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Crises of Site: Non-Specificity in the Theater

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Theater Studies

by

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January 2018

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Crises of Site: Non-Specificity in the Theater

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by

Joyelle Klaer Ball

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ABSTRACT

Crises of Site: Non-Specificity in the Theater

by

Joyelle Klaer Ball

Site-specific continues to be a recognizable descriptor that, when applied to performance, codes for a (potentially) culturally transgressive and aesthetically transformative work that relies on the physical co-presence of non-theatrical site and spectator to produce its effects. Digital and networked technologies, however, destabilize *site* as a physical concept, expanding the ways in which performance might relate to both virtual and actual environments. In this dissertation, I investigate site-specific performance's contemporary identity crisis. As the disciplinary frameworks of site, specificity, and performance each expand, affected by the influx of virtual and mediatized interventions, staging practices evolve along with them. The integration of new media forms in performance creates new possibilities for aesthetic and spectatorial experiences. Media technologies like virtual reality systems, interactive gaming interfaces, and live Tweeting alter sensory perception and remediate theatrical experience for a user-spectator who might experience multiple, simultaneous places of performance.

I examine the ways in which these technologically-altered spatial experiences in performance reclaim a specificity purported to be lost. Considering the virtual as *site-*

specific challenges narratives of technological determinism that relegate digitality to realms of disembodiment and distraction. I demonstrate that our digital age is not an age of spatial ambiguity but an opportunity to consider expanded forms of spatial specificity in performance. I explore practices which mix the spatial realities of the spectators by combining, in one form or another, physical and virtual components across multiple spaces, either simultaneously or in archive. These forms mix the experience of a physical environment with that of imagined metaphor, reorient the maps of spectator and performer, displace performances into multiple sites, and dismantle disciplinary binaries of liveness and presence. I present challenges to the conventional disciplinary frameworks that assume a version of liveness and presence that is predicated on physicality. These challenges demonstrate performance's capacity to extend ways of "being there" without physically being there, reshaping numerous spatial axes of exclusion that include race, class, gender, and physical ability. With the transformations and disruptions involved in making the virtual *site-specific*, contemporary works reawaken critical analysis of habitual functions of space, shedding light on the intersections of spatial politics and embodiment.

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I. Introduction

When asked about my research by a new acquaintance, whether at a conference or a coffee shop, the term *site-specific theater* is often greeted by a bundle of suggested case studies. Have I seen that version of *Orpheus* performed in a chamber under a bridge? Or that new immersive piece that has you walk through a hotel? Did I know the local theater company would be performing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* out in the woods? Or how about that one in a factory, bathroom, courtroom, museum, pool, treehouse, dilapidated discotheque? Regrettably, I inform them, I can't be everywhere at once. But apparently site-specific theater can be.

These conversations signal a continuing excitement for performances that pursue alternative relationships to space. The move outside the purpose-built auditorium, although as old as the history of theater itself, can still be successfully marketed as a novelty. Re-appropriated or found spaces bring to light forgotten histories. Community-driven work activates political and social spaces. Ambulatory and interactive performance events challenge the passivity of the spectator. *Site-specific* continues to be a recognizable descriptor that codes for a (potentially) culturally transgressive and aesthetically transformative work, or at the very least, an interesting jaunt through the forest. And as demonstrated by the new suggestion of a site-specific performance example that pops up in my inbox daily, the practice is now ubiquitous. For a term predicated on particularity, however, such widespread use threatens its foundations. If site-specific performance is happening everywhere, what is happening to its specificity?

In this dissertation, I investigate site-specific performance's contemporary identity crisis. As the disciplinary frameworks of site, specificity, and performance each expand, affected by the influx of virtual and mediatized interventions, staging practices evolve along with them. This expansion pulls the term further away from a singular definition and into multiple spaces of discursive potential. An ambiguous multiplicity, however, disrupts the intentional interrelationship between performance and site and produces a generic instability. I examine the political and cultural effects of non-specificity and argue that contemporary technology-driven performance practices constitute a response to this loss of specificity. These performance practices create new ways to understand specificity and its relationship to site—not by stabilizing the definition of either term but by materializing site-specificity as a continuous process.

Although the term has stretched beyond its own definitive category, in order to engage with its slippages, a consideration of the accepted norm will be useful. Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks's definition remains the most frequently cited:

Site-specific performances are conceived for, mounted within and conditioned by the particulars of found spaces, existing social situations or locations, both used and disused: sites of work, play and worship: cattle-market, chapel, factory, cathedral, railway station. They rely, for their conception and their interpretation, upon the complex coexistence, superimposition and interpenetration of a number of narratives and architectures historical and contemporary, of two basic orders: that which is of the site, its fixtures and fittings, and that which is brought to the site, the performance and its scenography: of that which pre-exists the work and that which is of the work: of the past and of the present. They are inseparable from their sites, the only contexts within which they are intelligible. Performance recontextualises such sites: it is the latest occupation of a location at which other occupations — their material traces and histories — are still apparent: site is not just an interesting, and disinterested, backdrop... Interpenetrating narratives jostle to create meanings. The multiple meanings and readings of performance and site intermingle, amending and compromising one another.¹

¹ Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology* (Routledge, 2001), 23. This definition has been reproduced and cited in numerous places over the years with a few variations. For example, in Pearson's *Site-*

This definition implies that for a performance to be considered site-specific, its content, form, and structure must be generated from its actual place of performance—notably a place outside the confines of a purpose-built theater. The place is physical, a tangible environment, and active as a participant in the theatrical action. The performance might fit comfortably within its found environment or clash discordantly “like when a sixth century battle is enacted in a car factory,”² but either way, Pearson and Shanks consider performance and site to belong to one another. I will briefly explore the history and evolution of the term in the next section and this is the conventional definition that I take for my point of reference.

Despite the accepted emphasis on physical presence, site-specificity has always been produced by the combination of literal and abstract elements. For instance, the materiality of a historical landmark—its architectural features, landscape, and artifacts—are thought to evoke for the physically present audience the imagined memories of a distant past. James Schlatter describes the historicity of En Garde Arts, a theater company founded in 1985 by Anne Hamburger in New York City, and their sites of performance: “Like the sites themselves, the history they conjure seems both dead and gone and very much still alive” and it is through the “act of collective imagining or conjuring” that the history is activated.³ *Site* encompasses a fluid network of associations, institutional forces, and social

Specific Performance, the quote reads: “They are inseparable from their sites, the only contexts within which they are *readable*” (my emphasis).

² Ibid.

³ James Schlatter, quoted in Scott T. Cummings, *Remaking American Theater: Charles Mee, Anne Bogart and the SITI Company* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 50.

constructions, an interplay between the physical and abstract that keeps its definition unstable.

The destabilization of site as a concept is compounded by the exponential increase in the effects of digital media and virtual technology on performance. The integration of new media forms creates new possibilities for aesthetic and spectatorial experiences. Media technologies like virtual reality systems, interactive gaming interfaces, and live Tweeting alter sensory perception and remediate theatrical experience for a user-spectator who might experience multiple, simultaneous places of performance. Many explorations have been made into the various ways technology transforms performance, with unique case studies manifesting quicker than they can be documented.⁴ My emphasis, however, is on how the concept of *site* expands to include the new spaces created by technology and the ways in which these technologically-altered spatial experiences in performance reclaim a specificity purported to be lost.

As site become more difficult to place, spatial practices that prioritize where performance occurs expand accordingly in a reciprocity between art and technology. The expansion of practices generates a more liberal application of site-specificity to performances that fall outside of Pearson's conventional definition. These departures do not always represent practitioners wrestling with how to make the virtual specific, but as the prominent critique asserts, how to make a "bold new setting" marketable.⁵ When the found

⁴ Some examples of scholarship on the role of media in performance: Rosemary Kilch and Edward Scheer, *Multimedia Performance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, *Cyborg Theatre: Corporeal/Technological Intersections in Multimedia Performance* (Springer, 2011); Steve Benford and Gabriella Giannachi, *Performing Mixed Reality* (MIT Press, 2011); Steve Dixon, *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation* (MIT Press, 2007); Gabriella Giannachi, *Virtual Theatres* (Routledge, 2004).

⁵ Lyn Gardner, "Orpheus beneath a bridge, Macbeth in a cave: theatre's ever stranger locations," *The Guardian*, March 1, 2017.

space, however bold, becomes a “disinterested backdrop,” site-specific becomes a trendy brand that might provide a company with the cultural capital to draw both critical attention and commercial gain. As with all once-experimental practices (the origin of the contemporary move-outside-the-theater) the experiment evolves into what it was initially reacting against. Lyn Gardner, writing for *The Guardian*, has been consistently critical of what she sees as spatial gimmicks. Her review titles, “Site-Specific Theatre?: Can you be more specific?” (2008) and “When site-specific theatre is just too vague,” (2012) reveal a growing skepticism about the term’s application to events where the play and location no longer seem to serve one another.

I frame my discussion about non-specificity in performance around the emergence of different crises facing site-specific practices. For Gardner, the crisis of non-specificity is a crisis of authenticity, a sacrifice of artistic integrity for capital. I choose the term *crisis* because it marks the contemporary urgency of the (dis)junctures produced by media technologies and the legion of anxieties that surround them. The blurring of physicality and virtuality mirrors contemporary tensions in performance studies, and I use the perceived crises of non-specificity to trouble disciplinary frameworks of liveness, mediatization, physical co-presence, perception, and spectatorship. As the concept of *site* becomes dispersed across much broader cultural, social, and discursive fields, the potentialities for relationships between performance and place become equally as various. My dissertation title, “Crises of Site: Non-Specificity in the Theater” reflects the mounting stakes of specificity in these emergent forms of multiplicity.

The crises and consequent responses to them that I explore are as follows: 1) Movement and transplantation; 2) Digital displacement and virtual spectatorship; 3)

Postmodern placelessness. If, as Richard Serra suggests of site-specific works, “to move the work is to destroy it,” then mobility threatens the very nature of the form. The popularity of the practice, and the often extremely limited access of a small venue or short run, however, spur the transplantation of performances from one bold setting to another. Even Pearson’s first site-specific epic, originally in a Welsh disused car factory, toured Europe. Further, with mobile technologies, users can carry performative interfaces with them beyond the bounded confines of an intended performance venue. As performances are displaced into digital realms, the Internet multiplies possibilities for virtual spectatorship. Virtual access to a performance, either recorded or “live,” to a performance questions the reliance on physical co-presence and introduces the potential for a spectator’s multi-sitedness. Accessing multiple sites at once seemingly weakens the power of specificity by stretching it beyond its reference to a singular experience in a single place. The experience of an infinite cyberspace becomes, for postmodern critics, an experience of placelessness. Pushed to the extremes of non-specificity, performances in the liminal spaces between the physical and virtual occupy a *non-place*. The result is a crisis of individual subjectivity with the subject unable to locate his or herself in reality.

Spatial ambiguity poses a perceived threat to artistic and political efficacy. Bruno Latour points to a similar “crisis of representation” in the political realm: “The idea can be formulated simply: by attempting to explain politics in terms of something else, we might have lost its specificity and have consequently forgotten to maintain its own dynamics, letting it fall into disuse.”⁶ The loss of semantic specificity becomes a loss of discursive usefulness and representational potential. The dynamics of site-specific performance are

⁶ Bruno Latour, “What if We *Talked* Politics a Little?” *Contemporary Political Theory*, 2 (2003): 143.

intimately involved with how place intersects with politics, cultural policy, community engagement, collective memory, and identity formation. A dulling of this dynamic might have ideological and actual implications for how performance engages with particular sites.

New media forms create new relationships to spatial specificity—but they are not all characterized by loss. Rather, for each crisis of non-specificity, I offer an example of a contemporary performance practice that creates new ways to locate its audience specifically within the broadening scope of digital mediatization. These methods embrace the productive potential of the indeterminacy produced by media technologies. As Miwon Kwon argues, with the “chance to conceive of site as something more than place—as repressed ethnic history, a political cause, a disenfranchised social group” comes the potential “to strengthen art’s capacity to penetrate the sociopolitical organization of contemporary life with greater impact and meaning.”⁷ Kwon suggests that a material site is always also informed by im/material intersections of social, political, and historical forces. An attention to site, then, increases performance’s capacity to intervene in these intersecting spaces. This capacity is multiplied by the virtual destabilization of site. Considering the virtual as site-specific challenges narratives of technological determinism. I demonstrate that our digital age is not an age of spatial ambiguity but an opportunity to consider expanded forms of spatial specificity in performance.

A History of Specificity

Site-specific performance is losing its specificity. Many scholars and practitioners have abandoned the term in favor of more specialized vocabulary—immersive,

⁷ Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (MIT Press, 2004), 30.

participatory, community-driven, site-based, site-responsive. The differences may be largely semantic, but they point to perceived crises of individual subjectivity. To be nowhere in particular (if site were unspecific) is to lack a feeling of one's place in the world, in both the geographical and metaphorical senses. Spatial ambiguity has possible consequences for nationhood, community building, and identity formation. Additionally, as site-specific performances become more marketable, they become more ubiquitous. Staging practices expand, adopt the popular moniker, become commercially successful and earn the exasperation of practitioners who argue that simply moving a performance outside does not make it site-specific. For some, the loss of specificity marks a loss of artistic and aesthetic authenticity. I turn to a brief history of the term and its practices in order to demonstrate how the crisis of non-specificity evolves and how new performance modalities respond to it by reclaiming the qualities of place assumed to be lost.

The term *site-specific* emerged in the 1960s, first used to describe visual art and installations that were permanently associated with their environments.⁸ Its application to performance would follow in the subsequent decades, first to describe site-specific dance performances and, later, theatrical events. While site-dance shares many similarities in origin and motivation to site-specific theater, dance scholarship has been more comfortable with *site-specific* as an inclusive umbrella term. As I focus my examination on the crises facing site and the contestation of its terminology, I will not delve into the expansive history of site-dance as its own distinct genre.⁹

⁸ Nick Kaye provides a comprehensive history of the site-specific movement in visual art in his book *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (Routledge, 2000).

⁹ For more on site-dance, Victoria Hunter's *Moving Sites: Investigating Site-Specific Performance in Dance* (Routledge, 2015) provides a comprehensive examination of site-based dance practices, exploring the various issues that arise as dance moves outside of theater spaces and into alternative venues. Melanie Kloetzel's collection *Site Dance: Choreographers and the Lure of Alternative Spaces* (University of Florida Press, 2011)

The impulse to connect place to performance was obviously not novel to the 20th century. Victoria Hunter cites folk dance practices and promenade dance as early influencers of contemporary site-dance practice.¹⁰ In Athens in 5th century BCE, theater was a place for watching performance but it was also the place of religious ritual, rife with social and political associations. Theodore Shank argues that all theater before the 19th century should be considered environmental (another overlapping term) because of the arrangement of the audience and the utilization of found spaces.¹¹ Performances at the hillside of the Acropolis, tennis courts in France, and inn-court yards in England appropriated non-purpose-built theaters and reflect an impulse of contemporary site-specificity to animate the ways in which physical environments can situate performance. Even the construction of the playhouse framed a specific spatial experience for its audience. Marvin Carlson, in *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture*, places these constructed elements at the center of meaning-making in the theater experience: “The entire theatre, its audience arrangements, its other public spaces, its physical appearance, even its location within a city, are all important elements of the process by which an audience makes meaning of its experience.”¹² With the emergence of scenographic practices that would be used to indicate the imagined space of the text, theatrical construction and the separation of audience and performer became a set of limitations site-specific performance would react against. *Site-*

was the first work to extensively engage with the topic, bringing together interviews and accounts of site-dance performances, including the pioneering works of Meredith Monk and Anna Halprin.

¹⁰ Hunter, 4.

¹¹ Theodore Shank, *Beyond the Boundaries: American Alternative Theatre* (University of Michigan Press, 2002), 91.

¹² Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* (Cornell University Press, 1993), 2.

specific can be understood as a relationship between performance and construction, denoting both a tension between physical architecture and natural environments and an intentional use or manipulation of constructed elements. The term emerged to describe a shift of intentions. While Carlson’s argument shows how perhaps unnoticed architectural elements have always informed performance, describing a performance as *site-specific* came to represent the effort to bring these semiotic markers to the forefront. As Pearson notes, site-specific performance “is the latest occupation of a location at which other occupations—their material traces and histories—are still apparent: site is not just an interesting, and disinterested, backdrop.”¹³ The work actively animates the social, historical, and cultural signs of an unconventional venue.

Contextualized within the historical evolution of theater spaces, site-specific performance can be seen, like most experimental movements, as a clash with what came before. The move to alternative stages or environments evolved from a series of artistic experiments concerned with reacting against the aesthetic and commercial qualities of the realistic conventions of proscenium-based theater. With an intentional effort to redefine the relationship between performer, spectator, and place, *where* theater was performed received renewed attention in the 1960s visual and performing arts scene—beyond the brand name of the theater. I choose to begin tracking site-specificity in the 1960s because this is when the particular vocabulary for the practice emerged. Certainly, there were anti-commercial, spatial experiments before this moment. John Stokes in *Resistible Theatres*, details experimental practices in the 19th century, including E.W. Godwin’s *plein air* productions of *As You Like It* in the woods of Wimbledon amidst “garlands, goats, armies of dogs along

¹³ Pearson and Shanks, 23.

with a hundred assorted live butterflies.”¹⁴ Hunter details how Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis explored nature and beauty through establishing connections among body, earth, and environment within their movement pieces in the early 20th century.¹⁵ In order to trace the efficacy of *site-specific* as a term, however, I begin my investigation when the term itself emerged.

The impulse to move theater beyond the proscenium stage involved commercial as well as artistic concerns. Found spaces like attics and apartment lofts restricted audience access and limited the potential for profit. Non-linear, semi-improvised forms hindered reproduction. Anti-theatricality in venue and structure resisted commodification. The Happenings of the 1960s, reflected in the work of Allan Kaprow and the events of the Fluxus Group, developed from the Dada and Surrealist visual art traditions. Michael Kirby, in his attempt to define a Happening, refers to the events as “alogical” and “non-matrixed” performing, in that actors did not operate in the matrixed worlds of their characters or settings.¹⁶ The Happening existed as a form of theatrical collage and utilized alternative spaces to bypass traditional forms with many performances occurring outside of theater venues in classrooms, at sporting events, and in lofts or stores. Kirby argues that spatial significance is often mistakenly ascribed to the Happening form, when spatial arrangement and environmental factors are in actuality only a matter of style, a part of the aesthetic

¹⁴ John Stokes, *Resistible Theatres: enterprise and experiment in the late nineteenth century* (London: Paul Elek Books, 1972).

¹⁵ Hunter, 5.

¹⁶ Michael Kirby and Jim Dine, *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology* (Dutton, 1965), 21.

composition but not fundamental to the piece's action.¹⁷ While a particular relationship to space may not define Happenings, the utilization of found environments resists the institutionalization of established staging practices and reimagines the interactions among audience, performer, and place.

Another experiment, which also surfaced in the 1960s seeking to “recapture” performance, was the environmental theater movement. Similar to Happenings, environmental theater endeavored to re-evaluate the transactions between the audience and performer. Richard Schechner's development of a form of environmental theater with the Performance Group focused on eliminating the distinction between performance space and audience space, insisting on the existence of one whole space, rather than two opposing ones.¹⁸ Performances are created from and with multi-level constructed sets in large warehouses, in which the entire space is utilized. The environment, then, is made an intrinsic part of the performance experience with the creation of multiple focus points for an audience who might be completely surrounded by the performance.

While the Performance Group was constructing environments for its theatrical events, the Snake Theater—a theater company founded by Chris Hardman and Laura Farabaugh based in California during the late 1970s—performed in found locations integral to their purposes. The Snake Theater, similar to the Performance Group, sought to create an environment where there existed no separation between the real world and created events. Hardman calls these experiments “location theatre” which involves “taking the audience to a place that was part of their existing environment and theatrically altering it into another

¹⁷ Ibid, 26.

¹⁸ Richard Schechner, *Environmental Theater* (Hal Leonard Corporation, 1994), 291.

experience for them, leaving the area sort of humming with that new meaning.”¹⁹ The environment as artistic collaborator, or even as performer, evokes a sense of necessity, a sense that the performance belongs to that specific space. Hardman discusses the company’s attempt to “bring out an essential story that could be inherent in that space” – a specificity physicalized in a particular place.²⁰ Pearson would echo this language in his own definition of site-specific performances as “inseparable from their sites” and an “interpenetration of the found and fabricated.”

In the United States, *site-specific* emerged as a definitive category to describe the work of Annie Hamburger and En Garde Arts in the 1980s. Until 1999, Hamburger commissioned playwrights, directors, composers, and designers to create pieces for architectural sites and neighborhoods in New York. En Garde set plays in Central Park, at loading docks, hotels, abandoned warehouses and, as Scott Cummings noted, in “overlooked, abandoned, ruined corners of Manhattan” and Hamburger “would create theatrical events in response to those spaces.”²¹ In situating performance outside a theater building, Hamburger was concerned with more than re-positioning the spectator. In fact, as C. W. E. Bigsby observes, in Hamburger’s work “there remained a space between the performed self and the audience which shifting the location of the performance changed but did not necessarily close,” a shift from the experimental attitudes of the 1960s.²² Instead, Hamburger saw these experiments as a way to explore the relationship among theater, architecture, collective memory, and the experience of a city.

¹⁹ Chris Hardman, "Walkmanology," *The Drama Review* 27.4 (Winter, 1983): 44.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Cummings, 49.

²² C.W.E. Bigsby, *Modern American Drama, 1945-2000* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 260.

Michael Pearson, along with scenographer Cliff McLucas, pioneered site-specific performance in Britain and Europe. The group often aimed to link Welsh history and language with politically evocative spaces. Their first performance, *Y Gododdin* (1998), a 12th century Welsh poem eulogizing slain heroes, was performed in the engine-shop of a large, abandoned car factory in Cardiff, Wales. Other venues include ice hockey stadiums, railway stations, abandoned farmhouses, and Welsh forests. Pearson describes the artistic possibilities alternative venues offer in contrast to the conventional:

There are so many rules that you can break in these [alternative] sites, and then an audience, which is perhaps not a theatre audience, feels more able to come. You can actually create the sense of event around one of those things, which is actually impossible within the theatre. Cliff says he thinks one reason is that the theatrical space has been worked over so many times. The stage is like a plot that's been tilled so many times that there's not much else you could do to it, whereas, when you go on to a site, into an empty factory, then a number of things are stripped away.²³

Pearson views site-specificity as a transposition of conventional staging practices into new environments, in which the site is transformed by the disruptive presence of performance and becomes a “scene of plenitude, its inherent characteristics, manifold effects and unruly elements always liable to leak, spill, and diffuse into performance.”²⁴ His work defies ready-made backdrops in favor of finding new ways to relate place to collective artistic and historical experiences. For Pearson, site-specific performance means a literal exploration of uncharted territory, performance where there has never been performance before. This novelty, at first a way to resist conservative staging practices, would later be appropriated for commercial use, which would contribute to the term’s liberal application. Critic Lyn Gardner often links contemporary site-specific branding with gimmick. For her example, her

²³ Geraldine Cousin, “An Interview with Mike Pearson of Brith Gof,” *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 2.2 (1994): 45.

²⁴ Mike Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 1.

review of *The Generation of Z* at the 2014 Fringe in Edinburgh, a show in which audience members frantically navigate an underground space to escape a horde of zombies, she criticizes the show's "quest to top past shows and deliver ever more extreme immersive experiences."²⁵ This quest for marketable edginess in the form of alternative locations and participatory experiences might result in performances more concerned with adrenaline-producing stunts than with space-related dramaturgy.

Pearson's definition also draws from the ephemerality privileged by spatial experiments in visual art and performance. For example, Andy Goldsworthy uses a range of natural materials like ice, feathers, twigs, or stones to create outdoor sculptures that might decay or disappear according to natural cycles. Whether artwork was washed away by changing tides or melted by the sun, the environmental art movement created projects that were intentionally ephemeral in their entanglement with nature. Impermanence in art was a reaction against the fixtures of artistic commodification, just as experimental theater pursued the unrepeatable performance as a release from institutional expectations. In visual art, the artistic power these experimental movements found in transiency shifts to an assertion of permanence as a means to resist reproduction. The development of *site-specific* understands the artwork as physically inextricable from its site. In 1981, Richard Serra, an artist known for working with large-scale metal sheets, famously stated when threatened with his sculpture's removal from a plaza in New York City, "To remove the work is to destroy it."²⁶ Serra's argument asserts an inextricable relationship between art and site, where the connection is so specific that the art cannot exist in any other space, because to move site-

²⁵ Lyn Gardner, "Immersive theatre: living up to its name or just an overused gimmick?" *The Guardian*, September 19, 2014.

²⁶ Quoted in Kaye, 194.

specific work would be to *re-place* it and transform it entirely. In visual art, permanence becomes the work's mode of resistance. In performances "inseparable from their sites," the specificity of both the *here* along with the *now* creates the ultimate ephemerality, unmatched within the expectations of the proscenium and auditorium.

Understanding site as inextricable from performance relies on an understanding of *site* that is literally grounded, or as Kwon states, "bound to the laws of physics."²⁷ For this brand of site-specificity, *site* exists as an actual location, a tangible reality, its identity composed from a combination of its physical elements. Kwon argues, however, that contemporary perspectives of *site* have shifted from understanding *site* as a fixed, physical location to viewing it as something constituted through social, economic, cultural, and political processes.²⁸ Pearson observes that *site* has the potential to become "a situation, a set of circumstances, a historical narrative, a group of people or a social agenda," while Kwon notes that *site* can now be "as various as a billboard, an artistic genre, a disenfranchised community, an institutional framework, a magazine page, a social cause, or a political debate."²⁹ Even apart from more recent virtual complications, *site* has never been a fixed concept as it occupies discursive spaces.

A broader conceptualization of *site* broadens the usages of site-specific. When site can be anything and performance can be anywhere, how can a specific relationship to site be maintained? Nick Kaye argues that site-specificity arises in the slippage of boundaries between the two.³⁰ This suggests that the more fluid the exchange between site and

²⁷ Kwon, 11.

²⁸ Ibid, 12.

²⁹ Pearson, 7 and Kwon, 12.

³⁰ Kaye, 215.

performance, the more difficult it is to extricate the performance from the site, as one becomes indistinguishable from the other. But as the definition broadens to include contemporary understandings of a shifting site, more and more practices adopt the umbrella term, threatening its actual specificity and usefulness.

Kwon refers to the liberal application of *site-specific* as a term used to describe any performance outside a conventional venue as an “unspecific misuse.” These misuses demonstrate how an innovative artistic practice can become co-opted by the dominant culture and how this generalization has the potential to weaken both the aesthetic and political efficacy of site-specific performance. Contemporary discourse has witnessed the emergence of a plethora of site-related terms meant to compensate for site-specific’s indefinable state: “site-determined, site-oriented, site-referenced, site-conscious, site-responsive” as well as “context-specific” and “site-based.”³¹ In her examination of site-specific theater in Britain, Fiona Wilkie struggles to classify a performance’s relationship to site into three categories: *site-sympathetic*, a performance of an existing text or production in a particularized location; *site-generic*, the performance of a production in a series of like sites; and *site-specific*, which is reserved for those performances that are intentionally and specifically developed from or for a particular place.³²

The problem with this surplus of terms, however, is that each term relies on its individual proponent for its definition. When a practitioner invents a new site-term to describe their practice, it is not always clear what departure has been made from Pearson’s *site-specific* or what the effective differences are between *site-responsive* and *site-conscious*.

³¹ Pearson, 8.

³² Fiona Wilkie, "Mapping the Terrain: A Survey of Site-Specific Performance in Britain," *New Theatre Quarterly* 18.2 (2002): 150.

What makes each term distinct, and are those distinctions significant enough to warrant this superabundance of specialized terms? In an attempt to distance themselves from the inadequate vagueness of *site-specific*, those seeking to typify site's relationship to performance have only succeeded in re-appropriating the original term for individual purposes. Each newer variation of *site-specific* grasps at what specific *should* mean.

I choose to examine *site-specific* rather than the resurgent term *immersive* theater, despite there being multiple ways the two overlap. *Immersive* is currently used to describe performances that engage the audience in an interactive journey-narrative through a constructed or found non-theatrical location.³³ For example, PunchDrunk's tremendously popular *Sleep No More* presents an adaptation of *Macbeth* that has audience members navigate their way through a formerly abandoned club in Chelsea, which has been re-purposed into the McKittrick Hotel. An immersive performance might also be site-specific but its emphasis remains on the stimulation of the senses and audience participation. I see the term as another branch trying to distinguish itself from the waning specificity of *site-specific*—an impulse that requires more attention. *Site-specific* serves as the root for numerous contemporary practices, and I focus attention on both its vulnerability and versatility.

The semantic debate reveals an anxiety about the destabilization of site and how performance will relate to it. These complications are compounded by the inclusion of virtual and digital spaces, as I will discuss further in the next section. Rather than abandon it for an equally vague term, Joanne Tompkins argues for an understanding of *site-specific* that remains contingent on these transformations. She accepts that the term will remain

³³ Jonathan Mandell, "Immersive Theatre, Defined: Five Elements in *Sleep No More*, *Then She Fell*, and *More*," *Howlround*, February 9, 2016.

impossible to define as it adopts multiple meanings. Her edited collection, *Performing Site-Specific Theater*, provides some examples of how “the ambiguity, contingency, and unsettlement” of site manifests in multimedia performance but offers no theoretical throughline for the virtual’s intervention in the discourse.³⁴ I aim to provide this framework, to go beyond simply introducing category-defying challenges in order to argue for an expansive understanding of site-specific that maintains its artistic and political, if not always semantic, specificity.

I look at site-specific performance in the digital age. As practitioners wrestle with how to incorporate virtual vagueness into the term’s specificity, I consider how this expansion is not only necessary for the survival of the form but also offers more political and artistic potential. I explore how the term, by relaxing its white-knuckled grip on physical co-presence, can be reinvigorated by the very concepts that constituted the perceived threats to groundedness. Site continues to be in flux, shifting like the disciplinary frameworks that try to categorize it, and *site-specific* forms challenge narratives of spatial ambiguity by finding new ways for place to inform performance. With the transformations and disruptions involved in making the virtual *site-specific*, contemporary works may reawaken critical analysis of habitual functions of space, shedding light on the intersections of spatial politics and embodiment.

The Great Space Debate

In order to argue that virtual performance can be site-specific, I first need to engage with the theoretical distinctions that complicate fixed notions of *site*. Entangled in

³⁴ Joanne Tompkins and Anna Birch, *Performing Site-Specific Theatre: Politics, Place, Practice* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 3.

definitions of *site* is the long-winded debate over the differences between *place* and *space*. With *place* often used to denote the literal and tangible and *space* relegated to the realm of the abstract, the terms also serve as analogs for the (perceived) binary of the *actual* and *virtual*. Site, then, constitutes a combination of factors, a confluence of material interactions and immaterial associations. Site-specific has previously privileged a place-based usage of *site*. In simplified terms, purists might consider these performances *place*-specific, literally connected to an *actual* physical environment while *virtually* influenced by immaterial *spatial* (social, cultural, historical) forces. I challenge the privileging of physical presence such considerations are contingent on, preferring instead to explore the elisions of im/materiality. What happens when the virtual takes place, for instance?

Place and *space* are overlapping concepts. The distinction between the two terms has been a topic of debate among cultural geographers and social scientists since the “spatial turn” of the 1970s when space, and not just time, was considered capable of encoding social, cultural, and political meaning. The general consensus reflects Tim Cresswell’s statement that place is space made meaningful.³⁵ Space represents the intangible sense of limitlessness and place is the specific localization that can be physically experienced. Space is the general that encompasses the specific. (By this logic, in order for site to be specific, it has to be place.) Space, however, is not just an empty container.

Material geography, also known as cultural geography, denies an understanding of space as a set of pre-existing conditions and instead refers to space as a complicated system of social relations that constitute our ways of being in the world. Henri Lefebvre, in his book *The Production of Space*, argues for space as a social construct—one that is culturally

³⁵ Tim Cresswell, *Place: An Introduction* (John Wiley & Sons, 2014).

produced through a set of relations that code for social or economic value. Lefebvre specifically argues against the idea of space as a container; space is not empty, ready to be filled. Rather, it is always in process. He divides space into two categories: abstract and absolute. Abstract space denotes space that is used for an abstract purpose of domination, his examples being the law and real estate, which seek commercial gain from the imposition of a specific framework over more “open” spaces. Absolute space refers to the social utility of space, the use value and functionality of space as used by consumers. While absolute space should not have the same capitalist connotations, the overlap between the two is inevitable, as consumers passively consumer (or enjoy) spaces of utility. Lefebvre’s materialist geography, then, is one that defines space in relation to power, affording space the means to control and exert dominance over our bodies that move within it.³⁶

Michel DeCerteau, in his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*, similarly articulates an argument that demonstrates the relationship of space and place to capitalist power and the consumer experience. For DeCerteau, *place* is the overarching institutional structure, the imposed spatial arrangement achieved by what he terms “strategies.” DeCerteau gives the example of surveying a city from the top of the World Trade Center. What is seen from above is *place*: the grid resembling a map, a visual tableau representing fixed and complete knowledge. He contrasts this experience with being on the street and walking through the “completeness” of the city, creating *space*. Space, then, is “practiced place,” the movement within the imposed spatial framework. In his chapter “Walking in the City,” DeCerteau argues that pedestrians are not localized, fixed in a specific place or location, but spatialized, in that they are actively involved in creating space. The act of walking, or the tactics

³⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Wiley, 1992).

employed by pedestrians, according to DeCerteau, is a transgressive one. While the state may impose and attempt to enforce place—with the division of city streets into grids, the inclusion of crosswalks for safety—walking is unpredictable as a pedestrian may elect to use back alleys or to jaywalk. In this way, the pedestrian, typically a consumer of space (especially in Lefebvre’s definition), works within and against the dominant culture and becomes a producer. Walking is a creative act, and it is an act that belongs nowhere. Space, according to DeCerteau, is always in progress because the act of spatializing within a particular place cannot be pinned down. Movement resists fixed notions of place in favor of creative spatializing.³⁷

Space and place, inseparable from each other, are intricately involved in the processes of how power is distributed and how identity is constructed. The cultural and political potency of spatial theory, along with its interdisciplinary applications, have made it a favorite area of focus for performance theorists and historians. In *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama*, Una Chaudhuri reimagines theater history as a struggle with the meaning of power and place. She traces how “geopathology,” the problem of place enacted on one’s identity through ruptures or displacements experienced in relationship with location, informs a history of theatrical experiments: “The experimentation of theatre that eventually exploded into a myriad of forms known variously as happenings, environmental theatre, performance art, and site-specific theatre is a history of practical engagements with the problematic of plays and place.”³⁸ The history of site-specific performance is a history of

³⁷ Michel DeCerteau, “Walking in the City,” *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (University of California, Berkeley: 1984).

³⁸ Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (University of Michigan Press, 1997), 22.

the tensions among space, place, and cultural identity. The way spatial terms are employed, either as clearly defined opposites or as mutually constitutive, affect how ongoing cultural and globalizing processes are made accessible through performance.

Intersected with the work of phenomenology, performance demonstrates how embodied and lived experiences in *place* can mediate the affective forces of *space*. In *Performing Remains*, Rebecca Schneider argues for an embodied archive achieved through the repetition of performance and the cross-temporal intersections of history. Schneider reminds us that time also takes place, that by a performance taking place wherever it does, it shares space with a history the performance is inviting to reappear.³⁹ Similarly, in his book *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine*, Marvin Carlson conceptualizes an experience he terms “ghosting,” the experience of a past memory or historical event haunting a present place of performance or encounter. These ghostings occur in the minds of the audience, as a reencounter with something that has been seen or felt—either literally or abstractly—in a previous moment. Carlson discusses particularized place (made specific by its im/material bodily haunts) as an active agent in ghosting: “in such site-specific productions, already written texts are placed in locations outside conventional theatres that are expected to provide appropriate ghostings in the minds of the audiences.”⁴⁰ Both Carlson and Schneider point to a viewing experience based on memory and expectation, and I argue that site-specific performance, in its use of places engendered with collective memory and

³⁹ Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (Taylor & Francis, 2011).

⁴⁰ Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (University of Michigan Press, 2003), 134.

historical associations, participates in the manipulation of viewing expectations and uses them to make the intangible qualities of space concrete.

Site-specific performance relies on the ways in which space and place make meaning. The departure from conventional proscenium-based staging practices reflects an intentional turn to reading site as an active participant rather than as scenographic frame or vessel. This move can be read as a shift from performance venue as *space* to performance venue as *place*. Like the material geographers, Carlson contends that the historical spaces of performance have never been inactive. In *Places of Performance*, he uses material semiotics to examine how theater architecture—from the stagecraft, seating arrangements, and backstage spaces to the surrounding city streets, marquee, and lobby designs—can “generate social and cultural meanings of their own which in turn help to structure the meaning of the entire theatre experience.”⁴¹ Now widely accepted, Carlson’s idea that an audience member experiences the entirety of a space is applied more literally when performance moves outside the bounds of purpose-built theaters.

Some versions of site-specificity assume that *place* offers more immediate access to cultural meaning, with an emphasis on producing physical connections to actual locations. While bringing place to the forefront of performance can activate the immaterial resonances of a location, the ways these immaterial spatial matrices encode meaning inevitably intersect with the materiality of place. Place and space always overlap. With their Welsh performance company Brith Gof, Pearson and McLucas use the terms “host” and “ghost” to refer to site as a layered entity. The work (ghost) haunts the site (host). The host site pre-exists and, once the scaffold of a set has been struck, continues after the ephemeral performative haunting.

⁴¹ Carlson (1993), 2.

Pearson refers to site-specific performance as “the complex superimposition and co-existence of a number of narratives and architectures, historical and contemporary.”⁴² The performance becomes DeCerteau’s “practiced place,” a transgressive negotiation of a pre-existing order, a placemaking catalyst that activates space in specific ways. The host, though, as the material geographers would suggest about space, is not an empty vessel waiting to be filled by a performative presence, but a site “where previous occupations are still apparent and cognitively active.”⁴³ The site, itself in process, is not a fixed backdrop set to be played against. The tension in the coexistence of host and ghost represents the process of producing site through performance.

Most site-specific practitioners, including Pearson and McLucas, acknowledge the intersectional relationship of place (ghost) and space (host) but maintain the essential separation between the two. They are, as Pearson says, “co-existent, but critically, not congruent.”⁴⁴ The ghost, a fleeting presence, leaves the site, perhaps leaving a permanent mark on the host that remains. The massive proliferation of digital technologies, however, makes this separation less clear and reveals that part of site-specific’s prevailing definition is premised on a false dichotomy. Instant communication changes the way we conceive of time and space. Screens change the way our bodies interact with our environments. Digital archives change our sense of the ephemeral. Web-based communities change our expectations for interpersonal connection. Networked technologies are activated by our use of them; they are pre-existing spaces readily available for haunting. But they are also active tools of placemaking that change how our reality is perceived. When applied to networked

⁴² Pearson and Shanks, 23.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

interactions, ordering vocabularies of *place* question where such an interaction is located: Where are you when you are online? The answer I present is, understandably, complicated. I argue against a constructed division between the *virtual* and the *actual* in favor of considering how their inextricability continually (re)produces site. As a result, the user (performer/spectator) can occupy two places at once, a simultaneously liminal, unstable, and powerful position as the virtual becomes site-specific. While others have examined the use of virtuality and multimedia technologies in site-specific performances,⁴⁵ I am the first to argue for digitally-infused performances as site-specific themselves.

The documented relationship between the *virtual* and the *actual* mirrors the binary distinctions assigned to space and place, respectively—a dialectical opposition that is employed to privilege physical presence in performance. *Virtual*, used to refer to experiences mediated through digital technologies, has often been understood in spatial terms. William Gibson, credited with coining the term cyberspace, locates digital experience in the imaginative center of the mind: “Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators...Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind.”⁴⁶ Steve Dixon, in *Digital Performance*, upholds this binary even as he considers the Internet spatially: “It must be conceded that the discussion of cyberspace as place(s) can be useful and highly appropriate, even though the notion is largely metaphoric and conceptual, and indeed romantic.”⁴⁷ The *virtual* is characterized as an “imaginary” space that lacks the physicality of place. The *actual*, conversely, is the place from which virtual space is

⁴⁵ Tompkins nods towards the multimedia influence on *site-specificity* in *Performing Site-Specific Theatre: Politics, Place, Practice* (8).

⁴⁶ William Gibson, *Neuromancer*. (Ace Publisher, 1986), 52.

⁴⁷ Steve Dixon, *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation* (MIT Press, 2007), 162.

accessed and includes the body and its material surroundings. When you access the Internet, it is assumed that you are *here*, in a chair with your computer on your lap, and that the digital content is *somewhere else*, accessible only in a disembodied interaction. The very use of spatial vocabulary to describe the virtual, however, reflects the ordering vocabulary of *place*. It attempts to make meaning of the infinite. Even in assigning the virtual the abstract qualities of space, then, cultural theorists participate in a form of placemaking and reveal the slippages between the two concepts.

Technology has the ability to condense and elide spatial distance, creating a more rapid and extensive layering that complicates the identity of site. The popularity and affordability of telematic communication—specifically communication through video conferencing applications like Skype and Facetime—alters our relationship with space by conflating physically separate places into one present location. In *The Condition of Postmodernity*, David Harvey refers to this phenomenon as “time-space compression.”⁴⁸ For many postmodern critics, time-space compression disrupts a specific, place-based orientation for the subject and replaces it with an unplaceable liminality. Conversely, I argue that in eliminating spatial distance, technology opens up possibilities for site-specific performances to be based on physically absent sites, as I explore in my final chapter.

Doreen Massey’s conception of space provides a helpful framework for understanding virtual realms as unlimited spheres of potentiality without dismissing their connection to the physical. Massey’s *For Space* is an argument for the recognition of space’s multiple properties and capabilities, an invitation to challenge our ideas of what

⁴⁸ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Wiley, 1992).

space can be. For Massey, space is characterized by possibility and multiplicity; it is “the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity.”⁴⁹ Her delight in spatial heterogeneity resonates with the image of virtual space as a landscape of limitless possibility—constantly changing and defying containment. Space for Massey, however, is not just vast, uncharted territory; it is also a product of interrelations, “constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny.”⁵⁰ Space is always in process, being created through interaction. Using this logic, then, the Internet does not simply allow for communication it *is* communication. Virtual space is difficult to *actually* place—sending an email may not feel like being somewhere beyond where the physical body is located, but virtual space is in the process of being constructed in that moment of communication. Virtual space is difficult to conceptualize, at times a product of imagination or impossible to categorize, but it is also grounded in interpersonal connection. We may not be able to graph the geographical coordinates of the path of that electronic correspondence, but it is directly involved with, and possibly even produced by, interactions with actual place.

When these interactions take place in performance, the lines between the actual and virtual blur even further. The use of multimedia in performance creates a liminal space between the audience and the screen, an experience which combines the physical and the abstract. Pearson often incorporates multimedia devices in his site-specific performances. In *Persians*, he includes video screens showing the performers’ action “backstage” or within the military facility. Rather than embrace the combination of elements, most performance

⁴⁹ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (SAGE Publications, 2007), 9.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

scholars prefer to highlight the juxtaposition. Dixon reinforces the binary by arguing that the use of multimedia fractures “real” space, as the virtual “writes over” the actual.⁵¹

My argument that the virtual “takes place” marks a departure from familiar discussions about the ontological status of networked performances. With virtual reality systems that are able to completely overhaul the physical experience of a location and simultaneous, multi-site performances that are distributed across geographically separated places, the assumed ontological distinctions between real/virtual and live/recorded have come into question. By reframing the concerns of the virtual and the “real” in spatial terms, the question becomes instead, “how can reality be manipulated and shaped when the distinctions between *place* and *space* are collapsed?”

Though Philip Auslander dismantled the binary between mediated and live, the digital elements of performance are still considered to be other than *here*.⁵² Alice Rayner asserts that cyberspace privileges the temporal by “materializing the now,” but not necessarily the *here*.⁵³ As with the spatial turn in cultural geography, I argue for a turn to considering liveness in spatial, rather than temporal, terms. The digital frame placed between the spectator and performer, the supposed source of the here/there binary, is becoming less and less visible. Technologies like video conferencing or Google Glass can produce an experience of space where the here and there are one and the same, perfectly overlapping and simultaneous concepts, as I examine in my third chapter. Dixon’s fracture becomes a continuous sensory field, a “here and now” created by the virtual. Kurt Vanhoute speaks of challenging the real/virtual, embodied/disembodied dichotomy in the digital era:

⁵¹ Dixon, 17.

⁵² Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, (Routledge, 2008).

⁵³ Quoted in Rosemary Kilch and Edward Scheer, *Multimedia Performance*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 129.

“The individual at the beginning of the 21st century is instead perpetually undulatory - in orbit - through a continuous network of embodied states of presence that are increasingly defined according to participation and agency, rather than physically co-present.⁵⁴ I resituate space and place in conversations about virtual co-presence. In my second chapter, I examine how virtual spectatorship of a site-specific performance reveals multiple, divergent ways for a historical landmark to produce affective experiences across distance. New modes of performance call for an exploration of how the instability of virtuality as a spatial experience reflects processes of identity construction, collective memory, and globalization.

Contemporary site-specific practices, locating and deploying digital liminality in performance, offer numerous methods for staging the dismantled binary. As I discuss, the advent of the virtual expands the definition of *site-specific* beyond its dependency on physical presence. *Site* becomes an unstable concept, applicable both to the pages we surf online and the material environments we occupy—and the abundance of ideologies, processes, and actions in between. Site-specific performance becomes the perfect battling ground for debates about how technology affects the disciplinary frameworks of liveness, remediation, presence/absence, connectivity, im/materiality, and the perception and manipulation of reality. In making site more fluid, these performances respond to perceived crises of placelessness by extending spatiality beyond its conceptual limits.

Virtually Endless: Performative Possibilities

In order to reflect the multiplicity of site, I explore a diverse set of performances that represent various relationships to site-specific performance. My chosen case studies do not

⁵⁴ Quoted in Joanne Tompkins, *Theatre's Heterotopias: Performance and the Cultural Politics of Space* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 146.

reify site as a stable concept but utilize its slippages as a staging practice. Rather than only look at networked technologies when they are incorporated into site-specific performances, I consider how the technologies themselves might create a site-specific experience. However, my expansion of the term is not indiscriminate, however; I explore practices which mix the spatial realities of its spectators by combining, in one form or another, physical and virtual components across multiple spaces, either simultaneously or in archive. These forms mix the experience of a physical environment with that of imagined metaphor, reorient the maps of spectator and performer, displace performances into multiple sites, and dismantle disciplinary binaries of liveness and presence.

For some of these performances, I was physically present as a spectator or participant. For others, I was the virtual spectator, accessing digital content as an extension of the physical performances. As this project is ultimately concerned with the expansion of site and its relationship to performance, I use virtuality as a methodological lens. Diana Taylor points to the validity of the digital archive: “I want to insist that the embodied, the archival, and the digital overlap and work together and mutually construct each other.”⁵⁵ Virtual spectatorship is not divorced from embodiment; instead, it interrogates the division between im/materiality and challenges how forms of visibility and kinesthetic experience are privileged in performance. Virtual spectatorship, like the *place* of performance, is always in process, constantly produced by the navigation of continuous streams of information.

In my first chapter, I engage with how movement, thought to annihilate spatial particularity, can produce site-specificity in performance. I examine Pearl Damour’s performance of *Milton*. The group spent three years visiting five different cities in the

⁵⁵ Diana Taylor, “Save As... Knowledge and Transmission in the Age of Digital Technologies,” *Imagining America* (2010), 3.

United States, each named Milton, and created a performance based on their interviews with Miltonians. The play will be performed in each of the Miltons and so far has been performed in North Carolina and Oregon. Despite its movement between different places, I argue that *Milton* represents a new way of conceptualizing *site-specific* performance. Katie Pearl, the group's director, refers to herself as a site-specific "purist." Having spent time with Michael Pearson and Clif MacLucas, she subscribes to their dominant ideologies of the inextricability of performance and site. I examine the flexibility of the expanded term and how *Milton* becomes a site-specific performance in each community it visits. The performance brings the expansiveness of multiple locations into one physical place. The combination of elements from disparate locations served to reinforce the audience's physical presence in *this* Milton (Oregon) while also creating the uncanny sensation of being a part of every other Milton at once. Through the interplay of the particular and the general, *Milton* materializes the community as *place* and offers creative placemaking as a form of national identity construction.

In my second chapter, I use the Globe Theatre's battlefield performances of *Henry VI* and their subsequent live-streaming and digital archiving to argue against digital displacement as a crisis of non-specificity. I explore how video recordings of performances advertised as *site-specific* (the performance of a Shakespearean history at its historical location) disrupt notions of physical presence and liveness as privileged theatrical forms. Using Rebecca Schneider, Joseph Roach, and Harvey Young, I examine the phenomenological and affective experience of "present" spectatorship at the battlefield site. I then move on to explore how the virtual displacement of these plays stretches the realm of performance space to include multiple spaces and times, multiple perspectives, and multiple

relationships between spectator and performer. Rather than losing the spatial specificity of the battlefield, then, I assert that this movement into virtual spaces creates *multiple* specific viewing experiences. I engage with television, new media, and critical cultural studies to argue for a form of virtual spectatorship that is as valid as its theatrically conventional counterpart. Virtual spectatorship offers alternate forms of liveness and presence that expand possibilities for how social connectivity and historical continuation are imagined and pursued in performance.

In my third chapter, I intervene in the deterministic critique of technology. The postmodern experience of space, characterized by the collapse of time and distance through the use of networked technologies and telematics like Skype and Facetime, has been criticized as a crisis of *placelessness*. Theorists like Frederic Jameson and David Harvey argue that the instantaneity of telecommunication results in the “annihilation of space” and in “de-spatialized access” that consequently presents a crisis for the subject trying to distinguish its reality and sense of *place*. This parallels the crisis of the increasingly unspecific misuses of *site-specific* to describe any performance that takes place outside of a conventional theater space. The spatial crisis of destabilization and disorientation is tempered, however, by performance practices that make the increasingly abstract concept of virtual space physically accessible. While spatial ambiguity threatens an individual’s ability to process the world around her, new technology changes the sensory processes themselves, using virtuality to make physical site more immediate. The virtual becomes how the user orients herself in space. *Site* expands, but now as a redefined combination of digital technologies and physical environments that produces specific responses to the movement of its navigators. By examining David Datuna’s *Portrait of America*, the first public art

installation to utilize Google Glass and its augmented reality technology, and Ryan McNamara's dance/performance art piece, *ME3M*, which aims to replicate the movement of the Internet, I propose that the sensory customization achieved by locating virtual space in *places* of performance increase possibilities for connection and social exchange. As the blurring of the virtual and the actual redefines performance space, participants share embodied experiences simultaneously in cohabited locations and across separated geographies as they navigate reconstructions and manipulations of their own realities.

In my final chapter, I conduct a performance experiment that addresses all three crises of non-specificity. The project is a nation-wide game of Performance Telephone where a performance of a single production is videoed and digitally "passed" to a different physical location where another performance group will make a "new" production using only the digital video they received. Each new production team only has access to the video to make all their staging decisions. The process is then repeated across multiple locations. Unlike the parlor game of telephone, the goal is not to keep the "original" message intact by reproducing it exactly; rather, the emphasis is on finding new ways for space to inform performance. I examine how separated places and contexts can inform each other—how the particularities of one location can become the "site-specifics" of another. For example, how does an outdoor performance in sunny Santa Barbara weather relocate to Colorado in the middle of winter? One spatial specificity relates to and informs another, creating digitally archived palimpsests. Definitions of site-specific performance often privilege physical presence and maintain that the performance cannot be moved from its performance site, but I assert that virtuality can be used as a tool for specificity by expanding the reach of performance beyond physical definitions of "site" and across separated geographies. I hope

that by creating a continuous chain of linked performances, the interaction between physically separated environments will demonstrate how a site-specific performance can be based on a physically absent site.

Each of these case studies exists in some way outside of Pearson's purist definition of site-specific theater. Performances go on tour or are live-streamed to virtual audiences; they are not always written for their sites and they do not disappear once the performances end. My appeal for digitally-inflected practices to be reconsidered as spatially specific is not concerned with whether or not these practices fit into defined categories—an exercise in homogenizing diversity, surely—but rather reflects an aim to reevaluate a set of assumptions leveled against the relationship between virtual space and performance. How would our understanding of site-specific performance change if rather than assuming that displacement destroys one's sense of belonging somewhere, we could discover how movement creates community engagement? And if performance can extend ways of being there without *being there*, how might it reshape numerous spatial axes of exclusion that include race, class, gender, and physical ability? I present challenges to the conventional disciplinary frameworks that assume a version of liveness and presence that is predicated on physicality. These challenges demonstrate performance's capacity to evolve as technology does, as a dynamic interrogator of subjectivity, affect, and reality, not in spite of virtuality but because of it.

II. “Radically Local”: PearlDamour’s Community-Specific Performance *Milton*

PearlDamour’s production of *Milton* explores what it means to be “American” by presenting small-town experiences as representative of a larger narrative of cultural identity. Sometimes the small town experience starts as you walk onto the stage of a high school auditorium and encounter an usher who immediately knows you are not from there. Sometimes you are seated next to a woman who graduated from this high school fifty years ago and together you watch a play about four towns named Milton and one named Milton-Freewater.

PearlDamour’s production of *Milton* begins with a “sometimes” list, a list of things that “sometimes” happen when you visit five different towns named Milton across the United States, which is exactly what PearlDamour spent three years doing in preparation for their performance event. The performance, fusing all five cities, makes multiple places specific at once. As an act of creative placemaking, it demonstrates how site-specificity can be achieved, not hindered, by transplantation. *Milton* is intensely localized and also spans the nation, creating a flexible type of site-specific performance by redirecting the conception of *site* from that of a physical location to the idea of a community made up of specific social, economic and institutional forces.

PearlDamour, a performance group made up of playwright Lisa D’Amour and director Katie Pearl, spent three years visiting four different towns named Milton and one town named Milton-Freewater across the United States: Milton, Louisiana; Milton, Wisconsin; Milton, Massachusetts; Milton, North Carolina; and Milton-Freewater, Oregon. Pearl and D’Amour, along with Community Engagement Strategist Ashley Sparks, spent time getting to know the towns and their residents, conducting interviews, and gathering

information that would become the content for their play. Over the course of three years, PearlDamour’s involvement with the Miltons grew from interpersonal conversations to community arts engagement. The depth of the group’s investigation of these towns would culminate in the construction of a single text that connected every Milton while making each place specific in its own way. During their visits, they were welcomed into homes, offered food, given tours, and hosted arts workshops. They discuss their experience of being “taken through family orchards, being told stories of gruesome town murders and grueling divorces,” of being “toured to the pecan-sheller in the garage, the pet cemetery next door, the solar panels in the backyard, the family photo albums on the shelf, and...to places that are no longer there—to football fields that are now strip malls and homes that are now highways.”⁵⁶ The diversity of their experiences highlighted the uniqueness of each place—the tire shop that is also a grill in North Carolina, the baby ducks being raised in a biker bar in Louisiana, the famous stop on the Underground Railroad in Wisconsin. In compiling a wealth of communal stories, PearlDamour also placed each town side-by-side and in overlapping combinations through the incorporation of interviews and artifacts from each place in their performance of *Milton*.

Questions about what it means to be American motivated PearlDamour’s process. Around the time of the election of 2012, when questions of Americanness were the subject of public debates, the group wondered, “What if we left our urban bubble to explore making plays in smaller towns?...Who are the people who live in those towns anyway, in this big country of ours, and how can we meet them? ... How do we all understand what it means to

⁵⁶ Katie Pearl, “With and For: What I’ve learned about community making theater in five small towns named Milton” (presentation, Thanks-for-Giving Service, Milton, MA, November 22, 2015).

be an American? Does an American community actually exist?”⁵⁷ Taking action in response to these questions, the group Googled “most commonly named cities in the United States,” struck out from their urban-based lives, and began to ask people in small towns some big questions. They chose “Milton” because it was a person’s name (and Pearl had an uncle named Milton) and it turned out there were around twenty-five other towns named Milton across the country. In choosing the five they would focus on, PearlDamour wanted the towns to be as different as possible: different sizes, different ethnic and racial demographics, different industry profiles, and different geographies. As far as population size, Milton, Massachusetts (ranked among the top three places to live in the country by *US News and World Report*) was the largest at 27,000 and Milton, North Carolina, the smallest at a population of only 164 people. The hope was that the diversity of the Miltons would represent the diversity of the country. The differences among the Miltons became the recognizably specific moments in performance and also served as the root of connection between separated, lesser-known locations. Just as the urban-based performance group learned the history behind their assumptions about the country, *Milton* audience members approached the differences of the nation through the frame of shared idiosyncrasies to see if there was anything connecting these cities apart from their names.

The play was first performed in Milton, North Carolina in August 2015, then in Milton-Freewater, Oregon in June 2016, which is where I saw the performance, and in Massachusetts in May 2017. In each town, the performance ran between three and five times. PearlDamour is still planning to perform the show in the remaining Miltons but the scheduling is, as of now, undecided. The one-hour multimedia performance combines

⁵⁷ Ibid.

spoken word and song. In Milton-Freewater, the text was performed in a combination of Spanish and English, representing the racial, ethnic, and linguistic demographics of the town, which is evenly split at 49% white and 49% Latino. The piece is performed by three actors who never embody named characters but rather speak with the voices of a rotation of anonymous Milton residents, as the text of the play was transcribed from in-depth interviews with locals from the five towns. PearlDamour's experimental approach breaks away from linear narrative and dramatic action. Instead, *Milton* is presented in various interactive segments that offer the audience details and perspectives on Miltonian life. The play begins with the "sometimes" list. The three actors deliver the list directly to the audience, which was seated in a loose circle: "Sometimes you are served a glass of chocolate milk." Drawn from PearlDamour's experiences in each town, the "sometimes" list introduces the audience to the idiosyncrasies of each community as actors roll out the lines in a staccato rhythm. One "sometimes" becomes a longer story about a bar owner in Milton, LA and the baby ducks he discovered behind his building. The story is presented like a monologue, although with no indication toward imitation, interspersed with audio from the actual interview recording. Sometimes both voices overlap and sometimes the actor stands and listens. The story transitions back into a list and as one actor relays that sometimes you are served cherries right off the tree, another actor passes a bowl of cherries around for the audience to eat.

The sharing and passing of material objects becomes a constant activity throughout the performance. In the next segment, actors pass around "artifacts" from each of the Miltons. Actors circulate throughout the audience, moving unpredictably and often speaking over one another as they announce each item before handing it to an audience member. They pass out pictures, homemade crafts, pieces of jewelry, and more food items, in seemingly no

particular order. Eventually they begin to hand out “job cards,” identifying each audience member with a particular occupation: “You are the librarian’s assistant.” Again, the recorded voices of actual Miltonians halt the activity. As an actor places her hand on an onstage radio, the speakers crackle and a male voice is heard detailing how he helped a man get his first job and then a female voice describes her job as a hospice nurse while mariachi music blasted in the background. The actors then return to giving out assignments; however, in this segment they assign audience members personal beliefs collected from Miltonian interviews: “You believe people should take better care of the cemetery. You believe you should lock your doors. You believe that the world is more free than it was fifty years ago.” The beliefs segment culminates in the climax of the play when two actors, one speaking in English and one in Spanish, aggressively approach one another while yelling with increasing volume for the other to learn their language.

With the conflict unresolved, the speakers begin to play another collage of bilingual voices telling stories of faith and reasons for human existence. As the voices play, the actors set to building a sky. They repeatedly bring on white cottony clouds tied to balloons, weighted at the bottom, and place them at various marks onstage until the audience’s eye level was full of clouds. Once the sky is fully “constructed,” the actors, along with Pearl and D’Amour, informally break the audience into groups where they have ten-minute discussions about where audience members’ come from and their advice for future generations. The performance concludes when the actors return to the center of the stage, surrounded by cotton clouds, and sing the words of a weatherman’s visibility report.

The performance is also accompanied by digital projection. Five screens positioned above the audience, bordering the circular performance space, projected images and videos

of the skies above each Milton. The skies, identified in the pre-show announcement, are thereafter indistinguishable from one another, and yet each represented an individual community. Above our heads float the skies over Miltons and below our feet stretch their streets. Differently colored lines on the stage map out the geographies of each town. Actors place models of buildings from each of the towns onstage, at taped-out intersections that corresponded to their real-life locations in each Milton. The buildings represent the locations where *Milton* had been or would be performed. The combination of elements from disparate locations serves to reinforce our physical presence in *this* Milton while also creating the uncanny sensation of being a part of every other Milton at once.

Milton demonstrates how a site-specific performance can be made mobile as it tours multiple locations. The performance itself is multiple, with its inclusion of particular elements from each of the Miltons, which makes the play site-specific to each audience while it also connects them to geographically separated spaces. Prominent definitions of *site-specific* argue for the performance's inextricability from its site, and in a way, *Milton* is inextricable from each of its locations all at once, and yet it has also been extricated from each. *Milton* represents both an incorporation of accepted place-based practices and a departure from the narrowness of the term's definition. The expansion of the term results in a specificity that allows communities to recognize themselves in performance and simultaneously discover connections to a diverse set of others. The flexibility of *Milton*'s spatial theatricality creates a connected web of specificities, which continuously challenge, foster, and (re)produce social and national identities.

Creative PlaceMaking: Making the Specific Multiple

With each performance, *Milton* integrates the multiplicity of locations into a singular physical location. PearlDamour makes multiple Miltons specific, and more importantly, constructs a performance informed by multiple, if absent, sites. *Milton* is inextricable from each of its sites at once. The performance was created “for and with” five different communities, and the multiple specificities drawn from them—the collection of images and details unique to each town—form a larger site-specific project, an act of “creative placemaking,” where *site* becomes a sense of collective identity.

The multiple specificities included in *Milton* represent the nation’s own multiplicity. In expanding the bounds of site-specificity to stretch beyond a single place, this new way of considering site-specific performance resists essentializing social and spatial identities. *Milton* aims to represent the heterogeneity of the nation and in doing so resists a singular definition of Americanness. In response to the findings of the 2000 census, former director of the Census Bureau Kenneth Prewitt spoke to nation’s diversity: “The US has become home to people from, literally, every civilization and of every nationality, and speaking almost every language. Not in recorded history has there been a nation so demographically complex. So it falls to us, the American citizens of the 21st century, to fashion from this diversity history’s first ‘world nation.’”⁵⁸ PearlDamour set out searching for a definition of America and found that multiplicity resists definition. The multiplicity of their own form then, the expansion of site-specificity into an indefinable category, matches the content of their performance. By spanning the nation in connecting Milton to Milton, the production

⁵⁸ Kenneth Prewitt quoted in Andro Linklater, *The Fabric of America: How our borders and boundaries forged our national identity* (Walker and Company, New York, 2007), 276.

provides a glimpse of the vast multiplicity of experience that makes “American identity” both indefinable and unified.

Milton's emphasis on multiplicity echoes Anna Deavere Smith's *Twilight, 1992: Los Angeles* which similarly aims to represent a theater that embraces diversity and reflects the multifaceted identities of society. In May 1992, Smith was commissioned by the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles to create a one-woman performance piece about the civil disturbances, also known as the Rodney King riots, that had occurred in the city in April 1992. Smith's script, like *Milton*'s, is based entirely on interview material. She collected material from those directly or indirectly involved in the events and then performed as the interviewees onstage (a performative choice radically different from the apparent neutrality of the *Milton* actors). About a year after the riots, Smith premiered *Twilight*, “a social geography of Los Angeles,” using literal impersonation to generate compassion and explore the shifts in attitudes toward race relations in the city.⁵⁹ Smith shifts her embodiment and vocalization from person to person as she transitions among black rioters, white police officers, Korean-American convenience store owners—twenty-one total characters—in order to represent the multilingual, multiracial, and geographically dispersed communities. The fragmentation of Smith's self, her jump cutting from one identity to another, represents the diversity of the city and the complexity of the traumatic events in a way that resists essentializing.

Milton's resistance to singularity in its expansion of site-specificity challenges common issues associated with place-making. Place-making, the act of defining or creating a location, typically with the implementation of borders, can mirror the act of making *site*

⁵⁹ Dorinne Kondo, “Shades of Twilight: Anna Deavere Smith and *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*,” in *Connected: Engagements with Media*, ed. George E. Marcus (Late Editions, 1996), 315.

specific. Both involve ordering the abstractness of *space* into the concrete tangibility of *place*. The site-specific situates you *here*, just as place-making distinguishes *here* from *there* with various material, political, and ideological conditions. As Arjit Sen observes, “Although space may exist in the abstract, as a social construction it, too, necessarily entails very real and often contested divisions, borders, and boundaries.”⁶⁰ In highlighting the specificity of each Milton and using this intense localization to suggest a connection to a greater national narrative, *Milton* risks simplifying the experiences of a country to the experiences of five towns, but the performance attempts to guard against this with the expansive diversity of its representation.

Making *site* specific, defining one place in opposition to another, might produce an essentialist narrative about what is “contained” within the constructed borders. Borders can become representative of shared beliefs or ideologies. Andro Linklater writes about American borders: “They evolved from the clash of sectional interests and competing visions about the way American society should develop. They contain within them values of personal liberty and public democracy that were hammered out as the nation grew.”⁶¹ So although American borders were constructed from conflicting ideas, the larger metaphor they have come to represent is of an expanse of people who share a belief in “personal liberty and public democracy.” Place-making can produce a homogeneous frame, a set of assumptions about what it means to American based on a shared sense of place and the identity *place* defines. But as *Milton* reminds us, sharing space does not always equate with sharing ideology. In discussing the beliefs section of the play, Pearl noted, “The boundaries

⁶⁰ Arijit Sen, *Making place: space and embodiment in the city* (Indiana UP, 2014), 3.

⁶¹ Linklater, 15.

and borders between us are invisible but very real.”⁶² She is referring to the differences that crop up within and between communities: the “very real” language barrier that keeps residents of Milton-Freewater from communicating with each other or the “very real” racial divides, remnants of the segregated South, that keep those in Milton, North Carolina socially separated from one another, or the “racial and ethnic boundaries” Smith’s impersonations attempt to cross.⁶³ Sen describes how *place* can be “limited not only by physical borders but also by much less explicit temporal and socially constructed boundaries.”⁶⁴ Sen’s use of the word “limited” suggests that there is some element of loss in assigning definition to the abstractness of *space*. Place-making risks reducing complexity to singularity, homogenizing a heterogenous whole or separating differences into bounded categories.

The multiplicity of *Milton* resists a homogeneous singularity and represents a connected, rather than divided, set of specificities. Linklater observes that “fears of cultural change have sprung from the assumption that the United States was formed by a single set of unchanging values” and that “set in this static context, the identity and culture of the nation inevitably appear fragile and vulnerable to any sort of change.”⁶⁵ *Milton* represents the inaccuracy of this assumption as the variety of personal beliefs fired out at the audience dismantles the notion of a static, stable American identity. *Milton* argues that a disagreement with your neighbor about the presence of wooden frogs, or with an abstract stranger who believes, “Anyone can pull themselves up by their bootstraps,” are not causes to abandon the

⁶² Katie Pearl in discussion with the author, June 2016.

⁶³ Cherise Smith, *Enacting Others: Politics of Identity in Eleanor Antin, Nikki S. Lee, Adrian Piper, and Anna Deavere Smith* (Duke University Press, 2011), x.

⁶⁴ Sen, 3.

⁶⁵ Linklater, 275.

perceived ideal of unification. In writing about *Twilight*, Gayle Wald argues, “Smith’s performance constructs an imaginary—and highly intimate—conversation among twenty-one people who will *never* share the same room together.”⁶⁶ Unification includes space for difference, and Pearl Damour, moving beyond an imagined conversation, wants to remind its audiences that differences should all have a place in the same room. The expansion of site-specific to include multiple sites allows the diverse performance form to reflect the diversity of the nation.

The multiplicity of *Milton* reflects the fluidity of national identity. National identity is not fixed by a set of physical borders or a single set of values. Jeffrey Mason, in *Performing America: Cultural nationalism in American theater*, questions the relationship between boundaries and definitions: “Where do “American” borders lie? Do they suggest a passage from one space into a distinct other, or do they float on the fringes, dissolving and re-forming between ambiguous margins on both sides? Who belongs? Do the boundaries define people, or do the people dominate the boundaries?”⁶⁷ The variability of “Americanness” produces the consequent need of site-specificity, as a form of place-making, to be adaptive. *Milton* adapts to each of its performance sites, presenting each location as a “distinct other” while also “dissolving and re-forming” the boundaries between the different Miltons. The taped-out maps on the ground display divisional differences parceled out county lines and city streets. The Miltons are designed differently, navigated differently, unique in the diagonals measured out by a stage manager in a high school

⁶⁶ Gayle Wald, “Anna Devere Smith’s Voices at Twilight,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary Thought on Contemporary Cultures* 4, no. 2 (2013).

⁶⁷ Jeffrey Mason, *Performing America: Cultural nationalism in American theater* (University of Michigan Press, 1999), 230.

auditorium. And yet the design choice, a representation of the identifiable specificity of each place, also presents as an interconnected web of differently-colored geographies. The maps are superimposed one onto the other and their lines intersect at numerous points. These intersections, however, do not represent the “real-world” intersections of streets within a given Milton. Instead, they represent imagined spaces of connection, where one Milton intersects with another in the shared experiences of community. The mapped-lines are not concrete markers dividing the different small towns into neat and separate categories; rather, they demonstrate how borders, and the identities they are used to define, can be porous and variable.

The integration of multiple spatial specificities into one physical location can collapse the perceived distance between separated geographies. *Milton* utilizes multiplicity—the connections between communal experiences and the recognition of shared idiosyncrasies—to construct collective identity. Jen Harvie in *Staging the UK* argues, “national identities are neither biologically nor territorially given; rather they are creatively produced or staged.”⁶⁸ PearlDamour’s stages a highly stylized interpretation of American identity, rich in image, metaphor, and music. The theatricality of *Milton*, with its hybridized aesthetic vocabulary found in digital screens, physical photographs, and tasted food, becomes the means by which the communities mediate their experience of national belonging. *Milton*, as a non-linear, highly theatrical performance, offers a metaphoric account of nationhood as a collection of stories, voices, skies, and homemade earrings. The group wanted to create a performance that creatively reflected the host community back to themselves without sacrificing the experimental aesthetic essential to PearlDamour. The

⁶⁸ Jen Harvie, *Staging the UK* (Manchester University Press, 2005), 2.

multiform aesthetic of *Milton* resists simplifying the complexity of small-town, American experiences. The theatrical accumulation of diversity, then, activates each individual community and places them side-by-side in a kaleidoscopic narrative of a large country characterized by multiplicity.

Milton joins the long history of performance as community-building. As in *Twilight*, *Milton* is a performance of the community for the community itself. Kimberly Rae Connor speaks of Smith's process as one of "theft and gift": Smith appropriates others' voices and then re-presents or returns those voices to them.⁶⁹ Both *Milton* and *Twilight* involve "outsiders" telling stories about the community with the goal of offering visibility to the underrepresented (voices that might be lost in journalistic accounts) and of finding common ground amongst difference. Similarly, Cornerstone Theater Company has worked with diverse communities, artists, and activists to create community-engaged theater for over thirty years. Their project *California: A Tempest* was the culmination of ten years of creative community outreach. From 2003 to 2014, Cornerstone created plays across California through their Institute Summer Residency program where they would work with local artists and educators to collaborate and stage performances that reflected the community itself. *California: A Tempest* sought to bridge each of these communities with a theatrical road trip. Alison Carey rewrote *The Tempest* to resonate more specifically with California (the tempest becomes an earthquake that turns a mountain into an island, for example). Cornerstone then brought the text to ten different California towns where the company had previously been in residence. They spent time within each community, working with

⁶⁹ Kimberly Rae Connor, "Negotiating the Differences: Anna Deveare Smith and Liberation Theater," in *Racing and (E)racing Language: Living with the Color of our Words*, ed. by Ellen Goldner (Syracuse University Press, 2001), 174.

residents to reshape the production while integrating local, amateur actors into the show's ensemble. At *California: A Tempest*'s final performance in downtown Los Angeles, Margaret Gray reports that "residents took the stage to talk, lyrically and honestly, about their hometown, its new condos and its 'urine stench.'"70 Unlike, *Twilight*, Cornerstone's performances are not performances of the communities themselves; rather, they reflect encounters and engagements between the traveling company and community members.

PearlDamour's *Milton* project was undoubtedly inspired by Cornerstone's work—Ashley Sparks, Community Engagement Strategist for *Milton*, had once been a Community Partnerships Associate for Cornerstone. PearlDamour combines Cornerstone's long-form community involvement with the verbatim representation found in Anna Deveare Smith's work to make theater a responsible partner in the growth of communities. In its contemporary moment, the *Milton* project is a form of "creative place-making," a form of arts-driven community engagement. The National Endowment for the Arts defines "creative place-making":

"Creative place-making animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired... Creative place-making projects strategically link communities and local governments with artists, designers, and arts organizations to improve quality of life, create a sense of place, and revitalize local economies."⁷¹

Creative place-making, as opposed to its potentially problematic border-drawing counterpart, works with a community to support neighborhoods and public spaces by

⁷⁰ Margaret Gray, "With 'California: The Tempest,' Cornerstone makes homespun magic," *The New York Times*, June 24, 2015.

⁷¹ Jason Schupbach, "Defining Creative Placemaking: A Talk with Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa Nicodemus," *National Endowment for the Arts Magazine*, www.arts.gov, September 2012.

enhancing a sense of *place* for residents and visitors. Creative place-making, as opposed to its potentially problematic border-drawing counterpart, works with a community to support neighborhoods and public spaces by enhancing a sense of *place* for residents and visitors. The practice is considered successful when it “demonstrates a commitment to place and its distinctive character.” This reflects the way in which *Milton* addresses each community’s specific sense of identity and the deep relationships the performance group built with each town. Just as site-specific performance relies on its site (in this case, the Miltons) for inspiration, form, and content, creative place-making “animates” a particular location through performance and arts programming.

Community as Site, Milton as Community-Specific

Pearl Damour chose for their performances in Milton locations that were important or central to the communities in some way. In Milton-Freewater, the high school was chosen because it was considered the most neutral, welcoming ground for families in the community. Generally, the chosen spaces were not unconventional performance venues; they were community centers, libraries, and auditoriums. They were certainly not the “found spaces” of 1990s site-specificity—historical landmarks or landscapes temporarily inhabited and repurposed for performance. For *Milton*, it is not the physical site of performance that defines it as site-specific. Instead, it is the community that produces the site. The community exists as more than just a set of geographical coordinates, and as more than the town itself. As Arijit Sen explains in his book *Making place: space and embodiment in the city*, “a physical environment’s...meaning is dependent upon the larger political and economic

contexts within which these individuals operate in any specific location.”⁷² In creating a sense of *place* in their performances, PearlDamour draws from the specific contexts that constitute each community. Reciprocally, the experience of *place* as a specific locality, in turn, contributes a sense of individual and communal self-identification. *Milton*, as a community-specific performance, performs a particular *site*: the materiality of the town itself and the immaterial forces that coordinate its residents and spaces. In reflecting this *site* to the receptive community, *Milton* also participates in (re)defining the specific identities of each represented community.

PearlDamour is known for their site-specific and community-driven work. Pearl spent time with Mike Pearson and Clifford McLucas in Wales, working with Brith Gof as they developed some of the field’s leading spatial experiments in the 1990s. Pearson has been the most prominent writer on site-specific theater and his definition of *site-specific* is the most often referenced: “Site-specific performances are conceived for, and conditioned by the particulars of found spaces...they are an interpenetration of the found and the fabricated. They are inseparable from their sites, the only contexts with which they are ‘readable.’”⁷³ Drawing from the company’s efforts to stage the history and myths of the Welsh countryside, Pearson asserts that *site-specific* requires the connection between performance and site to be one that is unbreakable and inherent to the integrity of the piece. Pearl came back from her experience with Brith Gof “on fire” for site-specificity, which is when she partnered with D’Amour. Their first collaboration in 1997, *The Grove*, took place at a grove of trees along one of Austin’s primary commuter routes. The site-specific 14-hour

⁷² Sen, 3.

⁷³ Mike Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 4.

long installation was intended to draw motorists' attention to a place that Pearl believed too often overlooked. *LandMARK* (2002) was a durational piece performed at the Stone Arch Bridge in Minneapolis and was billed as a "24-hour cycle of energy for the day, moving in sync with the cycles of light, water, and sound in constant motion at the site."⁷⁴ Pearl writes that their pieces "often happen in surprising locations, like on a bridge, or in an empty office, or in an old church."⁷⁵ For Pearl and Damour, *Milton* marks a complicated continuation of their site-based work.

Pearl is hesitant to describe *Milton* as site-specific. In a personal interview, in response to my question about her relationship to site-specific theater, she jokingly began with, "Let me get up on my soapbox!" and declared herself to be a "pretty hardcore purist" when it comes to the term's usage and definition. She explained:

To me, site-specific means the content and the structure of a piece grows directly out of the space...we just did some work in Seattle that I felt really comfortable calling site-responsive, but everybody just called it site-specific. But to me putting a play in a room in a building doesn't make it site-specific, even if it was made to go into that space in a certain way.⁷⁶

This definition would rule out *Milton*, performed in multiple buildings in different spaces. Pearl suggests an alternative: "community-specific" or "community-embedded." I argue, then, that the performance becomes site-specific as each community becomes the site of performance. Smith's *Twilight* similarly performs Los Angeles for the Los Angeles community. Performance belongs to the community. Yet, as a form of documentary drama, *Twilight* also memorializes a specific historical event, and in this way belongs more to Los

⁷⁴ "The Collaborative Works of Lisa D'Amour and Katie Pearl," www.pearldamour.com.

⁷⁵ Pearl, "With and For."

⁷⁶ Katie Pearl in discussion with the author, June 2016.

Angeles *at that moment* (1992-3) than to the site itself. *Milton* also has an obvious temporal specificity—Pearl Damour’s interviews were conducted at a particular moment in time—but the ambiguity of the performance, the absence of dates or specific identifying information, places the emphasis on what constitutes community rather than on how a community responds to particular event. Community becomes both subject and setting, creating a performance site at once expansive and localized.

Some of Pearl’s “purist” elements were evident in Pearl Damour’s process for *Milton*. She mentioned one of the similarities to the site-specific process is “the kind of time you have to spend building a relationship with a space in order to create something for it,” creating a performance both “with and for” the audience.⁷⁷ The group constructed its performance from the details and information gathered from specific sites. The experiences of their travels shaped the play. The Miltons were inspiration, content, and performance space all together. These intentions matched both Pearl and Pearson’s requirements, although *Milton* was not generated organically from a particular physical location or building. Instead, *Milton* expanded the concept of *site* in site-specificity. Beyond architecture or single historical site, entire communities functioned as the place of performance. The emphasis was less on where the audience was at the moment of the performance (although those buildings themselves contributed their own significance) but more on the specific combination of social, economic, interpersonal, and institutional forces that make up the experience of a place. By collecting stories, visiting landmarks, and building relationships, Pearl Damour focused on what made each Milton unique. They then performed a community for the community itself.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

The specific elements incorporated from each community become, to use Pearson's language, "activated" when they are presented to the community of origin.⁷⁸ *Milton* becomes site-specific to Milton, North Carolina when it is performed in Milton, North Carolina. Then Milton-Freewater, Oregon receives the performance, which has undergone minor revisions, and perceives it as belonging to their community. The flexibility of this specificity challenges "purist" doubts about site-specific work's ability to survive movement from place to place. As the narrow notion of *site* as a singular physical location expands to encompass both the material and immaterial particularities of a community, *Milton* remains a performance generated from and performed for its multiple sites.

The movement between places creates specificity as each new performance draws attention to the present Milton. The audience recognizes their town reflected back at them in the play, locating their community as both source material and place of performance. The play's introductory "sometimes" list begins the process of identification. The three actors sit amongst the audience and begin with a "simple telling of hospitality, of welcome": "Sometimes you are offered a glass of chocolate milk."⁷⁹ The offer came from the Cronins in Milton, MA, where they run Thatcher Family Farms, which still offers home milk delivery. Or, "Sometimes you are given a bag of kumquats, straight from the tree," (from the Duhons in Milton, LA). "Sometimes you are served wine made from grapes grown one mile away." The grapes were grown in Milton-Freewater, OR, a farming region that used to cultivate peas but is now dominated by vineyards. In Milton-Freewater, as the actors describe how sometimes you are invited to sit and talk with the dentist in his chair after

⁷⁸ Pearson, 4.

⁷⁹ Pearl, "For and With."

hours, the audience erupts in laughter and points at the man in the last row: the dentist. The play continues: “Sometimes you go in through the door of a gymnasium where Kareem Abdul Jabbar played when the gym belonged to Milton College and the Milwaukee Bucks used it for their training camp.” If the future audience in Wisconsin responds at all similarly to the one in Oregon, I imagine that a few chuckles of pride might arise at the mention of this unofficial landmark. The parenthetical and hypertextual clarifications are not scripted into the text of the play; rather, they are revealed through audience reactions, small indicators of recognition that claim *that* detail for *this* particular Milton.

In Milton-Freewater, audience interjections peppered the dialogue, making the performance’s connection to that town clear. When the actors presented the different models of buildings that would serve as performance locations in each of the Miltons, they saved McLoughlin High School, in whose auditorium we were currently sitting, for last. This culminated in a wonderful meta-moment as the local woman next to me declared that it passed inspection, speaking out, “That looks good!” As they had with each of the previous models, the actors went to place Mac Hi (as it is affectionately called) at its appropriate intersection of colored spike tape, representative of the actual streets of Milton-Freewater. The actors narrated, “This is McLoughlin High School, located on...” and the audience finished the sentence with a chorus of “Main Street!” In this way, the locals highlighted how *Milton* is a performance of their own community. They also demonstrated how they themselves perform community: generating material, footnoting the script, creating what Pearl refers to as “little magic mind trips” that happen when they recognize themselves onstage.⁸⁰ The lines between performers and community members become blurred as

⁸⁰ Pearl, 2016.

Miltonians insert themselves into the performance. This form of audience participation ensures that *Milton* is always in process and is made specific each time it is performed.

As an outsider to Milton-Freewater, Oregon, I was sometimes only able to distinguish between the different Miltons by gauging the audience's responses. Similarly, a member with the Milton-Freewater community might not know everything about their own town. So site-specificity might be build on hypothetical readings of site, on imagined recognitions, or on acquiring new knowledge about a site. For Pearl, the "sometimes" list reflect the perspective of an outsider's experience coming into a town. Pearl explains that the construction of the play was meant to reflect this experience of how someone gets to know a town.⁸¹ The play's movement toward specificity, from a generalized list of things that sometimes happen to the identification of individual details, grounds the performance in each particular Milton by featuring what makes each town unique. In Milton-Freewater, Oregon, this meant an emphasis on wine, translation, and wooden frogs.

Milton-Freewater, Oregon, located on the northeast border just eight miles south of Walla Walla, Washington, received its name when the dry town of Milton and the bar-filled town of Freewater merged in 1951. An agricultural town with a population of 7000, Milton-Freewater has cycled through multiple public identities. The town billed itself as the "Pea Capital" in the 1960s but as canneries closed down farming transitioned to cherry orchards. In 1971, the city manager hired a branding consultant who recommended the town brand itself with frogs. The city then sponsored the creation of over fifty chainsaw sculpture frogs—still located outside local businesses—to help market themselves as a "fun town" with the quirky nickname "Muddy Frogwater." In my one-time (rather than sometimes)

⁸¹ Katie Pearl, interview by Ian Daniel, "PearlDamour Explores What it Means to Be American, One Town Named Milton at a Time," *Extended Play*, April 20, 2015.

experience of Milton-Freewater, I ran into more than a few of these cartoonish figures (my favorite was the lounging amphibian reading *Lord of the Flies* outside of the library) and learned that the locals have mixed opinions about what has so long defined their town.

In a segment of PearlDamour's *Milton* in Oregon, actors passed around "artifacts" from the different towns. Audience members looked at pictures of a toothpick from the original founder of Milton, WI, touched earrings made from fish hooks in North Carolina, and tasted cherries picked that morning from the neighboring orchards in Milton-Freewater. As I shuffled through dozens of pictures of wooden frogs, the Mac Hi alumna next to me leaned over and told me the sculptures were on the brink of removal. She whispered that the town wanted to be "Milton Rocks!" now, not "Muddy Frogwater." Plus, the wood was rotting, she said. As if on cue, the actors caught the audience's attention and began to describe the frog situation (now old news to me). They echoed my local companion in explaining the sculptures' possible demise and proceeded to take an informal poll: to keep the frogs or destroy them? The crowd was boisterous, eventually ruling in favor of the frogs. I later learned that PearlDamour tailored this moment specifically for the Milton-Freewater performance, which became a moment of "surprise, specificity, and idiosyncrasy" for the community.⁸² The performance reflected the community in its content, the text of the vote, and in the participation of the community itself. The investment of an active, voting audience allowed members of the community to rehearse their own participation in the impending political vortex. At stake beyond the presence of amphibians was the identity of a town and the diversity of its inhabitants.

⁸² Lisa D'Amour, Katie Pearl, and Ashley Sparks, "Milton: A Performance and Community Engagement Experiment," *Audience (R)evolution: Dispatches from the Field*, ed. Caridad Svitch (New York, Theatre Communications Group, 2016), 148.

In June 2016, when I visited, Milton-Freewater was facing yet another identity crisis. Their agricultural focus was shifting to cultivating vineyards, joining with the rest of the Walla Walla Valley in the wine-making industry. The newly formed Rocks District of Milton-Freewater, a sub-appellation of the acclaimed Walla Walla Wine Appellation, represents another major rebranding—a movement away from the ludicrous, decaying frogs and into the sophisticated market of wine tourism. This move feels inauthentic to some, as evidenced by the popular vote at Mac Hi, and could threaten the small-town quirks that make Milton-Freewater distinctive. These questions about how to define a community and what makes a place distinguishable from another get presented and worked out on the stage of a high school auditorium in a community-specific performance. PearlDamour’s performance taps into a contemporary issue facing a community and involves itself in the process of (re)constituting the identity of the town.

PearlDamour makes a specific argument about the town’s identity by staging the Oregon performance as the only bilingual version of the *Milton* cycle. Performed in both Spanish and English, the performance represents the racial and ethnic demographics of the town, which is evenly split at 49% white and 49% Latino. The town’s major agricultural industry attracted an abundance of Latino migrant laborers who would eventually settle in the town permanently. According to PearlDamour’s research, a popular housing complex in town is still called “the Labor Camp,” a vestige of its migrant farm worker history.⁸³ In an interview, Ashley Sparks, the Community Engagement Strategist for the project, told me “it was such a priority to make sure [the language] was accessible.”⁸⁴ Pearl chimed in about the

⁸³ “Compare the Miltons,” skyovermilton.com, 2015.

⁸⁴ Ashley Sparks in discussion with the author, 2016.

difference between “inviting” and “welcoming”—that just because you invite someone does not mean they will feel welcome in the space you have created. And for the large Spanish-speaking contingent, that begins with being able to understand the language. Pearl Damour set out to make a performance that reflected the Milton-Freewater community by incorporating two different languages and the divide they represent. Sometimes the actors stage the process of translation, reciting one line in English and then repeating it in Spanish, or vice versa:

ROSE: Sometimes the tire repair shop is also the diner.

TODD: ¿La tienda de llantas también es un restaurante?

ROSE: Sí, in Milton, North Carolina. Y el museo también es donde pagas la cuenta del agua.

TODD: And the museum is where you also pay your water bill.

For some of the longer Spanish sections, the screens displaying the skies over Milton become a space for supertitles. For other sections, both languages remain untranslated or are mixed within spurts of dialogue or within individual lines. The play’s climactic moment “sparks up an age-old” debate.⁸⁵ An English-speaking actor becomes frustrated with his inability to understand his Spanish-speaking counterpart across the room. They slowly approach each other while alternating demands of “Learn my language!” and “¡Aprende mi lengua!” As they meet center stage in an aggressive face-off, one’s shouting becomes indistinguishable from the other. In this moment, the irony involved in cultural misunderstandings (or the refusal to understand) and its resultant unresolved tension demonstrates how this performance was crafted “with and for” the Milton-Freewater community.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

In Milton-Freewater, the production demonstrated how small-town realities might be shared yet experienced in individually and communally specific ways. At one point, actors distributed job cards to the audience, identifying each audience member by their position: “You are the librarian’s assistant,” or, “You work at the post office.” The randomness of the distribution was universalizing—until a white audience member was given a “Grape Packer” card and an actor interrupted to decry the inaccuracy of that selection. She grabbed the card and handed it to a person of color across the aisle. Amidst the uncomfortable laughter, this de-randomized assignment made visible specific ethnically-based socioeconomic issues facing Milton-Freewater. In another beat, one of the radios onstage played the voice of an interviewee as he ponders, “How many of the farm workers are Anglo? How many of the owners are Mexican?” More uncomfortable laughter and a few hums of assent. The town’s demographics may be evenly split, but as the production suggested, the employment opportunities are not as evenly divided. The play specifically reflected its community and strongly suggested that visibility is an important step toward inclusion.

Milton as a community-specific performance represents a community so that the community might recognize itself in the performance. Pearl spoke to me about the importance of representation:

We realized that a deep power of the performance is that it is shining a light onto details of life or people who aren’t normally considered—in the way our society works—important enough to think about or look at or lift up in that way... I think it’s true of community-driven work in general, when people see themselves expressed in this way, it’s really valuable.⁸⁶

In making the Milton-Freewater performance bilingual, she said they “attuned people’s ears to something radically local.”⁸⁷ Here Pearl also identifies the intriguing irony of the *Milton*

⁸⁶ Pearl, 2016.

cycle and the ways in which each performance is both intensely localized and the amalgam of multiple places at once. Frogs and language make the Milton-Freewater performance feel “radically local,” but it was the second stop on the *Milton* journey—meaning the performance was intended to feel “radically local” to different locales. For Pearl, this complicates her “purist” definition of site-specific performance: “The specificity of doing this work in the towns that supplied the content seems like it has that unbreakable bond that feels familiar to me when I think about site-specificity...but I feel like the show can be picked up and put down, picked up and put down, which a site-specific piece can’t really do.”⁸⁸ The fundamental issue is transplantation and whether specificity can be maintained despite movement.

When the concept of *site* is shifted from a singular physical location to a community, as was demonstrated in the examples from the Milton-Freewater performance, I argue that specificity can be created through movement and that a site-specific performance can belong to multiple sites at once. In its movement from North Carolina to Oregon, *Milton* underwent minimal revisions apart from its transformation into a bilingual performance. According to Pearl, the “intention and subject, dramaturgy and structure” remained “essentially the same,” unlike Cornerstone’s adaptive, community-specific approach which involves each community changing the script to more specifically reflect their concerns and experiences. As the community was already incorporated into the *Milton* text from its inception, even with the same general script used in Oregon, the North Carolina audience shared the similar experience of seeing themselves and their community reflected back at them. As details

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

about all the Miltons were rattled off in sometimes-list form, the North Carolina Miltonians responded to the images specific to their community. Pearl details some of these moments of “delightful recognition”:

Like when [the actors] mention the earrings that Taco made, they’re like, “Stand up, Taco!” It started to become a really alive moment. Or there was this moment when the actress Helga Davis is describing looking down and seeing the grave of Miss Patsy’s dad, and then Miss Patsy was sitting next to her, and she was crying, and Helga was holding her hand. Or there’s this one woman named Nancy Hughes, who is 87 years-old. And she’s worked her entire life, like so many jobs, and now her job was to clean the post office on Sundays. And when we were doing the job section, and the actor says to somebody else, “Your job is to clean the post office on Sundays, because Nancy Hughes needs to rest,” and when Nancy was in the audience she was, like giggling with delight. They just feel so... seen.⁸⁹

The moments of “delightful recognition” in North Carolina do not cancel out those from Milton-Freewater; rather, the inclusion of details from numerous communities serves to emphasize those specific to the present town. The performance becomes community-specific in part *because* of the other communities represented, not in spite of them. The performance becomes “readable” in multiple contexts, a direct affront to Pearson’s view that the physical sites of site-specific theater are the “only contexts with which [the works] are ‘readable.’”⁹⁰

The play asks its audience to pay attention: to notice their surroundings with the skies overhead and maps underfoot; to find the moments of recognition amidst an oversaturation of details; and, to identify points of connection between their experience of specificity and the experiences unrecognizable to them. In asking audience members to locate themselves, *Milton* borrows from the tradition of site-based practices. As models representative of the Miltons are placed on their respective streets, the actors announce:

⁸⁹ Pearl, interview by Ian Daniel.

⁹⁰ Pearson, 4.

“The library in Milton, Massachusetts is right here,” and so on. In Milton-Freewater, while holding the model of the current performance space, the actor paused and stated, “Milton-Freewater is right *here*.” The emphasis of the deictic both located and identified the audience. *Here* is the community, *here* is the place of performance, pay attention to *here*. Site-based practices, especially when they incorporate movement, make use of positional directives to ground their audience members in that particular location. The strategy is particularly prevalent in the emergent form of “smartphone plays.” These plays are developed as apps that can be accessed on mobile devices. The premise is you download the app, take your device to a specific designated location, and then listen to the play as it guides you through the space. I experienced This is Not a Theatre Company’s *Ferry Play* on the Staten Island Ferry. The play, like a guided meditation, was constantly directing my sensory experience: “Look at the water...smell the salt...feel the metal of the railing.” I became hyper-aware of my surroundings, that I was *here* and nowhere else. Similarly, *Milton* asks you to taste the cherries grown locally, to listen to the voice of your neighbor, and to realize what it means to be *here*. The play takes you on a guided tour of multiple places, with one that might be familiar to you, and in doing so, incorporates multiplicity into specificity.

The Constellation of American Identity

In the incorporation of multiple Miltons into one performance, PearlDamour connects communal specificities to each other in order to construct larger ideas about American identity. *Milton* locates the present audience, who recognize themselves and their town in performance, and also introduces them to distant towns that share the same name, and, as the play unsubtly suggests, much more than that. With five different Miltons

represented in one room, the show transitions among moments that are delightfully recognizable to the present Miltonians and moments that blur all the towns together. The “radically local” moments of *Milton* combine with the representation of ubiquitous everyday life experiences to demonstrate how individual idiosyncrasies can make up the general picture of the nation. McLucas, a part of Brith Gof and originally an architect, describes site-specific work as a “culturally specific creative practice that can engage with real locations, histories and identities,” one that “seeks ways of expressing and animating located identities not as simplified and essentialist narratives, but as fractured and negotiated, sophisticated strategies for survival.”⁹¹ I have discussed the ways in which *Milton* “expresses and animates” its “located identities” and now I turn to the “fractured,” “not simplified and essentialist narratives.” PearlDamour makes *Milton* specific to multiple places and also makes multiple places specific to each Milton. The towns, and the people in them, might radically differ from one another, and yet this multiplicity becomes the common thread among them when unique elements from all five Miltons are combined into a single show.

The five screens positioned above the audience, bordering the circular performance space, project images and videos from the skies above each Milton. The skies are indistinguishable from one another, and yet each represents an individual community. As reviewer Ben Gassman observes, elements in the performance “help transport and ground the audience at the same time; [they] sculpt shared space, shaping the text into an elegant and perpetually flipping hourglass of the idiosyncratically specific and rippling symbolic.”⁹² The integration of elements from all the Miltons creates a simultaneous experience of the

⁹¹ Clifford McLucas quoted in Nick Kaye, *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place, and Documentation* (Routledge, 2000), xi.

⁹² Ben Gassman, “America: A Performance in Five Miltons,” *Brooklyn Rail*, June 3, 2016.

local and the universal. By capturing images of the sky, PearlDamour attempted to physically map a space that remains abstract to its audience. The vast, indistinguishableness of the sky positioned against the grounded specificity of local detail demonstrates how *Milton* is produced by the combination of actual and imagined sites. The connection among Miltons is made through the imagined experiences of unseen physical places. The imagined experience is mediated through the physical interaction with “artifacts,” the material objects representative of a distant community, and the reception of auditory and visual accounts of these other places. The site of performance, then, is necessarily both the geographical city but also the virtual spaces of communal experiences and the limitless expanse of sky that can be seen to connect them. *Milton* cannot exist without the combination of elements from *all* the Miltons. In an expansion of Pearson’s definition, *Milton* becomes a site-specific performance that is inextricable from multiple sites at once.

Ubiquitousness—of sky, of “sometimes” experiences—connects all the Miltons to each other and even to the rest of the country. In the creation of moments that are at once local and national, PearlDamour connects the peculiarities of small-town life to a larger sense of collective identity. Part of their mission was to “fight any generalities we might have about being American, or about small town life.”⁹³ Sparks, who herself grew up in a small town, spoke about the project pushing on the assumptions made about rural communities and giving these identities more nuanced representations. Pearl added that in North Carolina, the town of 164 people said what they wanted most for the show was “just to make sure people know we’re not hicks.”⁹⁴ By emphasizing the specific differences

⁹³ skyovermilton.com

⁹⁴ Pearl, 2016.

among the towns, the performance group aimed to illuminate the complexities of small-town life. In order to challenge cultural assumptions about the different parts of America, Pearl Damour focused on the process of making each place specific—of turning a dot on a map into an actual person. This process is then reversed in performance. *Milton* represents the particularities of each town in order to construct the bigger picture of national identity and examine the individual in relationship to a larger system.

In Milton-Freewater, alongside the specific details that belonged to that audience was a flurry of details that could belong to any of the other Miltons. Without the inside perspective of a local (or the close proximity to one), we were unsure of exactly where the firemen made stew, where the kumquats were grown, or where the observatory looked out over. The collection of stories from the other Miltons blended together, sharpening accounts of Milton-Freewater while blurring the rest into a general category of “sometimes” small-town experiences. The other Miltons become representative of the universal, the experiences everyone can share: “You hold onto these things that everyone can attach to... The goal is to show as accurately as possible the scope and the range of the different experiences and the complexities.”⁹⁵ The jobs section of the performance, when the actors assigned jobs to the audience members, reflected the shared ordinariness of employment. The actors rattled off generic positions: “You are a nurse. You are the mayor. You work at the post office. You work at the community center.” I was lucky enough to receive two positions—a luxury in this economy—and was both the librarian’s assistant and a mechanic. These jobs were actual jobs held by interviewed Miltonians but the list began to feel ubiquitous, like a list of jobs found everywhere performed by anyone. For a moment, the expanse of the country felt

⁹⁵ Ibid.

bridged by the simple presence of postal workers. And then a moment of, as Pearl calls it, “telescoping in” as the dentist in the back row receives his dentist job card.⁹⁶ The announcement, “Your job is to entertain people by singing cowboy ballads,” was greeted with a quizzical expression and the realization that eccentricity can be found everywhere.

Another project of Cornerstone’s mirrors the tensions of representing the specificities of American life through general cultural archetypes. In 1991, the company embarked on an “interstate adventure” with their tour of *The Winter’s Tale*, which traveled to numerous small, rural communities across America. Sonja Kuflinec explores Cornerstone’s “polyphonic representation,” investigating the multi-vocality of its performances as a representation of a “new, inclusive American theater.”⁹⁷ Cornerstone faced the same challenge as PearlDamour: how to represent national identity amongst regional difference. Cornerstone’s emphasis on grass roots locality seemingly clashed with the execution of its mobile cross-country tour. To ensure that America would be universally recognizable to each community the production visited, Cornerstone opted to present a more mythic and conceptual vision of the nation, represented in the binary of urban and rural spaces. Kuflinec describes the painted backdrop for *The Winter’s Tale* as a “rough-hewn barn surrounded by hay and wheat and a city skyline thrusting upwards.”⁹⁸ Kuflinec argues that Cornerstone’s backdrop suggests that national unification might occur through movement, by traveling to each of these regions as the company itself has done. PearlDamour has done the traveling for its audience, bringing the similarities and

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Sonja Kuflinec, *Staging America: Cornerstone and Community-Based Theater* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003), 89.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

differences of each town onto a single stage. The grand, mythic narrative becomes a list of individual specificities, and it is through connecting these specificities, *Milton* argues, that unity might be glimpsed.

The expansive range of specificities and the resultant muddled details actually underscore PearlDamour's mission to connect the different places to one another. The other Miltons might be indistinguishable from one another, but each detail is as peculiar to its own town as Milton-Freewater's frogs are to its community. In the performance, each place is represented by what makes it unique. Rather than separating the distinct communities, however, the representation of specificity reveals how multiple specificities foster identification across difference. Milton-Freewater, itself attached to bizarre wooden figures, can understand Milton, Wisconsin's pride in the toothpick of its founder. More deeply, it can connect to the distant Milton's loss of industry and economic restructuring as an agricultural town, made visible in the jobs section of the performance when we hear: "You used to work at the GM assembly plant but that closed." The similarities between the Miltons are found in the shared experiences of specificity. In addition to recognizing themselves in moments when the performance literally reflects their community, the Miltons can also recognize themselves in one another. Despite the town's differences, PearlDamour found striking large-scale similarities: "We've been introduced to and have engaged with similar struggles in each town, especially having to do with the death of certain industries, with our country's legacy of systemic racism, and with the changing ethnic make up of populations due to immigration and local migration."⁹⁹ A national consciousness becomes activated through these shared experiences, creating a sense of shared identity. These communities' sense of

⁹⁹ Pearl, "With and For."

identity, of belonging to the nation in particular ways, connect them to each other despite the geographic separation and cultural difference, perceived and actual.

PearlDamour collected its information from the towns, the content that would become the play, by asking Miltonians a series of four questions:

How did you get to Milton?
If you could change one thing about the world, what would it be?
Do you have advice for future generations?
Why do you think we're here on this earth?

The questions served as a construct to help limit the amount of stories the group was collecting (still an overwhelming amount for D'Amour to convert into an hour-long performance) and got people talking about their own experiences in a small town. The grander philosophical questions also pointed to the sets of values and beliefs that make up the “umbrella” of how small-towns constitute a larger nation. The question of “What does it mean to be an American?” begins with “What does it mean to be a member of this particular community?” and reduces even further to the existential exercise of identifying the self. PearlDamour uses the particular to get to the general. The Miltonians share their ideas about the world. Pieced together, these individual ideas form a community. These Miltons, then, function as a sample size for the rest of America. PearlDamour refers to it as a “pointillist approach, using bits of images and experiences to move towards an ultimately ungraspable whole.”¹⁰⁰ The performance reminds its audience that the nation is made up of individuals all living side-by-side. In one of the final moments of the performance, the speakers play a collage of voices and the actors set to building a sky. This new representation of the sky mirrors the screens above it. The images of the skies that are consistently present throughout

¹⁰⁰ D'Amour, Pearl, and Sparks, 2015.

the performance are representative of the abstract points of connection among the Miltons, at once ubiquitous and unique. According to a reviewer, the film footage of the skies over Milton “might look like being inside a planetarium, or being outside at a backyard family barbecue, or a night out at the opera — the interpretation varies from place to place and performance to performance.”¹⁰¹ The actors, as sky-builders, then physically (re)construct the metaphor, piece by piece, the way each community is constructed story by story, and the nation voice by voice. The larger “ungraspable whole” is made up of multiple, mobile specificities.

PearlDamour imagined all the Miltons connecting to form an “earth-bound constellation.” Their website features a map of the United States with a line drawn connecting each Milton. The image, which has become the brand for their project, resembles a star chart with different points connected to form an abstract geometric shape and the visual serves the larger connective metaphor. They associate constellations with navigation and how explorers were able to orient themselves in the expansiveness of the sea and sky. They imagine the Milton stars (or skies) serving a similar purpose: “Like the Big Dipper for a sailor out at sea, can this newly-born constellation help locate us?”¹⁰² The points of connection among the different towns serve to “orient us within the vast concept of being American.”¹⁰³ The cluster of Miltons, loosely related by their shared name, group together to form a recognizable image of a nation. The multiple specificities of each place make the larger context of the country “readable” to its diverse inhabitants.

¹⁰¹ Nicole Rupersburg, “PearlDamour sees the way home in the stars over Milton, America,” *Springboard for the Arts: Creative Exchange*, springboardexchange.org, September 15, 2015.

¹⁰² skyovermilton.com

¹⁰³ D’Amour, Pearl, and Sparks, 148.

Performed in Milton-Freewater at a moment when divisive rhetoric surrounding the 2016 presidential election dominated the media, *Milton* presented a more optimistic view of America as a cohesive, if heterogeneous, whole. As four unique Miltons joined a fifth in Oregon, the production served as a metaphor for how American identity can be experienced in a variety of ways. The performed collection of everyday idiosyncrasies and existential ponderings connected the Miltons to each other and to an imagined identification with the rest of America.

Milton suggests that American identity is difficult to define because it is made up of innumerable specificities. The performance offers a provisional definition, that “what it means to be an American is that we live in a big country that was built for people to live side-by-side and have many different points of view.”¹⁰⁴ And those “side-by-side” differences, as the performance suggests, could be as proximate as the seat next to you. In a segment central to *Milton*’s inciting mission, actors circulate through the audience, this time assigning personal beliefs rather than jobs. The beliefs, also collected from Miltonian interviews, shift from benign to controversial and rotate through audience members indiscriminately. An actor told me, “You believe illegal Mexican immigrants are sucking up our country’s resources,” and then told the woman next to me, “You believe illegal Mexican immigrants are doing jobs that white people simply refuse to do anymore.” The experience of being assigned a belief that you yourself did not hold was uncomfortable. The temptation to correct the actor or to claim the belief of your neighbor instead was, for me, like being unable to scratch an infuriatingly nagging itch. Like the moment of re-assigning the “Grape Packer” job card to a person of color, the random assignation of beliefs made achingly

¹⁰⁴ Pearl, 2016.

visible the divisions in the nation, and possibly in the Mac Hi auditorium. And more than that, it made visible the individuals behind otherwise abstract opinions. The fabricated disagreement between my neighbor and me could easily reflect the division of the Milton-Freewater community and its ethnic and socioeconomic demographics. The stakes of “hot-button” issues, now grounded in a specific local context, become intensely personal. Sparks notes that this section “gets to how the big picture umbrella of who we are as Americans sits right next to what is very intimate and personal and highly local because sometimes you don’t agree with your neighbor.”¹⁰⁵ The litany of beliefs acts as another example of how PearlDamour uses the specific to represent the general, the individual as part of a larger system.

The production serves as a metaphor for how our nation shares space despite both distance and difference. Pearl states that *Milton* is about what brings us together as an American community, “but always, there are questions of difference, of longing to connect or to desire to remain separate: across racial lines, across class divides, across religious difference.”¹⁰⁶ *Milton* becomes about how a community encompasses all of these differences, how beliefs that someone might find deeply upsetting can be found sitting in the same room as them. This experience, the play argues, is what it means to be American:

You believe that we live in a big country that was built for people to live side by side, and live out many points of view.
...But you don’t know how to be in the room with all of them
...But you are afraid to be in the room with all of them.
...But you don’t have time to be in the room with all of them.
...But you wonder what it would be like to be in the room with all of them.

¹⁰⁵ Sparks, 2016.

¹⁰⁶ Pearl, “With and For.”

The play suggests that the act of sharing a room or an auditorium stage reflects how we belong to a nation. Just as the details from other Miltons highlight the specificities of the present town, the inclusion of conflicting beliefs forces an acknowledgment of the “other” in shared space. The idealistic desire for PearlDamour is a greater sense of empathy and a more inclusive understanding of “American.” For reviewer Ian Daniel, it is the opportunity to “lay down our rhetorical shields and listen for the fundamental goodness (or well-intendedness, at the very least) in those that we perceive as other, as enemies, or at least as the problem with this country.”¹⁰⁷ This idealism, as I write during the fraught first week of Donald Trump’s presidency, still has a long way to go before it is accomplished. But PearlDamour’s use of specificity as a tool of connection rather than separation feels, as McLucas puts it, like a new “strategy for survival.”¹⁰⁸

An Extended Engagement

In 2015, Milton-Freewater, Oregon received an Our Town grant from the NEA, partnering the city with PearlDamour and another performance group, Shakespeare Walla Walla. The \$75,000 grant was directed to the program called “Talk, Play, Dream: Hablar, Jugar, Soñar” with the intention “to bridge the divide between the city’s Anglo and Latino communities, fostering conversations through shared stories.”¹⁰⁹ As a form of creative place-making, the series of bilingual cultural programs were intended to enliven the city and

¹⁰⁷ Daniel, 2015.

¹⁰⁸ McLucas in Kaye, xi.

¹⁰⁹ Carrie Kikel, “Milton-Freewater awarded National Endowment for the Arts’ 2015 Our Town Grant,” *Oregon Arts Commission Press Release*, July 16, 2015.

connect disparate populations through creative pop-up events, workshops, and performances under the umbrella of PearlDamour's *Milton* project.

PearlDamour engaged the community of Milton-Freewater in a variety of ways leading up to the performance of *Milton*. They discuss the process of working with the Miltons as "Engagement as Intimate Creative Encounter":

From community asset mapping (identifying the local talent in town, which might include artists, cooks, organizers, electricians, preachers, poets, and so on) to attending church on Sundays, from afternoon hang outs at local business to attending community meetings, this type of work values the development of personal relationships.¹¹⁰

The performance group also set up a "dream booth" at the performance in Milton-Freewater, where residents could write their hopes and dreams for the community on a cloud-shaped piece of paper and add it to a "sky" full of dreams—a mirroring of the sky-building moment in the production. Children from the community guided you through the booth where you were surrounded by wishes: "I hope my children grow up to be safe and happy," and, "I hope for Milton-Freewater to become more accepting and loving of their people." Like the jobs and beliefs section of the performance, the collection of dreams represents how the specificity of the community is made up of individual points of view. This form of community engagement serves PearlDamour's mission: "Our goal is that the communities are left with some tools to continue moving forward in the work they are able to do with us; that some bridges are built and serve as active invitations to bring people together, and that those bridges remain [after we leave]."¹¹¹ The group's commitment to creating a performance both "with and for" a community produces a collaborative space where artistic

¹¹⁰ D'Amour, Pearl, and Sparks, 143.

¹¹¹ Rupersburg, 2015.

content is able to address community-based questions and generate engagement ideas for the residents themselves to implement. In North Carolina, a long-term effect of PearlDamour's creative place-making took the form of a Street Fair, which "brought hundreds of people into their usually sleepy downtown area to eat, play games, watch art demonstrations, and learn about the history of Milton."¹¹² In Milton, Massachusetts, the group organized a series of creative events and civic dialogue, under the project name "Milton—Our Community Reflected," in order to facilitate conversation about race, difference, and civic responsibility. The *Milton* project becomes embedded in an ecosystem of arts and community that emerge from, and help foster, a distinctive sense of place.

Through the years of content-generating engagement and the reciprocal reflection of Milton residents, the performances become a part of the communities themselves. PearlDamour aimed to create a mutually beneficial relationship that enables the performance group to produce their artistic experiments and Miltonians to take ownership of their communities. The creative programming was sparked by PearlDamour's interest and ultimately shaped by the residents' stories, memories, and history. The group describes, "As outside witnesses, we saw the poetry of people's lives and then brought the wonder of that into creating a theatrical, meditative, and conversational space for those same residents to experience."¹¹³ The *Milton* performances repeatedly engage the community through a direct engagement with the audience itself. The actors begin the play seated in the audience, within the circle of chairs reminiscent of a community gathering. Actors speak directly to audience members, hand them objects and job cards, and assign them personal beliefs. Near the end

¹¹² D'Amour, Pearl, and Sparks, 146.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 150.

of the show, the actors split the audience into small groups and ask us the same interview questions that inspired the play-making process. We share our advice for future generations and our ideas for how to make the world a better place. If, as the play suggests, America is a room we have to learn to share, then in that moment, the metaphor becomes literal as we share the stage with each other. *Milton* demonstrates how performance can serve as an innovative form of community engagement with the potential to bridge interpersonal and institutional divides.

The performance concludes with a song about weather, a final metaphor about the points of connection in a vast nation that can be difficult to find. An actor sings, “Visibility is low today,” as the overhead screens display an overcast morning in Milton, Massachusetts, “We call this low visibility...This is a very typical fog.”¹¹⁴ The text for the song was taken from Pearl Damour’s conversation with “Observer Bob,” who stands on the roof of an observatory in Milton, MA every morning to determine the visibility for the day and call it into the weather stations. Pearl discusses the final moments of the play:

“[As you] hear a voice from Milton, MA describe the sky floating just over your head, you wonder if Observer Bob is talking about the sky or if he is actually talking about the state of our country... ‘This is a very typical fog. Visibility is low today.’ ... How can we be ready for the clouds to lift, for the way forward to be visible?”¹¹⁵

During a moment when the country feels increasingly divided, when a flurry of executive orders defines the nation by its borders and the limited right to cross them, Pearl argues for “visibility” as connectivity. In making differences visible, presenting specificity, *Milton* offers an idealistic view of the powers of representation. Through the reflection of shared

¹¹⁴ Pearl, “With and For.”

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

experiences, both ubiquitous and idiosyncratic, the site of performance extends beyond a single point on a map and continues as communal identity.

Milton, as a kind of “metaphysical cartography,” locates its audience and its physical settings in both a specific place and a specific set of historical, social, and political circumstances.¹¹⁶ These specificities are multiplied as they move among and draw from the different contexts of each Milton. As the performance blurs intensely localized moments with grander conceptual frameworks, it creates a type of *site-specificity* that resists defining both itself and its subject. Instead, the particularities of multiple sites—their demographics, local histories, linguistic challenges, and small-town quirks—are collected into a more inclusive sense of communal identity. The expansion of *site-specific* beyond its “purist” restraints and into nonliteral conceptions of *site* expands the possibilities for connection as the multiplicity of the form reflects the multiplicity of identity.

¹¹⁶ Gassman, 2016.

III. “The Ghosts Are Watching”: The Globe’s Battlefield Performances of Henry VI

Site-specific, in its narrowest categorization, relies on physical location for its definition. *Site* refers to a mappable point, a tangible reality, and to be *specific* is to be in this place. A site-specific performance, then, originates from material interactions with constructed or natural environments. Abstract conditions of *space*—the historical resonances, affective references, and phenomenological experiences—will, of course, be attached to the literal location, but practitioners like Michael Pearson assume that these abstractions are only “activated” by physical co-presence with the site itself. “Site-specific” becomes the ultimate “You had to be there” experience. But now contemporary practitioners are expanding access to their site-based works to those who were, in fact, not actually *there*. What happens when site-specific performance moves, not just from its “original” site, but from the realm of physicality itself as digital recording technologies stretch it into virtual spaces? Nick Kaye examines the photographic documentation of site-specific art and the resultant challenges to conventions of authenticity, authorship, and ephemerality. As I argue, video recordings (both live-streamed and digitally archived) of site-specific performances continue this line of questioning by disrupting notions of physical presence and liveness as privileged theatrical forms. Just as virtual spaces complicate fixed understandings of *site* as a physical location, digital displacement multiplies the ways in which performance might be considered *site-specific*. This re-categorization of spatial specificity expands possibilities for how social connectivity and historical continuation are imagined and pursued in performance.

In the summer of 2013, the Globe Theatre mounted full productions of the three parts of Shakespeare’s *Henry VI* at Wars of the Roses battlefield sites. The battlefield as

performance space, with its rolling hills and buried corpses, mediates the temporal overlap of past and present, as contemporary bodies engaged with the construction of a historical narrative in the fictional play and the actual historical moments of the Wars of the Roses. The associations entrenched in the soil of these sites, the physical remains and histories of the past, encode a connective experience for the contemporary participants interacting with it. The battlefield site, then, is not just a site of historical significance—it is a site of historical reenactment, where present bodies meet absent ones in the Globe’s attempt to converge separated temporalities. The Globe framed the battlefield performances as a way of enlivening history by grounding well-worn Shakespearean texts in the places they represent. But the Globe, in collaboration with The Space, an online arts collective, also filmed the ten-hour marathon event at the Monken Hadley Common in Barnet, live-streamed, and then saved the performance to a digital archive.¹¹⁷ So the Globe displaced the site of their site-specific experience. Virtual spectatorship, a result of the Globe’s efforts to increase access to their battlefield performances by making them available online, challenges the privileging of a physical viewing experience that the Globe’s “open-air” project promotes. The displacement of site disrupts the relationships grounded in the material performance space and its geographical connections, and expands the understanding of *site-specific* by demonstrating how a specific relationship to place might be produced and maintained without physical access to a geographical location.

Locating virtual experiences as site-specific involves rethinking physical presence as the preeminent condition for social and performative connectivity. When the spectator experiences the presence of a temporally and spatially distant event, the past historical

¹¹⁷ *The Space: Digital Arts Online*, www.thespace.org.

moment becomes more immediate and the ephemeral theatrical moment continues its performance. The spectator did not have to be *there* but could be almost anywhere, anytime, disrupting the theatrical's privileging of physical co-presence while multiplying the ways in which history might be remembered. The (re)performance of history at the actual site questions the present moment as *only* present so its distribution into other literal times and spaces participates in the same dismantling of a "then and now" boundary that characterizes physical definitions of liveness.

Together with their placement at the historical sites and transmission into virtual spaces, the battlefield *Henry's* generate a multiplicity of shared viewing experiences that mediate the continuation of history. These shared experiences mediate the continuation of a (re)constructed historical and collective memory and highlight the role of spectatorship, both physical and virtual, in the formation of communal and national identity. The Globe's project to (re)construct a sense of national identity via a connection to shared history fragments as it is virtually displaced. The multiplicity of the virtual spectator experience challenges the singularity of the Globe's imagined national narrative and serves to diversify connections to heritage. Virtual spectatorship also troubles the attachment of historical authenticity to physical landmarks as the specificity of the battlefield disperses across multiple geographies. Digital transmission extends the possibility for emotional connection to a collective community but also challenges place and physical presence as necessary components in the construction of national sentiment and identity.

Physically Present: Cross-Temporality as Spatial Specificity

The *Henry's* were played at the battlefields at Towton, Tewkesbury, St. Albans Cathedral Grounds and Monken Hadley Common in Barnet. At each site, the full trilogy of plays were

performed in a single day, for one performance date only. For Dominic Dromgoole, the Globe's artistic director, and Nick Bagnall, the director of the series, the meaning of the battlefield performance site is entrenched in its history and their "open-air series" reflects the intentional desire to draw upon the historical and elemental particularities of the space. The *Henrys* toured the UK from June to September, beginning at the York Theatre Royal before moving on to the battlefield at Towton. The show would then move between purpose-built theaters, including three stints at the Globe Theater, and three more battlefield sites. By transporting the *Henry VI* series outside the Globe theater and into the "open-air" (although the viewing experience at the Globe Theatre is also in the open air), Dromgoole and Bagnall hoped to enrich the series of plays with the movement to an unconventional space. Both believed this move to be unprecedented, the first time one of Shakespeare's plays had been performed on a British battlefield. This sense of novelty infused the performances with a spontaneity attached to its staging space, while the history of the space itself provided the "authenticity" on which the Globe production team hoped to capitalize. Program notes for the marathon performances illustrated the Globe and The Space's collaborative mission: "We hope this will create an immersive and informative audience experience to help everyone to get the most out of the plays."¹¹⁸ The experience was expected to be both "immersive," a three-dimensional sensory engagement with the environment, and "informative," an educational venture that might be able to illuminate some of Britain's foggier historical moments that may have faded from public knowledge.

The Globe's use of a battlefield, a site of historical trauma, for the purposes of (re)education and entertainment aligns with what has been recently dubbed as "dark

¹¹⁸ Jake Berger, "Beyond the Battlefield," *The Space*, August 2013.

tourism,” where death, disaster, and atrocity are commodified for tourist consumption. Battlefields, grave sites, and memorials become complicated attractions that offer the opportunity grieve or gawk at the violence of the past.¹¹⁹ Frank Baldwin and Richard Sharpley question the appropriateness of battlefield tourism: “How should battlefield landscapes be interpreted: the glorification of war or the promotion of peace? How should battlefields be managed - sanitized and ‘cleansed’ or maintained with the detritus of war?... Can or should battlefields be promoted as symbols of national identity?”¹²⁰ The rhetoric surrounding the project was that the Wars of the Roses was fading away from contemporary British memory and these performances might serve to recapture what had been lost. This effort falls into Svetlana Boym’s category of “restorative nostalgia,” or the attempted “transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home,” in direct contrast with “reflective nostalgia,” which privileges the ambivalence and multiplicity of remembering.¹²¹ Boym argues that restorative nostalgia aims to fill in the gaps of history for the sake of “truth and tradition.” In this vein, Bagnall imagined the performances at their historical sites as a chance to remember: “I don’t know of any better way of acknowledging and honouring our history than playing these beautiful plays on battlefield sites.”¹²² Bagnall plays on a collective nostalgia—“our history”—that might serve to connect spectators to a shared sense of national identity through the (re)discovery of common origins. This connection, as

¹¹⁹ For more on dark tourism, see: Malcom Foley and John Lennon, *Dark Tourism* (Thomson, 2000) and Richard Sharpley and Philip Stone, “Consuming dark tourism: A Thanatological Perspective,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 35.2, 2008.

¹²⁰ Frank Baldwin and Richard Sharpley, “Battlefield Tourism: Bringing Organised Violence Back to Life,” *The Darker Side of Travel: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism* (Channel View Publications, 2009), 189.

¹²¹ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (Basic Books, 2001), xviii.

¹²² David Belcher, “When a Battlefield Becomes a Stage,” *The New York Times*, August 1, 2013.

Bagnall would hope, forms through the performance's proximate relationship to the historically charged space. Bagnall seems to suggest that the site serves as an agent of historical continuity, a backdrop against which bodies connect across times. Bagnall assumes, however, that a holistic sense of contemporary British identity can be constituted out of an imagined connection to the Wars of the Roses. The Globe's mission begs the question of whether or not this past trauma *should* begin or continue to serve as an active claim to "Britishness." Predicated on the presumption of shared ancestry, the Globe's project perhaps limits national identity to a linear, homogeneous narrative. Dromgoole and Bagnall's historical restoration project might glamorize a singular Britain that has never existed.

Jamie Parker, who had played Henry V for the Globe in 2012, served as host for the filmed event and interviewed audience members during the multiple intermissions and gaps between performances. He often asked individuals whether or not they were familiar with the War of the Roses' history and many were locals acquainted with the battlefield sites, while some cited Shakespeare's plays as the source of most of their knowledge concerning the events.¹²³ At the Towton performance, this knowledge was supplemented by the presence of the Towton Battlefield Society. According to Helen Cox, a Towton Battlefield Society member who also viewed the performances, the performance took place on the grounds of Towton Hall—an area believed to have been the site of the Lancastrian camp, now part of a landowner's garden and not a publicly accessible area of the battlefield. No placards, markers, or information signs marked the sectioned performance area (although such guideposts do exist along the Battlefield Trail) but a historical re-enactment group,

¹²³ *Henry VI, Parts 1, 2, and 3*, interviews by Jamie Parker, directed by Nick Bagnall (2013, Barnet) globeplayer.tv, Online Video.

dressed in period costumes, framed the historical experience of the space for the audience. Upon entering the field, the audience encountered a period tent containing information about the Battle of Towton, including maps and publications.¹²⁴

At Towton, the audience might then encounter food stands, portable toilets, and the lawn chairs of their neighbors, adding a festival feel to the educational efforts of the historical society. In pursuing a sense of “authenticity,” the performances meant to be part innovation and part commemoration also rely on artifice to construct the experience of the event. Dromgoole refers to it as a “funny kind of realism,” an acknowledgment of the representational aspects of a theatrical production but also of the historical resonance of the space.¹²⁵ The Globe’s staging of the *Henrys*, for instance, employs the natural battlefield as a backdrop only, opting to maintain a relationship among actor, audience, and environment that is similar to the arrangement of its theater in London. The departure from the physical site of the Globe, then, was not accompanied by a departure from the Globe’s staging practices. David Belcher titles his review “When a Battlefield Becomes a Stage,” but in actuality, the Globe brought the stage to the battlefield.¹²⁶ At each battlefield location, the same portable stage was constructed, similar in design and function to the scaffold sets the Globe travels with when it goes on tour with other productions. The raised, theatrical construct stands out against the rolling hills in the background. Audience members sit on the grass on blankets or on lawn chairs (perhaps a more comfortable alternative to the experience of standing in the pit at the Globe). Henry V’s coffin exists in the space, in

¹²⁴ These specific details about the historical battlefield site come from my electronic correspondence with Helen Cox, a Towton Battlefield Society member, in July 2015.

¹²⁵ *Henry VI*, globeplayer.tv.

¹²⁶ Belcher, 2013.

preparation for his funeral, on the grass in front of the stage as the audience enters. To begin *Henry VI, Part One*, actors make their entrances from behind, using the hill as an entrance through the audience, sharing space but not interaction. The audience is used as playing space several more times, including during Gloucester's revelation of his desires and plans for the crown in *Part Three*, but the majority of the action remains framed within the stage's scaffolding.

In addition to performing on a constructed set, the actors are also performing historical fiction. The director, Nick Bagnall, in conversation about the historical (in)accuracy of the *Henry VI* plays, expresses his intentions: "I tried to get to the muscle of these plays. Shakespeare is historically incorrect all over the place in these plays, but the emotional vitality of these characters is absolutely correct."¹²⁷ Bagnall cites (or wills) a bodily authenticity, a muscular vitality, which, for him, transcends the factual and historical inaccuracies of the dramatic text. The battlefield performance site animates this vitality. While Bagnall lauds the strength of the dramatic text and performance, he relies on the site to do the work of providing an historical aura.¹²⁸ The performances are placed on the battlefields—not integrated with them—so the staging does not alter the interpretation of the text in ways that other more fully site-specific performances might be able to. The space risks becoming inert, as if the performance activates the site and then runs off of the charge it provides. The contemporary performance mediates the continuation of a painful historical moment, but the performance does not activate the space—the battlefield existed before the Globe's field trip and continues after it. The performers and spectators continue after the

¹²⁷. Ibid.

¹²⁸. Here, and in other instances of questioning the term "authenticity," I refer to Walter Benjamin's concept of the aura presented in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."

performance as well, only now they carry with them the memory of the (re)performed history experienced at the site. The marketing tactics for the battlefield *Henry*s emphasize how the performance space enhances the participants' connection to history, but the Globe's movement outdoors might suggest more of an effort to commercially capitalize on the historical associations of the site. The productions were created to fit in both the battlefield sites and purpose-built theaters. The versatility of the *Henry*s runs counter to Mike Pearson's prominent definition of site-specific performances as "inseparable from their sites, the only contexts within which they are intelligible."¹²⁹ The Globe's site-specific claims of the battlefield performances' connection to history might be more apparent in their marketing than in their actual approach to the performances. Regardless of artistic or commercial intention, I will investigate the impulse behind site-specificity and examine how a battlefield site informs performance, how the space itself (re)performs its history as an active participant in performance, almost in spite of the presence of scaffolding, food trucks, and lawn chairs.

Although the staging does not engage directly with the performance space, the placement of these plays at battlefields affects the experience of the text as moments of resonance spark up between history, fiction, and the present moment. *Henry VI, Part Three* has more battle scenes than any other of Shakespeare's plays and represents the battles from all four performance sites. Towton was the most horrific, where, on March 29, 1461, Palm Sunday, 28,000 English men died, making it the bloodiest battle ever fought on English soil. Shakespeare represents the battle with meditations on the horrors of war, found in Henry's famous molehill speech and the double recognition scene of a father/son killing (2.5.1-124).

¹²⁹ Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology* (Routledge, 2001), 23.

While the Globe's staging does nothing to directly integrate the text with the performance site at Towton, the historical resonances are there. The performance utilizes the battlefield as a backdrop rather than as a staging area, but during Henry's soliloquy the constructed lines between stage and battlefield and the perceived lines between past and present, fiction and history, overlap. As King Henry sits on the molehill—a pile of sand Margaret earlier poured out on the stage, upon which she humiliates and executes York—he avoids the mayhem of the battle and muses on the carefree life of a shepherd: "O God! Methinks it were a happy life / To be no better than a homely swain. To sit upon a hill, as I do now / To carve out dials quaintly, point by point / Thereby to see the minutes how they run" (2.5.21-25). As Graham Butler, who plays the inactive king, speaks the line "to sit upon a hill, as I do now," he gestures with a smirk that seems to change the line reading to "as *we* do now," inviting the audience to share his vantage point. And they do. The audience sits on their own hill with Henry, surveying the same battlefield, the same site of trauma. Audience members reported hearing sheep bleat as Henry imagined living out his days shearing fleece rather than enduring his kingly responsibilities during a civil war.¹³⁰ As Henry meditates on the advantage of a pastoral life, the pastoral backdrop comes to the foreground: "Ah, what a life were this! How sweet! How lovely! / Gives not the hawthorn-bush a sweeter shade / To shepherds looking on their silly sheep / Than doth a rich embroider'd canopy / To kings that fear their subjects' treachery? O, yes, it doth; a thousand-fold it doth" (2.5.41-46). Butler charges the audience to notice their surroundings, to evaluate the shade of their own hawthorn-bushes. Just as Henry decides that the view must be sweeter for the shepherd, the audience must conclude that it is *their* view that is the privileged one. The sun is shining and

¹³⁰ Kerry Lambeth, "The True Tragedy of Richard, Duke of York at Towton Battlefield," *Planes, Trains, and Plantagenets* (blog), July 23, 2013.

the sheep are bleating as audience members share in the “happy life” of spending the day at the theater, not engaging in brutal hand-to-hand combat. The most intense moment of resonance between past and present as mediated by the performance, then, is in fact a moment of dissonance. As the audience becomes aware of how unsuited Henry’s yearnings are for a king, they also recognize the disconnect between the tranquil scene before them and the gruesome scene of history. And this is when the “feeling” of the space becomes the most heightened—at the confused intersection of perception, experience, and memory.

The production team refers to this feeling of performing these history plays at the battlefields by a variety of terms. For Dromgoole, it was a “shiver of resonance.” For Bagnall, it was an “energy,” for Peter Manjura, the curator of the online digital archive, it was a “visceral sensation.”¹³¹ The production team struggles to explain the experience of “being there,” grasping at a vocabulary to describe not just the charge of live performance, but the co-existence of present, living bodies with the ghosts of the past. The presence of the performance in the “actual” space of a historical event connects the two temporalities, past with present, by evoking the remembered (or more often forgotten) physical presences of the past and produces “shivers of resonance” for the spectators. But it is the glaring absence of the historical bodies in stark contrast with the imposing physical presence of the theatrical event that remains literally grounded in the battlefield site itself. The site contains the absence of the past bodies—literally in the graves of the fallen soldiers, but also immaterially in the memory of the past body, once present, now absent.

The performers stand in for those who participated in the battle, as do Shakespeare’s characters, and although they are not re-enactors, they (re)perform the history of the space.

¹³¹ *Henry VI*, globeplayer.tv.

After Henry concludes his molehill soliloquy and resigns himself to his fate as monarch, he witnesses the heartbreaking scene meant to be representative of the Battle of Towton. He watches in horror as a son realizes he has killed his father in combat, and in an immediate parallel, as a father realizes he has killed his son. Bagnall simplifies the staging, using only two actors who switch between life and death. After the double recognition, the son and father face each other, with Henry observing from in between, each inches from the others' faces. When the son asks, "Was ever son so rued a father's death?" and the father responds, "Was ever father so bemoaned his son?" it is as if they are speaking to an apparition still visible to them, rather than to an inanimate corpse (2.5.109-110). The stylized staging distances the moment from realism, but the stage moment might still vibrate with an uncomfortable energy of identification for the audience: the evidence of clashing familial loyalties and the tragic conflicts of conscripted services can be found beneath the nearby ground. How is it that a representation of the pathos of war—a theatrical *construct* on the themes of misery and familial strife—can resonate so strongly with the "actual" event?

The joint inhabitation of space by the contemporary actors and spectators with the memory and remains of past fallen soldiers—a cohabitation that suggests the material continuation of history in the present body mediated by space—reflects the body's ability to serve as a site of stored (or restored) memory. The difficulty the production team faced in finding words to describe the experience of being at the battlefields might be because the vocabulary in action, as Joseph Roach understands it, is a kinesthetic one. In *Cities of the Dead*, Roach describes a "kinesthetic imagination," an act that involves "a way of thinking through movements—at once remembered and reinvented."¹³² The motions and actions of a

¹³² Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead* (Columbia University Press, 1996), 27.

performer can reproduce collective memory and restore lost or forgotten behaviors. Similarly, Rebecca Schneider sees the body as a repository of historical knowledge and memory. In *Performing Remains*, an exploration of temporality and performance's sustainability through perpetual reenactment, she argues for the body as a site of historical repetition and the consequent convergence of past and present:

the resiliently irruptive rub and call of live bodies (like biological machines of affective transmission) insist that physical acts are a means for knowing, bodies are sites for transmission even if, simultaneously, they are also manipulators of error and forgetting. Bodies engaged in repetition are boisterous articulators of a liveness that just won't quit...their live bodies are the means by which the past and the present negotiate disappearance (again).¹³³

Both Schneider and Roach place emphasis on the body as the material that mediates the temporal overlap and charges "live" performance with historical resonances. Through the constant repetition of physical actions—whether gestures in performance or the physical act of spectating—live bodies as "boisterous articulators of a liveness" are (re)performing the past body, once live and boisterous itself, now presently rearticulated.

The physical actions of performers placed at a battlefield site imbue the accidental kin-slaying scene in *Part Three* as an event with a direct connection to the events of 1461. The scene itself, a non-literal representation of the actual events, functions as a kind of memorial. The double recognition, symmetrical both in Bagnall's staging and Shakespeare's text, ritualizes the moment. The memorialization of the text parallels the reverence granted to the battlefield site—a site memorialized by period tents, informational brochures, and a historical society that frame the narrative encompassing the performance. While I am not specifically arguing for the battlefield performances as rituals, the single performance at

¹³³ Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (Routledge, 2011), 38-39.

each battlefield and its intended link between past and present functions like the ritual temporality as described by Paul Connerton. In *How Societies Remember*, Connerton argues that during rituals, whether specific religious festivals or everyday practices, “temporal difference is denied and the existence of the same, the ‘true’ and ‘authentic’ reality...[is] disclosed.”¹³⁴ In the battlefield *Henrys* (re)performance of history at the historical site—a (re)performance Schneider would argue is mediated by the bodies in that space—there might be a “denial” of temporal difference that gives participants a sense of feeling closer to a past historical moment in the “metaphysical present.”¹³⁵ Schneider calls this conflation of temporalities a “touch” as traces from the past interact in a cross-temporal engagement with the im/materiality of the present.¹³⁶ This simultaneity of past and present elicits a visceral response from the present-day participants. In his review of the battlefield *Henrys*, Belcher describes how, on the battlefield, “even on a blistering summer day in this tiny village near York [an audience member] sees the snow and fog of a Palm Sunday more than 500 years ago.”¹³⁷ There is the sense that the present becomes the past—or perhaps the other way around—in a rupture of linear time that Schneider refers to as “part of the nervousness or queasiness of theatricality, which contributes to the uncertainty of where and how time takes place.”¹³⁸ The transmission of the live performance into virtual space magnifies this uncertainty, and the question of where and when the performance can be said to “take place” becomes more complicated. At the battlefield and beyond, the performances play between

¹³⁴ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 43.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹³⁶ Schneider, 27.

¹³⁷ Belcher, “When a Battlefield Becomes a Stage.”

¹³⁸ Schneider, 27.

the binaries, both then and now, here and there, challenging notions of a linear history and a singular performance event.

A moment at the Towton performance demonstrates how time also “takes place.” By act 2 of *Henry VI, Part Three* the sun was setting behind the audience. Before the Battle at Mortimer’s Cross, Edward and Richard see a vision of three suns rising over the horizon. As the characters shield their eyes against the “blazing” and “fair-shining suns” (2.1.36, 40), Graham Butler (Richard) and Patrick Myles (Edward) raise their hands to block out the setting sun, at eye-level in this moment of the performance. The *symmetrical* incongruity between the text and performance, the discussion of a sunrise during a sunset (and the obvious lack of meteorological phenomenon), actually serves to incite in the spectator a visceral feeling of past becoming present by highlighting the audience’s awareness of their own relationship to environment and its connection to the textual representation of history. Time becomes specific to place, with the sun setting around 8 pm in Towton, and the connection between the place and the text manifests in bodily reactions to the environment, seen onstage by the spectators and felt by the squinting performers. And then those watching online in the middle of the night might be watching those performers react to a sunset as they talk about a sunrise. The layers of time overlap and contribute to a theatrical “queasiness,” a “shiver of resonance” from a perceived or imagined connection between past audiences and a past battle that allows separated parties to share phenomenal experiences. Each viewing experience, specific to its contemporary moment, invites history to reappear. The War of the Roses may have ended over five hundred years ago, but it has yet to disappear completely.

The historical soldier reappears in staged representations of combat. The stylized, physical actions of battle scenes evoke the most obvious comparisons to the actions—and the consequences—of history. At Towton, the Globe faced the overwhelming challenge of representing 28,000 casualties with a playing company of fourteen. Bagnall staged the battles with the persistent beating of onstage drums to signal the presence of conflict, with the clanging of swords against the metal scaffolding, and with groups of actors facing the audience swinging their weapons in slow motion. For Schneider, the elision of the past and present exists in the labor of the performers: “the literalness and hard labor of reenactment provokes something that flickers in the space between ‘original’ and ‘copy’”¹³⁹ The cross-temporal overlap occurs in the gestic work of the body. The stage combat, slow and stylized as it is, contains the traces of the historical body in combat. The performers in (simulated) battle theatrically repeat the actions of a battle centuries old, continuing history through their sweat and labored breath. The performing bodies also unconsciously participate in the (re)enactment of a socially and collectively formed history inscribed on the body itself. Connerton examines how the body’s conditioned responses, whether trained through repetition or inscribed by cultural forces, are the ones performed without conscious thought. Habit, then, involves the body actively remembering while the mind forgets. Just as Roach believes performance can restore or produce collective memory, Connerton argues that habitual memory, through a process of repetition and sedimentation, also constructs a form of social memory, a communal, and unconscious, remembering maintained and preserved through bodies across history.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Ibid, 121.

¹⁴⁰ Connerton, 72.

The digital distribution of the performance also offers new possibilities for the continuation of history based in habitual recording and viewing practices. Paddy Scannell argues that television allows for “longitudinal studies of continuities and change in voice, talk, looks, and gestures — micro-studies of the performed self in everyday life made possible by a new regime of publicness brought into being by broadcasting and being preserved, for the record, by its technologies.¹⁴¹ The Battle of Towton, then, is memorialized not only through the structure of the text, but also through the physical (re)production of a shared history both at the battlefield and beyond it.

At the battlefield, live performers and spectators do not simply evoke a connection with the past by occupying a space that the historical bodies themselves once occupied; rather, the live bodies are the connection themselves. The imperfections and inaccuracies of theatrical representation become inconsequential. While the staging choices for battle scenes worked to give the audience a sense of the sights and sounds of combat, they could only be a pale reflection of the “actual” events. Regardless of the clarity of that reflection, however, the separated temporalities—past, present, and future virtual spectators—still converge through presence at a shared space. Even at the site of the battlefield, spectators must at some level work to imagine the connection through the stylization—the same work viewers watching online must do to fill in the sensory gaps of their distance.

The imaginative work the audience performs cultivates a sense of empathy across time and space. Roach’s understanding of kinesthetic imagination is that it “inhabits the realm of the virtual. Its truth is the truth of simulation, of fantasy or of daydreams, but its effect on human action may have material consequences of the most tangible sort of the

¹⁴¹ Paddy Scannell, *Radio, Television, and Modern Life* (Wiley, 1996), 211.

widest scope. This faculty... flourishes in the space where imagination and memory converge.”¹⁴² Roach draws on Susan Foster’s idea of “kinesthetic empathy” which is “an affiliation...between living and dead but imagined bodies.”¹⁴³ Kinesthetic connection, then, is not predicated on physical presence at the battlefield if it is partly achieved through imagination. Empathy may be developed by sight in addition to touch. The conflation of spaces achieved through telematics (telecommunication like Skype, Facetime, or a live-stream performance) mirrors and shares in the conflation of temporalities experienced at the battlefields. The Globe’s impulse to broadcast their productions and increase access (and revenue) results not in the loss of connection but in the expansion of empathy and in new ways of sharing and (re)producing social memory that extend beyond the geographical space of performance. In this extension, virtual spectators share space despite distance and (co)create a collective community that might diversify the Globe’s own constructed “authentic” collectivity.

Immaterial evocations produced by interaction with the space challenge physicality as the only form of presence at the site. The live bodies remember—both as an act of imagination and as the embodied encasement of history—as they specifically interact with the site. As the live body (re)enacts the historical archive, it comes into contact with the immaterial traces of bodies who previously inhabited the space. In an interview with critic Alfred Hickling, Bagnall touches upon this sensation of haunting produced by the cross-temporal meeting of present and absent bodies: “Coming here makes me feel that the ghosts

¹⁴² Roach, 27.

¹⁴³ Susan Leigh Foster, *Choreographing History* (Indiana University Press, 1995), 7.

will be watching.”¹⁴⁴ And in a way, Bagnall stages these witnesses. Throughout the three plays, when a character exited a scene, they continued to watch the action from upstage. Henry would remain on his throne, reading a book or cringing at battle noises, but the other Lancasters and Yorks would form a line of silent spectators, giving the sense of a solemn witnessing of trauma. The ghosts of the battlefield site that Bagnall feels are watching, however, are not merely passive spectators as his comment and staging suggest. They are active participants, presently haunting the space, immaterially touching the live bodies they come into contact with. The ghost is a way the space remembers and performs. While the ghost cannot necessarily take up space, it can certainly infuse it—with the affective evocation of its memory, but more interestingly, with the glaring acknowledgment of its absence. As the Globe’s production team would readily claim, these absent bodies are remembered because they were lost, violently and brutally. The performances of the *Henry VI* series on a battlefield that actively “remembers” this violence place material bodies in direct contact with the striking immateriality of loss. The past bodies are glaringly absent and their ghosts, in their haunting of the site, reflect the struggle to contend with that absence. For the Globe, this absence is an evocation, a chance to remember. And yet, the ghosts do not need to be summoned—the battlefield *Henrys* are not an invocation—rather the absent body is *present*, linked to the site, interacting across temporalities with those who share its space.

The material remains of the British battlefields, evoking their immaterial counterparts while interacting with those bodies physically present, highlights the loss of the historical event. Julian Humphrys emphasizes the potential power inscribed in the presence

¹⁴⁴ Alfred Hickling, “Shakespeare on the Battlefield: The Globe Theatre Step Out,” *The Guardian*, July 9, 2013.

(or, rather, absence) of physical bodies at the battlefield, urging Dominic Cavendish, his interviewer to “imagine if each sheep we can see now were a mutilated body.” Cavendish responds, “There are a lot of sheep.”¹⁴⁵ Humphrys uses this imaginative exercise, an exercise that parallels Henry’s own musings on sheep, and his emphasis on the physical trauma of the bodies that remain to frame the performance event as a more complete recreation. If the sheep, a contemporary part of the space, were people—and if there were 28,000 sheep—the battlefield would look and feel more like it did five hundred years ago. But the sheep are not people. The imagined corpses are visibly, and perhaps for Humphrys, regrettably absent. The live bodies’ perception of the space and those who haunt it is necessarily incomplete and imperfect—as the historical event itself remains incomplete. To lose sight of the force of imagination required to transform a sheep into a mutilated corpse is to underestimate the power of the actual buried corpses and their connection to the space and those who interact with it. Humphrys’s desire to connect the performance to the physical “reality” of the historical moment reveals the contingent desire to have the performance participate in the traumatic event itself. His evocation of the mutilated bodies, while an effort to solidify a sense of authenticity for the production, ignores the artificiality of the Globe’s project. The theatrical construct—while careful not to disturb the physical gravesites—risks forgetting that imagining is not living, that sheep are not people. While the experience of a cross-temporal “touch” may not be dependent on historical accuracy, what the Globe presented may have only served as their own substitution for history, as they valued the “authentic” while remaining oblivious to the contemporary limitations of reliving

¹⁴⁵ Dominic Cavendish, “Battlefield Performances,” *The Telegraph*, July 15, 2013.

a past trauma and to their presumptions of an all-encompassing British identity that identifies with the Wars of the Roses.

The literal remains of the dead bodies buried beneath the soil of the battlefield do not have to be imagined. They were used to serve the project's pursuit of creating an "authentic" connection between past and present. In 1996, thirty-seven bodies were discovered in a mass grave near the Towton village church. As Belcher states, "the bodies belonged to soldiers all killed around the time of the Battle of Towton."¹⁴⁶ With his use of the past tense—"belonged"—Belcher unintentionally strips the non-living physical remains from attachment to their previously-live bodies. If the dead body no longer belongs to the live soldier, to whom does it belong? Perhaps Belcher would suggest the remains belong to the public, as "the story of the grave has been the subject of television shows and books," documenting the discovery as the most direct contemporary link to the War of the Roses up until the Globe's open-air series. Or perhaps, as Bagnall might imagine, the remains belong to the space, to serve as an addition to the battlefield site itself, a provision to heighten the authenticity of a theatrical production: "We planned it so that we're not treading on these people's graves. We're there to understand part of our history."¹⁴⁷ Bagnall's consideration of the physical graves acknowledges the material presence of the past bodies and their ability to (re)enact history within the present, but also suggests that this materiality can be avoided, nimbly side-stepped somehow. Bagnall does not want to tread on the graves, but he still wants the performance close enough to benefit from the proximity. He privileges the physical graves as the sites that literally contain history: perform too close to this physical site and risk

¹⁴⁶ Belcher, "When a Battlefield Becomes a Stage."

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

disrespecting that history, perform too far away and the phenomenal and cross-temporal touch might not “reach” you. What are the boundaries of the historical site, and what are the limits of its physical connection to participants?

In staging at the geographical location, performance defines these borders, marking the space and containing it within conventional staging relationships. Sharing the space of the battlefield, like sharing the space of a nation as mapped by its drawn borders, produces a symbolic perception of community. As Benedict Anderson has famously argued, the nation is socially constructed, “an imagined political community.”¹⁴⁸ The site-specific (re)construction of a presumptively shared past serves to create Anderson’s concept of a “deep, horizontal comradeship.”¹⁴⁹ As with the mission of restorative nostalgia, the Globe’s battlefield stagings can be seen as an effort to preserve a particular (and limited) version of national identity through remembrance of the past, authenticated by the physical connection to the historical site. Ironically, the displacement of performance into virtual spaces stretches the phenomenological reach of the site’s history located at the battlefield. Even beyond the battlefield, the intersection of two different manifestations of the past body, the material remains and the immaterial trace, participates in the remembrance and consequent continuation of history. The mediated transmission makes visible the concentric spheres of community, collectivity, and the globalizing effect of linking two disparate spaces, allowing the virtual spectator to participate in the affective experience of (re)constructing history through an imagined connection to the physical audience, battlefield, and online spectating community.

¹⁴⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 1983), 6.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

The spectator's viewing experience involves an interaction with both the immaterial traces of the absent historical body and the physical remains of their corpses as navigated through the spatial specificity of the battlefield. While the performers (re)perform remembering through gestic practices, spectators (re)perform spectating as they participate in the connective memory between past and present. Marvin Carlson, in his book *Haunted Stage*, conceptualizes an experience he terms "ghosting," the experience of a past memory or historical event haunting a present performance space or encounter. Carlson explains that ghosting occurs when "audience members encounter a new but distinctly different example of a type of artistic product they have encountered before," and that in such an instance, ghosting presents the performance in a different context.¹⁵⁰ These ghostings occur in the minds of the audience, as a reencounter with something that has been seen or felt, either literally or abstractly, in a previous moment. At the battlefield, audience expectations of Globe staging—a specific relationship between audience and spectator—can influence their reception of the event. Ghosting is not necessarily the literal event of remembering a lived experience, but is rather the sensation of remembering, of returning. As spectators return (even if for the first time) to the battlefield, they return to the experience of the historical battle of the War of the Roses—a battle obviously not lived in their own bodily experiences, but one that returns through its associative haunting of the specific space. Carlson discusses particularized place (made specific by its im/material bodily haunts) as an active agent in ghosting: "in such site-specific productions, already written texts are placed in locations outside conventional theatres that are expected to provide appropriate ghostings in the minds of the audiences."¹⁵¹ Here, Carlson illuminates the Globe's desire to connect its performance

¹⁵⁰ Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage* (Michigan Press, 2003), 12.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 134.

to history through the associations the battlefield site evokes. Even in virtual performance spaces, the traditions of usage and the memory of previous performances form material traces that provide perceptual orientations for the spectators. In spite of the familiar physical orientation toward a stage constructed outdoors, or toward a screen, the spectator's perceptual orientation is instead informed by the material traces specific to the im/material remains contained in the site. The spectator, a repository for historical and social memory, serves as an agent of temporal continuity in the embodied reception of the historical traces simultaneously present with the viewer. The Globe might suggest that the continuation of this history, as mediated through the spectator, highlights a shared British heritage that is actively felt and remembered by a return to the historical site itself.

The battlefield *Henrys* demonstrate the body as archive, the body as repository for the collective and social memory of a space and a culture, and the Globe privileges the physical location of the battlefield as the site of this exchange. The spectators' physical participation in the (re)performance of history occurs in the body's sensory reception of its environment. In his review of the performances, Belcher describes his multisensory experience at the first battlefield performance in Towton, Yorkshire:

The Towton performance, on a clear day with the smell of newly mowed grass in the air, took place on a makeshift elevated stage in the shadow of a church and a towering tree. The audience sat on a gentle slope, mostly in lawn chairs or on blankets, just yards from where the graves of dozens of fallen soldiers from that war were uncovered as recently as seventeen years ago.¹⁵²

The ability to smell the surrounding environment highlights the sense of that "immersive" experience the artistic collaborators were hoping to create. While there are sensory elements to any performance, even within a purpose-built theater, the outdoor environment of the

¹⁵² Belcher, "When a Battlefield Becomes a Stage."

battlefield affects the spectating body in ways not found in indoor venues. Belcher also significantly underscores the necessity of physical and sensory cohabitation for the project—the graves were “just yards” away, close enough to touch, or smell even. The individual spectator’s specific positionality—seated on the grass with an immediate tactile connection to the site, or within the shade of “towering tree”—directly affects the viewing experience. The spectator reacts to the historical associations emanating from the battlefield performance site—physically perceiving the sensory immediacy of the site itself—while also responding to its own imaginative constructions of collective embodied experiences. Harvey Young, in his discussion of a lynching victim’s corpse, demonstrates how the spectator’s interaction with the bodily remain “creates the possibility of an imagined, personal interaction with the original body, even as a construct, that exists within the present as a series of parts...the value of the performance remain is in its seeming ability to reactivate the expired performance event.”¹⁵³ Direct physical contact with a historical object—in the case of the battlefield *Henrys*, the site itself participates as material object—seemingly possesses the ability to “reactivate” the historical experience, to allow the present to physically embody the experience of the past. This affective response as shared embodied experience can exist as an intense imaginative construction, as evidenced by Cavendish’s account of his marathon viewing experience:

I have to confess that I won’t be putting myself through such a sedentary marathon for quite a while – even with the benefit of a fold-up chair I felt like walking wounded by the end of the evening. But I’m heartily glad, nay feel thoroughly privileged, that I did and I’m full of admiration for a cast of just 14, directed by Nick Bagnall, that sweats its collective guts out in quasi-period costume to entertain, inform and inspire on such a grand scale.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Harvey Young, *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and the Black Body* (University of Michigan Press, 2010), 188.

¹⁵⁴ Cavendish, “Battlefield Performances.”

His “sedentary marathon” demonstrates the actual physical labor of spectating (as he also references the labor of the acting body that “sweats its collective guts out”), but also glibly echoes the historical events of the battle. Cavendish may have felt like the “walking wounded,” but his physical comparison to the absent wounded of the battlefield is ultimately a mental phenomenon. He continues to describe his affective response: “And without getting falsely sentimental, it’s quite a pole-axeing thing to realise that the field you’re in and surrounding tranquil farmland, was, that snowy day 550-odd years ago, a landscape of barely describable horror.”¹⁵⁵ Cavendish’s realization of the physical space he occupies is also a requisite imagination of the events that took place there, and this imagination, as Roach would suggest, has the material consequences of a physical reaction. Cavendish approaches the space, and the bodies present in the imagined “landscape of barely describable horror,” as an access point to an emotional connection between his physical body and the fighting and wounded bodies of the past. In feeling the stiffness in his legs and seeing the sweat on the actors’ brows, Cavendish imagines himself into the embodied experience of the historical moment—ignoring the discordant, yet equally present, contemporary intrusions of food trucks and picnics infusing their own specific sensory demands on the environment.

Unpredictable weather conditions provided another sensory experience specific to the battlefield environment. On the Saturday performance at Barnet, the marathon performances of the *Henry* series were met with a torrential downpour, drenching both audience and performers alike. The weather, like Henry’s molehill speech, served to bring

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

the surrounding environment into the audience's awareness. When Edward celebrates his victory during "this bright-shining day," the audience laughs from beneath their rain-soaked ponchos (5.3.3). His next line, though, "I spy a black, suspicious, threatening cloud," forebodes the dark comings of *Richard III* and mixes metaphor with reality as the weather suggests that those dark times have already come. And despite Clarence's assurances that "a little gale will soon disperse that cloud" (5.3.10), the rain is still falling as Henry provokes Richard, claiming that "a hideous tempest shook down trees" at his birth (5.6.46). The weather highlighted the performance's resonance with the space, and in doing so, also created a shared viewing experience unique to the specific site. Audience members were applauded for their hardiness, performers for their courage—as if, together, they had braved a battle by braving the elements. Jamie Parker, in an effort to encourage those sitting through the inclement weather between performances, at one point yelled out the British World War I battle cry: "Are we downhearted? No!"¹⁵⁶ In a fascinating moment that connects the War of the Roses to the Great War to a community of British theatergoers, Parker reflects that the rain acts as a unifying force, collecting the spectators into a single consciousness. The physical experience of discomfort, of sitting in the rain for ten hours, may very well touch the live bodies to that snowstorm on Palm Sunday in 1461, but in a more grounded sense, the spectators' sensory experience of precipitation connects them to one another in an experience of performance that is specific to its site. The shared experience of specificity, temporal and spatial, can become a shared sense of history. Spectators watch a performance belong to its historical site, a site that they themselves might

¹⁵⁶ *Henry VI*, globeplayer.tv.

feel a sense of belonging in for the ten-hour duration, and in the creation of a site-specific community might also exist a constructed sense of collective identity.

Screen Specific: The Spatial Presence of Virtual Spectatorship

The Globe privileges the physical experience of the live performance. The ability to touch the ground, to feel the rain, mediates the connection to history and creates the collective consciousness. For Schneider as well, the emphasis is in the body. Physical presence achieves the cross-temporal “touch.” But the experience of rain is not limited to only those who can feel it. Even with the experience mediated by a screen, an online viewer can hear the raindrops hit the stage and watch the actors lose their footing, their boots squeaking as they struggle to maintain traction. The Globe touted the “open-air” series as enlivening history by virtue of its placement at the battlefield location, but then the performances, so critically linked to their landscapes through the embodiment of historical traces, were stretched into virtual spaces. This displacement of the site-specific experience questions whether a live-stream and virtual transmission of a “live” performance can communicate the hauntings of history and the attachment of associations that exist within a physical space as effectively as the physical space itself.

Physical presence at the battlefield site might be only one of multiple ways to experience the collective and resonant energy of the battlefield performances. The virtual displacement stretches the realm of performance space to include multiple spaces and times, multiple perspectives, and multiple relationships between spectator and performer. Rather than losing the spatial specificity of the battlefield, then, this movement into virtual spaces creates *multiple* specific viewing experiences. The navigation of the multiplicity contained in the virtual represents a transference, or a continuation, of “liveness” from the physical

location of performance. The online viewer participates in the performance in a way that the “live” and “present” audience member cannot—by pausing, rewinding, and re-starting the video, accessing multiple viewpoints, and navigating hyper-textual material offered in the digital program—and disrupts the relationship between performance and geographical site by challenging the privileging of physical connections to the battlefield. The result of the narrowed gap between “live” and mediatized performance is the increased possibility for connection. Archived video gives millions access to the battlefield performances and the experience of the battlefield is shared, not only through physical co-existence in the same location, but through kinesthetic connection across time and space—an overlap similar to the imagined connection to the ghosts of the past achieved at the battlefield site. The history of the site—its specific charge and resonance—continues and transforms through the multiplicity of virtual spectatorship, contributing to the creation of a collective consciousness that extends beyond the limitations of a single geographical location. Thinking beyond physical presence at the battlefield as the only way to experience the performance in that space, the transmission of the performances into virtual spaces demonstrates an overlap of both separated temporalities and geographies that challenges the immediacy and ephemerality of physical presence conventionally privileged in performance.

Intent on harnessing the “authenticity” of the physical gravesites to enliven the historical components of their contemporary performances, the Globe’s production team also wanted to capitalize on the broader audiences (and broader capital gains) that digital dissemination allowed. On the surface, the dispersal of the Globe’s site-specific project into virtual spaces seems counterproductive to their artistic purposes. The draw of the Battlefield *Henrys* was the battlefield itself—the actual site of soil and grass. While filming and live-

streaming the performances is not a literal relocation, it is a type of displacement that allows remote access to the site-specific performance location. According to the more narrow definitions of the term championed by visual artist Richard Serra and theater practitioner Michael Pearson, site-specific performance cannot be accessed remotely. For Serra, “to move the work is to destroy it,” suggesting that the movement of the Battlefield *Henrys*—its virtual expansion—would eliminate the particular qualities that connected the performance to its site in the first place. Remote access cannot replicate the experience of physical access. For Pearson, the site and performance should be inextricable from each other, one cannot exist without the other. And yet, the Battlefield *Henrys* continue to “exist” in an online digital archive, far removed from the particular markers of the battlefield.

The irony of making a site-specific performance accessible from anywhere reflects the criticisms leveled against the effects of broadcast television. With the advent of technologies that allowed separate audiences to view the same program simultaneously, the perceptual field of *place* as a physical location expanded to contain new patterns of information and communication. Samuel Weber discusses how the simultaneity of broadcasting complicates singular understandings of place:

Television upsets ontology because it takes place in at least three places “at once”:
1. In the place (or places) where the image and sound are ‘recorded’;
2. In the place (or places) where those images and sounds are received;
and 3. In the place (or places) in between...the unity of television as a medium of presentation thus involves a simultaneity that is highly ambivalent. It overcomes spatial distance but only by splitting the unity of place and with it the unity of everything that defines its identity with respect to place: events, bodies, subjects.¹⁵⁷

The navigation of this “different kind of topography” is one that combines the experience of being both “here” and “there”—an analog to Schneider’s queasiness of being both past and

¹⁵⁷ Samuel Weber, *Mass Mediuras: Form Technics Media* (Stanford University Press, 1996), 110.

present. For Joshua Meyrowitz, this queasiness is the symptom of a larger societal illness. He argues that new media changed the “situational geography” of social life in a way that annihilates *place*.¹⁵⁸ In the dialectical expanse of television’s spatial forms—its massive global scope and its minute locality at the point of reception—Meyrowitz would argue that the viewer loses his or her sense of connection to either “here” or “there.” Remote access to a physical location, then, is de-spatialized access.

The result of this phenomenal form of televisual representation, its communicative transmission across distance, is the artificial simplification of geographical scale and the resultant homogenization of content. Everyday media practices constitute a political geography that manifest as mechanisms of power in the connections between the small-scale screens and the large-scale media corporations that dominate them. The globalizing effect of linking two disparate spaces can define the “boundaries...around which control is exerted and contested.”¹⁵⁹ Broadcast television, with its aura of immediacy and ubiquity, has the cultural reach to establish a dominant political hierarchy that goes unquestioned by its mass audiences. Nick Couldry argues that, “Media rituals are really exercises in the management of conflict and the masking of social inequality.”¹⁶⁰ The mobile networks of digital and broadcast media become an expanded space for the centralized transmission of services and messages. For the Globe, digital dissemination becomes a mega-branding platform and advertising campaign. The habitual consumption of digital media naturalizes the broader power relationships that exist between producer and consumer. The Globe’s act of curating

¹⁵⁸ Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior* (Oxford University Press, 1986), 6.

¹⁵⁹ Neil Smith, *Homeless/global* (Routledge, 1993), 101.

¹⁶⁰ Nick Couldry, *Media Rituals: A Critical Approach* (Psychology Press, 2003), 180.

the digital content may, as postmodern critiques suggest, homogenize the material and its reception. This process of standardized packaging dulls the specificity of the performance's relationship to its battlefield site and contributes to the unconscious experience of placelessness associated with the televisual medium. The Globe's promotion of the "live-stream" experience as an unprecedented event capitalizes on the constructed appearance of simultaneity. The spectacle of authenticity, unique to the battlefield, is framed as immediately accessible to the online viewer. Certainly this type of framing also occurs at the battlefield site itself with the prevalence of historical societies and period costuming, but the extension of the material historical connections into separate, yet phenomenologically similar spaces, suggests implications for the consumption and acceptance of a particular historical narrative. This kind of *placeless* spectatorship, defined by its ambiguity and the lack of critical awareness on the part of the spectators, might contradict the Globe's "open-air" intentions by remotely producing an experience of a site-specific location as a non-place.

The Globe's uncritical view of their own "misuse" of *site-specific* perpetuates the confused broadening of the term, and while I remain skeptical of the Globe's aesthetic execution and commercial motivations, the virtual displacement of the Battlefield *Henry's* offers the opportunity to explore new ways of producing and experiencing spatial specificity that are defined by multiplicity rather than by the singular one-dimensionality associated with broadcast television. The technologically deterministic view of television and digital media is beginning to feel outdated and overly simplistic. The value judgment inherent in the binary distinction between present and absent spectatorship is continually challenged by

advancing forms of interactive audience participation and interfaces that make networked experiences unique to the Net itself.

Rather than continue the assault on media as an annihilator of place, I examine the ways in which the screen as a convergence of material and immaterial media forms can make place specific. As Couldry questions, “Why not argue that media coverage massively multiplies the interconnections between places, rather than weakening our sense of place?”¹⁶¹ And in this multiplication, I argue there is also specificity. The complexity of digital media encompasses both the placeless sense of generality produced by the image and the particularity of the apparatus itself and its surrounding environment. These tensions are not compartmentalized binaries. Instead, they reflect the dynamic form of digital media, which, according to Anna McCarthy, might be “quite capable of overpowering technological modes of spatial rupture and add[ing] important nuance to our sense of [media’s] role in the lives of the hypothetical subjects who go about their everyday business in its presence.”¹⁶² The very heterogeneity of digital “live-streaming,” with its broadcast-like qualities and extended access, requires an acknowledgment of the variability of its use among users. Individual spectators, removed from the “present” collective at the battlefield, experience more versatility in how and *where* they engage with the performance. Multiple mobile platforms (laptops, smartphones, tablets, etc.) allow users to access the *Henrys* beyond the battlefield, but also beyond their own living rooms, creating viewing perspectives that differ from user to user, and place to place. This variability makes the virtual site-specific and

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Anna McCarthy, *Ambient Television: Visual Culture and Public Space* (Duke University Press, 2001), 152.

demonstrates how televisual and digital media can create multiple versions of a historical narrative, either contributing to or diverging from dominant political and social norms.

For the online viewer, it was a screen, not grass or graves, which mediated the experience of the Globe's battlefield performances. But the screen itself offers a specific viewing experience. As John Hartley notes about television, "Each TV programme may be the same for all the millions of its viewers, but what's 'on TV' — literally on it — is never the same; it's always personal, private, and significant."¹⁶³ The expansive dispersal of the performances and the resultant multiplicity of its reception make it impossible to define virtual spectatorship as any singular relationship between screen and environment. The *Henry* performances were filmed from different angles and online viewers were able to choose their preferred perspective, with the ability to switch back and forth among angles during the performance. One of these alternative viewpoints was called the ThroneCam, which as Jake Berger, The Space's head of technology, explains is "a miniature camera attached to the King's throne which remains on the stage for the entirety of the three *Henry* plays and would offer an 'actors' eye view of the performance, looking out across the stage and over to the audience."¹⁶⁴ The online viewers did not have the same viewing experience as the audience members physically present at the battlefield. The alternative perspective provided by an alternative medial representation created a virtual sense of spatial specificity distinct from its physicalized counterpart. With the perspectival shift that places the virtual spectator onstage, the online viewer participates in the performance in a way that the "live" and "present" audience member cannot, narrowing the physical gap between the online

¹⁶³ John Hartley, quoted in McCarthy, 11.

¹⁶⁴ Berger, "Beyond the Battlefield."

viewer and “live” performer. Through a shared perspective, if not a shared physical position, the virtual viewer can imagine the embodied experience of the actor. The online viewer, while unable to smell the grass, can gaze back at the audience, unseen, as an absent body adopting the physical experience of the performer.

The virtual spectator, separate from both the performer and “live” spectator, cannot participate or share in the physical experiences of the open-air performances. Rain cannot be felt virtually. But it can specifically affect the technology attempting to create the virtual space. While the outdoor audience at Barnet was subjected to a torrential downpour, the soaked audience members were not the only ones affected by the elements. Berger, in his personal account of the rain’s consequences, demonstrates how a virtual site, distinct and displaced from the material site, and a virtual spectator, literally untouched by the physical elements, can still maintain a specific connection to the physical environment it strives to reproduce and (re)create a particular sensory experience:

Those of you with a keen eye will have noticed that ThroneCam didn’t appear during the live stream. There is a simple explanation: rain, and lots of it. When we were installing ThroneCam on site, which was a clearing in the middle of woodland, the heavens opened. It appears that some water managed to seep in to the Ethernet power-and-connectivity cable linking the Raspberry-pi based camera to the satellite uplink. This meant that it simply didn’t work, which was very disappointing for all involved, but it brought home the challenges of using modern technologies in very un-modern environments.¹⁶⁵

While Berger touches on the potential pitfalls of introducing a theatrical construct into a natural environment, he also illustrates an alternative specificity, a sensory perspective—in this case, darkness—available only to the displaced spectators. The specific elements of the physical site affect the online viewer (although they remain dry). The production of an

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

alternative viewing experience suggests a multiplicity of (re)produced spatial specificities mediated through divergent, rather than collective, physical experiences. In its transmission from battlefield to home or coffee shop or bus stop, the specific continuation of history played across the bodies of the battlefield is not necessarily lost; rather, its possibilities for continuation are multiplied.

The example of the ThroneCam, a specific viewing perspective accessible only to the online viewer, represents the technological self-consciousness of mediated liveness. Technology creates these perspectives, just as it creates the shared spaces and temporalities of “live” broadcast television. The theatrical construct of the Globe’s scaffolding stands out against its natural backdrop—and yet its co-presence with the battlefield site itself is still privileged. Understanding that liveness is technologically manufactured helps to dismantle the primacy of physical presence. The immediate connectivity that defines digital technologies “hinges on the spatial pyrotechnics of images that function as visual spectacle.” The perception of *liveness* is produced by the technical and representational accomplishment of the apparatus, and occasionally, as in the case of the ThroneCam, displays an image representative of a privileged or unachievable perspective. Through the use of technology, site-specificity can be created. This construction may appear artificial, but so, I would argue, is the placement of a scaffold stage on a historical battlefield.

The multiplicity of spatial specificities is created in part by the flexibility of televisual and digital forms. Despite conceptions of the broadcast medium as a totalizing, monolithic force, the actual presentation and dispersal of content (while still constructed with the possibility of total standardization) remains heterogeneous. The transmedial transmissions of the battlefield *Henrys* reach disparate spaces, highlighting the technological

flexibility of the screen as an environmental media device. The performances, with the aid of ubiquitous digital technologies, span a range of social experiences in dispersed, local settings and take on multiple phenomenological forms. The *Henrys*, designed to be viewed at a battlefield, can now be watched while waiting in line for coffee or during a daily train commute. The adaptability of the form pluralizes conceptions of place by mixing and juxtaposing elements of distance and proximity. The battlefield might blend into the soundscapes of a café or a soccer field might foreground the imagined smell of distant grass. This blurring reflects Weber’s view of the space of television as being “already fractured by the undecideability of that which appears on the screen. Is it taking place here, there, or anywhere?”¹⁶⁶ Rather than simply blunting the specificity of the battlefield, the malleability of the digital displacement—its ability to transform in different locations—demonstrates the site-specific capabilities of the mobile form. As the online video travels across a diverse “network of gazes and institutions, subjects and bodies, screens and physical structures,” its site-specific practices, as McCarthy argues, are able to “both position people in physical locations and to render visible the entwined domains of context, control, and consumption that define such places within broader cultural logics of space.”¹⁶⁷ The variability of the medium becomes its specificity. Each different perspective is a specific method of engagement. Different material factors of public and private environments intersect with immaterial networks of power to create specific spatial and sensorial arrangements. The multiplicity of making the “elsewhere” of the battlefield present “everywhere” produces diverse site-specific experiences that challenge the term’s fixed definition.

¹⁶⁶ Weber, 112.

¹⁶⁷ McCarthy, 3.

Arguments that criticize the globalizing, place-annihilating effects of televisual and digital media remove the mediated image from the realm of reality. Distinctions between the “elsewhere” of the recorded action and the “here” of spectating become qualifications about what is “real” and what is not. Virtuality takes on disembodied characteristics and seems to exist in a separate, identifiable realm from the realities of physical experience. The online viewer inhabits multiple spaces at once—the actual viewing location and the distant one the screen mediates. While others argue that because the online viewer is figuratively everywhere (via the instantaneous and vast digital network), he or she actually exists nowhere. But I argue that the viewer maintains a specific relationship to these multiple spaces. Virtual access to the battlefield *Henry's* may be physically removed from Towton or Tewkesbury, but it is not completely “de-spatialized.”

In her exploration of television as a site-specific medium, McCarthy argues that critics who focus on the spectral nature of the screen ignore the materiality of television and its viewing experience. She challenges how “the language of placelessness makes us forget that television is an object and, like all objects, it shapes its immediate space through its material form” and questions whether placelessness is “really an adequate description of the range of ways in which we encounter television within spaces of everyday life, from the living room to the departure lounge to the department store?”¹⁶⁸ While McCarthy’s emphasis is more on the minutia of how the physical apparatus of the television affects the phenomenological experience of its environment, her argument is helpful in examining how the standardized “elsewhere” of the image, the in-betweenness of being neither here nor there, takes material form in particular places. Just because the image collapses the

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 144.

perceived distance between the viewer and a remote location does not mean that the viewer loses all connection to his or her physical environment. The act of watching television or browsing the Internet is not a disembodied one. While the individual perceptual awareness of the online viewer may not always reflect this reality, the reality remains that the viewer, along with the device he or she accesses, takes place in environments specifically informed by particular affective qualities. McCarthy brings attention to the ways in which the materiality of the television set is always embedded in specific geographical power structures and contexts. The physical object itself “defines the artefactual existence of media forms within social space, the links that media objects form between spaces, and the (no less real) cultural visions of a physical space transcended by technology and emergent virtual pathways of communication.”¹⁶⁹ McCarthy’s argument applies to mobile networked devices as well. As digital technologies evolve and proliferate, they become more dominant (and perhaps more unnoticed) parts of the user’s everyday life. And yet to focus only on the excessive visuality of today’s digital culture is to eclipse the spatial features that condition both visual and kinesthetic experiences of screens.

The placement and mobility of screens can, as McCarthy argues, operate as site-specific by channeling the constructed socioeconomic forces that condition the environment. Broadcast media has the potential to reveal (or disguise) local and global political structures. Similarly, digital media can never exist separately from the contexts it operates within. McCarthy focuses on small-scale environments and their relationships to larger power dynamics. I extend this examination of materiality to consider how the specificities of Internet access reveal different socioeconomic conditions. To digitally access the Battlefield

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 146.

Henry's requires a physical device with the ability to stream videos online. The experience of this access would vary widely based on the device and where the device was located. For example, watching the performances on a computer at a public library would feel incredibly different from viewing in the comfort of one's own home. Similarly, the functionality of the computing machine and network apparatuses (routers, modems, Ethernet cables) would affect whether the video stream seamlessly or frustratingly starts and stops. These factors invariably inform each other. I would not be able to watch the full *Henry* cycle from my current location, a coffee shop with no electrical outlets (a specificity of my physical environment), because my laptop would lose power (a specificity of the physical object). The material specificities of the mobile device and its surrounding environment can reveal issues of socioeconomic inequality and privileged access. The possibilities for variation based on the specifics of materiality are innumerable, and while focusing on them would be a bit myopic, they emphasize how virtual spectatorship can never be a placeless experience.

Like the online viewer, Internet itself is often referred to as a “non-place,” relegated to an imaginary, ethereal realm. However, beyond the materiality of the screen itself, the Internet exists both as a conduit for electronic signals and as a uniquely curated arrangement of content that functions as a particular kind of navigable environment. Just as socioeconomic forces act on a physical environment, different institutional and political dynamics construct the specificities of the Web. The Space, the digital platform the Battlefield *Henry's* was originally archived on, existed as a “space” for a collection of cutting-edge experiments with art and technology. The curators of the website state that their mission is “to develop and commission great art digitally...to support artists and organisations to make the most of the opportunity that technology affords by increasing the

reach of existing activity in innovative ways, by opening up art to new audiences and by exploring the potential to create new artistic experiences using digital technology.”¹⁷⁰ This mission statement makes the website “site”-specific in conditioning how its content should be received. An online viewer encounters the Battlefield *Henry*s placed alongside other “innovative” works on the website in a similar way that a museum patron might navigate visual art collections. The arrangement of The Space, while not posited as a literal physical place, functions as a material environment informed by specific aesthetic and capitalistic concerns and becomes, as McCarthy puts it, “both a commodity and a way of looking at commodities.”¹⁷¹ On The Space, the Globe also paired the online video archive with a digital program. The digital program contained hyper-textual information that virtual spectators could navigate while watching performances. They could learn about the War of the Roses and the *Henry VI* cycle, or they could follow along in the text, exploring footnotes while watching the words performed onstage. This extra-theatrical content served the Globe’s educational project and attempted to enhance a viewing experience that was distanced from the privileged physical one, and in doing so, also created a site-specific viewing experience for the virtual spectator.

The intersection between the immateriality of the remote image and the materiality of the technological device mirrors the tension between the physical presence of the live bodies and corpses at the battlefield site and the absence of the historical bodies. The online viewers, displaced from the physical site, participated in the performance as another form of absent body. The virtual spectator, not physically present at the open-air battlefield, demonstrated the physical and positional specificities of cross-temporal and cross-spatial

¹⁷⁰ www.thespace.org

¹⁷¹ McCarthy, 144.

viewing experiences mediated through the distinctive relationships among virtual, “live,” past, and present bodies. The Globe’s project relies on physical presence to achieve Schneider’s “cross-temporal” touch. The condition of materiality, however, is not predicated on physical presence. The virtual spectator can participate in the affective experience of (re)constructing history through a specific engagement with space. In Young’s examination of the lynching victim, he argues that the visible bodily remains—a product of extreme violence—are anchored in the invisibility of the absent body and its ability to “evoke the victim’s body through an underscoring of its absence.”¹⁷² This reflexivity, the body’s remembrance of itself, recreates the moment of trauma. Earlier, I argued that Young’s argument provides a helpful framework for explaining the phenomenon of the War of the Roses battlefields, where the material remains of dead soldiers evoke immaterial presences for the physical spectator. This overlap of evocations and remembrances makes the experience unique for those at the actual site but a similar phenomenon occurs for those absent from the physical site of performance. The virtual spectator, absent from the performance site itself, is *the* present body in the virtual viewing experience. Amidst the circuitous layering of positional and cross-temporal bodies—the present bodies of virtual audience members watching the now past bodies of spectators watching bodies reenacting past bodies in a space haunted by these past bodies—the virtual body, disconnected from the physical space and the physical bodies, views the remaining participating bodies through a lens of absence. Unable to literally touch the online viewer, both the “live” performers and audience members become immaterial traces reaching across virtual spaces to touch the individualized and immediate body of the virtual spectator. In relation to the virtual

¹⁷² Young, 186.

spectator, all other bodies become absent bodies, ghosts, whose physical absence evokes a material presence.

While *presence* has often been thought of in terms of participants sharing the same physical location, virtual spectatorship reflects a more diffuse way that two spaces might overlap. Derrida observes how *presence* as a concept is more slippery—and possibly more poetic—than a definition dependent on embodiment allows: “While we remain attentive, fascinated, glued to what presents itself we are unable to see presence as such, since presence does not present itself, no more than does the visibility of the visible, the audibility of the audible, the medium or ‘air’ which disappears in the act of allowing to appear.”¹⁷³ Contained in the concept of presence is the hybridity of a blurred binary. As Derrida notes, the process of “appearing”—which has an emphasis on visibility—also involves what goes unseen. *Presence* does not necessarily manifest as something *present* in the physical sense; in the case of virtual spectatorship, I argue that presence might be revealed through absence.

The traditional limitations of individual presence are stretched by the transmission of performance across time and space. The experience of absence—of being absent from the battlefield site—can operate with its own specific reflexivity that participates in the (re)appearance of the historical event. Accessing a location remotely may not be phenomenologically the same as actually walking through it, but the collapse of spatial distance achieved by transmedial displacement creates new and equally valid spatial relationships between spectator and performance, disrupting the privileging of physical ideations of presence. In performance contexts, issues of co-presence are often intimately connected with the elusive concept of *liveness*. While “live” in-person performances are

¹⁷³ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (A&C Black, 2004), 345.

often used as counterpoints to televisual experiences of liveness, the particular combination of the *Henrys*' placement at the battlefield site and digital streaming makes broadcast television a useful framework for how the phenomenon of *liveness* might transfer from actual location to virtual space.

Liveness is used to describe the condition of something happening “now” or in “real-time” and serves as the “conceptual anchor” for definitions of the televisual medium. Jane Feuer defines it as, “a charged sense of immediacy, presence, and direct representation that emerges from television’s technological capacity to transmit and receive signals simultaneously, regardless of whether the broadcast in question is ‘literally’ live or not.”¹⁷⁴ The common emphasis of liveness is its shared temporality. With live broadcasts, audiences tune in to watch events “together” in separate places, as the appearance of simultaneity creates the sensation of sharing an experience with others. As Paddy Scannell notes about television and radio, “the time of the event and the time of the telling coincide; both exist in the same real time now.”¹⁷⁵ The spectacle of liveness is reflected in the advertised excitement surrounding the Globe’s live-stream in contrast with the now-commonplace digital archive of the *Henrys* that can be accessed at a later time. The (re)performances of the *Henrys* at the battlefields already complicate this quality of liveness—Schneider’s cross-temporal touch confuses the barriers between temporalities and complicates the notion of “real-time.” The co-temporaneous overlap of past and present generations displays a continued repetition of liveness, a history that becomes alive again and again. And this continuation extends beyond the performance event, in the site itself and in the collective audience that moves on after the (figurative) curtain closes.

¹⁷⁴ Jane Feuer, quoted in McCarthy, 16.

¹⁷⁵ Scannell, 212.

I argue that the quality of liveness, celebrated at the battlefield, continues in the virtual spaces and various physical locations as well. Philip Auslander argues that the experience of “liveness” (the elusive synonym of “resonance” and “energy” when used to describe the experience of live performance) is not singularly contained: “live performance has indeed been pried from its shell and... all performance modes, live or mediated, are now equal: none is perceived as auratic or authentic; the live performance is just one more production of a given text or one more reproducible text.”¹⁷⁶ Auslander argues that live and mediatized experiences are not technologically opposites, but are rather historically synchronous, with “liveness” being a term that could only be understood with the advent of recording. The divide between “live” and mediatized, then, becomes less clear and less relevant and a singular definition of liveness does not hold up against the proliferation of mass media and performance forms. At the battlefield, history is experienced as “now,” or, to use the Globe’s own language, it is “enlivened.” Online, history is brought into the present moment with each new view.

Liveness, discussed almost exclusively in terms of temporality, should be reconsidered in spatial terms. The condition of the “live” is not only that it is happening “now,” but there is also the assumption of co-presence, of shared space. In the case of broadcast television, this is achieved through what Weber calls “space-binding,” which is the “ideological impression that electronic media are able to shrink space.” Television can render the distant proximate. News broadcasts record reporters “live from the scene” so that those at home can have the experience of “being there.” The temporal liveness of news is repeated and (re)cycled—the same footage looping again and again—but the spatial

¹⁷⁶ Auslander, 7.

emphasis on proximity, on co-presence with the event, remains critical with each repetition. Scannell argues that “television’s greatest technical prowess is its ability to be there... (hence the most catastrophic of technological catastrophes is the loss of signal.”¹⁷⁷ The loss of image—the blackout of the feed experienced by online *Henry* viewers during the rainstorm—is the loss of place, of feeling connected to the “here and now” of the “live” event. The online viewers remain co-temporaneous with those at the battlefield, but they are no longer able to share an experience of space. This catastrophic disconnection highlights the dominant role of spatiality in defining the “live” experience. Marshall McLuhan, in his early examination of the effects of television, argues: “There are no remote places. Under instant circuitry, nothing is remote in time or space. It’s now.”¹⁷⁸ McLuhan equates proximity with simultaneity. Certainly, time and space will always be inextricably linked concepts, but focusing on the spatiality of liveness reveals how simultaneity can create shared experiences of proximity, immediacy, and connectivity among distant places. The elimination of mediatized distance results in the virtual spectator’s imagined co-presence with performers and other remote audience members. Online viewers must imagine that they are at the Towton battlefield. But similarly, those at the Towton battlefield must imagine that the field full of sheep is a field full of soldiers. The embodied differences in viewing experiences converge as phenomenological constructions dependent on Roach’s concept of kinesthetic imagination. The liveness experienced at the battlefield site, in all its complicated glory, is transferred when mediated through digital technologies, making a co-present, not just co-temporaneous, experience accessible to a virtual audience.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects* (New York: Bantam, 1967).

The deterministic critique of digital technologies is that the postmodern condition of placelessness produced by simultaneity and spatial collapse inhibits “real” social connectivity. However, I argue that the simultaneous viewing experience shared by the live-stream virtual spectator becomes a type of co-presence despite the spectator’s actual absence from the performance site. Just as Jaime Parker fabricated a sense of shared community by rallying the physically present audience members together around their specific experience of rain, the experience of being *absent*, of accessing the battlefield from a distance, creates its own specific collective. “The presencing of a present occasion to an absent audience,” as Scannell describes of the abolition of distance, creates connected communicative and experiential spaces of spectating.¹⁷⁹ The imagined space of community is made literal through the digital activity of online *Henry’s* viewers. During the performance broadcast, online viewers “live-Tweeted” their experience of the event—commenting on the action of the play, expressing excitement about the site-specific spectacle, and checking in to see if others were watching as well. The Internet became a platform for multi-dimensional dialogue, a form of interaction exclusive to those with virtual access. Just as Pearson’s brand of site-specificity is achieved through the sharing of actual space with other battlefield spectators, virtual spectators share the same imagined spaces and same specific experience of access. The site-specific virtual experience is one of expanded, not annihilated, social connectivity.

The creation of a specific collective audience removed from the physical action of the performance participates in the continuation of history. While associated with immediacy and presence, liveness is also involved in framing historical dimensions of

¹⁷⁹ Scannell, 210.

events and forming their narrative production. It makes the past present by establishing a connection to shared social and historical realities when and where they are happening. Scannell examines the tension of liveness as “simultaneously present and past: a function of both spatio-temporal proximity (presence) and historical achievement (past).”¹⁸⁰ In packaging and distributing the experience of “being there” at the battlefield, the Globe produces a particular narrativization of both the event of performance and of the historical moment itself. While the recording archives a particular narrative frame, the multiplicity of virtual spectatorship—the diversity of access and reception—continues the process of history-making associated with liveness. Just as Schneider sees porous temporalities as a (re)enactment of history, Scannell views the work of audiovisual technologies as a type of “resurrection.” The constant (re)negotiation of the historical moment, (re)configured in its mediatized transmission, refracts the singular site-specific experience into a heterogeneous and continuous “presencing” of the past.

In the (re)performance of the battlefield’s history, site and performance together resist the disappearance of this history. The Wars of the Roses remain, not only in the physical remains of the battlefield’s graves, but also in the collective memory restored in the participants both at the site and removed from it. The movement of the battlefield *Henry’s* across geographies and temporalities, its placement at the battlefield and subsequent displacement into virtual spaces, creates multiple specific viewing experiences that each work to mediate the continuation of history. Through performance, a past event comes *out* of the past and into the present. While a direct emotional connection might be achieved through physical contact with the place of the historical event, the performance’s movement

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

to other spaces challenges a static understanding of history. Just as the performers and physically present spectators mediated the continuation of history through their embodied participation in the performance event, virtual spectators can also carry the collective and social memory of the event itself. The battlefield *Henrys* challenge the relationship between physical presence and spatial connection, and with it, the attached implications of historical authenticity and a static understanding of history. Virtuality offers another example for how national identity need not rely on national boundaries, along with presenting a new multiplicity of possibilities for collective identity formation that remain to be explored further. The question of whose identity is being constructed and who is doing the constructing also multiplies, however. The Globe's version of authentic history as singular truth might continue to eclipse other narratives as it stretches beyond the battlefield. Alternatively, the creation of multiple, specific forms of spectatorship might multiply the ways in which a self-reflexive viewer takes ownership of or actively participates in the construction of these national narratives. In the return of performance to a remembered site, and in the expansion of that site beyond the geographical location, virtual spaces continue to be new battlegrounds for perpetuating or disrupting how collective identities relate to history.

IV. How to Be in Two Places at Once: Locating Virtual Space in Performance

The advent of digital technologies and virtual spaces has destabilized a singular, physical understanding of the concept of *site*, making its usage unspecific and shifty when discussing site-specificity as a definitive category. And yet, not without irony, it is contemporary technology-driven performance practices that have brought a new specificity to *site*—not by stabilizing its definition but by making specificity a continuous experience. As practitioners disperse their performances across separated geographies, whether by live-stream broadcasting, digital archiving, or performances that are conducted on the Web itself or through other technological interfaces, *where* the performance can be said to “take place” becomes unclear. Is it in the embodied experience of the spectator (who may also be performer), or in the electrical currents that code for the performative actions? The typical “both/and”—and then some—response suggests a *site* of performance that is fragmented, and may always have been fragmented, stretched across multiple locations and intangible metaphors. The result of an unplaceable site, for some, is an unplaceable individual subjectivity. *Site* expands beyond its semantic usefulness, and in doing so, eludes the grasp of an individual seeking an ordered and navigable world. Russell Daylight argues that there is a “theoretical instability” to space that prevents its categorization, just as “site-specific” practices continue to diversify beyond the language of its initial definition.¹⁸¹ The spatial crisis of destabilization and disorientation is tempered, however, by performance practices that make the increasingly abstract concept of virtual space physically accessible. While spatial ambiguity threatens an individual’s ability to process the world around her, new

¹⁸¹ Russell Daylight, “The Language of Postmodern Space,” *Philament HABITS & HABITATS* (2008), 17.

technology changes the sensory processes themselves, using virtuality to make physical site more immediate. The virtual becomes how the user orients herself in space. *Site* expands, but now as a redefined combination of digital technologies and physical environments that produces specific responses to the movement of its navigators.

While the Internet has inserted itself as a medium for performance since its inception, recent works have redirected attention to the Internet as subject matter. Ryan McNamara's combined dance and performance art piece, *ME3M*, presented in New York in November 2013, and later in Miami in 2014, transcends telling us *about* the Internet—it aims to replicate it. By erratically wheeling his audience among simultaneous performance moments, McNamara attempts to simulate the experience of being online, how it feels to be plugged in with unlimited access to immediate content. Meanwhile, in a separate project, visual artist David Datuna attempts to plug the viewer in as an instrument of Internet creativity. Datuna, credited as the first person to utilize Google Glass in a public installation, showcased *Portrait of America*, a twelve-foot multimedia flag constructed with glass lenses embedded with GPS locators that interact with the wearable technology, at the Smithsonian in February 2014. In providing embodied experiences of the Internet and digital content, both works reflect the spatial experience of the Internet itself and demonstrate how the multiplicity of virtual space manifests in a physical place. Considering the tension between the customarily stationary physical experience of the Internet and the lightning-speed movement of its search engines and downloads, I focus on how the combination (rather than the juxtaposition) of the conventionally opposed concepts of physicality and digitality in performance creates new physical realities. I argue that unlike other networked or technology-based performances that question the ontological status of “reality” as a distorted

and discontinuous concept, McNamara and Datuna's performances demonstrate physical realities that are continuously specific, as they are constantly constructed by the user's specific interactions with tangible environments and computer-generated hypertextuality. By exploring how the multiplicity produced by these interactions challenges conventional models of interactivity and spectatorship, I propose that the sensory customization achieved by locating virtual space in *places* of performance increases possibilities for connection and social exchange. As the blurring of the virtual and the actual redefines performance space, participants share embodied experiences simultaneously in cohabited locations and across separated geographies as they navigate reconstructions and manipulations of their own realities.

Datuna's exhibition premiered only months after Edward Snowden leaked national secrets revealing the extent of the NSA's surveillance of American citizens. Much of this surveillance occurred digitally—harvesting emails, collecting information from search engine databases, tracking and mapping the location of cell phones. The same technology that enables Google Glass to become a work of art also enables a government to keep tabs on its citizens in what Sarah Bay-Cheng refers to as “self-surveillance.”¹⁸² And while there is debate about how “secret” these operations really were, most everyday users accessing the GPS function on their smartphones are probably not thinking about who else is privy to that information. The surveillance disclosures made many Americans aware of the potential monitoring of their online activities, not just by the national government, but also by local law enforcement and ad agencies, and posed the unnerving question about how much

¹⁸² Sarah Bay-Cheng (2014), “When This You See’: The (Anti) Radical Time of Mobile Self-Surveillance” *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts* 19.3 (2014): 49.

personal information was, and continues to be, unknowingly collected.¹⁸³ The features of Google’s wearable technology that increase possibilities for individualization by tracking an individual’s location also increase the possibilities for that location to be monitored. It is worth considering how the freedom of customization championed by participatory performance experiences, the participant’s agency in navigating and manipulating their environment, might very soon beg the question of who is really doing the manipulating. With the perception of reality at stake, how might performance participate in or resist the implicit and explicit ways in which digital technologies actually restrict or remove agency?

Ryan McNamara is an American artist known for blending practices of dance, theater, and performance art in works that aim to create social discourses on contemporary situations. With *ME3M*, he explores the Internet’s effects on our mediatized culture with a dance performance that mimics the stream of digital content we access. The content of the performance—the dancers costumed in gaudy metallics, the eclectic mix of music, and frenetic choreography—resembles viral videos and pop-up ads. Audience members, who are seated in cushioned office chairs arranged in an auditorium with a conventional relationship to the proscenium, begin by watching a pair of dancers onstage. Soon, however, they are physically moved by crew members who slip a dolly under the chairs from behind, tilt them back onto two wheels, and roll the unsuspecting spectators to different corners of the theater where other dancers have already begun their movements. Audience members are separated and dispersed. They are placed close to the action of the “mini-performances” but can never see the whole of everything at once, as different sets of choreography happen simultaneously in different spaces, and as their chairs keep unexpectedly moving.

¹⁸³ Daniel Zwerdling, “Your Digital Trail, and How it Can Be Used Against You,” *NPR*, September 30, 2013, npr.org.

McNamara takes his audience on a tour of the Internet via an unpredictable tour of rotating ballet performances.

David Datuna is a Georgian-born American artist whose work with eyeglasses in a pawn shop inspired him to create collages of portraits, flags, and icons using the lenses to symbolize different modes of perception. Datuna adds an additional layer of “lenses” to *Portrait of America* with the incorporation of Google Glass. The exhibit encouraged visitors to interact with the multimedia installation, an American flag made up of a collage of historical and contemporary images positioned behind re-purposed eyeglass lenses, using Google Glass, a wearable technology that reveals images and videos as the piece is viewed.¹⁸⁴ The term “augmented reality” (AR) is used to describe this process in which “physical environments are overlaid with digital information.”¹⁸⁵ As an intersection of locational geography and computer-based technology, AR uses GPS locators, so when a viewer directs her gaze at a particular part of the flag, one of more than fifty video or audio clips begins to play. A viewer can also trigger a clip vocally, by, for instance, saying “JFK,” whose picture is embedded in one of the flag’s stripes, to hear one of his famous speeches. Cameras are embedded in the piece itself, taking pictures and video of its viewers (Google Glass can also record through its viewfinder) as they verbally respond to prompted questions about democracy or technology, and otherwise interact with the piece in what Datuna calls a “see-you-see-me outcome,” which refers to the spectator’s simultaneous experience of watching and being watched. The spectators’ responses were live-streamed on Datuna’s website, and are now archived in a digital collage online.

¹⁸⁴ Google started selling a Google Glass prototype to “Glass Explorers” in 2013, before it became available in 2014. As of January 2015, Google distributing the prototype as it continues to develop the product.

¹⁸⁵ Steve Benford and Gabriella Giannachi, *Performing Mixed Reality* (MIT Press, 2011), 2.

For both these performances, I am the virtual spectator, literally, as I did not “see” these pieces, but experienced them as an extension of the physical performances. For *Portrait of America*, I can access the digital archive of videos and participate in the continuation of the performance. For *ME3M*, I have pieced together digital content—reviews, interviews, video clips, images—to form an account of the performance from an exclusively virtual perspective, instead of being present at the physical performance site. While I did not have the experience of feeling myself suddenly wheeled around—a critical way McNamara mimics the Internet in actual places—I view this standpoint as an opportunity to approach performance with virtuality as a methodological lens. Virtual spectatorship does not replicate the participation of the physically present viewers, but it does extend it. In discussing “remote spectatorship,” Elena Pérez argues that performance “space is expanded not only by ‘having’ spectators remotely located, but also by having them carry out actions that have an impact in the performance itself.”¹⁸⁶ While Pérez assumes the actions must impact the performance in “real-time,” I argue that the self-reflexivity of the virtual spectator is the action that continues the performance. Virtual spectatorship, like the *place* of performance, is always in process, and it is this constant formation produced by “participation feedback and net-based communities” that challenges “rather static ideas of time, space, and subjectivity.”¹⁸⁷ Lisbeth Groot Nibbelink and Sigrid Merx argue that in “intermedial performances spectating in itself becomes a self-reflexive act, and in this process of becoming, is able to entail a politics of spectating.”¹⁸⁸ By

¹⁸⁶ Elena Pérez, “Meaningful connections: Exploring the uses of telematics technology in performance,” *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 10, no. 1 (2014), 12.

¹⁸⁷ Wolf-Dieter Ernst and Meike Wagner, “Networking,” in *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*, ed. Sarah Bay-Cheng, Chiel Kattenbelt, Andy Lavender, and Robin Nelson, (Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 176.

navigating the curated digital content of *ME3M*, the kind of content McNamara himself attempts to display in performance, virtual spectatorship can further complicate the physical/virtual binary and illuminate intersections between the two spaces. A virtual methodology can also reveal the layers and patterns in spatial relationships: I use my virtual experience to access the actual experience of a performance attempting to simulate (however metaphorically or critically) the experience of virtual space. For *Portrait of America*, Datuna builds in this space of connection between the virtual and physical experience in hopes of expanding the reach of the performance's social network. This networking—the connections made between technologies, spaces, and spectators (virtual and actual)—becomes both a performance and a methodology. While clearly not the only viewing perspective, and not an altogether conventional one, virtual spectatorship can interrogate the division between virtual and actual spaces and challenge how forms of visibility and kinesthetic experience are privileged in performance. Virtual access (arguably more economically and physically accessible than a trip to the Smithsonian) can multiply the ways in which an absent other becomes *present* in an environment, making available experiences that would otherwise be inaccessible.

The Actual Space of Virtual Places

To rethink the realms of experience that result from merging (not just integrating) technology with performance I begin by rethinking the conventional distinctions between *place* and *space*. The concepts of *place* and *space* inevitably overlap. John Agnew argues that one consensus about their distinction might be “a phenomenological understanding of a

¹⁸⁸ Lisbeth Groot Nibbelink and Sigrid Merx, “Presence and Perception: Analysing Intermediality in Performance” in *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*, 218.

place as a distinctive coming together in *space*.”¹⁸⁹ Place, then, is the specific location, the surface on which actions occur, while space is the theoretical and abstract network that contains it. To better define these distinctions in terms of McNamara and Datuna’s use of mediated performance, I draw upon the concepts of *virtual* and *actual*. *Virtual*, which refers to experiences mediated through digital technologies, has often been associated with the abstract language of *space*. For example, Steve Dixon has regarded the Internet not as a place but as an “imaginary” space that lacks the physicality that place conventionally implies.¹⁹⁰ The *actual*, on the other hand, is the place from which virtual space is accessed—the body and its tangible surrounding environment. However, through my analyses of McNamara and Datuna’s performances, I challenge the binaries of *space* and *place*, and *virtual* and *actual*. By examining performances that both integrate and simulate new levels of digital interactivity, I hope to complicate the distinction between the opposing terms, to wrest the virtual from being imagined “out there” and to place it in the realm of the actual.

By locating virtual space in the “here” of actual place, I challenge the tendency to relegate the virtual dimensions of performance to realms of metaphor.¹⁹¹ Technology is said to “invoke spaces that go beyond the localized here and now of theatre”¹⁹² but I argue that the augmented reality of McNamara and Datuna’s performances emphasizes “hereness” by

¹⁸⁹ John Agnew, “Space and Place,” in *Handbook of Geographical Knowledge*, ed. John Agnew and David Livingstone (London: Sage, 2011), 317.

¹⁹⁰ Steve Dixon, *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation* (MIT Press, 2007), 463.

¹⁹¹ “It must be conceded that the discussion of cyberspace as place(s) can be useful and highly appropriate, even though the notion is largely metaphoric and conceptual, and indeed romantic,” Dixon, 162.

¹⁹² Brigit Wiens, “Instance: Christopher Kondek, *Dead Cat Bounce* (2005) in *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*, 107. Another reference to the specific spatiotemporal demands of performance: “theatre as traditionally understood in socio-historic context as a live phenomenon in the here and now, may be in the process of being re-qualified,” Robin Nelson, “Introduction: Prospective Mapping and Network of Terms” in *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*, 13.

constantly forming and reforming localized experiences of *place*. McNamara uses the (forced) movement of his audience to locate the experience of the Internet in the body and its immediate surroundings. Datuna's use of Google Glass alters the spatial experience of the Smithsonian based on the specific location of its user from moment to moment. Space is not invoked or imagined in these newly created realities; rather, through technology's seamless integration with a physical environment, both instances foreground the "here" of the virtual and explore the degrees of agency and restriction in a new *place* that offers unlimited access to social and informational content—all within the user's own field of vision.

My argument that the virtual "takes place" marks a departure from familiar discussions about the ontological status of networked performances.¹⁹³ With virtual reality systems that are able to completely overhaul the physical experience of space and simultaneous and multi-site performances that are distributed across geographically separated locations, the assumed ontological distinctions between real/virtual and live/recorded have come into question. By reframing the concerns of the virtual and the "real" in spatial terms, the question becomes instead, how can reality be manipulated and shaped when the distinctions between *place* and *space* are collapsed?

The digital technologies that enable instantaneous global communications have caused some theorists to identify a uniquely postmodern crisis of spatial experience. The experience of being "other than here" prompted by the disorientation of unlimited information streams becomes a crisis of locational identity. Fredric Jameson refers to a

¹⁹³ An abundance of terms has been used to identify performances that incorporate technology or other media: intermedial, virtual, cyber, Internet, online, digital, multimedia, to name a few. I choose *networked* for its connotations of Internet and interpersonal connectivity.

“postmodern hyperspace” that “succeeds in transcending the capacities of the individual to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world.”¹⁹⁴ The overwhelming ubiquity of content results in a fragmented, disrupted, and dispersed sense of *place*. Placelessness, by this model, results in cultural homogenization and the loss of individual identity. For David Harvey, the spatial development of commodity production, consumption, and distribution, along with political and cultural exchange, has been accelerated to the point of the “annihilation of space” and the loss of an individual’s ability to identify his or her world geographically.¹⁹⁵ He argues: Place-identity, in this collage of superimposed spatial images that implode in upon us, becomes an important issue, because everyone occupies a space of individuation (a body, a room, a home, a shaping community, a nation) and how we individuate ourselves shapes identity. Furthermore, if no one ‘knows their place’ in this shifting collage world, then how can a secure social order be fashioned or sustained?¹⁹⁶ To “know one’s place” hints at the hierarchical implications of accelerated place-making and suggests consequences that transcend personal disorientation. Both Jameson and Harvey reflect the worried position of Zizek that the limitless possibilities of cyberspace might actually present a crisis of “radical closure” as “general availability will induce unbearable claustrophobia; excess of choice will be experienced as the impossibility to choose; universal direct participatory community will exclude all the more forcefully those who are prevented from participating.”¹⁹⁷ The

¹⁹⁴ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Verso, 1991), 44.

¹⁹⁵ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, (Blackwell: 1989), 293.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 303.

postmodern crisis of space is that of non-specificity. The increasing ambiguity of an individual's relationship to *place*, the blending of the "here" and "there," complicates how realities are constructed and experienced.

I argue that certain contemporary performance practices respond to this crisis by reaffirming "hereness" through the use—not rejection—of information technologies. To make the virtual *place* is to make the abstract more specific. The "disorienting" experience of limitlessness becomes literally connected to the user's orientation and his or her access to the physical environment. In exploring the response to this crisis in the form of the newly accessible experience of the virtual as *place*, I identify a radical shift in what Brigit Wiens calls the "new spatial turn" in performance studies. Digital media and global communication have changed the way individuals and societies experience geographic distance, prompting Wiens to suggest a need for understanding "which spaces are forming within the Internet, what new forms of spatial experience and knowledge they cause, and how they in turn affect the spaces of the material world."¹⁹⁸ Even as Wiens questions the immaterial/material binary, her language ("forming *within*," "affect") upholds a separation of elements bridged by a linear cause-and-effect relationship.¹⁹⁹ I propose, however, that the radical shift in spatial experience is not just how the Internet affects material space but how it *becomes* material space. Moving beyond screens as the point of virtual interaction, augmented reality creates a *place*, an actual location experienced as a physical environment. This environment,

¹⁹⁷ Slavoj Žižek, "Cyberspace, or, The Unbearable Closure of Being" in *The Plague of Fantasies*, (Verso, 1997), 199.

¹⁹⁸ Wiens, 108.

¹⁹⁹ "The digital's importance and cultural implications cannot be fully understood without examining both its materiality and immateriality. These are not contradictory qualities but rather essential, mutually constituting elements," Jan Harris and Paul Taylor, *Digital Matters: The Theory and Culture of the Matrix*, (Routledge, 2005), 18.

unlike “unaugmented” reality, is always hypertextual, prompted by the “hereness,” the physical presence, of the individual user to reveal unseen connections between information, environments, and others.

The work of McNamara and Datuna also demonstrates a restyling of the way technology has been and will continue to be integrated in performance. While their performances display a seamless combination of the virtual and actual, other contemporary performance styles have focused on the differences between the “live” bodies and mediatized elements.²⁰⁰ In Michael West and the Corn Exchange’s *Freefall* (2009), an onstage portable camera captures videos of an actor portraying a man who suddenly finds his health failing. The videos are projected in real-time on upstage screens and sometimes portray the man’s point of view as doctors respond directly to the camera, while at other times they favor close-ups of his eyes reacting to the news. The effect of this juxtaposition might be one that disorients the spectators’ experience of reality and liveness. Steve Benford and Gabriella Giannachi, in their examination of “mixed reality performance,” focus on the creation of such “spaces of disjuncture.”²⁰¹ Mixed reality performance “offers the possibility of creating such hybrid performative and participatory environments in which real and physical data appear, but they are not so much as integrated into one another but [are] rather juxtaposed on top of or next to each other.”²⁰² The hybridity Benford and Giannachi emphasize might imply the dominance of one form over the other, while I argue

²⁰⁰ “Why is it so essential that “live” flesh be set against the digital? To demonstrate their difference,” Nadja Masura, “Digital Theatre: A “Live” and Mediated Art Form Expanding Perceptions of Body, Place, and Community,” (dissertation, University of Maryland, 2007), 8.

²⁰¹ Benford and Giannachi, 23.

²⁰² *Ibid*, 5.

that moments of equivalence between the actual and virtual—when two realities overlap but both remain visible—demand more attention in performance studies.²⁰³

Telematic performances simultaneously juxtapose and conflate the “here” and “there” of networked performances by using telecommunications (video conferencing applications like Skype or Facetime) to collapse the distance between two geographically separated locations.²⁰⁴ In telematic performances, as Bob Giges and Edward Warburton describe, “the live performers in the theater are clearly “here,” while the screened images are “there” (but also live), and the audience is asked to make sense of this juxtaposition of the remote and the proximate coupled in real time.”²⁰⁵ In *Lubricious Transfer* (2005), audiences in both New York and California watched “live” dancers onstage who moved simultaneously with or in response to broadcasted projections of the other remote cast. Station House Opera’s piece *Dissolved* (2014) “takes place” simultaneously in London and Berlin as real-time projections of one cast are superimposed onto the other, “mapping” faces from different places onto each other.²⁰⁶ The effect in both performances is an experience of “in-betweenness,” a disorientation with physical reality that places the performance “neither here nor there” and requires the audience to “sustain a split consciousness that bridges the two.”²⁰⁷ This spatial ambiguity reflects the postmodern crisis of placelessness and loss of

²⁰³ Robin Nelson traces idea of privilege in hierarchy from Marcos Bequer and Jose Gatti’s “Elements of Vogue” (2005), cited in her introduction to *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*, 18.

²⁰⁴ Telematic performances are also referred to as “remote,” “distributed,” or “multi-site” performances. Other examples include Paul Sermon’s *Telematic Dreaming* (1992) and The Builders Association’s *Alladeen* (2003).

²⁰⁵ Bob Giges and Edward C. Warburton, “From Router to Front Row: *Lubricious Transfer* and the Aesthetics of Telematic Performance,” *Leonardo* 43, no. 1 (2010): 27.

²⁰⁶ The Gertrude Stein Repertory Theater (GSTR) employs similar effects in their productions *UBU* (2000) and *Making Americans* (2005), using what they call “distance puppetry” and “interactive costuming.” See Masura for more on GSTR.

²⁰⁷ Giges and Warburton, 27.

spatial identity. The disorientation produced by the movement in McNamara's *ME3M*, however, serves to foreground the site of performance by creating perpetually specific viewpoints that sharpen the spectator's sense of *place*, rather than dissolving it. Similarly, in *Portrait of America*, Google Glass superimposes images onto a physical environment but these do not transform or replace the physical as they do in *Dissolved*, where the actor is "present" but also subsumed by the projection. Rather, triggered by the direction of a user's gaze, the wearable technology in *Portrait of America* highlights the experience of being "here," of standing in that place at that moment. The individual specificity and multiplicity of viewpoints produced by McNamara and Datuna's combination (rather than separation) of spaces directs the navigation of a new physical reality that becomes defined by uninterrupted hypertextuality. While other networked performances ask audiences to contend with disconnected and discontinuous spaces, *ME3M* and *Portrait of America* task audiences with processing a (literally) continuous *place* that perpetually streams sensory information as it is physically navigated.

The interactivity of both McNamara and Datuna's performances works to continually construct the place of performance. In *ME3M*, the (involuntary) participation of the audience members creates the feeling of surfing the Web and, through physical movement, constructs virtual space as *place*. In *Portrait of America*, the place of performance constantly changes based on the user's orientation, becoming new with each redirection of the gaze. In other participatory and immersive performances, the environment is already constructed and precedes the audience's interaction within it. "Immersive theater," which often surrounds the audience with a constructed or site-specific environment, functions more like a virtual reality system in attempting to overhaul an actual environment

and give audiences the experience of being somewhere else. Punchdrunk's popular *Sleep No More* (2011) combines interactivity with an immersive environment as audience members navigate their way through Manhattan warehouses that have been theatrically transformed into a hotel-like performance space.²⁰⁸ Audience members explore at their own pace, examining drawers and following actors, but their participation does not change the physical space itself. *ME3M* and *Portrait of America* do not attempt to transport audiences or supplant their environment; instead, the technology becomes a part of how the existing environment operates. With Blast Theory's recent smartphone-app-performance, *Karen* (2015), users "video-chat" with their life coach, Karen, played by actress Claire Cage. Karen responds to users based on their interactions with an onscreen interface to reflect the experience of a real-time therapy session. The Builders Association's production, *Elements of Oz* (2015), also takes advantage of personal technology, encouraging viewers to interact with the stage action via a smart phone app developed specifically for the performance. One such interactive moment is described: "when the song [Somewhere Over the Rainbow] strikes up, myriad self-made videos posted to YouTube of all and sundry singing that classic tune appear on phones and tables all over the theater, so that a whole chorus sings along from cyberspace."²⁰⁹ Interactivity with augmented reality, as experienced in *ME3M* and *Portrait of America*, similarly complicates the role of spectator and performer, but in doing so, it also changes the nature of space.

²⁰⁸ Other examples of "immersive" performances include *Then She Fell* (2013) by Third Rail Projects, Secret Cinema's immersive film screenings, *Door into the Dark* (2015) by Anagram, and "Escape the Room" experiences.

²⁰⁹ www.thebuildersassociation.org/prod_oz.html.

Another emergent form of technology-driven performance uses pre-recorded audio files to immerse users in the specificity of actual locations. In most audio (or video) walks, smartphone plays, or site-specific podplays (from the term “podcasts”), the audience downloads a sound file onto a mobile device, moves to the streets of a city, a transit station, a ferry deck, and presses play to begin the performance. Janet Cardiff, the pioneer of audio walks, began experimenting with the genre in 1991 and continues to create works that are a cross between a guided tour and a fictional journey. Walkers listen to Cardiff’s instructions through headphones mixed with ambient sounds she has recorded at the same site, along with local history and fictional stories. In *Jena Walk* (2006), her directions led walkers across the site of a battle between Prussians and Napoleon 200 years ago, while *Words Drawn in Water* (2005) took the audience on a tour around the Mall area of Washington D.C. Cardiff muses that she is “interested in places that immerse the viewer, that make you forget where you are.”²¹⁰ Her rhetoric is similar to that of the “disappearance of the actual environment” effected by virtual reality systems.²¹¹ Augmented reality in McNamara and Datuna’s works, however, does not immerse the user to the point of disorientation but rather brings the actual environment into a sharper focus. Similar site-specific audio-based works, like This Is Not a Theatre Company’s *Ferry Play* (2015) designed for the Staten Island Ferry or Newworld Theatre’s *Look Up* (2011), a guided walk through Vancouver, also aim to “augment” the experience of a specific location by increasing a user’s awareness of his or her surroundings.²¹² Commands such as, “follow” or “see,” as well as encouragements to

²¹⁰ Lina Dzuverovic, “Walking and Talking,” *Luhring Augustine* 9.1 (2006), 60.

²¹¹ Gabriella Giannachi, *Virtual Theatres: An Introduction* (Routledge, 2004), 5.

²¹² Other examples include Improv Everywhere’s “MP3 Experiments” and Soundwalk’s guided audio tour experiences.

“notice,” “sense,” or “feel,” bring attention to a user’s physical presence and relationship to the site. Erin Mee, co-director of *Ferry Play*, notes the irony: “We’re using technology to ask you to unplug.”²¹³ The experience of an existing, non-theatrical place as an immersive performance site might reflect the increased sensory awareness of wearing Google Glass; only, the viewer does not unplug to achieve this effect but rather is herself *plugged in*. The immersive experience of augmented reality is not just the navigation of a pre-existing location, as featured in guided tours, but an active production of *place* through perpetual renegotiations of reality. The user’s movements, not always part of a pre-determined narrative, make each hypertextual intervention a specific connection between individual, performance, and site.

The new *place* of augmented reality is one that is in constant construction. Like DeCerteau’s pedestrian walking through the city, the augmented reality user charts her own path, becoming a creator by finding back alleys in the form of hypertextual data and other deviations from the constructed grid in the revelation of otherwise unseen content.²¹⁴ Unlike DeCerteau’s pedestrian, however, the AR user does not (only) operate within a fixed system. The user’s interaction with and against DeCerteau’s view of the “totalizing”²¹⁵ map indicative of institutionalized power structures creates its own map. Google Glass, with its reliance on GPS locators, constantly tracks the movement of its user. As hypertext makes each physical encounter specific to the user, the technology literalizes the “mapping” of

²¹³ Lauren Steussy, “I listened to a play on the Staten Island Ferry and so can you,” silive.com, April 22, 2015.

²¹⁴ Michel DeCerteau, “Walking in the City,” *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (University of California, Berkeley: 1984). In this chapter, DeCerteau also makes a distinction between *space* and *place*, arguing, “space is a practiced place,” as “space is composed of intersections of mobile elements” and *place* “implies an indication of stability” (117).

²¹⁵ Bay-Cheng (2014), 24.

each new trajectory. Each inventive decision, each creative deviation from the imposed grid, serves to *build* the grid. The navigation of these newly constructed places, then, becomes both a subversive act and one that reinforces a social construction of power.²¹⁶

As the virtual is made actual, *place* adopts the plasticity of its limitless counterpart. When *place* becomes a less fixed, more unstable concept, the user's physical relationship to her environment and to others is reimagined. As Andy Lavender notes, "The network is not (only) abstract and remote, but (also) inhabited and experienced."²¹⁷ Since the end of the twentieth century, the dichotomies of embodiment and materiality in relation to information systems have been questioned, such that I accept as a baseline the embodied experience of technology, and instead investigate how these physical interactions affect and are affected by the collapsing binaries of *space* and *place*.²¹⁸ The persistently hypertextual, always site-specific *place* of augmented reality fosters an increased sensory awareness for the user. Paul Sermon's seminal telepresence work *Telematic Dreaming* (1992) connects two participants in separate locations (specifically, two separate beds) by recording and projecting the image of one onto the side of the bed next to the other. Sermon wanted participants to interact by "touching their eyes," to exchange "sight with the sense of touch, reaching the equivalent cognitive experience of closeness through the visual stimulation of the body at a distance."²¹⁹ Augmented reality extends the place of performance, not just through

²¹⁶ For the social constructions of space: Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, (Blackwell, 1991).

²¹⁷ Andy Lavender, "Digital Culture" in *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*, 134.

²¹⁸ This work has been done, to name a few, by Donna Haraway with "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1991), N. Katherine Hayles with *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), the edited collection *Posthuman Bodies* (1995), and Jennifer Parker-Starbuck with *Cyborg Theatre* (2011).

²¹⁹ Paul Sermon, "(Dis)Embodiment" in *Intimacy Across Visceral and Digital Performance*, ed. Maria Chatzichristodoulou and Rachel Zerihan, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 179.

conflating or distributing the performance across separated locations, but by making “present” physical environments more immediately accessible to the “absent” other.

This type of remote connectivity finds its analog in the work of Dries Verhoeven. Without the use of technology, Verhoeven explores the phenomenon of being “alone together,” the sensation Sherry Turkle described as feeling both ceaselessly connected to others via telecommunications and social networking, and also isolated in the individual accessing of networked content.²²⁰ In Verhoeven’s *You are here* (2007), a participant lies on a bed in a room alone looking up at a mirrored ceiling. Then the ceiling moves up and thirty-nine other rooms and guests become visible in the mirror, as if it is “Google Earth without roofs.”²²¹ Verhoeven creates a sense of togetherness between individuals who are physically separated—and also invites questions about mapping technology and privacy. Like in *Telematic Dreaming*, Verhoeven relies on audiovisual perception to replace the sensation of touch. Augmented reality features this same reliance, but I suggest that in creating a *place* that is always in process, AR extends the perceptual reach of its navigator. Nibbelink and Merx argue that “intermediality invites a new perception and realignment of the body; one perceives what was not seen before, or one remembers what was forgotten or had been taken for granted.”²²² Augmented reality literalizes this new perception. The expanded access to instantaneous information ranges from the trivial, like learning the name of a building’s paint color, to the profound, like seeing past images of what the building used to be combined or alternated with images of what it will become alongside or superimposed on

²²⁰ Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, (Basic Books, 2011).

²²¹ Wilfred Takken, “Me, me, me,” *80cm away from you: Performances 2002-2009*, 74.

²²² Nibbelink and Merx, 227.

the present building itself.²²³ Two decades ago, Sermon was limited to two-dimensionality with the sheets functioning as a screen. Now without a screen to take the AR user out of her own locative experience, we can imagine the other becoming an *actual* part of her audiovisual perception of her environment. The two separated users share the same specific experience of *place*, the same hypertextuality, and for a moment, the same literal point of view. Through this networked participation, “agency circulates.”²²⁴ The procedural specificity of one AR user can become the formation of *place* for another, or it might become the self-reflexive navigation of the virtual spectator. This new potential to “modulate our sensorium” will have aesthetic (a purple sky!), social (a farther connective reach), and political (a controlled and monitored reality) implications that we are just beginning to explore.

New Space, New Reality

I examine both *ME3M* and *Portrait of America* to show how the collapse of spatial binaries, the experience of virtual space as physical location, generates an altered embodied experience of reality for the spectator. As Nibbelink and Merx describe, “the clash between digitally influenced perceptions and embodied presence manifests itself particularly as a disturbance of the senses and results in *the blurring of realities*.”²²⁵ Participants in both McNamara and Datuna’s works might experience this “disturbance” as an “intervention in

²²³ Lev Manovich explores the example of The Jewish Museum of Berlin, designed by Daniel Libeskind. Libeskind projects onto the surfaces of the building a map “that showed the addresses of the Jews who were living in the neighborhood of the museum site before World War II” in an example of how “the past literally cuts into the present.” Lev Manovich, “The Poetics of Augmented Space,” in *New Media: Theories and Practices of Digitextuality*, ed. Anna Everett and John T. Caldwell (Routledge, 2003), 81-82.

²²⁴ Ernst and Wagner, 182.

²²⁵ Nibbelink and Merx, 219.

synesthetic processes of perception,” a new way of sensing, as they renegotiate a reality that not only blurs the boundaries between virtual and actual, but combines them.²²⁶ For McNamara, choreographed movement through an actual environment physically locates the virtual in performance by capturing the “feeling” of the Internet, of scrolling through endless webpages by wheeling among pop-up performances. For Datuna, the use of wearable technology literally alters the viewer’s sense of *place* with superimposed hypertext. Both performances redefine performance space, making virtual space inhabitable in a way that allows physical impressions of *place* to “mobilize a process of knowing,” as increased spatial and sensory awareness resonates with socio-cultural processes in and across spaces.²²⁷

Augmented reality recalibrates the sensory system by adding new modes of perception to otherwise typical encounters with physical environments. Jameson’s critique of postmodern space is grounded in his own difficulties trying to navigate the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles where he becomes disoriented by “people-moving devices” and a postmodern architectural design that is intended for spectatorship and capitalistic consumption.²²⁸ The hyper-sensory space of the hotel confuses his ability to distinguish distance, perspective, and his own position, which feels to him like “an imperative to grow new organs, to expand our sensorium and our body to some new, yet unimaginable, perhaps ultimately impossible, dimensions.”²²⁹ Augmented reality creates a hyper-sensory space that

²²⁶ Maaïke Bleeker, “Portal: Performativity and Corporeal Literacy” in *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*, 27.

²²⁷ Producing colliding sensual impressions in performance can mobilize a process of knowing by making these acts of mediation once again perceptible,” Nibbelink and Merx, 227.

²²⁸ Daylight, 2.

makes Jameson's escalators and fountains of the hotel lobby feel quaint. Google Glass footnotes every movement, every glance. But instead of overloading the user's system, the technology does, in fact, expand her sensorium. The hypertext becomes a part of the user's way of seeing. Limitless in its potential, the presentation of data is still always initiated and directed by the gaze, operated by a physical subject. Jameson's response to this crisis of dislocation is to call for a new way of locating ourselves: we exist in a "system so large that the only way to re-orient ourselves, physically and socially, is to employ a method of mapping ourselves spatially."²³⁰ Augmented reality is this new method of "mapping" and by integrating AR in performance, contemporary artists challenge the postmodern condition of *placelessness* by placing their audience in a locatable virtual environment. Audiences navigate this new environment with an augmented sensory awareness that creates a continuously specific relationship to *place*.

In *ME3M*, virtual space is (re)produced through the actual movement of the audience members, which replicates the feeling of the Internet in performance. In this way, McNamara pairs the movement of cyberspace—clicking between tabs and scrolling through tweets—with movement in actual space as viewers (sc)roll past performers. Viewers seated in office chairs are physically moved from place to place, wheeled by performers around the theater from onstage to backstage, to a cramped corridor or upstage corner, as they are taken on a tour of "the Internet's vast depths and social platforms via a rotating set of ballet performances."²³¹ The metaphoric gesture (or gimmick, depending on the reviewer) creates

²²⁹ Quoted in Daylight, 3.

²³⁰ Jameson, 112.

²³¹ Alanna Martinez, "Ryan McNamara's Seedy 'ME3M' Ballet Redux for Miami Beach is One to Remember," *The New York Observer*, December 4, 2014.

the sensation of being in virtual space, transforming the act of moving around an actual environment into the experience of surfing the Web. In her discussion of the rhetorical applications of the Internet, Carolyn Handa connects Web navigation to the act of physically moving through geographic spaces, suggesting that we “imagine multimodal documents [Web pages] as three-dimensional spaces instead of two-dimensional surfaces—in other words, collections of rooms rather than flat pages bound within a book.”²³² McNamara moves audience members through “collections of rooms,” and this movement through geographic locations constitutes the movement through the Web as a three-dimensional space. Superimposing the virtual onto the actual combines the way a viewer actually moves through space with the way a viewer might conceive of space as an extension of movement. McNamara uses theatricality to augment the experience of an actual environment with the “feeling” of the Internet and to “make a narrative that uses the architecture of the Internet as its structure.”²³³ Virtual space becomes inhabitable as it becomes less imaginary and more tangible. Reviewers muse on this phrase—“the feeling of the Internet”—and whether the performance expresses it accurately. Alex Needham, reviewer for the *Guardian*, comments: “[t]here is something about the accretion of images, the endless distraction and the way that one thing segues into another in a logic-warping style that certainly seems like a living Tumblr or late-night YouTube session.”²³⁴ Needham is referencing the performance’s rapid transitions among dance styles, from hip hop to classical ballet, and soundtracks with jump

²³² Carolyn Handa, *The Multimediated Rhetoric of the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 154.

²³³ Performa, “Ryan McNamara’s ‘MEEM 4 MIAMI: A Story Ballet About the Internet’ at Art Basel Miami Beach,” performa-arts.org.

²³⁴ Alex Needham, “Ryan McNamara - ME3M 4 Miami Art Basel review: the web made dance,” *The Guardian*, December 3, 2014.

cuts from house music to pop. The audience shifts along with these stylistic jumps. For the Internet to *feel* like something in the first place suggests an embodied experience. McNamara's performance, then, presents the space in which these embodied experiences, these feelings, are compared and begin to mix. The experience of a performance-induced short attention span mirrors the experience of virtually browsing vast collections of content, creating moments in which that experience of virtual space animates the performance space. The performance space becomes the Internet as it "places a cast of more than 18 dancers all over the Connelly Theater in the East Village: onstage, in the wings, in the balcony, in the foyer, like so many open tabs and windows in your browser."²³⁵ Although the description uses metaphor, as does the production itself, there is also a way in which virtual space is *producing* the actual through the metaphor of movement and creating a network of physical, social, and cultural processes. Sarah Bay-Cheng argues: "In a hyper-connected, digitized culture, digital media have become an increasingly ubiquitous presence, such that the existence of a single moment in time is replaced by a continuous state of being."²³⁶ In both *ME3M* and *Portrait of America*, a single *physical location* becomes a "continuous state of being," when geographical location is perceived and experienced as unbounded. The socio-cultural effects of spatialization take on an immediate sensory dimension as users navigate a hypertextual, augmented reality.

Moving beyond metaphor, Datuna's installation creates a performance in which neither virtual nor actual space can exist independently from the other—a mixture of

²³⁵ Brian Seibert, "A Digital Performance That Moves You—Literally," *The New York Times*, November 14, 2013.

²³⁶ Bay-Cheng (2014), 48.

experiences that challenges our understanding of digital space as only imaginary and affects the way we might navigate and identify space. This element of navigation is critical to Benford and Giannachi's understanding of mixed reality performance, which argues that the spectator participates by "feeling their way through an unknown environment in order to know it, constantly renegotiating the real and virtual elements that form it."²³⁷ Viewers of Datuna's exhibit move through the Smithsonian gallery, "mapping" that particular course of national identity, and then "renegotiate" their own realities and identities when virtual data is superimposed on the physical. This intersection of locational geography and computer-based technology is known as "augmented reality" (AR). Ken Jennings gives an everyday example of AR as "those yellow 'first down' lines that appear and disappear during televised football games."²³⁸ Jennings describes how a smartphone, interacting with ubiquitous GPS locators, the same kind found in Datuna's flag, might function as a map by visually superimposing images on a physical environment based on the user's orientation such that "[t]he screen shows your current point of view but augments it with a new layer of information: as you rotate the phone, symbols appear, hovering in the air in front of you as if fixed in place."²³⁹ Datuna views his installation as a kind of "roadmap to identity and history," and in its function, the flag does act as a map.²⁴⁰ The flag contains mapping technology similar to the smartphone Jennings imagines that locates its user and then responds by altering the perceived reality of that place. In this way, *Portrait of America*

²³⁷ Benford and Giannachi, 19.

²³⁸ Ken Jennings, *Maphead: Charting the Wide, Weird World of Geography Wonks* (Scribner, 2012), 230.

²³⁹ *Ibid*, 231.

²⁴⁰ Datuna, site.datuna.com.

makes virtual space inhabitable and combines the abstract ideologies of national identity with the physical processes of perception.

Lev Manovich uses Cardiff's audio walks as an example of augmented space. He argues that by integrating recorded audio instructions with the embodied experience of a specific location the walks can "show the aesthetic potential of overlaying a new information space on a physical space."²⁴¹ Cardiff's calm directives to "walk through that door" or "look at the ceiling," combined with her more dramatic interweaving of fictional narratives, act as a type of virtual hypertext that "reshapes the physical."²⁴² Cardiff's hypertext, however, is limited to her own constructed path. In following the course that has been predetermined for them, users navigate the same existing place, only with a new map. The experience of augmented reality with Google Glass, in contrast, is the constant *creation* of this new map. Manovich argues that Cardiff's augmentation brings together the separate spaces of present and past with "the user's walk versus the audio narration, which like any media recording, belongs to some undefined time in the past."²⁴³ I argue that augmented reality can bring the hypertextual into a continuous present as it "reshapes the physical" with each step the user takes. If the user looks at the ceiling, the action prompts the hypertext—not the other way around, as per Cardiff's guided tours—and the possible sensory information layered onto that physical place is limited only by the user's ability to process it. Cardiff's audio experiments have evolved into "video walks," which more closely replicate the experience of wearable technology. In the *Alter Bahnhof Video Walk* (2012), participants

²⁴¹ Manovich, 79.

²⁴² Ibid, 82.

²⁴³ Ibid, 79.

use a video played on an iPod to navigate an old train station in Kassel, Germany. Like in her audio walks, Cardiff verbally directs the participants who are moving through the train station, but in this project, her directions encourage participants to follow the moving images of the video and keep them in frame as if they represent a viewer's own field of vision. The difference from an augmented reality experience, however, is that Cardiff contrasts the experience of a physical location with superimposed images of a past that is no longer "present." She juxtaposes and confuses realities. While augmented reality might similarly reveal what is not visibly "there," it integrates this information with a cohesive, rather than disjointed, reality.

Without the frame of a screen, Google Glass literalizes the superimposition of spaces in *Portrait of America* by virtually altering the participants' physical environment. Hypertextual data is layered over a physical location, and this synthesis constructs a particular narrative of "American" identity that viewers experience as a new spatial reality. What a visitor sees depends on her physical relationship to the flag. As Google Glass tracks her eye movements, her physical position and viewing perspective change how she engages with the art. The wearable technology communicates directly with her physical environment, adjusted based on her orientation, and alters it to link the experience to various fragmentary elements of what it is to be "in America." Datuna speaks of the installation as if it possesses its own agency: "[i]n this project, Google Glass unlocks the narrative beneath the art and initiates a dialogue with the viewer."²⁴⁴ He credits the technology with initiating communication, "unlock[ing] the narrative," by revealing a hidden layer of the physical that is only accessible via virtual interaction and a layer of American self-consciousness that is

²⁴⁴ Dauna, site.datuna.com.

only accessible via integration within a national ideology. But the technology is also dependent on the actual. The wearable technology receives cues about which images to project from its interaction with GPS locators that have been placed in the physical object and associated with the individual viewer. So the virtual responds to what is located in actual space and, in turn, transforms the experience of that place.

The GPS locators, while changing the experience of space, do not completely overhaul it, and unlike the experience of looking at the screen of a smartphone with a map on it, Google Glass produces a form of hypertextuality that transforms *place* without taking the user out of it, the way reliance on screens does. Jennings clarifies that “augmented reality isn’t virtual reality. The world [AR] shows us isn’t a new one: it’s ours, only improved.”²⁴⁵ Virtual reality implies an immersive multimedia environment, an entirely computer-simulated world.²⁴⁶ In augmented reality, the actual environment does not disappear. Google Glass, in the case of Datuna’s exhibit, interacts with the established environment, combining realms of metaphor with those of lived experience. Jennings maintains that “the world [AR] shows us isn’t a new one,” but I disagree. The augmented reality is the new space. While the viewer is not physically relocated by the use of Google Glass, her physical location becomes something different. While viewing *Portrait of America*, the viewer not only stands in front of an art installation and she not only accesses cyberspace, the viewer also enters a new place that connects both experiences. The

²⁴⁵ Jennings, 230.

²⁴⁶ As early as the mid-1990s, there have been forays into virtual reality as a performance medium, including VR productions of *The Adding Machine* in 1995 and *Machinal* in 1999 at the University of Kansas. In these productions, immersive virtual worlds were created through the combination of real-time computer graphics and projections, which the audience interfaced with through polarized glasses. Steve Dixon engages with this history both in *Digital Performance* and his article “A History of Virtual Reality in Performance” (2006).

performance space is not one space; it is multiple and connective.²⁴⁷ While other networked performances focus on the juxtaposition of digital technologies and “live” bodies, the total combination of virtual and actual elements accomplished by augmented reality allows participants to experience a type of “hyper-real,” imaginative space as a seamless part of their own field of vision.

Augmented Reality as Controlled Reality

The combination of virtual and actual elements in performance, the turning of *space* into *place*, affects the viewer’s ability to interact with, conceive of, and manipulate her realities. Interactivity can produce a performance based on individual choice, but I also argue that these participatory elements in both McNamara and Datuna’s work can manipulate the ultimate outcome of these choices. In some cases, a newly created spatial reality seizes control of the reality in which the viewer operates, dictating which course is followed, which narrative is absorbed, and which identity is adopted. Harvey speaks of the consequences of “time-space compression,” the erasure of distance achieved by global telecommunications, which “always exacts its toll on our capacity to grapple with the realities unfolding around us.”²⁴⁸ Networked performances have often highlighted the prevalence of surveillance in digital culture, like the seminal *JenniCam* (1996) that allowed viewers to watch Jennifer Ringley’s daily life through her webcam or *Gob Squad’s Room Service* (2003), a “live interactive film” that has audience members watching the performers as if through surveillance television monitors.²⁴⁹ The location-based technology that creates

²⁴⁷ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (SAGE Publications, 2007), 9.

²⁴⁸ Harvey, 306.

augmented reality increases the potential for constant surveillance, while possibly decreasing a user's awareness of it. As Manovich states, augmented reality "extends over and fills in all of physical space," suggesting an oppressive and dominant element to the total continuity of AR.²⁵⁰ McNamara critiques the ubiquity (and danger) of Web-based content, while Datuna's idealistic vision of an American narrative of freedom ironically calls attention to new ways institutions of power might determine how the world is seen.

In McNamara's *ME3M*, audience members do not "feel their way through space," but rather are pushed and pulled through it. The involuntary movement of spectators represents an augmented experience of place that dominates in its manipulation of reality. Reviewer Hrag Vartanian asserts that this theatrical experience, of being moved without agency, "successfully captures the formless expanse of the World Wide Web and the way it permeates everything, often without our permission or awareness."²⁵¹ The fact that *ME3M* remains only "semi-participatory" serves McNamara's broader critique of a digital age characterized by overstimulation and commercial "infotainment" as a failed "utopic" vision of an information superhighway that has become mundane.²⁵² Jameson suggests that this overstimulation produces an "alarming disjunction point between the body and its built environment," resulting in an individual's inability to locate herself in "the great global multinational and decentered communicational network."²⁵³ McNamara's mundane information superhighway becomes a crisis of locational identity and disorientation. The

²⁴⁹ www.gobsquad.com/projects/room-service-help-me-make-it-through-the-night.

²⁵⁰ Manovich, 83.

²⁵¹ Hrag Vartanian, "Dancing at the Speed of the Internet," *Hyperallergic*, December 4, 2014.

²⁵² Performa, "Ryan McNamara's 'MEEM 4 MIAMI.'"

²⁵³ Quoted in Daylight, 1.

removal of the spectators' ability to navigate their own reality in *ME3M* represents McNamara's view of the technologically oversaturated world.

McNamara's critique is of the capitalistic landscape of the Internet. The overload of images and music in *ME3M*—the bright, the tacky, the inescapable—represents the overstimulation of constantly closing pop-up ads or filtering spam, while jumping from BuzzFeed quizzes to cat videos to pictures of food. This experience, perhaps more familiar for upper-middle class audiences, would differ for those without a personal computer or without unlimited access to the Internet. McNamara echoes Žizek's concerns about "informational anorexia" as he criticizes the wasted potential of instant access to nearly infinite portals of information and communication: "[w]hen I think about these technological advances, you're kind of awestruck by them, the kind of information superhighway, those terms that were this utopic idea of what was going to happen [...] Over time, [it] just kind of became junk mail [...] and Spotify asking you to upgrade to paid membership."²⁵⁴ The frenetic presentation of *ME3M* suggests that the experience of virtual space now has the overwhelming potential to be chaotic and shallow, disorienting and fragmented. This sensation is a physical one. Rather than expecting the actual to disappear in favor of the virtual, movement increases the spectators' awareness of their actual surroundings as continuous streams of hypertextual content.

McNamara's critique of the failure of the Internet is similar to arguments about the crisis of postmodern space as one that results in the loss of specific relationships to place. Una Chaudhuri argues that the "erasure of spatial particularity" is one of the characteristics

²⁵⁴ Žižek, 200. Jessica Glenza, "How to make a ballet out of the web: with pop, spandex and wheelchairs," *The Guardian*, December 2, 2014.

of postmodernism, and that electronic communication results in the “dispersal of subjective experience over multiple electronic channels.”²⁵⁵ Agnew also summarizes theorists who view the world as increasingly “placeless as space-spanning connections and flows of information, things, and people undermine the rootedness of a wide range of processes anywhere in particular.”²⁵⁶ With access to instantaneous global communication, we no longer experience space and time as fixed entities, but rather must question how to locate these interactions as we question where virtual space takes place. Prompted by what Harvey refers to as a “disruptive spatiality,” this questioning of space marks a loss of spatial specificity.²⁵⁷ Both theorists were examining the condition of postmodern space, which has had two decades to evolve and expand and break even more global communication boundaries, giving us the potential to be even less connected to our sense of place. “Instantaneous” is no longer an exaggeration with connection speeds that make international video chats no longer fantastical—really, they are no longer even that exciting.

Overwhelming access to sensory information characterizes the experience of augmented reality, and the specific experience of wearing Google Glass. In *Portrait of America*, seemingly unlimited hypertextual information streams combined with the movement through the gallery can potentially blunt the specificity of a user’s sense of place. During its Presidents’ Day exhibition, Datuna’s piece—aided, no doubt, by the opportunity to try out the cutting-edge Google Glass without its cutting-edge price tag—drew overwhelming crowds. Lines were hours long as visitors waited to be fitted with one of the

²⁵⁵ Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama*, (Ann Arbor MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 3.

²⁵⁶ Agnew, 318.

²⁵⁷ Harvey, 302.

seven wearable computers, and then, once viewing the exhibit, were quickly escorted through the experience in as little as three minutes in the interest of keeping the line moving. This quick movement through an excessive space—with more information and access points than could be feasibly discovered or processed in three minutes—can contribute to a sense of *placelessness*. Robert Sack observes, “If we move quickly the places blur; we lose track of their qualities, and they may coalesce into the sense that we are moving through space.”²⁵⁸ This resonates with Marc Augé’s concept of the “non-place.”²⁵⁹ Augé observes that “non-places” are often spaces of transition, spaces to be moved through, and as a result, he argues, spaces where no “organic social life is possible” because connections to such spaces are typically uniform. With his argument, Augé participates in equating postmodern space with ambiguous space—a space that is taken for granted in the rapid movement among digital stimuli or transactional exchanges, a space that becomes a “non-place” because it lacks enough locational identity to be labeled a place. While the experience of using Google Glass to view an art installation might disorient and displace a viewer (the archived video literally displaces the experience), the gallery is not a “non-place” in Augé’s sense, but a new place. The virtual as manifested in the gallery is a place of potential—potential for interaction, for connection, and for “organic social life”—as the viewer’s location is altered, but not *re-placed*.

While McNamara’s restriction of audience agency reflects his critique of the Internet, I propose that it is the interactivity in *Portrait of America* that (incidentally) reveals the limitations of agency that augmented reality can impose on its users. Datuna describes

²⁵⁸ Robert Sack, quoted in Agnew, 354.

²⁵⁹ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (Verso, 2009).

the installation: “[f]rom a distance the sculpture can be seen as a kaleidoscopic image that unifies the whole as a symbol; on closer inspection the viewer can discern collaged books and newspapers with headlines of political and social culture, along with pop culture images of celebrities, innovators and leaders that dared to be different.”²⁶⁰ These images, as Datuna declares, “stand in witness to the history and powerful status of the celebrated emblems captured, distilled and subsequently reflected back to us for personal re-examination.” Datuna’s idealistic vision for his project, however, does not eclipse the more troubling aspects of augmented reality, especially in its production a narrative of national identity. While the viewer watches the flag, the flag watches the viewer. This symbol of national place can know and anticipate the location of its citizens as the technology collects information about its users. Lev Manovich asserts that augmented space, by design, is always also monitored space.²⁶¹ The GPS locators that locate allow for an individualized experience can also be used to monitor and report information, in similar ways to how our Internet searches and the resultant “metadata” can be accessed by companies to create personalized advertising experiences. The experience of Blast Theory’s *Karen* (2015) ends with the option to purchase a “Data Report,” a compilation of the information users shared with their “life-coach” in order to show “how seductive and insidious” data-mining technology can be.²⁶² The viewers of *Portrait of America* knew that they were being recorded, but Datuna’s “see-you-see-me” outcome, produced by recording and sharing viewing experiences, questions what it means to be “seen” in America at this moment.

²⁶⁰ David Datuna, “David Datuna Creates a New Visual Language With His Groundbreaking Viewpoint of Billions Series: Portrait of America,” *Viewpoint of Billions*, Kiwi Arts Group, site.datuna.com.

²⁶¹ Manovich, 78.

²⁶² Sophie Weiner, “Can This Dysfunctional Life Coach Make You Care About Privacy Rights?”, *Fast Company*, April 14, 2015.

If Datuna's "roadmap to history and identity" offers an idea of what it means to be American, then surveillance also constitutes a part of this identity. It is a part that Datuna would rather exclude, however, in favor of a more idealistic national narrative. He curates this re-examination of history by selecting what he believes to be the timeless, instantly recognizable images worth representing. These images reflect progress, historical achievement, and celebrity. Datuna, who emigrated from Georgia during a time fraught with government corruption, celebrates America as a place of cultural and artistic freedom. What Benford and Giannachi call the "canonical trajectory," which is "prescribed and embedded into the original structure of the piece," can serve to limit the freedom of the viewer as Datuna's constructed narrative and Google Glass's brand of hypertextuality both work to manipulate the experience of the redefined place of performance.²⁶³ The viewer can interact with the installation, can orient herself in whichever way she chooses, but the experience is limited by the content. The "trajectories" may be multiple, but any path will participate in communicating Datuna's messages. This limitation represents one of the dangers of "place-making." Corralling the unboundedness of *space* in order to make meaning unlocks the potential for an unequal or arbitrary distribution of power. Datuna participates in his own "place-making" project when he positions "American" identity as a fixed location. The integration of *place* with *space*, in this instance, serves to manipulate the reality the viewer is able to navigate.

"Viewpoint of Billions": Multiplicity as Specificity

Even with the limitations imposed on users through their interaction with augmented reality, this interactivity still offers the potential to generate a multiplicity of perspectives. In

²⁶³ Benford and Giannachi, 54.

ME3M, involuntary movement fragments the experience of each viewer and creates multiple individual perspectives of the performance. *Portrait of America* creates individual perspectives on “American” identity and culture as a viewer’s movement changes the content of the work they are presented with. The variability of audience experience, of the ability to renegotiate both physical and ideological positions of accepted narratives, reflects the augmented nature of *place* as, what Kurt Vanhoutte refers to as, a “continuous network of embodied states of presence that are increasingly defined according to participation and agency.”²⁶⁴ When the virtual “takes place,” audiences experience *place* not as a location with fixed boundaries, but as a mutable state of potential for social, cultural, and political engagement. In *Dissolved*, the intentional dissonance between the separated performance sites displaces the experiences of its participants as they find themselves “half there, half not there.”²⁶⁵ Fragmentation in augmented reality, however, positions its user in a perpetually specific “here” by continuously constructing *place* as it responds to the physical orientation of its user, creating a multiplicity of perspectives that are also always site-specific.

McNamara’s “semi-participatory” audience might suggest how technology controls our society, but it also misses the active ways in which we must mediate our own experiences with virtual space. This navigation defines my experience as a virtual spectator, and informs the way McNamara’s performance space participates as virtual place. Spectators chart their own “trajectories” when actions and narratives become “emergent and unpredictable.”²⁶⁶ Bored (or exhausted) with the stimuli of their surrounding environment—

²⁶⁴ Kurt Vanhoutte, “Embodiment,” in *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*, 45.

²⁶⁵ www.stationhouseopera.com.

²⁶⁶ Benford and Giannachi, 54.

stimuli that copy that of the Internet—audience members in *ME3M* seek escape in their own screens as they begin to look at their smartphones during the performance, as Needham documents.²⁶⁷ In this literal way, virtual space is layered into an actual performance space that mimics the way virtual space feels. Viewers scroll through their news feeds while being rolled past gyrating bodies that are meant to represent those “friends” on social media. The distraction of the audience members might serve McNamara’s commentary on reduced attention spans and “infotainment” culture, but their use of smartphones also exhibits how an unstructured moment in performance can demonstrate the specific intersection of actual and virtual spaces.

In *ME3M*, the dolly-induced changing sightlines limit the viewing experience but in doing so, also serve to make the performance environment a “dynamically charged space.”²⁶⁸ As viewers are carted around to different areas of the space, they witness different “mini-performances”—some watch a lone man brooding in a corner while completely missing the couple in a backstage hallway who seem to be slowly fleeing something—exhibiting how no two viewers have the same experience. The audience is split up, experience fragmented. The constant movement and relocation of audience members results in a multiplicity of different viewing perspectives. This performance space is as Manovich describes of augmented space, “a space whose shapes are inherently mutable, and whose soft contours act as a metaphor for the key quality of computer-driven representations and systems: variability.”²⁶⁹ RoseLee Goldberg notes how viewing perspectives in *ME3M* mimic

²⁶⁷ Needham, “Ryan McNamara - ME3M 4 Miami Art Basel review.”

²⁶⁸ Manovich, 81.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 88.

the experience of accessing digital space: “[y]ou’re on your computer. I’m on mine. We’re seeing totally different things.”²⁷⁰ And not being able to see everything highlights the unfettered nature of virtual space, the Web’s resistance to confining spatial borders. Audience members, aware of the multiple layers of content available in the performance space, also resisted having their spatial perspective bordered. As Andrew Russeth observes, “[p]eople craned their necks to look around, to catch all the action, but you knew there were things you were missing out on.”²⁷¹ The physical limitation, reflective of a specific individual experience of sitting at a computer screen, demonstrates a geographical space altered by a conceptual understanding of the virtual. For a spectator, understanding that there is “more” to the performance space than what she is seeing changes the way she interacts with it. The movement of both chairs and necks reminds viewers that entry into a virtual realm still requires the physical body.

Interactivity in *Portrait of America*, the individual navigation of Datuna’s roadmap, produces a diverse representation of cultural identity and generates individual viewing perspectives that, Datuna hopes, will contribute to his goal of creating a “Viewpoint of Billions.” The experience of the installation becomes individualized as the functionality of the technology responds to the movements and navigation of the viewer. If I approach the recognizable flag and look in the direction of a picture of the cartoon characters, Tom and Jerry, located on a red patch beneath a re-purposed eyeglass, and am, as a result, treated to an animated cartoon that plays in the upper right quadrant of my field of vision, I may

²⁷⁰ Quoted in Glenza, “How to make a ballet out of the web.”

²⁷¹ Andrew Russeth, “‘ME3M’ at the Old Playboi Theater, Ryan McNamara Opens Miami Basel With a Stunner,” *ArtNews*, December 3, 2014.

briefly consider entertainment and its relationship to American culture—or I may just laugh along with the antics. Another viewer, watching a video of the Wright brothers’ first flight, may engage with the history of technological advancement and connect that to her current experience of wearing a computer on her face. The viewer is free to move, to look at any section of the flag, limited perhaps by her own vision (some viewers, in having to take off their own glasses to wear Google’s, complained of blurriness when viewing), and the installation reacts accordingly. The viewer has the power not just to interact with the media but also to manipulate it, to actively create a performance and become a part of the art itself. Technology, in combining the actual with the virtual, creates a viewing experience that is individual but not singular, one part of a kaleidoscopic whole that functions much like Datuna’s collage in characterizing the pluralism of “American” identity.

The specifically constructed viewpoints explore cultural identity “not as a single profile, but as the sum of many different perceptions and ideas.”²⁷² The technology-generated perspectives also expand the idea of a traditional portrait, suggesting that the *Portrait of America* is not just the flag or the recognizable images embedded within it; it is also those viewers who engage with it and whose videos are shared across space to make a new kind of portrait. The “billions” of viewpoints include not only the wearers of Glass who actually view Datuna’s flag but also the viewers who can access *those* viewpoints online. Uploaded to YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Datuna’s website, videos that capture the physical experience of navigating Glass and the installation provide a virtual entry point into that physical space. From California, I can see into the Smithsonian. And then I become an additional viewpoint. And my viewpoint is also individual and more than a little bizarre. As

²⁷² Datuna, site.datuna.com.

an online viewer, while I cannot manipulate the images I see, I become an alternative spectator of Datuna's exhibition. I can see the flag as the Glass user sees it, the details set beneath the eyeglasses, and I can see the movement of the Glass user as she interacts with the art, her face moving closer to read the fine print, her head bobbing in and out of the frame to explore the full height of the flag. I am seeing someone else's act of seeing. From my actual environment, a living room "unaltered" by the use of Google Glass, I enter into a virtual representation of an actual environment "augmented" by technology. The layers of digital landscape here seem endless. Similar to McNamara's rabbit hole that finds audience members accessing virtual space on their smartphones while participating in a representation of virtual space in their actual environment, multiple and simultaneous spaces compose my own digital experience of *Portrait of America*.

Although Datuna's flag presents the expectation of what it means to be "American," his roadmap must still be followed, and the technology must be mediated. Interactivity produces a variable space where participants encounter and readjust their positions to accepted historical narratives. If Glass users "opt in," the installation will ask them questions, heard through the bone-conduction technology of the worn device, which transmits sound directly to the inner ear through the bones of the skull, and their responses are picked up and recorded by the device's microphone. Like the rest of Glass's interactivity, these questions are based on the direction of a user's gaze, and range from "[w]ho is your favorite president?" to "[w]hat is your favorite social media platform?" I spent a few hours watching the recorded responses on Datuna's various platforms. There are 2011 videos posted on YouTube, 2449 on Tumblr, and a combination of 1696 videos and

pictures on Twitter.²⁷³ Needless to say, I did not make it to every video. Each clip is ten seconds long and was intended to include the visitor's response to a prompted question. The clip does not include the questions (which were initially transmitted to the visitor through bone-conduction), but they were easy to infer as visitors blurted out "Barack Hussein Obama," or "[y]es, we need technology!" (Although I was particularly confused by the outburst, "[f]ame is a sword!") These divergent "participant trajectories" create an "emergent network of viewpoints" that can serve to challenge established notions of authenticity through their variability.²⁷⁴ I watched as people stood in silence, confused, while other visitors milled about in the background. I watched as people asked for clarification, only to be cut off at ten seconds. I watched as people repeated "[n]o, no, no," apparently trying to "opt-out" of Glass's questioning. I observed the diversity of experiences. From my own actual environment, I accessed the actual environment of others. While this access does not replicate the experience, I watch how each experience with the performance space is specific, and in imagining that spatial experience, I experience my own space as a "pincushion of stories," as a dynamic and mutable process of engagement with others and their positions.²⁷⁵ This action of self-reflexivity, central to virtual spectatorship, extends the *place* of performance as a process that can be shared and continued by those in remote or separated locations. The destabilization of site, in this instance, expands the performance to include multiple, specific perspectives.

²⁷³ The number of posts and viewcounts are as of January 2014 and reflect the overlap of response videos found on each of the sites, making the total number of responses closer to 2000, rather than the sum total of uploads on each site.

²⁷⁴ Benford and Giannachi, 47.

²⁷⁵ Doreen Massey, "Doreen Massey on Space," interviewed by Nigel Warburton, Transcript of podcast, *Social Science Bites*, 2013.

The Social Potential in Locating Virtual Space

ME3M and *Portrait of America* demonstrate how access to physical experience through virtual means can open up a space for *actual* connection. The virtual may be, as Doreen Massey asserts about space in general, a product of interrelations, “constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny.”²⁷⁶ Massey’s understanding of space as a dimension that involves our social relations and connections to one another is made material in embodied interaction, just as the virtual is constructed both communally and intertextually. I argue, then, that augmented reality and the virtual continuation of performance offer the potential for social connectivity by increasing participants’ awareness of the other in moments of both actual and virtual cohabitation. Just as Verhoeven “gets the individual to create a new link” between “the individual and the outside world” by having participants “take a closer look at [themselves] and [their] surroundings,” the sensory realignment of augmented reality extends the site of networked interaction and performance beyond the screen and into the physical environment itself.²⁷⁷ While postmodern theorists argue that geographic conflation results in the loss of “real” social connection, McNamara’s performance demonstrates the virtual experience of forming community from isolation and Datuna’s exhibit and digital archive challenge physical presence as the primary means of connection.

ME3M can create a sense of isolation for the viewer through the constantly fragmented perspectives, but the viewer is never truly isolated. Viewers are moved in groups, placed in lines or distorted semicircles, where they can not only be aware of those

²⁷⁶ Massey (2007), 9.

²⁷⁷ Takken, 74.

seated next to them but can also witness others rolling through the aisles or being placed in front of a wall of mirrors. Again the Internet is represented in this simultaneous combination of the singular and multiple, of the experience of being “alone together.” The act of accessing digital space may differ for every user based on factors that affect what ends up on their screens but the experience of this access is that of connection. Whether or not any direct communication with another individual is made, surfing the Web comes with the awareness that we are not surfing alone. We are sharing virtual space with millions of other users, featured in the views on a viral YouTube video or the inflammatory comments on an editorial article. As with fellow audience members of *ME3M*, other Internet users are often anonymous, but their proximity can always be felt. Paddy Johnson communicates the dual sensation of separation and of sharing performance space: “[a]t the end of the performance, I was bewildered and disoriented, and only then thought to look for my friends. We’d been separated from the get-go, but the whole time I was wheeled around the theater, I hadn’t once felt alone.”²⁷⁸ The experience of virtual space in the actual environment is the “result of a network of collaborations”²⁷⁹ that mix elements of the physical and digital and enable cohabitation in a space that is generally conceived of as metaphorical.

There are moments in McNamara’s performance when viewers share screens, when they watch the same section of performance. But there are also moments when the shared connection is looser, less actual, when viewers share the *experience* of being at a screen, like when audience members recognize the same Beyoncé song blaring from the speakers and share the space of familiar cultural knowledge. In this way, virtual as *place* is constructed

²⁷⁸ Paddy Johnson, “The Ten Best Exhibitions of 2014,” *Art F City*, December 31, 2014.

²⁷⁹ Benford and Giannachi, 24.

intertextually, “linking the performance environment to matrixes of cultural, geographical, and historical addresses.”²⁸⁰ Viewers also share a sense of spatial literacy. When McNamara moved *ME3M* to the Art Basel Festival in Miami in December 2014 (where it then became *MEEM 4 MIAMI*), it was staged at the Miami Grand, which in its former life was the Playboy Theater. Martinez observes that the location “has all the trappings of a former den of sin [...] the halls are dripping with the sensual glow of red lamps” and Russeth overheard rumors that “Hugh Hefner once had a bedroom overlooking the stage.” The performance environment becomes an additional performer and an additional layer of information for audience members to “read” and navigate. For those audience members, a specific sense of place was immediately established in a geographical location with specific associations attached to it. Handa argues that it is the ubiquity of images that allows for connection, creating a simultaneous experience for two separated parties or generating a recognizable language through the repetition of familiar images.²⁸¹ McNamara’s performance demonstrates how access to ubiquitous content and unlimited communication does not always coincide with failed connections in actual locations; rather, it is the communication itself that links the physical to the virtual.

While certain scholars have suggested that a condition of postmodernity is that interpersonal connection comes at the cost of losing connection to space, in the case of *Portrait of America*, technology extends the place of performance to increase the possibilities for connection.²⁸² The cameras embedded in the flag record the viewer, while

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Handa, 154.

²⁸² Slavoj Žižek suggested that the elimination of distance between people would eliminate the connections between them in *The Plague of Fantasies* (Verso, 1997).

Google Glass records what the viewer sees, and these recordings, placed side by side, are uploaded onto a digital archive. Once the videos were archived, the performance moved to a virtual space and re-located the experience of viewing the exhibition. And the performance continues in this new performance space as the gallery visitors become part of the art. Datuna speaks of his goal of using technology to create connection, stating that “[i]t’s not about technology, it is about engagement. As artists we have to look at new and creative ways to engage a 21st century audience. Google Glass is merely a tool to assist with expanding my narrative [...] My concept behind including Glass is clear, how do I reach the most diverse and widest possible audience on a large scale to communicate my messages?”²⁸³ Datuna suggests that wearable technology allows the connection of a physically separated audience that “could literally allow thousands of people to express their thoughts and become part of [the] art and the ideas behind it.”²⁸⁴ The space connects the augmented environment of the exhibition with the actual environment of the online viewer. The actual experience of the installation may be highly individual based on physical orientation (some shorter visitors did not even make it into the frame), but the online viewer, tuning in months later from the comfort of an armchair, has access to the multiplicity of these experiences. I see different angles of the flag, hear different responses, and watch different faces. These different perspectives become “historical trajectories,” traces of the ephemeral performance moment that are extended and continued through their digital archival.²⁸⁵ This is how Datuna hopes to reach his billions, by posting responses online and

²⁸³ Datuna, site.datuna.com.

²⁸⁴ Leigh Silver, “Portfolio Review: Google Glass Artist David Datuna Explores Perception by Painting with Lenses,” *Complex*, June 19, 2014.

²⁸⁵ Benford and Giannachi, 254.

bringing his installation to more people in different places. The wireless communication and use of Internet technologies distribute the performance across multiple spaces and create new possibilities for interpersonal connection.

The conflation of performance spaces mirrors the telematic experience of video chatting. Mark Poster, writing before Skype and Facetime were commonplace, worries about the effects of telematic space: “[i]f I can speak directly to a friend in Paris while sitting in California, if I can witness political and cultural events as they occur across the globe without leaving my home [...] then where am I and who am I?”²⁸⁶ Poster worries about a crisis of identity, a typical postmodern loss of connection to place that has damaging consequences for personal subjectivities. Žižek similarly worries that the “disappearance of contact with ‘real’ bodily others” caused by the erasure of distance that separates individuals will mean that “a neighbour will no longer be a neighbour.”²⁸⁷ In true postmodern fashion, the technologies meant to connect the world may actually cripple social connection. And in some sense, as a virtual spectator, after watching hundreds of ten-second clips, I lose any sense of the individual. Each video looks almost the same: the screen split with the flag on the left and the visitor (what the flag “sees”) on the right. The automatic upload cuts three minutes of content into ten seconds, standardizing a specific individual experience. A visitor starts to have a conversation with an attendant about how consumed we are with technology and our Facebook pages, but my access to that space is truncated before I learn whether or not the visitor recognized the irony of that statement. With videos labeled “GATF5” or “CMVUC,” like character names in a dystopian novel, my experience of virtual space feels

²⁸⁶ Mark Poster, quoted Una Chaudhuri, 4.

²⁸⁷ Žižek, 199.

more in line with McNamara's criticism of the failed utopia of the Internet age. And as for the viewpoint of "billions," I was the first viewer on most of these videos, leading me to question whether Datuna's vision might have been "hyperbolically hopeful" after all.²⁸⁸ The limitlessness of the Internet, in this sense, might pose a limitation to the actuality of social connection. The possibilities for connectivity via spectatorship exist—you can click your way through the content if you so choose—but with the competition posed by an infinite number of other choices, the possibility for social connection might not always become a reality in the same ways.

Despite critics' cries to the contrary, with augmented reality, individual subjectivity is not just displaced, however; it is shared. Employing what Suk-Young Kim refers to as "technologies of seeing," *Portrait of America* can potentially collapse the mediatized distance between physical and virtual experiences.²⁸⁹ Kim uses the example of South Korean museum spaces using technology to virtually recreate the Korean Demilitarized Zone, making "the unsharable nature of historic pain" potentially "sharable."²⁹⁰ The simulated environment produces a "kinesthetic sensation of physically interacting with those spaces," and opens up a space where visual and virtual representations connect to actual places. Similarly, in Open Source Art's *The Machine to Be Another* (2015), a user sees real-time video, through immersive goggles, of another user's recorded point of view. The effect is of embodying another person. Google Glass, however, does not attempt to simulate site-specificity or replace a user's lived reality with a completely different one; instead, it

²⁸⁸ Sam Dangremond, "Art Appreciation Through Google Glass," *Town&Country*, December 2, 2013.

²⁸⁹ Suk-Young Kim, "Staging the 'Cartography of Paradox': The DMZ Special Exhibition at the Korean War Memorial, Seoul," *Theatre Journal* 63, no. 3 (2011): 382.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 386.

depends on a user's physical environment and I argue it functions as a "technology of seeing" by altering how physical reality can be experienced. This experience is then shared, transported to another virtual and kinesthetic experience, where it can generate the sensation for the online viewer of actual interaction in the gallery space. The sensation is not visceral: this is not a sharing of trauma as in the DMZ exhibits. Mostly it is lighthearted as the technology captures amazement, delighted giggles, wide-eyed curiosity, and ten-second tutorials on how to navigate this new reality. But access to these viewpoints constitutes an "ideological act of seeing," an engagement with a particular political ("Barack Hussein Obama!") and cultural ("[y]es, we need technology!") position.²⁹¹ This act of seeing, a continuous extension of perception in and across spaces, displaces physical presence as a means for connection and kinesthetic experience.

ME3M and *Portrait of America* express a shift in the way technology, whether metaphorically or actually, will continue to be integrated into performance, and how site can be reclaimed as a specific concept. Moving away from performances that juxtapose the virtual with the "live" and from interactive interfaces that seek to transport its users "elsewhere," augmented reality's form of interactivity produces a *place* of performance that functions as an uninterrupted network of specific interactions among environments, technologies, and others. In an interview about Datuna's exhibition, Neal Stimler, an associate digital asset specialist at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, envisions that "[w]earable technologies can be utilized as a tool to foster human connections between peoples and inspire new creativity in art, as well as industry. Human beings may come to

²⁹¹ Ibid, 385.

better understand the present and imagine the future.”²⁹² Ken Jennings imagines that “you could even use AR to turn the world into your own surreal wonderland, changing the color of the sky every thirty seconds or putting a werewolf mask or Groucho glasses on the face of every passerby,” altering reality and actively creating a performance.²⁹³ The variability of this new performance environment affects the spectator’s and performer’s ability to identify and manipulate their own realities, and in doing so, highlights how experiences of *place* and *space* present us with Massey’s “most political of questions which is how are we going to live together.”²⁹⁴ The possibilities for how technology might seamlessly blend virtual space with the physical experience of an actual environment in performance seem endless as performers and spectators occupy these two places at once. With augmented reality, virtual co-presence is no longer only imagined; it is actualized. Nonphysical modes of connectivity enable new forms of participatory access to performance, across geographic and possibly socioeconomic barriers. Different perspectives might be literally shared—and these perspectives might be shared unknowingly. Whether augmented reality as a performative practice features as an aesthetic gimmick, transformative innovation, or contribution to a surveillance state, it will continue to redefine spatial realities.

²⁹² Jillian Steinhauer, “Smithsonian Brings Google Glass to the Museum,” *Hyperallergic*, February 11, 2014.

²⁹³ Jennings, 232.

²⁹⁴ Massey (2013).

V. A Game of Performance Telephone: Creating Continuous Chains of Site-Specificity

In my previous chapters, I have explored how the increasingly diverse interrelationships between technology and performance have destabilized definitions of both site and specificity. This destabilization is met with anxieties over artistic authenticity with regards to the experience of liveness, presence, and affect and over the potential deadening of social connection and individual orientation within the world. I have consistently argued against a deterministic view of networked technologies, arguing against binaries that pit virtuality against reality. Contemporary performance practices, instead, utilize technology to actively produce hybrid spaces, like the superimposition of augmented reality, that offer new forms of co-presence and participation in performance. My case studies thus far have displayed how the interactions among networked technologies, spectators, and performers across multiple locations can invite new conceptualizations of *site* and what a specific relationship to *site* might look like. These works challenge Pearson's singular definition of *site-specific*, expanding the term's usefulness—and yet, none of the works themselves claim the term. PearlDamour opts for “community-specific,” the Globe's marketed site-specificity ignores its broadcasted element, and the combination of performance art and Google Glass claims a novelty that defies categorization. For my final case study, then, I wanted to design a performance experiment to test how these emerging spatial theories might directly and intentionally apply to theories of site-specific performance. The experiment's primary objectives were: 1) to create new avenues for contemplating how we conceive of and experience space in the digital age; 2) to investigate technology as a co-creator of performance space; and, 3) to rethink the stakes of spatial specificity in performance. Could technology (re)create the conditions Pearson deemed necessary for site-specificity? Could a

reciprocal relationship between location and performance be maintained once a performance leaves that location? How might absence create co-presence, distance create connection, and replication create originality? I hoped the experiment might constitute a response to the crises of non-specificity facing the theater, demonstrating how digital displacement does not destroy specificity, virtuality does not annihilate space, and networked technologies do not deplete interconnectivity.

My experiment is a nation-wide game of Performance Telephone. The Performance Telephone project has not yet completed its run. A performance was staged in Santa Barbara, CA in October 2015, Fort Collins, CO in February 2016, and Tucson, AZ in October 2016. Future performances are slated for Seattle, WA and New York City. I attempted to choose performance locations that represented diverse communities and theater scenes, and that were also relatively distant from one another. I contacted directors who I had previously worked with, whose styles and approaches I knew would be diverse. In both Fort Collins and Tucson, the productions were staged as a party of a community-run Fringe Festival. The performance order was determined by practicality and the specific availability of each production group. I produced the first leg of the project, staging a play in Santa Barbara, California, where we filmed it and then digitally passed it to another group in Fort Collins, Colorado who mounted a new production using only the digital video they received. The Fort Collins video was then sent to Tucson, Arizona, where the process was repeated. The project will move on to Seattle, Washington and New York City before its completion. In each new staging location, the production team only has access to the most recent video to make all their staging decisions. The project takes its name from the classic parlor game where a whispered phrase is passed down a line of participants, one at a time, until the end

of the line is reached and it is revealed how much the original phrase has transformed.

Unlike its namesake, with Performance Telephone, the goal was not necessarily to keep the message intact by reproducing it exactly; rather, the emphasis was on finding new ways for site to inform performance and for people to share space despite distance.

In designing my experiment, the first challenge was selecting a play. The process would not treat the text as original source material—as the text itself would not travel—but the play would serve as a beginning. Regardless of the details of the first production, I knew the play itself would continue to evolve. The adaptive process of Performance Telephone displays the divergent nature of production histories, the genealogies of difference that emerge from interpretations of a single starting point. Texts as starting points, even in conventional processes, however, are never singular. They are already palimpsests, layered with meanings, associations, and references. So as I considered how a starting point palimpsest (the play) would snowball into an increasingly layered entity, I wanted the experiment to begin with the blankest slate possible—even as I acknowledged the impossibility of neutrality. For this reason, I opted to commission a new, text-based play. This decision already marked a departure from Pearson’s purist definition of site-specificity as the piece would not be developed organically from its performance space. I was interested to see if the play could *belong* in multiple spaces, in the strictest sense of the term, and having the first group devise a piece from a local environment (an option subsequent groups would not have) felt like it might skew belonging in the direction of Santa Barbara. I contacted Diana Lynn Small, an Austin-based playwright who had spent her college days in Santa Barbara, and gave her the rundown of what the experiment entailed, what the rules would be for the directors, and what the objectives of the research were. I asked her to write

a play with an attention to space, something that would ask directors to make inventive and daring staging choices. This was not necessarily a departure from typical playwriting, as each play might be site-specific in a playwright's mind, but I can imagine an increased vulnerability of a playwright having to let go of her text one leg into the journey. Certainly, texts are at the mercy of a director's vision but in many processes the words on the page constitute the starting point. Given the conditions of the experiment, Small and I discussed a play that would be moveable without written words as the reference point. However, we didn't want the play to belong *anywhere*, vague and placeless; we wanted it to belong to different somewheres based on the combination of challenges presented in the text, the limitations of diverse locations, and the resultant theatrical solutions produced to stage the play. Small wrote *Reasons: The House Burned Down*, a play with realistic settings, expressionistic transitions between them, and scattered moments of magical realism.

The play follows Tiffany, a young woman whose house has recently burned down. Tiffany's face is set in a permanent smile, a medical condition she's endured since birth. She tries to tell the tragic story of losing her house at an open mic night in a dive bar, desperate for the audience to empathize with her, but the disconnect between the emotional content of her language and the expression on her face proves frustrating. (Even the fireman at the scene of her burnt house compliments her on her positivity.) As Tiffany navigates the aftermath of the disaster— encountering her ex-boyfriend concerned about the fate of their cat, enlisting a chorus of “creepy animals,” à la Cinderella, to help rebuild her house, marrying a billionaire for his money who loves her for her beautiful smile—the truth about the house fire is revealed: it was a last desperate effort by Tiffany to change her face. The darkly humorous and often absurd text, populated with multi-page, poetic monologues,

moves Tiffany among a dive bar, a construction site, and a hot tub in Aspen as it explores the limitations of language and expression.

I co-directed the first production in Santa Barbara, along with Haddy Kreie. I wanted to be involved in the initial set of interpretive choices to better be able to identify and speculate on the differences that would follow in the project's progressions. As the first leg of Performance Telephone, we had the familiar process of working directly from the script and realizing the production onstage. (To call it an advantage would suggest a competitive component to the game but there is certainly a convenience to familiarity.) The next production team would work exclusively from the video of our Santa Barbara performance—they would not receive the written script of *Reasons*. This meant that future productions would not have access to Small's cryptic stage directions like, "*The loud sound of penguins who don't give a shit about you.*"²⁹⁵ The decisions we made in Santa Barbara about what penguins look and sound like while not giving a shit would become an entirely audiovisual reference for another group, either to be replicated or replaced. The penguins might indeed give a shit a few iterations from now. Our decisions in Santa Barbara already layered the text with interpretation but how would this specificity be transmitted with only the audiovisual for reference? Would Small's written text be recognizable by the end of the process? The qualities of Small's writing, peculiar but not rigid, demand specific and variable choices in direction. "*A miraculous display of hammering by Tiffany*" can either be portrayed literally or as comedic pantomime.²⁹⁶ Alternately, I can certainly imagine a production team procuring an onstage hot tub, but given the spatial and financial restrictions

²⁹⁵ Diana Lynn Small, *Reasons: The House Burned Down*, unpublished, 20.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 21.

we were working within in Santa Barbara, some inflatable arm floaties would do the bulk of the representational hot tub work. These representational gestures are not compromises falling short of a textual expectation but the result of the peculiar ambiguity of Small's work that would help us track specificity across diverse locations and processes.

The directing challenge, as already stated, was to stretch the definition of belonging and make *Reasons: The House Burned* belong to multiple places in specific ways. This challenge felt different from, for example, making *Hamlet* belong to a new proscenium or scaffold stage for the duration of its running time. Our emphasis was on finding a space where the text could feel at home but in a nonliteral way. The text's style was not hyperrealistic and so we did not want the environment to feel that way (no hot tubs or burnt down buildings). We were looking for found spaces where the space could perform alongside the text—and which would accommodate our own specific limitations of a limited budget and short rehearsal time. The goal was to find a space that could match the tone of the play, highlight its themes, and add a visual depth to capture the performative richness of the stage directions for the next group.

We settled on an outdoor space at the Barnsdall-Rio Grande gas station, a historical and abandoned remnant from the 1930s. The station was built to service the neighboring oil fields, once the most productive in the world, and was constructed in Spanish colonial style, forty feet high with white plaster walls, blue and white ceramic tiles, and a red mission roof. The playing space was a large patch of dirt and gravel adjacent to the gas station and its protective chain link fence, which was located only a few feet removed from a major street. Visible across the way was a cluster of new houses under construction. The staging was not site-specific in Pearson's sense, but sensitive to the themes and tones of the play. The

dilapidation of the old gas station, its acquired grime, oil stains, and general disrepair, resonated with Tiffany's description of the scene of her destroyed house, while the new construction visible across the street reflected her own rebuilding process.

As the first group, we worked with a constant awareness that our performance might literally set the stage for the subsequent ones. While this did not affect what kinds of choices we made, we did think about what would be transmitted. Logistically, we had to consider the clarity and volume of the recording. We performed *Reasons* outside, against a backdrop of incessantly zooming traffic, making audibility a constant concern. What would happen to the text if the audio was not satisfactory? We accepted the inevitability of disappearance and the role of gaps and fissures in the creation of a dynamic, performative archive. But there is an acute sense of preciousness that develops knowing that some of your favorite staging choices might not survive—and beyond that, might not ever be seen by later groups. Tucson has no way of knowing, during their process, that there was ever an actual Toyota Corolla used in the performance because we couldn't be sure if other groups would replicate our specific choice. These variables informed our Santa Barbara specificity and by the time we passed it onto Fort Collins, *Reasons: The House Burned Down* was a multi-layered transmission.

The filmed Santa Barbara production was uploaded to Google Drive and the link was emailed to Heather Ostberg Johnson in Fort Collins. The video was sent with a brief description of the aims of the project: to experiment with space across space. I wanted to leave the relationship to site-specificity open to interpretation (as the term inevitably always is) and instead emphasize an attention to spatial practice. By leaving this open, I also hoped not to skew the findings of the experiment or to preempt an analysis before it occurred.

However, I recognize that the freedom granted to each production team also leaves the experiment open to multiple variables that would be beyond the scope of my investigation. Further investigations might include the specificities produced from community theaters versus fringe festivals, from groups with funding or without, and the impact of institutional support, access to rehearsal space, and the presence of professional actors. Furthermore, this experiment produces numerous questions regarding how the audiovisual reference is interpreted, different directing styles and approaches to an unconventional challenge, and varying audience expectations. I invited all these specificities and then determined to refine my focus to space and technology once the project had completed. I also sent production groups the rules of the game as a means of guiding their process with the experiment's objectives in mind.

The rules sent to each performance group were as follows:

1. **REHEARSE FROM VIDEO.** The rehearsal process should begin with and center on the video of the previous performance. The video should be treated as the “script”—all staging, design, and acting decisions should be based off of it. The written text may be used only if it is required by an actor for memorization but it should not be referred to in rehearsal.
2. **MAKE CHOICES ABOUT HOW TO CONNECT YOUR PERFORMANCE WITH THE VIDEO.** You may choose to follow the video closely or not at all, to make it recognizable or make it new. Blocking does not need to be recreated exactly but there should be some moments of continuity, whether literally or abstractly interpreted, that

demonstrate points of connection between your performance and the previous one. Let the other space of performance inform and inspire your own space.

3. PERFORM IN “FOUND” SPACE. Find an unconventional performance space (non-purpose built theater) for your production. This does not need to be *site-specific*, however you understand that term, and can be either indoors or outdoors. As with the rest of the staging decisions, the choice of performance space should be informed by the space of the previous performance—however loosely interpreted that might be.

4. FILM YOUR PERFORMANCE AND UPLOAD THE VIDEO. Have at least one of your performances filmed. This does not need to be professionally done but the quality of the video should be high enough for another group to work off of it. Upload the video to either YouTube or Google Drive and send me the links. I will pass the video on to its next destination.

The rules emphasize a group’s agency to interpret rather than replicate the previous performance in order to discover how a physically absent site of performance can directly affect another. How do the particularities of one location become the site-specifics of another? For example, how does an outdoor performance in sunny Santa Barbara weather relocate to Colorado in the middle of winter? I wanted to track how one spatial specificity relates to and informs another.

In order to track how the project evolved, I retired to a purely spectatorial role for the subsequent productions. I viewed the Fort Collins productions, first in person and then later on video. My physical presence in Fort Collins was a different kind of access than that available to director Gretchen Wirges and her Tucson production team. I was not able to be

in Tucson during the “live” performance dates, so I watched the video of their performances, my access similar to the next group’s. While I was not able to experience the physicality of the Tucson space in a conventional sense, I was still able to observe and identify what made this group’s choices specific. My virtual spectating experience, similar to how each leg of Performance Telephone experiences their source material, allowed me to reflect on the digital reach of a performance. How does specificity transfer digitally, with all its imperfections and limitations? My own evolving participation—from directing to physical spectatorship to virtual access—paralleled the dynamism of a digital and performative archive. There are gaps in my own experience, biases from my directing process, limitations to my audiovisual connection—all blows to the objectivity of a scientific-based inquiry and to the comprehensiveness of the experiment. And yet, the incompleteness of my own record participates in challenging the stability of the archive, in the digital move toward displacement, dissemination, and difference.

I report on this experiment as it currently exists, offering observations on what has happened so far and projecting hopes for what might continue as the telephone keeps ringing down the line. Any conclusions I draw from the three performed legs are preliminary but I think offer a clear sense of what new theoretical work this project can open up. My record, then, is made up of my own directing process, multiple viewing perspectives from Fort Collins, a YouTube video of Tucson, and conversations with cast and production crew of both past and future productions. At the end of the process, all of the videos will be made available in sequence on Google Drive.

From this collection, an ever-changing archive, I present an argument about how technology participates in the creation of spatial specificity. In its process, which is still

continuing, Performance Telephone offers a new way to conceptualize of presence and its relationship within performance. The project becomes a final case study in a series of investigations into the crises facing contemporary understandings of space and the performative practices that offer a response to them. I envision Performance Telephone as an attempt to encompass a response to each of these crises with an aim to demonstrate how digital connection can produce spatial specificity in and from multiple locations simultaneously. I have examined how others' definitions of site-specific performances often privilege physical presence and maintain that the performance cannot be moved from its performance site, but I argue that virtuality can be used as a tool for specificity by expanding the reach of performance and its spaces beyond physical definitions of "site" and across separated geographies. The expansion of site-specificity, its extension beyond a singular location, redefines performative archives, as *site* is exemplified as a continuous, palimpsestuous process. By creating a continuous chain of linked performances, the interaction between physically separated environments demonstrates how a site-based performance can be based on a physically absent site.

In Transit: Movement as Adaptive Generator

In the parlor game of Telephone, the goal is accuracy. The mission of each link in the chain is to reproduce the message exactly as it was heard, to keep the original intact. The joy of the game, of course, is in the inevitable failure of this mission. Differences in pronunciation or vocal quality disrupt the message's clarity, ambient noise affects the audibility, and pranksters might sabotage accuracy in favor of comedy. Combined with a

game-wide prohibition on providing clarification, multiple factors can result in a final message that bears ridiculously little resemblance to the original.

The simple delights of this game reflect larger concerns in adaptation studies. In comparisons between an original and adapted text, adaptation theory privileges fidelity as the mode of evaluation.²⁹⁷ Does the message stay intact through its transmission? Is the original text still recognizable by the time the adapted text is presented? An emphasis on fidelity contributes to, as Robert Stam establishes, “the unstated doxa which subtly construct the subaltern status of adaptation.”²⁹⁸ The derivative nature of adaptation becomes regarded as inauthentic, a lesser aesthetic form in service to the implied original. The digital age has multiplied anxieties about the inauthentic. Walter Benjamin’s “Age of Mechanical Reproduction” has become an age of mass and instantaneous digital recording and distribution that exponentially outpace the photographic and filmic forms that troubled Benjamin’s aura. Immediate and unlimited access to digital reproductions formed the basis of Ryan McNamara’s postmodern critique in *ME3M*, in which he mourned the loss of the material album in favor of individually curated Spotify playlists.

Digital reproduction has made the notion of singularity valuable. As consumers search for “something that is not mediated through globalized capitalism,” the market ironically shifts to accommodate and offer up a unique, material object.²⁹⁹ Site-specific theater emerged as a reaction against the reproductive, capitalistic forces of the visual art world, privileging Pearson’s irreproducible experience. Predictably, the emphasis on

²⁹⁷ Anja Muller and Mark Schreiber, “Sam 2.0: Appropriations, Interpretations, and Adaptations of Beckett on Youtube,” *Contemporary Drama in English* 16, (2009): 186.

²⁹⁸ Robert Stam, “The Theory and Practice of Adaptation,” *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (Wiley Blackwell, 2004), 4.

²⁹⁹ Russell Cobb, *The Paradox of Authenticity in a Globalized World* (Springer, 2014), 1.

ephemerality and physical presence acquired cultural and fiscal capital. Performance Telephone questions the persistent appetite for authenticity, revealing its outdated qualities while validating multiplicity as inclusive of both variation and specificity. Performance Telephone materializes the work of digital reproduction. The digitally transmitted adaptations (not the exact copies McNamara critiques) demonstrate how challenging material authenticity effectively destabilizes notions of physical presence and other ideological constructions privileged in performance studies.

While efforts have increased to embrace the instability of intertextuality and to deconstruct the devaluation of derivation, Performance Telephone focuses directly on the process of transmission rather than a final product. Emphasis on process and an embrace of the digital deemphasize fidelity to an original and opens up space to examine points of connection that are not bound to constructed notions of textual accuracy or material authenticity. Digitality is well-suited to the variability of the adaptive process. At a technical level, the difference between *digital* and *analog* is in how each process transmits information. While *analog* transmits information as a continuous signal, *digital* represents the variable quantities in terms of actual numbers. The *digital* can be seen as taking “snapshots” of the complete line presented by the *analog*, meaning digital representation will always have gaps, noticeable or not, in what it displays. Analog systems use electrical signals that become analogous with the original but both systems employ means of encoding, meaning neither has a claim on literal representation. While the experience of both technologies on an audiovisual level might be indistinguishable, digitality offers a metaphor for a reactive form of adaptation. Digital information need not have an invariable,

one-to-one relation to the representation it produces.³⁰⁰ The possibility for instantaneous movement between noncontiguous segments (in contrast to the sequential movement of analog manipulation) allows for a freedom of interaction and reactive adaptation. While adaptation theory reflects the stated rules of Telephone, the Performance Telephone project embraces the game's delight in failure. The differences that evolve from performance location to performance location represent newly produced spatial specificities that are connective and multiple, rather than isolated and singular. Understanding site-specificity as an adaptive process created by digitality challenges accepted intertextual and intermedial hierarchies.

Performance Telephone highlights the process of adaptation but instead of focusing on a transmitted text, the project explores site as the adapted form. Site becomes the transmitted message. Here I use *site* to include all the spatial and place-bound factors that might inform a performance, from the demographics and particular resources of a community to the topography and physical details of the performance location. How can the qualities of *site*, material and immaterial alike, be adapted elsewhere? Touring companies contend with this issue each time they move a production from theater to theater. The emphasis here remains on fidelity, on how to capture the "truth" of the original staging site in a new space. When the Globe goes on tour, for example, the house lights are often kept up, illuminating the audience, in order to replicate the open-air feel of London's outdoor Globe in an indoor space. However, if direct replication is not the intention, what would it mean to adapt a site-specific performance? With *site* already an unstable concept, its adaptation further destabilizes the notion of an original's claim to a singular authenticity.

³⁰⁰ David Saltz, "Live Media: Interactive Technology and Theatre," *Theatre Topics* 11.2 (2001): 107-130.

In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon defines adaptation as “repetition without replication” which encompasses both the “urge to consume and erase the memory of the adapted text” and “the desire to pay tribute by copying [it].”³⁰¹ The rules of Performance Telephone reflect the “urges” of this process: make new choices that are informed by the documentation of previous choices. In some ways, this process reflects a conventional text-based rehearsal process that engages with plays that boast centuries-long production histories. With the focus on transmitting site, however, the source material can never be stable. Performance Telephone creates a chain of derivatives that represent Hutcheon’s view of adaptation as “creative” and “reactive.”³⁰² The response of one production team to another, the creative and reactive process that moves the production from place to place, makes each setting an active participant in the performance and produces a continuous series of hybrid performance contexts.

The different settings of each performance, from Santa Barbara to Fort Collins to Tucson, demonstrate how site might be actively adapted. In Santa Barbara, spatial specificity was linked to the outdoor space. On the edge of the space, tucked near some small trees, a Toyota Corolla was parked, as if it had just pulled off the road. The audience stood in the center of the dirt as the actors rotated around them, like a reverse in-the-round configuration. Actors played in front of the chain link fence, from within and on top of the Corolla, and with their backs directly to the traffic that would noisily rush by. If a semi truck happened to pass by, both the dialogue and the view of the housing construction project would be eclipsed for a moment. One of the rules for the game of Performance Telephone is

³⁰¹ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (Routledge, 2012), 7.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 8.

that groups should pursue alternative staging options. The staging was not site-specific in Pearson's sense, but sensitive to the themes and tones of the play. The dilapidation of the old gas station, its acquired grime, oil stains, and general disrepair, resonates with Tiffany's description of the scene of her destroyed house. Tiffany's face is set in a permanent smile, a medical condition she's endured since birth. She tells her story at an open mic and the scene shifts between a dive bar, a construction site for the rebuilding of her house, and a parked Toyota Corolla that serves as her home until then. The transition between scenes is non-realistic and often features a chorus of "creepy animals" that have befriended Tiffany along the way. And with an actual Toyota Corolla and housing construction across the way, an expressionistic version of Tiffany's reality set a specific scene in Santa Barbara.

This specific setting was filmed and sent to Fort Collins, Colorado, where under the direction of Heather Ostberg Johnson, a performance group mounted another production of *Reasons: The House Burned Down* using only the video from the Santa Barbara performance. The staging decisions in Fort Collins demonstrated how physical aspects of a remote location can become a part of another distinct environment. Fall in Santa Barbara is just as balmy and sunny as its summers, but February in Colorado was not as accommodating to an outdoor performance. In Fort Collins, *Reasons: The House Burned Down* was performed in an art gallery against a backdrop of bright yet macabre abstract paintings. The stage was set up like an open mic, complete with onstage piano and a fully functioning microphone. (With its own spatial specificities to contend with, all amplified sound in the Santa Barbara production was blasted from the sound system of the onstage Toyota Corolla.) Behind the stage space was a set of double glass doors that revealed a large mural of colorful and angular cats. The surrounding artwork, filled with cartoonish skulls

and neon-colored blood, highlighted the dark comedy of the play and Tiffany's struggle to communicate grief from behind her smiling face. The climax of the play comes as she manically describes her beloved cat's death in the fire, just as the audience's attention is pulled to the outdoor mural with the opening of the glass double doors. This moment treated the audience to a blast of fresh (and frigid) air and was an intentional nod from Johnson to the production's first outdoor performance.

Johnson spoke to me of her goal to capture "the shape of a scene." She knew the reverse in-the-round configuration could not work in a gallery but looked for ways to replicate the fluid and circuitous movement the open, outdoor space of Santa Barbara allowed. Again, touring companies and revivals face similar challenges. For example, the recent national tour of the acclaimed musical *Fun Home* had to translate the intimacy of the in-the-round configuration of the Circle in the Square Theatre into much larger proscenium auditoriums around the country. Performance Telephone, however, moves beyond an attempt to "pay tribute" to static design choices or to capture the original and reproduce it as closely as possible within inevitable limitations. Players in this game of telephone remain reactive to the multiple qualities of site, not just its physical architecture. The Fort Collins team did not set out to recreate the experience of being outdoors within an enclosed space; instead, they used staging techniques that reflected the openness of the Santa Barbara location. In transitioning between scenes, actors in Fort Collins entered from outside, from the audience, from behind a piano, from the gallery's bar with the bar's stools in hand. Expressionistic gesture sequences—of open mic spectating, of creepy animal transformations, of house construction—marked the change of scenes and captured the transitory feeling that propelled the Santa Barbara production from imagined place to place.

As a creative process, Hutcheon argues that adaptation consists in “re/interpretation motivated by diverse desires.”³⁰³ The Fort Collins group created a stage space based on their mediated access to a specific type of topography, interpreting how an abandoned gas station can manifest in an art gallery.

When the play moved from Fort Collins to Tucson, director Gretchen Wirges mounted her production around a constructed puppet show stage. This decision continued the role of puppetry highlighted in the Fort Collins production. (I will discuss the specific evolution of puppetry in each production as an example of a site-specific palimpsest in the next section.) The three settings—gas station, art gallery, puppet show—are radically different locations in terms of architecture, design, and audience expectation. But each setting represents a response to the previous environment, and this emphasis on a reactive adaptive process creates a connection, material or otherwise, between the disparate spaces. In answer to Pearson’s suggestions that site-specific performances can never be separated from their sites, each subsequent performance in the telephone chain cannot be separated from the environments that came before it. The physical place of one performance, as it is experienced digitally, becomes a part of these new contexts and creates a new way of intentionally connecting performance to site.

The divergent yet connected iterations of Performance Telephone represent Joseph Roach’s concept of a “genealogy of performance.” In *Cities of the Dead*, he defines this genealogy as the “unraveling of the putative seamlessness of origins...it is at once a map of disaporic diffusions in space and a speculation on the synthesis and mutation of traditions through time.”³⁰⁴ Roach emphasizes the relationship between synthesis, something new

³⁰³ Ibid.

created through the combination of different forms, and mutation, something new created through divergent transformation. In both cases, difference also involves commonality. Performance Telephone explores how a digitally-produced “diasporic diffusion” can create a palimpsestic genealogy. The play’s movement across multiple spaces disrupts the stability of a singular original as it evolves, or mutates, over time. A major mutation from Santa Barbara to Fort Collins was the disappearance of the onstage Toyota Corolla. In the Santa Barbara production, the use of a fully-functional car, rather than a constructed set piece, added a hyperrealistic element to the space. The specific match between actual make and model and the character’s text suggested a particular fit between site and text. How could this site-specific relationship be translated into a different space without using another Toyota Corolla?

In Fort Collins, the inclusion of an actual automobile was not a logistical possibility in the gallery space. So the group had to adapt. In the literal sense, “to adapt” can mean “to fit.” A site-specific adaptation, then, takes a performance that fits somewhere else (like a text that fits with its Toyota Corolla) and (re)fits it somewhere new. In Fort Collins, rather than attempt to reproduce the car by constructing a prop, Johnson transformed the Santa Barbara fixture into clowning sequences. In transitions from the dive bar setting to Tiffany’s makeshift car-home, the full ensemble enacted scenes of mimed driving. Bodies became both car and driver navigating confusing intersections, honking horns, and managing road rage. Packed lines of actors, with their hands on imaginary steering wheels, moved one jolting step at a time to depict bumper to bumper traffic. The immediately recognizable

³⁰⁴ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (Columbia University Press, 1996), 30.

series of repeated gestures and physicalized humor indicated the shift in scene, and as Tiffany exits her invisible vehicle, the new scene is set containing her automobile.

The substitution of movement theater for a car became a full-blown mutation when passed on to the next stage. Working off of the Fort Collins film, Wirges and her Tucson group only had access to the clowning sequences. They had no way of knowing that an actual Toyota Corolla was used in the first production and, thus, were unlikely to replicate that Santa Barbara-specific choice. In Pearson's purist view, the car's disappearance would mark a loss of site-specific aura. He speaks of performances that are only "intelligible," or "readable," within the specific contexts of their site—a perfect and unrelenting fit. Roach also uses the notion of intelligibility in his discussion of changes made to codified acting styles throughout history: "Acting styles regulate the intelligibility of performances by authorizing certain substitutions as appropriate and proscribing others as meaningless or false. When critics agree that an actor has been miscast in a role, they implicitly refer to an error of substitution within a generally intelligible stylistic code."³⁰⁵ Roach's language of the appropriateness of substitutions relies on audience expectations and the authority they hold. If the Tucson audience had expected a Toyota Corolla, its total absence may not have been an intelligible choice. But does the omission in any way cheapen the production, especially for an audience that does not have access to any form of comparison? These radical transformations, from automobile to movement theater, are not necessarily recognizable to an audience that has not seen the first performance. Even if the audience is unable to consciously see the connection or have the same affective experience of perfect weather year-round, the experience of spectatorship in Fort Collins and Tucson is informed by the

³⁰⁵ Joseph Roach, "Power's Body: The Inscription of Morality as Style," *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Historiography of Performance* (University of Iowa Press, 1989), 100.

actions of those miles away. Each subsequent segment of Performance Telephone is actively informed by a combined theatrical and digital spectre, which serve as a form of connection rather than as a form of evaluative comparison. The co-present traces from the past inform the substitutions that make their presence invisible to the audience, but rather than threatening the intelligibility of a performance, the direct response to historical performances creates a new context in which the present performance is readable. The digitally constructed performance genealogy ensures these new specificities remain connected to each other without subscribing to an authoritative original. Site-specificity becomes a dynamic network of continuous production and reconstruction, embodying the concepts of movement and plasticity that once seemingly threatened its survival.

Layers on Layers of Specificity

The chain of digitally-communicated adaptations create linked performances that can belong to multiple places at once. The differences between each production are not concessions to an original but indicators of a continuous specificity that challenges singularity and expands the language of site-specific theater. Differences and continuities alike create a layered palimpsest that illustrates the digital role in mediating the (re)construction of production histories.

Performance Telephone reflects the increasing performative hybridity of digital landscapes. Navigating the Web is always a layered process, moving between pages constructed from metadata—information collected from previous browsing activity that essentially constructs a map that is continuously self-referential. The digital transference of performance from city to city was not a one-to-one transposition, as demonstrated by its

reactive adaptation, but rather a diverse, multi-referential process that mirrors the qualities of digitality itself. Hutcheon refers to the “multilamination” of adaptation, the palimpsestuous layering that keeps the past visible in the present.³⁰⁶ Performance Telephone’s emphasis on process, on digital transmission and the connection from link to link, creates multiple layers past performative and spatial practices that enable a physically absent site to be present elsewhere. The continuities among all three legs represent how site can accumulate and continue. A multi-sited, and thus multi-textual, accumulation of performative contexts and actions challenges the singularity of site-specificity. Performance Telephone, in creating a digital palimpsest, demonstrates a new form of site-specificity that is not ephemeral or isolated but continuous and connective.

Palimpsests allow multiple versions of events to be written over each other—with each version still visible under the layers. Viewing space as a layered entity has been popular for site-specific practitioners. The specific connection between performance and site relies, for them, on the physical remnants of the past still present in the ruins or the soil or the constructed landmark. Additionally, the affective qualities of site, which a director hopes to mine for a performance, depend on considering the invisible (or immaterial) aspects of history that might exist beneath the surface. Even if the slate has been wiped of the historical event, the traces, as Schneider has constantly argued, remain. In the Globe’s battlefield *Henrys*, the physical battlefield site was literally layered with the graves of soldiers but also with the “haunting” produced by the active evocation of a historical battle and its consequences. Pearson gives an example of site-specificity’s fascination with geographically-bound palimpsests in his collaboration with archaeologist Michael Shanks in

³⁰⁶ Hutcheon, 6.

their book *Theatre/Archaeology*. For Pearson, archaeology offers site-specific theater “a stratigraphy of layers: of text, physical action, scenography, and architecture (and their subordinate moments),” combining a vocabulary of strata and fragments with narratives, traces, past, and absence.³⁰⁷ Archaeology is positioned as a performative process, “an enactment of the past in the present,” making site-specific performance an archaeological investigation of place.³⁰⁸ The “dig” of site-specificity focuses on unearthing the narratives embedded in the strata of a particular place and making visible the palimpsestuous layers.

Pearson’s approach is limited to materiality, to the location that contains and produces these traces. Performance Telephone expands the archaeological process by introducing digitally-constructed traces to the interpretive spatial practice. Palimpsests inherently allow for multiplicity through the intersection of their many layers. Digital space, similarly, is inherently a multi-layered entity and the adaptive process of Performance Telephone creates layers of specificity that are moveable. The locational specificity of Santa Barbara, as it transfers to Fort Collins, becomes a new specificity—but this specificity is not a blank slate. Santa Barbara becomes a layer, a fragment in the strata, in Fort Collins’ performance. The historical layers of the historical gas station at Ellwood, evoked by the Santa Barbara performance, become the im/material traces present in the staging at a Fort Collins art gallery. Unlike Pearson’s performances, which are fixed to a pre-existing location and set of archaeological finds, this palimpsest is actively created through transference. The palimpsestuous possibilities multiply when one location’s site-specificity is inextricably dependent on a geographically distant site-specificity.

³⁰⁷ Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology* (Routledge, 2005), 24.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

The continuous specificity constructed by the repeated adaptive layering represents another challenge to the crisis of a digitally-induced sense of placelessness. Just as the pursuit of authenticity criticizes digital reproduction, postmodern critiques of technology value spatial singularity as a form of identity stabilization. Miwon Kwon suggests that site-specific performance arose as a response to “the sense of alienation and fragmentation in contemporary life” and the imperative to consider “the nature of the tie between subject/object and location,” which was accomplished by considering the “interplay between place and space.”³⁰⁹ Multiplicity, and the presumed resultant spatial ambiguity, poses a perceived threat to the subject. Performance Telephone demonstrates how spatial specificity can be multiple, fragmented, and continuous. Cathy Turner considers the complexities of positioning the self with regards to the composition of site, citing Probyn’s image of the self as “a combination of acetate transparencies: layers and layers of lines and directions that are figured together and in depth, only then to be rearranged.”³¹⁰ The metaphor of the self as a layered entity, a palimpsest constantly being rearranged, questions the stability of placed-ness touted by deterministic critiques of technology. Performance Telephone offers a new metaphor, a new digital map, still in process, that reflects the multilaminated tensions of the mapped subject, its “fixity and fluidity, ambivalence and ambiguity, transparency and opacity, and surface and depth.”³¹¹ Specific and multiple, virtual and grounded, the digital palimpsest of Performance Telephone opens new avenues to consider how spatial arrangements affect spectator/performance experience and identity.

³⁰⁹ Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (MIT Press, 2004), 8.

³¹⁰ Cathy Turner, “Palimpsest or Potential Space? Finding a Vocabulary for Site-Specific Performance,” *New Theatre Quarterly* 20.4 (2004): 378.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

The digital palimpsest is formed by (physically) absent collaboration. Decisions made in Santa Barbara inform those made in Fort Collins and subsequently affect the process in Tucson. The connective, additive process creates a virtual map that links locations that (re)produce and respond to one another. The underlying layers of the palimpsest, imprints made by previous production groups, are found in the evolution of particular theatrical elements tracked through all three performances. For example, the role of puppetry in each performance demonstrates how continuity connects each location, as a particular staging choice in Santa Barbara remains visible, albeit altered, two iterations later in Tucson. In the text of *Reasons: The House Burned Down*, Tiffany recreates a conversation between her childhood self and her negligent father for the crowd of an open mic night at a dive bar. In the dialogue (in which she plays both parts) she references how her father left behind his red, silk slippers when he left his marriage and child and she pulls out the artifacts to use as props in her drama of abandonment. In the Santa Barbara production, Tiffany used red socks as the slippers and wore them on her hands as sock puppets to enact the dialogue. The puppets would speak back and forth, left hand as the father to right hand as childhood Tiffany, respectively bobbing up and down in a rudimentary indication of speech. Performed with the ever-present smile on her face, the quick play-within-a-play reflects an attempt by Tiffany to emotionally connect with others despite her condition by opening up about the pain of the past. The choice to make slippers into sock puppets underlines the play's exploration of the performativity of emotional expression.

Seeing this moment in the Santa Barbara production, Johnson both replicated the scene and took the sock puppets a step further in Fort Collins. While in Santa Barbara, the

sock puppets were just socks worn on Tiffany's hands and personified, in Fort Collins, a fully-constructed sock puppet took on an entire role. Johnson replaced a male character, an old billionaire whom Tiffany eventually marries for his money, with a large grey sock outfitted with bushy cotton ball eyebrows, a full beard, and age-betraying ear hair. The old billionaire puppet was always operated by the actor who played Tiffany's young ex-boyfriend. When the two competing love interests shared a scene, the actor played both roles at once with no pretense at ventriloquism. The visible artifice of the puppeted performance paralleled Tiffany's own puppet show, an artifice openly acknowledged in the text. Johnson's decision to cast the billionaire as sock puppet connected Tiffany's relationship with her father and his socks to her relationship with all the men in the play. When speaking to her future husband (Billionaire), she could never escape her past in the present puppet operator of the Ex-Boyfriend. The newly prominent role of the puppet in the Fort Collins production highlighted the gendered expectations of emotional performativity. The evolution of puppetry served both as a commentary of the patriarchal presence in Tiffany's life and as a visible continuation of the Santa Barbara production.

As the play continues to evolve with each new movement, it becomes a historical record of a particular place's engagement with the piece. Fort Collins expands to include Santa Barbara, integrating the distant specificities within its own and making its own marks that will become the traces present in Tucson. Tucson director Gretchen Wirges, working solely off the Fort Collins video, continued puppetry's role in highlighting issues of gender in the play. The stage was set as a puppet show, with a simply constructed, box-like proscenium occupying most of the centerstage playing space. The puppet show stage served as the open mic venue, while the outdoor locations were played around the constructed box.

The Ex-Boyfriend remained both character and puppeteer, but now every other male character—not just the billionaire—was represented by a hand puppet. When Tiffany’s house burns down, she interacts with a fireman who is too distracted by her smile to provide her the necessary information about the fire and its status. When Tiffany starts reconstructing her house, woefully insistent on completing the task herself, a male contractor shows up to mansplain what a house is: “And then those walls? They go up this way so then at the top of them there’s a roof! ... And then there’s pointy roofs that go up to make a triangle? Those are house roofs!”³¹² The visual similarities of the hand puppets become a thematic continuity of Tiffany’s limitations in and resistance to a patronizing patriarchal system. And it is the continuity between different performance locations that produces this thematic continuity. Santa Barbara’s socks became the sock puppet billionaire in Fort Collins which then transformed into the all-hand puppet male ensemble in Tucson. The Santa Barbara staging decision was not completely overhauled; rather, it gradually mutated over time through a series of layered responses. Fort Collins, when sent to Tucson, was already underwritten with Santa Barbara. Wirges in Tucson, then, was not responding to a blank slate so that even if she did not have access to the film of the Santa Barbara production, her staging decisions continued to build on the layers produced in the spatially and temporally distant performance. The performance project becomes a mobile palimpsest, connecting past to present, distant to proximate, with its collection of both material and immaterial elements over time.

In the creation of the constantly evolving digital palimpsest, Performance Telephone produces a co-creative continuity that is based on physical absence. The digital layering

³¹² Small, 25.

offers a reimagining of Pearson and McLucas's site-specific terminology of the *host* and *ghost*. With their Welsh performance company Brith Gof, Pearson and McLucas describe site as a layered entity, as a host that is haunted by a performance, or ghost. Just as Pearson's collaboration with archaeologist Michael Shanks emphasized, the host is not an empty vessel waiting to be filled by a performative presence, but a site "where previous occupations are still apparent and cognitively active."³¹³ A site-specific performance, as the haunting ghost, is always played upon a palimpsest at the intersection of "the complex superimposition and co-existence of a number of narratives and architectures, historical and contemporary."³¹⁴ Each subsequent Performance Telephone production is always played upon the superimposition of numerous locations, their specific contexts, and relationships to space. Site, always in process, is then continuously (re)produced via digital transmission.

Pearson and McLucas's *ghost* is assumed to be transparent: a site-based work reveals the site beneath it. Through the ghost's structures and narratives, the layered space of the host is visible. Cathy Turner describes the palimpsest of site as "formed by lived experience, so that the givens of the site-specific performance comprise not only the machinery of 'place,' but also the patina it has acquired with past use."³¹⁵ The "patina" of the site(s) of Performance Telephone might be the movement sequences that mimic an outdoor venue turned makeshift puppet show. Or it might be the reappearance of a unique (and trivial) prop that remains visible through two separate ghosting performances. When the billionaire proposes to Tiffany, her astonished reaction combined with his self-professed wealth

³¹³ Pearson and Shanks, 111.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Turner, 374.

suggest the presentation of an impressively-sized engagement ring. In order to amplify the farcical and absurd quality of his character and the practical arrangement made between him and Tiffany (“You smile and I buy you things!”), the Santa Barbara production opted to use a Ring Pop in place of a realistic looking diamond. A Ring Pop is a brightly colored lollipop in the shape of an oversized diamond positioned on a wearable plastic band. Tiffany opens the candy’s package and places the ring on her finger, where it remains comically visible for the remainder of the show. In one moment, instead of kissing Tiffany, the billionaire sucks on the lollipop ring in both a humorous and disturbing gesture. Despite the seeming insignificance of the detail, both the Fort Collins and Tucson productions continue the use of the Ring Pop. The specificity of Santa Barbara, then, becomes clearly visible in each new location. If puppetry was a sort of foundation upon which the other productions built, the Ring Prop, in its total ridiculousness, displays the transparency of each subsequent ghost, a moment when the past comes piercing through into the present. The continuity marks each performance as connected to a physically absent specificity.

The palimpsest is not ever entirely transparent as new spatial specificities are created. Multiple absent locations co-exist with the physically present one, making it unclear who is haunting whom. Networked technologies are activated by our use of them. Networks are pre-existing spaces readily available for haunting—but then the digital spectre, the Santa Barbara performance mediated by a screen, haunts its subsequent recipients. The tension in the coexistence of host and ghost reflects the process of producing site through performance. Turner refers to this tension as “finding equilibrium in a reciprocal process of mutual haunting.”³¹⁶ The co-creative process of Performance Telephone relies on reciprocity for its

³¹⁶ Ibid, 384.

continuation. The ghost of a previous performance haunts a current production host. The host is informed by the ghost, using one specificity to inform its own, as it ultimately rewrites the previous site and becomes its own ghost to a new host. Turner suggests that the ghost can be “transgressive, defamiliarizing, and incoherent,” offering resistance to the continuation.³¹⁷ The text of *Reasons: The House Burned Down* includes the lyrics for five songs. The songs are Brechtian in nature in that they feel disruptive and unnatural in the context of the play and provide commentary on the action. The final song is even titled “This is a Parable,” announcing, “This is a parable / a story to teach you well.”³¹⁸ No music, musical direction, or notes on tone are included in the script, leaving the interpretation and execution of the songs completely open-ended. In Santa Barbara, the songs were all accompanied by ukulele, composed and played by the actor performing as Ex-Boyfriend. He strolled amongst the audience in the reverse in-the-round configuration like a wandering minstrel. Fort Collins departed from this unplugged approach, opting for a more fully-produced sound akin to an open mic performance. The songs were re-composed and performed by a musician separate from the character ensemble on an onstage piano. Tucson eliminated the music completely and delivered the song lyrics as spoken word poems. In each iteration, the host resists the influence of the ghost. In Tucson’s decision to opt out of a musical score, the previous performance layers become slightly opaque. Rather than erasing the previous layers, the accumulation of site can combine the individual identity of each participating production, co-creating hybrid ghosts and hosts. As Santa Barbara, Fort Collins, and Tucson simultaneously contribute to a single performance, they embody how

³¹⁷ Ibid, 374.

³¹⁸ Small, 47.

Turner describes an aspect of site-specificity as the distinction between “what is ‘of’ the site and what is brought ‘to’ it” might “disintegrate within the performance process and event.”³¹⁹ As Tucson is haunted, it also creates. The digital creation of spatial specificity across distance is co-creation, full of transparent continuities and divergent modifications.

The slippages between *host* and *ghost* can create meaning within the interpenetrating structures of continuity and divergence. The digitality of Performance Telephone, further undermining the stability of *site*, also demonstrates how the layering of virtual and actual elements creates new forms of specificity. The virtual presence of previous performances in “live” ones represents the reciprocity of past and present that characterizes remediation. The interplay of physical presence and technological virtuality brings to mind the Wooster Group’s 2007 *Hamlet*. TWG’s *Hamlet* places mimetic live performance in front of a filmed version of the 1964 stage production featuring Richard Burton in the title role, in what is described as a “gesture-by-gesture duplication” of the onscreen action.³²⁰ The onstage digital haunting creates a palimpsest where the 2007 actors write directly over the visible 1964 ensemble. Director Elizabeth LeCompte speaks of “channeling the ghost of the legendary 1964 performance...intentionally replacing our own spirit with the spirit of another.”³²¹ Much has already been written about the ghostly presences, who appear and disappear from the background screen, in an intersection of ghosting bodies: the archive remediated, the (re)performing physical bodies, the disappearance/reappearance of both bodies in the form of online content. I further this discussion by emphasizing TWG’s digital construction of a

³¹⁹ Turner, 374.

³²⁰ Ben Brantley, “Looks it Not Like the King? Well, More Like Burton,” *The New York Times*, November 1, 2007.

³²¹ Wooster Group, Program for *Hamlet*, dir. Elizabeth LeCompte, 2007.

palimpsestuous performance history as an example of how the virtual repositions the discipline's relationship to authenticity, spectatorship, and connectivity.

Echoing Carlson's oft-cited "ghosting" terminology, Alexa Huang argues that Shakespearean performances are always palimpsests "on which performances constantly erase, re-write, and gloss" because "for the Western audience, Hamlet has always already begun, far before the performance is staged."³²² Similar to how every production of *Hamlet* is haunted by the centuries of staging decisions made previously, each leg of the Performance Telephone journey is generated specifically from the staging decisions made immediately before it. TWG's *Hamlet* literalizes the play's genealogy of remediation. LeCompte, rather than staging an adaptation, presents a literal demonstration of how older layers permeate the new, with each making reference to an elusive original by, "reconstructing a hypothetical theatre piece from the fragmentary evidence of the edited film, like an archaeologist inferring a temple from a collection of ruins."³²³ The digital screen becomes archaeological artifact made manifest, an active presencing of the past through a seemingly immaterial form embodied through the replicative work of the Wooster Group's bodies. TWG's *Hamlet* plays its own parlor game, aiming to keep the message intact while aware of their inevitable failure. The imperfections of the digital content—its repeated skips and gaps—points to the impossibility of a completely faithful reproduction and the inevitability of the fragmentation of the historical narrative. The New York Times' Ben Brantley referred to the production as an "aching tribute to the ephemerality of greatness in theater;" and yet, fragmentation does not denote complete disappearance.³²⁴ The

³²² Alexa Huang, "Shamlet: Shakespeare as Palimpsest," *MIT Global Shakespeares*, 2014.

³²³ Wooster Group, 2007.

1964 production may not be made “perfectly live” again but it does reappear as a layer in a co-creative, adaptive process that constitutes an intersection between live actor, archived performance, and virtuality. Performance Telephone similarly demonstrates the tension between the present moment’s continuity with and inaccessibility to past performance—a tension made all the more complicated by the digital’s reconstitution of the “here and now.” As a virtual spectator of a filmed version of TWG’s *Hamlet*, Ayanna Thompson comments on how the digitally accessed performance “captured a recording of a production about the impossibility of capturing and re-experiencing past performances.”³²⁵ The impossibility references the fragmented (re)appearances of both ghosting bodies, and the reviewed “hollowness” of the attempt at reconstruction. I argue, however, that these fragmented (re)appearances, made possible by the superimposition of the virtual and actual, become agents for creating new contextual specificities. The incongruences between Tucson and its previous performances do not herald the disappearance of those foundational layers. Rather, they represent a repurposing in a new local context that, through theatrical (re)production, has the potential to intertwine the threads of intertextuality and interculturalism. The specificity of reactive adaptation in a new cultural location, affected by the virtual spectre, reflects the emergence of a globalization that both diffuses and sustains a multiplicity of forms and origins.

Performance Telephone challenges the view of virtuality as decontextualized space. Reviewer Robert Brustein critiqued TWG’s *Hamlet* on the basis of its technological placelessness: “LeCompte has left Elsinore for Media City, a technological complex that is

³²⁴ Brantley, 2007.

³²⁵ Ayanna Thompson, “Introduction: Popular Shakespeares: Modes, Medias, Bodies,” *Journal of Narrative Theory* 41.3 (2011): 314.

located out of literature, out of culture, indeed out of history.”³²⁶ To qualify a performance characterized by its attempted (re)production of history as existing “out of history” seems ironic but represents the popular conception of digital communication as an annihilator of specificity. N. Katherine Hayles details how critics perceive digital technologies as having turned information into a “free-floating, decontextualized entity,” in which information is separated “from context and thus from meaning.”³²⁷ This comes with the assumption of digital communication’s “stable value,” the assumption that digitality can flow unchanged between its different material endpoints.³²⁸ While the pattern of signals transmitting from Fort Collins to Tucson might remain unchanged, the digital communication is actively participating in the process of (re)contextualization. Physical absence becomes digital presence, locating one location within another. Rather than ahistoric, each Performance Telephone performance is a direct response to history. The palimpsest to which each new performance add its layer reflects multiple specific engagements with site.

Information technologies in Performance Telephone are never separated from context; rather, they are inextricably linked to the specific contexts of multiple locations at once. The inextricability of one location from another reflects Lefebvre’s views on how space is constructed: “The past leaves its traces. Time has its own script. Yet this space is always, now and formerly, a present space...Thus, production process and product present themselves as two inseparable aspects, not as two separable ideas.”³²⁹ Space is continuously

³²⁶ Robert Brustein, “More Masterpieces,” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 30.3 (2008): 6.

³²⁷ N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago UP, 1999), 19.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

³²⁹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1992), 17.

produced by the overlap of the past made present. The traces of the past become the present aspects that define the experience of a particular site. The structures of Performance Telephone produce a new version of Lefebvre's "lived space," a spatial practice that is always produced by the continuous tension of a contemporary site in relationship with a historical one. In Lefebvre's concept, this production relies on physical co-presence, the overlap of the same geographical location over time. Performance Telephone complicates the process of spatial production by superimposing a past and *absent* location on a contemporary performance event. This becomes, as Turner speaks of site-specific work, the "rewriting of space through a new occupation of site in tension with what precedes it."³³⁰ In this new occupation of site, the previous occupations of that physical site, in addition to an absent physical one and virtual space, are still apparent and "cognitively active" in both a co-creative friction and continuity.

The digital becomes a space of rewriting, of active (re)contextualizing, that challenges theater's focus on the phenomenological experience of physical presence. The accumulation of site through the (re)appearance of the past in the present demonstrates the paradoxes of the future of site-specificity: grounded in the contexts and histories of particular locations yet produced by digital, rather than physical, forms of presence. The digital transference of performance from Santa Barbara to Fort Collins to Tucson is neither a destructive fragmentation nor a restorative project. Performance Telephone emphasizes the process of creating new spaces through a responsive, co-creative collaboration. These continuously produced specificities become layered perspectives, not authoritative originals,

³³⁰ Turner, 374.

in an emerging conceptual framework that is inclusive of virtuality's multiple modes of connectivity and possibilities for the continuation of history.

Digital Archives: Connecting Across Time and Space

Performance Telephone's active creation of digitally-produced spatial specificity relies on the seemingly infinite process of layering that positions *site* as an endlessly continuous entity. Site mirrors the qualities of performance itself: multiple in its narratives and forms, not fully graspable in its fragmented construction. Rather than reifying the notion that this instability supports Peggy Phelan's argument for performance's irrevocable disappearance, however, the virtual connection between performances mediates performances' perpetual (re)appearance. The chain of digitality made manifest in physical environments creates a performative and historical archive that both resists the static qualities of text-based archives and dismantles the artificially constructed binary that separates the virtual from the embodied. The Performance Telephone archive is neither ephemeral nor permanent. Instead, in its active reconstitution of site through practice, the project both preserves and alters a record of performance. The digital archive, an extension (rather than opponent) of an embodied one, offers further possibilities for interconnectivity, participation, and mobility in the continuation of spatial specificity.

The adaptive process of Performance Telephone is an active rewriting of space, and it follows, a rewriting of the archive. In Diana Taylor's pivotal repositioning of the written archive in tension with the embodied "repertoire," she privileges the "performatic" over the discursive.³³¹ Taylor argues for the efficacy of embodied practices like voice and gesture to

³³¹ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Duke Press, 2003), 16.

transmit social and cultural memory over time. For Taylor, virtuality threatens embodied practices: “writing has paradoxically come to stand in for and against embodiment...Now, on the brink of a digital revolution that both utilizes and threatens to displace writing, the body again seems poised to disappear in a virtual space that eludes embodiment.”³³² But as Sarah Bay-Cheng repeatedly reminds us, digital technology is always itself an embodied practice. She argues that our positionality as theater historians is redirected as “the digital neither eclipses nor negates embodiment, but changes our relationship to the archive and thus constitutes a kind of digital repertoire.”³³³ For Taylor, the repertoire is dynamic, responsive, and evolving—all qualities that characterize the Performance Telephone process. Each embodied act performed in a new location continued the record of the previous embodied practices while generating new records that would be transmitted in the future. The continuities from Santa Barbara to Tucson—the puppetry, the Ring Pop—demonstrate a responsive interplay between the virtual and actual. The disappearances—the perpetual absence of the actual Toyota Corolla after the Santa Barbara production, the absence of music in Tucson—point to the digital archive as a repertoire that adapts and evolves. This accommodation of change is an important element of Taylor’s repertoire that enables the resistance of persistent hegemonic archival practices. Blurring the lines between the material and immaterial, the digital transfer of spatial specificity produces a performative archive anchored in interconnectivity that challenges physicality as the only mode of embodied memory.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Sarah Bay-Cheng, “Theater History and Digital Historiography,” *Theater Historiography: Critical Interventions* (University of Michigan Press, 2010), ed. Henry Bial and Scott Maglessen, 126.

The virtual access one location has to another in Performance Telephone is not disembodied access. While language surrounding the virtual has often aimed to dislocate it from both the “real” and the physical realm (indeed, even the language of ghosting suggests a lack of corporeality), the collaborative interaction in Performance Telephone, mediated through digital technologies, makes manifest the multiple experiences of site as simultaneously virtual and actual. As Pearson and Shanks’s archaeology recognizes, *site* is always partly constituted by virtual phenomena, the immaterial components of affect and association that become repeatedly actualized in material practices at the site. Similarly, the experience of one’s material body depends on a plethora of incorporeal elements—cultural, social, or otherwise—that destabilize the separation between what is of the body and what is outside it. Performance Telephone poses further questions concerning the porosity of the boundaries between site, bodies, and technology. As the absent body of Santa Barbara informs the gestic movements in Fort Collins, the absent body becomes (re)located.

Embodied memory is extended through spatial actualizations in a networked digital archive. Jose Van Dijck discusses the production of “mediated memories” which are “the activities and objects we produce and appropriate by means of media technologies for creating and re-creating a sense of our past, present, and future selves in relation to others.”³³⁴ The digital archive of Performance Telephone consists of the accumulation of these mediated memories. As one performance engages with the mediated memory of a past performance, it (re)performs it, creating a palimpsestuous archive that extends into the future. The mediated memories are externalized in performance, transformed, and then remediated in the process. The reciprocal relationships created between Santa Barbara, Fort

³³⁴ Jose Van Dijck, *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age* (Stanford University Press, 2007), 21.

Collins, and Tucson emerge through the shared production and distribution of mediated memories. These remediations become what Niels van Doorn refers to as “digitally material artefacts,” which “circulate in the networked environments of the web and emerge as performative incorporations of situated embodied experience.”³³⁵ These “artefacts,” a semantic nod to the archaeological, incorporate the duality of both the virtual and the actual. The films of each performance transmit the gestic work of the body, transferring an embodied experience through digital connection. The virtual image of the film becomes spatialized as it is located in the new specificity of the next location, where it then becomes (re)embedded in the continuity and reflexivity of the digital archive. Interconnectivity, the hallmark of digital communications, can be seen as grounded in the transmission and (re)production of embodied memory.

Performance Telephone demonstrates how the entanglement of spatiality, embodiment, and new media technologies enables new configurations of (re)mediated spectator/performer relationships in performance. The online transmission of mediated memories permeates the boundary between embodied memory and digital technologies and, as Van Doorn notes, “complicates the distinctions between personal and cultural recollection and affective exchange.”³³⁶ The process of watching and directly responding to a filmed performance literalizes the haptic sensation of when a filmed projection produces a visceral response in the viewer. The image produces the feeling of a vicarious experience, a reminder of the spectator’s own body through the vision of another’s. W.B. Worthen would refer to

³³⁵ Niels van Doorn, “Digital spaces, material traces: How matter comes to matter in online performances of gender, sexuality and embodiment,” *Media, Culture, and Society* 33.4 (2011), 541.

³³⁶ *Ibid*, 542.

this phenomenon as “thinking with bodies in history.”³³⁷ Performance Telephone puts the vicarious haptic sensation into action. Johnson’s adaptation of an outdoor space into an indoor art gallery demonstrates the affective exchange of movement between the two performances. The circuitous entrances and exits in the art gallery respond to the spacious reverse in-the-round arrangement at the gas station. The flat image of bodies on screen becomes the three-dimensionality of a site-specific performance. The imperfect mimetic impulse perpetuates the co-creative circulation of performative embodiment situated in both networked and geographical environments. As contemporary directors “think with the bodies” of the digital archive, they engage with an evolving form of critical inquiry into social memory and performative history.

The digital transmission of embodied memory is contingent on connectivity. Performance Telephone’s emphasis on reactive adaptation provides an example of how embodied responses can resonate across distance. The imitative process embodies the connection between self and other. Many performance scholars have turned to the study of the mirror neuron system (MNS) to explain the phenomenological response of spectating body to performing body. A mirror neuron fires when a subject observes an action performed by another, “mirroring” the behavior as though the observer were acting. While I do not endeavor to undertake a neurological study of virtual spectatorship, mirror neurons offer a helpful way to understand how an adaptive process mediated virtually can achieve physically-separated embodied connection. Vittorio Gallese argues that the MNS provides a direct way of experiencing what others are experiencing: “By means of a shared functional state realized in two different bodies that nevertheless obey the same functional rules, the

³³⁷ W. B. Worthen, “Antigone’s Bones,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 52.3 (2008): 16.

‘objectual other’ becomes ‘another self.’³³⁸ Each new iteration of Performance Telephone can be thought of as a way of embodying another self and site. The adaptive process is what Gallese would call an “intentional attunement,” a critical tool in social development that connects self to other through shared experience. Performance Telephone participants watch and respond, sharing space and embodied acts. The act of imitation is one of social connection. Amy Cook applies an examination of the MNS to the Wooster Group’s *Hamlet*, arguing that since spectating is the same as doing for some neurons, the performance always “inspires the imitation of an action” rather than simply just “being the imitation.”³³⁹ While originary acts are central concepts of mimesis within theater studies, Cook attests that the MNS undermines the difference between an originator and replicator. Performance Telephone’s adaptive process reflects how actions are both “performed and received, staged and housed.”³⁴⁰ The simultaneity of performative transference eliminates spatial distance, as it eliminates perceived distinctions between self and other, absence and presence, original and imitator. *There* becomes *here* through the imitative impulse and responsive performative action. Digital performative practices materialize in ongoing extensions of embodied memory.

The convergence of the virtual and actual in performance conflates geographically-distant sites and temporally-separated performances. This conflation also complicates the dialectic tension between notions of presence and absence. Performance Telephone makes virtual connection site-specific by positioning the co-creative process, the long-distance

³³⁸ Vittorio Gallese, “Intentional attunement: A neurophysiological perspective on social cognition,” *Brain Research* 1079.15 (2006): 20.

³³⁹ Amy Cook, “Wrinkles, Wormholes, and Hamlet: The Wooster Group’s *Hamlet* as a Challenge to Periodicity,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 53.4 (2009): 115.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

participation of multiple separated locations, as an equally valid form of presence. For Tucson, their site-specific performance is specific to two geographically distant sites and one locally proximate site simultaneously. The connection between sites ultimately destabilizes the binary of absence/presence that is predicated on physicality. While physicality is always entangled with virtual experience, as I have already discussed, it is no longer the only valid qualifier for describing the experience of sharing space. Performance Telephone creates a networked effect of co-presence by establishing what Tim O'Reilly refers to as an "architecture of participation."³⁴¹ Avenues of participation, the interconnectivity and reactive adaptive process, can produce multiple forms of presence, offering a diversity of perspectives. Each response and addition to the performative palimpsest extends a participant's sense of "being there" beyond a singular geographical location. The Tucson spectator/performer can experience co-presence with Fort Collins, and vicariously through Fort Collins, with Santa Barbara, as well. Reciprocally, the participation of Santa Barbara ensures its continued presence throughout Performance Telephone's journey.

The Tucson performance connects the use of audience participation with *Reasons: The House Burned Down*'s themes of emotive connection. Late in the play, when Tiffany has accepted that her permanent smile will never change, she cynically muses on the disappointments and tragedies of everyday life, listing the trivial ("Erratic cell phone service") alongside the grave ("Sexual trauma.")³⁴² As with all of Tiffany's monologues, this list represents Tiffany's attempt to connect with others through a shared experience of

³⁴¹ Tim O'Reilly, "The Architecture of Participation," *O'Reilly Media*, 2004.

³⁴² Small, 27.

suffering. Wirges elected to solicit audience participation for this portion of the performance. In doing so, she extended the possibility of emotional identification with the play to an immediate, interactive form of spectatorship. In the Tucson performance, while Tiffany delivers this monologue, she also fishes out pieces of paper from a “bucket of fears.” These fears were suggestions offered up by the audience pre-show and ranged from “unexpected dental work” to “loneliness.” The moment was specific to the Tucson performance and offered an example of how active participation enables connection. Co-creation both across performance and as a part of performance continues to question how meaning, specifically emotional and kinesthetic knowledges, might transfer.

The active participation of spectator turned performer produces networks of connectivity that bridge divides of absence and presence. A contemporary production group in Performance Telephone, responding to a filmed performance, is simultaneously spectator and performer. Many technology-based performances now make use of gaming interfaces to immerse participants in fully participatory events. For example, Blast Theory’s pioneering 2001 collaboration with the Mixed Reality Lab, *Can You See Me Now?*, was one of the first location based performance-games.³⁴³ Online players, navigating a virtual map of a city with an avatar, would try to evade Blast Theory performer-pursuants who were running through the *actual* city, tracking the position of online players using handheld computers and GPS technology. Online players could also see the location of the runners on the virtual map and listen to the runner’s walkie talkies to eavesdrop on their strategies or overhear their experiences of cold and fatigue. Blast Theory’s experiment complicates notions of absence and presence by overlaying the physical with the virtual and exploring how one can directly

³⁴³ www.blasttheory.co.uk.

affect the other. Despite the geographical distance, those online and those on the street share the same space. Virtual players see the same pavement, pass the same landmarks, overhear the same walkie talkie chats. The virtual players bridge geographic distance in their attempts to remain distant from their pursuers in the game. Their failure to virtually escape is accomplished by the physical efforts in actual cities by runners turning the same corners represented on the virtual map. When the physical catches up to the virtual, the online player's game ends and they are logged off—a “real” consequence of the overlap of two purportedly separate spaces. The participation of both parties constructs a hybrid space, a new spatial specificity experienced both locally and remotely.

Blast Theory, like TWG's *Hamlet*, still emphasizes absence over hybrid co-presence. When an online player is caught by a runner who comes within 5m of their avatar's location, the runner then photographs the street scene—a visualization of the physical absence of the virtual. Is the photograph a suggestion that the online player was never really there, or a reminder about the stakes of game in their avatar's removal from the interface? Certainly, there are differences between the online and on-the-street experience. Using the arrow keys on a keyboard to move throughout space requires a different physical effort than running up a hill. The difference with Performance Telephone is that both parties share in more similar, yet still not identical, embodied acts.

The digital archive of *Can You See Me Now?*, comprised of images of empty street corners, is a testament to absence. Like Robert Smithson's theory of “Non-Sites,” Blast Theory draws attention to the fragmentation of site when separated across distance. In 1968, Smithson created an installation that positioned gravel and rocks collected from various mining sites across New Jersey alongside maps of the sediments' found location. Smithson

referred to his work as a “non-site,” because it was an abstract representation of the “real thing,” a “container” for “the conservation of meaning after its removal to another site.”³⁴⁴ The sediments became physical metaphorical material that always imperfectly referred back to an absent original. Just as TWG’s *Hamlet* presented the impossibility of (re)presenting the past, “Non-Sites” presents the impossibility of transferring site beyond its physical location.

The text of *Reasons: The House Burned Down* is similarly concerned with the relationship between signifier and signified. Tiffany urges her audience to believe she is sad despite her smile: “I want you to imagine a world where a smile is a sinkhole.”³⁴⁵ For Tiffany, her visual signifier is always imperfectly disconnected from what she wants it to signify. An exploration of how our society interprets emotional signs, Tiffany’s condition is also an issue of inappropriate presence (the smile) and glaring absence (the facial expressions to denote her actual feelings.) The play suggests that emotional and kinesthetic knowledges are intertwined in ways that defy singular decoding methods. Tiffany’s grief and smile are always co-present and always at odds with one another. The tension suggests a reevaluation of reliance on visual and embodied forms for interpersonal connection. The multiplicity of Performance Telephone—of spatialities, forms, and processes—troubles representational notions of presence and absence.

An emphasis on absence reflects the presumed crises facing site-specificity: transplantation as destructive, virtuality as “unreal” and always incomplete. But these crises concede to fixed notions of materiality and authoritative originals. Smithson’s work emphasizes that an object need not resemble the site to represent it, even if the

³⁴⁴ Robert Smithson, “Theory of Non-Sites,” *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (University of California Press, 1996), 234.

³⁴⁵ Small, 4.

representation is imperfect. Each leg of the adaptive process of Performance Telephone is an evolving representation of a previous site. Santa Barbara is displaced in its digital transmission but its metaphorical map is still visible in the acts of Fort Collins. As Smithson argues, “to understand this language of sites is to appreciate the metaphor between the syntactical construct and the complex of ideas, letting the former function as a three dimensional picture which doesn’t look like a picture.”³⁴⁶ Smithson’s sediments blur the lines between the indoors and outdoors, inviting the image of the original site to reappear. Similarly, Performance Telephone eliminates the distance between three different cities by emphasizing the passages of time, space, and participation between them. Rather than represent site as impossible to represent, Performance Telephone embraces the dialectical tensions of presence and absence, illuminating site’s multiplicities made specific. The process produces new spaces rather than mourning the false sense of a lost original. While Blast Theory’s digital archive emphasizes absence, the images miss the ways in which the virtual body, as any form of embodiment does, inscribes both its presence and absence in the very act of performance. The performative act occurs in the level of interaction and connectivity between the two geographically separated players, displacing site as it is continuously (re)produced.

Performance Telephone’s multiple forms of palimpsestuous co-presence can bring new attention to the digital’s deployment as a tool for historical continuation and an embodied archive. Taylor asserts that “the repertoire requires presence: people participate in the production and the reproduction of the knowledge by ‘being there.’”³⁴⁷ In Performance

³⁴⁶ Smithson, 236.

³⁴⁷ Taylor, 20.

Telephone, people participate in the (re)production of knowledge by being in multiple places at once. Taylor's emphasis on physical presence precludes the ways in which the digital archive, a constantly evolving and connective (re)performance, constitutes a form of embodied memory. Performance Telephone's repertoire, like Taylor's, is produced by participation, interconnectivity, and co-presence. Performance Telephone ensures that continuity is never static; rather, its reactive adaptation embodies metamorphosis as a way to extend spatial specificity. As the performance record is distributed across social and digital networks, they are reworked, reembodyed, and remediated, allowing a more fluid sense of performance history as it exists beyond the concrete material traces of archaeological sites. An understanding of site-specificity that includes site-based work based on absent sites or site-specific performances where the site is an accumulation of multiple sites at once transcends the singularity of physical presence and expands how genealogies of performances are represented.

VI. Augmented: The Future of Digital Site-Specifics

In July 2016, The Pokémon Company, partnered with Niantic Inc, released *Pokémon Go*, a location-based augmented reality game played on smartphone devices.³⁴⁸ Using a player's smartphone camera and GPS signal, the game makes it appear as if Pokémon (or, "pocket monsters") are cropping up in real-world environments. Like Google Glass, which I discussed in chapter 4, this augmented reality game offers an experience that superimposes the virtual onto the actual. The blending of computer graphics with live camera video blends together two conventionally-separate realities. As trainers (as players are called) move around, whether indoors or outdoors, they can watch their onscreen avatar replicate their movement on a simple yet accurate map. When a player encounters a Pokémon, they receive a haptic buzz and the tiny creature appears on the map. When tapped on the phone's touchscreen, the creature then enlarges and enters into a "combat mode" where its image is superimposed on whatever actual environment is viewed through the phone's camera. The animated creature might then appear to be perched on top of your computer screen, in the middle of a busy intersection, or in the palm of your hand. At times, the overlay feels uncannily appropriate: a flopping fish Pokémon emerging from the ocean. At others, the virtual and actual realities clash: a nine-tailed fox on your coffee cup. With its participatory and immersive qualities, gameplay functions like a performance in each site-specific interaction. All the world becomes, quite literally for Pokémon and trainer, a stage.

The appeal of a seamless integration of the virtual (and fictional) within the physical world was made apparent in the game's 10 million downloads within the first week.³⁴⁹ The

³⁴⁸ In 2012, *Pokémon Go* developer Niantic, previously a part of Google, had also created *Ingress*, a science-fiction narrative game played in real locations with Android phones.

³⁴⁹ Brett Molina, "'Pokémon Go' fastest mobile game to 10M downloads," *USA Today*, July 20, 2016.

rampant success of *Pokémon Go* demonstrates the continuing trend of technologically-induced interactivity in both gaming and performance—an interactivity that I argue becomes more socially-focused with the incorporation of augmented reality. The game brings players outside to interact with actual physical locations where they might share space with fellow players who are also sharing space with virtual images and information. The player’s experience of multiple, simultaneous realities at once, activated by their own movement, reflects a level of participant engagement long sought after by immersive and participatory performance groups. As I have argued, digital technologies do not mark the end of presence and liveness in performance but constitute an extension of both.

I have argued that augmented reality, by combining two spatial realities, creates new modes of perception by superimposing continuous hypertextuality onto otherwise typical encounters with physical environments. The combination of virtual and actual elements in performance, the turning of *space* into site-specific *place*, affects the viewer’s ability to interact with, conceive of, and manipulate their realities. Making virtual space inhabitable can reveal unseen connections between information, socio-political processes, and environments. *Pokémon Go* demonstrates a continued interest in transforming virtual spectator into present participant by activating digital technology as a valid form of presence itself.

While performances have long been incorporating video game interfaces to increase spectator interactivity, the location-based component of the game refocuses the gaming experience on the body and on an environment that exists simultaneously within and outside of the gaming interface itself. Players must hunt for Pokémon; covering more physical distance increases the frequency of the creatures’ appearances. The game is also linked to

real-world locations. PokeStops provide players with needed resources to continue in the game (namely, PokeBalls for catching Pokémon) and players can battle each other at gyms. These features are attached to real-world landmarks, like libraries, parks, and stores (there was even a gym at the Pentagon), and can only be accessed if you are physically at these locations, as determined by your smartphone's GPS. In what Simon Parkin terms a "mini corporeal revival," the game gets its players outside exploring neighboring streets and attractions.³⁵⁰ One player reportedly walked 140 miles while playing the game, prompting claims that the gaming app could help people exercise and ease obesity and type 2 diabetes.³⁵¹ As evidenced in the potential health benefits, augmented reality highlights the virtual experience as a physical one.

As with the Globe's desire for the Battlefield *Henrys*, much of the game's appeal is in the navigation of a real-world environment. With AR, however, the sensory experience is invariably always a seamless intermixing of im/materiality. In chapter 3, I discussed how inclement weather was able to create a specific spectator experience for both those at the battlefield and those accessing the performances virtually. A week ago, the *Pokémon Go* team announced the implementation of "a dynamic weather system that reflects real-world weather in-game...further connecting the digital world to the physical world you experience around you."³⁵² The physical world becomes reflected in the digital one, just as the digital overlays the physical. Having the virtual take place, then, is not another way of privileging

³⁵⁰ Simon Parkin, "How Pokémon Go takes us back to the real world," *The Guardian*, August 7, 2016.

³⁵¹ Margaret McCartney, "Pokémon Go can boost health by making gamers exercise," *The Guardian*, August 10, 2016.

³⁵² "Developer Insights: Introducing Dynamic Weather Gameplay and Battle Parties," www.pokemongolive.com, December 7, 2017.

physicality; rather, it is an expansion of sensory limitations previously imposed on the navigation of virtual realms.

Pokémon Go made online multiplayer gaming communities visible in actual locations. While social interaction in online gaming has been conventionally relegated to virtual realms of voice or text chats during real-time gameplay, *Pokémon Go* creates a virtual gaming community that walks around the same park or sits at the same fountain in real-time. In the first few weeks after the game's release, the streets were glutted with Pokémon hunters looking to loot PokeStops or catch rare finds. In my experience playing the game, there was a shared sense of understanding as you encountered a stranger on the street and you both recognized in each other the standard Pokémon-gameplay posturing: smartphone positioned slightly in front of you, appearing as if you're taking a picture of an ordinary object while you swipe at your screen trying to catch an animated creature visible only to you—and to the stranger on their smartphone next to you. Landmarks (in my case, the Santa Barbara pier) became serendipitous meeting places where pockets of players converged to participate in the same activity. I discussed how AR literally manifests the virtual in the actual, the virtual no longer just a spatial metaphor, and *Pokémon Go*, in turn, manifests the virtual user themselves in the actual world. Like with Google Glass, AR allows the virtual to take place in a continuous site-specific experience. The site-specific experience for each player, an individualization linked to their location, was an experience that, rather than producing insularity, could be shared. The combination of the virtual and actual opens a space for social connection that may not have been previously accessible. In August 2016, CNN ran a story titled “How ‘Pokemon Go’ is helping kids with autism and

Asperger's.”³⁵³ While no formal scientific study has yet been conducted on the effects of *Pokémon Go* gameplay and the autism spectrum, Rachel Cao spoke to parents of non-social, autistic children who have noticed their children initiating socialization at a higher frequency since beginning to play the game. Stories of otherwise reticent children venturing outside to strike up conversations with other community members speak to the power of a common interest, the continuing popularity of the Pokémon franchise, and the novelty of AR integration in daily life. These stories also, I'd argue, point to a social space made possible by the novel site-specifics of AR. AR bridges the binaries of virtual and actual and, in doing so, elicits movement from its user. The experience of virtuality as embodied navigation creates a form of interactivity capable of producing real connection across a broader expanse of communities. Granted, as a player encountering a fellow player, I don't think I managed more than a brief nod in recognition to a stranger, but even a brief moment of recognition represents the social possibilities of visualizing in an actual location what normally would have been relegated to a screen.

I have argued that physical presence is not necessary for valid social connection but *Pokémon Go*'s use of augmented reality provides an interesting example of how the mixture (and manipulation) of realities can use technology to enable participants to co-inhabit physical space. As I explored in chapter five with the Performance Telephone project, virtual access can multiply the ways in which an absent other becomes *present* in an environment. What might it mean, then, to *perform* physical presence in a place where one's physical presence might not be possible? The Women's March was a worldwide protest staged on January 21, 2017 to advocate human rights policies and to protest the recently

³⁵³ Rachel Cao, “How ‘Pokemon Go’ is helping kids with autism and Asperger's,” *CNN*, August 5, 2016.

inaugurated Donald Trump. The Women’s March was the largest single-day protest in United States history but, as Katie Dupere states, “activism isn’t always accessible.”³⁵⁴ While the March was streamed live on various platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, disability activists created The Disability March to allow people with disabilities or chronic illnesses to participate virtually in the event. The Disability March organizers invited people living with disabilities to submit their names, photos, and a statement on why they wanted to “march.” The images and text were uploaded to a digital archive in line with the main event in Washington, D.C. on January 21. One of the organizers, Sonya Huber, discussed the virtual archive as a way to increase visibility and as a “challenge to other activist efforts to take inclusivity—and different types of participation in social movements—seriously.” Beyond a show of solidarity, The Disability March highlights alternate forms of participation that reveal some fundamental problems with the privileging of physical presence. We can imagine how the integration of technologies like augmented reality might contribute to the work of Huber and other disability activists in extending ways of *being there*, making the virtual spectator a present participant. As theater continues to be increasingly defined by its inaccessibility—financially and geographically—how might technology with the ability to augment reality redefine a market predicated on physical co-presence?

While location-based technologies might be employed in performance to increase engagement, connection, and access, I have discussed how place-making, or the act of making site specific, can also have implications in regards to political divisions and personal privacy. In chapter two, I discussed how place-making, the act of defining or creating *place*

³⁵⁴ Katie Dupere, “Virtual march helps people with disabilities join the Women’s March on Washington,” *Mashable*, January 18, 2017.

out of the abstractness of *space*, can produce essentialist narratives about what fits within the defined frame. In a way, augmented reality parallels the definition of borders: ideology overlaid on nature. Manifesting virtual space as actual place, then, comes with the potential to superimpose a homogenous frame, one that defines a set of assumptions about what it means to belong. Additionally, as I explored in chapter four, augmented space is always monitored space. The location-based technology tracks its user and reports information back to the program—and possibly, as we’ve learned from the influx of personalized advertising, to companies wishing to purchase it.³⁵⁵ Security concerns were high enough that Pentagon employees were banned from playing *Pokémon Go* within the building (where a popular in-game gym was located). Defense officials were concerned that employees could be tracked via the game and that their locations and other sensitive information might be accessed by foreign spies.³⁵⁶ The location-based technology that creates augmented reality increases the potential for constant surveillance, while possibly decreasing a user’s awareness of it.

Almost as soon as *Pokémon Go* was released, stories began circulating that served as reminders of the real-world consequences of virtual interaction. Numerous traffic accidents, trespassing charges, and even the discovery of a dead body help sustain the deterministic critique of technology as distracting from one’s experience of the real world.³⁵⁷ More sinister, even, were stories of armed robberies in which the criminals used the game’s

³⁵⁵ The game originally required permission for full Google account access, which would have given Niantic access to users’ emails, search histories, and Google drive. Niantic stated this message was an error and confirmed that no unnecessary information had been collected.

³⁵⁶ Sam Thielman, “Pentagon’s Pokémon orders: game must go (outside) for security reasons,” *The Guardian*, August 12, 2016.

³⁵⁷ “Pokemon Go player finds dead body in Wyoming river while searching for a Pokestop,” *BBC*, July 10, 2016.

location-based technology to lure victims to remote locations.³⁵⁸ With the game relying so heavily on its mapping capabilities, Robinson Meyers questions where the app gets its geographical data. The quick answer is, “probably Google,” but it also might be an amalgam of data collected from users playing a previous Niantic Inc game.³⁵⁹ The problem, Meyers notes, becomes how *Pokemon Go* shifts the context of this geo-data to reach the masses. He describes the situation of a man living in a renovated 19th century church, a landmark Niantic Inc’s geo-data shifted into an in-game gym that attracted over 75 strangers a day. The man’s property had “effectively been augmented by a digital beacon” without his consent or forewarning. Such a phenomenon literalizes *Pokemon Go*’s status as a “pervasive” game, another name for when the gaming experience is extended out into the physical world. The invasive consequences, however unintended, raise questions about how pre-existing reality will react to the superimposition of augmentation.

If augmented reality is effectively always a monitored and manipulated reality, we must then try to imagine the levels to which this technological manipulation might reach. In September 2017, the United States military announced that augmented reality wearable glasses and headsets will soon be standard issue for ground troops. As Gerald Lynch reports, “key data points will be overlaid onto a battlefield—everything from mapping information to mission parameters to markers defining the movements of allied troops and enemy forces.”³⁶⁰ AR, unlike the completely immersive and transformative virtual reality, is intended to allow the user to maintain environmental awareness. This awareness, Lynch

³⁵⁸ Marina Koren, “The Pokémon Go Armed Robbery,” *The Atlantic*, July 11, 2016.

³⁵⁹ Robinson Meyers, “The Curious Mystery of the Map in Pokémon Go,” *The Atlantic*, July 11, 2016.

³⁶⁰ Gerald Lynch, “AR warfare: How the military is using augmented reality,” *TechRadar*, September 16, 2017.

argues, also allows the troop to retain agency in the case of a technological malfunction, such as if “an innocent bystander rather than an enemy has been highlighted as an aggressor.”³⁶¹ And yet, the implementation of AR is meant to reduce the cognitive overload, the heightened stress of processing and acting upon information rapidly, for troops. This would entail an acceptance of the augmented reality *as* reality. The production and dissemination of that reality would not be within a user’s control, signaling a potential limitation to the agency necessary to distinguish malfunction from function. *Black Mirror*, a television series that imagines a near-future in which current technologies have been utilized to their darkest extremes, presents a scenario of manipulated realities within a military context. In the episode, “Men Against Fire,” soldiers have been implanted with a device that enhances the processing of their senses and provides instant data via augmented reality. Unknown to the soldiers, the implant alters the appearance of enemy combatants to that of rabid, monstrous figures, when in reality, they are actually human civilians who are victims of a mass genocide. AR is used to alter perception, to present a *performance* of otherness, in order to motivate disciplined violence.

In the introduction, I detailed how materialist geographers resist the conceptualization of *space* as an empty container waiting to be filled. We cannot ignore, however, that augmented reality is an act of filling, or adding to, a pre-existing set of social, political, and cultural realities. We are at a precarious moment of defining who will be doing the filling and what they will be filling our spatial reality with. Spatial specificity, like place-making, has the potential to be employed to manufacture divisions and exert control; to personalize content at the expense of privacy; to restrict agency in the name of security and

³⁶¹ Ibid.

novelty. If performance, however, can embrace creative place-making via technological means, I believe it can intervene as a form of resistance to these more sinister applications.

Augmented reality in performance can pose an aesthetic challenge to the limits of what we believe to be possible, blurring the lines between fiction and reality in ways that reveal our cultural assumptions. Aesthetic transformation becomes empathetic gesture in BeAnotherLab's experiment *Machine to Be Another* (2015). BeAnotherLab offers a technology-inflected response to their question, "What would the world be like if one could see through the eyes of another?"³⁶² Designed as an interactive performance installation, the "Machine," a set of immersive goggles and several cameras, allows users to literally see themselves in the body of another person. A camera attached to one user records their point of view in real-time as they move and interact with their environment. This video is transmitted to another user's immersive goggles who follow the movements in the video with their own body but see another's body moving instead. Rather than incite violence, this performance of otherness serves to promote empathy among individuals across different social, cultural, and ideological contexts. As with The Disability March, we can imagine virtually-constructed presence as a means of empowering the Other by rewriting spatial narratives. Augmented reality allows for a user created space, a spatial specificity constructed through movement and navigation. The user is positioned as a hyper-transgressive version of DeCerteau's pedestrian, ripe with the potential to overwrite dominant, homogenous narratives by filling space with their own subversive and variable constructions.

³⁶² www.themachinetobeanother.org

In this dissertation, I have offered a few examples of contemporary responses to different spatial crises posed by technology. However, technology is evolving at an immeasurable speed and performance will be on the forefront of exploring, questioning, exposing, and/or celebrating the ultimate realization of the merged social and technological potential of our lived reality. New spatial practices will require new dramaturgies that examine virtual site-specificity as both a new mechanism for social discovery and as a capitalistic and political enterprise. Mobilizing site-specificity, through actual movement of participant-spectators and through extensions into virtual spaces, employs performance as a mode of resistance and empowerment as we engage with how new realities will affect our existing ones.

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