

XR and the Future Stage (Roundtable)

Kim McLeod, University of Guelph, and Laura Levin, York University (Moderators)

Mode of delivery: in-person at Dalhousie University during the Canadian Association for Theatre Research Conference, June 15-17.

Structure of the session: 10 minutes presentations followed by 30-40 minute discussion

The field of theatre and performance has recently seen an upsurge in experiments with XR (extended reality) as an artistic medium. A term used to reference virtual reality, augmented reality, and mixed reality, XR has allowed artists to shift to safe delivery formats during the COVID-19 pandemic; at the same time, it has also offered creators new tools for worldbuilding and spectatorship.

The goal of this session is to explore how XR performance challenges assumptions about what theatre is. We are inspired by provocations posed in “A Manifesto for the Future Stage,” a text composed by the Future Stage Research Group at metaLAB, which urges the performing arts industry to grapple with “new expectations for media, culture, and presence in a hyperconnected world,” while simultaneously accounting for the political effects of technological shifts. We will take up this challenge by featuring work addressing how XR theatre experiments align with, particularize, and critique the manifesto’s central tenets. Roundtable participants might consider these questions:

- Is physical co-presence required for theatre? Is XR leading to a new medium that is something else entirely?
- What are the limits of utopian thinking about intersections of theatre and new technologies?
- Do we push back against the manifesto’s claim that “performance isn’t a commodity” or does it suggest a political orientation to this work to carefully think through?
- Is “liveness plus” a generative concept helping us to articulate new media affordances, or are we looping back to old binaries between liveness and mediatization that push against the emergent nature of this work?

We invite proposals for this roundtable from artists and scholars in a range of career stages. Participants may offer position papers, papers about their own performance experiments, or performative writing, such as countermanifestos, composed in relation to the manifesto. Those interested in participating in the XR and the Future Stage roundtable should email a 250-word proposal to Laura Levin (levin@yorku.ca) and Kimberley McLeod (kimberley.mcleod@uoguelph.ca) by March 31.