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Transmedia Intertextuality – Does It Work in Performance: *Follow the Sun* as a Proof of Concept Project

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Introduction

Follow the Sun is a contemporary music project that explores transmedia intertextuality in performance. It is a proof of concept exercise that is designed to transform the landscape for future generations of cultural consumers and change the culture of expectation in hard to reach communities. It combines creative content into a multi-platform and interactive global performance project where each community devises and controls the content. It will inhabit the contemporary version of our physical realm – and trigger responses on an individual and societal level by mapping onto the socio-cultural and environmental history of all who devise and experience it. Unrestricted and equal access to/participation for all, irrespective of level, ability or environment. The project is accessible via one/many/all available platforms.

The multiple narratives present the performers in live, recorded and geographically remote locations/forms and in a format whereby they, and the audience, can interact with, be co-present with or engage in a non-linear format with the live/recorded performers or their virtual presence. Thus the boundaries between presence and absence become permeable. A new relationship between the live and the mediated as introduced by Hayles' *Virtuality* (2000).

Klich (2007) addresses "how much mixed-media performance rupture the demarcation of the real and the virtual, creating an augmented space." In Blast Theory's "Can You See Me Now?" *Follow the Sun* seeks to embrace the term transmedia intertextuality as devised by Kinder (1991) whereby a particular narrative is presented across a range of formats with different levels of interaction and extend this to the full range of platforms in both linear and non-linear formats.

If, as Jenkins (2006) states, "a transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole" then there is a potential performance environment in which an audience member can assemble their own interpretation of the narrative from the range of platforms and genres to which they have access.

"Follow the Sun" is a transmedia performance environment in which 3 versions of a single narrative are explored, in a linear and non-linear fashion, across the full range of platforms which, were it to exist exclusively in the concert hall, research laboratory, or on the web would fail to achieve the primary objective of creating an interactive mass participation transmedia environment.

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Bridging the gap! Only through this unique collaborative network can the project access all areas, all people, all cultures at all levels with a pan-educational legacy. This legacy will be a change in the culture of expectation, a change in the access and entitlement to as well as the participation in opportunities to learn.

The media involved are: Film, animation, TV, radio, print, design, web, CD, DVD, social, phone apps, public realm, live performance and multiuser games - all of which have an independent identity but a related narrative. Participation will be active over the lifetime of the project with extensive workshop and development activity. There will be a constant mass/multimedia documentation exercise over the lifetime of the project which will, in turn, contribute to the legacy outputs. *Follow The Sun* is a research and activity exercise in transmedia intertextuality with a proposed outcome of a global pan-educational transmedia teaching and learning environment for all - including the most difficult to reach communities.

The project has already attracted participation groups in Hamilton (New Zealand), Singapore, Rome, London, Glassboro (USA), Grand Rapids (USA) and Vancouver creating unique content for the project, with the aspiration that additional engagement can be made by groups/institutions on the Indian subcontinent and Middle East. The live interactivity will use commercial games controllers e.g. Wii controllers and Connect boxes as well as unusual public realm interactivity e.g. motion sensors that will manipulate the unique content in real time using Jun Xion (developed by STEIM in the Netherlands) to control Ableton Live (Apple). This in turn will be vision mixed with digital media (sonic and visual) at the hub (Kingston University, London). The legacy content will be delivered via a variety of media (social media, broadcast, active and passive web content, apps, written and spoken work etc.) - each with their own identity whilst remaining intertextual with the central narrative which can be accessed in the variety of ways (linear and non linear) available to any individual at any time via the portfolio of media listed above - longer term aspirations for the legacy include continued engagement with the network in the public realm e.g. projections in public spaces, community workshops/activities, installations - on screens in schools, libraries, universities, public and social transportation etc.

The first pilot for *Follow the Sun* took place in April 2016 using a live, interactive, performance delivered simultaneously at Rowan University (Glassboro, New Jersey) and Kingston University (London). This was a first test of the technology and content required to sustain multi-platform simultaneity to a dedicated web page, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter content. It also tested pre and post event content management, real time character and audience interactivity and can be viewed on <http://www.followthesunofficial.org> and @FTS official 2016 or via hash tags such as #follow the sun on the social networks listed above.

The single 24 hour network event is designed to be a rigorous proof/test which will, ideally, attract significant global attention and will include live activities in each partner institution (directed from London via web links) with all of the elements vision-mixed live and in real time then reprofiled/adapted for the various platforms.

Each element of the network will be directed from London using a combination of communication tools such as Livestream, Facetime, Skype and Bambuser. In building the network the various idiosyncrasies of these programmes will be built into the control mechanisms and tested through the process described below. Description: The network event will take place over 24 hours with each live iteration happening as the sun rises in that location. The network will produce original content for and by a range of unique content providers and there could be a finished work as the sum of the work created. It is divided into sections and, during the presentations of each section the content is recorded and processed so that it can then be manipulated in real-time by the various performers.

The sections incorporate actions that activate the sensors in interactive controllers such as Wii controllers/Connect Boxes/live sensors/ apps etc which, in turn, activate and manipulate the recorded and processed content via JunXion and Ableton Live. At the same time the actions are being 'responded' to by the various sensors which manipulate the imagery, design and animation first encountered by the audience when it was shown during the performance of the preceding movement.

This imagery, design and animation has the same narrative but from a different perspective – a sort of synchronicity – that reflects the socio cultural and environmental expectations of the various participants and live audiences and, significantly, will allow this research to progress to the next level whereby the team build a transmedia learning environment. Previous experiments and most current research is multi-media 'Follow The Sun' is transmedia research and is much more. It will, for the first time, have an active legacy that will be a platform for further research.

The interactivity works on different levels at different times. During the event it is possible for anyone watching on all platforms to experience the narrative from one or many perspectives in either a linear or non-linear manner (thus it would also be possible to go back and revisit earlier parts of the event whilst the event continues – as well as interact with the narrative from the perspective of different 'characters'). It can also be engaged with through all possible active and passive media. After the event the work will exist on a variety of platforms allowing new audiences to assemble their own version and/or to experience the unique content from a variety of different perspectives and across time.

Phelan (1993) insists that the body, or presence, is entirely necessary to the authenticity of performance. However, in the proposed transmedia environment the body is both present and absent, often it is displaced, or held, until the audience chose a point of engagement. Klich, using Hayles (1999, 2000) identification of the 'posthuman' argues that the duality of live and mediated has ceased to be relevant, that "A framework based on the intermingling of the dialectics of the presence/absence and pattern/randomness offers a new lens through which to holistically view the complex process of communication and embodiment, disembodiment or re-embodiment in multimedia performance."

Follow the Sun embeds public information networks into the realm of the live and engages with a complex and, potentially, unpredictable environment – engaging with, understanding, analysing and, potentially, controlling this realm is a new and exciting challenge for the creative artist.

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