REMEDIANING THE FOURTH WALL

NEW MEDIA AND CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

Joshua Nettheim
REMEDIATING THE FOURTH WALL
New Media and Contemporary Theatre

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
Bachelor of Media and Communications (Honours)
RMIT University
School of Media and Communication
Melbourne, Australia.

Joshua Nettheim
Bachelor of Performing Arts
E: satyricalenterprise@gmail.com

Supervisor: Dr Larissa Hjorth
E: larissa.hjorth@rmit.edu.au
Statement of Authorship

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any tertiary institution, and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of this thesis.

Joshua Nettheim
24 October 2013
Abstract

This thesis will utilise the notion of “Remediation” forwarded by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin to examine contemporary theatre practice in terms of the “fourth-wall”. The fourth-wall was first introduced by Denis Diderot in his 1758 “Discours Sur La Poésie Dramatique” (Poetics of the Drama) and can be defined as the non-physical boundary that exists between performers and audiences in a live theatrical event. The fourth-wall was initially forwarded as a device within realist theatre, offering a “window” into the action occurring on stage. Here, the fourth-wall will be viewed—in remedial terms—as an “interface” unique to the live performance medium of theatre. As an interface, the fourth-wall has been pivotal in both traditional screen and new media development within live theatre. With new media like mobile phones and online media increasingly being deployed within contemporary theatre and vice versa through groups such as Blast Theory, Avatar Body Collision, The Wooster Group, and Not Yet It’s Difficult this thesis seeks to contribute to the growing dialogue between new media, performance and theatre studies. As a performance artist, this thesis seeks to contribute to practical implications of new media within performance and theatre.
For Tim, who won’t get to read this.

For everyone else, who just might.
Contents

Statement of Authorship iii
Abstract v
List of Figures xi
Acknowledgments xiii

Introduction 1
1. Re: Remediation 7
2. The Intangible Interface: Theatre’s Fourth-Wall 23
3. Black Boxes: Contemporary Theatre and New Media 41

Conclusion 67

Works Cited 71
List of Figures


Acknowledgements

Thanks to everyone in no particular order—until the end.

Brother, housemate, best mate, for always getting it and keeping me healthy in body, if not in mind. Mum, for persistence in love and deed. Dad, for phone tennis and Patrick Stewart. My late Nanna, for the funding. Adrian, for getting me started with an appropriate closing. Neal, for calling me out but always explaining why—even if its just “Picture?”. Danielle, for loving it—but making me do it backwards. Will, Anna, and Stuart, for feeding a defector… The Collective Futures Lab, for sharing yours and shaping mine. The Consilience Crew 2013, for taking the leap with me. Study Team 2K13, for jokes, sunshine and red ink. The DERC, for taking in a stray and giving him a home—with a desk! The Coast Crew, for my roots, even after a lifetime away. The Melbourne Crew, for understanding my hibernation. The Workmates, for leave, laughs and loads of free coffee.

But most of all, my humblest thanks go to the wonderful Larissa Hjorth. I know I’m supposed to put you first but this is truly saving the best for last. Supervisor, surrogate parent, editor, tea giver, fastest email respondent on Earth, artist, gamer, free library, motivator. If it weren’t for you this wouldn’t exist. Words aren’t close, but since I (finally) settled on a thesis they’ll have to do, right? Your patience, guidance and unbelievable positivity has made this possible—and given me a thirst for more! If, one day, I can be half of what you’ve been for me, everyone will be better off. Thank me? You’re crazy. Thank you.
The idea of ‘new media’ captures both the development of unique forms of digital media, and the remaking of more traditional media forms to adopt and adapt to the new media technologies. Indeed, the lines between ‘new’ and ‘old’ media are hard to draw. (Flew 11)

In fact, as we shall see, what you cannot see is often the most significant thing about digital aesthetics. (Cubitt 24)

In this respect, new media is post-media or meta-media, as it uses old media as its primary material. (Manovich “New” 23)

New media, it turns out, is a very old tale. (Liu 3)

The term “new media” has undergone considerable change over the last half-century, moving from Marshall McLuhan’s description of electronic/electric media to today’s convergent media as part of many everyday practices (Flew 17; McLuhan 58; Pingree and Gittleman xi). Whether viewed in McLuhan’s terms or in the contemporary context, new media continues to be distinctly defined for its ability to store, translate, and transmit information with increased speed, crossing time, and distance and increasing options for individual participation and interaction in the process
(Chun 1; Flew 17; McLuhan 58). With the rise of ubiquitous technologies like smartphones, debates around notions of new media and its place within everyday life and the arts has continued to provide much contestation (Bishop n.p.) In particular, contemporary new media is characterised by Web 2.0 practices such as user created content (UCC), collaboration and participatory media (Jenkins “Convergence Culture”). As noted in the opening quotes, while much of the content of “new” media is old (figure 1), the process of digitalisation produces different content, contexts and affects. A photograph on the desk is not the same as a photograph on the desktop. The former is discrete, while the latter is continuous.

While the digital technology that new media utilises is undoubtedly what has made it so “new”—especially compared to analog(ue) art/media formats of film, television, theatre, or print—the desires behind the introduction of any “new” media type and its ability to extend the ways we share information and experiences apparently remain constant (Ames and Naaman 975; Meyrowitz 57). Much new media discourse addresses not what is new about new media, but rather its uniqueness in terms of what we do with it, how we use it. Although new media theories clearly present some differences, they also share some commonalities regardless of approach. New media as a concept, interdisciplinary field, and a set of practices is both contested and divergent. As the opening quotes demonstrate, new media as a definition is always in flux, a perpetual reworking and recontextualisation of more traditional media through the lens of the digital. With the rise of smartphones heralding a new generation of haptic (touch) interfaces, the impact of new media within many everyday life contexts is palpable.

From devices like smartphones (and pirate copies such as China’s shanzhai) to tablets, new media has become haptic as it has become mobile. These mobile devices—with their uneven and yet prevalent uptake globally—usher in new media avenues, participatory tools and apps (mobile applications) once only accessible to those with technological savvy. The impact of this availability of new media at the level of the everyday and pedestrian can be felt across various disciplines. One discipline that has shaped and adapted alongside new media, is theatre. From performativity and metaphors about co-presence, the interaction between theatre and new media has been as productive as it has been dynamic. And yet, within theatre studies, only a few projects (The Builder’s Association’s House/Divided; Version 1.0’s The Tender Age) have given this area critical engagement. So too, much of the new media art projects by the likes of
Blast Theory—while borrowing from theatre, situation international (SI), and performance art—have neglected to fully address and critique the theatre-new media nexus.

It is this nexus—the intersection between theatre and new media—that this thesis seeks to explore. Through a detailed and nuanced discussion of Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin’s concept of “Remediation”, this thesis then applies this concept to one of the important modes of interface within theatre, the “fourth-wall”. First introduced by Denis Diderot in his 1758 “Discours Sur La Poésie Dramatique” (Poetics of the Drama), the fourth-wall can be viewed as a window or an interface between performers and audiences. The notion of the screen as a window or interface can be traced throughout twentieth-century media from film to TV and mobile media (Koskela and Macgregor Wise; Spigel; Morse; Chun and Keenan; Friedman), but as we move from a century where screen culture focused upon the visual and into the twenty-first century focus upon haptic (I. Richardson) and touch (Palmer “Mobile Media Photography”) screens, I argue this shift has been paralleled within the remediation of theatre’s “fourth wall”.

In order to trace this development from windows, screens, and interface metaphors and practices as shifting from visuality to the haptic—as part of broader movements in our understandings of presence and co-presence (I. Richardson)—in both new media and theatre, this thesis begins with outlining new media today. As smartphones increasingly become omnipresent, the role of new media becomes more and more central in everyday life. There is a need to revise new media notions as no longer something wholly distinct from preceding media. Indeed through theatre and the fourth-wall, I argue that theatre can provide great insight into new media and other media forms, both presently and historically.
In order to argue this link between theatre and new media, the thesis has three chapters. In Chapter One I identify the alternate schools of new media thought that constitute a media genealogy. The remainder of Chapter One will focus one specific media genealogy—Bolter and Grusin’s concept of “remediation”—as a framework for investigating intersections between the “old” medium of theatre and present day new media. In Chapter Two I repurpose the notion of remediation in terms of “The Intangible Interface”—that is, theatre’s Fourth-Wall—and trace the effects of this theatrical device on the more “immediate” media forms of film and television. I then conclude with Chapter Three where I first posit theatrical hypermediacy as a primary historical influence on present day new media, before discussing of two performative works—Gob Squad’s Room Service and Punchdrunk’s Sleep No More—for their particular expressions of new media concepts through the lens of contemporary theatre. Room Service will address shifting notions of mediated co-presence experienced within a theatrical setting, while Sleep No More will investigate the effects of new media convergence when applied to old media.

As a practitioner in the field of performance studies, I see this thesis contributing to the intersection between theatre, performance, and new media studies. While there are many examples of theatre deploying new media (Tamara Saulwick’s Pin Drop; Susan Kozel’s Whisper), much of the discussion around the intersection between theatre, performance, and new media remains predominately within new media studies, either restricted to new media in theatre performance (Causey “Theatre”; Dixon “Digital”; Salter “Entangled”) or using narrative performance theories to approach new media, specifically gaming (Murray “Hamlet”; Laurel “Computers”).

However, there is a pocket of research that is engaging in this area, a place where performers, theatre scholars, and new media theorists
collectively explore the unique shared aspects between digitality and theatre—ephemeral, mutable content and varied spatial practices (Farman “Mobile”; Giannachi “Politics”; Giannachi, Kaye and Shanks “Archaeologies”), and it is in this small area where I aim to contribute. While this thesis will primarily focus on theatre’s influence on new media through mediated co-presence(s) and convergence, it opens the door to later exploration regarding the move away from visual interface domination, the influx of locative media and the physically interactive embodied media.
1

RE: REMEDIATION

New Media Genealogy
As identified in the Introduction, paradoxes about temporality and historicity are at the heart of new media studies, a divided set of approaches working toward a potentially unified “answer”. In this chapter I explore and contextualise new media studies and then turn to one of the key new media notions, remediation, as a way for thinking through interfaces within contemporary media cultures. By comparing the tangible, evidence-based method of media archaeologists alongside the heuristic manner of cultural media theorists, I propose that a hybrid approach—media genealogy—will allow for a more detailed insight into the physically unmediated traditional theatre. Remediation’s visual genealogy, when applied to theatre, will extend interface recognition beyond both physically mediated and visual, opening new media interfaces to exploration through theatrical examples in theatre’s own language. As critical and new media theorist Wendy Chun notes, to map a general terrain of new media studies:

necessitates bringing together continental European media archaeologists, who have tended to concentrate on the logics and physics of hardware and software, and Anglo-speaking critics, who have focused on the subjective and cultural effects of media, or on the transformative possibilities of interfaces (4)

Chun’s quotation offers a variety of possible binaries, but a simple
distinction can be identified based on tangibility. Media objects (hardware, interfaces) are tangible forms and capable of being handled physically, like smartphones or VCRs. A media object can then be considered as a *what*, a discrete entity that occupies physical space. Content (software, culture) is intangible; it is quite difficult to physically grasp active software, or an entire culture. Content is malleable and subject to frequent change but is absolutely reliant on objects for realisation. Consider the Earth as an object and people—culture—as content. Cultures are quite flexible, but if the Earth-object were to disappear, so too would its content. Similarly, a digital device without an operating system is a functionless form, an empty object occupying just taking up space. If an object is a *what*, content is rather the way we interact with objects, or how we use them.

While Chun’s “schools” both address *what* and *how*, tangibility highlights a clear division between the two approaches based on their overall focus. Media archaeologists are primarily aligned with the *what*. European media archaeologist Wolfgang Ernst describes media archaeology as a logical, tangible, hardware-based approach to new media studies but prone to an often negative “branding”, with media archaeologists commonly seen as “hardware-manic, assembler-devoted and anti-interface ascetics, fixed to a (military) history of media without regard to the present media culture” (Ernst and Lovink n.p.). Jussi Parikka calls this extreme view “materialist” media archaeology, which greatly differs from the actual approach taken by the majority of media archaeologists (54). By isolating changes and inconsistencies in the actual objects through non-interpretive research, media archaeologists focus on clear statements and visible proof derived from a more scientific approach and avoiding overtly psychological explanations or “deeper” meanings (Stevenson and Cutcliffe 715).

Media archaeology is not so much dogmatic as it is quantitative,
preferring evidence drawn from the tangible what rather than intangible how—a view not shared by cultural and critical theorists (figure 2). Placing the onus on societal influences around the introduction of media objects—and not the objects themselves—cultural theorists primarily examine content, user experiences and the socio-political climates surrounding the culture under observation (Chun 4). However, cultural theorists have also been described as traditionalists, adhering to historical narrative rather than openly questioning in the manner of the distanced, scientifically modelled media archaeologists (Liu 6; Parikka 56). This focus on the intangible how often places cultural theorists in opposition to media archaeologists, especially in relation to broad theories lacking the support of concrete evidence (Parikka 55), but this too is an over-generalisation that negates the ability for cultural theorists to examine tangible objects as part of their investigations. So, if media archaeologists are object-oriented militants and cultural theorists content-focused narratologists, the idea of bringing together these disparate approaches into even a semblance of unity presents a difficult, if not impossible, challenge.

However, media genealogy may offer an intersection of these two methods. Merging media archaeology objects with qualitative cultural critique, media genealogy “rummages textual, visual and auditory archives as well as collections of artefacts, emphasizing both the discursive and the material manifestations of culture” (Huhtamo and Parikka 3). Media genealogy brings archaeological discoveries into the present and analyses current cultural practices based on their tangible origins. Where archaeology describes the rules and the organisational structures of media, genealogy explains how these rules are themselves enacted (Stevenson and Cutcliffe 715) or as Ernst neatly puts it “Genealogy examines process while archaeology examines the moment, however temporally extended that
moment might be” (Ernst and Lovink n.p.).

Michel Foucault, the “father” of both archaeology and genealogy in media studies, describes the genealogical approach in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”. Here, Foucault stresses that while genealogy depends heavily on source material (archaeology) it does not necessarily oppose itself to history (cultural narrative) directly; genealogy differs by rejecting linear perceptions of origin and evolution, instead studying the jolts, deviations and ruptures, and how these “accidents”—rather than notions of causal descent—may effect the present (76-83). This refusal to adhere to causality inherent in notions of lineage leads contemporary media genealogists toward the writing of counter-histories excluded from mainstream media history and cultural counter-memories that unfold in different, non-linear temporal rhythms (Parikka 54; Ernst and Lovink n.p.).

Media genealogy’s reliance on artifacts might see it more closely aligned with media archaeology than cultural theory, however Jussi Parikka and Erkki Huhtamo identify cultural and media theorist Marshall McLuhan as another “ancestor” of genealogy in new media studies. Described as both cultural critic and technological determinist, McLuhan’s primary contribution to media genealogy was the way in which his cultural critique dynamically challenged the popular dichotomy of object versus content by drawing seemingly incompatible connections from various sources—contemporary, historical and myth—and frequently forgoing traditional linear narrative retellings in the process (Parikka and Huhtamo 2-5; Morse “Virtualities” 364).

Clearly McLuhan’s line of inquiry shares much with today’s media genealogy, examining cultural effects derived from the introduction of media objects rather than cultural desires that brought about the objects. Approaching contemporary media and history in this way, McLuhan
proposed media history not as a vector but “an equilibrium theory…such as even now we are only striving to work out again for media” (20). McLuhan’s treatment of media objects as fragmented, select parts of a wider media history allowed him to forward a more inclusive cultural media theory, containing recurrent “themes and motifs that occupy [not just cultural theorists but] media archaeologists as well” (Huhtamo and Parikka 2).


Current new media debates are often situated around the level of affect that old media has on the new, what Larissa Hjorth describes as new media forms being “perpetually haunted by the ghosts—either through content or philosophies—of older media” (“Games” 32; figure 2).
Examples can be seen in desktop software processes, where what once required scissors and glue now needs only a ‘cut’ and ‘paste’ (Manovich “Language” 130-131), and witnessed in modern mobile aesthetics like Hipstamatic, with its tagline of “Digital photography never looked so analog” (Alper 3).

One theory that has provided insight into the constant recycling of new and old media is Bolter and Grusin’s notion of remediation. Drawing heavily on media genealogy developed through Foucault and McLuhan, Bolter and Grusin’s notion of remediation has been central in contemporary understandings of new media, gaining particular attention by helping to conceptualise new media in terms of immediacy and hypermediacy. All interactions—no matter how intimate—are mediated to some degree, if not by technologies then by memory, language and physicality (Hjorth “Games” 67), and central to new media debates is the desire to offset the presence of mediation through techniques and aesthetics such as “liveness” and immersion. Nearly 15 years since it was first published, Bolter and Grusin’s notion of remediation is a concept relevant in contemporary understandings new media—and warrants further exploration as a potential framework to explore the confluence of new media and theatre.

**Remediation**

Rather than following a linear progression of new media replacing old, remediation suggests a cyclic process where both new and old media consistently share traits and techniques with one another and integrate these ideas into contemporary forms. Bolter and Grusin describe this media interplay in terms of immediacy and hypermediacy, an equilibrium that can be traced back to the Renaissance (21). As materials for media and art
evolve, new methods become available to express content, and each new material development at once brings the offers the potential for greater authenticity of content—immediacy—as well as a heightened knowledge of how the content was created through a greater understanding of the methods and mechanics involved in making the art or media work—hypermediacy (Bolter and Grusin 19).

According to Bolter and Grusin, the process of remediation can be seen in three ways; a linear historical progression in the “formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms” (273); a reverse of this, where “in this genealogy, older media can also remediate new ones” (55) and; an active application where the twin remedial logics of immediacy and hypermediacy co-exist within a singular art-work or mediated output (Bolter and Grusin 87, 234-235, 238). While the process of remediation is bound to the logics of immediacy and hypermediacy, Bolter and Grusin argue that historically, genealogically or practically, the function of remediation is always to produce immediacy:

We can identify the same process throughout the last several hundred years of Western visual representation. A painting by the seventeenth-century artist Pieter Saenredam, a photograph by Edward Weston, and a computer system for virtual reality are different in many important ways, but they are all attempts to achieve immediacy by ignoring or denying the presence of the medium and the act of mediation. (Bolter and Grusin 11)

Immediacy is the ideal, the proposed end-point of remediation, with the goal always to place the viewer “in the same space as the object” under inspection, offering representation so accurate as to offset—or deny—mediation (Bolter and Grusin 53). With each historical progression, new
visual media forms remediate the act of viewing, moving away from obvious presentation towards an increasingly “realistic” representation of the object in the here and now—immediacy.

*Immediacy*

Our culture wants both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation; ideally, it wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying them (Bolter and Grusin 5).

The last century has witnessed the magnification of mediation. From photography and cinema in the 1920’s to the relocation of moving pictures into our homes (television) in the 1950’s up to today, the roles of immediacy and “liveness” have been central. The same is equally true of new media, where the significance of immediacy within “real time” participatory narratives such as webcams, camera phones, games and aesthetics is unmistakable (Palmer “Participatory Media” 21, 120, 138). Here, remediation can provide insight into the logic of immediacy seen either as a contemporary desire or a historical progression.

While instant access to a variety of art-media is in one sense a pursuit of immediacy—temporal immediacy—Bolter and Grusin define immediacy more specifically about a sense of transparency, that is, the perceptual erasure of an interface, an experience without obvious mediation (22-23). *Transparent* immediacy does not imply an “utterly naive or magical conviction that the representation is the same thing as what it represents” (30), instead offering the feeling of direct access to the object of representation by imploring audiences to forget the presence of the intervening medium through the best attempt at wiping out the medium
Immediacy for Bolter and Grusin does not pursue total realism or replication, instead working on the basis of being as realistic as the prevailing medium allows. The selection of words in a novel, the style of brush used in a painting and the props chosen for a play or film all impact the level of immediacy offered; while each new medium improves on its predecessor’s claim to transparency, the challenge to use this transparency to attain greater immediacy remains. With this aim in mind, transparent immediacy can be best achieved with a transparent interface, one that “erases itself, so that the user is no longer aware of confronting a medium, but instead stands in an immediate relationship to the contents of that medium.” (Bolter and Grusin 23-24).

Where Bolter and Grusin primarily discuss transparent immediacy relative to visual media, Richard A. Lanham describes this difficulty in terms of text, where transparency (and immediacy) requires an audience to look through a product, as opposed to looking at the product. By looking through, a viewer bypasses the stylistic falseness of the representation to instead connect behaviourally or emotionally with the object being represented, because in all cases pertaining to immediacy, “the final aim [is] stable transparency” (Lanham 5-6). Following this, it can be seen that where a novel requires the imagination of the reader to “realise” the content, a film of the same novel simply asks the viewer to watch, displaying all of the content visually. Film then is the more transparent medium of the two, removing the extra step between display and realisation. The more transparent the interface, the easier it is to look through, and the greater the likelihood for immediacy in viewer experiences. From novel to photograph to film, the historical path of immediacy perpetually attempts to move closer to this goal.
However, this opens immediacy up to a twofold approach. On one hand, an exploration of the individual media (photograph, film, etc.) regarding their increasing claims to transparency over history highlights the power of media objects in the realisation of immediacy, potentially supporting a deterministic object-oriented stance like McLuhan’s “the medium is the message” (7). On the other hand, if the main drive is the cultural desire for immediacy of content, newer media simply arise to better actualise the overarching societal appetite for immediacy, and media objects are nothing more than increasingly elegant tools for manifesting this desire.

**Hypermediacy**

Bolter and Grusin’s immediacy is more concerned with the cultural desire for transparency of content, but they do not deny the power of objects and address this more through hypermediacy. Where immediacy approaches realism using transparency to deny mediation, hypermediacy appears opaque in comparison, consistently drawing attention to—and creating enjoyment from—the mediation itself (Bolter and Grusin 21). Unlike the singular, unified visual space required of immediacy, hypermediacy overlays multiple representations concurrently to increase visually obvious signs of mediation in an attempt to recreate the density of the everyday human sensory experience (Bolter and Grusin 34). Hypermediate interfaces display a “multiplicity of windows, and the heterogeneity of their contents mean that the user is repeatedly brought back into contact with the interface” (Bolter and Grusin 33). Hypermediacy is equally achievable outside of a “windowed” setting, especially if the lone image or scene is either ruptured in some way or fantastic beyond belief, but windowed or otherwise, hypermediacy persistently draws viewers attention to the constructed nature of the work, the mediation and, at times, creates a self-reflexive desire for
immediacy. (Bolter and Grusin 34; Lavender 56; Erl and Rigney 4).

In terms of historical artistic progression, hypermediacy appears when a more transparent form emerges; older media incarnations have their mechanics exposed simply by comparing them against newer, more transparent forms (Bolter and Grusin 39). Comparing a photograph to a painting in terms of transparency, the painted image almost forces the viewer to focus on the painting’s construction (brush strokes, colours, and canvas etc), mechanics that are not evident in the photograph. Next to the “flawless” realism of the photograph, a painting seems not unreal, but unrealistic—a presentation rather than a representation—making the painting the more hypermediate of the two art forms by default through it’s lesser claim to transparency.

Hypermediate art forces the viewer to look beyond the representation and witness the mechanics, forgoing the instant gratification of the “finished product” in favour of the joy—or perhaps discomfort—on discovering what lies beneath, altering the process for creating an artwork, how audiences engage in the consumption of the artwork, and perhaps even the general nature of art itself (Bolter and Grusin 14). By experimenting with new ways of creating artistic content—and deconstructing the composition of these artworks—hypermediacy is presentational, consistently offering a mirror to reflect (and refine) the more representational form of immediacy (Bolter and Grusin 31). And yet, if Bolter and Grusin are to be believed, while hypermediacy provides a fascinating experience of its own accord, historically it is a secondary process, a byproduct of remediation’s trend toward immediacy. As interesting and useful as hypermediacy is, once hypermediate art has been explored openly it loses its “shock value”, and is ultimately used to trigger the next step in the evolution of artistic immediacy as, according to Bolter
and Grusin, “[t]ransparency, however, remains the goal” (46).

While that might hold true for a linear history of visual art, taken as an active process, hypermediacy is an artistic device of its own, one of collage and assemblage where creativity and newness are achieved through alternate combinations of objects often disconnected from their original contexts (Bolter and Grusin 39). By intentionally fracturing the visual space of a standalone artwork, hypermediacy draws audiences in one way or another to recognise the medium as a medium, or to recall Lanham, hypermediacy makes us look at the object rather than through it (Lanham 5; Bolter and Grusin 38). But where Lanham argues that we are always first confronted with the difficulty of looking at before potentially being able to move our gaze through the object, Bolter and Grusin describe hypermediacy as somewhat more belligerent, repeatedly bringing us into contact with the object/medium by hypermediating prior media forms; no matter how our culture may try, the desire for transparency can never be sated because no medium can ever fully deny mediation (Lanham 4; Bolter and Grusin 236).

**Remediation as Genealogy**

Remediation is the place where the unstoppable desire for transparent immediacy hits the immovable wall of hypermediacy. While it appears at first glance to fit very neatly into the Anglo-American media history approach in terms of the cultural desire for immediacy and its view regarding the transformative power of interfaces, remediation can also be read in reverse: that is, not as a dominant history of immediacy and linear perspective, but as an archaeology of the interface and a genealogy of hypermediacy.

If the starting point for archaeology is the artifact, remediation’s artifact is the actual, tangible interface. Bolter and Grusin take a somewhat
archaeological approach to the notion of medium as message by exploring the concrete interface objects across various visual media, citing their point of Foucaultian “departure” as the Renaissance invention of linear visual perspective (21). Having traced a line of descent from Renaissance to the present, Bolter and Grusin then work retrospectively, combining the same historical artifacts with “the twin preoccupations of contemporary [new] media to explore the genealogy of remediation” (21).

In particular, Bolter and Grusin aim to establish present day hypermediacy as more than a contingent strategy to broach immediacy. Certainly hypermediacy’s multi-modal representations aid in new methods of approaching transparent immediacy but also directly address areas where the one-dimensional realism of transparent immediacy fails to satisfy contemporary audiences used to modern—or postmodern—art (Bolter and Grusin 54). This places hypermediacy in a category of its own, particularly in relation to new media where today, the oscillation between immediacy and hypermediacy fascinates audiences as new media often attempt to deny mediation by applying the myriad uses of mediation itself (Bolter and Grusin 236).

For Bolter and Grusin, concurrent examples of the two opposite ‘logics’ are seen as integrating digital imagery with film (replacing stuntmen with special effects) and virtual reality applications (flight simulators for pilot training); each using “more exciting, lively and realistic” applications of hypermedia to approach a completely transparent interface (23). Virtual reality is of particular interest as an immersive medium, (theoretically) designed to “disappear” by filling one’s entire visual spectrum with an uninterrupted stream of images, coming as close as possible to our daily visual experience and effectually creating an “interfaceless” interface (Bolter and Grusin 21-23). Although theoretical, virtual reality gives a practical,
present-day example of remediation and its attempts to erase the appearance of mediation through the sheer multiplication of media. Still, in offering more immersive, interactive and participatory experiences, virtuality constantly reminds us that all experiences—immediate, hypermediate or otherwise—are ultimately subject to mediation (Morse “Virtualities” 10-11, 14, 102).

Whereas remediation is discussed almost exclusively in terms of visual media, Bolter and Grusin do (briefly) address rock music’s progression from immediate to hypermediate in terms of “visual and aural spectacle” (42), as well as amusement park “attractions [that] recall and refashion the experience of vaudeville, live theater, film, television and recorded music” (169). Here, it becomes clear that while the linear visual perspective offered through transparent immediacy is one pathway towards new media, it is not the only one. Certainly visual stimulus plays a major role in interface engagement, but the move towards haptic designs and cross-platform convergence is decidedly hypermediate. Increasingly new media (i.e., smartphones, tablets, gaming devices) are about haptic rather than visual logic. While the photograph may have proved invaluable in terms of the transition from painting through film into graphical interfaces in one aspect, another media with an altogether different interface—theatre—provides an alternate genealogy. As a genre, theatre is more in line with how content is experienced in new media today—co-present, convergent, haptic and interactive—and also presents closer ties with the historical progression of media forms, especially film and television.

What remediation offers is a framework to approach a genealogy of theatre in new media terms, and this thesis seeks to revise remediation beyond its visual economy to reflect upon the intersections between theatre, new media, immediacy and hypermediacy. Throughout this thesis,
remediation will be repurposed to describe an interface specific to theatre—the “fourth-wall”—and the influence of this theatrical device on media new and old. The next chapter will trace immediacy from the same historical starting point as Bolter and Grusin—linear visual perspective—from its manifestation in the theatre’s fourth-wall through to present day Remediations of theatrical “liveness” and immediacy in film and television.

The final chapter (Chapter Three) will adhere to the cyclical nature of remediation by using the counterpoint of hypermediacy, and theatre—so often celebrated for its immediacy (Auslander “Liveness” 21; Barranger 1-3)—will be investigated here for its overall capacity as a hypermedium (Chapple and Kattenbelt 24; Wagner 127). However, unlike the genealogy of primarily unidirectional visual media offered by Bolter and Grusin, this exploration into hypermediate theatre and its alternative treatments of the fourth-wall interface may provide further insight into the development of haptic technologies and interactive new media experiences not governed by visuality.
THE INTANGIBLE INTERFACE:
THEATRE’S FOURTH-WALL

In the theatre, in the cinema, in traditional literature, things are always seen from somewhere (Barthes 76).

“Theatre”
Considering remediation as a function of visual media, it is interesting that for Bolter and Grusin, theatre is discussed mainly in terms of movie-theatres, except to quickly comment on cinema as the remedial evolution of its theatrical precursor (60, 80-81). The word “theatre” is derived from the Greek word theatron meaning “seeing” or “looking-place” and is commonly used to describe either a live performance event or the space in which the event occurs (Zarrilli et al. xxii, Balme 1). Over the last century, theatre has been incorporated into cinema and television terminology, forgoing the live element of traditional theatrical performance and focusing instead on the place in which a film or program is screened for an audience, be it movie- or home-theatre (Spigel 106-109). Theatre metaphors—such as “front” and “back” stage—have also been integrated into sociology such as Erving Goffman’s “dramaturgical model”, which utilises theatrical process to explain different types of identity management and personal interaction (“Presentation”).
Accepting that a theatre is a “seeing-space”, distinctions between the theatre, film, and television relate more to how the performance is transmitted than the “theatre” in which it takes place. Performance theorist Philip Auslander uses the concept of “liveness” to distinguish between how various entertainment forms—including theatre, film, and television—mediate their content, citing theatre as an example of “Classic” liveness, where performers and audiences are physically co-present and temporally simultaneous in terms of the event’s production and reception (“Liveness” 61). Theatre for Auslander, and more recently David Osipovich, is contrast with the primarily pre-recorded mediums of film and television, standing apart in terms of temporal simultaneity and especially in terms of the theatre’s reliance on physical co-presence (non-mediation) for realisation (Auslander “Liveness” 15; Osipovich 469).

Traditional theatre can then be seen as a spatially co-present and temporally simultaneous performance event, and using this definition, it does not require screen-based mediation for an audience to view the performance. In fact, Osipovich contends that any physical mediation—even a glass partition—removes the basic character of theatre by confusing theatre’s aesthetic with that of live television (466). This lack of screen mediation appears to place theatre beyond the visual logic of remediation, as unlike a photograph or a monitor, traditional theatre does not offer a concrete object-interface through which to view it’s content, placing audiences in unobstructed immediate temporal and physical contact with the content—here a performance—under inspection.

The Fourth-Wall

However, traditional theatre has its own unique mediating device in the form of the “fourth-wall”, a transparent (in this case, physically non-
existent) construct that forces spectators to “sit outside the world [of the play], watching it passively as observers, voyeurs” (Haring-Smith 50). The fourth-wall can be seen to operate in the manner of a physical interface, offering a rectangular surface framing a virtual world within the real world without obscuring the viewer’s entire perspective, like a window or a “screen” (Manovich “Language” 16; Morse “Virtualities” 16).

Commonly found in proscenium staging (figure 3), the fourth-wall clearly divides performers from audiences even within the shared space and time that renders theatre distinct from cinema or television. While early examples of fourth-wall traits can be seen in Greek tragedy and Aristotle’s “Poetics”, eighteenth-century French philosopher Denis Diderot was the first to firmly establish it as a concrete theatrical device, a marriage of the disparate styles of drama and comedy into a unified ideal for theatre practice and
reception (Kruger 356; Stevenson 4). The fourth-wall became the governing practice in theatre and the herald of realist theatre—more often referred to today as traditional theatre—by delimiting the fantasy onstage from the viewers in the auditorium (Stevenson 4; Morse “Virtualities” 224).

Prior to Diderot’s fourth-wall, theatre patrons often sat on the stage as well as in seating banks. Theatrical performance frequently relied on physical interaction between actors and audiences, but the fourth-wall did away with then-traditional “collectives based in immediate physical contact” turning theatre instead into a place where people “gather to watch a representation by the live actors” (Schneider 383). This can be seen clearly in English theatre of the same period, and particularly that of David Garrick, who as early as 1748 attempted to separate audiences from the acting space, resulting in great disturbances to actors and spectators alike (Price 95). It wasn’t until 1762 that Garrick finally succeeded and “[f]or the first time a virtual fourth wall was created between the stage and the audience” (Hatchuel 7).

This intervening medium of the fourth-wall severed the homogeneous reality natural to theatre by cutting spectators off, making them mute, immobile viewers fixated on the wholly imaginary world of the play (Schneider 392). As such the eighteenth-century fourth-wall was distinctly hypermediate. Audiences had difficulty adjusting to these darkened auditoriums, and the passivity necessary to draw visual focus to the stage was not seen as particularly immersive (Schneider 392). But with increased funding coming into the theatre, seating banks became more comfortable and audiences began to accept the more passive role of spectators, leaving actors to concentrate on playing in virtual worlds increasingly separate from the theatre—even while remaining inside the confines of the theatre’s actual walls (Price 95; Hatchuel 7).
Immediate Theatre

After the initial shock of the (then) hypermediate fourth-wall, theatre gradually became more “natural” and “realistic” in order to match Diderot’s ideal of “playing as if the curtain were not drawn” (Diderot qtd. in Schneider 1). Actors were expected not to “drop” character, at the risk of destroying naturalism’s carefully crafted illusion (Fisher-Lichte 85) and over the nineteenth-century, theatre moved away from elaborate gestures, projected voices and fantastic scenery, focussing instead on realistic actor expressions and representations of everyday experiences (Barranger 382). Theatrical realism moved towards genuine articles (including live animals) instead of fabricated props and photographic prints for backdrops, while performers began to absolutely embody characters, approaching the point where there was no obvious distinction between actor and role (Barranger 205; Zarrilli et al. 288-292).

Performance theorist Elizabeth Bell describes the fourth-wall as a (now) conventional theatrical frame based primarily on representation. While realist productions are real in terms of unfolding in real-time within a shared physical space, they are by no means “for real”. The illusion of realist theatre relies on flawless stagecraft in order not to “break” the fourth-wall, because by “breaking the fourth wall of realistic drama, actors and audiences alike are asked to analyze the construction of all reality” and in true remedial fashion, immediacy quickly becomes hypermediacy (Bell 37, 203).

Realist theatre then thrives on familiarity, giving mundane depictions of human life by adhering to recognisable characters, settings and even physics, all on a visually homogeneous, conventional stage (Haring-Smith 53). Today, barely two centuries after Diderot proposed the fourth-wall, the proscenium arch has become the dominant form of
theatrical staging, comprising of “a darkened auditorium, a bourgeois drama [and] performance conventions that confine the play behind the fourth wall of a box set on stage” (Worthen “Drama” 1096). Along with the normalisation of naturalistic staging, props and acting techniques, the fourth-wall interface gained greater acceptance, becoming a stable “window onto the actual, tangible [performance]” (Weisel n.p.). With this growing stability, the fourth-wall “window” became increasingly transparent, supporting,

… a state of immediacy in which the experience…is as real as the medium itself, the [theatre] disappears…immediacy is the absence of the window, and it is at the same time, the presence of the observer with his vision, his experience of it and his gaze. (Pereria 7)

In this way, realist theatre clearly adheres to notions of transparent immediacy, directing the audience’s gaze toward the performance object through the transparent interface of “its most ideal expression, the fourth wall”, promoting the visual experience above any other sensory input as realistically—and immediately—as the theatrical medium permits (Morse “Virtualities” 159).

**Software Becomes Hardware: Film**

This fourth-wall approach was quickly adopted into film and television as realism’s naturalistic performances provided a basis for “live” recording, and the linear perspective of proscenium staging offered an uninterrupted, stable viewing platform—and a greater potential for immediacy (Bolter and Grusin 5, 30). Several theorists have traced paths from theatre to both film and television (Sontag 2005; McAuley 1988) but Auslander offers a concise explanation as to which points each medium primarily emulated,
[F]ilm remediated theatre by adopting the narrative structures and visual strategies of nineteenth-century melodrama. Whereas film could only remediate the theatre at these structural levels, television could remediate theatre at the ontological level through its claim to immediacy. (“Liveness” 13)

Putting aside television for now, here Auslander states that film is a direct remediation of traditional theatrical techniques, and clearly a derivative of realism and the fourth-wall. As a historical segue, Steele MacKaye’s “proscenium adjustor” offered an early attempt at framing theatrical action on stage—a direct precursor to film—narrowing the audience’s focus from full-stage to alternate sections of the stage as “the theatre’s name clearly suggested that viewing, not listening was the primary audience activity” (Sokalsi 197, 208). Literature and cinema theorist Sarah Hatchuel notes that MacKaye’s proscenium adjustor anticipated film’s medium- and close-shots through sharp focal changes, making audiences pure voyeurs by totally removing any active participation.

The fourth wall had become completely watertight between the reality of the auditorium and the idealism of the stage. There was no way to progress toward greater illusionist realism without going into another mode of presentation, into another medium. (Hatchuel 12)

Clearly film borrowed (and continues to utilise) the formalities of theatre and attendees of both plays and films would be hard-pressed not to remark on the similarities between a proscenium stage production and the cinema (figure 3; figure 4). Tickets are purchased and patrons often shown to their seats by ushers. Seats are situated in rows directed towards a rectangular viewing area and lights dim to signify commencement of the action. In the
case of a lengthy event intermissions are common protocol and etiquette for both events dictates sitting quietly next to potential strangers so as not to disturb the illusion of the viewing, except perhaps in the case of applause.

The introduction of the film screen executed Diderot’s fourth-wall absolutely, separating performers from audiences temporally and physically by replacing the stage with a screen incapable of interaction—but ideal for viewing. Early films (and screenings) were often recorded theatre performances and subsequent films carefully mimicked theatrical realism (Hatchuel 13), but cinema quickly began to advance realism in ways not possible in theatre. Whereas cinemas retained theatrical architecture, films themselves were no longer bound by theatre’s general “frontality” of playing angle or stylised acting methods built for stages, and film moved from “theatrical artificiality to cinematic naturalness and immediacy” (Sontag 134-135). As film progressed, close-ups shots remediated the spectacle of nineteenth-century melodrama but lighting, camera angles and the ability to edit were used to ultimately control the gaze of the film audience far beyond theatre’s capacity to do the same (Mulvey 77; Wienerroither 38).

Aside from film remediating theatre’s visual strategies to promote greater immediacy on a technical level through direction of the audience’s gaze, film’s heavy usage of illusionistic narrative far surpassed theatre, allowing a much higher likelihood of realising immediacy in terms of content (McAuley 47; Mulvey 25; Bolter and Grusin 156). Manovich refers to this narrative film practice as a prison of sorts, where spectators are confined within the prison of the cinema, and filmic fourth-wall—as with all screen interfaces—forces viewers to remain immobile, prisoners in body and mind to the point where representation may be mistaken for perception
in spectators simply through the act of viewing (“Language” 107-109). Manovich’s idea has been echoed further, and arguments exist to the point where representational depictions are seen as repressive by rendering viewers inert and indulging audiences escapist voyeurism (T. Brown 7).


While the above view may come across somewhat heavy handed and has itself been contested (N. Richardson 160), if aligned with the notion of passive viewership associated with transparent immediacy, the model of representational narrative does make lesser demands on audiences “requiring of film viewers little more than their own basic understanding of the world and their natural perceptual faculties” (Schummer 4, McLuhan 320). In terms of sheer representation, film offers a level of transparency via
the tangible fourth-wall of the cinema screen unmatched in theatre and highly demonstrative of Bolter and Grusin’s trend towards immediacy. But in remediating nineteenth-century fourth-wall theatre, film lost something very particular to theatre in terms of theatre’s temporal and spatial capacity. If immediacy is the desire to move beyond or through the medium, the physical fourth-wall of cinema often inadvertently elicits distance—temporal, spatial or critical—in the viewer experience, no matter how accurate the filmic representation (Bolter and Grusin 82-83).

**Personal Fourth-Walls: Television**

This is what Auslander is referring to when speaking of television replicating theatre’s immediacy ontologically. While cinemas constructed literal fourth-walls for viewing, the actual content of film is always after the fact—recorded—which is not the case for television. The first television programmes were audio-visual broadcasts modelled in the vein of radio, built around live (often theatrical) performances and direct address presentations (news) as the medium lacked the ability to record—or replay. Lucille Ball’s *I love Lucy* was the first recorded telecast, which enabled the further options of post-editing, re-runs, and worldwide distribution, either physically through videotapes or simply via broadcast transmission (Mellencamp “Logics” 3; “Situation” 33).

As technologically revolutionary as *I love Lucy* was, the programme remained “artistically retrograde, a profitable hybrid of nineteenth century staging techniques and B movies’ continuity style” (Mellencamp “Situation” 34), but these techniques and their association with “liveness” remained integral to the televisual aesthetic and the medium’s authenticity “Unlike film, but not theatre, a television broadcast is characterized as a performance in the present” (Auslander “Teevee” 28) and although the
televisual medium owes much of its technological evolution to film, the actual presentation of it’s content—television’s *character*—is much more aligned with theatre (“Teevee” 28). Television could display content immediately in real-time, whereas cinema could only reproduce. Even in the era of silent film, the only temporally immediate event was the live music accompanying the recorded pictures. Television audiences, while physically distant beyond the shared viewing spaces for theatre and films, were temporally present in a way akin to theatre. Live events could be experienced by individuals through television in home as they occurred thanks to television’s real-time broadcasting, offering spectators an immediate front row seat and creating “a kind of theatre characterized, paradoxically by both absolute intimacy and global reach” (Auslander “Teevee” 28; Palmer “Participatory” 73).

Sandy Flitterman-Lewis describes television as a medium of the “here-and-now” rather than the cinematic “there-and-then”, arguing that television’s capacity to simultaneously record and transmit content is what sets it apart from film in terms of immediacy (163). Daniel Palmer further refines this notion, describing not television but the live events television records as the province of the here-and-now. Television becomes the distributor for the here-and-now by moving live action (here) into the home (there) while retaining the liveness (now)—effectively operating as a medium of the there-and-now (“Participatory” 17).

Television maintains this there-and-now tendency even where representational programming is concerned, retaining the tangible fourth-wall built in cinema but adding the illusion of immediacy even when displaying televised reproductions. Television’s instantaneity and its position in the home replicates the intimacy of theatrical presence and many audiences initially perceived the television set as a “window to the world”,
enthralled by representations of ‘plausible’ worlds and experiencing immediacy through the transparent interface of the televisual fourth-wall (R. Nelson “New” 140). Because television can “go live” at any point, just the potential for instantaneous transmission that viewers associate with the medium creates a greater sense of immediacy—even though the majority of modern television programming is either dramatic representation or pre-recorded presentations (Auslander “Teevee” 28; Palmer “Participatory” 13).

Crossing the Wall: Televisual Remediation

Along with increases in immediacy, television also took several steps in hypermediating the fourth-wall of screen media. The simplest of these was reducing the scale of the interface itself. While television’s smaller screens allowed the mass-proliferation of the medium into the collective “home”, television became less engaging than media with full-scale fourth-walls; “rapt attention” is often exchanged for “occasional glances in the direction of the screen while you are doing something else” (Allen 77). If immediacy relies on disregarding the off-screen space to connect with the on-screen representation, television’s smaller scale, less immersive interfaces make it increasingly difficult to focus purely on the image, disrupting the illusion and drawing attention to the world beyond the representation (Manovich “Language” 96).

Co-present television audiences may even subdue television’s visual facility altogether (figure 5). By talking amongst themselves while programmes are screened, in the privacy of the home or in public venues, like bars or waiting rooms, attention is removed from television’s visuals and instead it becomes primarily aural, something closer to radio or passive background music (Warmelink, Harteveld and Mayer 2; Bolter and Grusin 186; Palmer “Participatory” 77). In this way, television remediated the
fourth-wall by *shrinking* it, allowing a possibility for distraction more likely than in the viewing environments of cinema or theatre.

Another televisual development that altered the window of the fourth-wall—and presupposed new media—was the option of instantly shifting between programs, or changing channels. No longer forced to sit through an entire recorded drama or live broadcast, television allowed viewers the option of quickly switching between both modes of observation—apparently without majorly impacting immediacy. Bolter and Grusin attest that:

… transparent or hypermediated, all television programs present the experience of watching television as itself authentic and immediate. Even when television acknowledges itself as a medium, it is
committed to the pursuit of the immediate to a degree that film and earlier technologies are not (187).

Although in some cases this may hold, Manovich contends that television’s instantaneous channel changing has an effect on viewers similar to shrinking screen size, arguing that this “zapping” disrupts the concentration necessary to focus on a single image; within the lone window of a television screen exists a multiplicity of simultaneous displays, with no single window completely dominating attention (“Language” 97). This intersection of options within a single window again remediates the fourth-wall, not by shrinking but by crossing. While crossing, viewers retain immediate contact with the televisual object, but the content within the object becomes replaceable. The television frame remains unaltered, but the choice between multiple programmes within the frame offers another layer of potential distraction, opening the interface up to changes within itself—not just interruptions from the world outside the display.

Several other variables factor into television’s viewing equation (screen size, clarity of picture, individual preference—and a working remote!) but the potential for immediacy to emerge through hypermediacy aligns with Bolter and Grusin’s remediation, without totally discounting Manovich’s earlier argument. Robin Nelson notes that this is more related to audiences than objects as more “media-literate” individuals are drawn to increasingly “windowed” television content (news, sports, reality television), programmes that mimic the often fragmented displays of computing mediums and move towards hypermediacy (“New” 145).

These “windowed” programs present television’s other major remediation of the fourth-wall—the technique of direct address, more commonly referred to in theatre as breaking the fourth-wall (Dawson, Levy,
and Lyons 388). While the two terms are often used interchangeably, there are subtle differences between direct address and a clean break, depending on the type of program. Direct address is more commonly seen in the role of narrator, host or presenter, and the program styles Nelson refers to above clearly offer this, especially news broadcasts (Whannel 101).

Direct address, while hypermedially reminding us that we are actively viewing a presentation has become quite conventional in news and sporting broadcasts, documentary, reality-TV and commercials, actually creating an immediate, almost participatory relationship between host and viewer by remediating the face-to-face exchange (Bolter and Grusin 193; Palmer “Participatory” 76; Morse “Poetics” 20). In this light, direct address’ one-to-one relationships are particularly suited to televisual intimacy and immediacy, but their necessary frontality easily ruptures the linear visual interface of narrative cinema where direct address it is almost prohibited for its potential to destroy transparency by forcing audiences to step back and critique the film itself (Kozloff “Narrative” 59; Gerbaz 18, 23; Galloway 38).

Breaking the Wall: Hypermediacy in Television and Theatre

The real difference between direct address and a fourth-wall break is that direct address primarily exists within the same in-world reality as the programme. When a character in a narrative drama directly addresses the audience, the character remains within the program’s virtual reality; by maintaining this representation, direct address may even promote greater experiences of transparent immediacy (Brown 17; Kozloff “Invisible” 78; Chapple and Kattenbelt 14, Bolter and Grusin 193). A true break occurs when this internal reality is disturbed and audiences are jolted into critical mode as the virtual fiction becomes evident through the sudden influx of
external reality (T. Brown 83-84). The language used to describe these fourth-wall breaks is indicative of its effect on audiences. Whether “destroying the ‘interfaceless interface’ of the theatre of realism” (Farman “Hypermediating” 104), “revelling in the disorientation of shattered incoherence” (Galloway 39), or promoting “distanciation…in the way it establishes an immediate critical distance” (N. Richardson 160), breaking the fourth-wall can turn the most transparent interface opaque in an instant.

These breaks are frequently seen in the smallest occurrences. “Stepping out” of character (consciously forgoing acting) is normal in much theatre, often used in combination with direct address as a narrational aid for audiences—which may well account for the confusion between the terms (Townsend and Mennecke 75). Unplanned character mishaps are also quite commonplace as actors and presenters may “drop”, “break” or “corpse”, ranging from momentary (stumbling over a line, missing a cue) to complete loss of character or self control (total blank, uncontrollable laughter), startling audiences into critical distance from the representation (Fawcett 564; Marsh et al. 101-102).

Even with a flawless performance, breaks may appear in a myriad of other ways. More obvious in theatre are things like exposed cables, excess lighting and disruptive scene changes (Farman “Hypermediating” 104), but set or prop failures also break the fourth-wall—as performance theorist Patrick Lonergan notes:

Immediately my attention turned to the fact that the performer playing Julie was in her bare feet… At that moment, I wondered if she was aware that there was a huge chunk of glass just below the place where her foot was swinging from the table… The key problem when something goes wrong on stage is this – the audience has to believe that the character has solved the problem, and not
that the actor has solved the problem. And here this play is so tightly and intricately managed, that there was no space for the characters to fix things. So the illusion kept breaking down, at least for me (Lonergan n.p.)

If immediacy is to erase the mechanics of representation, then certainly the fourth-wall was built to enforce—not erase—the illusion (Fischer-Lichte 84). But as all mediated immediacy relies on near-perfect execution to support transparency, the fragility of theatre’s interface makes it distinctly hypermediate through the ease with which the real world may interrupt the performative illusion. Theatre then is not particularly immediate, but a distinct “hypermedium disposed more towards diversity, discrepancy and hypermediacy…than to the idea of unity, harmony and transparency” (Kattenbelt 25-26). Immediacy can be seen rather as a primary function pertaining to one sub-genre of theatre, and this “naturalism, which demands that the duality be suppressed, was a relative failure in the theatre” (McAuley 54). While McAuley takes an extremely long view of theatre—most of which precedes the “building” of the fourth-wall—it is worth investigating the varied available ways of traversing the mediated fourth-wall (shrinking, crossing or breaking) through historical antecedents, twentieth-century remediations and their effects on contemporary theatre practice.

The next and final chapter of this thesis will explore theatre in its primarily hypermediate capacity, drawing links between theatrical remediation and present day new media especially in relation to new experiences of co-presence, convergence and the increase in haptic technologies of modern interfaces. Close attention will be paid to two particular performative works—Gob Squad’s Room Service and Punchdrunk’s
Sleep No More—at once for adhering to traditional theatrical notions of co-presence and temporal simultaneity in performance, but also for integrating various media into theatre—and attempting to extend theatre into new media. Through these case studies, this chapter will explore how hypermediate theatre practices remediate—and are remediated by—new media technologies and contemporary interface experiences.
New media objects are no different in that respect... They represent/construct some features of physical reality at the expenses of others, one world view among many, one possible system of categories among numerous others possible. (Manovich “Language” 15)

Hypermediate Theatre

Theatre’s tenuous interface turns the simplest malfunctions into potentially hypermediate disturbances, but these technical glitches are not relegated to theatre, presenting across the virtual worlds of all screen-based media to some degree (Townsend and Mennecke 70). Whether shrinking, crossing, or breaking the fourth-wall, new media’s development towards higher levels of interactivity, participation, and haptic interfaces frequently moves away from purely representational immediacy and embraces increasingly hypermediate traits in the process.

However, these trends are nothing new in theatre. Busking, street and corporate performances shrink the fourth-wall, refashioning medieval court performances and allowing even the most “overtly theatrical” outputs to blend into their surrounds, effectively remediating television and radio to
become little more than background noise (S. Nelson 86). Festivals and the Situationist practice of the dérive offer assorted stages for viewing, multiple concurrent windows that can be viewed at the spectator’s desire complete with the option of switching between them—like channel surfing (Johnson 73). In some instances, these sensations are dually realised as in Melbourne International Arts Festival’s Urban Dream Capsule (figure 6) where the fourth-wall was a tangible shopfront window in an open street filled with other co-present performances (Rossiter and Gibson 441-443).


Breaking is even more pervasive in theatre, especially in comedy. Direct address, split staging (presentational chorus/representational performer) and meta-theatrical humour were used heavily in classical Greek theatre to deliberately break the fourth-wall (C. Carey 94).
This was not the later theatre of scene-painting and removal from the urban setting, but rather an immersive and involving experience whose rudimentary nature was pointed out unashamedly...the fourth wall is broken, and the stage is revealed for just that—a pretense, a farce, a joke. (Foot 3, 7)

The Renaissance works of Shakespeare functioned similarly, rife with hypermediality through variations on direct address (asides, soliloquies), cross-gender casting (and associated jokes) and the windowed, layering effect of “dumb shows”, or plays within the overall play (Lublin 68, K. Carey 73-74). These techniques—along with the scripts of Shakespeare and the Greeks—were appropriated and remediated by avant-garde theatre around the turn of the twentieth-century, opposing naturalism by rejecting the customs of realist theatre, social institutions and established art conventions, insisting the only things real about realism were the performing bodies and the spaces in which they performed (Szabolesi 53; Innes 70; Fisher-Lichte 85,94).

Around the time of silent film’s emergence, Alfred Jarry’s *Ubu Roi* remediated prior theatrical traditions to absolutely deny realism. A mixture of symbolist puppetry, Shakespearian collage and trash aesthetic, *Ubu’s* opening word (the modified French expletive ‘Merdre!’—in effect ‘Shitte!’) incited the audience to imminent riot (Innes 27). Once the commotion subsided, the second word (also ‘Merdre!’) followed, and the rioting recommenced. The effect of *Ubu* was intensely confronting—precisely what Jarry intended. “It is because the public are a mass—inert, obtruse and passive—that they need to be shaken up from time to time so that we can tell from their bear-like grunts where they are—and also where they stand” (84). Jarry forcefully attacked notions of society, originality and the
bourgeois by hypermediating traditional theatrical realism and dramatic excellence; making the familiar strange, Jarry challenged performers and audiences to liberate their imaginations within the theatre and transport this perspective to the outside world, characteristics and questions that are still being explored in contemporary theatre, albeit in different fashions (Eckersall and Paterson 182; Innes 24-27).

Jarry’s hypermediate *Ubu* emerged from—and in opposition to—fourth-wall theatre, paving the way for, if not less invasive, at least less offensive forms of avant-garde theatre, forms that began to readopt the interactive and participatory aspects native to the theatre before the fourth-wall. Bertolt Brecht’s *Epic Theatre* is perhaps the most commonly cited example of twentieth-century theatrical hypermediacy, especially regarding the influence of his “Alienation Effect” which promoted critical distance in individuals while also creating a shared collective experience, something present in many new media encounters and interfaces (Hazou 8; R. Nelson “After” 33; Farman “Mobile” 81-82).

Unlike Jarry, Brecht engaged audiences rather than affronting them, moving away from the theatre of realism by immersing participants in the immediate experience instead of the transparent illusion. Later twentieth-century avant-garde practitioners made individual hypermediate developments opposing fourth-wall realism, often by remediating their predecessors—and contemporaries. Antonin Artaud’s *Theatre of Cruelty* generated participatory, embodied engagement with narrative by assaulting the viewers in the style of Jarry (Villarreal 6). Augusto Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed* remediated Brecht to the point of “literally tear[ing] down the stage’s ‘fourth-wall’”, breaking the audience/actor divide to create a single arena for complete interaction (Frasca 169-170). Jerzy Grotowski’s *Poor Theatre* removed the distractions of elaborate staging and realist acting to
focus on physical and emotional immediacy through performative spectacle (Martinez and Welizarowicz 184-186), while The Wooster Group used (and still use) everything at their disposal, “refus[ing] to provide audiences with an immediately comprehensible or consumable work of art… or even to acknowledge the audience’s applause at the end” (Savran 38; figure 7).

This is a very brief overview of a monumental development in theatre/art/media history, but the aim here is to address that, like Bolter and Grusin attest, “[w]here transparent media fail to satisfy us, opaque (hypermediated) media become necessary to our experience of ourselves” (236). Unlike immediacy, hypermediacy inescapably pursues the world beyond representation by pushing past transparency to arrive at the real (Bolter and Grusin 53) and non-realistic theatre—the majority of theatrical output—consistently hypermediates beyond the levels of more transparent media like film and television. What twentieth-century avant-garde theatre
accomplished was to consciously hypermediate, breaking the fourth-wall and drawing attention to theatre’s artifice by intentionally fostering a discerning, participatory audience—one increasingly more comfortable and reliant on new media forms (Schechner 6).

**Without Walls: Virtual Reality and Black Box Theatre**

Viewed in sheer fourth-wall terms, theatre is a predominantly hypermediate genre, but when theatre breaks the fourth-wall, the breaks themselves generate and result in authentic, immediate responses from spectators in the moment (Steyaert et al. 97). Regardless of their individual or emotional meaning, these immediate experiences are important in that they can only be brought about through the interplay between virtual and actual, immediate and hypermediate (Bolter and Grusin 53-54). Within the theatrical hypermedium, immediacy and representation remain integral to theatre practice and audience experience:

The essential principle of theatrical art is in my view duality: we are always aware that the stage is simultaneously both stage and fictional place, that the actor is both actor and character, that things are both happening and not happening, that things both are and are not what they seem (McAuley 54).

As McAuley observes, theatre has always been conscious of this duality, and present-day theatre is acutely aware of this predilection. Blending virtual/actual, critical/imaginative and flesh/technology, present-day theatre uses any means available to construct a place where anything and everything goes, merging the representational “language of angels, poets and troubadours and the everyday practices of people” to create new
experiences via the possibilities generated through the multitude of available interconnections (Steyaert et al. 93-98).

Contemporary theatre adheres to the above framework, creating increasingly liminal spaces and immersive environments that trend towards virtual reality (Fisher-Lichte 95; Hoorn, Konijn, and Van der Veer 21; Steyaert et al. 98). By integrating realism’s transparency and visually immersive qualities with the interactive and participatory engagement of the avant-garde, today’s theatre frequently offers “a fully immersive, absorbing interactive experience of an alternate reality in which the participant feels totally immersed in the environment” (Halarnkar et al. 325).

Contemporary, virtual reality theatre hypermediates performance spaces to raise levels of immediacy available through interaction, involvement and immersion (Bolter and Grusin 28-29), but rather than breaking or erasing the fourth-wall, these interactive and immersive theatres are porous, allowing fluctuations over and through the fourth-wall and easily balancing the opposing logics of remediation through audience involvement in the virtual world. Increasingly, contemporary theatre creates these virtual environments by manipulating traditional performance spaces, utilising the flexible staging options of black box theatres (figure 8), spaces that lack a traditional proscenium arch and can be arranged in any number of possible configurations (Worthen “Drama” 1096). Black box theatres have become common enough to be considered the primary spatial paradigm for theatre practice in the twentieth-century (Hannah 23).

Certainly these black box spaces share a major architectural similarity with traditional proscenium arches—buildings designed to house performances—but black box theatre designs remove the primarily visual focus of nineteenth-century staging, remediating the “chora” of ancient
Greece by creating participatory spaces with minimal distinction between actors and audiences (Hannah 23, 31).

These anti-visual black box spaces have also influenced site-specific performance, works made in alternative, non-theatre locations such as warehouses, breweries, libraries and even buses (Wiles 262; Kaye 7). While these locations are architecturally distinct from—and far less malleable than—the “empty spaces” provided within black boxes, site-specific works closely maintain the participatory non-visual black box aesthetic in the execution of the performance proper (Hannah 27; Wiles 262).

Contemporary, virtual reality theatre hypermediates performance spaces to raise levels of immediacy available through interaction, involvement and immersion (Bolter and Grusin 28-29), but rather than purposely breaking or fully erasing the fourth-wall, these interactive and
immersive black box theatres are porous, allowing fluctuations over and through the fourth-wall and easily balancing the opposing logics of remediation through audience involvement in the virtual world. The black box aesthetic of contemporary virtual reality theatre remediates the fourth-wall, shrinking, crossing and breaking it in new and interesting ways, and this contemporary remedial approach to theatre practice is prevalent in Gob Squad’s *Room Service* (2003-) and Punchdrunk’s *Sleep No More* (2003-).

Both works demonstrate contemporary theatre’s move away from extensively visual focus—offering virtual worlds within alternative site-specific spaces—yet, each performance retains the co-presence and real-time necessary to traditional theatre experiences. Each work heavily integrates multimedia in very different ways—another primary mode of black box theatre (Hannah 28)—and in doing so offer interesting critiques on the junction of theatre traditions and new media experiences. *Room Service* will be viewed for its treatment of co-presence, while *Sleep No More* (addressed later) will be seen as a theatrical exercise in convergence.

**Hyper-mediation: Interacting in Room Service**

Interactive performance requires the audience to be more than a viewing body, encouraging the active creation of meaning making through participation (de Souza e Silva and Delacruz 234), and interaction in a co-present setting—like that of theatre—increases a participant’s status through involvement, allowing a greater sense of personal immediacy (Fearnow 100; Ryan 677-678), which is certainly the case in *Room Service*.

*Room Service* is a live interactive film. In the conference room of the hotel the audience watch four performers on a [sic] four huge TV monitors set side by side. Each performer is in a separate hotel
room, unable to see and hear the audience or each other. Its late at night, and none of them are sleeping, instead they kill time, sharing moments of hope, fear and boredom. Their only contact to the outside world is a phone line that puts them directly in contact with the audience. As the night progresses they call their voyeurs with increasingly absurd and desperate demands, in a plea to remain with them and help them make it through the night (Gob Squad “Room Service” n.p.).

Room Service appropriates the tangible interface of film/television as it’s fourth-wall but quickly integrates this into hypermediate theatre, merging genres as “the four performers refuse to entertain the audience and instead lay the burden of action (“Help them!”) on the spectators” (W. D. Ernst 204; figure 9). Interacting with the cast, audiences become performers—
what Augusto Boal calls “spect-actors”—by engaging in the immediate creation of the narrative while simultaneously bearing witness to the performance (Boal 122). The selection of transparent “media channels” (screens, telephones, hotel intercoms) are those modern audiences often use in everyday life; their transparency lends the media “quasi-actor” status, becoming increasingly integral to the performance and promoting greater access to performative immediacy as Room Service wears on (W. D. Ernst 205).


Yet this interactive media also has an opposing effect, heightening awareness of the distance between performers and audience by creating a sense of “alienated intimacy”—a feeling of closeness overshadowed by the obvious distance in the exchange (Tecklenburg and Carter 24)—even
though the physical distance is negligible. This layering of technological mediation atop the traditionally intangibly mediated theatre is a distinctly hypermediate technique, but confronts audiences with the notion that without the media there would be no chance of any connection, even in the co-present performance space (W.D. Ernst 205).

In *Room Service*, Gob Squad offer interactive performance by withholding much of the physical co-presence typically associated with live theatre (figure 10). Moving between direct address and actually inviting spectators—now spect-actors—to physically move beyond the mediatised fourth-wall, Gob Squad favour no participant above any other in order to realise performance that cannot exist without immediate co-presence, whatever form it might take (Govan, Nicholson and Normington 186-187). Gob Squad turn specific real-world sites into immersive virtual worlds, blending mediated connections with physical absences to “explore different strategies of (re)connecting the theatre with the outside world”—ideas consistently addressed in the ongoing dialogue between theatre and new media (Primavesi 102; Eckersall 72-73; Vanhoutte 478).

**Rethinking Spaces: Co-presence**

Osipovich’s contention that “[t]heatrical co-presence is special to the extent that it involves an attempt on the part of the participants to create an alternative reality out of their co-presence” includes a clause: the traditional, non-mediatised, fourth-wall (469). *Room Service* certainly adheres to the first portion of this definition of theatrical co-presence, but the boundaries of the latter half become especially blurred, particularly in relation to spatial co-presence and the role of participants. *Room Service’s* performance site is a single spatial unit (hotel) physically co-inhabited by performers and audiences that remains under the domain of spatially co-present
performance. However, within this total-space are a series of smaller, fragmented spaces—encompassing real/physical and virtual/digital—that hypermediate the whole, remediating co-presence in theatre practice.

Room Service’s technologically mediated interactions generate physical participation as spect-actors cross between and break through the variety of fourth-walls present within the total performance space (figure 11). In Room Service, Gob Squad use the openness of black box theatre to help erode distinctions between new and old, visual and visceral media forms, recontextualising notions of co-presence, intimacy and immediacy for an increasingly mediated and mediatized world (Govan, Nicholson and Normington 183-187). Room Service prompts a reimagining of a theatre specific concept of co-presence towards a more inclusive understanding, one that “decentralizes the notion of space without excluding it. It opens up
the possibility that co-presence might be established through a variety of modes, physical co-location being one among others” (Beaulieu 454).

For Christian Licoppe, this multiplex of available presence(s) in mediated communication creates a “connected presence”. In the absence of co-location, physically distant parties may remain in increasingly direct temporal contact through numerous mediated interconnections (phone calls, email, text, pictures), effectively creating a virtual “connected presence” strong enough to compensate for co-located, face-to-face interaction—depending on the nature of the overall relationship (Licoppe 136, 154). While the perpetual flow of small communicative gestures that make up these “connected relationships” allows greater temporal access between absent parties—provided communicatory devices are at hand—Licoppe concedes that “the less expressive a medium is, the scarcer the signs of attention from the other person and the more actors try to reassure themselves that their interlocutor is present and attentive” (137, 145).

In lieu of face-to-face communication—or the potential of even further expression in body-to-body co-located interaction—absent technological exchanges require more time and effort to maintain, simply by lowering certain levels of expression, gesture and touch afforded in the media transmission (Licoppe 135-137). However, more experience with mediated environments may negate some of these affects on co-presence in connected relationships. Just as Robin Nelson identifies younger television audience’s greater desire for hypermediate programming, Licoppe considers younger mobile users “hyper-connected”—more inclined to view “connected relationships” as co-present, more likely to possess mobile devices, and highly capable of negotiating between real and virtual interactions in absent or present settings (R. Nelson “New” 145; Licoppe 145-148; Ling and Yttri 166).
Gob Squad’s “alienated intimacy” is itself a play on “connected presence”, where co-location is a direct term for physical co-presence but overall co-presence—what I have referred to as “spatial” co-presence in the original theatre definition offered in Chapter Two—is open to include virtual and digital spaces along with the co-local. In this way, theatre is not absolutely reduced to co-located, non-technologically mediated participation as Osipovich would have us believe, but rather theatre may be co-present across a multitude of spaces—provided the overall production retains temporal simultaneity.

Using contemporary theatre, Gob Squad critique shifting notions of co-presence, a theme recurrent in theatre history (Power 40-44) and new media alike (Hjorth, Wilken, and Gu 54-58). What is most interesting in terms of this thesis is that these notions of spatial co-presence addressed in Room Service highlights a dialogue that exists I argue, exclusively in—and between—theatre and new media, because in the analogue media guises of photography, film or television there is no potential (let alone actual chance) to touch what lies beyond the interface: there is only virtual content for viewing.

Theatre and new media have so much in common the lines between them are becoming very blurred. Twentieth-century theatre has largely contributed to new media through video- and hybrid-games (Hjorth “Games” 67, 89-91, 100, 137; Farman “Mobile” 78-82), while new media has influenced theatre production technologies, virtual character experiments and hybrid staging options (Dixon x; Saltz 107, 119-120; Hannah 28-29). Contemporary black box theatre combines real with virtual, mediatized with live, physical with digital and hypermediacy with immediacy to realise co-presence in ways not possible elsewhere in theatre history. But equally, the same can be said of current new media relative to it’s own
historical trajectory, with digitality, the Internet and Web 2.0 providing heretofore unrealisable confluent experiences.

While the two media forms stand distinct from other media in terms of real-time and co-present possibilities, they become increasingly entwined with one another because of these very same options. Although theatre may be seen as the progenitor of experiments regarding spatial co-presence (perhaps due simply to its longer history), one new media concept—convergence—is being adopted more and more into contemporary theatre practice, as we will see in Punchdrunk’s *Sleep No More*. Yet even here, part of the convergence framework—the Black Box Fallacy—may be seen as another remediation of theatre, again displaying theatre’s pervasive affect on new media. The next section will initially describe the immersive theatre production of *Sleep No More* before moving on to an investigation of its later attempts at convergence, which—due to the basic tenets of theatre—also supports to the Black Box Fallacy.

**Inside the Box: Immersion and Sleep No More**

While *Room Service* is somewhat immersive, this is secondary to the work’s interactive characteristics. Immersion is a state of mind, the suspension of disbelief upon entering a virtual world built on the “perceptual illusion of nonmediation” (Järvinen 69-70; Lombard and Ditton n.p). Immersive theatres create virtual worlds in expansive, often site-specific environments where audiences “move within the space occupied by the performers, a space that is replete with associations and which becomes performative in new ways in consequence of the audience’s presence within it” (White 225). Immersive theatre requires interaction with the space itself, but as everything in the environment constitutes the space—including spectators and performers—simply being in the space makes the “intangible become
tangible”, the virtual, real (Machon 68).

Set in a cavernous Chelsea warehouse over six floors [Punchdrunk’s *Sleep No More*] melds plotlines from Shakespeare’s “Macbeth” with a haunted house layout and an interactive, audience participation concept. After donning mandatory Venetian masks, theatergoers are free to roam more than 90 rooms in the 100,000-square-foot space... Closets are meant to be opened and drawers explored as one walks through the dimly lit expanses... It’s a choose-your-own-adventure... where attendees can begin and conclude their evening’s sojourn with a cocktail (Lipke n.p.).
Sleep No More’s “choose-your-own-adventure” aesthetic bends genres, merging cinematic realism with the tangible warehouse environment, creating the liminal space of a participatory horror film (Koumarianos and Silver 168; figure 12.). Alone or in groups, audiences wander their own path, immersed in their one-off journey (Worthen “Written” 82). Participants are gradually integrated into the total virtual world, becoming part of the other participant’s environments but retaining an “almost unlimited sense of agency” within “a fiction over which we ultimately had no control” (Koumarianos and Silver 168).

Punchdrunk give audiences masks (figure 13), “fourth-wall stand-ins” that distance spectators and hypermediate the immersiveness of the performance (Gordon 6; White 225). And yet, throughout the piece, masks are sporadically removed—forcefully at times—to create shockingly immediate performer/spectator responses which again invert as unmasked participants are thrust into the public, and made hypermediate to their masked fellows (Worthen “Written” 93).

The masks offer personal fourth-walls in an environment without an obvious one, creating a kind safety barrier as participants begin to recognise just how little separates them from each other and the performance environment (Koumarianos and Silver 168). But the potential for unmasking also adds risk, cultivating the excitement of immediate experience and pulling focus away from the technical hypermediacy of the constructed space (Wixon 37; Machon 58).

Participants are variously taken aside and given personal performances, commonly cited as Sleep No More’s most powerful feature. Kevin Ewert describes his initial state of mind as “the vaguely detached way of a director/academic who has seen the play [MacBeth] way too many times and is comparing and contrasting with other experiences even while
having the current one” (53), only to have this disperse as Lady Macbeth hauled him away. “I knew the lines, all from the sleepwalking scene, but I had never known them in this way, spoken only to me, the actor’s body pressed against mine, the actor’s voice only in my ears” (Ewert 54). D.J. Hopkins was suddenly locked in a room where ‘The Matron’ removed Hopkins’ mask to spoon-feed him cold tea while recounting an ominous bedtime story, before screaming into Hopkins’ face, replacing his mask and gently ushering him from the room, “a shocking intimacy after two hours of enforced masquerade” (Hopkins 271).

Creating “active voyeurs rather than passive consumers” Punchdrunk free audiences from traditions of spectatorship, spearheading alternate “strategies of engagement [which] could go a long way toward reviving a theatre scene that seems moribund in comparison to the popularity of film, television, and new media” (Hopkins 271). However, where Gob Squad
“(re)connect” theatre by remediating co-located settings, Punchdrunk have begun to work in reverse, branching out across various media platforms and exploiting the “connected presence” of new media convergence to liberate theatre from traditions of co-location.

Outside the Box: Convergence and The Black Box Fallacy

By convergence, I mean the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want. (Jenkins 4)

Convergence is where *Sleep No More* differs from *Room Service*. Entire online communities have developed to pore over specific events missed in individual experiences of performances, often resulting in participants returning for multiple viewings—in excess of a dozen in some cases—with no guarantee that another’s experience will be replicated on the next visit. *Sleep No More’s* online and offline conversations converge to create “at once very personal and highly social” participant experiences, ensuring *Sleep No More’s* “world extends far beyond the walls of the [performance space]” (Cairns n.p.). While *Sleep No More’s* co-located encounters rely primarily on immersion, the emotional extensions and ongoing social connections beyond the spatio-temporal single performances may present the most powerful effect of *Sleep No More*—and the immersive theatre genre (Rodley n.p.).

Online forums add to *Sleep No More’s* existing elements of risk, personal autonomy and immersive virtuality, frequently resulting in the
performance being likened to—or even described as—a game (Alston 134-137; S. Brown n.p.), an aspect especially apparent when Internet savvy fans utilise *Sleep No More's* replay value. Avid, returning participants—“players”—frequently set themselves goals to be achieved (more one-on-one experiences, tailing a specific actor, etc.) based on their previous experiences, often in search of reaching the next “stage” (Schreier n.p; Dixon, Rogers and Eggleston 6, 23). Punchdrunk and their surrounding online communities have taken this even further, layering digital features atop *Sleep No More’s* physical free-world to create “an interactive play that’s also a community-sourced Internet game” (Grant n.p.). As Drew Grant observes:

> this play is an ARG, although it doesn’t have to be; it can start and end with your experience during a performance. But the show does have bonus material that will lead you to real-life encounters with the characters…provided you can figure out how to unlock Punchdrunk’s coded website…There have been location-based clues…IRL meet-ups…everything is a possible clue, relating to a story much larger than the ones told inside the confines of the “Macbeth” story line. (n.p.)

In 2012, Punchdrunk remediated this theatre/gaming convergence in collaboration with the MIT Media Lab, attempting to augment co-located participant experiences through online partnerships with remote audiences. While digital/physical hybridity has been used extensively in gaming (Hjorth “Games” 86-89; de Souza e Silva and Delacruz 232; Montola, Stenros, and Waern 12, 17), this venture was primarily concerned with digitally relocating theatre specific experiences liveness and co-location to absent participants—not hybrid-reality gaming, but hybrid-reality performance
Online/offline partnerships were enabled through audio-visual links between digitally enhanced versions of the masks (figure 14) worn by proximal participants and the Multi-User Domain (MUD) styled “online companion world” offered to remote audiences (Koumarianos and Silver 173; Van Troyer 110). Specific articles (typewriters, mirrors) within the performance space became “portals”, interactive objects allowing further layers of communication between online/offline partnerships—and recognisable only to the hybrid participants (Koumarianos and Silver 173; Van Troyer 109-115; Dixon, Rogers and Eggleston 30).

The experiment met with mixed success based heavily on the different interfaces. Functionality issues aside, the non-invasiveness of the augmented masks mainly added to local participant experiences (Horn n.p.). Hybrid portals increased on-site engagement with the physical space and allowed a relationship to build with external partners through persistent micro-
interactions (Van Troyer 117, 141; Horn n.p.). Co-located participants acquired more options for interaction while retaining those already available in the non-augmented *Sleep No More*, and the augmentation itself fostered a shared intimacy similar to connected presence. However, online partners consistently expected “more communication with the on-site participant and connection with the real *Sleep No More* world…[to feel] a genuine connection with the real world, which I didn’t really get” (Van Troyer 118).

To combat this detachment, off-site participants engaged with the MUD interface (figure 15) as a text-based narrative game, accepting limited agency and communication lags as features common to gaming and establishing connected relationships with the digital facilitators—“game-masters”—in place of their on-site partners (Van Troyer 58; Dixon, Rogers and Eggleston 6, 29).

For remote audiences, the immersive theatre of *Sleep No More* was lost in translation, replaced by an online game. While *Sleep No More* supported convergence in terms of content shared across multiple media platforms, industry cooperation and migratory audience desires, in relation to hybrid-reality theatre Punchdrunk’s Peter Higgins notes that “to say it was a glowing success would be inaccurate—we were treading a fine line between game and experience, in an already delicately balanced performance” (Higgins n.p.).

This is what Henry Jenkins has labelled the Black Box Fallacy, the sought after but unlikely notion that a single media object will provide all of our media content, one tool to satisfy everybody’s media needs and bring them into the home (14-16). *Sleep No More* applied convergence to create a more permeable theatre experience, transmitting audio-visual aesthetics and certain social interactions across online space while integrating various levels of co-presence into the physical and participatory environment of the black box production (Horn n.p.; Dixon, Rogers, and Eggleston 7).

However, the lack of synchronous two-way interaction between on- and off-line participants and the combination of mixed interfaces created an asynchronous hybrid that became more game than performance, denying the basic temporal and spatial tenets of theatre—especially for absent participants—something that continues to remain elusive outside of co-located theatre practice (Dixon, Rogers, and Eggleston 4).

Jenkins is absolutely right when he says that to consider convergence only in technological object terms denies the cultural, human demand for varied content (14-15). Though the black box productions of *Room Service* and *Sleep No More* clearly remediate notions of “classic” theatre, nonetheless, their instinctive conformity to traditional theatrical co-location and temporal immediacy maintains an ongoing division amidst the
convergence of theatre and new media. Consistently, we are reminded of theatre’s resistance to replication in digital space and new media’s insistence on eradicating spatial binaries. The black boxes theatre of and new media traverse tangible and intangible interfaces, physical and virtual spaces, but even in their convergence the fact of the fallacy remains—no one black box can do it all.
CONCLUSION

Why do you act? You act for an audience. In the theatre, you’re in their presence. Film stars don’t know what it is to have an audience. (McKellan qtd. in Singh n.p.)

Theatre as it basically stands is a totally dead and irrelevant, archaic form. (Friel qtd. in Dow n.p.)

Just remember, watching them is no substitute for being there...
(Gob Squad “Videos” n.p.)

When I read the words of Sir Ian McKellan, I nodded to myself in shared recognition. Having worked in both film and theatre I can comfortably attest to the vast difference between the two mediums, for performers and audiences alike. Soon after I came across Colin Friel’s acerbic remark. That one hurt. I love theatre—at times to an unhealthy degree—and seeing this immortalised in print from a fellow Australian theatre performer was awful. But what made it even worse was that deep down, the thought had occurred to me too.

This thesis was born from a stubborn belligerence to prove myself—and Colin Friel—wrong. Throughout, I have attempted to demonstrate the relationship between theatre and its tensions around liveness and co-presence using the new media notion of remediation. What
I have argued is that while liveness has manifested within other media (film, television), most often it plays out in aesthetics and philosophy rather than in actual practice. By taking one of the most important devices in theatre—the fourth-wall—I sought to further explore the role of mediation within constructions of liveness. New media theory has provided valuable tools with which to understand the rhetoric of liveness by contextualising new media within broader mediations. What has become apparent is that all forms of presence are mediated, if not by media then by language, memories and gestures (Hjorth “Games”). All experiences of events are mediated and this is especially true of theatre’s fourth-wall, the intangible interface. Through this thesis I have also endeavoured to reconcile discussions about co-presence in relation to changing interface cultures, particularly as we move from aural-visual to haptic screen cultures.

In Chapter One, I explored new media, its bipartisan distinction between media archaeology and cultural theory before arriving at the combined investigatory method of media genealogy. This led to Bolter and Grusin’s genealogy of Remediation, its terms of immediacy, hypermediacy, and remediation and its potential as a system with which to investigate theatre. Working from immediacy, Chapter Two reconciled the notion of remediation with theatre. By identifying Diderot’s fourth-wall as a primarily visual interface within realist theatre, I contextualised remediations of the fourth-wall through other visually immediate media forms—film and television. Here, further theatrical initiatives of “liveness” and co-presence were examined as alternative ways to distinguish between these three media forms, and also to identify the extent of the similarities between theatre and new media. I also argued that film—not theatre—had the greatest claim to immediacy of the media examined thus far. I had mistaken theatre entirely.
In Chapter Three, this contestation was rectified by establishing the overall character of theatre as hypermediate—thoroughly distinct from the immediate sub-genre of realist theatre. What became fascinating was that hypermediacy—not immediacy as I had initially thought—aligned theatre much more directly with new media. Two black box theatre productions—Gob Squad’s *Room Service* and Punchdrunk’s *Sleep No More*—were respectively examined in reference to co-presence and convergence, exploring deeper these similarities between theatre and new media. Oddly, traditional realist theatre—with its visual immediacy and representational fourth-wall—and the liberal hypermediacy of black box theatre both maintained a stubborn adherence to the absolute basic tenet shared across all theatre: to paraphrase Gob Squad from above—you just have to be there. While that might seem a touch simple, the very same idea applies to new media. Furthermore, in exposing this necessity for co-presence and want for convergence in theatre, the move towards haptic interfaces and embodied and locative media technologies became clearer in new media practices. Although that hasn’t been explored in this thesis, nonetheless, I hope to extend these ideas in further research of my own. In offering an alternate, theatrical approach, perhaps others may consider doing the same.

New media is everywhere. Digital interfaces and ubiquitous computing pervade every aspect of our lives and they aren’t going anywhere anytime soon. But, contrary to Colin Friels words and my own suppressed dread, theatre is also alive and kicking. Theatre’s ghosts haunt the newest media, and theatre practice influences media forms that have yet to be realised. Theatre too, is everywhere. It is no surprise that sociologist Erving Goffman’s influence on mobile communication theory deployed dramaturgical theories and notions to understand the complex ways in which identity plays out at the level of the everyday. Goffman’s pivotal
“The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life” addresses the relationship between performance and life by acknowledging each of us as actors, watched by an audience and at once providing the audience for other actors—much like the spect-actors in Augusto Boal’s “Invisible Theater” transcending staged fictions to connect with society, self, and everyday life. It seems especially fitting to end with Goffman and Boal given their ongoing relevance within broader mobile media interface theory, and specific influence on the likes of Jason Farman (“Mobile”; “Story”), Alexander R. Galloway (“Interface”) and Mark Sample (“Location”). From Parkour to playful ambient smartphone games, theatre and performance can be found intervening within everyday life. While we might occupy co-present spaces, liveness, intimacy and art can be felt throughout new media interfaces.

This is the interface of everyday life—the correspondence between digital objects and the material environment that both creates them and is altered by them. While I do not seek to dismantle the category of subject in the way the category of humachine does, I do argue that such embodied subjects are only embodied by the interplay between the physical world, digital interfaces, and the societies that are linked across those spheres (Farman “Mobile” 111)
Works Cited


<http://nms.sagepub.com/content/early/2013/09/16/1461444813504265>.


CHI ’07.


