



A Recalibration of Theatre’s Hypermediality

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2.1 INTRODUCTION

As my wife and I take a seat in the lobby of The Lansdowne, we are asked if we would like a tour of the building in case we are interested in renting one of their “stylish one, two or three bedroomed apartments”, close to Birmingham city centre and with a range of in-house communal amenities including the Fitness Studio and the Cultural Mixer with a home cinema and pool table (The Lansdowne 2019). We say politely that “we are fine

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thanks, we already have a house”, and that we are “just here for the performance”. The member of The Lansdowne staff smiles politely and walks away.

Having been to see a range of theatre pieces in recent years that deftly and mischievously fashion artifices of commercial behaviour as an entrée into performance (dreamthinkspeak’s *Absent* 2015 springs to mind in which the façade of the hotel enterprise is utterly convincing until you literally see behind the doors), I am always intrigued by events such as that transpiring at The Lansdowne: Who and what is “performing” in this 18-storey residential tower? Specifically we have come to see Stan’s Cafe’s *It’s Your Film*, a piece originally created over twenty years ago in 1998. I was fortunate enough to see a performance in that year and fascinated to see it again all this time later, particularly with its added spectatorial dimension for 2019. To quote the marketing blurb from the theatre company:

This unique four and a half minute show is performed to an audience of one. Viewers are seated in a passport photo style booth, with the show unfolding through a letterbox-sized aperture—it looks like a film but is performed just for you! A story of lost love and detection set in Birmingham, the show takes its inspiration from film noir and uses special slide and video projections, and even a Victorian theatre trick called Pepper’s Ghost, which allows live actors to magically dissolve or be layered over each other. For the first time ever, audience members will be invited to watch the performance a second time from behind the scenes to see how the magic is done. (From a promotional email received 24th April 2019)

My previous knowledge of the piece, as a self-contained performance, suppresses my incertitude as to the boundaries of the event, but nevertheless the scale of the apartment block, its metropolitan bravura and the efficient commercial disposition of its employee inform and frame my expectation of this urban noir love story. Before we even begin to experience the piece itself, the qualified media of architecture and what might floridly be referred to as the performance of real estate surrounds us at a presemiotic and semiotic level—the polished concrete, the airy lobby and the industrial signage, signifiers of modernity, youth, urbanity and wealth. Elleström’s term, “media product”, which he defines as “the intermediate stage that enables the transfer of cognitive import from a producer’s to a perceiver’s mind” (2020: 13), has pertinence in this context as the media products of property lettings are seemingly at work in the prelude to, or in

the all-consuming service of, theatre. The request from The Lansdowne developers for Stan's Cafe to re-stage the show as part of their publicity and sales drive is resonant of what Richard Schechner refers to as proto-performance (2002), a precedent or impetus to performance, in this case an event prompted both by a specific request and by its own previous incarnation in 1998 and subsequent iterations. We only experience this proto-performativity briefly and superficially in the seemingly innocuous collision of newly developed property and re-fashioned theatre, but in that momentary juncture, the playful ambiguity of theatre's encroachment into its wider environment and the uncertainty this triggers within us over its parameters are unmistakable. The door to the booth is situated to our right, the liminal divide, but where we sit is more than theatrical foyer, we are embedded within a hybrid of qualified media, architecture and real estate co-opted (perhaps unknowingly by the developers) into the theatrical signification of *It's Your Film* (a city that is bigger than us, hidden from us) and theatre co-opted more consciously and strategically into the qualified medium of real estate performance, or what I later refer to as the architecture of commerce.

2.2 RECALIBRATION

This capacity of theatre to shapeshift and ingest other media is captured in Chiel Kattenbelt's suggestion that "when two or more different art forms come together a process of theatricalization occurs" (2008: 20). This chapter outlines and recalibrates theatre's position as a hypermedium, in other words its capacity to envelop a seemingly endless profusion of modes, modalities and media (basic, qualified and technical; see Elleström 2020) within its ambit and reframe them as theatrical performance. This quality of theatre offers both opportunities and tensions for contemporary artists, audiences/participants and those engaged in the study of intermediality as it complicates and multiplies unpredictability into the processes of mediation and representation. This hospitality of theatre with its open invitation to other qualified and technical media creates a dynamic yet crowded environment, alongside which the proliferation of digital and post-digital options creates ever-greater challenges to authorial agency historically afforded to writers, directors and actors as well as increasingly complex challenges to audiences/participants in understanding the layers of signification presented to them or experienced by them.

The premise that theatre has a particular capability to assimilate all other media was notably elucidated in Chapple and Kattenbelt's influential text *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance* within which they state that "theatre has become a hypermedium and home to all" (2006: 24). The argument has long been rehearsed throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, in both multimedial and intermedial theories, that specifically theatre has the capacity to embrace other artistic forms without fundamentally altering their structure. Peter M. Boenisch, for example, described theatre as a "fully transparent medium" (2006: 112) with the ability to leave its incorporated media free of "any palpable fingerprints of its mediatisation" (112) unlike television or film. He exemplifies this by stating that "a video might be projected as part of a theatre performance, which is then recorded for TV; yet the video on stage is still a video, whereas on the television it will be the broadcast of the showing of a video" (112). Kattenbelt developed this point further when he proposed that film, television, video and DVD (when they appear in a theatre setting) become staged and "in this capacity, not only cinematic, televisual, videographic or digital, but at the same time theatrical" (2008: 22–23). However, my contention in this chapter is that these recent perspectives are limited in the rigour of their analysis and greater interrogation is needed of the complex reality of what is happening in contemporary theatre, both in terms of what theatre-makers are seeking to achieve and in how audience/participants are interpreting the plethora of media products. My perspective builds upon Elleström's own recurring dissatisfaction with the generalised definition and assumptions of theatre as a hypermedium. Originally outlined in 2010, Elleström reiterates the point in the opening chapter of the present publication:

Therefore, theatre could be described as a profoundly multimodal qualified medium that is susceptible to intermedial analysis. It makes sense to say that it not only integrates several basic media, but also several qualified media; one may recognise parts of a theatre performance as, say, music, architecture, gesture, dance and speech. However, it might be an overstatement that "theatre is a hypermedium that incorporates all arts and media" (Chapple and Kattenbelt 2006: 20; cf. Kattenbelt 2008: 32) because once the different media types are integrated, they become something else: the qualified medium of theatre. (Elleström 2020: 77)

In pursuit of this closer interrogation of theatre as a hypermedium, I will refer to a range of contemporary productions but with particular attention to three performances that I have experienced in recent years, *The Ferryman* (2017) by Jez Butterworth which opened at The Royal Court Theatre in London before transferring to the West End where I witnessed it at The Gielgud Theatre in 2018; *In Many Hands* by the Brussels-based experimental artist Kate McIntosh, performed at festivals across the world and experienced by myself at Utrecht's Spring Festival in 2018; and finally, as already discussed in part, *It's Your Film* by Birmingham-based Stan's Cafe Theatre Company. I have selected these productions as they span a diverse range of theatrical styles from the more traditional naturalism of *The Ferryman*, viewed en masse in a proscenium arch theatre, the hands-on participatory experience of *In Many Hands* in which the audience are invited to touch and share a plethora of objects, through to the fleeting solo cine-theatrical experience of *It's Your Film*. These brief descriptions alone are indicative of the breadth of contemporary theatre practice, not just in terms of genre (what Elleström refers to as submedia in 2020: 78) but also in terms of materiality, spatiotemporality, sensoriality, diverse semiotic signs as well as contextual and operational aspects that draw from a profusion of qualified media, not merely conventional theatre.

2.3 HYPERMEDIUM AND HYPERMEDIACY

Before considering these productions in more detail, it is important to establish the most current debates regarding theatre and hypermediality. Recently, in *Intermedial Theatre: Principles and Practice* (Crossley 2019), I began to reconsider and modify the conception of theatre as a hypermedium, citing Claudia Georgi's more nuanced articulation. Her argument, which at times uses Elleström's modal theory, has resonances of Kattenbelt and Boenisch, as she writes that theatre is notable for "its ability to integrate other media without affecting their respective materiality and medi-ality" (2014: 46). Georgi's theoretical approach becomes more granular however as she distinguishes certain aspects of theatre's mutability, contending that any sign can be incorporated within theatre but as this is a trait to be found in other "plurimedial media" such as film, theatrical distinctiveness is actually evidenced in the material mobility:

What is unique to theatre is thus not its semiotic mobility as such, but what could in analogy be termed its 'medial mobility,' i.e. the ability to leave the

materiality of the incorporated media intact while their respective signs acquire an additional semiotic quality as theatrical signs. (Georgi 2014: 47)

In response to this, I reflected on how greater clarity may be gleaned beyond the term “additional”, arguing that “[t]he additional layer that Georgi refers to may not be easily distinguished as an addition when the original semiotic signification may be denuded to the point where we are actually perceiving a hybrid between the original and the theatricalized” (Crossley 2019: 19). My contention was that the interrelationship between materiality and other presemiotic modalities was so intricate that any repositioning of, or interaction with, material objects on stage (book, statue, film, text, fabric, etc.) disrupts and reframes these elements to such a degree that further investigation is required to articulate the nature and complexity of these cognitive imports (the input and output of communication from producer’s mind to perceiver’s mind as defined in Elleström 2020), moving beyond a binary distinction of pre-theatrical and “additional” theatrical signification.

In addition to the specific term hypermedium, hypermediacy as a related but discreet concept has been scrutinised, stratified and defined in recent years, initially within Bolter and Grusin’s influential *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999) in which they delineated two significant types of mediation, referred to as transparent immediacy and hypermediacy. Andy Lavender summates the distinction: “In *Remediation* Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin describe processes of *immediacy*, that efface the appearance of the artwork by giving the spectator an apparently direct access to its matter; and processes of *hypermediacy*, through which you see the medial arrangement that presents the artwork for your engagement (1999: 33–34)” (2019: 54). In theatre, these two concepts can easily find themselves in close proximity and partnership, and in this context of hypermediality, I propose certain gradations as to their distinctiveness, suggesting they are simultaneous conditions in correspondence during all performance. Immediacy can be defined in a variety of forms, including direct communication from producer to perceiver (e.g. stand-up comedy), but it is also in evidence in a production such as *The Ferryman*. The performance follows a naturalistic narrative, focusing on the impact of “The Troubles” in Northern Ireland on one family in County Armagh during the 1980s. Our spectatorship, within a classic West End theatre auditorium, is, perhaps counter-intuitively, an invitation to frame our experience as immediate and unmediated, emotional and direct as we invest in the

grief and the longing of the protagonists. Despite the overtly theatrical context in which we sit, the social praxis informing this event directs us towards a persistent, yet agreeable, naivety. Whilst our experience is significantly enhanced by our extracommunicational knowledge of the socio-political events portrayed in the play and our cultural understanding of what is expected of us in the stalls with programme in hand and so forth, we are persuaded to uncouple the two domains and immerse ourselves in the autonomy of the virtual sphere created by the semiosis of intracommunicational objects on stage, as Elleström proposes: “This is because we may perceive them, in part or in whole, as new *gestalts* that disrupt the connection to the extracommunicational domain” (2020: 30). If we wished to disengage for a moment and look around us, we would quickly recognise the medial arrangements of the artwork, our fellow spectators, the gilded proscenium and the specific modes of naturalistic theatre in such a space (the artifice of the rustic *mise en scène*, the stairs to nowhere upstage left, etc.), but we decide to resist the hypermediacy of the context and remain committed to the virtual, immediate domain.

2.4 TEMPORALITY AND SENSORIALITY

Hypermediacy also manifests itself within the construction and participation of *In Many Hands*. At the beginning of the performance, the audience of only forty-five people are invited to wash their hands before entering into a large auditorium within which there are three long tables, arranged in a triangle, with chairs down one side of each of them. Aside from assistants directing where to sit, there is no one overtly performing for us. We are intrinsic to the performance as participants but also more radically as agents, activating the event and controlling the temporality. Such participatory experiences echo Lavender’s contention in the present publication, as he notes that “the actor/performer takes on a more pro-*tean* form in this environment” (2020: 120). Our own centrality is evident in this Fierce Festival description of the performance:

This project steps away from the stage—instead bringing the audience into a series of aesthetic sensory situations, inviting them to experiment with materials and encounter physical phenomena themselves. *In Many Hands* is part laboratory, part expedition, part meditation—as it unfolds, visitors take their time to engage and explore as they wish, following their noses and curiosities. (Fierce Festival 2019)

As the performance progresses, we are passed, one by one, objects of interest, all the way down one table, then the other before reaching the final participant on the last table—sponges, shells, mud, rocks, seeds, bird skulls and dozens more, a multitude of textures, temperatures and resistances, eliciting degrees of intrigue, humour and squeamishness. It feels part interactive museum display and part ceremony. The material modality of these objects has not been altered to any significant extent; their mobility from original context into performance is seamless, yet it is the temporality of the event which is so specific and theatrical. In contemporary performance, I would argue that it is our control and manipulation of time that is often the most significant factor in creating the “additional” layer, or perhaps what I might suggest is a hybrid signification. In *The Ferryman*, the audience are relatively passive in temporal terms (putting aside the virtual sphere of temporality), as we sit dutifully through the duration of the play. Essentially, it has a fixed temporality, akin to film or recorded television. In one sense, *In Many Hands* also has an overarching fixed temporality as the show has a total duration of approximately ninety minutes. However, within that timescale the participants construct the temporality of both personal and collective moments quite significantly. As each object approaches, we decide the point at which we accept it from the audience member to our right and when we shall pass it on to the person to our left. The temporality of the sensorial engagement with each object is delineated predominantly by every individual with adjustments made in response to prompts (impatience, anticipation) from their “collaborators” left and right. The collective autonomy over temporality is heightened in the latter stages of the performance as the scale of objects increases to include swathes of damp fishing net and finally a large gauze carried aloft across the heads of the whole crowd. The intensity of sense data and subsequent sensations is closely intertwined with the ephemeral temporality of the touching. The objects which have a static temporality in and of themselves are animated by our examination of them and the brevity of our connection to them. This temporal agency that theatre is able to exploit over media is commented upon by the performance maker Jo Scott:

I am suggesting that performance is always in a process of undoing the temporalities of its media [...] because of the intersection between the ‘timing’ of the performer’s action and the temporality of the media with which they intersect. Intermedial activation in live performance wrestles the fixed media

from their moorings and sets them loose, so we *feel* their happening differently and the temporality of the piece itself also shifts. (Scott 2019: 112)

As the participant performers in this event, we negotiate the different temporalities and sensorialities for ourselves and between ourselves, executing subtle split-second judgements over our experience. In this regard, the sensations of the finale are acutely individual as we feel the soft fabric on our fingertips, yet also undeniably communal as we are all shadowed by, and share the delicate weight of, the expanse of cloth. It may be argued that temporal and sensorial control are in evidence in other qualified media, with parallels often being drawn between gaming and theatre. It could also be suggested that in our encounters with certain art objects, fine art and sculpture, for example, we have agency over our temporal engagement as we decide to move towards, away from or around such objects. However, the particularity of theatre is that the temporalities and sensorialities of these other qualified media can themselves be subsumed within theatre and theatre-makers can then consciously seek to engineer or encourage such participations within the theatrical event.

From a hypermedial perspective, this event combines a number of qualified media: certainly theatre in terms of a performance within an auditorium but also museum exhibition and ceremony, facilitated by Kate McIntosh and her collaborators, but orchestrated by the audience. Modes of theatre such as the atmospheric lighting are intertwined with cross-modal modes; the objects are both exhibits and props. To advance Georgi's notion of an additional layer, I would emphasise the dialogic nature of this signification as the cognitive import flexes between the extracommunicative knowledge we have of these inert objects but then seeks to place this in relation to their presence in the theatrical space. McIntosh has spoken of the extensive and meticulous selection process for each of the objects (2017), but as they pass through our hands, we have only a transitory moment to wrestle with the juxtaposition of modes and what these may represent. As Elleström reminds us, "compared to the potentially extensive act of production, the act of perception is brief and quickly channelled into interpretation, which of course occurs in the perceiver's mind" (2020: 18). Immediacy and hypermediacy are present both in the event as we have immediate access to the objects and one another, and they are materially immediate to us, yet simultaneously the construction of the artwork is confidently in evidence, the assistants silently mediating our experience

through the passing of objects, the presence of each audience member positioned closely in relation to one another, necessarily in touching distance.

2.5 SIGNIFICATION AND PARTICIPATION

The distinction between art and real-world experience is increasingly blurred in many contemporary performance genres from performance art to gaming and social media-based practice. It is also at work in site-based theatre that intentionally draws upon built and social environments such as dreamthinkspeak's *Absent* or less overtly or consciously such as Stan's Cafe's *It's Your Film*. Immersive theatre, which has seen a global exponential rise in recent years, may initially seem disconnected from the real world as we are enveloped within the complex *mise en scène* of a performance from Punchdrunk, WildWorks, You Me Bum Bum Train and the like. However, the centrality of our own material body as close observers or participants continues to bombard us with real-world sense data (breathlessness as we run, the heat of our face behind a mask, the scents carefully embedded in the scenography), and hence this creates a visceral dialogue between the virtual and actual spheres. The frisson is in the hinterland between the two, as a Punchdrunk performer leads you by the hand for a confidential chat in a caravan in *The Drowned Man* (2013) or kisses you tenderly goodnight in *Sleep No More* (2003–present). These encounters, which I have experienced first-hand in London and New York, respectively, are too immediate to consider as discreet or additional layers of signification; they are more an instant perception of both/and (to loosely appropriate Robin Nelson's term for intermediality 2010), as it is both distinctly fictional *and* real. It is hypermediated theatrical signification.

Patrice Pavis was alert to this movement in diffuse performance framing towards the end of the twentieth century. He wrote that many contemporary artists sought to create “the impression that there is no division between art and life, contemporary art has often endeavoured to invent forms in which the frame is eliminated” (Pavis 1998: 155–156). Such practices bring our attention to the impact of “noise”, as Elleström refers to it: “The basic phenomenon of disruptions that occur on the way from the producer's mind to the perceiver's” (2020: 23). Such a phenomenon is of major significance within the capacious hypermedium of theatre. When a single media product (painting, sculpture, poem, solo dance, etc.) is presented within its own qualified medium of fine art and so on, there is

a more predictable bandwidth in the potential cognitive import from producer to perceiver's mind. Whilst the perceiver may draw upon a range of extracommunicational domains to inform the intracommunicational domain, there is a greater degree of direct and bounded modes, and therefore signifiers, that can be employed and thus interpreted. Elleström refers to this modal stability in relation to art: "Whereas painting is a qualified medium because expected aesthetic qualities are to be presented within certain social and artistic frames that are bound to undergo changes, its expected modal traits are relatively stable" (2020: 58). However, as theatre is able to host a plethora of qualified and technical media within which are countless modal options, the increase in disruption and "promiscuous" cognitive import is inevitable. Compounding this promiscuity are what may be described as the intentional acts of "noise disruption" embedded within work by the artists themselves, in terms of collision, contradiction and juxtaposition. This premise finds correspondence with Simonson's articulation of "intermedial gaps" in her contribution to the present publication, "moments that withhold as much as they communicate, and that communicate withholding" in which there is the fertile potential for "acts of concealment" (2020: 4–5). Such intentions can be seen in, amongst others, Montage, Fluxus and Assemblage practices which gathered pace within the twentieth century and were often appropriated into theatre experimentations. These practices problematise the premise of intentionality in relation to the act of production and transfer outlined in Elleström's Fig. 1.1 (2020: 16). The media product may be clearly framed as performance, but specific modes of transfer—text, image, audio recordings and so on—may have intentionally been found and selected at random, rejecting established norms of authorial control. In such instances, the act of production is proportionally at a greater divide, in terms of predictability, from the act of perception compared to media products within other qualified media. This disruption of cognitive import is amplified when the capacity for participant agency is factored in, as we make unpredictable interventions in to the processes of mediation.

The movements and timings of all forty-five participants during *In Many Hands* make infinite adjustments to the cognitive import for each and every one of us within the room. The tactile nature of the event and the plethora of objects we touch multiply the extracommunicational domains at play as each person confronts every object with intimacy and a degree of vulnerability. Kate McIntosh, in reference to the performance, notes how "people's threshold of what is challenging is really different

from one person to another” (2017); a fragile bird’s skull may be anatomically fascinating to one person whilst an unnerving glimmer of mortality to another. In such instances, the “overlaps” between producer’s and perceiver’s minds are unpredictable at best. This is certainly not to say that such uncertainty is problematic or a weakness. It is one of the great strengths of theatre, particularly in the experimentations of recent decades, that coincidence, happenstance and participant agency are central to the construction of cognitive import and representation. It may be argued that one of the fundamental and particular features of the hypermedium of theatre is the facility for collaboration and participant authorship through real-time transformation of events.

2.6 ANGLES OF MEDIATION AND EXCLUSIVITY

This particular capacity of theatre to proliferate new angles of mediation and hence profusions of representations can also be seen in *It’s Your Film* as we are taken behind the scenes for the second viewing of the piece. In the original version, our viewpoint is intentionally restricted as we look ahead towards a small aperture in which images are projected into our eyeline, never quite knowing if these are pre-recorded or live, vignettes of furtive assignations no more than a few seconds each. For the following version, we are taken through a different door and sat alone on a chair to the side of the backstage area. What unfolds before us is a choreography of three performers, constructing each image in the moment, projected through the Pepper’s Ghost device into the booth for the next audience member. Such a performance obfuscates the line between extracommunicational and intracommunicational domains as the second experience is intensely informed by the preceding experience in the booth. The rich, virtual domain of noir intrigue from the first performance is still imprinted on the memory as you are witness to its deconstruction a few minutes later. The intracommunicational experience of the first bleeds into the latter’s intracommunicational world as we partly project ourselves back into the original experience in order to take pleasure in the conspiracy of the backstage reveal.

This playfulness can also be seen in more mainstream work such as *Network* (2018), starring Brian Cranston at The National Theatre in London, for which during certain performances you could book a table on stage for a fine dining *Foodwork* experience. Whilst these diners may not also have seen the play from the auditorium, as per *It’s Your Film*, it is

setting a similar mediating puzzle as participants enter into a dialogic mode of spectatorship, partly immersed within their onstage *mise en scène* and partly projecting themselves out into the perspective of the auditorium to imagine the viewpoint usually afforded to the audience. The pleasure, according to several audience members I spoke to who participated in the *Foodwork* events, was the thrill of knowing what the main audience could and could not see. Pivotal to this thrill is their contextually qualified understanding of proscenium arch productions such as *The Ferryman*.

In both of the examples at The National Theatre and The Lansdowne, theatre has created and afforded angles of exclusivity which are a specific quality distinct from other qualified media. An art exhibition may have a private viewing, but in the end all visitors to the gallery see the same art object from a similar angle. A film premiere may have an illustrious and select guest list, but the media product is the same in any cinema once on screen, whilst a great novel is the same set of symbolic signs in my hand as it is for any literary critic. The context of perception is different in each of these latter cases but the modalities and modes are the same. However, in theatre, the spatial modality can be fundamentally adjusted within any given performance event, often affording simultaneously different spectatorial dimensions as in *Network* and *It's Your Film*. It could be argued that gaming has a similar capacity as multiple gamers can be perceiving a virtual environment from multiple angles online but these are virtual recalibrations of space whereas theatre can accommodate such virtual spaces materially intact as well as real-world physical displacements. Alongside the material mobility already alluded to by Georgi and others, and the temporal and sensorial mobility that I have foregrounded, it is clear that spatial mobility is also of considerable significance when defining the properties and potency of the theatrical hypermedium.

2.7 ARCHITECTURE OF COMMERCE

Having considered, with greater nuance, the qualities of theatre as a hypermedium, what may be fathomed in regard to theatre's capacity for housing other media and reframing them with hybrid both/and signification? Is there something unique or dominant in this complex interplay of mediation and representation? Before we ascribe theatre such a pre-eminent position in a hierarchy of qualified mediation, I am reminded again of the experience at The Lansdowne. Earlier in the chapter, I suggested an interdependence between commercial architecture (specifically

real estate) and theatre. Whilst theatre can strategically and creatively colonise such space, it is assertable that the dominant qualified medium in such scenarios is the commercial environment itself. In free market neo-liberal economies, it would be naïve to think that there is always a mutual exchange within such practices. At times theatre can subvert or question the values of such economies and the marketisation and commodification of everyday experiences whilst housing itself in the very centre of such commercial institutions. *vHotelling* (2016) by the Australian company Not Yet It's Difficult is a prime example of this, set within the hotels of Gold Coast yet designed to question the façade of hospitality. However, alongside such work that pushes back against corporate influence, there is undoubtedly an argument that, in many instances, the architecture of commerce is a far more voracious and all-consuming qualified medium than theatre. It is immediately evident in the Gielgud Theatre, owned by the Delfont Mackintosh group, which staged *The Ferryman*, as £100 ticket prices are quickly complemented by £10 glasses of champagne sipped within the auditorium. The modes of theatre are often aligned to the modes of commerce. This correlation is overtly celebrated in the Theatre in the Clouds experience at The Shard in London which presents theatre near the top of the tower. *The Handbook* style magazine writes that:

Once seated, the £95 per person ticket allows for you to indulge in two glasses of Champagne and a brimming selection of Shangri-La canapés; fairly priced considering all that's involved, plus solely travelling up to The Shard's viewing point costs £32 alone. What's more, the audience is made up of a truly intimate number of people, just shy of 20, making it an idyllic date-night experience or something for those seeking a night that subverts the norm of dinner dates and drinks. (*The Handbook* 2019)

The angles of exclusivity in this instance are predominantly driven by financial rather than directorial decisions, and the same argument could be made of *Network* and other such productions starring marquee names. It must be stressed that these observations of theatre co-opted or central to economic imperatives are not offered, on my part, to make broad political points, but are placed as a reminder of our contemporary economic context. Jane Jacobs, the renowned activist on urban planning, famously stated that “A city cannot be a work of art” (1961: 372), yet works of art are often integral, beyond their capacities to entertain, to the economic functions of “the city” and likewise they are sustained by these functions.

The contextually and operationally qualifying aspects of theatre are often indivisible from those of commerce, and if not indivisible, then they are brought into convergence for mutual gain. The “communicative task”, to use Elleström’s term for the operationally qualifying aspect (2020: 61), is often in theatre as well as commerce, to reaffirm and re-sell lifestyle aspirations. The architectural spaces of commerce are technical media, be that skyscrapers staging Noel Coward or stately homes staging Shakespeare, but they are also a cornerstone of the qualified medium of commerce which often houses theatre, or certain modes of theatre, as part of its own *mise en scène*. Moving towards a conclusion, it may seem that I am suggesting that theatre has capitulated to commercial imperatives, but on the contrary my specific argument is that theatre’s status as a hypermedium needs framing, as Pavis would remind us, in the contemporary context of obscured divisions between art and, in this case, commercial life. Theatre is both adept at negotiating this relationship, sometimes out of financial necessity and sometimes out of creative curiosity, or both. If not in partnership with the architecture of commerce, then theatre, as in the case of *vHotelling*, has the armoury to expose the inconsistencies or inequalities of the economic systems in which we reside as it has the capacity to inhabit and subvert the modalities and modes of commerce.

2.8 CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this chapter, it was highlighted in many of the references that theatre was a particularly special form of qualified medium, a hypermedium and an expansive and generous host to all other qualified media whose materiality it deftly embraced intact but reframed with theatrical signification. Using Elleström’s modalities of media, my intention in this chapter has been to enhance these statements by Georgi, Kattenbelt and others by establishing the significance of the spatiotemporal and sensorial modalities, alongside the material modality, in realising the hypermedium and to shed greater light on what this specific hybridised theatrical signification may look like and what it may accomplish.

The mobility of materiality is undoubtedly the most obvious of distinctions for theatre in this context as objects, bodies, recordings, screens, social media feeds and so on can all be enfolded within a theatrical event. This material mobility can be extended to the consideration of theatre as a technical medium, a physical host for performance. Unlike other qualified media, theatre can inhabit and shift through endless technical hosts,

from traditional West End theatres to Birmingham residential towers, from London skyscrapers to Australian hotel complexes and far beyond. A single theatre performance can commence in one type of space and traverse through multiple other spaces (pavements, bedrooms, churches, etc.), appropriated as the technical media of theatre for the time they are required and then jettisoned back to their original context. Other qualified media are arguably not so flexible, as despite ongoing experimentations, fine art generally requires (or is perceived commercially to require) some form of canvas to realise the basic medium of visual images and literature needs the pages of a book or a digital device to realise the basic medium of written text. It may be initially argued that art, for example, can be galleried in any location but the gallery is not the technical medium of art; it is just one location, contextually agreed by society, to observe the qualified medium of fine art. The act of perception in fine art can be substantially, if not entirely, delineated from the context in which the media products of art are observed. We may profoundly contemplate a masterpiece by Hockney or O'Keefe in the privacy of our own home with a copy purchased online, but this is not possible with theatre, even when spectating online, as we are always cognisant of the physical context. Location for theatre is the equivalent of canvas or a book; it is intrinsic to the form, enmeshed within the media products of theatre and hence the cognitive import.

Beyond the significance of material mobility, the influence of specific spatiotemporal and sensorial affordances within the hypermedium is likewise not to be underestimated. Through such affordances, new and imaginative angles of mediation are crafted by theatre-makers to reveal the medial arrangement whilst simultaneously saturating you, often inculcating you, in the virtual domain. Theatre, particularly participatory and immersive practice, has the extraordinary capacity to suspend the audience between the extracommunicational and intracommunicational domains as immediate sense data and subsequent sensations converge or conflict with the richness of the virtual domain that we are inhabiting *and* the complex set of discourses that we are referencing from beyond the immediate experience. The acceptance into our hands of the bird's skull in *In Many Hands* compels us to respond to the surface and appearance of the bone, as sense data and affective sensation, whilst simultaneously sensing and perceiving the gravity of the ceremony from the pace of movement around us and our external knowledge of ceremonial practices extrinsic to this event; we navigate both the moment and the context.

Back at The Lansdowne, my wife and I emerge out of the darkened rooms of *It's Your Film*, blinking into the light of a Birmingham street. Whilst the architecture of commerce may be an undeniably persuasive medium, today we did not rent a flat; we saw some theatre.

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