

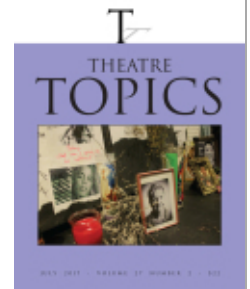


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Twenty-first-Century Perception: A Case Study for the
iGeneration

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Theatre Topics, Volume 27, Number 2, July 2017, pp. 123-136 (Article)



Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

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Theatrical Reception and the Formation of Twenty-first-Century Perception: A Case Study for the iGeneration

William W. Lewis and Sarah Johnson

“As we connect with each other, with objects, and with data across material and digital landscapes, these hybrid spaces are transforming the ways we conceive of embodied space. The stakes related to the ways we conceive of embodied space are significant, including the ways we imagine identity, community, and cultural objects we create, including art, games, performance and narrative.”

—Jason Farman (*Mobile Interface Theory* 15)

In 2012 Will Lewis attended a conference roundtable on new media and theatre promoted as “multidisciplinary.” Unexpectedly, the panelist’s discussion quickly devolved into palpable fear of theatre departments’ dissolution due to the “encroachment” of interdisciplinarity with film and media studies departments. The fear in the room was alarming. However, during the question-and-answer session, one attendee resisted the narrative of anxiety by reframing the conversation. He offered an anecdote illustrating a new way of approaching the future. The story encouraged a novel outlook on the inclusion of digital media in theatre, one where theatre practitioners, critics, and educators are willing to adapt to the pervasive nature of mobile and social technology. He asked the room to make a gesture for how they would make something bigger. Nearly every person in the room, a majority of whom appeared to be in their late 40s or older, raised their hands and widened their reach outward by roughly four feet. Continuing, he then explained how his 3-year-old niece responded when asked the same question: “She raised one hand slightly in a pinched gesture and moved her thumb and forefinger outward about two inches.”

This child represents the emergence of a future generation of performance spectators. Her generation perceives the world not from the same practical, tangible, “real” (actual/material) world of those born before the mid-1990s. Previous generations first experienced the world removed from the digital and the virtual; they were instead inscribed via a culture based in the live and actual that was perceived through the screens of their own eyes without constant digital remediation. The generation coming of age today was raised in digital cultures whose primary media source is the internet, delivered via multiple pervasive interfaces. For them, perception and thought process are forever altered by a chipping away at the “capacity for concentration and contemplation” (Carr 6).

As coauthors, we belong to two different generations: one resides at the end of Generation X, and the other is firmly in Generation Y.¹ One’s proximity to the next generation forces him to live in a tenuous cultural temporality, looking forward though also anxiously holding back, and the other is deeply rooted in her cultural paradigm. The gap between our individual ways of perceiving the world has proven fruitful in our ongoing collaborative investigation into performance and its relationship with different cultural expectations. Working together forces us to contemplate how each generation approaches the world differently and allows us to look forward so that we can adapt to new worldviews. As scholar-artists interested in cultural divides, we are attempting through this essay to explain how current trends toward digital culture affect the potential future of theatre. Our

primary mode of inquiry is to consider how social networking has become a pervasive presence in today's hyper-connected, hyper-aware, and hyper-real worldview. We hope that our writing will urge other artists and scholars to contemplate how the pervasiveness of social connections made digitally are affecting the ways in which all theatrical performance is received and produced.

This essay explores both the effect and affect of mobile digital technology on the understanding of the *self* (extrapolated out to the audience) in the age of digital social media. To do so, we begin from an understanding of *media* “both as technologies including infrastructures and as processes of sense-making” (Couldry and Hepp 5) that form the social reality of the current world.² In the late 1990s Nicolas Bourriaud presciently foretold the current era of sociability through the digital as a coming fundamental shift in the ways of operating in the world, warning of “epistemological upheavals (concerning new perceptual structures), stemming from the appearance of technologies” (66). Our argument focuses on a generational shift emerging during that decade, one that represents the ontology of future audience members belonging to what educational psychologist Larry Rosen labeled the *iGeneration*.³ Rosen's work on the learning capacity of late-millennial and early iGen students further defined the term. For Rosen (and others), the iGen is rooted in a culture subsumed by the internet via smart devices as a primary cultural marker and interlocutor. The emergence of the iGen is argued as early as 1991 (Napoli 188), but the date is fluid depending on the study, with most researchers agreeing on the mid-1990s. Although delimited by age ranges, generations are better understood as temporal-cultural signifiers with multiple determinates and blurry boundaries. Recognizing this generational shift warrants a reexamination of the means of audience engagement. To better explore the issue, this essay uses a theatrical production created by the authors as a case study: an adaptation of Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck* that incorporated multiple forms of communicative technology. This performance as research (PAR) methodology allowed us to put the theoretical implications of an emerging audience into practice and to develop a critical framework toward attracting and retaining these spectators. Rather than anxiously viewing technology as an encroachment of theatre's terrain, we perceive it as a welcome and necessary complement in today's techno-cultural reality.

The Future of Spectatorship?

The iGen lives in a “real” that is culturally formulated based on what Jason Farman refers to as the “sensory inscribed body” (19). This sensory inscribed body is a substrate that gains its mark in a perpetual and pervasive state of communication and embodiment augmented by digital/virtual realities introduced through the screens of mobile technologies. This body is understood as one “that is not only conceived out of a sensory engagement across material and digital landscapes, but also incorporates socio-cultural inscription of the body in these emerging spaces” (13). The current era of pervasive digital interfaces, both conscious and unconscious, reconfigures the ontological basis of perception and embodiment requiring greater attention to the phenomenological states of contemporary spectators.

For the sake of argument, we take as a given that Generation X (those born between the mid-1960s to late '70s) developed its perception of embodied reality partly by way of Jean Baudrillard's concepts of *simulacrum* and *hyper-reality* delivered through televisual media; and that Generation Y, also called Millennials or the Net Generation (those born between the late 1970s to early '90s), did so by way of the internet via computer screen (Carrier et al. 483). In contrast, the iGen constitutes its reality and likewise its embodied-self based on a pervasive virtual/actual dialectic that is not fixed to any tangible physical location. The iGen is pervasively mobile—a generation formed in the age of Web 2.0.⁴ Antonella Napoli explains the relationship of Web 2.0 and the self: “Thanks to Web 2.0, the spectator point of view is so internalized that from that same perspective, individuals are able to observe their own lives, their own experiences. . . . Individuals think of themselves as being watched by an audience, using the set of tools and criteria of judgment they get when they were

only the audience for their own narratives and communication practices” (189). The mobile social interfaces moving in tandem with and also enacting forces of perpetual movement on the user are a forceful cultural determinate shaping the iGen spectator. Locations and spaces are never fixed in this new spectator’s perception of reality, hence disrupting an ability to detach from the ubiquitously mobile locations, let alone focus on one form of prescribed reality seen in static modes of storytelling.

Farman situates this cultural paradigm shift brought on by augmentation via virtuality. He does this by reformulating Heidegger’s *Dasein* (*being*, or *the to-be*), which is extrapolated out to *being-in-the-world*:

Instead, the virtual better represents “being-as-becoming.” Mobile technologies’ impact on the production of space demonstrates how the virtual is always understood as a state of being that is intertwined with a state of becoming. This being-as-becoming is a present-tense experience of embodied space informed by past and future potentials. Essential to this experience of virtual space is the way that the practice of materiality is informed by various modes of representation. (39)

The evolving modes of representation and sociability and their impacts on the user/spectator are at the heart of a potential coming crisis in contemporary theatre. Following Marshall McLuhan’s research in medium theory, we find it helpful to investigate transformations in form rather than simply content. Therefore, a critical assessment of theatrical performance architectures becomes a priority, as opposed to traditional hermeneutics of narrative worth.

Thinking generally and holistically, a large percentage of nonexperimental or non-avant-garde theatre continues to conform to a mode of representation resisting the ways that the iGen predominately operates in the world. As such, theatre that is more traditional may be encountering a difficult period, where connection with newer audiences is impaired. We correlate this with Katherine Hayles’s description of a neurological mind-shift in contemporary culture: one that has moved away from attention rooted in deep focus and instead is oriented toward a hyper-awareness desiring constant nurturing in order to operate most effectively. She names this shift in the evolutionary framework of young readers’ and learners’ perception of the world *technogenesis*. For her, the development of these shifting ways in perception is primarily brought about by the constant connection to a virtual that has become real and actual.

Shifting Toward an Audience-centered Theatre

Putting these ideas into practice has proved a challenge for many. Theatre-makers, just as with the panelists at the conference, often fret about how to engage these young audiences. To explore these theories concerning the cultural shift in such audiences, we attempted to make audience-centered theatre: one that invites these spectators *into* the performance, recognizing the needs of an audience with increasingly digital lives outside the theatre. In October 2015 the University of Colorado Boulder’s Department of Theatre and Dance produced an adaptation of *Woyzeck*. As the director and dramaturg of this production, we were able to experiment with audience-reception theory for spectators immersed in digital culture. In order to create theatre for digital natives the production needed to collaborate with artists of that culture; therefore our decision to work with undergraduate actors made sense.

Our department’s audiences are comprised largely of undergraduates, ages 18–25, enrolled in theatre courses that meet the university’s arts and humanities core requirement. These students often have little-to-no exposure to theatrical productions beyond those referred to in popular media or seen at primary schools. As such, their expectation of theatre often comes with an assumption of fourth-wall realism as the primary model—a model they may find unsuited for their particular



FIG. 1. *Woyzeck* (Nathan Christensen) being examined by Chorus of Freemasons (Paige Olsen, Samantha Yoho, Christina Longman, Sasha Georges) in *Woyzeck: The Endless Cycle 1.0*. (Photo: CU Presents/Jackson Xia.)

ways of seeing. In the twenty-first century it seems challenging to entice these younger spectators into the theatre; but the larger problem, perhaps, is that once they are there, how do we keep them coming back for more? Our production intended to emulate a kind of theatrical experience that would appeal to these digitally sophisticated spectators. Using the academic theatre as a laboratory, the production experimented with multiple techniques designed specifically to engage these audiences. The student-actors who collaborated on the show were also crucial in shaping a theatrical experience to which their peers would connect; in some ways they were the preliminary subjects of the production's experiment, as they created, responded to, and helped shape aesthetic choices.

Adaptable and flexible, Büchner's tightly constructed scenes and its status as an "incomplete" text hold up to experimentation in structure and style with short scenes and fast-moving narrative that seemed a good match for those seeking instantly gratifying experiences in short but effective bursts. Although modernized, the primary dialogue remained close to the original, with added narration and monologues from contemporary characters used as thematic interludes. Andres, a minor character in the original, transformed into a narrator/puppet master controlling the progression of the story. As such, we endowed him with the ability to become anyone and everyone at any possible moment, entering scenes as minor characters, speaking directly to the audience at times, and reflecting on the story in a meta-theatrical perspective. The adaptation also featured a Chorus of Freemasons who rarely spoke, but manipulated *Woyzeck's* environment and transformed into minor characters as needed (figs. 1–2). In order to research and apply theories of audience reception in the digital age, the production staged the textual adaptation of *Woyzeck* in an environmental configuration incorporating multimedia interactivity that embraced digital tools and narrative techniques. The laboratory became the theatre itself, where the subjects were both the artistic collaborators and the performance's audiences.



FIG. 2. Chorus of Freemasons (Paige Olsen, Samantha Yoho, Christina Longman, Sasha Georges, Alex Markovich, Jakob Rasmussen) carry off Woyzeck (Nathan Christensen) under scales of justice projection in *Woyzeck: The Endless Cycle 1.0*. (Photo: CU Department of Theatre and Dance/Jason Banks.)

Discussing the production as an “experiment in a laboratory” acknowledges both the metaphor of scientific investigation for our performance as research and the realities of collecting data from our audiences. As the first theatre production to go through an institutional review board (IRB) process at our university, *Woyzeck: The Endless Cycle 1.0* included an informed-consent speech delivered in direct address by the character of the Doctor, which we felt was dramaturgically appropriate. The data collected ranged from surveys and interactive polls (embedded in the narrative of the play) to talkbacks and interviews conducted post-production. Through the process and the data collection we gained new insights into understanding how to address an iGen audience’s unique ways of being and seeing in the twenty-first century.

iPerformance

To engage iGen audiences, the production had to consider their experience and ontology as Farman’s “sensory inscribed body.” Incorporating familiar digital technologies into the performance experience was the first step in adapting the production for their ways of perceiving. Therefore, the production used a multimedia approach to create the environment to employ such audiences’ senses in a recognizable manner. To utilize the digital skills that iGen audiences and our actors have so keenly developed, the production started by expanding the multimedia interface beyond tools used in the physical theatre space.

Two weeks before the staging, we invited audiences to experience a transmedia digital pre-show to introduce them to the narrative before the corporeal event as a method of interactive frontloading. We took into consideration how contemporary consumers rely upon sources such as reviews and trailers before choosing an event or daily encounter as the impetus for this digital intervention. Commercial tie-ins through apparel, toys, internet trailers, fanfiction, and even fast-food combo

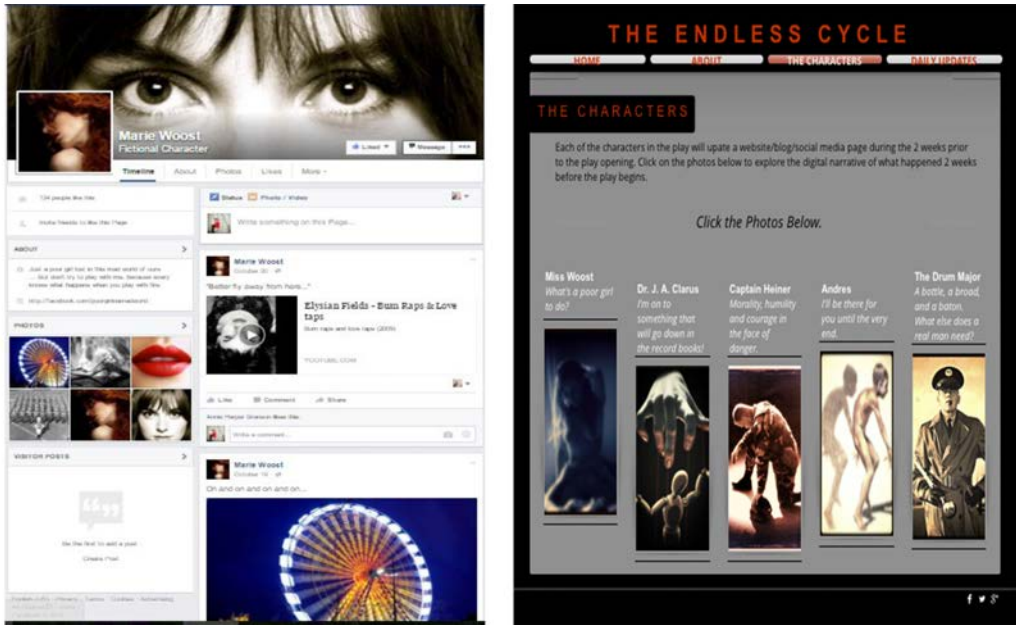


Fig. 3. Marie Woost (Victoria Lacoste) Facebook page and transmedia narrative website landing page. (Photo: William W. Lewis and Sarah Johnson.)

meals prime the pump for commercial and aesthetic success in other forms of narrative. The prominence of sites like Yelp and Google Reviews give digitally immersed users a level of knowledge before interacting with an event, place, or object in the corporeal real. The digital pre-show used this frame of thinking as a launching pad into the narrative's world and minds of its characters. Each actor created an online presence for their character in the form of social media, blogs, and websites (fig. 3). These digital avatars interacted with one another, commenting on one another's posts and actions, and enacted the narrative of their lives two weeks prior to the action of the play. Through their respective websites, the Drum Major shared photos of his workouts and shenanigans at a local bar; Marie flirted with the Drum Major; the Freemasons recruited new members; the Doctor shared the results of his most recent experiment and invited his readers to an upcoming live lecture; and the Captain encouraged you to join the paramilitary enterprise to which Woyzeck ostensibly belonged.

This digital interaction accomplished multiple goals: actors' character work, marketing for the live performance, and audience engagement through digital storytelling techniques. The pedagogical implications of producing this show within an academic setting made the digital pre-show particularly fertile for the student-actors, who were tasked with creating digital content for their characters, thus engaging in a form of Web 2.0 character analysis. By exploring their characters' voices through composing and curating for an online platform, they were encouraged to think about them as actual human beings connected to one another in ways similar to their own form of sociability; for the iGen actors, a "real and complete" person is often one who is intertwined with their digital self. The cast members, who perpetually curate their own lives for digital consumption and dissemination, applied that same cultural knowledge to curating the lives of their characters.

We also employed multiple forms of technology in the creation of the performance's physical environment. Projections of both environmental elements and media were incorporated into the scenic design to create an immersive space of multiplicity through sensory overload (fig. 4). Beyond projections, a nearly continuous underscoring of non-diegetic sound affected the spectator's aural senses. As audiences entered the space they were surrounded by multiple projections of news coverage of recent violent events, subconsciously priming them to think about Woyzeck's violence in relation to the violence they consume in their daily newsfeed (fig. 5). These projections were stacked over one



FIG. 4. Woyzeck (Nathan Christensen) and Andres (Eddy Jordan) at start of performance among multiple environmental projections in *Woyzeck: The Endless Cycle 1.0*. (Photo: CU Department of Theatre and Dance/Jason Banks.)

another, layering onto the screens so that each screen had multiple news clips running simultaneously, reifying the sense of oversaturation seen in the digital realm. Visually, the audiences were stimulated with text, image, film, and light bouncing around and behind the projection screens. We argue that this stimulation allowed the digital-native spectators to quickly alternate between multiple visual sources of information as a way of multitasking: a skill developed through constant interface with digital domains and argued by Rosen as a necessity for the iGen (75–95).

The abundance of screens also supported our primary metaphor of multiple ways of seeing: in, on, and through. The audience consumed the digital pre-show exclusively through computer and mobile-device screens, multiple projection screens surrounded the performance environment engulfing the audience, and the scenic framing between architectural pillars made the stage itself into a screened-in playing space. So much of what contemporary spectators interact with is mediated by screens, influencing the ways in which many of us read, view, and consume information. Mediation via screens is not a new phenomenon; it affects the vast majority of contemporary spectators. We contend that these screens have become a dominant mode of meaning-making for the iGen, further embedding its social reality inside structures of “deep mediatization” and therefore carrying more cultural significance than with previous generations and previous waves of mediated communication (Couldry and Hepp 35–56).⁵

The Playing Spectator

Theories of play are also important when considering the way that contemporary users/spectators reflexively consume all media. One way to understand this paradigm shift is to examine how



FIG. 5. Woyzeck (Nathan Christensen) stands at attention with the Captain (Bernadette Sefic) watching under news footage of violent tragedies in *Woyzeck: The Endless Cycle 1.0*. (Photo: CU Presents/Jackson Xia.)

contemporary readers primarily receive literary data: by way of multiple entry points and rabbit holes. In *The Shallows*, Nicholas Carr describes the introduction and pervasive popularity of e-readers as a monumental interstitial mark changing how the intake of the written word operates. Digital reading displaces the focus of the reader through its multiplicity of information portals. Electronic literature in its many forms (newspapers, novels, blogs, pdf's, magazines, technical manuals, comic books, and so on) has become networked hypermedia through its ever-present digital connection to the Web. The book, as a unidirectional form of knowledge dissemination, disappears "as soon as you 'extend' and 'enhance' it and make it 'dynamic'. . . you change what it is and you change, as well the experience of reading it" (103). When reading digitally you click on hyperlinks, you look up definitions automatically, you jump out to supplementary information, you "scroll back and forth, search for key words" (104), creating an experiential activity that no longer fully belongs to the realm of imagination and contemplation. Users of this form of literature are constantly active, in an almost game-like manner, through the gathering and processing of textual/visual information.

In the shift from reading books to reading e-books and digital content, the medium is no longer a one-way message; instead, it operates in a ludic/experiential networked space. The user becomes a participant in a ludic journey of episteme gathering, constantly linking in and out of narrative that allows the user agency to play the “game” in whichever way seen fit. In his book *Understanding Media Users*, Tony Wilson explains that this manner of playing “is purposeful, with media use inherently projecting meaning to be realized” (78). The goal is to attain as much knowledge as possible in as many ways as the user can manage. The interactivity and reflexivity of reading/seeing performance as a game allows users to “drive themselves forward (sometimes compulsively) to further involvement in content, exerting themselves to attain the creative goal of finally knowing” (ibid.). This way of reading fundamentally impacts how the user perceives and interfaces with other narratives.

Perception of the real is now at the mercy of reflexive experiential interfacing, where the world, as perceived, is no longer a binary of static/dynamic inputs, but instead one made through its own perceiving inside of a perpetual feedback loop of interactions. The iGen, raised in this paradigm, simultaneously builds its reality and experiences its reality through a reflexive referencing and reformation of the self, bracketing the world in which it exists. The logic of social-media communication allows for a nonstop flow of world and identity creation that imprints on the user a fluid place in the actual. A pervasive sociability through multimodal interactivity marks this fluidity. Therefore, we sought to develop a performance aesthetic conforming to strategies of digital interaction and playful meaning-making arising through the juxtaposition of fate and choice.

The Playing Audience in *Woyzeck*

Audience choice in the consumption of information and creating interactivity in the narrative became key techniques in engaging the digital reading skills of an iGen audience. So much of what we consume digitally has elements of interactivity, where a choice you make has measurable and recognizable outcomes: clicking on hyperlinks brings you to a new page; people like your Facebook status; animations are triggered by the movements of fingers on a touchscreen. Without changing the narrative of *Woyzeck* to a choose-your-own-adventure story where individual choice directly influenced the progression of events, the production attempted to create an experiential dynamic that allowed iGen audiences to feel as though they were contributing. Without directly altering the narrative, their presence directly affected the event in a phenomenological manner, making them *aware* of how important they are to the theatrical event—something often missing in fourth-wall realism. Our students often remark that they see the role of the audience in traditional theatre as passive, which in turn dissuades them from attending. By creating corporeal embodiment of digital experiences, this production attempted to invite them back in.

Upon entering the theatre, the ensemble members (serving as ushers) split the audience into two distinct groups, sitting on either side of the space, creating an alley performance configuration. They did so by asking each individual audience member to draw a playing card: hearts and diamonds were sent to what the Doctor referred to as “the happy fluffy place,” a seating area with comfortable cushioned seats with armrests and ample room, giving the spectator a “first-class” experience in which concessions were provided free of charge and the characters would converse with them as members of an elite class. Audience members who drew a club or spade were directed to “the hill,” an AstroTurf-covered seating area with a hodgepodge of purposefully uncomfortable benches, most of which were backless, with not quite enough room for the number of people seated there. Concessions on this side were available only if the spectators could pay, and the ensemble treated these “lower class” spectators with varying levels of disrespect. This division of the audience allowed them to embody the idea of privilege explored in *Woyzeck*, and even though the outcome was random, the action taken by the audience member (drawing the card) resulted in tangible effects. Before the scripted dialogue had even begun, the audience knew their participation mattered.

The ensemble also showed them how to use the iClicker devices waiting for them on their seats. iClickers are small remotes used in large lecture-hall classrooms at many universities and colleges to promote in-class interactivity. At eight different moments in the play, Andres would ask the audience to engage with the narrative by answering a “Yes” or “No” question related to thematic material of the play. The question “Is murder ever justified? Yes or No” was both the first and last question asked, with the implication being that the second time, the question is referring to the execution of the historical figure on whom *Woyzeck* is based. The question and answers were projected on the screens and the audience answered by pressing the button matching their opinion. In part, the use of a handheld device became a surrogate for the mobile phone that department production policy requires to be silenced and kept out of sight.⁶ iGen members can often feel very anxious when their connection to the rest of the world through their smartphone is cut off. Ongoing research has named this psychological condition “nomophobia” (King et al. 141–42). Farman (31–32) also explains this phenomenon by way of mobile proprioception. When the smartphone allows a constant and easily accessible connection to the entire world, losing that connection (even momentarily) can create an uneasy rupture in one’s sense of being.

The iClickers were also one of the production’s primary modes of data collection as outlined by our IRB protocol in which we theorized that the different sides of the audience would respond to the questions differently as they were either cast in the privileged role of *Woyzeck*’s oppressors or empathizing with *Woyzeck*’s lack of privilege. However, our results failed to prove our hypothesis, because the side of the audience had no significant statistical correlation to the audience’s answers to the questions. This result reframed our approach to our research; our focus became the audience’s interface with the production, and the IRB approval and consent speech became theatrical tactics of interaction. The iClicker responses became less important than the engagement afforded and the audience’s investment in the “game” of answering questions.

While the audience’s answers did not directly affect the narrative, they did change the way that audience members felt about their involvement. Many felt as though they were meaningfully contributing to the production. One young audience member said in a post-show interview: “I had a great experience with using a clicker in the show because it made me more involved and drawn to the show.” Some even felt as though their answers made a difference to the show as a whole, and that the iClicker questions “impacted me by making me feel like I was helping the show succeed in some way or another. Like somehow my participation in answering the iClicker questions would help better understand the questions being asked. I really enjoyed the iClicker questions because it made me feel involved.” For some audience members, the questions influenced their understanding of the effect that the show had on them: “I had two different answers for the first question of whether or not murder could ever be justified by the time the show had started and ended.” The iClicker questions even encouraged engagement with the production outside of the live event: “The questions impacted me more after the show than during. I actually did have a long debate with my boyfriend on a couple of the questions that we disagreed on. I think it was obviously powerful to put in the iClicker questions, since it certainly got us debating.” Answering questions about personal convictions in the public space of a theatre also amplified the self-consciousness of being an active audience member making choices that potentially influenced the show’s atmosphere. One audience member noticed “people who were answering the clicker questions often hid their answers from their neighbors.” Asking our audience to answer questions throughout the show (even if they were anonymous and did not directly influence the action onstage) created a form of interactivity that iGen spectators have come to understand as habitual.

Screened in: A New Way of Looking

As the first truly digital natives, the iGen may be the first generation to live in a phenomenological age where engagement similar to what Web 2.0 allows is necessary (Hayles 55–121; Rosen

13–16). Their perceived “real” is guided by “an experience of multiplicity” (Farman 38) ingrained in their understanding of the world. Farman explains *multiplicity* as “an experience of layering and constant interplay that bonds the virtual and the actual together” (ibid.). This bonding allows the iGen to operate in a perpetual liminal space between the virtual and the actual. The touchscreen of the mobile devices creates a proprioceptive link to the virtual, and through this link, it becomes part of the user’s actual sense of being. In essence, the screen the world is seen through is augmented literally and figuratively by the adoption and addiction to the virtual gained through the use of mobile technologies. In 1996 Jean Baudrillard claimed that “we are threatened on all sides by interactivity” figuratively screened out by “video, interactive screens, multimedia, the Internet, virtual reality” (192). For the iGen, that outing has become a social norm enforcing cultural embodiment through the socially digital mobile.

In order to keep this generation’s attention when telling narratives, what must those engaged in the process of theatre and performance do? Bill Blake contends that “you could argue that theatre always has been and always will be under threat from technology” (3). By contrast, we argue that fear of the socially digital in the current era is problematic; instead, we must begin to understand how best to incorporate its epistemological functions. The imperative lies in acknowledging this awareness of changing structures encapsulating the way in which the iGen seems to perceive the world and themselves in it (their *Dasein*). If, as Farman states, “we draw from the tools at hand to create something that was perhaps never intended from the design of the equipment we are given” (90), we may be able to adapt current practices to fit a future generation of spectators. As theatre artists, we have always operated as Derridean *bricoleurs* creating through a process of assemblage by using the cultural materialities presently at hand. This process requires accepting the use of the technologies presently at hand and the epistemologies they bring with them.

Considering the exponential increase of change brought about by the advent of mobile technology and social communication in and through the digital in such a short time period, what are the best ways of thinking about a theatre for the future? Many have argued that the history of humanity has not seen such an unprecedented rapidity of technological progress as experienced over the past ten years. The introduction of the printing press, telephone, automobile, and even the internet vastly changed the cultural-social landscape of humanity, but the introduction of the smartphone, and with it the pervasive connection to communicative technologies, has introduced a swift and affective paradigm shift. If the iGen is the future of spectatorship, we in the field of theatre and performance must begin to understand that these future spectators belong to a contemporary era based on computation of the social. Digital technology is no longer simply a tool that humans use, but is rather embodied and embedded into the social and cultural being. The iGen fundamentally belongs to a new culture, and as such we must approach creating theatre for this audience as a form of intercultural communication.

While the experiments we conducted were new in our academic setting, we want to acknowledge others in the field using technology in performance that informed our approach. The UK performance company Blast Theory is a prime influence. Although its work is less often considered “theatre”—it is usually marketed as game-based performance—the company has created productions using smart-device technology and interactive media for over twenty-five years, achieving numerous accolades for the use of smartphones in site-based performances, such as in *Rider Spoke*, *A Machine to See With*, and *Dial Ulrike and Eamon Compliant*. The use of smartphones inside of traditional theatre spaces has begun to have success as well. The Builders Association’s production of *House/Divided* at BAM (2012) asked the audience to use the smartphone app Layar to overlay an augmented reality (AR) image of a flood over the live action. AR is the technology behind the hugely successful *Pokemon Go* app, and the Builders Association’s recent production *Elements of Oz* has stretched its potential in conjunction with live projected video. Other productions using the smartphone to connect the audience via social media include *Privacy* (2015–16) at the Donmar Warehouse/Public Theater and New Paradise Laboratory’s *Fatebook* (2009). In each performance the narrative uses

the social-media profiles of audience members to create interaction. *Fatebook*, along with RIFT's adaptation of *The Tempest*, titled *O Brave New World* (2012), inspired the transmedia narrative portion of the project, with each using internet-driven video juxtaposed against live action to connect audiences over expanded timespans as a form of serial storytelling. Commercial productions have begun to experiment with technology as well. Simon McBurney of Complicite recently ended the Broadway run of *The Encounter* in which the audience was given binaural headphones as a way of being immersed in the narrative. The above examples all harness the potential of various new media and technologies to encourage forms of interactive spectatorship for digitally enculturated audiences.

If the fate of upcoming generations holds the future of theatre, then it is increasingly necessary to understand how they have come to *be-in-the-world*. Using the equipment and epistemology that comes from their cultural tools may allow a new generation of audiences agency within the spectacle. Experiential agency transmitted to the user has the potential to open up new vistas and break down boundaries in theatre reception. With increased agency, we can invite the audience back into theatre as a coauthor and cultural contributor with meaningful investment.

Referring to the art world in the late twentieth century, Bourriaud warned that "by failing to conceive of this compatibility at work within our mental apparatus to attain new ways of seeing, we are doomed to a mechanistic analysis of recent art history" (66). We as theatre scholars, educators, and artists should accept a new way of looking to avoid a similar fate. Above our campus's main library is this quote: "Who knows only his own generation remains always a child." Adapted from Cicero, the quote reminds us of the necessity of understanding our past in order to encounter our future. We also find it helpful to consider this quote as a way of thinking progressively, where we must understand those that come after us in order to allow a future. A first step in this understanding is appreciating the iGen's *being-in-the-world* as a new cultural paradigm and welcoming with arms wide open the crucial cultural difference/sameness between a four-foot-wide gesture of enlargement and a two-inch outward pinch.

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Notes

1. Generational classification often opens itself up to intense debate, as something that allows overly deterministic thinking and generalization. The boundaries of these classifications are often blurry, with multiple cultural-markers impacting the makeup of the class. Napoli addresses this in her article (183). Whereas not all individual members of a generational class exhibit all the signs attributed to that class, when taken as a cohort, general traits do emerge that bring about a shared cultural identity. Our point of entry into thinking about generational identity is via technologies of reflexive communication, which Carrier et al. state are “central to differences between generations” (483).

2. Matthew Causey’s recent article in *Theatre Journal* also addresses the reality-shaping capacity of media, as part of a “postdigital condition” with traits including “the pervasive presence of the digital in everyday life, new conceptual maps figured on the language of new media and digitization, hybridity between the digital and the analog, and accelerationism. This assemblage of ideas revolves on the hegemony of the digital as the primary model of conceptualizing and engaging the world, rethinking the analog and the real in terms of the digital and the virtual and back again” (431). He further explains that this condition brings about “postdigital culture,” which is a “social system fully familiarized and embedded in electronic communications and virtual representations, wherein the biological and the mechanical, the virtual and the real, and the organic and the inorganic approach indistinction” (432). We believe that his explanation of “postdigital” thinking, along with Couldry and Hepp’s understanding of social reality in the digital age, firmly aligns with the cultural being of the iGeneration.

3. The term *iGeneration* was first made popular through the song “iGeneration” by MC Lars in 2006 (<https://vimeo.com/19497936>). Its lyrics describe the social paradigm of those in the second half of the millennial classification as those fully immersed in internet culture. Rosen solidified the dominant understanding of the term through his extensive psychological research on early twenty-first-century learners. Our adoption of Rosen’s *iGeneration*, also referred to as *Generation Z*, *post-Millennial*, *Founders*, and *Plurals*, is intentional due to its contested start date, which can overlap with the final years of late-stage millennials. We also prefer the term *iGen* due to the multiple definitions of the “i” prefix: i = internet; i = interactive; i = individual; i = techno-device manipulation (iPod, iPhone, iPad, Wii, iClicker, and so on); and most importantly, i = immersed (as in techno-social paradigms).

4. Web 2.0 refers to internet technologies that are interactive. Examples include blogs, wikis, websites with configurable content (YouTube, Vimeo), social medias (Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat), and mobile telephony-based technologies (Text, Facetime, Skype). The interfaces allow the user to contribute rather than only consume.

5. Couldry and Hepp explain how waves of technological mediation have affected the perceived construction of social reality. With each successive wave, the impact of mediatization becomes deeper and more profound. They describe these waves as *mechanization*, *electrification*, *digitalization*, and *datafication*. Each wave comes in overlapping progression, with certain affects continuing inside the successive wave. For example, the television is considered part of the electrification wave, but as soon as the televisual is transferred via internet media or smartphone, it becomes part of the digitalization wave containing traits of both. The iGen is the first generation coming of age inside the liminal mark between digitalization and datafication, thus allowing it greater understanding of each wave’s epistemologies though still being affected by previous waves.

6. During preproduction we had hoped to use some form of cell phone-based survey technology. Our department’s production and house-management teams were anxious about the use of cell phones in the theatre, believing that it may set a bad precedent for other productions and therefore asked us to find another option. We finally settled on the use of iClickers for three primary reasons: the IRB requirement of anonymity for in-show answers; the fact that we were able to acquire the full number of iClickers without cost from our

Office of Information Technology; and the clicker technology's ease of use. After the production was selected as a Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival regional finalist, along with experiments with Twitter in our dance division, the department has changed its policy to allow audience use of cell phones when the production requires it.

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