Book of Abstracts (Draft)



Table of Contents

[**Keynote** 3](#_Toc164852255)

[Heidi Liedke (University of Frankfurt), “The Politics of Care in a Digital Age: What Remains after Viral Theatre?” 3](#_Toc164852256)

[**Panel 1: Digital Worlds** 4](#_Toc164852257)

[William C. Boles (Rollins College), “Technology in the Plays of Mike Bartlett” 4](#_Toc164852258)

[Benjamin Broadribb (University of Birmingham), “‘It can’t just be me, but it feels like it could be’: Digital Depthiness and Internet Affectivity in the Verbatim Musical *Public Domain*” 4](#_Toc164852259)

[**Panel 2: Theatre and Digital Media** 5](#_Toc164852260)

[Nassim Balestrini (University of Graz), “Becoming and Being in Digital and Physical Realism: Characterization, Communication, and Conflicts in Quiara Alegría’ Hudes’s Works” 5](#_Toc164852261)

[Gemma Allred (Université de Neuchâtel), “‘I read Brecht’: Meme Culture Mirrors and Brechtian Echoes in Fake Friends’ Digital Theatre” 6](#_Toc164852262)

[Shefali Banerji (University of Vienna), “Embracing New Horizons: The Emergence of Digital Spoken Word Theatre in the UK” 7](#_Toc164852263)

[**Panel 3: (Dis-)Embodied Relationships** 8](#_Toc164852264)

[Johanna Hartmann (University of Halle-Wittenberg), “Video Games, (Dis)Embodiment, and Intersubjectivity: Jennifer Haley’s *Neighborhood 3: Requisition of Doom*” 8](#_Toc164852265)

[Megan Reilly (University of Wisconsin-Madison), “Beyond the Garden of Adrian and the Authentic Actor-Audience Connection” 9](#_Toc164852266)

[**Panel 4: Posthumanism and Digital Theatre 1** 10](#_Toc164852267)

[Susanne Thurow (University of New South Wales), “More-Than-Human: Explorations in Performance, New Media and Terrestrial Aesthetics” 10](#_Toc164852268)

[Alex Watson (BIMM University Brighton), “Animal Cyborgs Onstage: Audiovisual and Digital Technology in Anglophone Climate Crisis Theatre” 11](#_Toc164852269)

[**Panel 5: Posthumanism and Digital Theatre 2** 11](#_Toc164852270)

[Siân Adiseshiah (Loughborough University), “Ageing, Time, and Digital Technology in Contemporary Theatre” 11](#_Toc164852271)

[Klára Hutková (Charles University Prague), “Staging an Epic Poem in the Twenty-First Century: Marina Carr’s *iGirl* and the 2021 Abbey Theatre Production” 12](#_Toc164852272)

[**Panel 6: Digital Activism** 13](#_Toc164852273)

[Hannah Greenstreet (University of Liverpool), “Virtual Realisms in *seven methods of killing kylie jenner* (2019-2021) 13](#_Toc164852274)

[Eva-Maria Windberger (University of Trier), “Fighting the Virulence of Racism: Performative Responses to Anti-Asian Hate amid the Coronavirus Pandemic in *WeRNotVirus*” 14](#_Toc164852275)

[**Panel 7: Post-Lockdown Theatre** 15](#_Toc164852276)

[Janine Hauthal (Vrije Universiteit Brussels), “Metatheatre and Remediation: Uses of the Zoom Meeting Format in Lockdown Works by Forced Entertainment and Richard Nelson” 15](#_Toc164852277)

[Christine Schwanecke (University of Graz), “Lockdown Theatre and #TinyPlay Challenge: Medial, Formal, and Social Affordances of Digital Theatre at Times of Enforced Individual and Institutional Restraints (and Beyond)” 16](#_Toc164852278)

# **Keynote**

## Heidi Liedke (University of Frankfurt), “The Politics of Care in a Digital Age: What Remains after Viral Theatre?”

While the pandemic may not be as omnipresent in our daily lives as it was during the year of lockdowns in 2020, it has had an indelible effect on us and on the cultural sphere in particular. As Kwame Kwei-Armah, the (departing) artistic director of one of London’s most established theatres, the Young Vic, has put it, the Covid-19 pandemic ‘will be in the DNA, and the subconscious of, an emerging generation of theatre-makers who will remember this time when they couldn’t get into theatres and make their art’. In the context of this conference, we want to explore a) how the pandemic has changed the way we conceive of the potentials and drawbacks of the digital within performance practices, b) how incorporating (or rejecting) the digital can be a form of care, and c) what will remain, with audiences and with theatre makers, after forms of ‘viral theatre’ (Liedke/Pietrzak-Franger 2021) have receded into the background. After providing an overview into recent societal discourses on resilience within the theatre industry, we use the concept of care as a cultural framework to engage with performance. Using Caridad Svich’s work as a case study, we argue that the heightened implementation of the digital in the years 2020-2022 has invited a turn to the anti-dramatic and anti-digital in recent performance, turning instead to the instability and uncertainty of participatory audience involvement.

Biographical Note:

Heidi Lucja Liedke is Professor of English Literature at Goethe-University Frankfurt/Main. From 2018 to 2020, she was a Humboldt Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow at Queen Mary, University of London. She is the author of *Livecasting in Twenty-First-Century British Theatre: NT Live and the Aesthetics of Spectacle, Materiality, Engagement* (2023). Other recent articles cover topics such as queer ethics, feeling spectators, and idling in Modernist and Victorian writing and have been published or are forthcoming in *ZAA*, *Performance Matters*, *The Routledge Companion to Literary Urban Studies*, and *The Handbook of Literary Ethics*.

# **Panel 1: Digital Worlds**

## William C. Boles (Rollins College), “Technology in the Plays of Mike Bartlett”

At the start of *Love, Love, Love* Mike Bartlett’s brutal look at Baby Boomers and their offspring, Henry celebrates the dawning of satellite television as twenty-six countries participate in the first of its kind television spectacular, as artists, like The Beatles, perform for a global audience. As Henry heralds this 1967 technological breakthrough, he tells his unimpressed brother Kenneth: “You’ve got to understand the significance…. It’s remarkable” (142).[[1]](#footnote-1) The changing technological landscape over the ensuing decades becomes a backdrop as Bartlett chronicles Henry’s family’s disintegration.

 Since *Love, Love, Love*,Mike Bartlett, one of Britain’s leading theater and television writers, has kept an eye on and incorporated the everchanging development of technology into his writing, especially when they prove to be powerful tools for narrative and character conflicts. Unsent emails in *Bull* lead to a firing, a hidden second phone confirms a husband’s infidelity in *Doctor Foster*, and myriad unanswered texts remind a father of his daughter’s refusal to communicate in *Snowflake*. However, more than being a convenient narrative device, he has also featured technology to critique the state of society, ranging from the political influence of social media in *13* and *King Charles III* to technological intrusions by the government into people’s lives in *Wild* to the ubiquitous presence of influencers in *Scandaltown.*

In my paper I will discuss Mike Bartlett’s changing representation of technology from the heady, excited days of Kenneth in the 1960s to his interest in the more contemporary, fraught questions about technology and its impact on politics, culture, society, and relationships.

Biographical Note:

William C. Boles, the Hugh F. and Jeannette G. McKean Chair of English at Rollins College, is the author of *The Argumentative Theatre of Joe Penhall* and *Understanding David Henry Hwang*. He is also the editor of *After In-Yer-Face*: *Remnants of a Theatrical Revolution* and *Theatre in a Post-Truth World*: *Texts, Politics, Performance*. In addition to a book coming out soon on Mike Bartlett for the Routledge Modern and Contemporary Drama Series, he is a co-editor with Anja Hartl of the Methuen Drama Agitations Series. He currently serves as the director of the Comparative Drama Conference.

## Benjamin Broadribb (University of Birmingham), “‘It can’t just be me, but it feels like it could be’: Digital Depthiness and Internet Affectivity in the Verbatim Musical *Public Domain*”

Written by Francesca Forristal and Jordan Paul Clarke, *Public Domain* is described as ‘a dark, funny verbatim musical about the internet’, with its book and lyrics constructed from ‘the words of YouTube vloggers, Instagram influencers, Facebook’s tech giants, and everyday internet users’.[[2]](#footnote-2) A digital native production, *Public Domain* received its premiere in January 2021 as a livestream from Southwark Playhouse in London, then secured a three-night run in the West End at the Vaudeville Theatre later the same year.

I have previously argued that digital theatre performances created during the pandemic regularly offer examples of metamodernism, which has been put forward as the dominant cultural logic of the opening decades of the twenty-first century, succeeding late twentieth-century postmodernism. Cultural theorist Timotheus Vermeulen argues that a key feature of the metamodern sensibility is a ‘new depthiness’,[[3]](#footnote-3) in contrast to the ‘new depthlessness’[[4]](#footnote-4) which characterised postmodern works. This paper explores the ways in which Forristal and Clarke draw on their digital sources to create a metamodern musical reflection on both internet culture and life in lockdown. Whilst *Public Domain*’s status as verbatim theatre positions it as inherently postmodern in its recycling and repurposing of digital materials, the potential depthlessness of its construction is counterbalanced by the sincerity and affectivity in the way its writers adapt these sources to achieve a metamodern ‘depthiness’ – encapsulating the ‘oscillating in-betweenness’[[5]](#footnote-5) of metamodernism.

Biographical Note:

Benjamin Broadribb completed his PhD at the Shakespeare Institute, University of Birmingham, in 2023. His thesis considers the cultural significance of twenty-first century screen adaptations and appropriations of Shakespeare, spanning cinema, television and online productions. Benjamin’s wider research interests include the broader social and cultural sensibility of the twenty-first century, particularly metamodernism. With Gemma Kate Allred and Erin Sullivan, Benjamin co-edited *Lockdown Shakespeare: New Evolutions in Performance and Adaptation* (Bloomsbury Arden, 2022).

# **Panel 2: Theatre and Digital Media**

## Nassim Balestrini (University of Graz), “Becoming and Being in Digital and Physical Realism: Characterization, Communication, and Conflicts in Quiara Alegría’ Hudes’s Works”

This paper will contemplate ways of physically staging digital realms in plays that, otherwise, adhere to creating an illusion of reality through the well-established means of naturalist theater. As a case study, I will discuss Quiara Alegría Hudes’s works, especially her Pulitzer Prize-winning play *Water by the Spoonful* (2012). Her use of an online chatroom as one of the settings in *Water by the Spoonful* raises questions not only about representing social media on a physical stage but also about the meaning-generating and argumentative functionality of the analogue-digital divide or, possibly, complementariness of both elements with regard to ethnic, gender, and class identity, intergenerational justice, family relations, social conflicts, and war. The boundary-crossings between digital and analogue forms of self-representation and communication pinpoint processes of becoming and contrast them with ascriptions of being—that is, labels that emerge when one person claims to have grasped another person’s selfhood. Thus, the play’s two-world approach transcends

technological differences and rather elucidates conflicts and the inquiry into trauma related to death and loss.

I will use an intermedial approach to discuss (1) the productive tensions between strategies of self-definition, communication, and relating to others in digital and analogue realms and (2) changes in how selfhood in the chatroom and in physical settings are constructed and communicated in the course of the play. From a transmedial perspective, I will address how Hudes uses the contrasting realms for characterization, character constellation, and the depiction of mental states and emotional development. In addition to considering the printed drama, the analysis of several stage designs for *Water by the Spoonful* will highlight the meaning-making potential of visual elements, especially the widely diverging options for representing digital technology in or as a physical space.

Biographical Note:

Nassim Winnie Balestrini is full professor of American Studies and Intermediality at the University of Graz, Austria, where she also serves as director of the Centre for Intermediality Studies in Graz (CIMIG). Beforehand, she taught at the universities of Mainz, Paderborn, and Regensburg (Germany), and at the University of California, Davis (USA). She has published monographs on Vladimir Nabokov and on opera adaptations of nineteenth-century American fiction, essays on hip-hop life writing and rap poetry (e.g., in *Popular Music and Society* and in the *Oxford Handbook of Hip Hop Music Studies*), on intermediality theory and practice (e.g., a special issue on “Depicting Destitution Across Media” for the *Journal for Literary and Intermedial Crossings)*, on American poetry, fiction, and drama. She has edited collections on *Adaptation and American Studies* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2011) and on *Intermediality, Life Writing, and American Studies* (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2018, with Ina Bergmann). Two of her current research foci are contemporary poetry and climate change theater.

## Gemma Allred (Université de Neuchâtel), “‘I read Brecht’: Meme Culture Mirrors and Brechtian Echoes in Fake Friends’ Digital Theatre”

‘I read Brecht. And then somewhere out of nowhere a voice said: “Watch *Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*”, so I did’. As he speaks these lines in voiceover, ‘Michael’, played by Michael Breslin as a fictionalised version of himself, is being driven (via obvious green screen) towards the Long Island McMansion that hosted Fake Friends’ *This American Wife[[6]](#footnote-6)*, a live-streamed quasi-improvised virtual theatre production performed in May 2021. As ‘Jakeem’ (Jakeem Powell) and ‘Patrick’ (Patrick Foley) undertake similar journeys, they also describe through voiceover their relationship with the *Real Housewives* reality TV franchise. As the characters entered the house, they were transformed into versions both of themselves and the Real Housewives they idolise. Throughout *This American Wife*, Breslin, Foley and Powell examine gender, race, sexuality, and trauma through the devices of meme culture and social media tropes. The production held echoes of the company’s earlier lockdown work, Pulitzer finalist *Circle Jerk[[7]](#footnote-7)*,which used ‘Gen-Z TikToks and Millennial memes’ to interrogate ‘inherited supremacies and the white, dimpled underbelly of our discourses and cults of culture’.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Exploring *This American Wife* and both the original 2020 live-streamed production *Circle Jerk* and the subsequent 2022 hybrid staging, this paper argues that, behind the quick changes, memes, TikToks and social media trends, these productions offer Brechtian echoes. Fake Friends make what they describe as ‘livestream multi-camera internet theater’[[9]](#footnote-9) seamlessly interpolating live-streamed performance with pre-recorded video preformance and pre-existing media. Fake Friends grapple with questions of reality and authenticity, leaning into contradiction. Swift scene changes, visible cameras, and *on-stage* costume changes draw attention to the mechanics and artificiality of performance, moving beyond the dramatic towards epic, post dramatic theatre.

Biographical Note:

Gemma Kate Allred holds degrees from the Shakespeare Institute at The University of Birmingham, Sheffield University, The College of Law, London Business School, the Open University and is currently a Doctoral Researcher with the University of Neuchatel. Her doctoral work examines how Shakespeare in performance is sold and marketed. Her co-edited volume *Lockdown Shakespeare: New Evolutions in Performance and Adaptation*, eds. Gemma Kate Allred, Benjamin Broadribb and Dr. Erin Sullivan was published by Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare in July 2022. Her examination of celebrity and Shakespeare: ‘“Who’s There?” Britain’s Twenty-First-Century Obsession with Celebrity *Hamlet* (2008-2018)’was published in *Shakespeare Survey* (2020). Gemma is contributing a chapter on marketing *Emilia* for the forthcoming publication *Notelets of Filth: An Emilia Companion Reader* (Routledge 2023). She also has a chapter on the bio-fictional representation of Shakespeare on the modern stage in the forthcoming Bloomsbury Arden collection: *Shakespearean Biofiction on the Contemporary Stage and Screen* (Eds. Edel Semple and Ronan Hatfull).

## Shefali Banerji (University of Vienna), “Embracing New Horizons: The Emergence of Digital Spoken Word Theatre in the UK”

Spoken word theatre emerged at the turn of the millennium (Katie Ailes) in the UK poetry performance scene, comprising of “theatre shows (usually lasting an hour) performed through spoken word poetry. Spoken word theatre blends theatrical staging with the conversational and intimate delivery of spoken word.” (Pete Bearder). Digital spoken word theatre in this sense is its younger counterpart, having taken a popular turn in the past 3 years of global lockdowns and physical distancing. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, a majority of previously on-site spoken word theatre shows have had to go online, thriving in their existence amidst internet disruptions, technological lags, and unpredictability of online interactions, thus propositioning the virtual stage as a promising gateway to navigate the politics of cultural institutions and physical spaces.

Indeed, there has been criticism leveraged against online platforming of spoken word shows, in terms of audience engagement and liveness, but dialogues on accessibility have also ensued with the online mode opening up its proverbial doors to more and more people. Building upon existing digital theatre and spoken word scholarship, in this paper, I will therefore first theorise upon spoken word theatre as a form, and second, investigate the possibilities of digital spoken word theatre in terms of a) accessibility, for both performers and audiences, b) the perceived ease of production for performers, keeping true to the one-person D-I-Y aesthetic of spoken word theatre, c) the problems associated with a transition from physical to a virtual stage, with close textual and performance analyses of the virtual show “The Geography of Me” by Rose Condo, a show conceptualised for physical theatre spaces in 2017 and later adapted for ZOOM 2020 onwards.

Biographical Note:

Shefali Banerji is a poet-performer and PhD researcher at the University of Vienna, working on the ERC project “Poetry Off the Page”. Her research explores the origin and development of Spoken Word Theatre in the UK. Her wider interests include Postcolonial Theory, 20th and 21st c. British Poetry (both print and performance), and Gender & Queer Studies.

# **Panel 3: (Dis-)Embodied Relationships**

## Johanna Hartmann (University of Halle-Wittenberg), “Video Games, (Dis)Embodiment, and Intersubjectivity: Jennifer Haley’s *Neighborhood 3: Requisition of Doom*”

That human existence is inherently embodied has been a fundamental assumption in phenomenological thinking and is indispensable for understanding “the relationship to ourselves, the world, and others” (Zahavi 64, m.t.). Virtual realities, as, for instance, offered by video games, allow for the possibility of quasi-disembodied experiences. This not only prompts inquiries into the nature of embodiment but also demands of us to reconsider what it means to be human in the digital age. At the same time, the advent of digital technologies is of particular relevance for the theater which has traditionally incorporated new technologies while at the same time privileging the bodily co-presence during live performances. Haley’s “tech play” *Neighborhood 3: Requisition of Doom* explores the transformation of human relationships in the context of digital technologies on both a thematic as well as on a formal-aesthetic level. In this play, a MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game) functions as an interface through which the characters immerse themselves into the digital realm. In this play, the eponymous video game blurs the boundaries of reality by using satellite data to transform everyday life into a potentially lethal virtual realm and radically impacts the coming-of-age of the teenagers playing this game, as well as their relationships to their peers and parents. At the same time, the play mimicks digital strategies, for instance, in the form of so-called “walkthroughs.” In summary, in this presentation I will explore the thematic and formal-aesthetic implications of video games, forms of (dis)embodiment, and the impact on intersubjectivity in Jennifer Haley's “tech play” *Neighborhood 3: Requisition of Doom*.

Works Cited:

Zahavi, Dan. *Phänomenologie für Einsteiger*, Fink, 2007. UTB 2935.

Biographical Note:

Johanna Hartmann is Assistant Professor of American Literature at the University of Halle-Wittenberg. In her research, she focuses on American drama and theater since the 19th century, questions of (inter‑)mediality (e.g., American photography, film), and contemporary literature. She is the author of *Literary Visuality in Siri Hustvedt Works: Intermedial Perspectives* (Königshausen und Neumann 2015). In her habilitation project she focused on modernist American short plays and theater photography. She is the editor of *Censorship and Exile* (together with Hubert Zapf, V&R 2015), *Zones of Ambiguity in Siri Hustvedt’s Works: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (together with Christine Marks and Hubert Zapf, De Gruyter 2016), *The Tragic in Contemporary American Drama and Theater* (together with Julia Rössler, guest issue of JADT 31:2 2019), *Theater & Community: Poetics, Politics, Performances* (together with Ilka Saal, forthcoming in JCDE, 2024), and *The Body in/of Don DeLillo’s Plays* (forthcoming in TSLL, 2025).

## Megan Reilly (University of Wisconsin-Madison), “Beyond the Garden of Adrian and the Authentic Actor-Audience Connection”

The one-to-one performances of Adrian Howells depended upon the ‘seeming authenticity of exchange’ (Heddon) and created spaces where the audience member became an audience-participant, in a sense a ‘performer’ alongside the artist himself. In the 14 years since Howells presented *The Garden of Adrian* at the University of Glasgow, one-to-one, immersive and interactive performance has seen an explosion of new work worldwide. While much has been written on the actor-audience connections available in these and Howells’ pieces, a question has arisen on the nature of such relationships when the live performance becomes a virtual one. During the COVID-19 pandemic, theatre artists and digital designers began creating ‘live’ performances within virtual reality spaces. Work by Double Eye Studios (*Finding Pandora X*), The Ferryman Collective (*Gumball Dreams* and *Welcome to Respite*) and others has enjoyed international acclaim and garnered new audiences. But do such performances create the ‘authenticity of exchange’ upon which live theatre relies? By recreating Howells’ original *The Garden of Adrian* within the VR Chat platform and modifying it based on test audience’s reactions and connections with the actor playing Adrian, I seek ways artists can connect performer and audience-participant within virtual spaces. This paper presents the results of these experiments alongside the responses from Howells’ original audience-participants to answer the question: can virtual reality performance create an authentic theatre experience for its audience members? What tools can artists in virtual spaces use to engender authentic, empathic engagement with participants?

Biographical Note:

Megan Reilly is an assistant professor of theatre at the University of Wisconsin-Madison where she teaches courses on lighting design and 3D environment design for virtual spaces. She is a lighting and media designer whose professional work includes over 100 designs across the United States, the UK and Ireland. Her research and scholarly work explores immersive, augmented, and virtual performance, ways to tell stories in these spaces ethically, and performance methods in virtual environments that connect emotionally with audiences.

# **Panel 4: Posthumanism and Digital Theatre 1**

## Susanne Thurow (University of New South Wales), “More-Than-Human: Explorations in Performance, New Media and Terrestrial Aesthetics”

Intensifying climate change highlights our complex entanglement with the more-than-human world. It raises urgent questions regarding our pathways for and capability to perform within ecological systems that envelope yet also far exceed our species. Pioneers in anglophone eco-feminist and eco-critical performance theory and practice, such as Una Chaudhuri or Peta Tait, have laid important groundwork for exploring ways of conceptualising and staging these expanded dimensions of our planetary existence. Yet, much mainstage performance still only engages climate change as a trope in service of a predominantly anthropocentric narrative.

For example, productions like Licciardello’s staging of Finnigan’s *Scenes from the Climate Era* (Belvoir Street Theatre, 2023) seek to ferment reflection of our responsibility for non-human systems, sketch possible alternative actions, and conjure evocative scenarios of escalating climate dynamics. Such work proves theatre can be a potent conduit for addressing pressing issues and catalysing public engagement. However, the human-centred structure hinders an investigation of terrestrial entanglement (Latour 2018).

Leveraging the theories of Chaudhuri and Tait, the proposed paper will sketch new research that seeks to articulate more-than-human performative entanglement through a new media dramaturgical framework. I will draw on preliminary collaborative work (funded by the Australian Research Council) undertaken with Sydney Theatre Company in immersive interactive visualisation and Mixed Reality, as well as in AI programming and Machine Learning approaches developed for analysis of wildfire data (in partnership with CSIRO). I will explore the strengths of these capabilities for designing an experimental framework that can translate complex entanglement without centring the human– through abstracting patterns and rules from wildfire propagation and translating these into narrative structures that are animated and to be engaged through a Mixed Reality system.

As such, interaction with the system in a 360-degree CAVE environment will offer the opportunity to explore non-human agencies and to test performative engagements.

Overall, the presentation will provide insight into how one of Australia’s leading performing arts institutions has been driving experimentation with digital technologies, and how this research may be deployed to unlock new frontiers that can augment the role and capabilities of theatre.

Biographical Note:

Susanne Thurow is a Deputy Director and ARC Laureate Postdoctoral Fellow at The University of New South Wales (UNSW)’ iCinema Centre, where she leads the Climate Aesthetics Research Program. Her interdisciplinary work rethinks contemporary arts through performative digital aesthetics, having co-developed multidisciplinary projects with iCinema industry partners, such as Sydney Theatre Company, since 2014. She has published widely, spanning theatre, performance and digital media studies. Her latest book (Routledge, 2020) won the 2021 Alvie Egan Award and the 2019 UNSW Art & Design Dean’s Award for Research Excellence, Best Monograph. In the past, she worked for Thalia Theater (Germany), Big *h*ART (Australia) and German cultural association Goethe-Institut.

## Alex Watson (BIMM University Brighton), “Animal Cyborgs Onstage: Audiovisual and Digital Technology in Anglophone Climate Crisis Theatre”

In her exploration of *Jurassic Park* (1990/1993) and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968/1982),Ursula K. Heise states that 'the crucial conceptual task for environmentalists in their encounter with a profusion of images and narratives that privilege recent technologies is [...]: how to reconnect this explosion of the technological imagination with a concern for the rapidly diminishing natural world' (2003: 78). Drawing on Donna Harraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto' (1985), Heise muses that the figure of the 'animal cyborg' seen in her case studies is '[n]ot merely the symbol of a nature finally vanquished by technology [...], the animal cyborg also points to the possibility of a different relationship between species: one that no longer privileges the rights of humans—feminine or masculine—over those of all other forms of life, but that recognizes the value and rights of nonhuman species along with those of humans' (ibid.).

 Taking up this understanding of the 'animal cyborg', this paper will explore how recent examples of British climate crisis theatre have used audiovisual and digital technologies as dramaturgical components to represent non-human life onstage. This has been explored, for example, by Katie Mitchell's 2022 staging of *The Cherry Orchard*, as well as her recent work on the touring *A Play for the Living in a Time of Extinction* (2022). emma and pj's *Ghosts of the Near Future* (2023), too, uses a variety of audiovisual technologies to present their representation of climate crisis; and Crystal Pite and Simon McBurney's *Figures in Extinction [1.0]* combines visceral, corporeal representations of extinct life through contemporary dance with auditory accompaniment. Overall, the research here will demonstrate how Anglophone theatre makers have 'staged nature' through technology, and how their 'animal cyborgs' might allow audiences to imagine the potential of alternative species relationality.

Works Cited:

Heise, U. K. (2003), 'From Extinction to Electronics: Dead Frogs, Live Dinosaurs, and Electric Sheep', in *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*, ed. by C. Wolfe. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press. 59-82.

Biographical Note:

Alex Watson is a Principal Lecturer at ICTheatre Brighton, BIMM University. He is published in the Methuen Engage series, *Theatre Notebook*, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, and *CDE*. His work mainly focuses on contemporary British and climate crisis theatre, and he has an upcoming monograph published with Bloomsbury Methuen entitled *Staging Systemic Violence: British Theatre 2010-2019*.

# **Panel 5: Posthumanism and Digital Theatre 2**

## Siân Adiseshiah (Loughborough University), “Ageing, Time, and Digital Technology in Contemporary Theatre”

There is an abundance of contemporary anglophone plays and performances interested in the subject of ageing and old age, a growing number of which explore the impact of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, on older people. The highly technologised mediascape of contemporary life – with its emphasis on speed, the compression of time and space, and the related youth-associated ideas of newness, innovation, and the cutting-edge – potentially generates a tension within theatre and performance where a work’s interest in, and sympathy for, older characters, is not informed by a questioning of the semantic conditions of age or technology. In our contemporary culture where rapid speed and the manipulation of time are instrumental to the movement and accumulation of capital, the ageing body – particularly a body marked with physical signs of ageing – is an interruption of the fast flows of technology, while additionally posing as an awkward reminder of the failure of technology to stop the ageing process.

This paper will probe the intersection of theatre, performance, older age, and digital technology to consider ways in which theatre utilises or represents digital technology in plays about older age. The digital in performance is richly resourced in opportunities to escape the determinations of narrative which casts ageing into old age in terms of decline; instead, the digital lends itself to prioritising the present and presence, alternative temporalities, and the subversion of chrononormative logics. I will briefly consider the techno-cultural context of the digital and old age, including the implications of using digital technology in Hollywood ‘de-ageing’ practices and the creation of virtual immersive environments for simulating old age, before going on to consider contemporary plays on the digital and older age, such as Vlad Butucea’s *Glowstick* (2019), Jordan Harrison’s *Marjorie Prime* (2015), and Pipeline Theatre Company’s *Spillikin: A Love Story* (2015).

Biographical Note:

Siân Adiseshiah is Professor of Literature, Politics and Performance at Loughborough University. Her research interests are in contemporary theatre, utopianism, and age studies. She is author of *Utopian Drama: In Search of A Genre* (Methuen Drama, 2023) and *Churchill’s Socialism: Political Resistance in the Plays of Carly Churchill* (CSP, 2009), and co-editor of the special issue ‘Narratives of Old Age and Gender’, *Journal of the British Academy* 12.s2 (2023), as well as (with Jacqueline Bolton) *debbie tucker green: Critical Perspectives* (Palgrave, 2020), (with Louise LePage) *Twenty-First Century Drama: What Happens Now* (Palgrave, 2016), and (with Rupert Hildyard) *Twenty-First Century Fiction: What Happens Now* (Palgrave, 2013).

## Klára Hutková (Charles University Prague), “Staging an Epic Poem in the Twenty-First Century: Marina Carr’s *iGirl* and the 2021 Abbey Theatre Production”

This paper will discuss the 2021 Abbey Theatre production of Marina Carr’s monologue play *iGirl.* Premiering on the main stage of the national theatre of Ireland during the COVID-19 pandemic, it made use of pre-recorded film footage and live camera streaming. Resembling an epic poem, *iGirl* brought the voices of fictitious and historical women such as Antigone, Jocasta, Joan of Arc, and the Neanderthal ‘Girl’ onto the national stage. Directed by the then new artistic director Caitríona McLaughlin and starring Olwen Fouéré, a dominantly female team was behind this production. As such, the play can be seen as part of an evolution in Irish theatre, sparked by the 2015 social–media campaign of the grassroots movement #WakingTheFeminists, which has drawn public attention to the historical dominance of male voices in the Irish theatrical canon. The importance of digital media, as well as the theme of female presence both in history and in the Western canon, is captured in the title, *iGirl*, the *i*- prefix serving as a reference to the age of the internet and the digital.

Catherine Fay’s set design, Sinéad Wallace’s lighting, Carl Kennedy’s sound, and Daniel Denton’s video designs added a significant dimension to Carr’s script. The production process was highly collaborative and has also led to sections of the script appearing in a different order on the stage than in a printed version sold to audiences, as changes were being made until the last minute. This paper will compare the printed script and the 2021 production, drawing on a recording held at the Abbey Theatre Archive. Building on the scholarship of Seda Ilter, Duška Radosavljević, and Barbara Fuchs, it will discuss the ways in which *iGirl* fits within the contemporary theatrical discourse and practice in Ireland and beyond, foregrounding its use of and relationship to digital media.

Biographical Note:

Klára Witzany Hutková is a PhD candidate in the Centre for Irish Studies (Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures) at Charles University in Prague. Her interdisciplinary research focuses on the theatre of Marina Carr and the cultural heritage of ancient Greece and is supported by funding from the Charles University Grant Agency (GA UK). Other research interests include women prose writers and Irish folklore. Klára received a Master’s degree in Irish studies from Charles University in 2021 and an undergraduate degree in Ancient history from the University of Edinburgh in 2015. She was a visiting student at University College Dublin (2021–22), Trinity College Dublin (2020–21), and Université de Bourgogne (2013–14). She has presented at international conferences and is a member of the editorial board of *The Protagonist* and the editorial assistant of *Litteraria Pragensia*.

# **Panel 6: Digital Activism**

## Hannah Greenstreet (University of Liverpool), “Virtual Realisms in *seven methods of killing kylie jenner* (2019-2021)

Advocates of postdramatic theatre have argued that realism is an inadequate form through which to respond critically to our contemporary reality, including the internet. In *Mediatized Dramaturgy*, Seda Ilter (2021) argues that ‘the desire for logical order and causative structure is no longer adequate to fully articulate and *critically* grasp the complex social and cognitive conditions of a ubiquitously mediatized culture […] Dramatic mediatized dramaturgy therefore tends to reiterate what we accept as the social reality’. Yet, suggesting that the internet cannot be adequately represented through realism is to deny realism’s capacity to develop in response to a changing world and to insist upon a false dichotomy between the ‘real’ and the ‘virtual’ that cannot account for the intermeshing of the two in twenty-first century life. This paper therefore picks up and extends Sarah Bay-Cheng’s (2015) concept of ‘virtual realism’, which she uses to describe plays that respond to the virtual through dramatic forms. I argue that Jasmine Lee-Jones’ *seven methods of killing kylie jenner* (Royal Court Theatre, London, 2019) develops a new articulation of realism that both critiques anti-Blackness and misogynoir and centres its characters’ subjective experiences as young Black women on the internet. While at first Lee-Jones’ script and Milli Bhatia’s production maintain ‘IRL’ and the ‘Twittersphere’ as two distinct worlds with distinct theatrical languages, they converge over the course of the play, suggesting the impossibility of separating online activity from real life. Moreover, the play and the production suggest a powerful analogy between Black feminist activism and theatrical realism as having the potential to imagine a different world, without neglecting critique of the status quo. Ultimately, thinking of *seven methods* as a realist play, notwithstanding its formal experimentation, productively expands our sense of what realism can do and how it can engage with the contemporary world.

Biographical Note:

Dr Hannah Greenstreet is Lecturer in Creative Writing: Stage and Screen at the University of Liverpool. She completed her PhD in contemporary feminist theatre at the University of Oxford in 2021, winning the Swapna Dev Memorial Prize for best doctoral thesis submitted in the Faculty of English that year. Her monograph, *Radical Realisms in Contemporary British Theatre*, is under contract with Bloomsbury. Her work has been published in *Studies in Theatre & Performance* and *Contemporary Theatre Review*.

## Eva-Maria Windberger (University of Trier), “Fighting the Virulence of Racism: Performative Responses to Anti-Asian Hate amid the Coronavirus Pandemic in *WeRNotVirus*”

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a significant increase in hate crimes against East and South East Asian communities was registered worldwide. In the UK, this surge of racism alerted British East Asian playwrights and performers Daniel York Loh and Jennifer Lim to raise awareness about the kinds of discrimination and violence their communities were experiencing by producing *WeRNotVirus* in collaboration with Moongate Productions and Omnibus Theatre. *WeRNotVirus* is a digital arts event including ten short plays, many of which interlace different media and art forms, among them film, poetry, dance, and song. It originally took place via Zoom as a two-day event from 13-14 June 2020 and is now available to watch on YouTube.

This paper examines how the digital format of *WeRNotVirus* intersects with its political agenda. In a first step, an exemplary analysis of the plays and their uses of intermediality and stylistic, dramatic, and filmic devices will enable an understanding of the different poetics of digital performances with a distinct political aim. In a second step, this paper will focus on the overarching ambition of *WeRNotVirus*, in particular its aims to counter anti-Asian hate crimes and racist stereotyping and to achieve a higher level of visibility and representation of British East and South East Asians in society and in the arts by using the digital ‘stages’ Zoom and YouTube. By investigating the interrelations between the political, the performative, and the digital, this paper argues that digital forms of theatre provide unique opportunities for innovation, accessibility, and giving a voice to those often unheard.

Biographical Note:

Eva-Maria Windberger is a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of English Studies at Trier University and author of *The Poetics of Empowerment in David Mitchell‘s Fiction* (Routledge, 2023). Together with Ralf Hertel, she has co-edited the volume *Empowering Contemporary Fiction in English: The Impact of Empowerment in Literary Studies* (Brill, 2021). In her second book project, she is turning her attention to drama and looks at how British East Asian Theatre negotiates transcultural and gender identities on the stage. In addition to empowerment studies and 21st century fiction, film, and drama, she is interested in Modernism and feminist criticism.

# **Panel 7: Post-Lockdown Theatre**

## Janine Hauthal (Vrije Universiteit Brussels), “Metatheatre and Remediation: Uses of the Zoom Meeting Format in Lockdown Works by Forced Entertainment and Richard Nelson”

This paper focuses on the theatrical remediation of a specific digital genre, the online (Zoom) meeting, in contemporary Anglophone lockdown pieces. Taking Forced Entertainment’s *End Meeting for All* (2020) and *How the Time Goes* (2021) as well as Richard Nelson’s *The Apple Family: A Pandemic Trilogy* (2021) as examples, the three works are united across space and time by their interest in experimenting with the online format of the Zoom meeting at a time when theatres were closed during the worldwide coronavirus lockdown. While *End Meeting for All* and *How the Time Goes* are stand-alone works, Nelson’s trilogy continues the playwright’s engagement with contemporaneity that he began in his so-called “Rhinebeck Cycle”, consisting of altogether nine plays about three Rhinebeck-based families (the Apples, the Gabriels and the Michaels). All three productions address how everyday reality changed in and through lockdown and highlight the resilience of their characters or performance personas. Rather than primarily exploring this thematic aspect, however, my paper, first and foremost, takes an interest in how the medium of the theatre is remediated through the format of the online meeting and how the theatrical and the digital interact to form a hybrid new mode of representation in these three works.

Adopting an intermedial approach, I will demonstrate how *End Meeting for All,* *How the Time Goes* and the *Pandemic Trilogy* make use of the online format but opt for markedly different styles. While Forced Entertainment’s take on the online format results in a highly absurdist and metatheatrical reflection of (stage/online) acting, embodiment and storytelling, Nelson’s trilogy clearly subscribes to a realistic agenda. The three works also differ in how they connect with their potential audiences, with Nelson’s trilogy continuing to adhere to the dramatic convention of the fourth wall, while Forced Entertainment model a more active, explicitly acknowledged and ethically involved spectatorship. At the same time, however, all three works use the format of the Zoom meeting to experiment with temporal structures (consisting, as they do, of shorter sequences) as well as structures of viewing (arranging six, nine and four Zoom windows, respectively) and of relating to others in digital and analogue realms. Hence, in the three works, the remediation of the theatrical through the digital works in two directions at once: it clearly shapes theatrical storytelling, enabling their creators to experiment with ways of showing, telling and viewing that the online medium in general as well as the specific genre of the Zoom meeting afford, while the re-entry of theatre into the digital realm also attests to the pervasiveness of the theatre as medium of human expression, not just in terms of social roleplaying but also as a way of modelling artistic exchange, at a time when both human connection and the theatre itself were at risk.

Biographical Note:

Janine Hauthal is full-time assistant research professor of intermedial studies at Vrije Universiteit Brussel. Her research and publications focus on multilingual theatre, Anglophone ‘fictions of Europe’, metareference across media and genres, British drama since the 1990s, postdramatic theatre, contemporary British and postcolonial literatures, as well as transgeneric, intermedial and cultural narratology. Her latest articles focus on works by Susanne Kennedy and Milo Rau (“The Loop as Transmedial Principle in Susanne Kennedy’s *Drei Schwestern*,” *Forum Modernes Theater* 2023; “Contemporary (Post‑)Migrant Theatre in Belgium and the Migratory Aesthetics of Milo Rau’s Theatre of the Real,” *Handbook on Theatre and Migration*, 2023). Her most recent FWO-funded research project is entitled “Self-Reflexivity and Generic Change in 21st-Century Black British Women’s Literature” (2021-24).

## Christine Schwanecke (University of Graz), “Lockdown Theatre and #TinyPlay Challenge: Medial, Formal, and Social Affordances of Digital Theatre at Times of Enforced Individual and Institutional Restraints (and Beyond)”

Taking its cue from the CfP’s concern to “explore how, in the context of contemporary Anglophone theatre, playwrights, theatre practitioners, and cultural institutions are engaging with the opportunities provided as well as the problems posed by the digital” (CfP), the present proposal suggests to inquire into the intricacies of digital lockdown theatre. By way of example, I suggest to explore #Tiny Play Challenge and TINY PLAYS 24/7 by the Dublin-based performance company ‘Fishamble,’ in order to further develop existing research (e.g. Fuchs; Liedke/Pietrzak-Franger) on kinds of digital theatre that emerged during the Covid 19-Pandemic.

During the lockdowns in spring 2020, ‘Fishamble’ prompted playwrights from Ireland and around the globe to write and submit ‘tiny plays’, 600-word plays in English. The company reports that over 470 plays were submitted, of which 35 were published on the company’s website. Out of these, ten were produced (e.g. in actors’ homes) and broadcasted online: for one week in summer 2020, round the clock. Fishamble even participated in an online festival of Irish theatre with further tiny plays.

Based on the experience and experiments of #Tiny Play Challenge, this proposal investigates the ways in which the specific combination of digitalization and ‘theatre of the lockdown’ engendered new artistic realities at times of enforced individual and institutional restraints, and possibly beyond: dramatic innovation and unique theatrical and socio-political oxymora, e.g. spaces of artistic freedom within tight formal boundaries (word limit and thematic prompts) or forms of social participation in environments of social isolation. From an intermedial perspective, the paper moreover lays bare the formal and medial strategies of keeping theatre alive during lockdown. Finally, it abstracts the novel conditions of theatre writing and consumption that have been spawned by digital lockdown productions like TINY PLAYS 24/7 and which, in all likelihood, have come to stay.

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Biographical Note:

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Christine Schwanecke is professor of English Literature and Culture at the University of Graz. Focusing on the intersections between literature and culture, she specialises in drama, early modern literature and culture, gender studies, intermediality, and transgeneric and transmedial narratology. Her most recent publications include *A Narratology of Drama: Dramatic Storytelling in Theory, History, and Culture from the Renaissance to the Twenty-First Century* (De Gruyter 2022) and *The Transformative Power of Literature and Narrative: Promoting Positive Change, A Conceptual Volume in Honour of Vera Nünning* (Narr 2023, with Corinna Assmann and Jan Rupp).

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7. A trailer of the show is available: <https://circlejerk.live> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
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