

**Emma Willis, Cheng Nien Yuan, Chris Hay**

Editorial:

“To the Ends of the World”

The impulse for this issue came from the experiences wrought by Covid, particularly the rapid migration to online platforms. Many of you reading this editorial will be familiar with the demands of delivering performance pedagogy online. 2020 was a time of immense challenge—for both students and teachers—as we grappled with how to transform our teaching and learning practices, which had hitherto been grounded mainly in face-to-face exchange, in collective embodied practices. There were also glimpses of possibility—of solidarity—of ways in which the world might become different, better, *because* of all this. And it was because of this unsettling of our default performance modes—an entertaining of “what if” thinking and doing—that we began to reflect on Jon McKenzie’s *Perform or Else*. We wondered: how revisiting this text might help us negotiate the challenges we currently face? How might experiences of Covid be read in relation to the techno-performance paradigm? How was the language of performance management deployed during the pandemic? What does this tell us about the values underpinning our institutions and our place within them? Indeed, in his response to our editorial interview with McKenzie, Ed Scheer remarks that “for a career academic like me, it hurts to admit that after so many years the answers [to the challenges McKenzie identifies] are becoming increasingly far from self-evident especially as the Universities merge ever more indistinguishably with their corporate strategic partners.” How might the performance studies field step forward to offer insights and demonstrate new possibilities?

Alongside these considerations, we were aware that *Perform or Else* had reached a significant life milestone: 21 years. And there has been a maturation process of sorts as the book, from its launchpad of performance studies, has entered into the orbits of a range of different fields, some of which are represented in this issue: Helen Dickinson, for example, writes from the field of performance management, while Anna Isind has applied McKenzie’s work to co-design for health. Such cross-over from performance studies into not just one but a range of varied fields is unusual and a testament to the broad scope of McKenzie’s analysis of performance. The range of global perspectives in this issue also reflects this breadth. The book continues its journey and, we suggest, remains richly resonant in the current environment.

There is also a certain circular logic for us in returning to *Perform or Else*. The very name of the journal—*Performance Paradigm*—references McKenzie’s work, and indeed the journal’s inaugural issue, “Live Ends: Performance in the Information Age,” followed four years after the publication of McKenzie’s text (and featured an article by him). In their editorial for the issue, Peter Eckersall and Ed Scheer wrote of how the experience of live performance was “increasingly susceptible to digital subversion by the temporal disintegration and restructuring of audio and visual data” (2005, i). Through the articles they commissioned, they sought to explore how performance might engage with new technologies in ways that enhanced communication and offered new possibilities that transcended media interfaces. Our interview with McKenzie is followed by a response from Scheer, which acknowledges these relational threads. This issue returns to those concerns and illuminates the changes that have occurred in the interval between the two issues.

In re-reading McKenzie’s work in preparation for this issue, the word “challenge,” around which the text is organised, leapt out: What are the key challenges facing us today as both performance scholars and global citizens? And how, in turn, might we *challenge*? In chapter 10 of *Perform or Else*, McKenzie introduces the figure of Jane Challenger, the protagonist of M6rcio Souza’s 1993 novel *Lost World II: The End of the Third World*. Souza’s book is a satirical fantasy loosely framed as a sequel to Conan Doyle’s *The Lost World*. The chapter features a remarkable excerpt from Souza’s book, which details the environment in which Jane Challenger finds herself. The setting is the Amazon in the future. Souza describes a period of rainforest destruction in the early 2000s before identifying “outbreaks of deadly epidemics” in the year 2020 (2001, 251). There is a sense of vertigo—a temporal collapse—in reading this passage in 2022. Setting aside prescience or coincidence, the challenge here is one of imagination and of the relationship between imagination and futurity.

In the final pages of *Perform or Else*, McKenzie begins to imagine “future researchers,” “distant researchers,” who will study the “Great Mutation,” the sudden event that leads humankind from orality to literacy to digitality (267). This mutation has accelerated since the publication of McKenzie’s book, a process not so much prompted as revealed by the pandemic. But where might this lead? From here to where? McKenzie writes:

And if we have begun to sense that performance embodies such values as efficacy, efficiency, and effectiveness and to see performers as being animal, vegetable or mineral, distant researchers will experience performance as intensifications in a highly charged atmosphere, as contestations in a cloud of forces without form or substance, all the while taking themselves to be living-dead perfumers, not so much organic-inorganic synthesis or biomechanical contraptions, but recursive patterns of a genre machine. (268)

What does McKenzie’s speculative vision mean for performance and performance studies, and in what ways do we already see what he twenty years ago hypothesised? He finishes the passage above by further pressing his characterisation of a future perspective on the present:

Finally, while we may be shocked at the notion that everything's become performative, that the whole world's been framed as a high performance test site, future researchers will merely be shocked at our shock.

"How could this have surprised them? They're the ones who took performance to the ends of the world—and beyond." (268)

We wrote this editorial at the same time as COP 27 unfolded, where speech after speech unfolded stories of nations disappearing under rising oceans, engulfed by floods, and starved by drought. In this context, McKenzie's evocation of the "ends of the world" takes on a particular charge. It seems optimistic that there may even be future researchers. But let us hope.

We point to the future to signal that our interest is not in a backwards-looking "canonisation" of McKenzie's text. Instead, we are interested in how the trajectories it maps out might be followed in ways that lead us forward, that is, that engage us in a reimagination of our future. As such, in our interview with him, we pay particular attention to his most recent publication, *Transmedia Knowledge for Liberal Arts and Community Engagement: A StudioLab Manifesto* (2019). Grounded in his pedagogical practice, the book demonstrates how the notions laid out in *Perform or Else* might be realised through a range of accessible practices. They point to new futures for transmedia and transdisciplinary education firmly grounded in a commitment to community. We do urge readers of McKenzie's work to delve into this volume.

Before introducing the contents of this issue, a word on methodology. The collected contributions follow what Will Daddario calls a method of "constellatory thinking" (2017, 5), a metaphor that works well in the context of McKenzie's cosmological preoccupations. The figures in this constellation include, of course, *Perform or Else*, but also a set of broader political, aesthetic and disciplinarily-specific concerns. Some authors relate their work very closely to McKenzie's text, while others use it as a launch pad. The issue's contents vary in style, comprising long and short articles, artistic contributions, interviews and responses. For readers, we hope there will be moments of productive insight as the orbits of the "planets" in this constellation cross paths.

### **The Contributions**

We are indebted to Tim Edkins for two contributions to the issue. The first is what he calls a "User's Guide" to *Perform or Else*. Edkins skillfully walks us through McKenzie's text chapter-by-chapter. The "Guide" is an invaluable 'refresher' for those familiar with *Perform or Else* and an introduction for those new to it. Edkins helpfully synthesises the critical concepts of the work and shows how the ideas in the text accumulate as the chapters advance. We recommend reading Edkin's guide alongside this editorial for a comprehensive introduction to the work that follows. Edkin's second contribution to this issue, outlined below, is an interview which also helpfully traces the history of *Perform or Else*.

The following section comprises four full-length articles from emerging scholars which apply McKenzie's work in various contexts. We point to the 'emergent' status of these scholars deliberately. Their work is rich and nuanced, and collectively they illustrate the

future of performance studies. Their concerns span integrating digital technologies into performance, applying artificial intelligence, and investigating the interface of performance practices and community building.

The first of these four articles is Ioana Jucan's "Digitally Live: Performative Presence in Times of COVID-19." Jucan responds to McKenzie's observation of the "profound transformation of performative presence" produced through "the incorporation of media technologies into live performance and vice versa" and the "hypermediation of social production via computer and information networks" (McKenzie 2001, 42). She playfully takes up the challenge of "performing the role of an artist-researcher from the future, not as someone who has some kind of special insight or intuition, but as someone who observes and participates in the future that is already present" (24). As such, Jucan's article helpfully leads us from where McKenzie left off until now. Her article comprises two main parts. Returning to the preoccupation in performance studies with "liveness," Jucan draws on a wide range of theories of media to examine how Covid has changed our understanding of "performative presence." She trains her attention on online engagement platforms and the integration during the pandemic of the internet into our work and social lives. Secondly, she discusses her artistic research project, *Left and Right, Or Being Who/Where You Are*, an online devised performance that she co-created and directed. Her reflection offers a detailed illustration of digital liveness, its challenges and possibilities. In talking through both the dramaturgical and technical elements of the work, Jucan's discussion is a clear case study of new media dramaturgy viewed through the lens of McKenzie's performance stratum.

Another form of new media dramaturgy is interrogated in Ali Na's paper, "The Racial Haptics of ASMR: @breadfaceblog and the Curation of Instagram." Na explores the intersections between social media content creation, artistic institutional curation, and the unlikely performance art of smashing one's face into different kinds of bread with a sensitive microphone. Bearing in mind that "it is impossible to disassociate the affective force of the visuality of Bread Face from race" (57) (and sexuality), Na coins the term "racial haptics" to explain the multi-sensorial intimacies and politics of this phenomenon. She also implores us to "take seriously the proliferation of important and talented artists working through digital platforms like Instagram" (63) and, like Bread Face, take that less conventional path into the corporate art world. The paper thus extends McKenzie's deliberations on media and mediated performance and accepts his challenge of linking "the performance of artists and activists with those of workers and executives, as well as computers and missile systems" (2001, 3).

Shuntaro Yoshida and Natsumi Fukasawa's essay, "How Artificial Intelligence Can Shape Choreography: The Significance of Techno-Performance," further presses how McKenzie's insights in *Perform or Else* might be read in the present. Their article focuses on *Beethoven Complex* (2020), an online live-streamed dance performance choreographed by the authors at The Tokyo University of the Arts Center of Innovation (COI). The work used an automatic music composition system that incorporated AI, and this is the focus of the authors' discussion. Their analysis hinges on tensions within the creative process, particularly between artistic collaborators and AI engineers. The authors point to McKenzie's observation in *Perform or Else* that "techno-performance foregrounds the 'contradictory demand' technology makes on performing agents and confronts the demand with a 'trade-off' involving different criteria of effectiveness" (McKenzie 2001, 97). The

article, therefore, explores not so much the spectre of AI augmenting human performance as the complicated relationships between *humans* as they negotiate this technology.

Esther Neff's "Theatrical Agencies and Performance Principles: *MARSH* (Materialising & Activating Radical Social Habitus)" returns us to the analogue. As with Jucan, Yoshida, and Fukasawa's contributions, Neff's article intertwines theorisation with anecdotal reflection in ways that thicken and enrich the analysis. Her focus is on a participatory social project that she helped initiate and has long been involved in. Named MARSH, she writes, "Our intentions were to stage a 'biocultural laboratory' in order to test and practice agencies, particularly through cooperative labour organising, prefiguration of grassroots food-land-body relations, and deliberative, communicative democratic processes" (89). In reflecting on the various iterations of this ongoing project, Neff is most interested in the intersections of agency and performativity and, indeed, in challenging the political capital we usually associate with agency. Drawing on McKenzie, she writes that "he extends an invitation to consider how agentic capacities are designed through *ways of seeing and situating* (theorising, theatricalising) 'performance' and 'performativity,' as *principlings* which themselves 'do things'" (90). Neff leads us towards the conceptualisation of what she calls "theatrical agency," which she describes as a specific form of embodied work that has political effects. From this, she offers hope, writing: "What 'else' can be performed agentially through theatrical methods, frames, and strategies? Senses of potential alternatives—"elsenesses" say—are materialised through, as McKenzie proposes, perpetual liminautic passage, de- and re-territorialisation, movement between performance studies and prefigurative cooperative organising, and use of already-interdisciplinary modes of theatrical theory and theatre practice" (105). Neff's article is a deeply thoughtful contribution which invites us, in turn, to think deeply about the relationship between performativity, power and the values that so richly infuse MARSH itself: reciprocity, collectivity, equity, and dignity.

From the four full articles that follow the introductory section of the issue, we move to two full interviews, a response to the editorial interview with McKenzie and a transcription of a recent Q & A session between Sara Baranzoni and Paolo Vignola.

"There are autobiographical aspects encrypted [in *Perform or Else*] which perhaps no one will find, not even myself" (111), states McKenzie in his interview with Tim Edkins. Yet in this interview, McKenzie, with the aid of Edkins, tries his best to tease out and untangle the autobiographical threads which led to the creation of *Perform or Else* and the concepts within, including a fateful meeting with Jacques Derrida during the philosopher and proto-*performancer's* visit to the University of Florida in the early nineties. Along the way, with reflexive awareness, they also rehearse the various imperatives to perform in performance studies and academia.

McKenzie elaborates on these various imperatives in his interview with the editors of this volume: Cheng Nien Yuan, Chris Hay, and Emma Willis. As we critique this imperative (perhaps especially when we critique it), we engage in it. "It's pharmaka, medicine/poison, all the way down, up, and sideways—and chance and fate play roles in who and what lives on, how lifedeath unfolds" (128). Life and death, literally speaking: McKenzie outlines here his most significant project since *Perform or Else*. Defying the university's siloed and static lecture machine, McKenzie created the StudioLab approach, which "works transversally to experiment with para- and post-disciplinary learning" (129). Students

collaborate with NGOs and NPOs on projects and crises surrounding human rights, environmental and land rights, gender and violence and public health, engaging in critical design thinking. This is the legacy McKenzie hopes to leave for future generations, a mission to “*let the kids reign by any media necessary*” (145).

In “The Joys of Jon McK?#\$&!: Reading McKenzie’s *Perform or Else* After Laurie Anderson,” Ed Scheer provides a brief response to the editorial interview with Jon McKenzie. This is followed by “Doing Things With Worlds: Philosophy Becomes Cosmography,” which captures answers to comments and questions posed by Sara Baranzoni, Paolo Vignola and audience members following Jon McKenzie’s plenary multimedia presentation, “Cosmography, Storytelling, and Performance Design Thinking,” given at Cumulus Virtual Guayaquil: Arts imagining communities to come. Cumulus Association of Art and Design Education and Research, Universidad de las Artes del Ecuador (UArtes), 2021 (<https://vimeo.com/662662645>).

The issue closes with two further sections. The first comprises four articles, two short and two long, that offer a range of varying disciplinary perspectives on McKenzie’s work. We are delighted to include these articles as a representation of the reach of McKenzie’s work.

Helen Dickinson specialises in public service research and her article, “Applying *Perform or Else* in the Public Management Field,” provides an overview of the impact of McKenzie’s book on her research. In particular, she unpacks how McKenzie’s “performance management” paradigm helps inform a critique of certain contemporary ‘orthodoxies’ of public management (an analysis she offers in-depth in her monograph, *Performing Governance*, published in 2014). She also considers how McKenzie’s discussion of techno-performance might bear on the development of new caring technologies. She concludes by urging “a broader application of the insights provided by *Perform or Else* to the public management field” (163).

Fabian Muniesa’s research specialises in the study of science and technology studies, economic sociology, organisation studies and anthropology. In 2014 he published *The Provoked Economy: Economic Reality and the Performative Turn*, which, similarly to Dickinson, engages McKenzie’s work. In his contribution, “Paranoiac-critical Performance,” Muniesa begins with the provocation—“The performance paradigm is already indelibly marked with a promise of delirium” (166)—and proceeds to introduce a line of thought that moves from Salvador Dali’s “paranoiac-critical method,” to Pierre Klossowski’s “science of stereotypes,” to Felix Guattari’s “schizoanalysis.” The paranoiac-critical method, as Muniesa frames it, provides a way of both perceiving and resisting the paranoia and delirium of our present context; he writes, for example, that “the QAnon syndrome offers indeed quite a testbed for an exploration of the ‘paranoiac-critical’ in the performance paradigm” (168). As with Dickinson, Muniesa underlines the value of McKenzie’s text in the present moment, writing that “Now that paranoia seems to be—again—on the rise, it may be appropriate to situate it within the project of the performance paradigm” (168).

Anna Sigridur Islind’s article also focuses on the relational, personal and intimate implications of McKenzie’s theorisations of performance. In “Co-Design as a Driver of Change”, Islind brings together different moments of McKenzie’s scholarship to consider what kind(s) of change participation in co-design processes can offer in healthcare settings.

Isind's project begins from the view on socio-technical systems that McKenzie outlined in *Perform or Else*, which "broadens the concept of performance to include the operations of technical systems" and "focuses on the interface of social and technological performances" (2001, 72). Ultimately, Isind traverses territory informed by McKenzie's later work on critical design, where he encourages would-be cosmographers to become "co-designers of worlds through community engagement, such as participatory research, citizen science, and public humanities" (2019, 30).

In his contribution to the issue, music scholar Anthony Gritten expands the McKenzian universe to the world of notated Western classical music in a fascinating short essay that explores the Stravinsky performer's habitus from discipline to performance. Ultimately Gritten reframes the "challenge" in *Perform or Else* to the more open-ended performative of the "dare" (197). How does the performer under the weight of Stravinskian pedagogy finally dare to perform, to ripen in the process of performance?

The issue closes with two artistic contributions: Misko Suvaković's diagrammatic essay, "Diagrams/Virus : War : Climate and Performance/Media Research," and Sergej Pristas's poem, "Turn or Else." Following McKenzie's lead in his diagrammatic practices (see, for example, his 2015 essay, "Stratification and Diagrammatic Storytelling: An Encounter with 'Under the Dome,'" Suvaković's approach is highly graphic. He explains: "Why did I choose a diagrammatic format for discussing Jon's theoretical propositions? Because he uses the diagram as a *vehicle* for a radical critique and self-criticism of thinking about the relations of the performative event, the form of life (the living as a medium) and the productive powers of storytelling in quite different regimes of technology, politics and mediation" (199). And closing the issue, Pristas's "Turn or Else" provokes us, as the author writes, to imagine a world that might be 'otherwise': "Because if we can imagine it, we might be able to do something" (222).

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