**Conference Report**

**32nd CDE Conference, “Theatre in the Digital Age,” Innsbruck (Austria)**

Dorothee Birke and Anja Hartl opened the conference by introducing the theme of “Theatre in the Digital Age.” The Dean of the Faculty of Language, Literature and Culture at the University of Innsbruck, Jürgen Fuchsbauer, welcomed the delegates to the conference. Afterwards, the President of CDE, Kerstin Schmidt awarded the biannual CDE Award to Leila Vaziri (Konstanz) for her dissertation on “The Theatre of Anxiety: Border Crossings in 21st-Century British Theatre.”

The opening ceremony was followed by Heidi Lucja Liedke’s (Frankfurt) keynote address on “The Politics of Care in a Digital Age: What Remains after Viral Theatre?” In her talk, which was chaired by Dorothee Birke, she explored the idea of the digital space as an availability, not merely as a substitute. She illustrated her argument about the digital as a form of care by drawing on the works of Caridad Svich.

The second day opened with a panel on “Digital Worlds,” chaired by Christoph Singer (Innsbruck). William C. Boles’s (Rollins College) talk focused on the work of Mike Bartlett to show the ways in which technological developments serve an important backdrop to and theme in the plays. Drawing on his play *Love, Love, Love* (2010), he explored how changes in technology also reflect – and bring about – changes in community and communication. Benjamin Broadribb (Birmingham) drew on Timotheus Vermeulen’s concept of “new depthiness” to analyse the verbatim musical *Public Domain* and its recycling of digital materials. He argued that the piece is an example of metamodernism (van den Akker/Vermeulen) insofar as it repurposes the “depthlessness” (Jameson) of social media materials to achieve a heightened affective sincerity and earnestness.

The papers in the second panel, which was chaired by Ilka Saal (Erfurt), explored the relation between theatre and digital media. Nassim Balestrini (Graz) analysed the relation between digital and physical realism in Quiara Alegría Hudes’s *Water by the Spoonful*, in which, she argued, the ostensibly clear dichotomy between the physical and the digital is disturbed. Gemma Allred’s (Neuchâtel) talk explored Brechtian echoes in Fake Friends’ *This American Wife*, a live-streamed virtual theatre production that blends media and plays with notions of authenticity and artificiality. The panel was concluded by Shefali Banerji’s (Vienna) talk on digital spoken word theatre. She used the example of Rose Condo’s *The Geography of Me* to scrutinise possibilities for audience interaction through notions of liveness and co-presence.

After lunch, the conference continued with a panel on “(Dis-)Embodied Relationships,” chaired by Ulrich Pallua (Innsbruck). Johanna Hartmann (Halle-Wittenberg/Munich) analysed Jennifer Haley’s *Neighborhood 3: Requisition of Doom*, in which human relationships are transformed through digital technologies. The play is preoccupied with the lack of regulation of digital worlds, which is reflected, for example, in the grotesque deformation of embodiment and a dehumanised perception of others. Megan Reilly (Wisconsin-Madison) closed the panel with a paper on her work with Adrian Howells’s *The Garden of Adrian*, which she transformed from a physical into a digital performance using VR technology. The experiment explores the ways in which empathy and intimacy in actor-audience relations can be created in digitally mediated spaces.

In the afternoon, conference participants went into the centre of Innsbruck for a guided tour of the city with historian Robert Rebitsch (Innsbruck). The day concluded with a roundtable discussion hosted by Anja Hartl and Dorothee Birke on the rehearsal stage at the Tiroler Landestheater on the topic of “How the Digital is Changing the Theatre.” CDE members Heidi Lucja Liedke and Cyrielle Garson (Avignon) were joined by local theatre and film maker Sarah Milena Rendel and Felix Tenhaef from the Game Studies research group at the University of Innsbruck to discuss the theoretical, practical, and creative implications of digitalisation for the theatre.

The third conference day opened with two panels on “Posthumanism and the Digital,” chaired by Ines Gstrein (Innsbruck) and Anja Hartl, respectively. Susanne Thurow (New South Wales) introduced a research project on terrestrial aesthetics. Drawing on theories of eco-criticism and posthumanism, she argued that theatre and performance on the climate crisis still privilege human agency. In her project, she is looking for ways in which an enmeshed form of agency can be achieved in performance by breaking the fourth wall and offering sensing environments for spectators. Alex Watson’s (Brighton) paper focused on the figure of the animal cyborg and explored how non-human life has been represented on the British stage through the use of audiovisual and digital technologies as an attempt to shift the notion of what it means to be human in relation to animals.

Siân Adiseshiah (Loughborough) explored the intersection between theatre, digital technology, and old age by examining the impact of digital technologies, in particular artificial intelligence, on older people in selected plays, arguing that the digital offers an opportunity for alternative temporalities. Klára Witzany Hutková (Prague) discussed the use of digital media in Marina Carr’s *iGirl*, a monologue which combines the voices of fictitious and historical women.

After the AGM, which took place after lunch, conference delegates had a choice of two excursions to Castle Ambras and the Bergisel ski jump. The day finished with a participatory VR performance from the Los Angeles theatre group Ferryman Collective, who joined on Zoom, at the conference venue. Cyrielle Garson shared her expertise on VR theatre and led the post-show talk.

The final day started with a panel on “Digital Activism” chaired by Kerstin Schmidt (Munich). Hannah Greenstreet (Liverpool) introduced the concept of virtual realism in her analysis of *seven methods of killing kylie jenner* by Jasmine Lee-Jones, exploring the potential of realism to represent social media culture on stage. In her paper, Eva-Maria Windberger (Trier) focused on *WeRNotVirus*, a digital arts event which targets racism towards East and South East Asian communities during the Covid-19 pandemic and which seeks to shift perspective, create space, and give voice to those unheard.

The final panel of the conference on “Post-Lockdown Theatre” was chaired by Chris Megson (London). Janine Hauthal’s (Brussels) talk focused on experiments with the theatrical remediation of the Zoom meeting in Richard Nelson’s *The Apple Family: A Pandemic Trilogy* (2021) and Forced Entertainment’s *End Meeting for All* (2020). Christine Schwanecke’s (Graz) paper on Fishamble’s *#TinyPlay Challenge* explored the medial, formal, and social affordances of digital theatre during lockdown and analysed ways in which forms of community in isolation can be achieved.

The conference ended with closing remarks by Dorothee Birke, Anja Hartl, and CDE Vice President Chris Megson, who thanked the organisers and their team as well as the staff of the conference venue. The next conference will be organized by the University of Konstanz and will take place 19-22 June 2025.