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Modal transpositions towards theatres of encounter (or, In praise of “media intermultimodality”¹)

On 4 September 2014 Rufus Norris, artistic director-designate of the National Theatre, London, reported a telling discovery.² He and his National Theatre associates had watched a diverse set of theatre productions at Edinburgh’s International and Fringe Festivals the previous month. Once everyone had provided feedback on the most exciting and interesting shows they had seen, Norris realized that they all had something in common. Each did away with the fourth wall – the division between spectators in the auditorium and a self-contained drama that takes place on the stage.

This discovery has been a while in the making, given the rise of immersive theatre along with a range of work from games-based performances to one-to-one pieces, all of which directly involve – talk to, move physically, sometimes require action from – its audience. Nonetheless, in the way he put it the NT’s future leader implied that this was the moment when unsettled weather turns into a sea-change. It’s as though theatre has become something other than itself,

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¹ The term is Lars Elleström’s. See Lars Elleström, “The Modalities of Media: A Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations,” in Lars Elleström (Ed.), *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 11-48), 37.

² Rufus Norris in conversation with Dan Rebellato, TaPRA (Theatre and Performance Research Association) Conference, Royal Holloway, University of London, 4 September 2014.

spilling beyond its borders, trading with other artforms, incorporating its spectators in a jamboree of participation and engagement. This kind of theatre, and indeed this process of dissolution, connects with a broader “reality trend” (the German term adopted by its arch exponents, the Berlin-based company Rimini Protokoll, is *Theater der Zeit*), where theatre events aim to provide lived and felt encounters, and draw on actual lives and experiences. We observe a mixing of modes of performance, presentation and participation, along with a more complicated alteration of modes within mediation. This is perhaps not surprising in a culture where the digital revolution has spread an array of intermedial operations across different platforms and artforms. In this scenario change and adaptation occur *within* specific media precisely through their interrelation with other media. This is not to say that a medium becomes something other than itself – that might be thought impossible, for all the frisson of excitement that we feel when the National’s director-designate reports some theatrical foundations shaking – but that it evolves to take on the modes, effects and affects of other media in a dynamic field of intermedial development.

Lars Elleström has a nicely self-deprecating aside towards the end of his account of media interactions:

Intermediality might be described as ‘intermodal relations in media’ or ‘media intermultimodality’. I do not expect these terrible terms to win general praise but I think there is a point in seeing intermediality as a

complex set of relations between media that are always more or less multimodal.³

I will spend some time below unpacking the terrible term “media intermultimodality,” for it gives a good account of dynamic processes in contemporary theatre production and spectator engagement. This is pertinent to current understandings of adaptation, our particular interest here, where we are concerned not only with the work done in moving an artifact across media, but also with the reformulation of media themselves, in a field of continuing technological development and artistic innovation. That’s to say, “adaptation” describes not only a process of dealing with source texts or artifacts, reshaping them for different media and new audiences. It also describes the way in which different media evolve by adjusting to changing technological arrangements and aesthetic affordances. Just as artistic genres and practices develop over time, responding to both what has come before and the present circumstances of production, so too with media. They are not immutable, but shift and reshape in accordance with their moment and milieu. Adaptation, then, is a matter of dynamic development, and the multimodal interrelation of media is a significant part of this changing cultural landscape.

We are familiar with the adaptation of literary material to make theatre pieces – from the Royal Shakespeare Company’s *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* (1980) to Peter Brook’s *The Mahabharata* (1985) to the National

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³ Elleström, “The Modalities of Media,” 37.

Theatre's *War Horse* (2007).⁴ In each of these instances, the source text is edited and remodeled towards a theatrical rendition that seeks to present the material in an appropriately responsive manner. This kind of adaptation is a case of medial transposition – a movement of representation across media.⁵

Characteristics of the literary text are reworked within a theatrical idiom, so that literary textual function is replaced by theatrical function.

We are also familiar with the adaptation of theatre plays (typically) in service of productions that are themselves original works, and this brings us to the heart of contemporary intermedial practice. I don't mean concept productions that find

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⁴ *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*, by David Edgar, adapted from the novel by Charles Dickens, directed by John Caird and Trevor Nunn, presented by the Royal Shakespeare Company, opened at the Aldwych Theatre, London, on 5 June 1980. *The Mahabharata*, adapted by Peter Brook, Jean-Claude Carrière and Marie-Hélène Estienne from the Indian epic attributed to Vyasa, directed by Peter Brook, presented by the Centre international de créations théâtrales-Bouffes du Nord, opened at the Carrière de Boulbon, Avignon Festival, France on 7 July 1985. *War Horse* by Michael Morpurgo, adapted for the stage from Morpurgo's novel by Nick Stafford, directed by Marianne Elliot and Tom Morris, presented by the National Theatre in association with Handspring Puppet Company, opened at the Olivier Theatre in the National Theatre, London, 17 October 2007. See Katja Krebs (2014) "Introduction: Collisions, Diversions and Meeting Points," in Krebs (Ed.), *Translation and Adaptation in Theatre and Film* (London and New York: Routledge, 1-10) for an initial position on characteristics of adaptation for theatre. In her essay in the same volume, "Definitions, Dyads, Triads and Other Points of Connection in Translation and Adaptation discourse" (13-35), Márta Minier provides a list of terms that might fall under the broad category "adaptation", including "appropriation", "transposition", "transformation", "tradaptation", "repositioning" and "reinventing" (15-16), under the banner of "modes of cultural re-creation" (16).

⁵ Irina Rajewsky has written about medial transposition in these terms. See, for instance, Irina O. Rajewsky, "Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality," *Intermédialités: Histoire et théorie des arts, des lettres et des techniques* (6, 2005, 43-64), where Rajewsky describes medial transposition as "a production-oriented, "genetic" conception of intermediality; the "original" text, film, etc. is the "source" of the newly formed media product" (51). See also, Irina O. Rajewsky, "Border Talks: The Problematic Status of Media Borders in the Current Debate about Intermediality," in Elleström (Ed.), *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, (51-68), 55-56.

new ways of staging familiar material, as for instance with Robert Lepage's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (National Theatre, 1992) or, at the same theatre fifteen years later, Katie Mitchell's of Martin Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life* (National Theatre, 2007), where the playtext might be edited but is otherwise presented in its original shape.⁶ Rather, I mean the sort of *response to* and *use of* classic (or not-so-classic) material exemplified by a number of shows broadly within the 'immersive' bracket, which are presently modish and also highly cross-modal and -medial. Punchdrunk's *The Drowned Man: A Hollywood Fable*, for instance, is informed by Georg Büchner's unfinished proto-Expressionist play *Woyzeck*. Zecora Ura Theatre's *Hotel Medea* is based on the Medea myth (best known through Euripides' eponymous play), but lasts for six hours through the night. dreamthinkspeak's *Before I Sleep* is a multi-textured refraction of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* that features models, performance, installations and a good deal of promenade. Not the least interesting aspect of these pieces is that they rework a medium-specific artifact *within the original medium*, whilst drawing on techniques and modes *across* media, and I discuss them further, briefly, below.⁷ This artistic *dispositif* also lies behind pieces that are decidedly non-fictional – the examples I turn to below are *Situation Rooms* by Rimini Protokoll and *The Pixelated Revolution* by Rabih Mroué – so that a kind of artistic adaptation of both mediality and encounter runs through diverse

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⁶ *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, by William Shakespeare, directed by Robert Lepage, presented by the National Theatre, opened at the Oliver Theatre in the National Theatre, London, 9 July 1992. *Attempts on Her Life*, by Martin Crimp, directed by Katie Mitchell, presented by the National Theatre, opened at the Lyttelton Theatre in the National Theatre, London, 14 March 2007.

⁷ I explore *Before I Sleep*, *The Drowned Man: A Hollywood Fable* and *Hotel Medea* more fully in *Beyond Theatre: Performance after Postmodernism* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, forthcoming), in relation to ideas of hybridity, *mise en sensibilité*, experience and affect.

contemporary performances.⁸ The notion of “intermultimodality” provides a key to understanding how this is so, for it helps us to understand the relationship between artistic production, media function and audience engagement. In order to unpack this, I will explore Lars Elleström’s concept of media modalities, in which he describes a way of understanding how media operate. The focus here is on distinct *modes* of presentation and perception across diverse media. I apply this analysis to recent theatre productions, as indicated above, that are variously immersive and intermedial, in order to see adaptation in play across media and in service of new encounters with and through performance.

In “The Modalities of Media,” Elleström proposes a way of conceiving media and their interactions in a field of increasingly routine interrelation. He describes four ‘modalities’ that intersect to form the particular construction of a medium in any particular instance. These are the *material* (the concrete and corporeal aspect of a medium, including bodies, objects and physical properties such as sound waves); the *sensorial* (involving sense-based perception); the *spatiotemporal* (by way of expressions and perceptions of time and space); and the *semiotic* (which entails meaning creation through cognition and interpretation). The modalities operate diversely across tangible, perceptual and

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⁸ The term *dispositif* is meant here in Foucault’s sense, where it refers to the gathered procedures and apparatus of a cultural practice, discourse or institution. See Michel Foucault, “The Confession of the Flesh”, in Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-77*, edited and (this chapter) translated by Colin Gordon, New York: Pantheon Books, 1980, 194-228.

conceptual planes and, taken together, allow one to calibrate the specific features of a medium.⁹

The four modalities apply to what Elleström calls “basic” media (such as still images or moving images), which he distinguishes from “qualified” media (such as dance, photography or computer games), which have specific social, cultural and aesthetic determinants (although we might say the same of instances of basic media). Likewise, both basic and qualified media are distinct from “technical” media (such as the body, a guitar, paper, or photographic paper), which are the means by which mediation is realized. The model takes on a further layer of complexity, in that each of the modalities (“which underlie all conceivable media”) can be described in terms of predominant modes.¹⁰ For instance, the “sensorial” modality includes modes such as seeing and hearing; the “spatiotemporal” includes modes such as virtual space and perceptual time. The modalities structure a medial complex, and the modes by which they operate are integral to the functioning of media.¹¹

This model allows for both a critical perspective and procedure. As Elleström observes, “the modes of different media clearly differ and the modalities always interact in more or less complex ways. ... [The model] suggests a method of investigating minutely the features of various media and how they may be

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⁹ Elleström, “The Modalities of Media”, 15.

¹⁰ Ibid., 35.

¹¹ The modalities and modes are given in tabular form in Elleström, “The Modalities of Media,” 36.

interpreted.”¹² This process is not without its challenges. There is a tension between a desire to calibrate the defining features of a medium, arguably distinct and broadly unchanging, and a notion, running through the essay, of the historical and formal development of a medium in a dynamic scene of cultural and technological evolution. Definitions of mode, modality and medium become rather slippery, or (since categories depend upon a good degree of overlap) attain distinctness only in the precise delimitation of any particular instance. And so many entities, agents and phenomena count as media of one sort or another that – as is already clear – we require an extensive toolkit in order to subject them to the sort of minute investigation that Elleström envisages. This kind of surgical procedure is sometimes useful, but the value of Elleström’s account in relation to our present interest in adaptation and intermediality resides more broadly in its insights concerning media form and modal function.

Some key lines of thought are worth noting. First is the notion that media are always mixed, sometimes entangled, and always involve other media.¹³ This perspective aligns with a view among some media theorists that all media are to some extent multimodal.¹⁴ Secondly, the notion of modalities and modes

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¹² Ibid., 24.

¹³ Ibid., 24, 28.

¹⁴ See Irina O. Rajewsky “Border Talks: The Problematic Status of Media Borders in the Current Debate about Intermediality,” in Elleström (Ed.), *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality* (51-68), 65-6, n7, for brief discussion of two distinct positions, one focusing on the separate qualities of individual media, the other emphasising a field of plurimedial and multimodal media where (after W. J. T. Mitchell), ‘all media are multimodal (media).’ Rajewsky’s essay discusses media as conventionally perceived to be distinct, arguing that identifying borders and separations allows for a more subtle analysis of the operations of media at and across medial boundaries. See also Jørgen Bruhn, “Heteromediality”, in Elleström (Ed.), *Media Borders, Multimodality and*

provides a useful means by which to describe media operations and interaction in contemporary cultural production. We are less concerned with immutable ontological categories; more interested in nuances, degrees, shifting combinations, the play of unlike elements that together form something particular and effectual. Elleström's model caters for the prospect of an alteration (adaptation) of the determining features of modalities in view of specific interrelations between media – it is, after all, geared to an explication of intermediality. The key implication is that the modes of presentation and perception that express the four modalities (material, spatiotemporal, sensorial, semiotic) are not in and of themselves fixed, but fluid. Their fluidity helps to account for medial operations in a contemporary – hybridizing, pluralizing, routinely adaptive – cultural landscape.

We can develop from this analysis a notion of media adaptation.¹⁵ As Elleström suggests:

When the mediation of basic and qualified media through technical media is restricted by the modal capacities of the technical media, or when the

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Intermediality (225-236), 229; and W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994) on the impurity and mixedness of what might appear to be distinct media. With respect to what he sees as the “pictorial turn,” Mitchell observes “a postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visibility, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality” (16) – a characteristically multifaceted perspective.

¹⁵ In a different vein, Elleström discusses adaptation in relation to the field of media transformation, and particularly the notion of transmediation, in Lars Elleström, “Adaptations within the field of media transformations,” in Jørgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik and Eirik Frisvold Hanssen (eds.), *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 113-132.

technical media allow of modal expansion, that is, when the mediation brings about more or less radical modal changes, it may rather be described as transformation.¹⁶

It may also, and sometimes more suitably, be described as “transposition,” as I suggest below. I’m not sure that the example that Elleström gives (dance on the radio) best serves to illustrate his case. Nonetheless, developments to theatre in a domain of intermedial production bear witness to a shifting set of media relations and the mutually adaptive work of media. This might not constitute transformation on the level of a change to media form, but it is transforming in view of how media interrelate, and how spectators (who are increasingly participants) relate to them. This notion of “transformation” helps to explain that of adaptation as it concerns media function, even if the term itself might in some cases be a step too far. I am particularly interested in developments *within* a medium in relation to the contiguous operations of other media; hence the term “transposition” seems preferable, to indicate a category shift in the way elements are arranged or presented, rather than a change of state that suggests that a medium becomes something other than it already is. This is a matter of the development of a medium over time, as part of its dynamic historicity within cultural practice. An added feature is that we must now consider this development always alongside intersections with other media, in a play of modal adaptation. The characteristic arrangements, behaviours and practices that attach to modes (that is, forms of presentation that key in with sorts of perception) *adapt* to medial interrelation. For example, familiar modes in the

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¹⁶ Elleström, “The Modalities of Media,” 34.

theatre of demarcating materiality (material modality), seeing action in performance (sensorial modality) and understanding cognitive space (spatiotemporal modality) are altered and extended in theatre events that provide new encounters with space and situation. In this case, we can talk of “modal transposition,” whereby the characteristics of a mode apply in ways that evoke their operation in other media, in new intermedial configurations and contexts.

This isn’t to argue that media separations or specific defining characteristics are effaced. Instead there is a process of transposition that sees specific media functions both adopt and adapt functional aspects of other media, or alter their own characteristic modes through their interrelation with other media (we can’t avoid it – we are back to the terrible term “media intermultimodality”). This is a matter of discursive arrangement – how the material that is mediated is presented and perceived – but also of relational interaction. It begs a question: what is possible within a medium in order for it (meaningfully, effectually) to operate *like* other media, to intersect *with* other media? The concept of modal transposition allows us to describe this artistic affordance without going as far as to say that foundational media must of necessity change in their form.

This approach is, then, arguably more complex and variegated than that provided by “remediation” which, in Bolter and Grusin’s celebrated formulation, describes “the representation of one medium in another.”¹⁷ We are not looking at

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¹⁷ Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1999), 45.

the express refunctioning of one medium by another in any particularly deterministic way, or in a strictly bilateral sense. Nor is this “the refashioning that occurs within a single medium,” which Bolter and Grusin describe as a kind of intertextual referencing (as, to use their example, the borrowing from *Vertigo* in the film *Strange Days*).¹⁸ We see instead a differently thoroughgoing adaptation of attributes *within* a given medium *because of* its interrelation with other media. This is not so much remediation as a sort of intermedial contamination that makes for a necessarily interrelated evolution of media function.

A turn to modes and modalities as a way of understanding developments within and across media echoes a development in linguistics, and particularly the idea of multimodality as a signal feature of contemporary communications. In *Multimodality and Genre*, John Bateman observes that “things have changed” for a wide array of written documents, including bus tickets, newspaper pages and gas bills. These feature increasingly diverse and plural visual elements that make for “the *multimodal document* ... an orchestrated collection of interwoven communicative goals.”¹⁹ In addressing different sorts of texts, images and graphic devices that are marshaled to the same end, Bateman emphasises the “multi,” and thereby “the *interaction* and *combination* of multiple modes within single artefacts.”²⁰

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¹⁸ Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 49.

¹⁹ John A. Bateman, *Multimodality and Genre: A Foundation for the Systematic Analysis of Multimodal Documents* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 1 (original emphasis).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1 (original emphasis).

In a cultural scene given to continuous adaptation, we observe the play of multiple modes of presentation and perception within and across media, often within single performance events. This matter of modal transposition has become increasingly routine. It applies in particular within an increasingly hybridizing production and reception process. To explore this further I address modal transposition in three immersive theatre events that each draw upon canonical dramatic texts; and two new pieces that deliberately engage with contemporary political and social agendas. This particular selection focuses on resonant areas of contemporary performance, although the processes that I describe can be traced more broadly in a wider set of productions and events (including festival spectaculars, games-based work, installations, one-to-one performances, promenade and journey-based pieces and online interactive entertainments) that are beyond the purview of this essay. There are two planes of adaptation here. Each of the five examples features the sort of modal transposition, within an intermedial performance economy, that I have begun to describe above – for example, shifts in the way that material structures are used, action is encountered, or space understood. Such shifts reverberate the modal features of these elements in other media and in any case extend the way in which the mode operates. In the first group, the immersive pieces, we are also concerned with a process of adaptation that draws upon fictional sources, and in so doing provides spectators with an encounter with themselves in the act of spectatorship. The spectator, so to say, is herself adapted into performance, producing a particular sort of reality-effect. In the latter pair of instances there is a different engagement with actuality, a sifting of fact and material circumstance. Taken together, the productions allow us to examine the adaptation of modes

and media function in pursuit of new aesthetic encounters, variously with the canon, a fashionable kind of immersion, social process and civic responsibility. This is not only a matter of media development, then, but also one that concerns the close engagement of spectators and the way in which artworks provide both pleasure and pertinence.

The Drowned Man: A Hollywood Fable, presented by Punchdrunk and the National Theatre, directed by Felix Barrett and Maxine Doyle, was premiered in a former Royal Mail building at 31 London Street in London on 20 June 2013. Its narrative core is arranged around the premise of two more or less proletarian figures having affairs that have disastrous outcomes. The show – or rather event – features live performance, extensive and usually ambient sound design, quasi-naturalistic exchanges between performers, movement routines that additionally stylize the performance, and a series of scenic spaces that the spectator inhabits along with performers (and sometimes without performers being present), some of which are functionally blurred. The bar in *The Drowned Man* is an instance of the latter. Spectators can buy a drink, remove their masks (the only space in which this permission applies to all), and watch performance as if they were in a cabaret club. It is a peculiarly mixed space, a place of performance and entertainment, its design providing continuity with the event zone of the piece as a whole, whilst it is also a chill-out space where individuals can take a break from the business of being an immersed spectator. (They are simply immersed within a higher level of evental construction.)

We can consider *The Drowned Man* in terms of Elleström's modalities; here, for the sake of brevity, the first of the four. The material modality entails the presence of human bodies, all of which shift in function as the piece progresses. Performers are sometimes actors in scenes; sometimes dancers (as in a sequence in which I observed a man perform an expressive dance on a sandhill); sometimes they appear to be backstage, moving from one scene to another, albeit in full view. Typical modal presentation (mimetic performance, dance, offstage activity) is deliberately raveled. Spectators, wearing Venice Carnival-style masks, are visible to other spectators, forming a continually shifting presence that figures the act of spectatorship as a key feature of the piece's scenography. Again, a modal transposition takes effect, where the watcher is also the watched; the body is also a material scenic feature. Our mode of viewing is that of the theatre-goer, the gallery visitor and the improviser, responding to circumstances as they unfold. This extends the body to what Elleström describes as "demarcated materiality" (36), another mode. In this category, too, there are similar transpositions. The sandhill on which a dance takes place, for example, is demarcated as a scenic space, but it is also a space in which the spectator can wander, sit, indeed perform her own dance, should she choose. As we have seen, the bar is demarcated materiality twice over, as a space within performance and a functional space for resting from performance, whilst the site itself blurs with the "not demarcated materiality" of the building in which everything takes place.

Likewise in *The Drowned Man*, when I enter a corrugated tin hut that is dressed as a church on the edge of the desert, I am not encountering a performance (no actors are present), yet I am encountering theatre. Someone else enters. I am a

witness to an act of – what, grazing? – as another immersive theatregoer consumes a setting. Space here consistently pretends to be another place (church in desert) and continually hosts the witness of its own fabrication. It is capable for performance and sufficient without it. It is modally transposed – space for performance becomes space for spectating, and *vice versa*. The *temporality* of a space (remembering Elleström’s spatiotemporal modality) appears differently to us. We perceive space to be variously waiting, resting, in action. Space has its own history of performance and function, and our presence in it helps to produce both this history and our awareness of it, as we perceive it from within. The mode of perception here is that of the spectator, but within a timeline akin to that experienced by the gallery visitor, where we encounter spaces divergently, and the games-player, where zones are variously active or suspended.

In the case of Zecora Ura Theatre Network’s *Hotel Medea*, spectators live the piece in an unusually durational way, as it starts at midnight and finishes at dawn.²¹ The production is divided into three sections. Partway through the first, the audience is separated into two groups. The room is divided in half for the women to watch as Medea is prepared for her wedding, whilst the men do likewise with respect to Jason, who stands in the centre of a circle of onlookers to be stripped naked, washed, anointed with oils and perfumes, and dressed. After this ritual, we find ourselves dancing simple steps during the wedding ceremony.

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²¹ *Hotel Medea*, adapted by Marc Von Henning, directed by Jorge Lopes Ramos, opened at the Arcola Theatre, London, 29 January 2009. It was presented as part of LIFT2010; the Oi Futuro/TEMPO Festival in Rio de Janeiro; Summerhall as part of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2011; and the Hayward Gallery, London, in 2012. A website for the project is at <http://www.hotelmedea.co.uk/>; for videos of performances, see <http://vimeo.com/hotelmedea> (both accessed 1 June 2014). I saw the show at the Summerhall in Edinburgh, 13-14 August 2011.

In *Hotel Medea*, the moment when we are taught the steps of a dance is both an encounter with a performance technique, and the development of a functional capability that will itself become part of a *mise en scène*. The dance, as far as the spectators perform it, isn't exactly presented as a dance for other spectators. Nor is it a physical expression appropriate to a moment of celebration (although it is staged as such). It is not-dance, because we might perform it improperly or not at all. Instead it is an emblem of involvement, a transgression of the specificity of a medium in favour of a staging that is encompassing, and that invites its audience to perform, witness and understand from *within representation* the mediation of the story's epicentric marital union. The mode 'dance' takes on the shape of dance as we know it (professionalized learned moves), that of social dance (available to all), and of the playground (flowing but structured ensemble action).

This expertly facilitated encounter (for it is made easy to participate) sets the tone for the rest of the show. In the second part we move across different spaces: the bedroom of Medea and Jason, which is also the bedroom of their children, where Medea discovers Jason's infidelity; and a media zone in which TV monitors show a series of news and interview snippets figuring Jason as a politician in the public sphere. Back in the bedroom, I find myself tucked up in a bunkbed as a child, to watch as Medea begins to unravel. In the third section we move through additional evental spaces before gathering at the funeral pyre of Medea's two murdered children (played by members of the audience, who lie

with discreet headphones providing them with their own soundtrack to the sequence).

Let's take the second of Elleström's modalities, the spatiotemporal. "[T]ime manifested in the material interface" appears in a number of ways.²² Firstly, it involves the presentation of theatrical scenes by co-present actors in real time. Secondly, there is a more acutely experiential sense of the present for spectators, as (for instance) we pose with Jason for a campaign photograph, and are woven into representation whilst simultaneously processing the encounter live. Thirdly, we encounter a set of scenes presented on the TV monitors in the media room, that show as-it-were documentary and news footage of Jason attending events, meeting people, opining about matters of national concern. These present serialized time, with a flavor of the long-form rolling present through the conventions of the news format, and a serialized past that cascade the backstory of Jason's political currency. Fourthly, we experience time in parallel when, in the show's second act, we move through three different stations of the piece, each of which play out for a third of the audience and are repeated twice over, so that at points we intersect with a group encountering dramatic presentation with which we have already engaged from this different perspective. Running alongside this is "perceptual time (always present)"²³ – event time (midnight to morning) that makes one aware of the unusual and special nature of the show, and requires increasing negotiations with one's own flagging body-clock. These temporal modes slide across norms. The packaging of time concerning the news clips, for

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²² Elleström, "The Modalities of Media," 36.

²³ Ibid., 36.

example, displays the sort of segmentation customary on television; the simultaneity facilitated by YouTube and other video sharing channels, where segments of material are always available; the spectatorial encounter of cinema or gallery installation, where the audience members sit in front of screened material for the first time; and the presence-structure of theatre, where they are aware of the liveness of the event and the architectonic nature of its presentation. The seriality of this sequence of clips is echoed in the seriality of the act as a whole, with its repeated (looped) enactments, drawing on both the temporal mode of theatrical time and that of the installation or the short-form video. The mode of perceptual time is likewise that of theatre, as befits a durational event that depends on co-presence; but also that of the gallery (we get tired, we rest at points); the game (we get more or less involved, depending on our inclination to play, and we can zone out now and again); the journey (we move where we are directed, from start to finish); and quotidian experience (I am glad of and revived by a hot chocolate). We could perform this analysis across other modes of the piece. Suffice it to say that *Hotel Medea* is profoundly multimodal, not simply in that it contains diverse modes of presentation, but that it entails systemic transpositions of modal function within an intermedial flux of performance, presentation and encounter.

dreamthinkspeak's *Before I Sleep* was presented initially in a disused department store in Brighton (2010), where it became the longest-running show in the history of the Brighton Festival, and was subsequently mounted in a disused

office block in Amsterdam (2011) as part of the Holland Festival.²⁴ The piece included models of different scales. One, for instance, was an evocative representation of the house in which *The Cherry Orchard* is set, in a snowy landscape showing the cherry orchard adjacent to the house, and a forest beyond. This landscape is refigured in another room, as we cross a boarded walkway through a space arranged to look like a snowy outdoors, dotted with bare stumps of trees – the cherry orchard post-purchase, post-play, and a scenic space postdramatic.²⁵ Actors presented motivic set-ups within installation settings that resonated with aspects of the play. For example, early in the piece we stand in a space dressed as a drawing room. A window frames a scene, arranged and lit as an outdoor patio. On it we see two characters at tea, in period costume, to all intents and purposes a figuring of Madame Ranevskaya and Gayev. There is no dialogue and virtually no action, rather a gallery-style encounter with a living snapshot – referential, situated – from the imagined world of the play. Towards the end of our journey we stand before a wider-than-widescreen film showing the couple at tea in the middle of a wood, being served by a butler – the figure of Firs – whom they ignore. They rise from their table and walk out of shot, leaving Firs, samovar in hand, to collapse on the ground. The film reiterates a thematic aspect of the play (the casual negligence of an increasingly redundant haut-bourgeoisie; the inept ministrations of an inapt

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²⁴ *Before I Sleep*, presented by dreamthinkspeak, conceived and directed by Tristan Sharps, opened at the Old Co-op Building, Brighton, 1 May 2010.

²⁵ The term, of course, is Lehmann's and refers here to the move away from dramatic representation in late-twentieth-century theatre that Lehmann describes, in favour of the foregrounding of spatial arrangement, flow, sensory experience and the non-linear presentation of material. See Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, translated by Karen Jürs-Munby, Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2006.

serving class) and echoes other elements and images from the show, whilst also confounding its own mediality.

FIGURE 1 NEAR HERE

The latter seems to me a typical trope in the work described above (and a good deal more) in its use of space, engagement of audiences and multimodal mixing of media. Let's consider this in relation to the modes of seeing (sensorial modality) and the three modes that Elleström assigns to the semiotic modality: "convention," "resemblance" and "contiguity." The film in *Before I Speak* is encountered as a film – we stand and watch it in its two-dimensionality – yet it is only meaningful in relation to the piece as a whole. It exists as a composite, and partly as a consequence works against the grain of cinematic representation. The action within the shot is continually metonymic, referring to actions and figurings that we know (if we do) from the play, and that we have seen previously in the show that we now experience (the characters seated for tea, the slow meandering of a butler, the autumnal woodland). The *mise en scène* within the frame rhymes with that of other scenic spaces in the show, themselves lodged as partial segments of a larger assemblage (model, installation, scenography, video). Performance is deliberately elliptical and restrained, again extra-referential, gesturing to other figurings within the piece (whether by way of models, costumes or actors), and other performances. In its very aspect ratio, requiring the spectator to be aware of the act of seeing as she watches, the film denies that it is a film and presents itself as a spatial encounter within an installation setting. There is a continual slippage of modes. Elleström's "resemblance," for instance, belongs both to the visual domain of theatre and that of cinema, whilst the specific iconic signs here call to mind nineteenth-

century Russia, a staged installation previously encountered in the piece, and (in a wonderful reveal by way of a top-shot at the end of the video) a desert island. The mode of resemblance is medially mixed. The mode of seeing is that of the cinema-goer, the theatre spectator, the gallery visitor and the cultural tourist *en promenade*.

As Irina Rajewsky suggests, “practices of border crossings or of dissolutions of established borders ... may result in *other* constructions, *other* borders that are again perceived as conventional, and in turn modified or even entirely new conceptions of individual media and art forms.”²⁶ This is happening in site-responsive immersive theatre: a medium (theatre) is modified by way of its intersection with other media and adaptation of conventional modes of its own medium, producing a genre (immersive theatre) that begins to attain its own conventional appearance. An oscillation between actuality and fabrication is in play, in these productions and in a good deal of reality-trend work – between the situated point of reference and its theatrical arrangement; and between the immersed experience of a spectator and the scenarios of encounter that mediate between what she feels, and what she understands of the event and its themes or narratives. Writing before the turn of the millennium, and prior to the turbo-charge provided by Web 2.0 technology to digital interconnectivity, Bolter and Grusin addressed “our culture’s contradictory imperatives for immediacy and hypermediacy,” where the former provides a sense of unimpeded connection, while the latter derives from the simultaneous play of proliferating media. “Our culture wants both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation,”

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²⁶ Rajewsky, “Border Talks,” 62 (original emphasis).

they observed.²⁷ We wouldn't say this now. As the instances above suggest, artistic practice has found ways to meld both immediacy and hypermediacy; to give a sense of direct encounter alongside an enjoyable awareness of pervasive mediation, not least through a multiplication of modes of presentation and perception within a single event.

Modal transposition is especially fruitful in adaptations of canonical texts and theatre forms. It helps achieve a thoroughgoing process of adaptation both in dramaturgical (dramatic) arrangement and in the manner of the piece's expression and representation. It is designed to return the spectator to the actual, or to stage this return playfully within a tissue of fabrication. Reality effects are encountered within dramatic representation; and within spectatorial experience and self-awareness. Yet these tendencies are not confined to immersive theatre, or to fictional representation. "Media intermultimodality" also characterizes – is methodologically, procedurally and aesthetically inherent to – other performance encounters. Not least, it helps to explain the operation of new intermedial production that seeks to engage with present actuality and political realities (with no trace of textual inheritance, fictional, canonical or otherwise). I conclude by discussing Rimini Protokoll's *Situation Rooms* and Rabih Mroué's *The Pixelated Revolution*, to suggest that multimodality can be both problematic and progressive.

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²⁷ Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 5.

Rimini Protokoll's *Situation Rooms* takes its name from the 'situation room' of contemporary political process, as famously depicted in Pete Souza's photograph of President Obama and his team watching a live video feed showing the storming of the compound in Pakistan that housed Osama Bin Laden and his entourage. As Alison Croggon suggests,

It's a compelling photograph, not only because of its subject, but because it captured so dramatically the peculiar alienation of contemporary existence. Some of the most powerful people in the world were following a mission which was taking place thousands of miles away. They had ordered the action and now, via drones and live cams, they could watch it in real time. It's an image that is almost iconic in its banality. Anyone with a smart phone or a television or a computer does something similar every day.²⁸

Rimini Protokoll's situation rooms are more diverse, and located in a different kind of compound – a performance zone divided into a series of interconnecting spaces.²⁹ The show is nonetheless suffused with mediation, actuality, political

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²⁸ Alison Croggon, "Perth Festival: Situation Rooms and Bianco – review," <http://www.abc.net.au/arts/blog/Alison-Croggon/Perth-Festival-Situation-Rooms-Bianco-review-140220/default.htm> (posted 21 February 2014; accessed 27 May 2014).

²⁹ *Situation Rooms* was conceived and directed by Helgard Haug, Stefan Kaegi and Daniel Wetzels, with design by Dominic Huber/blendwerk and video design by Chris Kondek. Details of the project are on the company's website at http://www.rimini-protokoll.de/website/en/project_6009.html (accessed 1 June 2014). The piece was premiered at the Ruhrtriennale in Bochum on 23 August 2013 and has since been presented in locations including Frankfurt, Perth and Paris. I saw it on 3 May 2014 in Athens, Greece, where it was presented as part of the Fast Forward Festival. See also http://www.rimini-protokoll.de/website/media/situationrooms/programmhefte/Situation_Rooms_englisch.pdf (accessed 1 June 2014) for the programme accompanying the

pertinence and the sort of banality Croggon observes. It is a piece for twenty spectators, each of whom is given a mini iPad and a pair of headphones and advised, in the pre-show briefing, that it is important to interact as other people will depend on what each participant does. This becomes clear as the spectators proceed through the piece. The iPad serves as a guide, a window on the installation-cum-scenographic spaces in which they become immersed, and a screen for documentary-style material. The show takes place by way of eleven segments. Each features an individual whose life has been touched by war in some way. My set of scenarios included, for example, a child soldier from the Congo, a visiting field surgeon for Doctors without Borders working in Sierra Leone, and the production manager of a Swiss defense systems company. Each segment proceeds by way of a voiceover and pre-recorded footage appropriate to the subject. It also mixes an in-show realization, so that the spectator-participant sees on the iPad screen exactly the same theatrical space that she inhabits. Each space is scenically arranged according to a realist aesthetic. The manager's office, for example, is suitably minimalist, contains smart furniture and some well-chosen ornaments. The surgeon's room contains a medical bed, and an operating table with instruments – scissors, tweezers, scalpels – laid out alongside. The iPad sometimes shows other characters in a scene. As I watched the screen, for example, I saw the hand of the surgeon take a yellow sticker from a roll above the operating table (I did the same), in order to mark the patient's degree of priority for treatment. He turns to the couch, on which (in both the screen, and the room that I presently inhabit) there is a spectator-participant

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premiere of the piece, which includes accounts of each of the twenty "experts" and other useful commentary.

wearing headphones, offering up a hand to receive a sticker. This part of the film on the iPad is not a documentary, then, but the restaging of a documentary-derived scene within a theatrical space dressed as an authentic setting. Space is modally trebled, as reference for an actual place; the site of an edited, pre-recorded performance; and the site of current participation involving new actors – the spectator and a co-spectator. Mimicking the action played out within the screen, I placed a sticker on the hand of my colleague who lay on the couch before me.

The logistical solutions that lie behind the piece contribute to the brilliance of its execution. This is an impressive rendition of show as system, bringing together scenic construction, video production and event facilitation into a single continuum. The show's doubling of space and action, in which the representational modes of video and theatre are mutually transposed, marks a step on from Rimini Protokoll's earlier reality-trend style. Whilst *Situation Rooms* derives from testimony (the sort of "expert of the everyday" account privileged by the company in many of its pieces), there is a parallel drive towards representation, but without the paraphernalia of characterization. We do not *play* the surgeon or the patient. We simply stand in for them in order to realize a scene. This is dramatisation as a form of refiguring the real, but in a way that is neither entirely televisual nor theatrical. Modally, the iPad requires you to place yourself behind a point-of-view shot that is specifically cinematic, as if the device were the camera rather than the screen, whilst you orient yourself in actual space, and avail yourself of opportunities for the kind of lateral observation typical in an installation setting.

The show's multimodality presents something of a challenge to participation, as well as to description. As Vicky Frost observes in her review of the piece at the Perth Festival:

I'm still not entirely sure how I should categorise this remarkable experience – it's theatre with the audience as actors; journalism with the consumer interacting directly with the story; a video game where the screen bleeds into real and constructed worlds. But above all it is utterly absorbing – for more than an hour you are so busy living this piece of extraordinary art that that you do really become it.³⁰

Situation Rooms is not without other difficulties. One of the key requirements is to navigate your way around the interconnected set of spaces that function modally in a way similar to those of immersive theatre events, as described above. It's not always easy to follow the prompts and images on the iPad, and I took a wrong turn and ended up having to step out through one of the exit doors at the perimeter of the space and ask for assistance. This is hardly a criticism, but the process of navigation means that inevitably one plays less attention to the voiceover and the content of the video than would otherwise be the case. On the other hand, the fact of almost continuously watching the iPad means that there is less opportunity to savour the nature and details of the scenic spaces that one

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³⁰ Vicky Frost, "Situation Rooms by Rimini Protokoll – review," <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/australia-culture-blog/2014/feb/18/situation-rooms-by-rimini-protokoll-review> (posted 18 February 2014; accessed 27 May 2014).

inhabits. If a Punchdrunk show fetishizes its scenography and provides the spectator with enough time to do the same, *Situation Rooms* offers scenic plenitude that is encountered more glancingly. The spectator's mode of engagement is task-based action rather than freeflow fascination (another kind of modal transposition).³¹

The company describes *Situation Rooms* on its website as "a multiplayer video piece." Frost echoes this when she suggests that "your experience of the work is much closer to playing a video game than watching a theatrical work,"³² although this is really a function of finding oneself within a mode of presentation that brings together the spatiality and temporality of short-sequence video on the one hand, and those of installations and durational games-play on the other. The signal difference is that the spectator-participants don't have the sort of agency that a video game offers, so modally *Situation Rooms* is closer, peculiarly enough, to end-on theatre in this respect: the spectators don't change anything that happens. Then again – and by way of another modal transposition – their encounter with the action materializes them within *mise en scène* so that sensorially their reactions to content (accounts of damage and deprivation, for example) are internally negotiated alongside those of playful observation of rules (following prompts and instructions), and the casual observance of self and others as participants move through a series of new spectating scenarios. The

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³¹ My relationship to the piece was the same as Frost's, who "wondered at times whether the balance between interactivity and storytelling was a bit out; the impact of these important stories reduced because one is given so little time to really consider them." Croggon had the opposite experience: "[t]he show requires a ferocious concentration, which I found somehow drove the realities home, rather than distracting from them."

³² Frost, "Situation Rooms by Rimini Protokoll – review."

pleasure is of entering a fabrication (I prefer this term to “fiction”) that puts the actual (both its stories, and the spectator’s own engagements) into play.

The serial construction of the piece also poses some problems. We are continually asked to transpose from one geographical location to another, one demographic context to another, without quite having solid ground from which to determine what we are seeing, hearing and navigating. It is fun to be in the face of such diverse scenarios, but arguably more questionable politically. The piece accumulates narratives that, taken together, depict global interrelations between the support structures, operations and effects of contemporary warfare, from the political and economic system that tolerates an often indiscriminate arms trade, to the lived experience of displaced and brutalized groups and individuals. It appropriately finds sinuous relationships between the work of people in western democracies, and that of the warlords and soldiers on the ground in Africa and the Middle East. But it also merges a wide set of experiences and engagements with war narratives into a single meld that dilutes the potency of the individual stories precisely because they cannot all connect narratively or causally. What predominates, then, is theme (war and its deleterious effects), seriality (the segmentation of experience within a common aesthetic treatment) and encounter. The latter is diffused. My encounter was with individuals whose stories I half-remember from the swirl of the event; scenographies that aimed at a mode of realist reassurance of immersive connection with the worlds represented; fleeting images in videos; half-heard voices providing testimony; and a zone of palpable fabrication and event-production.

There is a very uneasy line drawn between the in-world spaces and rubrics of the event and the in-the-world histories of the various individuals. I wonder where to locate the adjective “real-world” here, for the company performs a sort of inversion, through another set of modal transpositions. The techniques of a theatre of experience and encounter mean that, for the spectator, there is an immediate sense of the here and now, as we negotiate space, take in the specific details of a series of new surroundings, witness other people having a similar experience, and undertake a limited set of actions that conform to the requirements of the specific scene. The here and now is deliberately theatricalized but modally mixed. It is an effect of event-time (structured according to the beginning- and end-points of the video segments), the choreography of participants, and relational intersection between bodies both within and outside the screen.

Herein lies an epistemological and representational problem, and one in good part due precisely to the multimodal form of the piece. The fabrication simultaneously erodes the facticity on which the piece depends, and compartmentalizes its component parts to the extent that they become ironically unmoored from their context. This is none the more the case than the instance in which I am prompted to sit on a stool in front of a computer monitor. My iPad shows a field of flowers and the instruction not to look anywhere else. The computer monitor, meanwhile, shows the beating – leading to the death – of a man in what I recall to be a Middle Eastern, perhaps Syrian, setting, which of course I watch. Yet the scene is hardly fleshed out, the man’s history perhaps necessarily unavailable, the political scenario unexplored. I am not criticizing the

company for including this more acute truth-instance, this apparently utter fact, within its texture. This, after all, metonymically represents the array of deaths that shadow *Situation Rooms*, given its focus on the production and aftermath of war scenarios. Rather, we must at least say that death appears here too as a form of system design, ratcheting up the frisson of experiential engagement as there can be no higher stake than a life. The very injunction not to watch recognizes that on one level this is the most watchable (the most drastically defining, most requiring of witness) moment in the piece. Yet the sequence takes its place in a swathe of glancing moments, briefly and partially illuminating their subjects, but leaving us without completion, cognisance, possession. Perhaps one mode too many has been transposed – probably, here, the mode of theatrical access is precisely too similar to that of YouTube surfing access. Perhaps this only serves to demonstrate that beyond the multimodal machinery of presence and presentation, experience and encounter, when we return to representation it remains as platonically unsatisfactory, as unreachably not-real as ever. Modes of production and engagement are extended, ingeniously so, but here at least they are spread thin.

Rabih Mroué includes footage of what appears to be a death moment, but takes a different tack in *The Pixelated Revolution*.³³ In a characteristic set-up, Mroué sits

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³³ *The Pixelated Revolution*, written, directed and performed by Rabih Mroué, was premiered on 9 January 2012 at the Baryshnikov Arts Center in New York as part of P.S. 122's 2012 COIL festival and has since been presented at festivals and locations including Documenta 13, Kassel (2012), Festival/Tokyo and the WRO Biennale, Wrocław (2013), and Vancouver (2014). I saw the piece on 5 May 2014 at the Onassis Cultural Centre in Athens, Greece. See Rabih Mroué, translated by

at a table, in this instance positioned stage-right. A large screen, slightly off-centred to the left, runs across the back. Mroué operates a PowerPoint presentation, displayed on the screen, that conveys a mix of text, images and video material. He presents what he describes as a 'non-academic lecture' about the Syrian conflict, dealing largely with the mediation of the conflict through videos taken from mobile phones, uploaded to social media sites and in particular YouTube. This is a lecture because there is an accompanying PowerPoint, a presenter who reads from a text, an audience watching face-on. It is non-academic since, as Mroué says in a post-show discussion, the references that inform his research are not shared, there is some "imprecision," and elements of the show are more free-form than a conventional lecture. He reflects that the mix of facts and fabrication "is not to cheat the audience – but to say that history is not always in focus."³⁴ It also becomes clear that this is a delicate and nuanced treatment that avoids making a case about the conflict, whilst leaving you in no doubt as to the pro-liberation sympathies of the presenter. The mode of the lecture has become closer to that of the monologue, whilst the stratification of fact and discursive analysis help the piece to oscillate between presentation and performance. In her response to the production, Carol Martin finds that

Mroué is an excellent actor. He shades his performance with many subtle and fleeting emotions: a flicker of sadness at his first mention of the deaths

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Ziad Nawfal, introduction by Carol Martin, "The Pixelated Revolution," *The Drama Review*, 56:3 (2013) for a full text of the piece (25-35), along with Martin's introductory essay (19-25).

³⁴ Post-show discussion, Onassis Cultural Centre, Athens, 5 May 2014.

of Syrian protesters; tenaciousness in his efforts to find some fragments of truth about the protesters' plight; anger at injustice. Mroué's acting style is to present himself as an entirely trustworthy performer and researcher.³⁵

Mroué begins by noting that in September 2011, a few months after the conflict started, he was drawn to reports and representations of the conflict on the Internet, and in particular scenes that indicated (whilst not showing directly) the death of the person holding the mobile phone. As he speaks, a line of text comes up on the screen: "To record one's own death." The word "record" is in red. It is replaced by the word "document," then the word "shoot," and throughout the piece Mroué draws threads between the notion, techniques and procedural characteristics of shooting a film and shooting with a gun.

The Syrian protestors filmed their own demonstrations as an act of witness and prospectively a record of the identities of those opposing them. Mroué makes much of this seeking out of identity. As he says at one point, in cases where someone has shot someone else in cold blood, the criminal should be identified and tried. Making an identification is not easy, however. Mroué shows a segment of video, which he entitles "Double shooting." The image shows the point of view of the man filming with his mobile, from a room or balcony in what we assume is the fourth or fifth floor of an apartment block. There is the sound of shooting and shouting. The man scans his surroundings jerkily. He – his mobile lens – picks up the figure of a soldier holding a gun, in the shadow of a ground-floor doorway. As he deliberately films the figure, the soldier lifts his gun and shoots. The image

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³⁵ Martin, "The Pixelated Revolution," 20.

jerks, and after a flurry of movement it shows the ceiling. The sound of the man saying (Mroué reports) “I am wounded” can be heard, but only briefly.

FIGURE 2 NEAR HERE

Mroué picks over this sequence with the lengthy detachment of post-production scrutiny and the obsessive attention of a forensic investigator. He splits it into separate frames to explore the prospect of the man with the mobile escaping his fate. He proposes a de-reality effect that obtains through the mode of filming. As events are watched through the camera, the camera and the eye are as one. In that case, the man doesn't perceive his death, as it does not take place within the scene. Mroué concludes (we might take this to be an instance of the imprecision granted to the artist as opposed to the academic) that a compulsion to record – to witness, provide an evidence-base – has superseded an instinct for self-preservation. He zooms into the image of the soldier, to reveal only a field of pixels that suggests a face whose eyes cannot be seen, let alone any other distinguishing features. The lecture format, the attention to detail, the consideration of perspectives (literal and conceptual) provides a patina of coolness, but the discursive arrangement of the material around questions of agency, consequence and responsibility rings with a sustained anger. Both shooters are anonymous, although one loses his life (we assume) in an attempt to de-anonymise political and civic action through representation.

The modal transpositions here are manifold. The lecture indeed presents an analysis, but it does so by shifting the docu-footage into the plane of cinema, whilst the commentary narrativises civic struggle. Prior to this sequence, Mroué explains that he has mapped the common traits of mobile records of

demonstrations with the Dogme 95 manifesto, “The Vow of Chastity,” produced by the Danish filmmakers Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg, recommending specific cinematographic approaches and tactics.³⁶ The Dogme rules pursue a seemingly transparent mode of filmmaking that gets closer to the actuality of its subject matter, through an insistence on hand-held camerawork (as opposed to the use of tripods, dollies and tracks), location shooting and the use of natural rather than theatrical lighting. Mroué’s adapted list – drawn up, he tells us, in collaboration with von Trier, Vinterberg and Syrian activists – is perceptive and ironic. The first of nineteen recommendations, for instance, is “Shoot from the back and do not show faces, in order to avoid recognition, pursuit, and subsequent arrest by Security Forces and their thugs.”³⁷ This matter of preserving anonymity may be one of life or death. Hence the third recommendation: “Try to take long shots of the manifestation from afar, and for close-up shots only show bodies.”³⁸ The fourth, meanwhile, concerns the process of justice through identification: “Make sure to film faces, when someone is assaulting or being assaulted.”³⁹

There are clearly ethical challenges in dealing with actuality-based material drawn from the Internet, let alone with current conflict. Kaelen Wilson-Goldie notes the “heated debate among local artists on how to address the underbelly of ongoing Arab revolts in their work, and, more specifically, how to deal with the

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³⁶ See <http://www.dogme95.dk/the-vow-of-chastity/> for the original manifesto (accessed 1 June 2014).

³⁷ Mroué, “The Pixelated Revolution”, 26.

³⁸ Ibid., 27.

³⁹ Ibid., 27.

situation in Syria.”⁴⁰ Mroué muses upon what would constitute a decent pause between incident and artwork in a time of political upheaval:

[W]ith the revolution in Tunisia, or the revolution in Egypt, or the violence in Syria, when are we allowed to talk about it? How long do we have to wait before we can make a work? I think there are no limits, no defined times. ... Am I allowed to talk about the protesters when they are still being killed? Am I allowed to take them out of these events? Is it okay? Is it possible for an artist to make a work about something that is still going on? When I ask myself such questions, I tend to think I’ve pinpointed something I should pursue.⁴¹

The solution in this particular case, surprisingly perhaps, is not to make a markedly polemical piece. *The Pixelated Revolution* is notably restrained and cool. You might say that this is another modal transposition, where the ragged rush of uprising and repression are transmuted into a calm, aestheticized act of reflective analysis. The more telling transposition, however, concerns the epicentric footage from the mobile phone. So entirely quotidian, given that the mobile is now the device of choice for demotic filming and photography, and yet so drastic given what is at stake, the footage appears notably different in its use from the rendition of the video capture of a death in Rimini Protokoll’s *Situation Rooms*. Here the segment is returned to us as something close to an artwork –

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⁴⁰ Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, “Rabih Mroué on Tour: The Pixelated Revolution,” <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/3091> (published 5 January 2012; accessed 27 May 2014).

⁴¹ Quoted in Wilson-Goldie, “Rabih Mroué on Tour.”

that's to say, a composition as indicated by Mroué's discussion of the presence of the (mobile) camera operator and his choice and limitations as to what to record; and a filmic sequence as demonstrated by Mroué's separation of the material into its constituent frames. With the overlay of the post-Dogme recommendations for filming in Syria, a piece of guerrilla video is modally transposed to become, for a theatre audience, the emblem of a specific video aesthetic. Whilst Mroué is careful to ascribe actuality only as and where he finds it, his piece nonetheless slips productively across modes and categories. Martin celebrates the systemic shifts that this entails:

Mroué participates in an aesthetic and analytical discourse that claims to represent the real and to tell the truth while openly acknowledging the simultaneous use of fiction to do so, in his invention of a fictional aesthetic manifesto. He straddles fiction and non-fiction, performance and documentation, and entertainment and edification in a performance in which acting, video, photographs, stage design, and text all operate together as equal partners in the creation of meaning. In our upload culture the revolution we can see and know is the revolution that is aesthetically digitized.⁴²

As suggested above, the term "fabrication" seems more appropriate to "fiction" in this realm of the apparently-actual, but Martin's point nonetheless stands: *The Pixelated Revolution* is multimodal, and effects a flickering series of transpositions across medium-specific modes of presentation, reception and

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⁴² Martin, "The Pixelated Revolution," 24.

cognition. The transposition that cannot be scrutinized here, however, is that from life to death, at least in representation. Mroué analyses a scene in which a tank turns its gun towards the person filming, a way along a street, and fires:

Paradoxically, we don't see the moment of death. Even though the scene is not edited, we do not see it; we see only what comes before and after death. The moment itself cannot be located. It seems that recording the moment that separates life from death is impossible. I play the scene in slow motion; I watch it once, twice, ten times; I watch it frame by frame. I print the different images on paper and scrutinize them carefully. There is no image of this vital moment. It is as if the moment of transition from life to death cannot be recorded with cameras, even if we are using highly developed equipment and sophisticated lenses. ... My theory is that this vital moment is stretched in two directions at once — life and death — thus causing borders and separations to dissolve, and preventing us from seeing and recording.⁴³

And yet the moment of death (as we assume that it is) has been recorded, replayed by way of its theatrical presentation here. The mode of reality-capture enabled by the mobile phone camera resists aestheticisation even whilst it is figured as an aesthetic construction, in a theatre piece that recuperates political protest whilst refusing closure.

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⁴³ Mroué, "The Pixelated Revolution," 33-35.

In *Multimodality and Genre*, Bateman notes a “broadening in ‘modal basis’” and observes that, “The ascendancy of the multimodal document is also accompanied and accelerated by the dramatic growth of technologies by which such documents are produced, distributed and consumed.”⁴⁴ This makes for what Bateman terms “modal density” – a phrase that applies no less readily to *The Pixelated Revolution* and indeed the larger swell of actuality-oriented performance, facilitated by the techniques and evolving aesthetics of ubiquitous digital production. In such work, modal transposition refigures our engagements with space, liveness, presence, experience, and presentation. Media function is altered (modally), precisely to intersect with other media. There is a *partialising* and *relativizing* of mediality, and an *amplifying* of particular modal elements – saturated engagements with space, for instance, in *The Drowned Man*; plural modes of looking in *Situation Rooms*; diverse perspectives on and placing of the subject in *The Pixelated Revolution*. Modal transposition serves a characteristic agenda: the provision of encounters with actuality, where both artwork and experience are pluralised, segmented and synthesized.

Perhaps Elleström’s “terrible” term deserves a longer lease of life for, contrary to its appearance, “media intermultimodality” turns out to be rather trim. It describes two sorts of modal transposition. The first is a kind of aesthetic contagion where ways of seeing and showing develop through mutual influence across media. The second concerns the incorporation of media within each other, not as free-standing elements (for example a film within a theatre piece), but as parts of a larger assemblage that can only be understood or experienced through

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⁴⁴ Bateman, *Multimodality and Genre*, 2.

the serial or simultaneous operation of the various media together. This isn't quite the same as "mixed media," although it is part of a longer history of artistic development that draws on multimedia practices. It is rather the result of the sorts of technical interface now used across artforms; and the cultural practices – towards routine multiplicity and hybridity – that contemporary production technologies now permit. "Adaptation," then, is a matter of evolving media form and function within a digital, intermedial and neo-liberal culture that prizes change – as demonstrated in the instances discussed above by way of their artistic innovation and their offer of new experiences and perspectives. In this sense they exemplify some striking developments more widely in theatre and performance, as Rufus Norris and his colleagues observed on their trip to Edinburgh in the summer of 2014, particularly in relation to our encounters with actuality in the larger scene of reality-trend performance.