

Intermedial Voices: Documentary Theatre and the Refugee Experience in

Version 1.0's *CMI* (*A Certain Maritime Incident*)

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Abstract

This paper examines the potential role that media technology can play in the presentation of documentary material on stage. Using the 2004 production of *CMI* (*A Certain Maritime Incident*) by the Australian theatre company Version 1.0 as a case study, this paper focuses on key 'intermedial' moments in production, moments in which the asylum seeker experience is both mediatised and mediated by various technologies incorporated into the production. In October 2001, an Indonesian people smuggling vessel code named the SIEV X (Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel) sank in Australian patrolled waters resulting in the deaths of 353 asylum seekers. Accounts from the survivors of the tragedy were incorporated into the *CMI* production. Version 1.0's intention was to distance the personal accounts of asylum seekers by using digital projections and a computerised voice to strip the refugee testimonies of any human presence. However, despite Version 1.0's efforts to highlight the absence of asylum seekers and their voices in the production, *CMI* enacted an immediacy that was deeply involving for audiences. By situating *CMI* as an intermedial performance, the impact of the SIEV X survivor accounts on audiences can be read in terms of hypermediacy resulting from the simultaneous juxtaposition of the written text of survivor accounts appearing on screen, the heavily mediatised survivor accounts spoken aloud by simulated voice software, and the corporeal presence of the performer's body positioned onstage as a corpse and a symbolic reminder of the drowned bodies of the asylum seekers. Despite Version 1.0's specific intention not to enact a testimonial transaction where audiences would be compelled to engage as witnesses to what could be perceived as the authentic testimony of asylum, I argue that the intermediality of the production and the use of digital technologies produces a hypermediacy that works to both expose and engage the audience's desire for immediacy: the desire for an unmediated, direct, and transparent engagement with an asylum seeker's story.

Introduction: Australian Asylum Policy and the Resurgence of Documentary Theatre

Between July 1999 and December 2001, approximately 9500 asylum seekers arrived on Australia's shores seeking sanctuary and protection.¹ The conservative liberal coalition

¹ Since the development of Australia's official refugee policy, the vast majority of refugees resettled in Australia fit under the category of 'offshore refugees.' Offshore refugees are generally individuals who have fled persecution and have spent time in refugee camps run by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). The UNHCR processes asylum applications using the Refugee Convention criteria and appeals to signatory states to make appropriate resettlement of those granted refugee status. Offshore refugees differ considerably from onshore asylum seekers. Onshore asylum seekers include those 'authorised' non-citizens who arrive in Australia on valid visas, either as students, tourists or performers and who then apply for political asylum while in the country. Yet more controversially, onshore asylum seekers also include 'unauthorised'

government at the time, led by John Howard as Prime Minister, responded to this particular group of asylum seekers with a series of policies marked by what has been called a politics of exclusion (Carrington; Corlett; Fiske).² Under Operation Relex, the Government deployed the military to ‘deter and deny’ asylum seekers trying to reach Australian territories by boat (Corlett 56; Marr and Wilkinson 172). Asylum seekers attempting to engage Australia’s protection obligations were physically excluded from the mainland, and transported to detention centres on Christmas, Nauru and Manus Islands under the terms of the ‘Pacific Solution’ (Fiske 221). Those asylum seekers who managed to penetrate the cordon of military security erected to deny them entry faced a range of administrative, legislative and bureaucratic exclusions (Carrington 187). The policy of mandatory detention ensured that asylum seekers were excluded and segregated in detention centres far removed from Australia’s urban centres while their applications for protection were processed. Changes to legislation introduced by the Howard liberal coalition government restricted the rights of asylum seekers to access the courts for judicial review of migration decisions. Legislative changes also severely narrowed down the definition of the term ‘refugee’ used by the Federal Court and the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) in determining refugee status (Corlett 65-66; Manne and Corlett). Research for this paper was primarily concerned with documenting the Australian theatre’s response to the Howard liberal coalition government’s asylum policies.³

arrivals who generally enter Australia without valid visas by boat. Although the vast majority of asylum seekers arrive with the appropriate documentation by air, the arrival of unauthorised asylum seekers appears to stir the emotions of the Australian public to a heightened level of anxiety and fear (Neumann 54).

² In response to the peak in numbers of boat arrivals seeking asylum, the Howard coalition government of the time introduced the ‘Pacific Solution’ which excised Australian territories from the migration zone, prohibiting asylum seekers arriving on Christmas, Ashmore, Cartier and Cocos Islands from applying for protection.

³ It should be noted that Australian asylum and refugee policies have undergone considerable changes in recent years with the election to office of a Labor government under Kevin Rudd in 2007 who officially abandoned aspects of the ‘Pacific Solution.’ Under the leadership of current Prime Minister Julia Gillard, the Labor government has formulated new asylum policies including the expansion of the detention centre on Christmas Island and the introduction of what has been called a ‘Malaysian Solution,’ which will see asylum seekers deported back to Malaysia in a deal aimed at disrupting people smuggling operations.

These policies of exclusion were made possible largely as a result of a successful media censorship and misinformation campaign that served to provoke hostility and indifference to the plight of asylum seekers among the Australian public.⁴ Journalists were prohibited from entering detention centres, except on occasional guided tours and only after signing agreements not to interview or film detainees or staff (Mares, *Borderline* 12). The government restrictions were considered so severe that, in 2003, Reporters Sans Frontières (Reporters without Borders) downgraded Australia's rating on its International Press Freedom Index. Australia fell from the twelfth to the fiftieth position in the ranking of countries by the degree of freedom with which reporters are able to carry out their work (Romano 187).

While journalists were constrained from reporting about detention centres and the impact of government policies on asylum seekers, these same restrictions proved to be a compelling provocation that incited theatre makers into action. Responding to the deficit of public information about asylum seekers and detention centres, theatre makers such as Alice Garner, Ros Horin, Linda Jaivin, and Nigel Jamieson, to name but a few, went to extraordinary lengths to visit detention centres, to meet asylum seekers and detainees, to document and record their stories, and to disseminate their experiences and accounts in performance. As a corrective to the government's media censorship and control, the Australian theatre witnessed a resurgence in various forms of documentary theatre engaging with the plight of asylum seekers in Australia (Gilbert and Lo 191; Jaivin 61; Litson).

Peter Weiss traces the development of the documentary theatre form to the 'realistic theatre of actuality' associated with Russian agit-prop, the experiments of Erwin Piscator and the didactic plays of Bertolt Brecht (247). The term 'documentary theatre' is said to have been coined by Piscator, whose political theatre epics not only utilised written documents performed in direct address to the audience, but also incorporated projected films and

⁴ See Corlette; Gale; Klocker and Dunn; Lawrence; Leach; Pickering; Saxton.

photographs into the theatrical event (Irmer 18). Indeed, there is a direct connection in the development and genealogy of political theatre and documentary theatre and the advancement of technological media during the twentieth century. As Derek Paget notes, Brecht and Piscator recognised the ability of emerging media technologies of the twentieth century to replicate ‘actuality,’ a recognition that provoked a series of theatre experiments investigating the interface between theatre, technology, and politics (44).

The development of documentary theatre is directly linked to technological innovations in the media, the profusion of new media technologies in the public sphere, and the encroachment of these new technologies on theatre. Given these connections, this article examines the impact of media technologies on the presentation of documentary material on stage. Using the 2004 production of *CMI (A Certain Maritime Incident)* by the Australian theatre company Version 1.0 as a case study, this paper focuses on key ‘intermedial’ moments in production, moments in which the asylum seeker experience is both mediatised and mediated by various technologies incorporated into the production. Although the incorporation of electronic media into performance has a long history of practice and associated theatre scholarship (Auslander; Birringer; Copland; Jensen; Phelan), this article principally draws on explications of media and performance as outlined in Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt’s edited volume *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance*. In this paper I will attempt to assess the impact on audiences of the staging of accounts by asylum seekers by examining the ‘immediacy’ and ‘hypermediacy’ that can result in intermedial performances that stage the interface between the live and the mediatised. While immediacy in performance relates to an effort to make mediating technologies transparent, hypermediacy refers to the way viewers are often made aware of the digital technologies mediating their viewing experience. Despite being confronted with the various technologies that can impinge on audience reception, and despite the potential that these technologies might act as a kind of barrier – distancing the

audience from material being presented – I argue that the simultaneous inter-play between the actual and the virtual, the corporeal and the mediatised, produces a hypermediacy in the production which evokes an immediate emotional response from audiences. By situating *CMI* as an intermedial production, I argue that despite the mediating technology (or perhaps precisely because of it), the intermediality of the staging produces paradoxical effects of propinquity and engagement; this produces a hypermediacy that works to both expose and engage the audience's desire for immediacy – the desire for an unmediated, direct, and transparent engagement with an asylum seeker's story.

CMI (A Certain Maritime Incident)

In the lead-up to the Australian federal election in October 2001, Howard government ministers sparked a political controversy when they alleged that asylum seekers rescued from a sinking Indonesian people smuggling vessel had thrown children overboard in an attempt to secure safe passage to Australia. In this same month, a vessel code named the SIEV X (Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel) sank in Australian patrolled waters resulting in the deaths of 353 asylum seekers.⁵ The 45 passengers who survived the incident were rescued by Indonesian fishermen and transported back to Indonesia. The details surrounding the 'Children Overboard Affair' and the sinking of the SIEV X were later investigated by a Senate Select Committee in an inquiry called *A Certain Maritime Incident* (2002). This inquiry became the subject of a dark satirical performance entitled *CMI (A Certain Maritime Incident)*, which premiered on 26 March 2004 at The Performance Space in Sydney.

Presented by Australian theatre company Version 1.0, the group-devised project involved the distillation of some 2,200 pages of transcripts from the Senate Select Committee's inquiry. While Version 1.0 presented material distilled from the transcripts of

⁵ The X denotes 'unknown'.

the Senate Select inquiry that was ‘quoted verbatim,’ the company remains reluctant to describe the production as a straightforward piece of ‘documentary drama’ (Dwyer 131). This reluctance is due in part to the company’s acknowledgment of other refugee documentary theatre works staged in Australia during this period such as Sidetrack’s *Citizen X* (2002), Ros Horin’s *Through the Wire* (2004), or Company B’s *In Our Name* (2004). As artistic director of the company David Williams explained, such works share the perceived role of letting ‘the hitherto silenced voices of refugees speak’ (124). In contrast to other documentary theatre productions that purport to facilitate direct access to asylum seekers and their stories, *CMI* instead aimed to highlight the very absence of asylum seeker voices from the inquiry. The limitations of Senate Select Committee’s powers to implement the principle of habeas corpus meant that asylum seekers were denied the opportunity to be present at the inquiry to face their accusers and respond to the allegations of their misconduct. Although refugees held in detention centres on Nauru and Manus Island were invited to give testimony via radiotelephone, they declined the offer after advice from the Department of Immigration that it could not guarantee that their testimony would not adversely affect their claims for asylum in Australia (Williams 125-26). As a result, the Select Committee did not hear testimony from any asylum seekers, despite purporting to be an investigation into their alleged conduct (125). As Williams explains, *CMI* set out ‘not only to inform its audience about the absence of asylum seekers from the inquiry, but to stage this absence’ (126).

Using various digital technologies, the enactment of the absence of asylum seekers in *CMI* finds its most significant realisation towards the end of the performance, with the staging of several accounts from survivors of the sinking of the SIEV X. Before examining the impact of the staging of these survivor accounts on audiences, it may be useful to introduce the conceptual framework that will inform the analysis of this key scene by examining the ‘intermedial’ nature of the production.

The Intermediality of *CMI*

The term 'intermedial' is generally used to describe the incorporation of digital technology into theatre practice, and the presence of film, television and digital media in contemporary theatre. Several forms of media and digital technology were incorporated into the staging of *CMI*. In collaboration with Perth's Performance Video Intervention (PVI) Collective, *CMI* integrated the use of Ex-Sense lie-detection software into the performance, software which analyses digitised voice for pauses and other indicators of deception (McCallum, 'CMI Introduction' 139). In several scenes a computer monitor is positioned onstage that is hooked up to a microphone that several performers use to deliver evidence to the inquiry in their capacities as 'witnesses' and 'senators.' Throughout these scenes, the lie-detection software can be seen running on the computer monitor, providing audiences with a visual 'readout' of the veracity of the statements offered by the different speakers. The production also incorporates a video montage by Samuel James, including images of Parliament House, the interior of an unnamed vessel, various images of the rolling surface of the ocean, and shots of a receding coastline, all of which are projected onto a large screen positioned at the back of the performance space (Filmer; Trezise). In act one, during a scene in which Commander Banks submits photographic evidence to the inquiry, a photograph of an Indonesian fishing vessel overloaded with asylum seekers appears on a large television monitor positioned onstage. In act two, a live camera feed captures the various 'theatrics' of the senators, with assorted close-ups of the performers appearing on the large television monitor. Finally, the accounts from the survivors of the SIEV X are not only incorporated into the staging by being read aloud by the computerised voice software, but the words of the survivors also appear in text scrolling across the large screen that forms the backdrop to the playing area (Dwyer et al., 'A CMI' [video]).

What is particularly useful about the concept of the intermedial is that it addresses the incursion of the mediatised within live performance, offering a theoretical framework with which to attend to the possible impact of the mediatised survivor accounts staged in *CMI*. In their edited volume *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance*, Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt offer an explication of the intermedial which circumvents much of the troubled territory surrounding the debate regarding live theatre versus mediatised performance as epitomised by the opposing views of Phelan and Auslander.⁶ Chapple and Kattenbelt define 'live performance' as 'the simultaneous physical presence of the performer and the spectator in the same space in the moment of here and now' ('Key Issues' 22). In contrast, 'mediatised representation' is defined as 'utilising recording and playback technologies, no matter whether what is recorded is played back at (nearly) the same time or at a later moment' (22-33). The authors also differentiate between the 'mediatised' and the 'mediated,' arguing that all forms of communication are mediated by signs but not necessarily mediatised by technology. With this, the authors provide a useful general conception of the live and the mediatised; 'live means "absence of recording" and mediatised means "absence of live"' (23).⁷ Having laid the conceptual groundwork, I want to return to assess the impact on audiences of the staging of the SIEV X survivor accounts, by examining the 'immediacy' and 'hypermediacy' that can result in intermedial performances that stage the interface between the live and the mediatised.

⁶ In *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993) Phelan defines an ontology of performance by valorizing the presence of the live body and the ephemeral qualities of performance as that which cannot be recorded and re-produced. In *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatised Culture* (1999), Auslander critiques Phelan's position and definition of 'liveness,' arguing that the very concept exists as a result of mediatisation and that there are no longer clear cut or hierarchical distinctions between the 'live' and the 'mediatised.' These two positions have established an assumed opposition of the live and virtual within performance studies, a binary which is usefully teased out by Chapple and Kattenbelt..

⁷ Although the authors concede that the concept 'live' can be used in a broader sense to refer to live television and video, they assert that while such audiovisual media may be played-back at the same time, performers and spectators are nevertheless separated in space (Chapple and Kattenbelt, 'Key Issues' 23).

Immediacy and Hypermediacy

According to media and cultural theorists Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin, 'immediacy' is a common feature of digital media, whereby digital technology is made 'transparent' so that the viewer is no longer aware of confronting a medium but instead stands in an immediate relationship to the material being viewed (24). In contrast to the notion of 'immediacy,' the authors argue that digital media can also be characterised by 'hypermediacy,' which seeks to make viewers aware of the medium being used, and which works to remind viewers of their desire for immediacy (34). A simple example of hypermediacy might be the way 'lens flare' is sometimes inserted into animated movies as a visual effect. Lens flare sometimes occurs when light is reflected off a camera lens, creating a scattering effect sometimes appearing as a 'halo' when a camera pans across the sun or a light source. In recent animated movies, lens flare is a contrivance that can often be deliberately created by animators to help create the sense that what the viewer is seeing is somehow more 'real.' As Bolter and Grusin make clear, the two categories of immediacy and hypermediacy are to an extent mutually linked: 'If the logic of immediacy leads one either to erase or to render automatic the act of representation, the logic of hypermediacy acknowledges multiple acts of representation and makes them visible' (33-34). The authors also note that although hypermediacy and immediacy are opposite manifestations, they share the similar desire 'to get past the limits of representation and to achieve the real' (53). They define this pursuit of the real not in metaphysical terms, but rather as it relates to the viewer's experience, as that which evokes an immediate emotional response: 'Transparent digital applications seek to get to the real by bravely denying the fact of mediation; digital hypermedia seek the real by multiplying mediation so as to create a feeling of fullness, a satiety of experience, which can be taken as reality' (53).⁸

⁸ While Bolter and Grusin appear to conflate the terms 'mediation' and 'mediatisation,' Chapple and Kattenbelt offer a useful differentiation between the 'mediatised' and the 'mediated,' arguing that while all forms of communication are mediated by signs, not all are necessarily mediatised by technology (Chapple and Kattenbeltm, 'Key Issues' 23).

Following Bolter and Grusin, Andy Lavender argues that the simultaneous co-existence of distinct media in intermedial performance can produce effects of immediacy that are deeply involving and more deeply pleasurable for spectators (56). Utilising a phenomenological approach, Lavender examines the 'visceral nature of spectatorship,' assessing the impact of staged elements in terms of their 'felt charge' (64). In intermedial performances, Lavender attributes this charge to the hypermediacy arising out of the simultaneous inter-play between 'the actual and the virtual, the corporeal and the mediatised' (65). He argues that it is in the very interface between the actual and the virtual, the corporeal and the mediatised, that spectators often find themselves enjoying or being drawn into intermedial performance (55).

Staging the Absent Body

The absence of asylum seekers was staged in a potent reminder at the beginning of the performance, when audiences entering the performance space were forced down a narrow corridor in which the actors lay motionless and naked. The audience were forced to step over the naked bodies in order to reach their seats, and the bodies of the actors became a powerful symbolic reminder of the asylum seekers drowned in the sinking of the SIEV X. Although the SIEV X tragedy was not originally intended to be a part of the Senate Select inquiry, the committee reluctantly examined the event largely as a result of the advocacy of retired diplomat Tony Kevin, who appeared before the committee to question the extent of Australia's involvement in the circumstances surrounding the sinking of the vessel (Williams 126-27). Although Kevin submitted several witness accounts from survivors of the SIEV X tragedy to the inquiry, the accounts were never read into evidence (McCallum, 'CMI Introduction' 141). In contrast to the workings of the inquiry that seemed to diminish the impact of the SIEV X tragedy and make the drowned asylum seekers inconsequential, the

opening of *CMI* makes the corporeal reality of the drowned bodies difficult for the audience to dismiss.

The enactment of the absence of asylum seekers in *CMI* finds its most significant realisation towards the end of the performance, with the staging of several accounts from survivors of the sinking of the SIEV X. In the performance, the survivor accounts of the SIEV X tragedy are projected onto a large screen in text form, while a computer text-to-speech engine simultaneously reads the accounts aloud. As the narration of the disaster begins, the performers strike the stage, erasing any trace of the inquiry, and substituting the main table used in the inquiry for a mortuary slab. One of the actors (Stephen Klinder) strips and lies naked on the mortuary slab while a pair of actors clean, tag, and prepare his body for storage. As the corpse is prepared, the disturbing survivor testimonies continue to be read out in the emotionless computer monotones: ‘The boat broke up within seconds; the waves washed the family members apart. I saw a woman giving birth in the ocean, I saw my brother being washed away by the waves, I called out to him but saw him crying’ (Dwyer et al., *CMI* 175). The computerised voice works to strip the survivor testimonies of any human presence, and as the survivor testimonies end, the audience contends with the visual impact of the washed and naked corpse lying still and silent before them (Figure 1). The silent corpse becomes a powerful symbolic reminder of the actual bodies of the asylum seekers that drowned in the SIEV X tragedy, the significance of which has been washed out of the original Committee’s inquiry.

The last sentence of the survivor testimonies is looped, echoing repeatedly, ‘I never imagined that the boat would sink ... I never imagined that the boat would sink ... I never imagined ...’ (Dwyer et al., *CMI* 175). This repetition seems to compel audiences to imagine what it must have been like for the survivors of the tragedy, struggling to survive in the cold ocean waters as the drowned bodies of women, children and loved ones floated

in the darkness around them. The echoes of the last sentence haunt the closing scene when the body lying on the mortuary slab speaks for the last time as Senator Cook, Chair of the Senate Committee, announcing the departure of the other senators and the ending of the official hearing. As John McCallum notes, the final scene powerfully suggests that the departing senators have wiped their hands of the whole affair, and that ‘the testimony of the SIEV X survivors, frighteningly mediated, is left lingering, heard only by the audience’ (McCallum, 'CMI Introduction' 141).

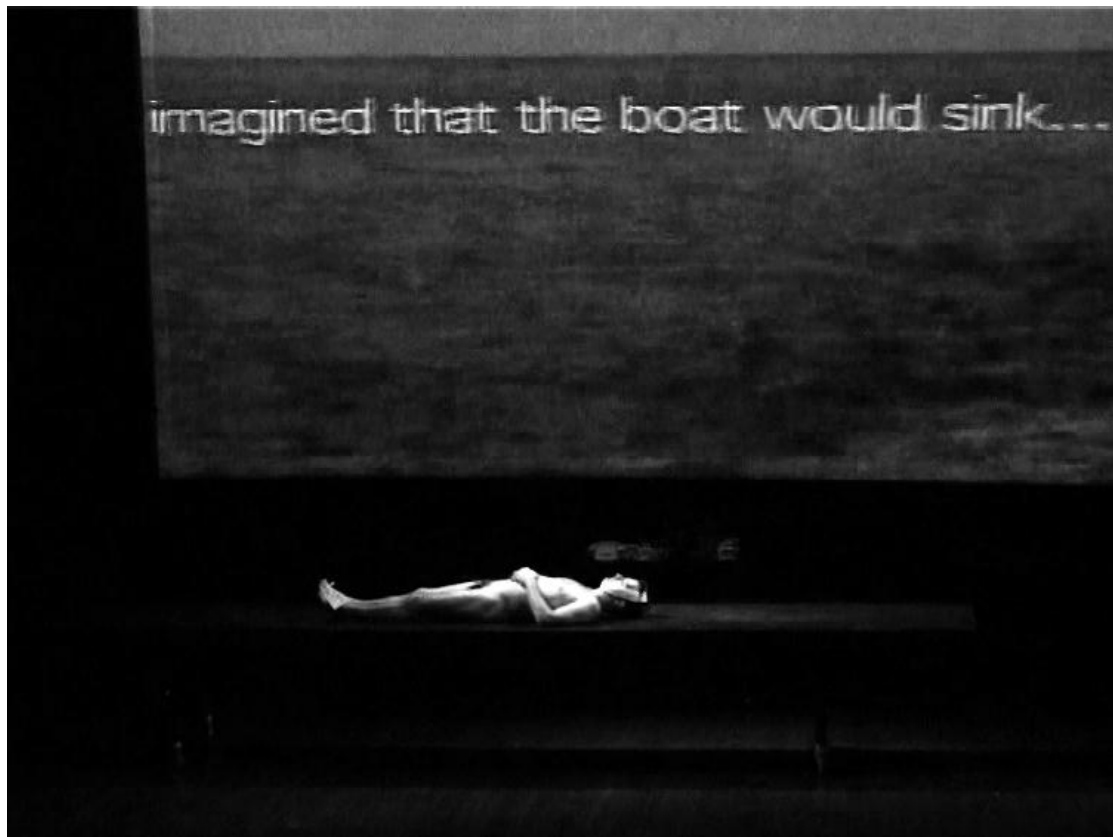


Fig. 1: Stephen Klinder as the corpse of a drowned asylum seeker in Version 1.0's *CMI* (2004). Courtesy of Version 1.0.

As evidenced by several reviews and as confirmed by various personal audience accounts, the final staging of the SIEV X survivor testimonies had a profound effect on audiences. In her online review, Rebecca Meston indicates that the ending engendered a deeply physical response: ‘at the end [...] neither my friend nor I could leave our chairs; our

legs too jelly-like to move, our hearts strangely beating out of control' (n.p.). Sarah Stephen recounts how at the end of the performance an audience member was overheard whispering to a friend, 'We killed them. We could have gone and rescued them, and we didn't' (n.p.). What has also inadvertently emerged through the staging of the SIEV X survivor accounts is the willingness of audience members to coalesce the various survivor accounts of the SIEV X tragedy into a single narrative, mistakenly believed to be the witness statement of a single survivor (Filmer; McCallum, 'Human'; Rose; Trezise).

The multiple effects on audiences of the staging of the SIEV X survivor accounts are somewhat surprising, given the company's specific intention not to represent directly the experience or views of asylum seekers. As Dwyer explains, no matter how much an audience might want to 'lean into a performance about these issues, ready and willing to bear witness,' Version 1.0 was never inclined to recount the experiences of asylum seekers by enacting an 'embodied presence' that would function as 'the warrant for a sense that some authentic dialogue is occurring' (134). Yet 'lean' is exactly what audiences did, not only willing to bear witness, but eager to grasp hold of what was perceived, by some, to be the authentic testimony of an asylum seeker hitherto made silent and absent. This occurred despite Version 1.0's efforts to distance the survivor accounts by stripping them of any human presence with the simulated voice computer software. Despite Version 1.0's efforts to highlight the absence of asylum seekers and their voices in the production, *CMI* enacted an immediacy that was deeply involving for audiences. How can the impact of the staging of the SIEV X survivor accounts be understood in the framework of intermediality?

By situating *CMI* as an intermedial performance, the impact of the SIEV X survivor accounts on audiences can be read in terms of the hypermediacy produced in the performance. This hypermediacy results from the simultaneous juxtaposition of the written text of the survivor accounts appearing on screen, the heavily mediated survivor accounts

spoken aloud by the simulated voice software, and the corporeal body of the performer positioned onstage as a corpse and a symbolic reminder of the drowned bodies of the asylum seekers. By acknowledging and making visible these multiple acts of representation, *CMI* produces a hypermediacy that works to both expose and engage the audience's desire for immediacy: the desire for an unmediated, direct, and transparent engagement with an asylum seeker's story. In the context of a production that seeks to highlight the absence of asylum seeker voices, this desire for immediacy attains an added urgency. This, coupled with the 'feeling of fullness' and the 'satiety of experience' that hypermediacy entails, evokes an immediate emotional response from audiences, leading them to ascribe a sense of authenticity, immediacy, and reality to survivor accounts that are staged in a highly mediated, mediatised, and simulated manner.

By exposing and engaging the audience's desire for the immediate, the staging of the SIEV X survivor accounts also solicits the kind of empathetic pity common to humanitarian representations of asylum seekers and refugees. As Peter Mares points out, when viewed from a distance, displaced people are often portrayed as helpless victims who are deserving of compassion and assistance. Yet when asylum seekers make their way to the developed world seeking protection, asylum seekers are often transformed from 'passive objects of compassion into untrustworthy actors who provoke a sense of fear' (Mares, 'Distance' 330). Moreover, as Liisa Malkki suggests, humanitarian representational regimes often reduce refugees to the image of a mute suffering body, to an 'anonymous corporeality,' which not only reinforces a sense of a universal primordial humanity, but which also works to 'depersonalise' refugees by stripping their predicaments of political and historical specificity ('Speechless Emissaries'). The staging of the SIEV X survivor accounts in *CMI* unwittingly replicates some of the underlying characteristics common to these humanitarian representational regimes. The mediatisation of the survivor accounts simulates the distance

that Mares identifies, conjuring up representations of asylum seekers as ‘helpless victims’ deserving of Australian compassion and assistance. The staging of the silent and naked corpse not only operates as a powerful symbolic reminder of the drowned asylum seeker bodies, but also functions as a symbolic representation that reflects an ‘anonymous corporeality’ through which the predicaments of the asylum seekers are leached of historical and political specificity. The use of the voice-simulated computer software diminishes the specificity of the survivor accounts even further, eliciting a sense of universal humanity, evoking a sense of empathetic pity, and leading audiences to merge the separate asylum seeker narratives of the SIEV X tragedy into a single amalgamated witness account.

Kattenbelt points out that when media technologies are incorporated in live performance, instead of providing effects of transparency and immediacy, quite often such technologies are used ‘to extend the lyrical and epical modes of representation, for the sake of the *intensity of experience* and the reflexivity of thought’ (my emphasis, Kattenbelt 37). The intermediality of the performance provides audiences with hypermedial effects that are deeply involving and engaging. Moreover, the potential political consequences of this affectivity cannot be easily dismissed. Weiss contends that political documentary theatre ‘takes sides,’ demanding affective judgement from audiences in a process that rejects the kind of ‘objectivity’ used by ruling groups to excuse their actions (251). As political documentary theatre, the kind of judgement and engagement that CMI engenders from audiences emerges from the intermediality of the production.

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