

Theatre, Social Media, and Meaning Making

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One of the best things about writing this book has been the opportunity to bring several traditionally separate strands of my scholarly work in performance studies, cultural studies, disability, race and gender studies, and arts, cultural and creative industries management studies together in one text. Though the concept of transdisciplinary research on a topic, problem or issue in contemporary industry practice is increasingly popular in academic circles, the practice itself can meet with challenges when it comes to reviews, readings and critiques of contributions in relation to the respective scholarly fields invoked. I am as a result grateful to my many colleagues in transdisciplinarity-friendly scholarly communities such as Performance Studies international (PSi) and the Australasian Association for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies for their encouragement of this investigation of engagement with social media across the aesthetic, critical, audience development and evaluation domains of theatre practice over the last three years. I am particularly grateful to Gunhild Borggreen, Laura-Luise Shultz and their colleagues at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark for the opportunity to share some of the content of this book with an international audience at their conference on telematic performance as part of the PSi #22 global conference in 2015.

Closer to home, I am grateful to Paul Makeham and Joon-Yee Kwok for the invitation to join their project using the now 10-year-old AusStage Australian Theatre Database to map the health of local theatre

ecologies almost 5 years ago, and for the impact that collaboration has come to have on the development of sections of the concluding chapter of this book. This work on local Brisbane theatre culture, and the way online technologies influence its evolution, provides an excellent extension to the recent work on US, UK and European theatre cultures considered here, and some salutary reminders about mistaking volume of activity for value of activity that can benefit all working in this field, and I have relished the opportunity to cite some of our shared articles in this area. I have also appreciated the chance to point those who are interested in evaluating the cultural value of theatre practices to work with another collaborator with whom I completed an evaluation for the Brisbane Festival some years ago, Sandra Gattenhof. Our work looked at the ways in which these specific characteristics of our local Brisbane theatre ecology sit within recognised stages in the evolution of evaluation criteria, processes and protocols for Australian theatre more broadly over the past 50 years. In both cases, inflecting my reading of global trends in uptake of social media in drama, theatre and performances practices in terms of locally specific issues has improved the contribution of this book. I have also appreciated the friendship, collegiality and critique of my fellow audience, spectators and spectatorship studies scholar Caroline Heim throughout the production of this book.

Finally, my gratitude to these research colleagues, peers and collaborators sits together with that to a great many others I cannot name here, including a large number of my students. The first audiences for the content in this book have frequently been my students and my teaching colleagues in the Bachelor of Fine Arts—Drama, Bachelor of Creative Industries, and Master of Creative Industries programmes in the Creative Industries Faculty at Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia. I am grateful to those I have taught with in our performance, digital media, and social media innovation subjects in particular, including Elizabeth Ellison, Linda Olsen, Michael Klaehn, John Banks, Sharon Altena, Samantha Harrington-McFeeter, Alison Quin and Hyacinth Steele, who have been supportive in allowing me to test the measure of some of this content with students, and in some cases fellow travellers in investigating new ways to use some of the technologies mentioned here to teach this sort of content. Though I cannot name all of the students who have been partners in those learning experiences, their questions have kept me honest about the pros, cons and perils of uptake of this technology over the years, and, above all else, I am looking

forward to seeing what these emerging practitioners do with these technologies in their own drama, theatre and performance practices in their careers to come. If their work proves as thought-provoking, inspiring and innovative as the many fantastic artists, artworkers and critics whose work I have been fortunate to spend the last three years immersed in, the uptake of these new technologies in the theatre industry may well prove to be the game changer many are looking for as they strive to make sure that theatre remains relative to the society it shapes and is shaped by.

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