Self/Scape

An Exploration of Belonging and Wayfaring

Miguel Angel Paredes

Self/Scape

How do we make meaning? Is it through text or is it through embodied experience? Or perhaps it is both at different points in time. Within game studies there are two ideologies that reflect this: Narratology and Ludology. The former is the reading of text and subtext within every experience while the latter is the analysis of action, experience, and practice. Karen Collins studies sound design within video games specifically looking at player (or audience) interaction with sound. Collins (2013:xi) writes, "I seek to understand games not as texts but as sites of participation and practice where players construct meanings." Utilizing this framework, I shall examine my own immersive digital theater making process and 'seek to understand [plays] not as texts but as sites of participation and practice where [audience members] construct meanings' (Collins, 2013:xi). This has been the newest development within my theoretical praxis that examines the work I make and the world at large. Given this new lens, I feel there is a promise in my attempts to create a new genre of immersive digital theater that has its roots and history in oral tradition, ritual Llatinidad, music/sound, and video games. Within this framework I am not only just a writer, director, producer and actor but I am also a *programmer*. The process of making theater is the same process as coding, especially my process of creating immersive digital theater. Not only am I encoding my embodied experience into a soundscape, but the audience is also decoding and encoding the sound they hear with their own personal embodied experience. The use of QR[1] codes within the explication itself shall also serve as an example of

---

[1] Quick Response code: A matrix barcode that is readable through smart phone cameras. In this performance the QR code leads to a URL containing audio. https://www.digitaltrends.com/mobile/how-to-scan-a-qr-code/

the innovative use of technology to enact embodied listening. In this explication, I shall elucidate the theoretical foundations and underpinnings of the new genre of theater I believe is possible for the digital age.

Before moving forward, I would like to provide a brief roadmap of the various sections included within this paper. Section one, which is right after this brief introduction, is titled "Theater Reflections" and it discusses the progression of my process of theater making and theorizing through theater making. More specifically, it discusses my shift from physical theatre to immersive digital theatre. Section two is titled, "Roots" and explains the genesis of my theoretical framework and how it is localized within Latino Theatre and autoethnography. Section three is titled, "*Self/Scape USA*" and it reflects and theorizes on the relatively new experience of producing *Self/Scape* in the Unites States.. And lastly, section four titled "Futures" which features my dreams of what comes next.

Theater Reflections:

Much of my work is driven by the following questions: How can we make theatre more accessible to people who do not possess the privilege to enter into performances spaces? And, how can we utilize sound and audio recording techniques to bring embodiment into the virtual? My first performative production within this research encountered many challenges regarding the questions I was trying to ask about immersive digital theatre. I wanted to make work that engaged audience interaction and created a soundscape to immerse the audience in the world of the play. The main issue I grappled with was the reality that not only was I still tied to traditional theater making, but the work did not translate or convey the issues I was trying to investigate within the form. One unique characteristic of this first production is that I designed the show to

be experienced by a sole audience member. I had the impulse to do this because I wanted to recreate the feeling of listening to people on headphones but instead of left/right headphone speakers, there was an actor on the left and an actor on the right. However, this first production did not translate well because there were multiple barriers blocking me from achieving what I had intended. Firstly, I felt limited as a director because I could only seat one person in the chair that was meant to be the immersive seat. The immersive seat was placed in the liminal space between the audience and the performers. The actors would speak to the audience member in the immersive seat as though they were really a character in the world of the play. Even with such a placement of the audience member, I found it hard to achieve the level of intimacy I wanted for every audience participant. The audience member in the immersive seat also had the opportunity to fully immerse themselves in the world of the play but the theatrical form failed to bring that opportunity to everyone's experience. There were still audience members watching the interaction between the actors and the immersed audience participant, which generated some connection, but still failed to produce the interactivity I was aiming for. After that production I had two options for moving forward: I could rewrite the script to include every audience member in the room or I could use headphones as a way to bring immediacy and intimacy. After some preliminary research, I chose the path towards headphones.

My next production was a fifteen minute one-person show that engaged with headphones more specifically. I used this opportunity as a testing ground for my idea of 'headphone theater' which was inspired by Rosemary Klich (2017). I had the hypothesis that it was indeed possible to create a theatrical experience within a digital yet imaginative embodied soundscape. This production was an effort to create theatre that could be transferred from the physical realm into an acoustic digitally embodied medium. Because of cutting-edge technologies (e.g. Binarual

audio[2] and 360 video[3]), there is a neoteric way to create theatre that can be reproduced to feel as though it's happening in the moment. My hypothesis was also built on the foundation of a curated space that was made to coexist with(in) a digital soundscape, and given the level of immersion that audio technologies can generate, the corporeal experience of listening returns back the "digitally captured event" into the physical realm through the audience member's body. This is to say, that even though the audience member is experiencing the production within a digital and imagined "head space," everything they experience is still physically and affectively embodied because they (co)exist as the listener in the curated physical space (Klich, 2017:375). Michel Serres poetically argues, "The modality of hearing is closely linked to the modalities of tactile and proprioceptive sensation; thus the ear is no more to be located in one place than the skin. The listener is always a body; the process of hearing involves skin, flesh, and bone" (Serres, 2005:324). I would also add that affect, the emotional dimensions of experience, is also an important part of the process of hearing. Consequently, this idea of hearing as also involving 'skin, flesh and bone' is the ontological foundation of my research.

Klich brilliantly explains how the use of headphones within theatre can lead to different intersensory effects. These effects are triggered by a special kind of sound recording technique called 'binaural.' Binaural microphones are designed to record sound in the exact same way the human ear hears sound. More specifically, they recreate the same auditorial location finding mechanisms our ears use to localize oneself within space. By recording sound in this way, we are given the ability to transport our audience members into the acoustic world of the play. Klich draws upon the work of multiple headphone theatre productions, especially productions that use

---

[2] Binaural: A recoding technique that records exactly as a human ear does.
[3] 360 Video: Omnidirectional camera that captures a 360° field of view. I'm saving to get into that in my PhD ;)

only headphones to tell the story, with no visual. For example, plays such as *Ring* (2014), *Symphony of a Missing Room* (2014) and *The Roof* (2014). There are different intersensory effects that take place when an audience member listens to binaural audio. As explained by Klich, the first intersensory effect is the "visual imagination of the unseeing spectator in receipt of auditory information" (Klich, 2017:374). This auditory information is similar to listeners of music who "see" a certain world according to the music or when a person visualizes a speaker on the other end of the phone. The intersensory effect is similar, but at a much more immediate scale because of the special recording technique. According to Klich, binaural audio recordings "trigger the powers of one's 'inner eye' to render visually the environmentally suggested through sound" (2017:365). Just imagine what other sensations could be triggered by sounds that relate to our olfactory or somatosensory senses. What I find fascinating about this performance technique is that everyone's visual imagination of the environment would have to be intrinsically different everyone's perspective and positionality to the work is socio-politically different. There is research, such as Cassandra Amesley's (1989:323) concept of the "double viewing", that demonstrates "how the rendering of visual imagery is individually nuanced" (Klich, 2017:374) and thus different and prolific. Therefore, each audience member would not only experience headphone theatre differently, but the differences in interpretation would also be heightened by the diversity of positionalities and visualizations that each listener's postionality would bring to the imagined environment.

As Charles Stankievech notes, headphones, as modern technological prosthetics, "are quite literally a bracketing of the world for a precise analysis of sound, allowing for a focused investigation into a 'phenomenology of interiority'" (Stankievech, 2007:55). The 'phenomenology of interiority' also plays a foundational role in the emerging framework of my

investigation into embodiment through sound and the kinship of lived experiences that emerges through the multimodality of the auditory. This exploration of interiority through headphones also allows the audience member to become self-aware of their own body and ways of listening, and more importantly, to explore the question: "can I trust my senses?" Immersive digital theatre not only engages audience regarding what they receive, but also propels them to question the articulation of their senses. This is important because it is through our senses that our feelings can be invoked, expressed, and experienced.

According to Klich, another intersensory effect of binaural sound recording is the "proprioceptive and haptic perception of auditory space" (2017:374). Because binaural microphones record in the same way that humans hear, it offers the possibility for 'space' to be used as an effective audio tool to immerse the audience member in the play. When I say 'space' I mean the use of distance between the 'listener' and the 'speaker'. One may ask, how there can be 'space' if it's all within headphones? Firstly, space is not merely physical. It can also be experienced and created as sound or a 'soundscape'. Secondly, 'space' in this context relies on how the headphones relay the recorded sound. If one were to record an actor speaking five metres away from the binaural microphone, it would sound exactly as it was recorded. This allows for more innovative ways to use sound in situating the audience in the world of the play.

What are the possibilities towards creating a digital yet embodied experience through sound? Or to imagine a "realizable utopia" as described by Puerto Rican scholar-activist Liliana Cotto Morales when speaking about innovative cultural productions (2017:6). I aim to answer this question by creating a theatrical space within the body and imagined sphere. Through headphone theatre I want the audience to explore their relationship to the work as an individually curated and embodied, as well as affective (and effective) experience. The moment an audience

member slips on a pair of 'effective' (i.e. ideally, noise cancelling/high quality) headphones, I believe – given the research – it is possible for them to "experience a heightened sense of interior space" (Klich, 2017:375). This phenomenon grants me, as a theatre maker, the ability to utilize an audience member's imagination to help further immerse them in the world of the play. As Klich explains "[t]he psychoacoustics of headphones produce a vivid imagining of one's own 'headspace'" (2017:375). It is within this 'headspace' the audience member is given the autonomy to imagine any kind of visual to the auditory stimuli of the piece and the feelings associated with their experience. This 'headspace' replaces the need for a classical (and potentially colonial) proscenium theatre.

As Klich explains "[n]oise-cancelling, over- the-ear headphones enforce perceptual immersion; while psychological immersion relates to the participant's mental absorption in the virtual reality, perceptual immersion refers to physically cancelling out the real world, making it impossible for the participant to perceive anything but the virtual world." (2017:370). This complete 'perceptual immersion' is imperative to the effectiveness of a piece and yet a fascinating challenge given the competing distractions on audience attention. Mack Hagood explains the science behind these headphones, "Noise-canceling headphones add tiny microphones and signal processing to produce an out-of-phase copy of the aural environment in an attempt to negate its phenomenological existence" (2011:1). Consequently, there's something very powerful about the ability to erase (or at least minimize) the phenomenological existence of the 'outside' or 'other'. In this sense, I follow Hagood in using "noise as a problematic to explore relationships between media technology, space, freedom, otherness and selfhood in an era characterized by neoliberalism and increased mobility" (2011:574). Within this framework, noise is not just a nuisance but a socio-political modality used to interpret and experience the world.

Using noise as a framework to look at the world through sound, I realized that different people experience different kinds of noises depending on their positionality. For instance, the loud noise produced by a cop car's siren in my solo show generated different reactions based on listeners' positionalities, their relationship with police defined how they heard that sound. Specifically, men of color hear a police siren as a potential threat instead of safety. Hagood further explains, "Noise is the sound of individualism and difference in conflict. Noise is othered sound, and like any type of othering, the perception of noise is socially constructed and situated in hierarchies of race, class, and gender" (2011:574) With this framework in mind, my goal is to create soundscapes that immerse audiences in the aural experience generated by my unique positionality.

It is also important to note that the term soundscape has a large range of interpretations and applicabilities. Sound theorist Jonathan Sterne theorizes on the history and legacy of the term 'soundscape' in his article "Soundscape, Landscape, Escape" (2013). In the article, Sterne compares and contrasts Hagood's socio-political theorization of the term, with another well-known scholar writing on the topic, Murray Schafer. Sterne even goes so far to say that "[i]n a way, Hagood is the Yang to Schafer's Yin" (2013:183). Whereas Hagood theorizes on the term 'soundscaping' to explain how socio-political factors can shape how we create space even through sound, Schafer focuses on the phenomenology of soundscapes and how we can interpret them. Schafer's use of the term 'soundscape' is meant to invert our visual biases in the description of space by replacing visual with aural metaphor, for example, landmark vs soundmark (2013:182). This idea of a sonic 'landscape' is pushed even further by Emily Thompson who writes that it is "an auditory or aural landscape. Like a landscape, a soundscape is simultaneously a physical environment and a way of perceiving that environment" (2013:182).

Taking from these ideas, I argue that soundscape and landscape go hand in hand. For example, if one can experience the world through a soundscape as though it is a landscape, then Tim Ingold's theory of 'wayfaring' could apply to soundscapes as well (2000). Ingold argues that as humans we are constantly recognising where we are and creating cognitive maps based on landmarks we encounter (2000:219). If so, then I argue that it is possible to create a piece of theater that is a soundscape interspersed within a landscape which invites audience members to make their own cognitive story map. In this way, the audience member is engaging in their own version of worldbuilding, story creation, and wayfinding through the piece, which allows the audience to have the autonomy to explore and create.

I found that during my process of creating my one-person (QR code inspired) show, I had to change my thinking in terms of directing and producing to allow for wayfinding. For this new production I had to convey a story within a nonlinear narrative and a framework that aligned with immersive theater and headphone theater while also engaging with the recording and usage of QR codes. Some colleagues described this production as art installation but this also failed to fully grasp the fundamentals of interactivity and play that are present within the QR code framework. As I kept creating the work, I deeply considered the audience experience and tried to understand it in terms of what they are physically doing. They enter a space and are given the task of finding and scanning QR codes to hear the story unfold. By watching audience members throughout this production, I came to the realization that the digital immersive theater I was creating was more like a video game than a proscenium-based play. I related this process to the experience of playing point and click computers games.

As a child in the late 1990s, I used to play *Pajama Sam*[4](1996) and *Freddi Fish* (1994) which were both point and click games made for children. What stuck with me throughout all this time was the ability to click any object in the virtual space and be guaranteed a response, whether it be the progression of the story or a funny little sound. Karen Collins speaks about this as "interactive sound" or "event-based sound" which is creates a different listening experience than other non-interactive media (2013:33). "Interactive sound in games is kinesoncially synchretic: sounds are fused not to image but to action. In other words, interactive sound is event driven, and the sound is controlled by an action or occurrence that is initiated by the game or by the player." (Collins, 2013:32) A perfect example of an audience-generated event in the context of my work is the scanning of a QR code. I was creating an experience within my one-person show that was kinesonically synchretic with not only the QR codes but the artifacts that the audience members had to handle in order to scan said code. I utilized this device to create a multitude of embodied moments of listening that was driven by the kinesonically synchretic relationship of the sound, the afrtifact and the listener.

Collins further explains how interactive sound can help audience members understand the world of the play, "The concept of interactive sound as being event-driven suggests that events are repeatable – that if we repeat the action, we will receive the same reaction. This repeatability of events is one of the key elements in sound's ability to provide feedback to the player. Repeatability establishes an expectation that we will hear the same sound a s a reaction to the same action. This helps players learn the sound's meaning, increasing efficiency for the players,

_____

[4]

who can rely on the feedback to help the play the game." (Collins, 2013:33) Within the context of my show, the QR codes were static and always sent the audience member to the same sound experience. This created the same 'repeatability' that Collins was talking about. I used this technique in order to guide the audience member through the piece. Especially the first QR code which sets up the context for the rest of the play.

As another point of comparison, consider audio-based QR code theater which relies on audience interaction to progress through the story. This "mental mapping" that is utilized by the audience to navigate the world of the play is exactly the experience I have been aiming to create. The production *Self/Scape*, 2019 fostered the audience's ability to create a 'cognitive story map' and this one-person show was a perfect testing ground for exploring a new form and the theoretical experiments of immersive digital theatre. Audience members often commented it felt like a game or a treasure hunt. This is the exact interactivity I was hoping to create. Others said that it felt very personal and intimate. I believe this is because of the content as well as the use of headphones which creates the "phenomenology of interiority" as stated earlier (Stankievech, 2007:55).

Roots:

Before continuing to delve deeper into the nuances of immersive digital theatre, I must digress just a bit to explain the socio-political frameworks that ground me. The theoretical frameworks that take into account self-reflexivity, practice as research, and autoethnography are key in my understanding of digital archives and embodied experience. According to Leon Anderson (2006:376) "autoethnography [has] clearly laid out a case for self-observation in ethnographic research" and is a "popular form of qualitative research" that gets at the

expressiveness of lived experiences, cultural performances and creative writing. One of the challenges that D. Soyini Madison (2006) discusses is the need for listening, observing, and reflecting closely. She states, "I struggle everyday with distraction, trying hard to pay attention. Taped to my refrigerator door and my computer are the words of jazz singer, Dianne Reeves: 'Be Still, Stand in Love, and Pay Attention'" (Madison, 2006:323). I, too, struggle to see the nuances in everyday life but have come to witness that within the academic world of theatre, my experience, and other Latinx theatre makers' experiences are often not taken into consideration. It is done through invisible walls around language and accessibility. In America, Latinx theatre makers cannot make plays fully in Spanish for fear of "othering the audience". In academia, the experience and theorization on the positionality of being Latinx is not seen as "rigorous enough" because it's pedagogical language is "too colloquial". Yet through the use of critical performance autoethnography, I wish to document the nuance of Latinidades - as it takes place through digital and live performances - as well as my own ability to observe more deeply the transformations that take place on the stage and on the street.

Norman K. Denzin notes "I believe that performance-based human disciplines can contribute to radical social change, to economic justice, to a cultural politics that extends critical race theory and to change that envisions a democracy founded in a social justice that is not yet" (Denzin, 2003:3) Theatre as a humanistic discipline that engages with texts, perspectives, objectives, language, history, and the body has the ability to extend democratic social justice by intersecting the individual with community experiences, especially under represented communities. Agustin Laos-Montes (2017) has argued that the western models of research must be challenged and often, it is not until we are in "the thick of our performances" that we recognize what we need in terms of scholarship to make sense of our work.

My recording praxis is that of capturing myself and others within "the thick of our performances" in spaces of academia, creativity and daily life. I use the recordings I gather as an archive and reflexive tool that allows me to theorize on my life and experience. Another way of theorization is performance and thus I also include many 'real life' recordings in my work. When I listen to authentic (unscripted 'real life') recordings from years ago, I am overcome with a feeling of awe as well as secrecy. The awe comes from the feeling as though I am listening to an auditory artifact, that moment in time has been captured auditorily. Within my mind, time is overlaid onto space. Each moment is like a different layer inhabiting the same space simultaneously. These different moments create "imprints" onto the space that can be felt even after the moment is gone. When I enter spaces that have witnessed severe trauma to human beings, I can feel the imprint onto the space. At times I can hear the imprint. At home, I see the imprint my childhood has left in the yard, my room and the hallways. These imprints exist everywhere. My work is aimed to let people into the process of finding and listening to these imprints via QR codes.

While researching I learned to localize myself within the paradigm of U.S. Latino theatre through a historical analysis of Latinx theatre makers that influence and inspire me. Within U.S. Latino theatre, Teatro Campesino[5] was viewed as laying the foundations for Chicano performance within the context of social justice and creating a space for historically underrepresented communities, especially in theatre. As Henry Elam (1997) identified in *Taking It to the Streets*, the Teatro Campesino created a new form of theatre to achieve social change from within their community. The Teatro's social goals were the same as the United Farm

---

[5] http://elteatrocampesino.com/

Workers Union and Chicano nationalism movement during 1960s and 1970s - which were to build solidarity, unionize and have rights for migrant workers. Teatro Campesino was founded by Luis Valdez in 1965 as the cultural part of the United Farm Workers Union. His goal was to create performances that would give the Chicano community a reason to feel empowered and join the movement. Teatro Campesino curated their performances for a specific audience which was the Chicano community during the 1960s. As Elam states, "the cultural and social constitution of the audience, the social environment in which they lived, and the self-conscious construction of the performance itself all contributed to making the social protest performance a participatory experience." (Elam, 1997:7). Through this participatory experience Teatro Campesino was able to create a liminal space in which the audience could be taken into a different reality in which their social oppression could be transformed.

Luis Alfaro's *Mojada* (2019) that has been seminal in my understanding of telling our narratives. Alfaro has been able to convey meaning and intimacy through the use of storytelling and brujeria while engaging with subject matter regarding immigration, gender-based violence, ritual, and assimilation into capitalism. The experience of sitting in the front row watching Latinx actors embody such a tragic story reminded me why I am creating these narratives. The reflection of their trauma within my own family that was told in this play kept me grounded in the reality that the oppression we face seems insurmountable but the moments of liberation on and off stage are worth the effort.

Self/Scape USA:

When I arrived in America earlier this year, I believed that I would be able to construct a piece that was both accessible and foundational in the search for creating an immersive auditory

experience that feels embodied and transformative. Through the piece I wanted to emphasize questions relating to family, belonging, legacy, reality, perception, and migration. While I was working in the United States, I had the rare opportunity of being given a space in the middle of downtown Greenfield, Massachusetts for six days. It was in the time and space that I created *Self/Scape: Greenfield*. The space was an old clothing store and then bookstore, and now it is a creator space that has been leased for free by the owner to the creatives of Greenfield for a year. It was much bigger than the site of my one-person show which meant that I was given more room to play and grow. I owe much of my experience creating to my collaborator Kathrine Adler, specifically the curation of the space and the creation of artifacts. It was thanks to them that I was given the space in the first place and they also worked alongside me during the entire process of those six days. If we were to define our collaboration in terms of theatre making, then I was the director and writer and they were the set designer. During the beginning of the process, we walked around the entire space and felt our first impulses as well as the "imprints" within the space. When I say "imprints", I am referring to what I had said earlier about how I see memory and space. In the context of this production, I was walking around and feeling the natural imprints (including the traumas that were experienced in the basement) as well as constructing where I would place my own memory imprints onto the space. To produce this kind of work, I had to be in tune with the auditory and phenomenological experience of the space in order to design a piece that worked in conjunction with what was naturally going on. I utilized this technique to create an experience that started from the moment one entered into the space.

When the audience entered the space they were greeted by two walls side by side which represented the two paths they could take. As the designer, it was my choice to give people the freedom to chose how they started their journey. I also made this choice because I knew it would

influence how the audience would experience the rest of my piece. The wall to the left was white and it represented 'White America' while the wall to the left was black and it represented 'Cape Town'[6]. I was intending to use the audience member's preconceptions with color to contextualize how they were going to experience the piece. Now I will explain each section of the piece and how it intersects with my research.

Within 'White America', I explored the juxtaposition of being born in a country that doesn't make oneself feel safe or validated. I wanted to 'hit' the audience with the shock of being brown in America, similar to when I reentered the United States from studying in South Africa. This section included recordings of conversations I've had, journal entries as well as curated abstract sound that conveyed feeling more than meaning. One entry highlighted the phenomenological difference of seeing and being surveilled by the police within America vs South Africa:

This experience of having to 'play to their whiteness' has been reaffirmed by many audience members of color. One woman of color told me that she's been pulled over on Route 116 that stretches between Greenfield and Amherst, Massachusetts more times than she can count. This fear of driving 'as brown and black' is very present within America.

---

[6] *an image of the set as well as Kathrine Adler*

Another embodied experience I have had since I was a child was the dehumanization of people of color within the U.S context. While it may not be overt as segregation or racial slurs, I have felt throughout my life as though I am less than a human being because of the way I have been treated. Within 'White America,' I wanted to make that feeling of dehumanization clear in all its facets. This not only includes police harassment but also subtler ways that are present throughout one's life including childhood. One example of this was my feeling of invalidation since childhood explained in this entry:

What was so interesting was the audience response to this piece. I was able to connect with audience demographics that I wasn't clearly expecting. One example is how I linked my experience of being called "good Miguel" as a racialized micro-aggression while other people understood it as a question of neural diversity and understanding ADHD. Another audience member, Lori Holmes Clark, sent a voice recording of their thoughts of the moment:

"Some of the other phrases that stand out to me is relating to yourself as a dog as a good dog. I remember feeling that too. And that good dog performance energy. That joyful compassionate 'Approach me! I am good! I am relatable! I can mirror you!' is a strong way to kindly traverse the landscape" (Self/Scape, 2019).

I shall expand upon her response and experience on my piece further but in the context of this example, I was surprised by how relatable this racialized experience was for her. As a white woman, she was able to relate it to the performability of self and how it can be viewed by others. It is moments like these that illuminate the distinct perspectives within the experience of dehumanization and reclaiming humanity.

Audience members throughout the performance of the production would reaffirm how intimate the piece felt. They told me that they identified with many of the things I said or created at the time of the recording. I had to understand why the piece was having such an influence on people's feeling of intimacy within a space. When I looked back to my research I found that part of the reason is the 'phenomenology of the interiority' noted previously (Stankievech, 2007:55), but it is also about the interactivity of the sound and how that effects the listener's experience. Karen Collins (2013:61) explains,

> They understand human made sounds (including those of playing a musical instrument) in terms of their own experience of making similar sound and movements. The mental re-creation of the sound causes a neuronal and motor-sensory response that mimics the performer/emitter, and thus players are able to interpret the emotional inflections through a mental re-creation of the action. People therefore give meaning to sound in terms of emulated actions or corporeal articulation. Put differently, we mentally (and sometimes physically) imitate the expressiveness of the action behind the sound, based on our prior embodied experience of sound making. (Cox 2001,195)

There are moments within *Self/Scape* that express the multitude of experiences people have in life and in this way audience members always find something to attach meaning to. Whether it be the fear of police or the pain of missing family while living abroad[7], there is visceral emotion that is meant to be corporeally listened to within every recording of *Self/Scape*. I was aiming to imbue my selfhood within the piece, encoding every experience I've had into sound. This allows for the experience to be translated into interactive digital media such QR codes and MP3s, and

[7]

thus the audience can interact with the experience. As previously noted, I felt as though I was a computer programmer who was coding a game or experience for the audience in real time[8].

In conjunction with Schafer's impulse to flip the visual bias on its head to emphasize an auditorial experience, I translate the visual bias of video games to fit in the world of immersive digital theater. Within this framework, I also plan on translating media theorizations that investigate our empathy and relateability from the characters we watch to the characters we hear. Collins explains Cassandra Amesley's (1989:323)

> a variety of theories have arisen as to our identification with on screen characters. Cassandra Amesley in discussing television, suggests that a 'double viewing' occurs when we watch a program in which the characters are simultaneous both real and constructed in our minds: we project and transfer our own beliefs about the character on that character. Thus the character becomes us as much as we become them, in a blurring of real and imagined personality traits. Through empathy and mental role-play, we adopt the character and extend our sense of self into the character.

This is what I am trying to bring into theater and my work. The player being the audience member, the character which is me or whoever is recorded and the virtual world is the sound space I've created. The interactions between the audience member and myself as the character is the liminal space that I am aiming to create.

---

[8]

Finally, I would like to reflect on the audience experience of the production of

Self/Scape: Greenfield, specifically drawing upon the recording by Lori Holmes Clark[9] whom I

mentioned earlier. Clark highlights the experience of arriving to the performance space while

also relating it back to her own personal experience of getting there. She mentions a skunk and

how it was black and white and relates it to the opening of the show. As an artist, Clark was able

to give me insight that other audience members may have not been in tune with. Her

understanding of creating theater as a means of liberation and building community as well as the

mask work we all do in order to survive in our society. The latter point interested me more

because she was able to tell by "venturing past mom's garden into the recesses of family history

and pain. With so many photos of smiles, I thought it was really telling of the mask work you use

to survive as a human being, and specially from your perspective" (Self/Scape, 2019). Listening

to the full recording allows the listener to fully understand the extent to which this piece engaged

Clark, and I am grateful to have a such an in depth recording of an audience member's

experience.

Futures:

The virtual theatre has been theorized as a way to express the performability of being a

computer user. Within this context, users are not only consumers, but also performers and

disseminators. Brenda Laurel's seminal book *Computers as Theatres* (1993) which lays the

---

9

foundation on the topic of human-computer interaction as performance. Expanding on this, Jon McKenzie (1994:90) suggests that "one might invent the computer as performance". Within this framework, my proposition of interactive immersive digital media as theatre can be expanded upon. Gabriella Gianacchi takes this analysis further in her book *Virtual Theatres* (2004:10),

> one which through its virtuality is able not only to include the viewers within the art but also to distribute their presence globally in both the real and simulated virtual world.

It is within this understanding that I embrace the use of technology and digital/virtual realities in order to create new spaces of storytelling.

New technologies are being developed that offer the opportunity to immerse oneself within virtual worlds that are ever present in our lives. I am especially inspired by Kenderdine (2012:113):

> Interactivity has been a seminal feature of media art research over the last decades, and it proliferates because the digital technologies open a broad new range of interaction-design possibilities that were not available in the analogue world. While interactivity exists during a theatre performance inasmuch as each member of the audience reconstructs its meaning and expression as a personal experience, in the 1960s, happenings enlarged this interactivity by offering members of the audience opportunities to physically intervene in and modulate the outcome

In my own work, I am attempting to combine the spirit of 1960s with the framework of immersive digital theatre. Paul Dourish (2001:229) futher explains that within interactive digital media, "embodiment is a 'participatory' status and a foundation for exploring interaction in context." This participatory interaction is the primary interest of my work and theorizations. Peter Dalsgaard and Lone Koefoed Hansen (2008: 5) take these theorizations further by investigating "the trichotomy of system-user-spectators, embodiment implies a reciprocal relationship with the context, encompassing users, interactive systems, spectators, co-users, physical surroundings and the meanings ascribed to these entities." This complex relationship between the 'user', system and space are all foundational to my future projects in which I will

explore how to create interactive stories and experiences that promote empathy and liberation, which we need now more than ever.

References:

Amesley, Cassandra. (1989) 'How to Watch Star Trek', *Cultural Studies 3* (323-339).

Anderson, L. 2006. Analytic autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography; J.Contemp.Ethnogr.* 35(4):373-395. DOI:10.1177/0891241605280449.

Boal, A. 1979. *Theater of the Oppressed.* London: Pluto Press. Available: .

Charles Stankievech, 'From Stethoscopes to Headphones: An Acoustic Spatialisation of Subjectivity', Leonardo Music Journal, 17 (2007), 33–59 (p. 55). Stankievech identifies the Koss SP-3 Stereophone produced in 1958 as the first commercially available stereo headphones (p. 55).

Collins, K. 2013. *Playing with sound : a theory of interacting with sound and music in video games.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press. Available: .

Dalsgaard, P. and L. Koefoed Hansen, 'Performing Perception. Staging Aesthetics of Interaction'. In: *ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction*, 15, 3, p. 13:1-33. New York, 2008

Denzin, Norman K. *Performance Ethnography: Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Culture*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003. Print.

Dourish, P., 'Seeking a Foundation for Context-Aware Computing'. In: *Human-Computer Interaction*, 16, 2, p. 229-241. London, 2001.

Elam, Harry Justin. Taking It to the Streets: The Social Protest Theater of Luis Valdez and Amiri Baraka. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 1997. Print.

Elleström, L. 2016. A medium-centered model of communication. *Semiotica.*

Freddi Fish [Video Game]. 1994. Produced by R. Gilbert & Created by R. Gilbert and L. Kay,

Bothell, WA USA: Humongous Entertainment, Inc.

Hagood, M. 2011. Quiet Comfort: Noise, Otherness, and the Mobile Production of Personal Space. *American Quarterly, 63*(3), 573-589. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/41237567

Hamilton [Performance]. 2015. Produced by J. Seller & Directed by T. Kali, New York City, NY USA: Richard Rodgers Theatre.

Hansen, Mark B. N. (Mark Boris Nicola). 2006. *Bodies in code : interfaces with digital media.* New York ;: Routledge. Available: .

Holst, Arne. 2019. *Number of smartphone users in South Africa from 2014 to 2023 (in millons)*. (Research report). South Africa: Statista. Available: https://www.statista.com/statistics/488376/forecast-of-smartphone-users-in-south-africa/

Ingold, T. 2000. *The Perception of the Environment*. London: Routledge. Available

Klich, R. 2017. Amplifying Sensory Spaces: The In- and Out-Puts of Headphone Theatre. *Contemporary Theatre Review.* 27(3):366-378. Available: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10486801.2017.1343247.

Laos-Montes, A. 2016. Critiques of western models of research [Lecture]. UMass Amherst. 13 October.

Laurel B., *Computers as Theatre*. Boston, 1993.

Leman, M. 2008. *Embodied Music ognition and Mediation Technology*. Cambridge MIT Press.

Michel Serres cited in Steven Connor,'Michel Serres' Five Senses', in The Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader, ed. by David Howe (Oxford: Berg, 2005), pp. 318 –35 (p. 324).

Mojada [Performance]. 2019. Produced by D. Federick & Directed by C. Yew, New York City, NY USA: Public Theatre

Morales Liliana C. 'Collective Actions of Resistance against PROMESA', El Sol Latino, 13.8 (2017), 6-7 (pg. 6).

N.A, 2019. *The State of the ICT sector report in South Africa*. (Research report). South Africa: Independent Communications Authority of South Africa. Available: https://www.icasa.org.za/uploads/files/state-of-ict-sector-report-2019.pdf

Oliver Sacks, 'The Mind's Eye: What the Blind See', in The Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader, ed. by David Howes (Oxford: Berg, 2005), pp. 25–43 (p. 35).

Pajama Sam [Video Game]. 1996. Produced by R. Gilbert & Created by R. Gilbert and R. Moe, Bothell, WA USA: Humongous Entertainment, Inc.

Piñero, Miguel. *Short Eyes: A Play*. , 1975. Print.

Red Dead Redemption 2 [Video Game]. 2018. Produced by R. Nelson & Created by P. Hooker and D. Houser, New York City, NY USA: Rockstar Studios

Ready Player One [DVD]. 2018. Produced by D. De Line & Dirceted by S. Spielberg, Hollywood, CA USA: Warner Bros. Pictures

Rewind [Performance]. 2015. Produced & Directed by J. Bechtold, Amherst, MA USA: AHRS Theater Company

Ring [Performance]. 2014. Produced by Fuel Theatre & Directed by D. Rosenberg, London, UK: Battersea Arts Centre

The Roof [Performance]. 2014. Produced by Fuel Theatre & Directed by D. Rosenberg, London, UK: National Theatre

Schafer, R. Murray (1994): *The Soundscape. Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, Rochester Vermont.

Silver, Laura. 2018. *Smartphone ownership increasing across sub-Saharan Africa*. (Research report). South Africa: Pew Research Center

Sleep No More [Performance]. 2011. Produced by J. Hochwald & Directed by F. Barrett and M. Doyle, New York City, NY USA: Punchdrunk and Emursive.

Soyini Madison, D. 2006. The Dialogic Performative in Critical Ethnography. *Text and Performance Quarterly*. 26(4):320-324.

Sterne, J. . 2013. Soundscape, Landscape, Escape. In *Soundscapes of the Urban Past.* Bijsterveld Karin, Ed. Transcript Verlag.

Symphony of a Missing Room [Performace]. 2014. Produced & Directed by C. Lundahl and M. Seitl, London UK: Royal Academy of Arts

Thomas, Piri. *Down These Mean Streets*. New York: Vintage Books, 1974. Print.