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Performance, Technology, Intimacy

In December 2015, the *Guardian* published an article titled "Sex, Love and Robots: Is This the End of Intimacy?" In it, author Eva Wiseman provides an overview of the field of "teledildonics," defined as "smart sex toys connected to the internet." While teledildonics "started life as vibrators that could be operated remotely," the category has now expanded to include a "new generation of robotic sex dolls." Wiseman introduces several of these, including RealDoll, Pepper, and Roxxxy as well as a "chatbot" named "Do-Much-More," described as the offspring of "Do-A-Lot," and a "sociobot" who is, rather unusually, unnamed. The discussion of these operational systems soon segues into a conversation about cultural representations, including the television series *The Bionic Woman* (1976–78) and *Futurama* (1999–2013), specifically the episode "I Dated a Robot" (2001). Then there are the films: *Lars and the Real Girl* (2007), in which Lars enjoys the companionship of a RealDoll named Bianca; *Her* (2013), in which Theodore Twombly falls in love with his phone's operating system as personified by the voice of Samantha; and *Ex Machina* (2015) where humanoid robot Ava seduces and murders not once but twice. (If Pepper and Roxxxy didn't alert you to the problematic operations of gender in this domain, then Ava, Bianca, and Samantha surely will!) Finally, Wiseman mentions the play *The Nether*, by American writer Jennifer Haley who employs the genre of the police procedural in order to explore a future where people abandon real life to spend most of their time in an online world called The Hideaway. Like *Westworld*, the new HBO television series based on the 1973 film by the same name, The Hideaway is both futuristic and anachronistic: virtual, violent, and Victorian.

Yet perhaps the most startling moment in the article comes when Wiseman meets a robot named Molly, who combines the operational and representational. Instead of a chest, she has a tablet that displays photographs, which then prompt her to ask: "Do you remember Paris?" In response, Wiseman writes: "In that echoing space I found myself suddenly breathless." If ever a scene crystallised an issue's concerns, this might be it for here is a performance—in the sense that the encounter is scripted and repeatable and yet also revisable—that neither represents nor reproduces but rather produces *tout court* an affective experience with technology. Eva (whose name suddenly sounds like all those other objects) and Molly sit in silence. For the former, that silence seems stunned or awkward: what starts in the spirit of play, even jest, produces a moment of surprising intimacy, intensity and then anxiety. For the latter, by contrast, that same silence might be experienced as companionable or, more likely, simply as data: a pause is a time code,

a facial expression information, and both have to be sent back to the server. This, of course, is the alchemy of performance, which is both the thing itself—object, affect, agent—and its representation, and it is this duality that lies at the heart of the essays in this issue.

This issue of *Performance Paradigm*—our twelfth—attends to love, information, and performance in all of their individual and intertwined complexity. It opens with an article by one of the leading thinkers and practitioners in the field—Johannes Birringer. In "Kimospheres, or Shamans in the Blind Country," Birringer provides a detailed account of some of his most recent experiments in creating what he and his team call, and conceptualise as, "metakimospheres." Initially, I misread this neologism as "metakinospheres," mistaking the "m" for an "n." In doing so, I imagined variously: a mobile space that enveloped another space (emphasis on "meta"); an immersive cinema about cinema (emphasis on "kino"); and an architectural installation that both manipulated and revealed the materiality of light, like the structures by American artist James Turrell (emphasis on "sphere"). However, as evocative as these scenes might be, to misread the "m" is to miss out on something so subtle as to be almost invisible—an atmosphere.

If an atmosphere is, according to Kathleen Stewart, "a force field in which people find themselves … a capacity to affect and to be affected that pushes a present into a composition, an expressivity, the sense of potentiality and event," then a metakimosphere is one conceived, designed and delivered aesthetically (2011: 452). For Birringer, metakimospheres are "kinetic atmospheres or environments staged for visitors that pass through them, listen to them and feel them, unconsciously, attentively, distractedly, blindly" (8). Importantly, performers are also embedded in metakimospheres and while they are often "invisible … their incubating presence is [always] felt" (8). To observe an atmosphere is hard and to create one even harder; to do both at the same time—observe one's creation and craft one's observations—is nigh on impossible but Birringer pulls it off. Reading his essay, I was reminded of Stewart's words:

> attending to atmospheric attunements and trying to figure out their significance incites forms of writing and critique that detour into descriptive eddies and attach to trajectories. This is writing and theorizing that tries to stick with something becoming atmospheric, to itself resonate or tweak the force of material-sensory somethings forming up. … Attending to atmospheric attunements means … chronicling how incommensurate elements hang together in a scene that bodies labor to be in or to get through. In the expressivity of something coming into existence, bodies labor to literally fall into step with the pacing, the habits, the lines of attachment, the responsibilities shouldered, the sentience, of a worlding. (2011: 452)

Remarkably, Birringer's essay conjures all of these—bodies, labours, worlds—and more.

The second and third articles, by Paul Rae and Eddie Paterson respectively, take up the issue of theatre, performance and data. Data, big and small, are at the centre of many current debates in the humanities and social sciences but the fields of theatre and performance studies have had, as yet, surprisingly little to say. In his article, "Theatre/Data: Cate Blanchett's Manifesto of Futurist Finance," Rae proposes two approaches to this topic: one that "register[s] where and how data … feature within theatre, albeit in ways that promise to change what we understand theatre to be"; and another that employs "performance as a resource for thinking through the apparently novel questions big data raise about self-identity, prediction, social behaviour, sentiment monitoring and so on" (34). It is the difference between performance as object and performance as optic, if you will. In this particular issue, Paterson pursues the former and Rae the latter. Or as Rae puts it, he wants to investigate "what can be gained by watching … film and thinking theatre" (37).

The particular film that Rae focuses on is one of the thirteen that comprise Julian Rosefeldt's work *Manifesto* (2015), recently seen at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image in Melbourne and the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney. Rae focuses on the second film, which features a bewigged Cate Blanchett mouthing Modernist manifestos while trading commodities, in order to examine "theatrical performance and financial practice … and the relations between them" (34). Initially, these relations seem both obvious and oppositional. Obvious, because finance has always involved performance: think of the bell that opens the stock exchange, the yell that confirms the sale, and the exaggerated slump of the trader who embodies the plummeting Dow Jones, Nasdaq or S&P500. Oppositional, because performance has so often conceived of itself in contradistinction to the market, economy, and especially the market economy. (Think of Peggy Phelan, for instance, who writes: "[p]erformance clogs the smooth machinery of reproductive representation necessary to the circulation of capital. … Performance resists the balanced circulations of finance. It saves nothing; it only spends" [1993: 149].) Slowly, however, Rae's article brings something far more subtle and profound to the reader's attention. Through his engagement with the sociological literature on trading, he identifies unsettling affinities between theatrical performance and finance: their conceptions of presence, time, and attention among them. If data haven't already "change[d] what [you] understand theatre to be," then Rae's article will.

Paterson, in "Bodies of Data: Informatics in Contemporary Performance," focuses on the politics and performance of the census. International readers may not realise that Australia conducted its first online census in August 2016, with disastrous results. In the two years prior, elements of the survey were jettisoned or reduced due to budget cuts; in the two weeks prior, it became clear that supposedly anonymised data could be easily reidentified. Then, on the night itself, the website crashed, probably because of cyberattacks but possibly because it was so poorly tested. Either way, the census had been compromised and the population will suffer as a result, as public servants design and implement policy with incomplete information. His article was written well before this misadventure, but it nonetheless attends to many of the same issues the census debacle raised: when, where, why and how data are captured; what data omit, obscure

or otherwise overlook; and how the surveyed can subvert the survey, if indeed we can. Through his comparison of two recent productions—Rimini Protokoll's *100% Melbourne* (2012) and rawcus's *Catalogue* (2015)—theatre emerges an ideologically neutral machine when it comes to data and informatics. For while *100% Melbourne* inadvertently reproduces the biases and absences of the data it supposedly seeks to embody and examine, *Catalogue* effectively points to the people, contexts and affects that escape data. This comparative analysis also expands the emerging vocabulary around the drama of data: what Annie Dorsen calls "algorithmic theatre" and the "dramaturgy of algorithms" (2015: 133); what the Call for Papers named "theatres of seriality and sequence"; and what Paterson calls the aesthetics of the grid, the box, and the Petri dish.

The phrase "algorithmic theatre" also came to mind when I first read Caryl Churchill's play *Love and Information*—the focus of Helena Grehan's paper. Churchill's instructions that "sections should be played in the order given but the scenes can be played in any order within each section" reminded me of the restricted freedoms of search engines, which can supposedly show me anything in any order (scenes) except that my own search history, and that of others, provides the search with strict parameters (sections). In her previous work, including her important book *Performance, Ethics and Spectatorship in a Global Age* (2009), Grehan has argued that performance does much of its work in the productive pause and the ambivalent aftermath. Here, she is surprised to find herself affected by a work that streams past in a series of micro-scenes between characters that rarely, if ever, re-appear. In a culture beset by anxieties about attention—whether economies of or deficit disorders in—*Love and Information* seems to restage these anxieties rather than addressing them. Whereas some performances create a space for contemplation, *Love and Information* asks the spectator to create this space for herself, afterwards. Beyond that, however, she argues that Churchill's play demands a radical reconception of the relation between speed and ethics. Slowness and ethics are often conflated, think of the slow food movement for instance, but what might an ethics of speed look like on stage and how might we recognise it as such? Perhaps *Love and Information* provides an important clue.

While *Love and Information* is implicitly entangled with social media, it is not literally so. Enter Misha Myers, Dane Watkins and Richard Sobey with their paper, "Conversive Theatres: Performance with/in Social Media." This article focuses on two performances that have been "intentionally scripted and staged within and for a social network" (84). The first is the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Such Tweet Sorrow*, a version of *Romeo and Juliet* performed on and through Twitter; the second is WildWorks's performance *100: The Day Our World Changed*, described as "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" (92). This surprising comparison yields a range of insights into the problems and possibilities of social media and theatre.

This issue also includes a bumper crop of book reviews, thanks to our book reviews editor Emma Willis. These include not one but three reviews of dance books: Katherine

Profeta's monograph *Dramaturgy in Motion: At Work on Dance and Movement Performance* (2015); Meredith Morse's monograph *Soft is Fast: Simone Forti in the 1960s and After* (2016); and Erin Brannigan and Virginia Baxter's edited book *Bodies of Thought: Twelve Australian Choreographers* (2014). We also have reviews of two books that employ performance as optic in order to look at "objects" that might typically be claimed by cultural and media studies. The first is Bree Hadley's wide-ranging book *Disability, Public Space Performance and Spectatorship* (2014), which includes performances in galleries and malls as well as on sidewalks, boardwalks, television and online. The second is Bryoni Trezise's innovative *Performing Feeling in Cultures of Memory* (2014), which considers performances in theme parks, on television and on stage as part of a broader memorial culture. It is a work that reminds us of the ways in which affect can operate within the aesthetic realm to, as Trezise lucidly explains: 'enliven our minds, senses and selves to other ways of doing, thinking, feeling and being' (157).

In John Potts' slim volume *The New Time and Space* readers are entreated to think about time and space in a range of aesthetic and critical contexts. Questions of duration, public and private space, network time, digital distribution and notions of displacement, amongst others, are covered through a focus on works of art, performance and photography as Potts draws on a wide range of examples to make his arguments about, as Prudence Gibson explains 'the aggregated ways that human relationships with technology and media have altered the ontology of living in the anthropocentric world' (122). Last but not least, there is a review of Helena Grehan and Edward Scheer's book *William Yang: Stories of Love and Death* (2016). Yang started his performance career in the late 1980s with a series of modestly staged slide shows. He would stand on stage—stock still—and slowly talk his way through a carousel of slides. The results were mesmerising, as he played with cultural stereotypes of shyness and inscrutability while at the same time divulging intimate stories about life in Sydney during the HIV epidemic. These days, of course, he posts his photos on Facebook, recombining performance, intimacy and technology yet again.

Please enjoy the issue, which was initiated by Anna Teresa Scheer. She was, unfortunately, unable to bring the issue to completion due to illness. We wish her well in her recovery. This issue is also Helena Grehan's last as Chief Editor. During Grehan's time at the helm, she has produced a remarkable series of issues, covering a range of topics from "The End of Ethics? Performance, Politics and War" (2007), through "Images of Happiness" (2011), to "Performances of Resistance/Resisting Performance" (2014). She has also guided multiple guest editors, including me and Bryoni Trezise, through their own issues as well. *Performance Paradigm*, and indeed performance studies more generally, owes Grehan a huge debt. From 2017, I will serve as Chief Editor and am thrilled that Emma Willis will be joining me as Deputy Editor. We hope to expand our team as well as our production schedule in the coming months, so please keep your eyes peeled and your ears pricked for more news on that front. In the meantime, please consider submitting a proposal for our next issue on "Performance, Choreography, and the Gallery."

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