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TECHNOPARTICIPATION: Intermeshing performative pedagogy and interruption

Abstract

Arguing for the positive disruptive nature of interruption, this article concentrates on my current performative and pedagogic usage of Skype in order to promote the positive aspects of interruptive elements within performative pedagogy. Referring to technoparticipation, this article explains how teaching and learning activities that combine performance, participation, and technology within the learning environment can be punctuated with varying degrees of interruption that are structurally engineered into their framework.

This practice as research is supported by a Loughborough University Teaching Innovation Award and draws together discussions from within Performance Studies and the ever-growing discipline of E-learning. Skype as interruption is addressed in terms of both theory and practice in order to argue that its interruptive capacities are useful in unpacking key concepts relating to the terms 'embodiment' and 'disembodiment','virtuality' and 'physicality', and 'absence' and 'presence' amongst others. This article focuses on an instance of *technoparticipation* practice that took place in Summer 2015 at University College Cork. The project was put forward as prime evidence of how technology and the operations of interruption can collectively be used to further understand the aforementioned concepts.

The writing that follows explains how the write-up preceding, during and post event at UCC relates to a three-stage teaching process. This process - *Anticipation, Action, and Analysis* – was designed as an extension to an existing model of reflective practice (Rolfe 2001).

Introduction: Art, performance and interruption

Interruption is typically seen as an unwanted interference into the flow of something, though as Ian Hutchby identifies, interruption can be seen as transformative, a radical reimagining of practice. He argues that interruption 'has a positive dimension ('we have to do this to save the world')' (Hutchby 1992 as quoted in Bousfield 2008: 233). On the one hand, commentaries relating to the operations of interruption have branded interruption negatively, as a violation (Bilmes 1997). On the other hand, interruption has been positively commented upon as an action that may be 'supportive', 'creative' and 'poetic, lyrical and unexpected' (Hutchby as quoted in Bousfield 2008; Kendall 2015; Arlander, 2009; Cotter and Tawadros 2009). Derek Bousfield (2008), alongside the work of Brixey, Johnson-Throop, Walji and Zhang (2004) appear to support my argument that 'interruption' can have a positive dimension. They propose a theoretical framework to help explain the 'positive aspects of interruptions' in which 'warnings & alerts, reminders, suggestions and notifications' are examples of interruptions that have beneficial outcomes by changing and influencing behavior (2004: 1416). They claim that 'there is little understanding how interruptions can be exploited for positive outcomes'

(2004: 1417). In a January 2015 episode of the BBC World Service's radio programme *The Forum* entitled *Interruptions*, the host Bridget Kendall stated: 'Interruption can be a cause of disruption, but sometimes [interruption] can strengthen and support us' whilst American linguist Debra Tannen stated: 'What's so fascinating about interruption is that it's a negative thing'. As Annette Arlander states:

> Work that functions directly as an interruption of the flow of activities in public space, where the interruption consists of breaking down the conventions and norms of how that space is ordinarily used in the expectations of the passerby, is a common strategy for artistic interventions (2009: 154-55).

Indeed, it can be argued that interruption has historically been used as a tactic by artists/performance makers in their practices, ranging from Dadaist performance and the Mummers to flash mobs and happenings and recent attempts in theatre to structurally engineer interruption into performance as a means to rouse the audience and participation. For example, one could cite DV8's 2013 performance of planting hecklers into a performance in order to provoke audience reaction as one iteration of this pattern. *Transmission Interrupted*, a 2009 exhibition at Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, examined how contemporary artists have deployed the term 'interruption' as a method for 'open[ing] up spaces that disturb the course of everyday life and reframe the way in which we see and understand the world' (Cotter and Tawadros, 2009: 1-3).

Aligned with Hutchby and extending performance practice using interruption, I argue for the positive nature of interruption and see value in its disruptive potential. Referring to interruption's etymological roots as a derivation from its Latin origin *interrumpere, [inter* meaning 'between' and *rumpere* meaning 'break'], I set up performative interventions full of interruptions in order to see what kind of level of disruption I can produce in an event's liminality (Broadhurst 1999). Despite interruption being generally perceived as negative (Bilmes 1997), my work deploys interruption as a performative strategy and extends the work of others using interruption by emphasising its capacity for disruption (and often elements of impoliteness). For example, Forced Entertainment's *Bloody Mess* (2002-2011) can be described as a performance that consists of a series of ruptures and interruptions. Referring to interruption's etymological roots as a derivation from its Latin origin; 'interrumpere'; (inter) 'between' and (rumpere) 'break', my role as the protagonist of an artwork using interruption (as a branch of the term impoliteness) involves injecting a cast of interruptions ('breaks') into the event's proceedings (the liminal space 'between start and finish). In my recent doctoral thesis 'Tactics of Interruption: An exploration of art performance, participation and power relations' (2015), two case studies of practice are put forward containing explicit versions of interruption: slapstick as an extreme form of the body physically interrupting a process, and heckling as people interrupting each other (Campbell, 2014).

The key example of practice that I put forward as an explicit example of interruption within this thesis was *Contract with a Heckler* (2013). DV8's 'Can

We Talk About This' (2012) contained a planted heckler as one aspect of the performance, whereas 'Contract with a Heckler' consisted of me signing a contract a friend planted as a heckler and myself as speaker. The planted heckler as a planned interruption was used as a means of exploring how an audience would react to not just listening to theories around heckling as a form of unannounced and unexpected interruption (the content of the paper I was giving as a speaker) but how they would deal with heckling/interruption in practice. The interruption to my paper involved the planted heckler organising a security guard to remove me from the room when the paper I was giving sparked a heated and uncomfortable altercation between audience members. Farock Soltani was an audience member present throughout the time of the production of this work. I use his appraisal of the work to underline how my usage of interruption and its operations relating to concepts as seconded by Soltani including discomfort, disruption, (in)appropriateness, (im)politeness, what's (un)acceptable and how the politics of surprise and so on can be positively provocative. In this sense, Soltani suggested that:

> the power structures of documentation and the presentation of knowledge [related to me] being in that room were very uncomfortable, extremely uncomfortable. I really enjoyed it [the discomfort]. After a while the discomfort gave way to 'ooh that's interesting […]'. What is happening is clearly an act of thought; it is an act and it's an act of thought. I can clearly understand even if the paper was not about [heckling] even if the paper was about the biology of the hippopotamus. I would still understand what is going on here and its about interruption and disruption and the only way that comes across is that it is completely unexpected and unacceptable and if what happened was completely acceptable, if it [the interruption] had been announced and if it had not been so uncomfortable there would really be no point in it. And when it ended and the Q and A started, I thought people would say 'Wow! That was cool!' but [they said] 'Oooh you should have warned us!' It was completely ethically justified, exactly for that reason. The idea that everything here [in academia] had to be controlled and the presentation of critical ideas such as these had to be controlled and framed within a very specific set of regulations. I found the discussions after the presentation as much demonstrative of the idea of presentation as the presentation itself.

Working with Interruption: Campbell's Anticipation, Action and Analysis

How I structure, plan, carry out and reflect upon practice adopts a three-stage process: Anticipation, Action, and Analysis. This process consists of devising a series of projections, planning a sequence of actions within a performance, carrying out those actions and then writing about those experiences using different strategies. These strategies consist of making notes, annotating diagrams, writing factual reports and listing the different stages that participants (protagonist and audience) go through. The writing that follows in this paper is structured to reflect the exact process that I underwent in my role

as protagonist. This echoes the aforementioned three stages; terms that are used as subheadings to provide the basis for my following discussion.

These three stages are:

- **Anticipation**: making a set of predictions informed by theory and argument relating to interruption and using one's intuition.
- **Action:** executing practice based on those predictions, in order to gain experience of the operations of interruption in practice and to lend a different understanding to its associated theories.
- **Analysis**: reflecting upon what happened in the last stage, considering how the practice extends the theory, through embodied and emotional response.

Referring to my practice as a learning process, the concept of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) is applied and linked to Gary Rolfe's reflective model (2001) using the key questions: What? So What? Now What? These are added to my three-stage process with a particular emphasis on the 'Now What?' as a procedure to extend the last stage Analysis for building upon practice after practice.

Supporting my perspective of the importance of reflection is Maggi Savin-Baden and her excellent section 'Reflective Spaces' as part of the chapter 'Engaging Possibilities' in *Learning Spaces: Creating Opportunities for Knowledge Creation in Academic Life* (2007). Savin-Baden states: 'when we are engaging with reflective spaces there is sense that we are located in an interrupted world' (2007: 69). In the next section entitled *Reflection as Interruption*, she ties reflection to interruption, a major concept that forms part of my performance research. She continues: 'Reflection can be seen as interruption because reflection tends to disturb our position, perspectives and views of the world' (2007: 69). The importance of reflection and 'choos[ing] to interrupt everyday actions through reflections and interrupt current stances by attempting to expose new perspectives and positions' can be argued as being absolutely essential in learning about how certain things (including the term 'interruption') may operate in the world. Indeed, it can also indicate how practice and subsequent reflection upon practice can make aspects of theory on practice more tangible. Moreover, and most importantly, it can highlight how reflection (provoked through interruption) can produce huge shifts in practice. Thus, reflection and interruption, albeit *interruption as reflection*, can be argued as 'enabl[ing] learning to happen' (Fry, Ketteridge & Marshall 2009: 3). However, what follows in this paper points not so much at reflection as being a form of interruption, but rather how interruption (and its alliance with the unexpected and surprise) can force immediate critical reflection and a call for spontaneous decision-making and action. Arguing that interruption can advance learning, I structurally engineer successive interruptive moments during performances and teaching sessions in order to see how participants deal with the operations of interruption in practice.

Stage One: ANTICIPATION

As a teacher and performance artist, there are clear links between how I spark the engagement and participation of an audience during one of my performances and how I attempt to do the same with students in the context of my classroom. Applying my knowledge and expertise of generating live performance practice with an emphasis on participation from within my discipline to my teaching practice, I structure the form and content of my teaching sessions to include performative techniques. I use these as methods in order to provoke learner participation, heighten engagement, nurture creative ability and facilitate learners getting to grips with specific key concepts within performance, with an emphasis on considerations of the body in terms of participation. I am interested in the pedagogic value of performance with a view to investigating the binaries of embodiment/disembodiment and reality/virtuality in practice.
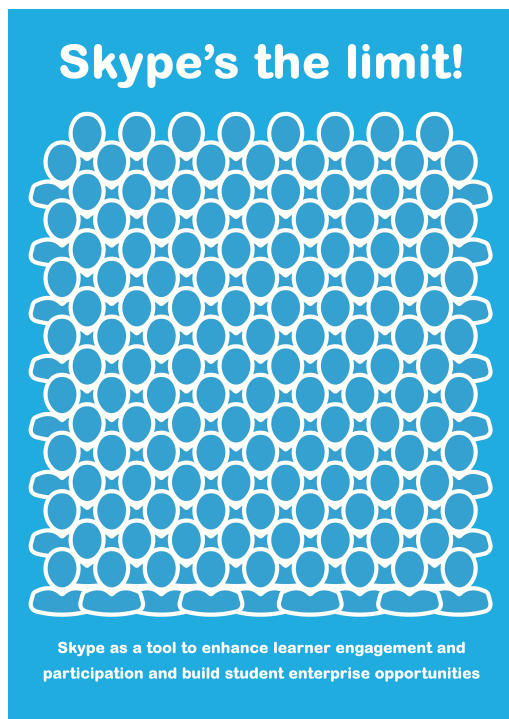

Figure 1: Conference poster image designed by Robert Wittendorp (2015)

A recent development in my teaching has been integrating performative techniques and different forms of digital technology, many of which students use inside and outside of the classroom. Extending the limited amount of literature available on using Skype within practice as research (Abe and Jordan, 2013; Carrier, 2009; Eaton, 2010; Poore 2013), my deployment of technology and particularly Skype has been triggered by me receiving a Loughborough University Teaching Innovation Award for a funded period of research from 2015-2016 to examine its potential as a technological social media tool with pedagogic value.[1]

The emphasis of my research is not 'how to use Skype' and is not a shortcut instruction manual, but more of an exploration of Skype as a virtual

technological platform, as well as deploying some of the concepts that emerge when using Skype in practice.[2] In my practice, I set up a dialogue between teaching and research so that both work in tandem with one another and inform each other. I aim to produce a stimulating and creative learning environment by which both students and teacher are engaged in a collaborative learning process using performative strategies in conjunction with different forms of technology to achieve outcomes. Skype is so far proving to be effective in generating such an environment. Skype was first implemented into my lectures and seminars in February 2015 whereby different speakers from different parts of the world were to share aspects of their professional practice with the student audience via their presence on Skype. Virtual speakers would engage in conversation with me and then engage in a question and answer session with students. Testimonials by students and presenters taking part highlighted Skype as facilitating student engagement with professionals in their field in real-time exchange. Direct questioning by students and speakers, who gave answers in real time, provided students with first hand material; students learn directly from the speaker rather than through secondary sources, producing a heightened sense of 'the live' and generating innovation in terms of subverting the bog standard presentation format of a lecture.

Building upon my practice's previous consideration, which focussed solely upon the physical body and its capacity for interruption in the physical world, by including an element of 'online-ness' as major component within pedagogic process, I use Skype as an interruption to the physical classroom as default. Skype's capacity for varying degrees of interruption is already sparking healthy debate amongst my students (Figure 1). On the one hand, I am keen on building my students' digital literacy by helping them to engage with multiple technologies. On the other hand, I use the virtual classroom to prompt statements and responses from students as to its limits by using the learning environment as a space in which to not only reflect upon practice but also to produce it. This stimulates reflection upon the using practice in order to encourage students to consider to what extent they agree or disagree with statements such as 'technology is interruption' and 'technology disrupts the natural free flow of social communication'.
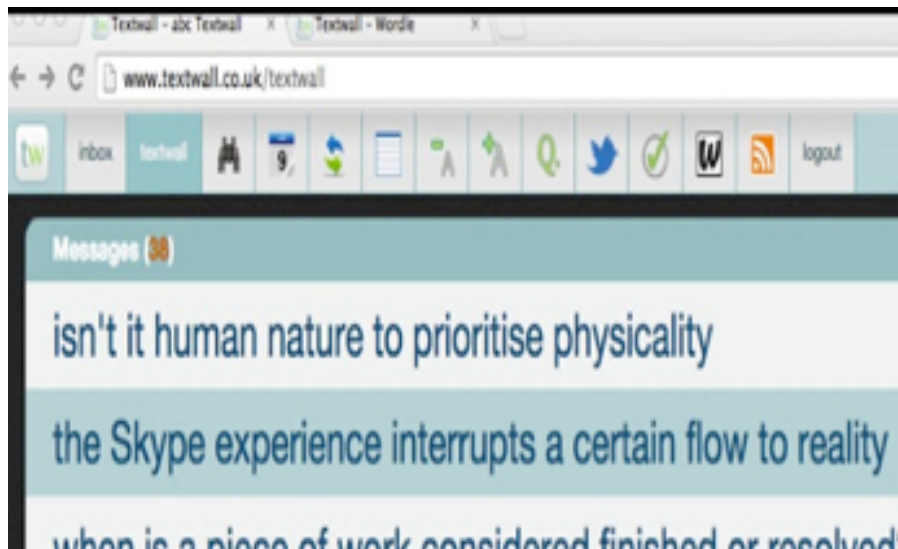
Figure 2: *Textwall* posting by one of my students: Skype as interruption

Stage Two: ACTION

The Technoparticipation performative lecture in Cork, Ireland in September 2015 was set up to provide evidence for several key concepts to prompt consideration of how social communication may be viewed as fragmented exchange. The key concepts included the argument that Skype has an untapped performative potential to explore participation between an audience of physical bodies and a virtual speaker(s). This participation together plays with 'online-ness' as a dynamic liminal space. Such a space renders the human body as transgressive, being neither wholly present nor entirely absent when it is restricted to an online presence. The event was also used to foreground discussion relating to a symposium the next day to be held at UCC entitled *Performance, Politics and Protest* organised by Dr Roisin O'Gorman.

The lecture involved physical and virtual participants and an explicit knitting of both theory and practice that aimed to extend many of the concepts (considered as interruptions) made by Dr Dani Abulhawa, Senior Lecturer in Performance at Sheffield Hallam University. Dani had bought these ideas into discussion as part of a Skype presentation that she had made at a previous *Technoparticipation* performative lecture that took place in July 2015 at Nottingham Trent University as part of this year's *Summer Lodge* (Figure 3). During her presentation Dani highlighted how the environment in which she teaches (performance) is very much about her being physically present. She says that what she finds really interesting about presenting via Skype relates to how Skype, for her, seems to mirror debates that were going on years ago in the context of Performance Studies about the difference between screen acting and live theatre. Dani also commented during her presentation that she did not know how the audience read or registered what she said (when she was presenting via Skype) and she found it unsettling that she could not read what was going on in the room. She suggested she could not get any feedback from the audience in terms of bodily nuance, people's frowns or smiles, or nodding with the speaker. She did not know if she needed to clarify something or go over a point she had made again.

Figure 3: Key concepts from Dani Abulhawa's comments at *Technoparticipation*, Nottingham Trent University (2015)

Dani suggested that when you are acting on the stage in the theatre, your whole body is visible, everything seems bigger and more expansive and you also have an opportunity to see how people are reacting and how to respond to that. Dani suggested that: 'when you are 'acting' for the screen [like presenting via Skype] everything is much more close up. In theatre, you have to know about how you orientate yourself and how to be expressive with your body whereas when using Skype, there is now importance placed on being vocally expressive'. She also commented that 'how you use facial expressions to hopefully connect with your audience' was also an important factor and described this as 'a tricky process but very interesting'.

The lecture also sought to build upon the other varying degrees of interruption that had taken place during the Nottingham event that were addressed by other speakers presenting via Skype as affecting their relationship with the physical audience due to the spatial dynamics set up. Spatial dynamics between virtual speakers and physical audience were a key concern. During the *Technoparticipation* NTU lecture, the Skype presenter joining Dani Abulhawa and fellow speaker Thomas Jancis went so far as to ask the learner audience to confirm their presence by walking past the camera on my laptop. Having presented a paper to the learner audience that they could not see, if any member of the audience wished to ask the Skype presenter a question then they would take my place at the presenter area and the audience member would engage in a conversation with the speaker. In this case each person would be situated where each other could virtually see one another, which was hoped would ease communication between audience and speaker rather than the speaker just asking and answering questions to an audience they could not see, thereby communicating with an invisible presence. One could surely not anticipate the question asked by this audience member during the lecture. His request to the Skype speakers for a guided tour around their geographical locale of speaking was granted, an interesting provocation that suggests presenting via Skype renders the place of speaking

inconsequential. We took a leisurely stroll through Skype presenters Tom and Dani's living quarters and a brief interlude with Dani's cat.

Joining an audience and I in physical space were two speakers via Skype: Dr Mark Childs who came to work with performance through technology, and art/performance practitioner Annie Morrad, who is a senior lecturer in film and media at the University of Lincoln and works as part of collaborative sound improv duo Morrad+McArthur.The event began by setting out key aspects of my Skype-themed research and informed the audience of how I intended to use the session in order to extend my research by including the participation of Childs and Morrad. Childs' presentation was instrumental in setting out a conceptual and philosophical framework in which to reflect upon the participants' prior engagements with technology. This helped us to think about participation in terms of 'experiencing online in a particular way', as a kind of interruption through virtual presence, social presence, co-presence, and embodiment/self presence.This was indeed being enacted in practice through the performative speech act moment that had been set up by the virtual speaker and attentive physical audience.

Mark gave examples of his own practice exploring immersive learning through performance and technology by presenting the audience with different forms of documentation. Morrad, who then joined the audience via Skype, used documentation and recording produced from previous practice to provide the basis for generating new practice as part of her Skype presentation. She did so as an extension of her collaborative work under the guise of Morrad+McArthur. Together with her collaborator Ian McArthur (based in Australia), Morrad+McArthur offer an innovative usage of Skype by making positive performative usage of the reverb echo Skype can cause. Whereas most of us try to engineer the reverb out as it interrupts the free-flow of social exchange in a two-way conversation, McArthur and her partner exploit this 'glitch' as a staple in their practice. Annie suggests that often her voice is echoed back to her through a delay process and she plays against this. She says she really enjoys working with Skype particularly because of its improvisatory nature and capacity for surprise elements. As part of her Skype presentation, Annie generated a complex layering of recording upon recording, interruption upon interruption caused by technology operating in liveness. This is a creative deployment of delay patterns, sound disruption and linear space being punctured and fragmented. As the physical audience in the Cork event listened to selected sound recordings that she had made with Ian, Annie recorded this recording being echoed back to her in Lincoln.

The corresponding question and answer session following all three presentations (as forms of practice) invited healthy debate and useful observations and insights as to inform future practice as research. I wish to undertake further research that extends considerations of heckling as it pertains to include onlineness and the virtual world.

Stage Three: ANALYSIS and FUTURE ACTION

In 2013, I organized Heckler at Artsadmin in London (Figure 4), a public symposium designed to discuss theories of heckling as well as provoke

audience members to interrupt/heckle the speakers, myself, Mel Jordan and Manick Govinda. Incorporated into the event was the inclusion of social media channels in order to provoke online discussion as to what constitutes heckling and what may in fact be a virtual, online version of heckling and the heckler.

The event concentrated upon two presentations disseminating two considerations of the heckler, democracy and freedom of speech as presented by Mel Jordan and interruption and impoliteness, forming the content of the presentation that I delivered. As each presentation got underway, social media channels including Twitter (a live feed was set up with the hashtag 'hecklerartsadmin') mapped online discussion as a result of what was being argued. The presentations served as provocations to interrupt and heckle. The audience was polite and no one interrupted Mel or myself throughout our presentations. However, the same cannot be said about the participation of the audience during the question and answer session led by chair Manick Govinda, interrupting and overshadowing each other's opinion in order to articulate what heckling is and what the heckler stands for. The irony being that heckling as a practice in terms of interrupting, being disruptive, being impolite, and so on was indeed being produced by the same audience arguing about what it is or what it could be.
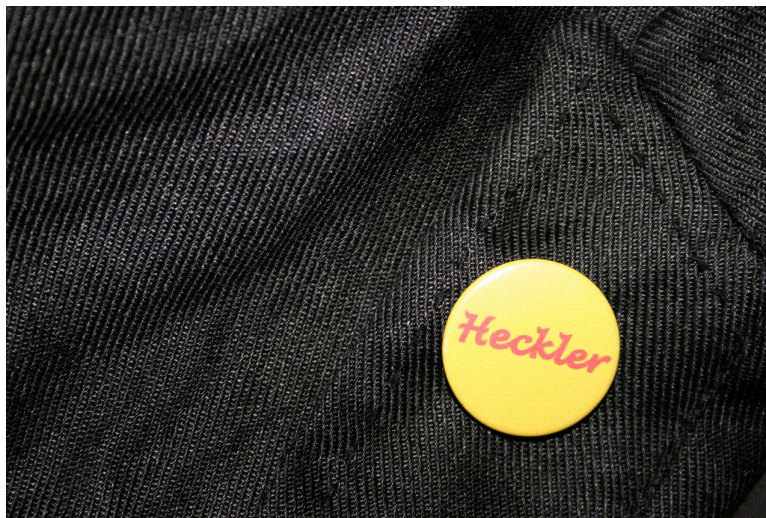

Figure 4: Heckler badge for *Heckler* (2013). Designed by Mel Jordan, Freee art collective, (2013) Courtesy of Mel Jordan

Heckling is predicated upon interruption using your body and language. There were three comments made during the question and answer session at the Technoparticipation lecture in Cork that became really pertinent for reflection on this argument. Mark referred to the effects of virtuality, onlineness and dislocating the body, suggesting that the body is problematized. Does the heckler then lose his body as a tool to interrupt and resign to use (only) verbal language? The chair, Dr Roisin O'Gorman's comments about being gesturally hyperbolic are also significant; the heckler's exaggerated usage of bodily gesture is paramount in physical space. Does virtual space therefore negate his body's potency? Annie Morrad's comment about virtual communication is also useful in thinking about heckling and interruption. Annie suggested that

'we actually wait for each other to finish our sentences and then we respond. So we listen in a different way'. The heckler can still disrupt in virtual space! The heckler does not wait for others to finish their sentences. This is in response to Mel Jordan's theory of the heckler (2013) as someone who makes usage of interruption in order to sidestep the protocols of how and when to speak; 'heroic, public speech super hero, with the ability to suspend rhetoric, preserving the right to speak out of turn' (2013: 118).

The implications of my future practice-as-research combining Skype and interruption have resulted in the design of a public master class in interruption entitled 'Speak with your mouth full'.

Interrupting is often seen as the pinnacle of rudeness and impoliteness. One important point raised in 'The Forum' (2015), a recent BBC Radio programme discussing interruption related to intentionality and cultural specificity of interruption, was: 'Intention is interesting […] your cultural intention […] what you think is polite or rude' (Kendall). To explore this idea further via interruption and impoliteness in performance, master class participants will take on the role of hecklers and experience heckling and interruption briefly in the physical world before exploring what it means to heckle and interrupt in the virtual.

Participants will undergo a series of activities exploring the effects that virtuality and onlineness may have on the body in terms of social communication and the power to interrupt through a series of absurd performative constructs.

During this research, the format of a reading group will be utilised to explore the following: communication, online-ness and various forms of heckling by using the practices of a heckler as a means to generate dialogue. This activity aims to reconstitute the heckler through the language of contemporary participatory art practice and construct a reading group as a performative public intervention that explores the boundaries between cyber-world and real-world heckling. Hecklers ignore the official speaker and refuse to take turns; they use their body and its corporeality to assert opinion. This will be achieved by participating in a series of body-related activities that may be considered as incongruous and unacceptable whilst performed amongst 'serious' debate. For example, speaking with your mouth full, brushing your teeth, standing on your head, doing the conga, attempting a limbo and so on, participants will be able to reflect upon the importance of the body to put one's individual opinion across by using the body as an expressive tool within everyday social communication. This allows all participants to interrogate in depth how the body operates in the presence of onlineness and reflect upon the consequences of how certain forms of online activity 'remove' the body entirely from view or partially obliterate and restrict it. Using the body as a heckler to socially accepted norms of how one ought to behave when entering a discussion as both a speaker and a listener, participants will be asked to consider what rules can be put on heckling. For example, can there be a conduct code for heckling? What contexts and sites may authorise heckling as permissible? This action session is intended to reappraise participants' attitudes towards themselves operating as actors within any discussion space

where they are physically there and not there: in the real physical world you are known, you can't just hide like an Internet 'troll' (an online version of a heckler).

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to give the reader insight into a recent research project addressing Skype as a form of interruption. As an extension of my pedagogic process as both performance maker and teacher, concepts emerging from a scrutinisation of Skype and virtual communication have been argued as useful in gaining a better understanding of the often fragmentary nature of social exchange. By making the reader aware of the current discourse around interruption as a term that invites both positive and negative criticism, this paper focused upon an example of practice whereby Skype was used to simultaneously generate and disseminate practice in the work of Childs and much more explicitly in the work of Morrad+McArthur. Discussions emerging from the event have been instrumental in underpinning the rationale for future practice that reexamines my interest in heckling as interruption, now with the addition of what heckling and interruption may mean in terms of bodily and linguistic disruption in terms of online space. I would be interested in hearing from collaborative partners to work with in terms of realising this project both as co-protagonists and those who can offer venues that may be happy to accommodate such an event in the future, both in the UK and internationally.

A Call for Papers for 'Technoparticipation: Performative Pedagogy and Technology' a symposium that I am planning to be held at Loughborough University will be out in early 2016.

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[1] See http://blog.lboro.ac.uk/teaching-learning/2015/07/27/technoparticipation-practice-as-research/ and www.leecampbelltechnoparticipation.blogspot.com Participate in a discussion about using in the classroom and in other performative contexts via the Twitter hashtag #technoparticipation.
[2] For really informative help with using technology in the classroom, see Russell Stannard's site: www.teachertrainingvideos.com

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Biography

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