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Ritualized Performance in the Networked Era

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## **ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS**

*Ritualized Performance in the Networked Era*

By

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Master of Fine Arts in Music.

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Professor Michael Dessen, Chair

In this essay, I present a concept of ritualized performance as an ideal way to approach the telematic medium, arguing that many longstanding performance rituals share characteristics that can be exploited in networked performance. After delimiting a notion of ritual, I introduce three aspects of this performative mode that make it a valuable approach to networked environments: 1) democratization of the space (a concept I explore through Victor Turner's ideas on *liminality* and *communitas*), including integrating audience participation as well as moving beyond single-author models, 2) hybridization of media, merging audio and visual technologies, and 3) interculturalism and collaboration across geographically-defined cultures and traditions. Many artists in the 20th century have explored these ideas to create alternative approaches to performance, and in this essay I argue that they can be extended in new ways within the telematic realm. Drawing on theoretical and philosophical writings by various authors and three case studies by artists whose work is related to each of the aforementioned aspects of the mode I am studying, I situate these ideas in relation to

my thesis capstone project, *Spatia* and seek to contribute to the body of scholarly reflection on performance ritual in the era of telepresence.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,  
IRVINE

Ritualized Performance in the Networked Era

THESIS

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in Music

by

Juan David Rubio Restrepo

Thesis Committee:

Professor Michael Dessen, Chair

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The thesis of Juan David Rubio Restrepo is approved:

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Committee Chair

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## **Ritualized Performance in the Networked Era**

In his article “Not Being There”, Miller Puckette argues that he finds “the potential of networked telepresence as an aid to rehearsal, not performance.” (Puckette 2009: 412) Puckette points out that many of the qualities of networked performance reside in its “economics,” by allowing experimentation between performers geographically separated for a longer span of time through less costly means. Puckette bases his critique in his personal experience as a performer and spectator of telematic concerts, arguing that the technical complexities of the medium overshadow the artistic aim. While Puckette may have valid critiques of telematic performances, in this essay I would like to offer a more positive, contrasting view, emphasizing that telematics is a performance medium with its own properties and potential. For me, telematics is an exciting and emerging field in which artists are still exploring ways to utilize the medium's unique qualities.

Arguably, Puckette is referring to an approach to networked performance in which artists extrapolate preexisting performance practices of their respective fields to the telematic environment, i.e. musicians performing telematic concerts, actors performing telematic plays and so on. In this approach to the telematic medium, we can see how the dynamics and practices of traditional artistic media and disciplines have been translated to the telematic field. Despite the fact that such works and models are valuable and their contribution has been essential, they also conceptualize telematics as an extension of a preexisting field. Although telematics does provide a fertile environment for continuing to explore traditional practices of artistic performance, in this essay I outline alternative approaches that exploit the inherent characteristics of the

telematic medium itself. Specifically, I argue that ritualized performance shares key characteristics with networked performance and therefore constitutes an ideal model from which to address and conceptualize the telematic medium.

The most important parallels I find between ritualized performance and networked performance are their propensity to challenge standardized social practices, or what I refer to as *liminality*, a concept borrowed from anthropologist Victor Turner, and the fact that both inherently incorporate different media for a single purpose, which I will refer to as hybridization. In addition, a third important aspect of telematics is the possibility of connecting people in a shared, virtual space across cultural and geographic borders, which I refer to as telematic interculturalism. I will address each of these concepts throughout the essay and in order to illustrate each of them, I will refer to three case studies: a filmed performance of avant-garde jazz, African-American collective The Art Ensemble of Chicago, an interactive installation by Canadian artist David Rokeby and a collaboration between experimental composer John Cage, choreographer Merce Cunningham and film director Elliot Caplan. But first, and because of its importance for our discussion, I will start by addressing ritual and ritualized performance.

### **Ritual, performance and ritualized performance**

Ritual, performance and ritualized performance are by no means disparate concepts. On the contrary, they overlap and complement each other. But, within this trilogy we can find differences that are crucial and must be established for sake of our discussion. If we consider performance and ritual as opposite, is in that middle point, in that intersection between them that we can find ritualized performance. According to

Felicia Hughes-Freeland, "Ritual generally refers to human experience and perception in forms which are complicated by the imagination, making reality more complex and unnatural than more mundane instrumental spheres of human experiences assume." (Hughes-Freeland 1996: 2)

I will frame this broad definition further by focusing exclusively on the social dimension of ritual, and in order to do this I will use the concept of *liminality*, widely studied by Victor Turner. According to Turner, *liminality* is a phase usually found in rites of passage. Turner calls the participants of such rites "liminal entities". These entities are "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial." (Turner V. 1969: 95) This gap between traditional conventions leads to a state of *communitas*, in which society is "an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders." (Turner V. 1969: 96). My approach to the concept of ritual is rooted in this *liminal* quality, and the subsequent achievement of a state of *communitas*.

For this discussion, I will use the term "traditional performance" to refer to models of concert performance that still dominate the fields of classical music, dance or theatre, in which a staged work is presented to an audience. A particular quality of this practice is the emphasis placed on "the work in itself [rather] than to its social meaning." (Small 1998: 7) The social and aesthetic dynamics of western performance practices have become so monolithic through stereotyping and standardization that performance has now become not an "unnatural reality", as Hughes-Freeland puts it, but a rather preconceived and predictable situation.



As an alternative to the “traditional performance” model, I will use the hybrid term ritualized performance to refer to a social practice contained in the crossroads between ritual and artistic performance. For Susana Rostas, ritualization “involves a modification of the normal intentionality of human action: it affects a subtle yet pivotal transformation in the relation between intention and action.” (Hughes-Freeland 1996: 90). It is through this particular relationship between intention and action, that performance becomes ritualized. Ritualized performance therefore possesses an explicit *liminal* quality through which standardized conventions are momentarily overthrown by a collaborative and relatively egalitarian state of *communitas*.

Although ritual and performance are closely related, western performance practices have, over time, led to a de-ritualization of artistic performance. This is not to say that music has lost its ritualistic quality, for ritual is inherent to music, but that the many discourses in classical music culture about absolute music or “the music itself” implicitly undermine the social meanings and extra-musical dimensions that constitute ritual. This has led to a dichotomization that clearly exemplifies this de-ritualization process. Art-daily live, performer-audience, stage-off-stage and artist-non-artist are just a few examples of the big impact western practices have had on artistic performance.

Of course, there is not a specific model of ritualized performance -quite the contrary. The case of the Art Ensemble of Chicago is a particularly interesting one on this regard. Born in the 1960’s and part of the Chicago based Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), The Art Ensemble of Chicago is one of the most important exponents of what some people call Afro-American experimentalism. The Art Ensemble’s work could be defined as quest/experimentation through African

and African-American music, culture and its legacy. The videotape *The Art Ensemble of Chicago: live from the Jazz Showcase* (1990), constitutes one of the best documents of the ensemble's work and live performance. The video documents a fifty-minute concert at the Joe Seagal's Jazz Showcase in Chicago on November 1, 1981. In this video we can see the ensemble constituted by bassist Malachi Favors Maghostut, percussionist Famoudou Don Moye, saxophonists Joseph Jarman and Roscoe Mitchell and trumpeter Lester Bowie. The concert is composed by an eclectic and at the same time unified repertoire. From be-bop to free improvisation, and from New Orleans band sound to African drumming, the Art Ensemble of Chicago take us in a musical journey of disparate elements, whose only link seems to be a shared African and African-American heritage.

As prominent as the music is, the first thing to be noticed is the visual element in the ensembles' staging. Don Moye, Jarman and Favors Maghostut especially stand out due to their traditional African dresses and face painting, in the case of Jarman and Favor Maghostut a mask with a third eye on it conceal their faces for the whole concert. On the other hand, Mitchell wears casual clothes and Bowie his traditional white lab coat. On stage, we see a wide variety of percussion instruments from diverse origins, which at some point are played by all the members of the ensemble, and the ensembles' banner containing a pyramid and what seems to be the eye of Horus on the top, create a unique and complex symbology. While the singularity of the visual and musical elements of the ensemble is far too complex to analyze here, it definitely demarcates an important extra-musical component to the performance. The theatrical component of the

ensemble evidences the ritualistic quality of their practice, or in other words, "... their performance practices quite consciously evoke myth and ritual." (Tucker 1997: 29)

The ritualization of the ensembles' work comes from a conscious decision and the Art Ensemble of Chicago brings the audience into a ritualized space. The audience may not necessarily understand the exact elements constituting the ritualized performance, but as Rostas points out: "Ritual action is stipulated and not necessarily accomplished by processes of intentional understanding, thus it does not imply any particular beliefs." (Hughes-Freeland 1996: 89) Bruce Tucker relates the ensembles' work with the ideas of Victor Turner, and addresses it as follows:

It is the transformation and creation at the heart of the Art Ensemble's work that makes the performance a living ritual rather than a simple ceremony of foregone conclusions. As Victor Turner puts it, "Ceremony *indicates*, ritual *transforms*." Such living ritual neither "reflects" a social or cultural structure nor acts as a kind of social glue promoting group solidarity. Nor is a struggle between chaos and order, with order finally reasserting itself. Rather, says Turner, it is 'a transformative self-immolation of order as presently constituted... Only in this way, through destruction and reconstruction, that is, transformation, may an authentic reordering come about. Actuality takes the sacrificial plunge into possibility and emerges as a different kind of actuality'. (Tucker 1997: 40)

Turner links the ritualistic with the transformational, and what is being transformed is the actual existing conditions of a given "reality", or what he calls actuality. Ritual is therefore a tool to generate alternative actualities through the sacrifice of pre-established ones. This idea is clearly connected by Turner himself with the aforementioned "antistructure," where man is liberated from his quotidian structure. In the particular case of the Art Ensemble of Chicago, a battle between "destruction and reconstruction" is taking place continuously. The members of the ensemble interact on stage through a constant fluctuation between pre-determined compositions and free

improvisation, and collective development and individualistic isolation, constituting a micro-cultural structure in constant transformation, a continuous reordering of actualities.

The ritualized performance of the Art Ensemble of Chicago is more than a mere musical or artistic statement, as is the case with all ritualized performances. The awareness of the rite is implied by the complex and conscious extra-musical dynamics. As in ancient ritual, in ritualized performance there is not a strict distinction between performer and audience. The role of the audience goes far beyond experiencing and admiring the performance passively. Although in this particular concert by the Art Ensemble of Chicago there is not explicit interactivity between them and the audience, there is for sure an inclusive attitude, for without the witnesses the ritual could not take place. Drummer Famoudou Don Moye at the end of the performance demonstrates the importance of the audience to the Ensemble, when he goes off-stage with a kind of ceremonial cane to acknowledge, pay respect and acknowledge the people that walked the transformational path of ritual together with the Ensemble.

### ***Liminality, ritual and play***

As humans, we are inherently drawn to ritual. Hughes-Freeland mentions: “We are attracted by ritualized behavior because it challenges our socialized expectations of ‘normal’ behavior.” (Hughes-Freeland 1996: 11) Ritual as a communal activity is a bonding social experience, and what connects ritual with the community around us is an activity as ancient as ritual itself: play. Johan Huizinga’s theories are particularly important in this regard, especially the ones contained in his book *Homo Ludens*. Huizinga defines play as a voluntary activity that takes place within “fixed limits of time and place”; this activity is different from “ordinary life” and is *the* primal socializing

behavior. On the matter of ritual and play, Huizinga mentions: “Primitive, or let us say, archaic ritual is thus sacred play, indispensable for the well-being of the community, fecund of cosmic insight and social development but always in the play sense.... The ritual act, or an important part of it, will always remain within the play category.” (Huizinga 1955: 25-27) As Huizinga mentions, play and ritual are closely connected, not only on the social level but also “reflected in the making and appreciation of works of art.” (Huizinga 1955: 167) Now, what this symbiotic relation between ritual and play offers us in the field of ritualized performance is the possibility of creating environments that promote hierarchical ambiguity by empowering the audience, therefore inducing a *liminal* quality to performance.

In the telematic medium, this *liminal* quality has been embodied in what some authors call democratization. Artists working in telematics have been characterized for exploiting its democratizing potential, or in the words of David Kim-Boyle: “composers of network-based music often share a common interest in democratizing performance through establishing musical environments that are expressed through playful exploration and interaction among participants.” (Kim-Boyle 2009: 364) *Liminality* through play, and therefore ritual: this logical progression suggests that telematic environments are ideal for ritualized performance practices.

David Rokeby’s installation *International Feel* (2011) is a very interesting example of how networked technology enables democratization of practice. Rokeby is a Canadian installation artist working with human body interactivity through technology and intermedia since the 1980s. Based on a previous installation by the artist called *Body Language* (1984-86), *International Feel* is an interactive installation for 2 sites and

1 participant (an audience member) in each location. In each of the locations, a *kinect* sensor maps the exact location of each person within a 2.8 x 2.8 meter space. The mapped presence of the person in the remote space is then expressed through sound in a quadraphonic sound system constituted by a set of 4 speakers, 1 in each corner. The scanning of both locations creates a space where both bodies occupy the same virtual area. If both bodies are having no contact, a breathing sound will come out from the direction where the remote person is. The sound changes when both bodies make contact and intensifies to indicate where to move in order to maximize contact, enabling the 2 persons in the remote locations to occupy the same exact (virtual) space.

Regarding interaction, Rokeby mentions: "Interactive works are incomplete until the audience experiences them. The audience is to a greater or lesser degree, a co-creator with the artist." (Rokeby, "*Challenges in the Intermodal Translation of Art*") As Rokeby points out, interactive works depend completely on the audience to be completed. Although Rokeby does not conceive his work in terms of ritual, this particular work evokes an innate ritualistic quality, achieved through ritual-play that induces a *liminal* phase in the performance. In such an environment, dichotomies like artist-audience, activity-passivity, etc. do not apply, everyone is equally important in the performance space, therefore traditional hierarchies are irrelevant.

As we have seen, traditional stratification and hierarchies become ambiguous in the realm of ritualized performance. If so, what is the role of the author/composer in ritualized performance, and specifically in networked environments? As Roland Barthes mentions in *The Death of the Author*, "in primitive societies, narrative is never undertaken by a person, but by a mediator, shaman or speaker, whose 'performance'

may be admired (that is, his mastery of the narrative code), but not his 'genius'. The author is a modern figure." (2) Barthes indicates how author and authorship are modern constructions that come from a commodification process of "the work" that eventually introduced the idea of ownership.

Most relevant to our discussion is how Barthes mentions "primitive societies" and the allusion he makes to the figure of the "mediator", a concept as ancient as ritual and directly related to it. It is within this idea of "mediator" that the figure of the author/composer is contained in ritualized performances. Such ideas have already been explored in contemporary scenarios, generating alternative models of authorship such as Pedro Rebelo's "Distributed Dramaturgy" model (see Rebelo 2009). In ritualized performance as in networked environments, the role of the author/composer is replaced by that of the facilitator/designer. The entity responsible of composing the situation (whether it is one person or a group of people), now functions as a mediator, an instigator of a particular scenario, or what Turner refers to as "the ritual elders." Although the job of the facilitator –who prepares the situation and its framework or rules– is essential, in the act of performance, he, she or they are no more or less important than the other participants.

This is certainly the case with Rokeby's *International Feel*, in which everyone involved is indispensable, and to some degree responsible and committed to the situation, and it is because of its ritualistic nature that the situation is impossible to control as its outcome impossible to foresee. In contrast to traditional notions of authorship and control, in works such as this, the facilitator must embrace these aspects of the process. In the words of Hughes-Freeland:

A ritual is not a text with a pre-established structure or meanings, but something which emerges as participants bring together bits and pieces of knowledge in the performance: it creates reality and selves experientially. (Hughes-Freeland 1996: 15)

*Liminality* also affects the facilitator/designer figure in itself. As I mentioned, either one person or a group of people could constitute the figure of the facilitator. Ritualized networked performance is an ideal scenario from which to generate collaborative practice. This has been discussed by experienced artists of the telematic medium such as Gloria Sutton, who “suggest that a fundamental trait of networked creativity is the privileging of ‘collaboration over authorship’ and the democratization of the production and reception of art.” (Dixon and Smith 2007: 429-430)

Multimedia practice is inherent to telepresence because we are highly visual beings, and the visual component is a powerful element of telepresence. The newness of the telematic medium requires that people with different expertise collaborate, and the technical complexities that telematics present currently make multimedia collaboration a necessity. We will now turn to analyze how such collaborative environments constitute another component of the telematic ritual.

### **Hybridization of practice**

In *Homo Ludens*, Huizinga explains how the Greek word for music “was far wider in scope than our ‘music’. It not only embraced singing and dancing to instrumental accompaniment but covered all the arts, artistries and skills preside over by Apollo and the *Muses*.” (Huizinga 1995: 159) He then points out how “everything ‘musical’ was related to ritual.” Even if these are to some extent theories or conjectures about ancient Greek rituals, this ancient approach to music and ritual could be used as a model for



performance practices that make use of networked technology, merging diverse disciplines and skills into a unified practice. In that case, differentiations between media are not as relevant as the combination of them.

In the field of digital media performance, Franzisca Schroeder points out: “Digital media performances hardly ever refer to one or two particular cultural practices anymore, and artists derive their creative strategies from looking sideways at other artistic paradigms.” (Schoreder 2009: 381) She also remarks: “networked environments are very much characterized by a hybridisation of diverse artistic practices.” Schroeder’s hybridization in networked environments parallels Huizinga’s ideas in Greek music ritual. Performance through digital media, and networked performance in particular are innate environments for collaboration, merging of media, disciplines and knowledge and, thus, hybridization of practice.

Returning to Rokeby’s *International Feel*, we can see how concepts of hybridization of practice are at the very core of the piece. Movement producing sound and sound affecting the movement in a symbiotic and synesthetic environment, a place where sound, movement and space merge into a unified entity; a ‘oneness’ of media. Rokeby achieves this through cutting-edge technology and networking tools. It is intriguing to see how networking technologies have influenced the artist’s work in this particular piece. The technical aspects of Rokeby’s pioneering and influential interactive sound installation, *Very Nervous System* (1986-1990), and those of *International Feel* are very similar, but the aesthetic and conceptual component varies between them, emphasizing and intensifying the ritualistic component of the later.

*Very Nervous System* is one of Rokeby's earliest works. In this installation a video camera captures the movement of the person in front of it, a computer processes the information from the camera and maps the movement into sound through a synthesizer. Of course, the technological component of the image processing is by far less developed than the one in *International Feel*, but it is the very nature of the pieces that is more relevant for our purposes. *Very Nervous System* is first of all an instrument; it offers a place to explore a particular tool. The democratic and hybrid component in both pieces is very similar, but the telematic interaction between the two persons from remote locations of *International Feel* (as opposed to a human-machine interaction) is what stresses its ritualistic nature. As is the case with telepresence, real time interactivity across geographic locations is a major component of the telematic ritual. It is interesting to observe how networking technologies impacted Rokeby's work, and took it from an initial movement transmuted into sound model, to one where movement is expressed through sound in order to express a sense of spatiality of a remote location, that is, a sense of remote presence. This is a much more complex, and in my opinion interesting, model. Interactivity between people is a crucial aspect of the networked ritual. We could think of it not as a human-technology-human interaction, but rather a human-human interaction through technology.

Hybridization through technology is not new, nor a quality unique to telematics. Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century there have been countless examples of how hybrid practices have been achieved with technological means. One of the most known multimedia collaborations in the realm of experimental art has been the one between composer John Cage and dancer/choreographer Merce Cunningham. For decades

these 2 revolutionary artists collaborated producing a revolutionary body of work, deeply influential for both of the artists, their respective fields and society. The use of audio and video technology in their work broadened the boundaries of multimedia collaboration. The complex and innovative audio and video electronic devices used by Cage and Cunningham in several of their collaborations surpassed the traditional model of sound-movement cooperation, transforming their work into an indivisible object constituted by different media.

A valuable and unique document of the Cage-Cunningham work is the VHS video *Points in Space*, published originally by the BBC in 1986 and re-edited in DVD in 2007. In this documentary Cage and Cunningham are joined by filmmaker Elliot Caplan in a three-way collaboration that produced one of the most exciting and original documents on artistic hybridization. By the time *Points in Space* was made, Cage and Cunningham have been working together for over 40 years, so this piece is therefore not an isolated collaboration but the product of decades of work. *Points in Space* has its basis in pieces like *Variations V* (1965). *Variations V* is especially important because it marked a new approach to the way Cage and Cunningham had been working. In this piece both artists took a step further in their creative cooperation. Leta Miller writes about the piece:

In *Variations V*, however, Cage and Cunningham set up a new relationship between movement and sound in which the dancers functioned as co-composers, exerting as much influence over the sonic landscape as the musicians who operated the electronic equipment. Furthermore, the interaction of sound and motion was facilitated by a sophisticated technological component that marked 'the beginning of an enormous operation of interaction between creative artists and engineers' (...). As an outgrowth of his [Cage's] decades-long history of collaboration with composers, dancers, and nonmusicians, it [*Variations V*] constituted a model of cooperative interdependency. (Miller 2001: 547)

Indeed, the most noticeable feature of *Variations V* is the inclusion of interactive technology between dancers and sound. This was achieved through a set of photocell sensors connected to antennas that triggered sound through loudspeakers when the dancers interrupted the light of the photocells. Bell Labs, a long-term collaborator of Cage, developed this technology. But it was the dynamics of the collaborative approach between Cage, Cunningham and technology that made of *Variations V* a milestone.

The inclusion of technology definitely deepened and made more complex the long-standing relationship between the two artists. Aesthetically and philosophically it is very interesting to see how the complex dynamics generated by collaborative interdisciplinary environments deepened Cage's philosophy on indeterminacy, chance and de-personalization of practice. Miller mentions:

By superimposing the inputs of an increasingly large number of imaginative personalities, Cage and his colleagues created a work with so many collaborators and such intricate linkages that each participant could influence the sound, but none could control it. The greater the number of participants, the more unpredictable the result. Thus Cage increasingly buried his own intentions under the weight of those of his artistic partners. (Miller 2001: 562)

*Variations V*'s model of collaboration with and through technology is the basis of later works such as *Points in Space*. Recorded between New York and London in 1986, *Points in Space* is more than a mere documentary film. The first section of the video shows the "behind the scenes" of the piece, presenting its compositional and preparation process, including interviews with Cage and Cunningham. From the very beginning the intensely collaborative environment is exposed when Cunningham points out that "The fact that I'm going to work with video makes me think a different way." (Caplan 2007) Throughout all the rehearsals we can see how Cunningham is always

planning his choreography with the help of a director's viewfinder for he is aware that the camera is a completely different space than the stage. Furthermore, Cunningham evaluates and makes corrections based on how the choreography looks on the screen. In the rehearsals we can also see how director Elliot Caplan works directly with Cunningham, staging the choreography/scene together.

In the interviews, Cage mentions that when he started working with modern dancers he was not pleased with the model of collaboration they had, and how he was looking for a situation where "both the choreographer and the composer worked, so to speak, simultaneously and brought the work together without one being ahead of the other, or interpreting the other." (Caplan 2007) The way Cage uses the word "interpreting" illustrates his interest in a model where different media are not conceptualized as separate entities (or even disciplines), and how he seeks an alternative way of collaboration. Cage found in Cunningham the perfect match for such an endeavor. In the documentary they explain how they do not construct the piece together, but build it separately within pre-settled parameters, timeframes that together constitute the whole length of the piece. Their methods are of course non-traditional, so much that someone could argue that it is not real collaboration but some kind of collage instead. It is important to keep in mind that the methods and models Cage and Cunningham used were the result of decades of working together, as Cage mentions: "I have no idea of anything that will be happening in the dance, Merce has no idea of what will be happening in the music, but we have a kind of confidence that they will work together." (Caplan 2007)

In the actual performance we can see a unique piece of work. A thirty-minute performance where collaboration produces an uncategorizable piece of audiovisual work. Cunningham's choreography merging with the camera, Cage's music not as accompaniment but as an active component, and Caplan's camera not as a passive witness but an active element within the piece. The camera work is so dynamic that in fact, we can see how it infers and creates movement beyond the dancers'. This is the case when Cunningham is introduced in the later part of the performance and his choreography is framed not only by the camera but also by the body of other dancers, a technique used only when Cunningham is featured. The visual-technical approach used in this piece and Cunningham's conception of the camera as a space different from the stage are pioneering concepts to be aware of when working in the telematic medium. *Points in Space* is neither a documentary nor a dance film, neither a ballet nor a concert. This unique piece of work is more related to the Greek model of music Huizinga mentions; a hybrid object developed on collaboration.

In both Rokeby's *International Feel* as in *Points in Space*, we see complex works where different media are used not as separate and differentiable elements, but merged to construct a unified object. This 'oneness' of media is what I call hybridization, and while it can be achieved with many means, I argue that technology, and networking technology and telepresence in particular, are environments that facilitate and inspire such practice. Both cases exposed above use technology in very different ways, not only to create hybrid works, but also to encourage collaborative models.

Hybridization is inherent to networked performance; the integration of different media is a necessity in this field. Thus, hybrid practices are imprinted throughout the

history of this rather young practice. The use of different media in networked environments and telepresence surpasses the traditional models of multimedia and intermedia, or in the words of Franziska Schroeder:

This trend of hybridisation of various media forms highlights more than a simple combination of practices. It shows that performance cultures and practices literally have become placed into one another, more akin to the interweaving of materials and in fact the interlacing of ideas and concepts. (Schroeder 2009: 381)

While the technical possibilities of such diversity have been explored to some degree, I believe that there is much to be explored in its aesthetic dimension. It is in this crossroads between the technical and the aesthetic where real hybridization of media, disciplines and artists reside.

### **Telematic interculturalism and *communitas***

Unlike the aforementioned aspects, telematic interculturalism is a quality unique to this medium. In order to elaborate on this concept I will delve further into some of Victor Turner's ideas mentioned above. We have established that ritualized performance has a *liminal* quality leading to a state of *communitas* or "antistructure", which according to Hughes-Freeland is the potential ritual "has to release humans from the structure of their quotidian life" into a "creative and liberating" state. (Hughes-Freeland 1996: 2) Turner differentiates between three kinds of *communitas*: existential, normative and ideological.

Existential –or spontaneous- *communitas* refers to a counter-cultural happening, in which there is a transitory personal experience of togetherness. In terms of telematic performance this works on two levels. First, the democratic quality of networked

environments that leads to a *liminal* phase as mentioned above which is not unique to this medium. And second, the telematic dimension is one in which two or more geographically dispersed environments interact and affect each other. The possibility of creating *liminality* and the subsequent state of *communitas*, and therefore togetherness, across geographical distance in various locations is a characteristic unique to the networked medium.

We find ourselves here with what I think is one of the most relevant aspects of telematics, for this is a medium in which intercultural collaboration can be developed in a framework where traditional hierarchies and power structures of performance practice can be reevaluated not only in an aesthetic dimension but also in a spatial-geographical one; and in which dichotomies such as host-visitor, local-traveler, unfamiliar-familiar environment and even concepts like “otherness”, to name a few, acquire new meanings. The implications of such reevaluations are numerous, and although it is imperative to approach these issues from different angles, I will restrain myself to the ritual-anthropological dimension in order to keep our discussion framed.

According to Edith Turner, “*Communitas* occurs through the readiness of people [...] to rid themselves of their concern for status and dependence on structures, and see their fellows as they are.” (Turner E. 2012: 1-2) In the telematic medium, inducing *liminality* (readiness) can challenge the concern for traditional structures of performance practices, perpetrating a performance space where the collective takes precedence over the individual. Networked connectivity has the peculiarity of making “the collective” the “geographically-dispersed collective” as well as expanding and challenging our sense of spatiality by building a single telematic space out of two or more



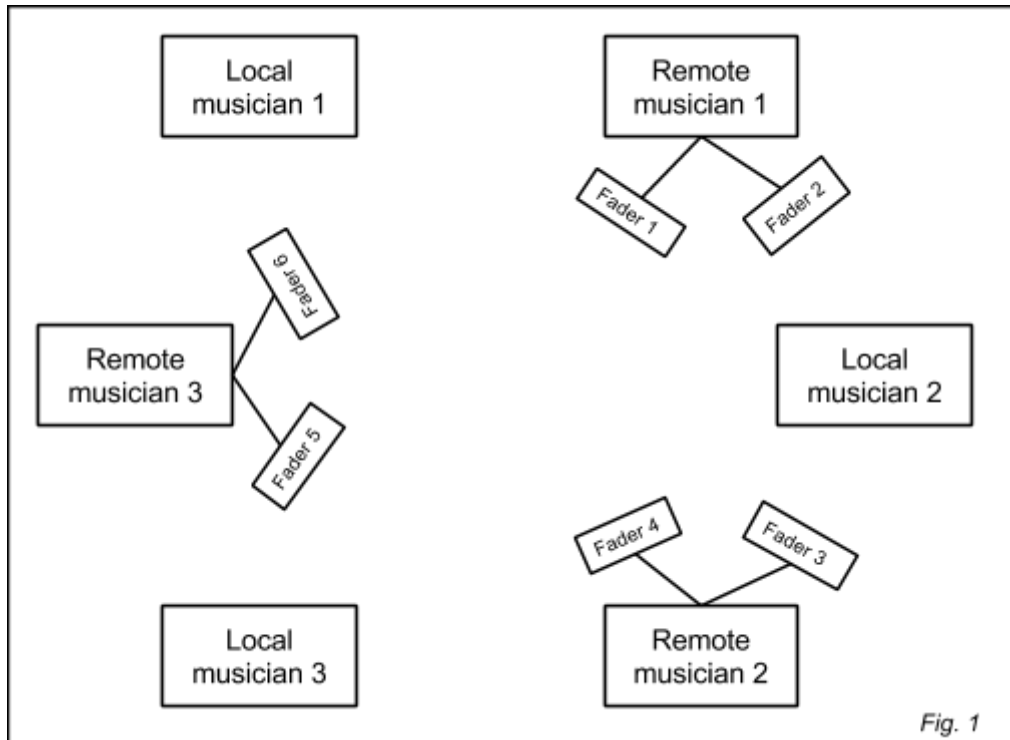
geographically dispersed ones. Telematic interculturalism is a place where, within a certain framework or a set of rules, the collective can be a part of the creation of something across distance and cultures, a transient and geographically-dispersed existential *communitas*.

### ***Spatia***

*Spatia* is a telematic concert/installation initially performed between the *Experimental Media Performance Lab* (xMPL) at the University of California, Irvine and the *Centro Ático* at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá, Colombia in April 2014. *Spatia* was my thesis project for the MFA in Integrated Composition Improvisation and Technology (ICIT) at the University of California, Irvine.

In *Spatia*, there are three local and three remote musicians in each location that are spread over the performance space. Each local musician is broadcasted from the venue through an audio-visual feed. Likewise, those feeds are reproduced in the remote location, embodying each remote musician in a discrete space of the venue. Hence, there are a total of six musicians spread in each location. A set of six potentiometers (e.g. fader to control lighting) are distributed in each venue, available for the audience to manipulate them (see fig. 1). Each of these faders controls a particular color of a lighting system; these colors function as visual cues to guide (or conduct) the musicians through a composition designed especially for this environment. The lighting system, manipulated by the local audience through the potentiometers, affects the remote location, that is, the audience in Irvine manipulates the lighting system –and therefore the musicians- in Bogotá and vice versa. Thus, the networked connection of *Spatia* is

constituted by an audio, a visual and a data element. Both the sonic and visual outcomes are product of the collaboration and interaction between both audiences and musicians in both locations.



This production is an attempt to explore the inherent qualities of the telematic medium as exposed throughout this essay. Considerable amounts of technical, technological and network research as well as artistic experimentation were performed prior to the performance of *Spatia* in order to assemble all the elements required for this production. In the same spirit of its performance, *Spatia* is also the product of multimedia collaboration between musicians, visual artists, sound engineers, lighting designers and technologists across two countries. Much of the technology used in *Spatia* is still incipient; this is why some preliminary projects were developed,

particularly focused on establishing the necessary technical requirements for telematic performances in Bogotá. Among these was a concert organized in the summer of 2013 by a team led by Juan Reyes and myself in Bogotá, Colombia; Mario Valencia in Manizales, Colombia; and Julian Jaramillo in São Paulo, Brazil in which we did a three-site performance of John Cage's *Four6*<sup>1</sup>.

*Spatia* is an effort to generate ritualized performance environments in the telematic medium. The integration of audio, video and lighting connections makes such media not discrete elements but indivisible parts of the experience. The interaction between audiences and musicians across distance constitutes a live intercultural exchange where remote entities not only share an experience, but also impact each other's environments. These interactions shape the outcome of a scenario that I created as director in order to stimulate a *liminal* phase and achieve a subsequent state of *communitas* where traditional conventions are temporarily challenged and hierarchies become ambiguous, leading to state of communal construction of an experience.

## **Conclusions**

As is often the case when new fields become part of artistic practice, traditional models of performance have been applied and adapted to the networked space. This is only natural, yet as telematics consolidates as a field, it becomes imperative to conceptualize it as a space on its own, rather than an extension or emulation of a pre-existing one.

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<sup>1</sup> A video of this performance and a complete list of all the people involved in it can be found in these links: <http://vimeo.com/76192087> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJBsKAB40YM>.

The complexities new performance environments present puts a difficult but urgent labor to scholars, and much important theoretical work still needs to be done in the telematic medium. Several of the authors and sources used in this essay either come from or borrow ideas from other disciplines such as anthropology, ethnomusicology or drama and literary theory. This is a sign of how the philosophical/artistic theoretic aspect of the networked practice has still much to offer and this, I think, is the terrain where major developments and contributions of the field can be discovered. On this regard Schroeder points out:

(...) such hybridisation also presents us with challenges as to how we think about other practices, and I argue that the thought processes and intricate typologies of communications among specific artistic practices have not been theorised successfully or sufficiently investigated. (Schroeder 2009: 381)

I believe ritualized performance models, in the way I presented them here, are ideal for networked environments. The potential such environments have to induce *liminality*, and the intrinsic necessity telepresence has of hybridization evidently resembles ancient ritual. Therefore, ritualized performance does not have to deal necessarily with the “theatrical” or “ceremonial”, but with the anthropological-transformational.

As in ritual, ritualized networked performance could be a place for collective elevation and creation, and in this particular matter it is crucial to make everyone involved in the performance aware of their role and importance in the construction of the ritual by inducing *liminality*. I believe that ritualized models and Turner’s concept of *communitas* are approaches that can bring telematics to a further stage of artistic and aesthetic development. The ideas of *liminality*, hybridization, telematic interculturalism,

authorship, play and ritualization exposed throughout this essay constitute an alternative approach to telematic performance. It is in ancient ritual where one possible approach to networked performance resides. The irony of this statement can only be described as beautiful, for it is through cutting-edge technology that we could return to the most ancient form of artistic performance.

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