

## A Look at Both Sites: Foreword

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**I:** Ever since Aristotle relegated spectacle and its mechanics to the place of least significance among the constituent elements of the tragic experience, the tension between technology and drama/theatre has continued unabated. Either as part of drama's thematics or as a component of its stage (re)presentations, it has proven throughout the ages to be both a source of anxiety for many playwrights and a source of inspiration for an equally large number of practitioners. In fact it could be argued that there has never been a moment in theatre history when the problematics of this *liaison dangereuse* has not been an issue. We remember Aristophanes' beetle contraption in *Peace*, devised to help Trygeos climb Mount Olympus – the equivalent of, say, a spaceship in modern fiction stories. Before him, of course, Euripides' *deus ex machina* had been introduced as a crucial determinant not only of the problem of the story's resolution but also of the level of stage illusion. There is also ample evidence of this dialogue among the producers of the Romans' grand and complex spectacles, the elaborate theatrical entertainment brought to England by James I with the court spectacles, the Masques of court designer Inigo Jones and his collaborator playwright Ben Jonson, to give some early examples, examples which multiply dramatically as science/technology approached the landmark shifts marked by the advent of industrialization, modernity and the historical avant-garde.

In the last hundred years, this relationship between theatre and technology has taken on new and radical dimensions. Among those *fin-de-siècle* and early-20th-century artists who tackled the problematics of this relationship, could be included naturalists and realists like Emile Zola and Henrik Ibsen, writers of spectacular melodramas like Dion Boucicault and Kotzabue, visionaries like Richard Wagner and his *Gesamtkunstwerk*, expressionists like Georg Kaiser – see his *Gas I* (1918) and *Gas II* (1920) –, Ernst Toller and his major work *Man and the Masses* (1921) and Karel Capek and his most celebrated play *R. U. R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)*, directors like André Antoine and his practical innovations in productions like *The Butchers* (1888), Meyerhold and Reinhardt, and designers like Gordon Craig, Adolphe Appia, Prampolini, Robert Edmond Jones, and the Russian constructivists.

As we enter the second half of the 20th century, examples proliferate still further, first with the plays of Samuel Beckett (*Quad*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Eh Joe*,

among others), to be followed by an inflow of “postmodern” works like Snoo Wilson’s *Darwin’s Flood*, that introduces Nietzsche, Jesus Christ and Darwin to discuss the human evolution in terms of advances in philosophy and technology, Manjula Padmanabhan’s *Harvest*—Onassi’s Drama Competition First Prize Winner in 1997—that focuses on the trade of body parts, Patrick Marber’s box-office hit *Closer* that examines the impact of internet technology on human affairs, Arthur Kopit’s *Y2K*, a comment on the ever-increasing presence of computerized technology in human life, and Juliana Francis’ use of multi-media technology for the needs of her solo performance in *GO, GO, GO*. From the Greek repertory we could mention Stelios Lytras’ *E Juliet ton Macintosh* (*Juliet of Macintosh* 1999) and Pavlos Matesis’ *Biochemia* (*Biochemistry* 1970, revised version 1997), among other examples that mingle benevolent representations of science and technology with darker representations of doom, catastrophe, decay and desperation.

While many contemporary dramatists observe with a range of moods, the material and ethical changes brought to people’s lives through rapid advances in applied science and technology, many practitioners are turning increasingly to the facilities and potential advantages of the new technologies in an attempt to explore new notions and forms of representation, subjectivity, mediation, race, gender, morality, identity. As Lance Gharavi argues in his essay in this volume, a prominent feature of present theatre is the computer-assisted work which has opened up, a broader “cyber vista,” a landscape to host problematics of body (re)presentation, of power, presence and absence. Among the numerous names that could be mentioned here are: George Coates’ Performance works (*The Way of How* 1981, *Are/Are* 1982, *Rare Area* 1985, *Invisible Site* 1991), the Gertrude Stein Repertory Theatre, David Saltz’s Interactive Performance Laboratory (with productions like *Hair*, *Kaspar*, *The Tempest*), and the Institute for the Exploration of Virtual Realities (commonly known as i.e.VR), the visceral Fura dels Baus from Spain (*Accions* 1983, *Suz/o/Suz* 1985, *Manes* 1996, *F@ust versio 3.0* 1998), the Italian Societas Raffaello Sanzio (*Iconoclastia*, *Santa Sofia Khmer Theatre*, *Kaput Necropolis*, *Genesi*, *Oresteia*), the British Théâtre de Complicité (*Mnemonic*), Robert Wilson (*CIVIL warS* 1984), Robert Lepage (*Needles and Opium* 1992), and Jan Fabre (*The Power of Theatrical Madness* 1986).

Last but not least are numerous dancers, choreographers and solo performers who focus on performance design inside intelligent systems operated by the computer, using choreographic gesture as a control component for music and video image processing. This category of theatre-based mixed-media and performance spectacle artists will undoubtedly keep growing since technology, as all contributors to this volume seem to agree, will continue increasing its impact upon people’s lives.

Whether this will finally prove a blessing or a curse remains to be seen, as does the thwarted question of whether we will one day go too far and commit hubris (how far is too far). For the time being what matters most is the significance and impact of this plunge into the darker corners, the dangers of this ter-

ritory, with all that it throws up about human beings, human interaction, human pleasure and pain – in short, human nature and its (im)possibilities.

**II:** When we decided to propose this special issue to *Gamma's* Editorial Board, the site of cultural production where the issue belonged was indeed impressive both practically and theoretically. Some of the leading journals in the field of Theatre Studies had already run special issues (see *Theatre Journal*, for example, *Performing Arts Journal*, *The Drama Review*), or extensively published relevant articles (see *Theatreforum*, *Theatre Topics* and *New Theatre Quarterly*). The topic, however, is far from exhausted. Interest in technology, as briefly argued above, has always been a strong and inseparable part of theatre's historical development. What makes our era different is that at no other time in the past has there been such a surge of plays and theatre events exploring the potential of scientific discoveries and in their own way subscribing to the prevailing idea that within the culture of late capitalism there is no-body (or text) that does not "suffer" the inscriptions of technology.

As is increasingly recognized in many academic fields today, technology has developed into the latest "-centrism" of social and behavioral discourse, to replace all traditional centrifugal narratives coming from the Court, the Church, the Military etc. Technology's range is so vast that it seems to engulf everything. Wittgenstein's claim that there is nothing outside language, a claim endorsed by post-structuralists such as Lacan, Foucault and Derrida, among others, seems recently to have been challenged by the claim that there is nothing outside technology. Technology has developed into a force that impinges upon and inscribes all available surfaces and prescribes possible individual and/or collective performances. Everything, from consumer goods to political discourse, is being mediated and penetrated to its core by technology's incursions. In producing ideology it produces subjectivities, kinesic and body codes, models to imitate, limits and (im)possibilities. In other words, it produces its own *gestus*, its own theatricality, if by theatricality we mean a form of performativity which employs signs of signs. It produces the Kaspars of the New Age, those with the illusion that they can be authentic, only to find in the end that they can simply mimic the dictates of their indoctrinators.

From the beginning the intention of Elizabeth Sakellaridou and myself has been to bring together a collection of essays to speak across the languages of theatre scholars and practitioners, to speak of dramatic (mis)representations of science/technology in present-day life, of ethical issues arising from the uninhibited use of science/technology, of science dystopias and technophobias, of the theatrical body as cyborg, of science and the disabled body, of science and stage brutality, of performance documentation (video), of digital scenography, televisual *mise-en-scène* and hypertextual-interactive access and of their consequences for the art of representation. In short, our interest has been in essays that provide models for thinking about new theatre(s) critically and theoretically, models to make sense of things at an historical moment when the old security

provided by centres, traditional frames and grand narratives is rapidly disappearing to give way to a series of scientific discoveries and technological inventions that have unlocked some of the deepest secrets of life and creation and which offer, with all its ambivalence, the prospect of seemingly limitless control over communication and genetic engineering.

The present selection of essays illustrates many major issues, concerns and unresolved questions that characterize this uneasy convergence of theatre and technology. Some of the essays concentrate more on technical and performance matters, others have a more textual emphasis; all, however, seek to develop some provocative line of argument regarding thematic, political, sexual, and aesthetic formations (and transformations) of contemporary drama and performance. One of their strongest arguments concerns contemporary drama's inter-sections with other discourses (media, cultural and gender studies, postmodern theory, medicine).

Those essays that concentrate more on the practical uses of technology (mainly Birringer, Gharavi, and to a lesser extent Causey and Case), express a kind of urgency, a desire to make visual technology matter in the theatre and dance, to allow it to change things. In their own way they ask readers to reconsider assumptions about theatre studies and theatre practice today. Others are more reserved as to the value of technology (Puchner), claiming that it might be temporarily exciting or impressive but in the long run it will turn out to be ultimately unsatisfying, if employed at the level of mere "effect."

The second group includes essays that concentrate more on the plays/playwrights themselves (Palmer, Sakellaridou, Shepherd-Barr, Komporal, Berninger, Grammatas). These authors discuss the way(s) dramatists respond to the presence of technology in our life, their reservations (their technophobia), how they dramatize (or criticize) technology's power in shaping bodies, identities, genetics, behavioral patterns. It is probably no surprise that most of the papers turn to contemporary authors (Wertenbaker, Frayn, Brenton, Ravenhill, Luckham, Hwang, Lytras, Matesis) in an attempt to show the extent to which technology has penetrated everyday life.

**III: Johannes Birringer** opens this special issue with his essay "Dance and Interactivity" where he claims that at the turn of the century, practitioners in the performing arts are increasingly turning to new conceptual models of performance and interactive environments derived from the computer's information processing capabilities and the internet's global reach. After a brief description of the trajectory of dance in its relationship to media, his essay examines some of the main principles of contemporary "performance design": interactivity, programming and digital processing, new spatial and architectural concepts for the creation of responsive or immersive environments, navigational interfaces, and networked or distributed choreography in telepresence. Drawing on examples from the international field of digital performance art and examining some of the software applications currently in use, Birringer's paper insists on

the corporeal and multisensory dimensions of new dance, all the while redefining choreography as a collaborative transdisciplinary process.

**Sue-Ellen Case's** article "Performing the Cyberbody on the Transnational Stage" explores the uses of gender and sexuality in the formation of a new transnational discourse. Case argues that this discourse has been shaped by the assignment of sexual practices to the categories of licit and illicit within nation-building operations; new transnational re-territorialization through tropes of gender and sex, and the creation of an on-line interface through websites and chatrooms that operate through simulations of gender and sexuality. The article traces the formation of the nation-building discourse in the two Germanies and Taiwan, which regarded homosexuality as allied with either a capitalist decadence or communist threat. It then moves to a consideration of terminology specific to virtual environments, websites dedicated to transgender identifications, and gendered representations of the world wide web in order to illustrate how virtual/transnational operations signify their existence through corporeal referents.

**Matthew Causey** in his "Aesthetics of Disappearance and the Politics of Visibility in the Performance of Technology" attempts to critique the tendency of some twentieth-century theatre and performance artists (from the body art of the 1970s to the identity performance of the 1980s and '90s) to disregard the challenges of mediatized and digital culture by foregrounding identity and concretizing subject positions through the use of what Spivak calls "strategic essentialism." The struggle for visibility by disenfranchised subjects, Causey claims, continues to be an important use value of performance. Yet, a reification of the fictions of an essentialized identity is, in Causey's view, an inappropriate response to the bio-politics of digital cultures for all that virtual, televisual, and mediated technologies challenge the subject to confront a troubling dis-empowerment. Causey's solution to this dilemma is to suggest that technological and digital stages offer a laboratory for the exploration of the construction of identity in digital cultures while working through the problematic politics of visibility (the known) by playing through the aesthetics of disappearance (the unknown). Drawing upon an appropriate bricolage of dramatic, theoretical and performative examples, including Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, Beckett's *Film*, Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysterical Theatre, and Castellucci's *Societas Raffaello Sanzio*, Causey demonstrates the problem of misusing strategic essentialism in the performance of identity while pointing toward various useful alternatives of current philosophical and technological/new media stagings.

**Lance Gharavi** in his "Backwards and Forwards: Regression and Progression in the Production Work of i.e.VR," argues that despite the explosive increase in the use, relevancy, and sophistication of computer technology in the 1990s, the practice of theatre remained in that decade largely untouched by the "e-revolution." Yet throughout that decade a number of organizations sought to experiment with the application of the tools of new media to live performance. The Institute for the Exploration of Virtual Realities (i.e.VR) at the U-



niversity of Kansas, is one of them. Though their productions typically incorporate a variety of media, Charavi argues, i.e. VR favors the use of virtual reality for the way its real-time aspect mirrors the liveness of theatre. With its 1998 production of David Fraser's *Tesla Electric*, i.e. VR stepped away from using virtual reality as its primary scenic medium in order to experiment with different means of producing higher quality graphics. The article discusses this production, chronicles i.e. VR's eventual return to the use of real-time virtual reality in 1999, and examines the collisions and collusions inherent in the creation of this techno/human form of hybrid performance.

**Walter Puchner's** paper "Iconic Body, Living Body: Reflections on the Application of Technology to Contemporary Theatre" offers a survey of the field in question and provides a comprehensive view of its varied trajectory. Puchner writes of the shift from logos to soma that occurred at the turn of the 20th century that gradually led to new forms of communication no longer attached to the traditional line of comprehension-identification-communion, but to a new and wider "shared field" between the spectators' bodies, those of the actors and a common lived aesthetic experience. According to the writer, this quality—presence and communication/interaction of real living bodies—is also that quality that separates theatre from the mass media, virtual reality, cyber space, etc. Thus, the more technology invades the territory, the more the dynamic of theatre will be eroded.

The second group of essays begins with a discussion of *After Darwin* by **Mark Berninger** in his "Crucible of Two Cultures: Timberlake Wertenbaker's *After Darwin* and Science in Recent British Drama." Berninger argues that science has usually been either conspicuously absent from the stage or it has been the target of a moralizing attack based on the warning against the dangers of uncritical and uncontrolled scientific research. In recent years, however, a series of new plays, including Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* and Michael Frayn's *Copenhagen*, have ventured a different approach to the inclusion of science in drama. Based on the postmodern connection between science, history, and literature, all of which are regarded as sharing common narrative strategies, these new plays use the dramatic form of the history play in combination with postmodern theatricality to examine the interrelatedness of science and drama. Berninger's article examines Timberlake Wertenbaker's *After Darwin* as an example of how new plays use the "door that has cracked open [...] due to the writings of Lyotard, Kuhn, White and others," and go beyond a confrontation of the "two separated cultures," literature and science, by using scientific thoughts as complex metaphors for dramatic and historic concerns. In "connecting the two cultures they make drama truly a 'crucible of cultures'."

In his informative article "Oh! What a Wonderful World! Technology as Panacea and Disaster in Twentieth-Century Greek Drama," **Thodoros Grammatas** provides an insightful reading of plays that show the trajectory of modern Greek theatre's encounter with technology. He begins with Greek modernity and writers like Nikos Kazantzakis, Pantelis Horn and Elias Voutieridis, then

he moves on to the years right after the Second World War and Alexis Damianos' play *We'll Reap the Fields in the Summer*, and closes with examples from Greek postmodernity.

For all the concentration on Greek drama, Grammatas' reading raises a fundamental question that brings the issue full circle: Is technology panacea or nightmare? For most Greek playwrights, Grammatas claims, technology has remained pretty much at the margins of their discourse and has rarely become part of their main concerns. Whenever it has, it has mostly been depicted in negative colors.

**Jozefina Komporaly** in "De-sexing the Maternal: Reproductive Technologies and Medical Authority in Contemporary British Women's Drama," investigates approaches to the technologization of motherhood as examined in contemporary British women's drama. Focusing on the surveillance exercised by the medical profession, Komporaly scrutinizes ways in which women are objectified and eliminated from discourse. She claims that reproductive technology is a potentially liberating and addictive phenomenon that offers new avenues for exploring sexual and maternal identity whilst also perpetuating the objectification and essentialization of women. Addressing a post-modern agenda of identity politics, Claire Luckham's *The Choice* (1992) and Timberlake Wertenbaker's *The Break of Day* (1995) set out patient-consultant oppositions, but while Luckham centres on an already-existing pregnancy, Wertenbaker examines the obsession with having a baby in conditions of reduced fertility. In both plays, Komporaly writes, it is the medical profession with its focus on riddle-solving that has access to power and decision taking. Eventually, Luckham's protagonist terminates her pregnancy and Wertenbaker's fails to conceive, yet in both cases the endnotes present women re-appropriating selfhood: regaining confidence, trying to make sense of events and re-locating themselves as agents of their own desire.

**Richard Palmer** in his essay "Technology and the Playwright" sets out to provide an answer to the question of the extent to which stage technology has influenced contemporary playwriting. With only a few exceptions, Palmer argues, innovative technical staging is largely limited to "highly commercialized musicals" or operas, revivals, and spectacles. And this is due to five factors, the writer maintains. The first has to do with economic constraints (the high cost of some elaborate technical requirements may make a new play unattractive to producers, a risk that most unestablished playwrights avoid), the second with technophobia (suspicion of technology), the third with the empowerment of Poor Theatre (beginning with Jerzy Grotowski, an outspoken antagonist of the incorporation of increased technology in the theatre), the fourth with a tradition of marginalizing technology in the education of playwrights, and the fifth with postmodern dissatisfaction with a verbally-centered text.

According to Palmer, the work of Robert Wilson, and secondarily that of George Coates and of Robert Lepage, demonstrates how technology-centered productions encourage new concepts of "text" that diminish the conventional

centrality of a writer. Howard Brenton's play *H.I.D. (Hess Is Dead)* shows how a more traditionally scripted production can integrate technology in a way that develops themes and characterization, a lead tentatively explored by playwrights such as Emily Mann, Eric Overmeyer, Patrick Marber, and Craig Lucas. Unless dramatists develop more favorable attitudes towards opportunities provided by theatre technology, Palmer concludes, and unless producers support productions using new technologies, playwrights may find themselves writing in a textual medium detached from a technologically informed contemporary society.

**Elizabeth Sakellaridou**, in her "Exporting an Aesthetic, Importing Another? Experimental (Ad)ventures In Contemporary British Theatre," claims that since the appearance of Harold Pinter, English theatre has exported throughout the world an effective and innovative theatrical idiom. At the same time, she argues, it has been haunted by the nightmare of exhaustion, in the sense that new developments in the area of performance art, the media and cybernetic technology as much as in postmodern culture and thought have posed new threats to traditional dramatic theatre. With this in mind, Sakellaridou goes on to examine whether the contemporary theatre avant-garde has changed hands and alliances, whether there have been resignations and replacements, deaths and resurrections, in the ranks of the major proponents of the theatre industry. To this end she analyzes some recent dramatic texts and their staging (Ravenhill's *Faust (Faust Is Dead)* and *Some Explicit Polaroids*, Lavery's *Frozen* and Barker's latest plays among others), claiming that an inexhaustible dynamic for critique and readjustment to the new cultural and technological ethos still lies in the hands of imaginative and resourceful playwrights, and that advanced digital technology is welcome as long as it interacts and empowers.

**Kirsten Shepherd-Barr**'s essay "Copenhagen and Beyond: The 'Rich and Mentally Nourishing' Interplay of Science and Theatre" chooses to concentrate on two plays, Michael Frayn's *Copenhagen* and Timberlake Wertenbaker's *After Darwin* as typical examples of the recent sub-genre of the "science play," which not only thematizes scientific subject matter but literally performs it for the audience. In this merging of form and content, Shepherd-Barr argues, lies a performative action that is one of the hallmarks of the recent wave of science plays, as in *Copenhagen*'s use of the Uncertainty Principle and Complementarity and *After Darwin*'s demonstration of evolutionary theory.

**IV:** Whether one agrees with the writers' conclusions or not, what is most valuable in these thought-provoking, elegantly-written contributions is that they command the interest not only of specialized theatre experts, researchers, and practitioners, but also of the general reader or theatregoer who is open to what this encounter with technology can teach us about the present, the past, and the near future. In guiding us towards a deeper understanding of this uneasy coexistence, far from establishing a uniform approach, they interrogate borders, reinforcing the need for a careful investigation of the complex socio-cultural and political formations and affiliations that have gone into its shaping. The mutilat-



ed body, the conditioned body, the colonized body, the transnational body, the cyborg, virtual realities, cosmetic surgeries, dematerialized bodies, digital surfaces, each of these seems to contain in its own way bits and pieces of our present tragic disorder that writers and stage practitioners try to weave together and make some sense out of.

Theatre people have to face the fact that the theatregoers of the near future will be the young people growing up now with multi-million euro/dollar concert and other extravaganzas. To be attracted by the theatre they will need either more stimulation or perhaps a radical shift in visual/dramatic practices. And theatre, as the art medium traditionally dedicated to experimentation in visual form, would seem to be particularly equipped to meet the challenges of technologized, visual culture as well as any other medium. What is of utmost importance in all this is to find ways to combine the technical image and human flesh, that is to strike a delicate balance of elements where technology and theatre will help us understand the hidden potential of each. This means that theatre and technology must work together, inform or comment upon each other, thus contributing to our better understanding of the time and space we inhabit.