggests the decision to use Twitter for the play was its asynchronicity, its ‘mixture of simultaneity and search-ability’ (Hunter 2014). The feed publishes live updates over time in the same way that theatre does, but its asynchronous nature allows people across different time zones to catch up in their own time and jump to any point in the timeline to review previous posts. The RSC chose to work with *Romeo and Juliet* for the project because it is an evocative narrative—it is widely known and therefore, the audiences’ ‘narrative competencies’ could be drawn upon (Jenkins 2004: 123). Hunter describes how *Such Tweet Sorrow* played out as ‘a kind riff on that story in the way that Twitter is a kind of riff on everything, because with 140 characters you kind of riff on the big story of the day’ (Hunter 2014). The writers Bethan Marlow and Tim Wright created a story grid and six actors, the same actors as in the RSC production, improvised *Romeo and Juliet* purely by tweeting from their own accounts over a five weeks duration (15 April – 12 May 2010), and sometimes tweeting links to YouTube video posts in-character (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNiG-rhfq8Y>), photo posts (see <http://twitpic.com/1ikxtm>), or random sites with associative links to narrative content (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g2jAwiq6YsE> and <http://www.newson6.com/Global/story.asp?S=12231106>).



Twitter is a rolling newsfeed and anyone with an account can instantly publish their status. Subscribers tracking these newsfeeds are followers and the key difference with traditional forms of theatre is not just the immediacy of receiving the content, but the ability of followers to question the newsfeeds. Twitter users can engage with content published via the platform through all four of the different modes of participation discussed earlier—passive consumption by receiving and reading the information without subscribing, phatic communication by re-tweeting or following feeds, annotative dialogue by replying or commenting on content, and re-mix production through the curation or repurposing of content.

Some of the intentional design choices made in *Such Tweet Sorrow* encouraged percipients to interact with their own re-mix production and annotative dialogue in ways that generated some alterations of the performance that were unintended and not necessarily desired by the artists. Although one might question whether the platform's garrulousness was suited for the intimacy of *Romeo and Juliet* as a story of forbidden and discreet love, the public intervention into the affair that brought it to a tragic end in the play's narrative was played out in some unintended ways within the Twitter version. In *Such Tweet Sorrow* some audience-followers and tweeters such as [romeo\\_mon](#) and [BenVoli0](#) joined in as percipients offering their own re-mix production by tweeting in their own versions of Shakespeare's characters or in the style of Shakespearian language.

The criticism of *Such Tweet Sorrow* focused on what was seen as a failure of the performance to understand some of the core mechanics of Twitter and Twitettiquette (@nav\_eeen in boyd, Golder and Lotan 2010). Criticism focused on the lack of dramatic action, interactivity or nuance in the writing. Twitter may be a live medium but it is based on reducing messages to 140 characters: 'creativity comes from constraint' (Twitter's Creative Director Biz Stone in boyd, Golder and Lotan 2010). The *Guardian* newspaper critic Daniel Bye's review of the performance questions theatre companies' use of Twitter to communicate 'Bland nuggets of fact and instamatic retweetings of praise', but comments in relation to *Such Tweet Sorrow's* more creative use of the platform that 'the skill of acting well is irrelevant to the skill of writing well for Twitter' (Bye 2011). In her blog review of *Such Tweet Sorrow* Hannah Nicklin criticises the writing for its lack of nuance in the characterisations, a shortcoming she attributes to the artists and not the media itself when she argues 'it's entirely possible to be [a] nuanced individual in a reduced, 140 character format—everyone else on twitter manages it' and asks, 'Would you consider a haiku fundamentally less expressive than a longer poem? What about iambic pentameter?' (Nicklin 2010). She also observes that the form used for the tweets did not promote interaction; they reported on events or the character's feelings rather than showing them through dramatic action: 'Saying "my eyes are so red from crying" is not interesting, but asking people if cucumbers on the eyes bring down puffiness because you don't want your dad to know, is' (ibid).

Twitter is a platform for social media, which means that it is an open space for people to interact and add comments. Twitter adds a 'new twist to the death of the author'

(boyd, Golder and Lotan 2010) with alterations of content to original messages and confusion of attributions that occur as messages are retweeted and potentially altered with each retweet. Feeds are most successful when they are written in a responsive style and interact with other feeds, but interaction with the performance caused confusion for the artists. Hunter made the following comment on the question of one audience-follower that ‘jumped on stage’: ‘I think that was problematic in the end because it confused the audience and it didn’t really delineate that he wasn’t actually part of the company’ (Hunter 2014).

The production also included a staged plant as part of the form, a fanboy, cast as [BenVoli0](#), an intervention that was intentional and pre-determined by the artists. When BenVoli0 tweets ‘[@mercuteio](#) do you think you could play 10 up ... IQ points that is? lol [#suchtweet](#)’, he opens an invitation to the audience to not only join in, but to also critique the performance as it is happening and to ask the actors to ‘break character’ or respond in-character. These interventions present interesting risks and experiments that work with the conversational infrastructure and mechanics of the platform, but they deliberately confuse the delineation of who is an actor and performer, which it appears from Hunter’s comments, was not the intention. Nicklin raises interesting questions about how to deliver criticism to an on-going creative feed and attempted to do so ‘in-character’ herself. She comments in her blog, ‘When you interact with the characters you are interacting with them as a character yourself—a version of your self, one who pretends that these characters are real’ (Nicklin 2010).

While there may have been a miscalculation in the fusion of social reality with the chosen artifice that was required for working successfully with the medium, Hunter found the most exciting thing about working with Twitter in this way was that it was happening in real time:

If you turned on Twitter you might see Tybalt stomping home in a strop because Mercutio had accused him in the pub, or you might actually see the teasing happening there and then. You’d know it was fixed, but actually social media, doesn’t tend to give you very good stories, it tends to reflect other good stories ... So people were actually getting, primary content ... over weeks on their social network which hadn’t really been done otherwise (Hunter 2014).

This was a bold experiment that took place at the early adoption stage of Twitter, as the platform’s uses and users’ practices were still evolving to the recognisable forms that are now familiar and accepted. The work reveals some of the frictions and tensions that can destabilise performances in this context when the artist’s expectations or intentions take those adopted practices or the *conversive* infrastructure for granted and hold onto more regulated notions of authorship, performer and the authored work.

## Social Dramaturgy

Along with new forms of dramatic and collective writing, social media platforms demand and offer new strategies for transmedial dramaturgy and design. They afford opportunities for percipients to contribute content during a performance, but also to contribute to the process of developing the performance and its story world, herein referred to as a form of *social dramaturgy*. While informed by Goffman's dramaturgical sociology, it is not to be confused with it. Rather, social dramaturgy is concerned with the design of aesthetic frames or structures for percipients to contribute to the shaping and composition of dramatic story worlds through their social interaction. Authors Myers and Watkins worked with WildWorks' Richard Sobey, to explore these particular affordances of social media as a means through which WildWorks might build a community of advocates and critics that would promote the company's own thinking about a particular performance (for a report on other experiments devised as part of the research, see Myers et al. 2016). This research focused on the performance *100: The Day Our World Changed*, a full performative day of remembrance and commemoration to mark the centenary of the outbreak of World War One and the impact of the First World War on communities.

The work was created by WildWorks for The Lost Gardens of Heligan in Cornwall and was co-commissioned by 14-18 NOW, a United Kingdom cultural programme of arts commissions commemorating the centenary of the First World War. The *100* was created to mark the lives of Cornishmen from surrounding parishes who went to war, leaving their families behind. The work was devised and developed within three parishes from which the Cornishmen hailed and the work was performed across the parishes. Most of the 600 participants involved in making and performing in the event came from local communities. The event took place over 12 hours on 3 August 2015 with dispersed activity happening across multiple geographic locations from the harbour of Mevagissey, along a 2.5 mile walk through the town and throughout the 200 acre grounds of the gardens.

As a way of introducing the *100*, a novel framework was developed with Myers and Watkins through a series of Twitter feeds (which also fed into Facebook posts) based on characters and storylines relevant to the event, a method WildWorks refers to as 'heralding'. In contrast to *Such Tweet Sorrow*, the aim of the feed was to initiate dialogue with audiences beforehand and strengthen their relationship to, or understanding of, characters or narratives in the live event. The feed was a part of a nexus of disparate media channels that contributed to the work's narrative worlds and extended beyond a specific duration and location of a live event.

The first heralding tweets were sent from a fictitious gardener William Pill who worked at Heligan during WWI [<https://twitter.com/1914Gardener>]. Different forms of writing were explored to attempt to make the feed more interactive and dynamic to attract annotative dialogue and re-mix production from followers. Pill's tweets often recounted details of the character's fictional day to day life gardening at Heligan in the build-up

to the war, providing a personalised perspective on the historical events, such as a tweet posted on 12 July 2014: 'Listened to the men talking at the Parliament. All about war. Mr Treffry got angry and swore' (<https://twitter.com/1914Gardener/status/487944783428874240>). The Pill feed also retweeted in-character tweet conversations posted by actors playing laundry maids in the performance (see [https://twitter.com/kitty\\_ferrars/status/494509867454169088](https://twitter.com/kitty_ferrars/status/494509867454169088)). Like the characters of RSC's *Such Tweet Sorrow*, these retweets established a fictional network and sense of conversation amongst the characters of the performance world. Sometimes Pill's tweets were associative and included traditional gardening tips, photos and direct invitations for a dialogue with questions. These tweets in particular received some playful interactions, such as the following one that questioned the temporal conceit of the feed:

**@1914Gardener:** Back hurting now after a lot of bending.

**@TheRealAnnieman:** @1914Gardener Well, since your profile says you were born in 1898, I would think you would be aching all the time at 116 years of age.

**@1914Gardener:** Yes @TheRealAnnieman you wouldn't believe the aches you get when you're 116 (<https://twitter.com/1914Gardener/status/489746283486130178>).

Pill's tweets acted as a participatory dramaturgical tool that generated material linking the site of Heligan Gardens with the war and which in itself triggered interactions and contributions from online audiences. For example, in one post, Pill mentions eating Shippam's fish paste for lunch, a food from the war period. Another post including an image of the paste and link to an article on nostalgia and childhood tastes prompted a Facebook comment from Mavis Taylor, which revealed her personal experiences and memories of the period:

All I remember as a child is that it came in tins. It was very thick and rich. I wish I could remember the other things in the parcel. I think one was golden syrup and may be peaches. All a great luxury. (Taylor 2014)

While Pill was to be a recognisable character on the day of the live performance, concerns were raised as to whether the focus on Pill in the feed might set up audience expectations for the character to be a main protagonist of the event, which was not the initial intention for his character. In response, a new Twitter feed was developed around a motorcyclist character, originally conceived as a device to introduce the announcement of the outbreak of war in the performance. The motorcyclist would arrive on motorcycle during the event to pass a telegram to the Mayor of Mevagissey with news of the impending war (Wildworks 2014).

With the idea of developing the narrative around the motorcyclist character further, playwright Paul Farmer was commissioned to author 130 tweets sent from the fictitious 1914 motorcyclist commencing on 3 July 2014. Conceptualised as urgent messages,

warnings, signposts sent from a dispatch rider as he journeyed across Europe with news of the impending war, these tweets included background detail not included in the performance and provided an additional layer of information and perspective on the era to prepare an audience in advance of the performance. As with Pill's feed, this content provided a kind of close up and intimate experience of the character—his voice, thoughts and perspective—that would not be available to the audience otherwise on the day of the event, when his appearance would be more visual in the landscape of the event, with the first glimpse of him appearing on a distant hillside to the moment of his arrival amongst the crowd to deliver the message. While the feed quickly built a wide following, monitoring revealed that tweets were not being re-tweeted. In response, unscheduled messages with historical images and other information connected to the motorcyclist's tweets were added. Importantly, these tweets appealed to a wider global audience, with retweets from as far as Argentina and California, extending the reach of the performance beyond Cornwall. Overall, 200 individual accounts interacted with WildWorks Twitter feed in the run up to the performance.

An invaluable outcome of this experiment was that the Twitter campaign significantly impacted on the development of the show itself and on WildWorks' creative working with digital media. The experience of tracking the tweets and responses shifted artistic director Bill Mitchell's thinking about the potential of the motorcyclist as a mechanism in the show (Mitchell 2015). The character became an essential through-line for the whole performance and the mechanism by which very personal stories of families in the three parishes involved could be connected, not only to the global event that was the opening of WW1, but also to the variety of physical locations for the show (the audience moved across a 2.5 mile performance space).

The long lead time between the commencement of the tweet feeds and the event allowed the company to improvise and respond to percipient interactions, which contributed audience's insight and perspectives on the historical event that constituted the central narrative of the event and generated new ideas and material for the performance. It provided a way for the company to find out more about its potential audiences for the event. But it also provided a mechanism for audiences to discover character detail throughout the performance.

As the event took place across a dispersed landscape with scenes performed by minor characters interspersed in different locations, audiences might have byplay or side involvements during the event with these minor characters. While these byplays may not be the actions of the main protagonist or intended as the primary focus, they may draw the audience into interactions that become meaningful for them and potentially as or more significant than the main actions. These are portals where the percipient can get up close and become a part of the event. As with the dispersed and uncontained structure of Twitter, this is an important affordance of immersive and site-responsive performances. The social dramaturgical strategies employed with the *100* through social media led to new understandings about designing dispersed experiences and

story worlds that extend across multiple geographical and virtual network spaces and asynchronous and synchronous temporalities.

## Conclusions

Contemporary participatory communication landscapes offer new opportunities for merging social reality with artifice in theatrical performance. By enabling the fusion of virtual and physical locations they not only create *conversive* theatres that are both immersive and personalised, but also game-like experiences that can reach disparate geographical locations over an extended time period and which offer opportunities for both immediacy and search-ability.

The success of such works depends upon their ability to initiate dialogue and facilitate sustained interaction amongst percipients along a particular topic of conversation that may both become modified as it disperses amongst a diffuse and uncontained network, and also be experienced as originating from the percipient and/or as happening around them. To accomplish this different narrative forms and styles of writing may be more conducive to *conversive* performances within participatory landscapes, such as those that (1) communicate dramatic action with brevity and nuance for example the imposed constraint of short textual messages in Twitter, which promote a sense of a shared conversation, (2) invite response and are responsive to interaction, for example Pill's direct questions to Twitter followers in the *100*, or Nicklin's suggestion of cucumbers on the eyes as ways of showing not telling dramatic action and nuance, and (3) allow dispersed and multiple voices and storylines, for example [romeo\\_mon](#)'s contribution to *Such Tweet Sorrow* or @TheRealAnnieman's playful interaction with Pill in the *100*, and (4) are set within evocative narrative frames that draw upon audiences' narrative competencies or personal knowledge or experience (*Rome and Juliet* in *Such Tweet Sorrow* and the start of WW1 in the *100*).

Employing adopted practices that participants can use to create a sense of shared conversational space or some sense of structure amongst the network's disorder, can help establish intentional talk lines that allow for conversational, unintentional or unknown responses, thereby giving focus to the aesthetic event while allowing byplays and side involvements (planting the fanboy [BenVoli0](#) in *Such Tweet Sorrow* or the retweeting of other characters' content by Pill in the *100* heralding feed). The complexity of the sharing logic of these mediations requires the right calibration of changeability, permeability and spreadability of content to engage contemporary theatre audiences. This *conversive* environment demands and offers new collective, responsive and improvisational aesthetic forms, structures and conditions of reception that intertwine with generative and participatory processes of making.

The design itself of transmedial performances within participatory communications landscapes shifts traditional notions of authorship (i.e. the authored work or the designed and intended aesthetic event) towards collaborative forms of authorship and social dramaturgy. Given this context, creative content providers will need to adapt to

the current paradigm shift in authorship to take advantage of the opportunities afforded within participatory environments. As explored previously in the discussion of Twitter performances, the design and structure of the performance and what is authored in this context is first and foremost the opportunity for a conversation.

---

### Acknowledgements

This research was funded in part by the European Union through the European Social Fund project 'Augmenting Impact with Social Media' (no. 011200NCO5). As Principal Investigator of the project Dr. Misha Myers was responsible for the project conception, funding application, research plan and theoretical and technical analysis in preparation of this paper. As Research Assistant for the project Dane Watkins was responsible for social media content development, website and database design and management, gathering data on relevant practices. On behalf of the project partner WildWorks theatre company, Richard Sobey was responsible for curating and directing social media content and the evaluation of the project with the project partner.

### Works Cited

Online sources cited in this article were checked shortly before this article was published in November 2016 and all links were current at that time.

- Adler, Margot. 'Disruptive Broadway: Audiences Master Stage Whisper', *National Public Radio*, 11 June (2013), <http://www.npr.org/2013/06/11/190588070/disruptive-broadway-audiencesmaster-stage-whisper>
- Ahmed, Beenish. "'Tweet Seats' Come to Theaters, But Can Patrons Plug In without Tuning Out?", *National Public Radio*, 12 December (2011), <http://www.npr.org/sections/monkeysee/2011/12/12/143576328/tweet-seats-come-to-theaters-but-can-patrons-plug-in-without-tuning-out>
- Alston, Adam. *Beyond Immersive Theatres: Aesthetics, Politics and Productive Participation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
- Artieri, Giovanni Boccia. 'Productive Publics and Transmedia Participation', *Participations: International Journal of Audience Research*, 9.2 (2012): 448–68.
- Baran, Stanley J. and Dennis K. Davis. *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Ferment, and Future* (Wadsworth: Cengage, 1995).
- Bishop, Claire. 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents', *Artforum*, 44.6 (2006): 178–83.
- boyd, danah, Scott Golder and Gilad Lotan. 'Tweet, tweet, retweet: Conversational aspects of retweeting on twitter', in *System Sciences (HICSS), 2010 43rd Hawaii International Conference on* (2010): 1-10.
- Bruns, Axel. 'Prodisusage: Towards a Broader Framework for User-Led Content Creation', in *Proceedings Creativity and Cognition*, 6 (2007): 99–106. [http://eprints.qut.edu.au/view/person/Bruns,\\_Axel.html](http://eprints.qut.edu.au/view/person/Bruns,_Axel.html)
- Bye, Daniel. 'Drip-fed Up? Why Don't Theatres Get Twitter?', *Guardian*, 8 February (2011) <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2011/feb/08/theatre-twitter-feed-new-media>
- Castells, Manuel. 'Communication, Power and Counter-power in the Network Society', *International Journal of Communication*, 1 (2007): 238–66.

- Fewster, Russell. 'Presence', in Sarah Bay-Cheng, Chiel Kattenbelt, Andy Lavender and Robin Nelson (eds.) *Mapping Intermediality in Performance* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 46.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1975).
- Goffman, Erving. *Behaviour in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings* (New York: The Free Press, 1963).
- Harvie, Jen. *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
- Heim, Wallace. 'Navigating Voices', in Gabriella Giannachi and Nigel Stewart (eds.). *Performing Nature: Explorations in Ecology and the Arts* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), 199-216.
- . 'Slow Activism: Homelands, Love and the Lightbulb', *Sociological Review*, 51.2 (2003): 183-202.
- Hunter, Charles. Interview with author Dane Watkins, 24 June (2014).
- Jenkins, Henry. 'Game Design as Narrative Architecture', in Noah Wardrip-Furin and Pat Harrigan (eds.). *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 118-30.
- . *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).
- Jenkins, Henry, Sam Ford and Joshua Green. *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).
- Kelly, R. 'Twitter Study Reveals Interesting Results about Usage', *Pear Analytics* (2009), <http://pearanalytics.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/Twitter-Study-August-2009.pdf>
- Kester, Grant H. *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).
- Mechanical Heart Theatre Company. #Hashtag, Hollywood Fringe Festival (2013), <http://www.hollywoodfringe.org/projects/1353>.
- Miller, Vincent. 'New Media, Networking and Phatic Culture', *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 14.4 (2008): 387-400.
- Mitchell, Bill. Conversation with author Richard Sobey, 5 August (2015).
- Mudlark. *Such Tweet Sorrow*, project website (2010), <http://wearemudlark.com/projects/such-tweet-sorrow>
- Myers, Misha. 'Along the Way: Situation-responsive Approach to Education and Participation', *International Journal of the Arts In Society*, 1.2 (2006): 1-6.
- . 'Situations for Living: Performing Emplacement', *Research in Drama Education*, 13.2 (2008): 171-80.
- . *Homing Place: Towards a Participatory, Ambulant and Conversive Methodology*, PhD Thesis, Dartington College of Arts/University of Plymouth (2009), <https://pearl.plymouth.ac.uk/handle/10026.1/3181>
- . 'Walk with Me, Talk with Me: The Art of Conversive Wayfinding', *Visual Studies*, 25.1 (2010): 59-68.
- . 'Vocal Landscaping: The Theatre of Sound in Audiowalks', in Lynne Kendrick and David Roesner (eds.). *Theatre Noise* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 70-81.
- Myers, Misha, Dane Watkins and Richard Sobey. 'Extending Story-worlds through Social Media', *Research in Drama Education*, 21.3 (2016): 431-37.
- New Paradise Laboratories. Fatebook (2009), <http://www.fatebooktheshow.com>
- Nicklin, Hannah. 'Such Tweet Sorrow, a Blog Post in Two Acts', 19 April (2010), <http://www.hannahnicklin.com/2010/04/such-tweet-sorrow-a-blog-post-in-two-acts>.
- Rose, Frank. *The Art of Immersion: How the Digital Generation is Remaking Hollywood, Madison Avenue and the Way We Tell Stories* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011).



- Ogden, Charles Kay, Ivor Armstrong Richards, Sv. Ranulf and E. Cassirer. *The Meaning of Meaning. A Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Company, 1923), 256–60.
- O'Reilly, Tim. 'What is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software', 30 September (2005), <http://www.oreilly.com/pub/a/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html>
- Pine, Joseph B., and James H. Gilmore. *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre and Every Business a Stage* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999).
- Radovanovic, Danica, and Massimo Ragnedda. 'Small Talk in the Digital Age: Making Sense of Phatic Posts', Workshop proceedings at #MSM2012 (Lyon, France: 2012): 10-13, <http://ceur-ws.org/Vol-838/>
- Shirky, Clay. 'The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change', *Foreign Affairs*, 90.1 (2011): 28–41.
- Taylor, Mavis. 'Wildworks Theatre', Facebook post, 14 July (2014), <https://www.facebook.com/WildWorksTheatre>
- Toffler, Alvin. *Future Shock* (London: Pan Books, 1971).
- Vanhoutte, Kurt, and Nele Wynants. 'Immersion', in Sarah Bay-Cheng, Chiel Kattenbelt, Andy Lavender and Robin Nelson (eds.). *Mapping Intermediality in Performance* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 47.
- Wagner, Meike, and Wolf-Dieter Ernst. 'Networking', in Sarah Bay-Cheng, Chiel Kattenbelt, Andy Lavender and Robin Nelson (eds.). *Mapping Intermediality in Performance* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 173–83.
- White, Gareth. *Audience Participation in Theatre: Aesthetics of the Invitation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
- WildWorks. *The Passion* (2011), <http://wildworks.biz/projects/the-passion>.
- . *100: The Day Our World Changed* (2014), <http://wildworks.biz/blog/1914-motorcyclist>

MISHA MYERS is a performance practitioner, researcher and Lecturer at Monash University. Her research is focused on enabling social change through participatory, located and digital performance. She is Principal Investigator on the European Social Fund project 'Augmenting Impact with Social Media'.

DANE WATKINS is a creative technologist starting a practice-based PhD at Falmouth University and was Research Assistant on 'Augmenting Impact with Social Media' funded by the European Social Fund.

RICHARD SOBEY is an international strategic planning consultant, working across the cultural, heritage, urban planning and land management sectors. Formerly Executive Director at WildWorks, he is also Director of International Strategic Initiatives at the Global Arts Agenda and a Research Fellow in the University of Leeds' School of Performance and Cultural Industries.