

TRANSMITTANCE: telematic performance

Transmittance¹ explores collaboration which is local, global, networked and broadcasted. It involves an artistic group of performers, visual artists, musicians and computer programmers to research performative possibilities of streaming, broadcasting and telepresence forging new types of performance and audience. With focus on critical and socially-aware artistic languages this work is based on asking questions about body, self and society - opening non-dualistic perspectives. The project tries to rethink the notions of spectatorship and spectacle, ways of watching and seeing and the audience as spectators from the outside. Emphasis is made on creative use of free and open source software and its impact on artistic process and collaboration. The project develops a specific method of improvised performance which allows compositional freedom beside specific prepared scenes at the same time and in the process collide different specifics of various artistic media (performance art, expanded cinema, sound art, new media realities).

Transmittance is a project proposed by Maja Delak & Luka Prinčič and it is developed further in each situation with the collaborators that are in this work longer work or just joined for one part of research. The project started out in the year 2010 and was continuously upgraded and transformed from the very first residency. Transmittance was developed as a collaborative project that included performers, musicians, visual artists and computer programmers using open technologies to stream live physical performance and foster an active and engaged audience on-line live on the internet.

¹ See more on: <http://transmittance.si> and <http://emanat.si/en/production/transmittance>.

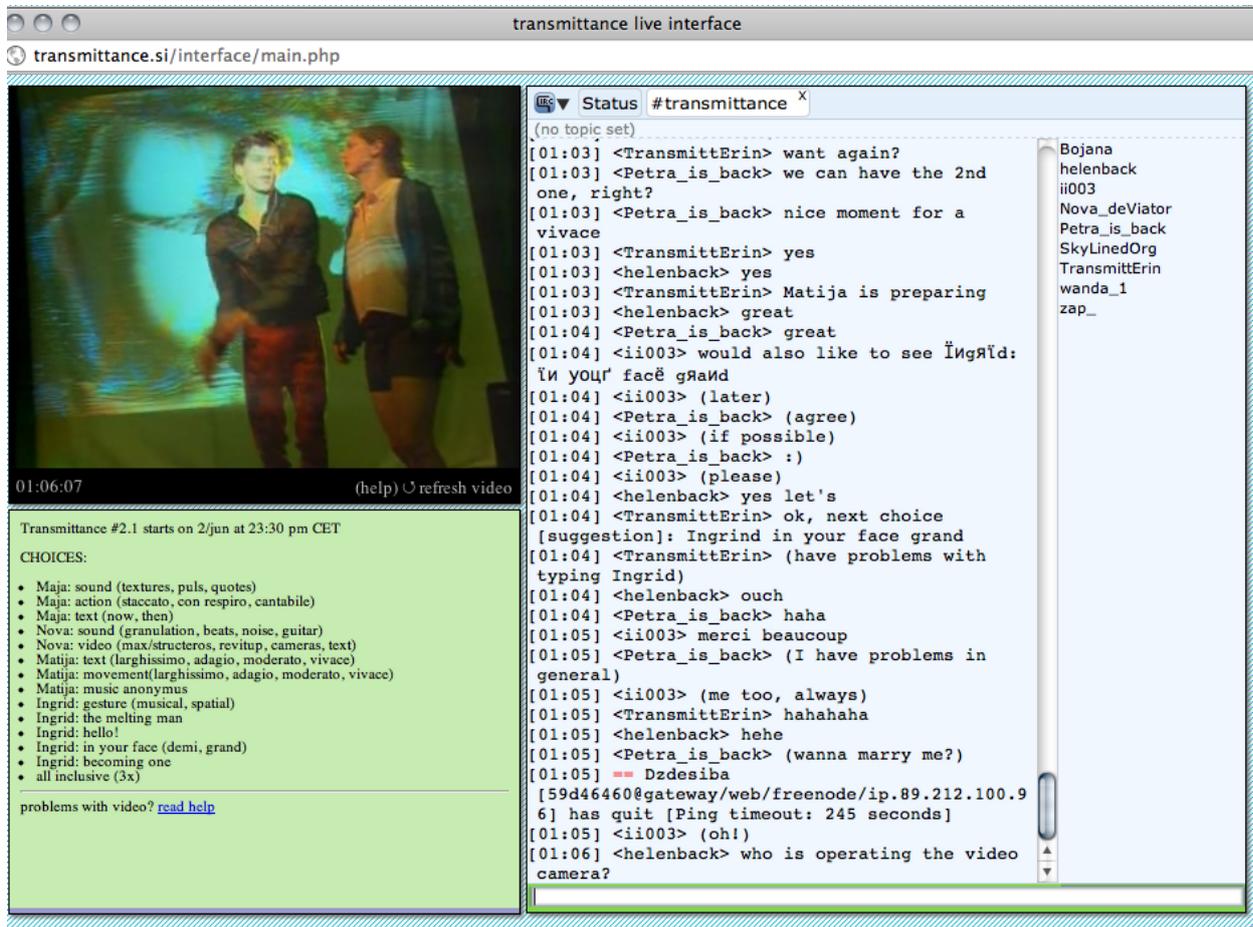
Description and locations



Physical space, Transmittance #2, Ljubljana, photo: Nada Žgank

Primary physical setup of Transmittance is usually not in a theatre. More likely it's a mid-sized hall in an abandoned industrial space - like for example former military barracks Karlo Rojc in Pula, Croatia. Or a gallery space. The space usually contains a big projection surface, to which various video and real-time processed visual materials and feeds from small cameras are projected. One or two computer programmers are controlling sound and lights through various means - like for example mapping one performer's movement to the amount and colour of light in the space. In the space is an additional musician with a bass guitar and a laptop, another visual artist using a webcam and additional projector. Most technology faces and embraces a performance area and opposite of the projection screen is a big camera with a camera person controlling it. And behind it the audience can sit and during 2-3 hour performance can come and go at any time. Rack of costumes is visible, hats and wigs are hanging from the wall. Some microphones are in use from time to time, there's a lot of sound and music, rarely there is time without projected material, in silence. Three or four performers move, talk, stare, dance, change costumes, read aloud... The whole dramaturgy seems narrative and in peculiar way it is not. Performers sometimes talk to the big camera and they follow an invisible pattern,

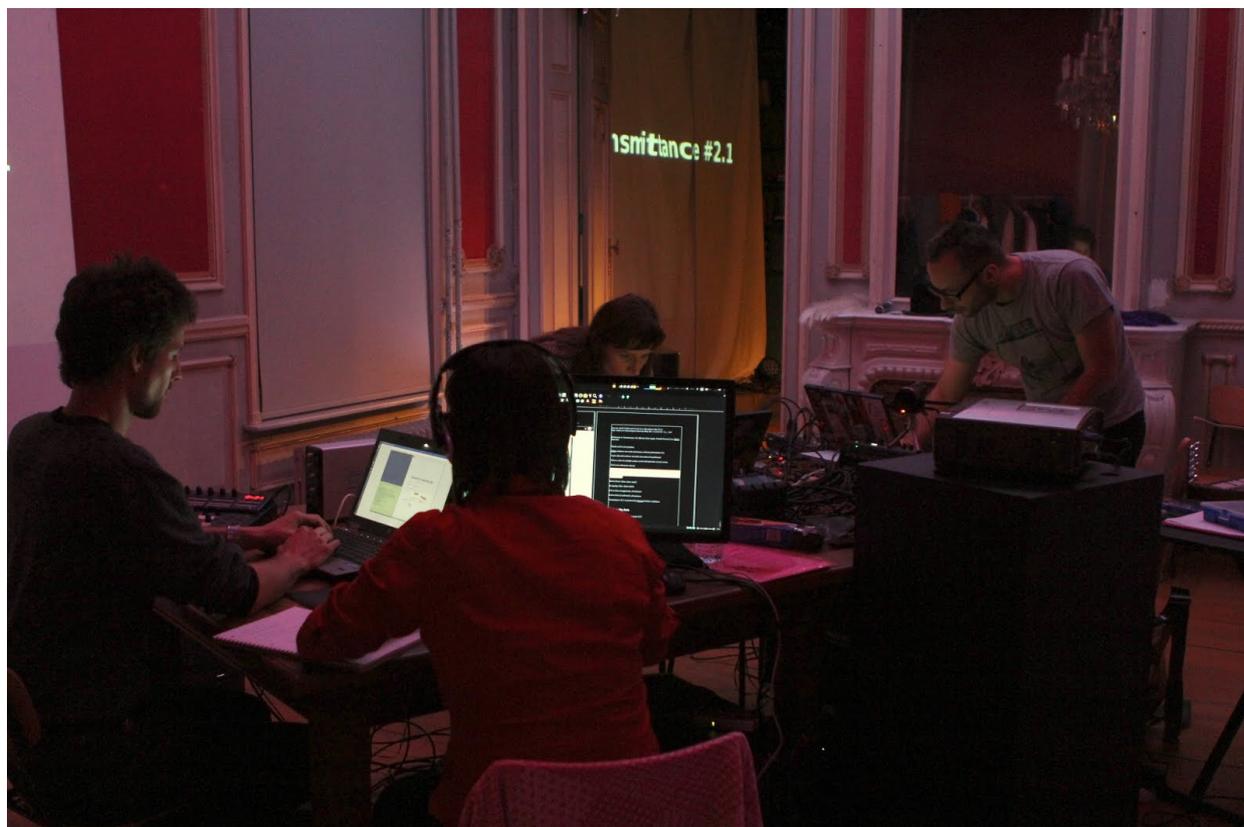
invisible commands. Part of the atmosphere, that can be wild and explosive, or calm, almost dead ambience, is also another smaller projection of words, of commands, on the side. From this interface - which is an ambience of the physical space - we switch to another.



Interface, Transmittance#2.1, Trouble Festival, Screenshot: Helen Varley Jamieson

A curious member of on-line audience at her respective home clicks on a link in her browser and new window opens with three elements: an audio/video stream, a menu of choices and a textual chat room area. Suddenly she hears sound and can see camera moving, focusing, zooming out, framing the space, the performers, sometimes even the audience. The chatroom is full of people, but not too many. They talk and comment on actual content of the stream. Some of the responses are emotional. Somebody with a nickname “Moderatorin” calls for suggestions and after sometime reports back which suggestion will happen next. These suggestions correspond to the list of choices on the bottom-left part of the screen. Some of the choices are struck through. The accepted suggestion is being performed by one of the performers. The discussion in the chatroom by about 20-30 people is lively and active. There’s music

and the show continues.²



Moderator in Transmittance, photo: Nicolaos Zafiriou

Creators³ of Transmittance are a mixture of performers, musicians, visual artists, artists working with sound, video, computer programming and text. Creators of this performance are also dedicated agents in the chat fueling and animating the atmosphere inside the web interface. And the moderator, who is crucial for translating the dynamics of chat into physical space and vice-versa. In effect, moderator's role is to care about the right timings between different scenes depending on their nature (they can relate to either sound, video or movement, or thematic section, and some of them can overlap for extended periods of time) - she is a live dramaturgical DJ - a "drama jockey" who mixes and cross-fades performative tracks. The creators of Transmittance are also engaged members of on-line audience, who choose and suggest items from the menu - these give performers cues and directions for the next scene - which is partially predefined and partially improvised upon. On-line audience also cheers and comments on what they see through stream

² A short video that partially presents the described situation and goes through three editions of Transmittance, Pula, Ljubljana: <http://transmittance.si/cyposium/>

³ The list of collaborators in different situations in years 2010-12: Loup Abramovici, Ingrid Berger Myhre, Marko Bolković, Boštjan Božič, Adele Cacciagrano, Maja Delak, Matija Ferlin, Mauricio Ferlin, Rea Korani, Jakob Leben, Tihana Maravic, Silvia Mei, Luka Prinčič, Ana Pečar, Maja Šorli, Igor Štromajer, Samuel Volsten, Fabrizio Zanucoli, Jelena Ždrale, Nataša Živkovič.

and some of this feedback is being projected back into the physical space by the moderator.

Surely technology plays an important role in telematism. It cannot be devoid of contextual retrospection however. In other words, the perspective on technology is necessarily grounded in media and their histories. Technological invention seems innocent fact - at first sight. Its introduction into social and artistic sphere transforms it into one with a necessary political dimension. Transmittance uses free and libre open source software whenever possible. All streaming infrastructure, most video and audio processing and the web interface is done using Linux, open standards and patent-free technologies. In fact, there's an inherent understanding, that sharing of code is closely related to methodologies involved in art-making. In the creation process we are making an effort to confront live art practitioners like performers and musicians with the world of technology and free and libre open source software.



Lecture by Marcell Mars, photo: Marko Bolković

Audience

Working with a streamed performance, using the network as medium for already established performance practices but allowing to re-frame them in the light of digital tools of transmission and communication allowed us to break away from, and rethink the established notions of audience and live art practices.

A traditional theatre (dare we say spectacle) functions as a closed structure for both audience and creators into which it is hard to enter. It is a place suitable for programs and coded behaviours that are already decided upon, chosen and clearly prioritized. On the other hand a telematic project like Transmittance has a potential to bypass those rigid structures and create different and accessible possibilities for art making and representation, forging a new type of audience on the way.

The research question influencing our process concerns the close interaction with audience taking into account the challenge that the internet communication and socialization creates a feeling of intimacy and proximity while perhaps provoking a feeling of loneliness. Does “having fun on-line” replace the feelings of nostalgia, loneliness and shame?

Looking at the connection between performers, machinery and audience within the setup of Transmittance there is a number of noteworthy constellations of relationships and activities. For example the roles of the observed and observer change between the performers, the offline audience in space and on-line audience, with the only exception that the on-line audience is never observed. On-line audience is seemingly the most free of all. Its possibility of interaction also enables it to choose the level of its engagement - how passive or active it will be. On the other hand performance of the physical space has unpredictable dramaturgy and possible unreadability for off-line audience because the information seemingly circulates between camera, online audience, moderator of the chat and performers. This in fact highlights the fact that off-line audience has a different non-verbal communication with performers which, in turn, creates a relationship in the physical space which is functionally different from the one with on-line crowd.

Improvisation



Possible choices - performers, photo: Nada Žgank

The performers (in a broad sense these sometimes include musicians, computer programmers, sound, video and other media artists) have a particular methodology for improvisation and structuration. Concrete performative material, improvisational cues, visuals, sounds, music, text and digital tools are arranged in sets that are given a title, or code word - usually describing it to a certain degree. They are either assigned to a single artist or to the whole group - something called "all inclusive". These titles are then being suggested in the chatroom and decided upon by the moderator (drama jockey). When communicated into the physical space, the performer of assigned choice is the carrier of action in space. Others - they are side-players - can accompany or contrast her with their own actions or media or not at all - also allowing silence and stillness. The sensibility and responsiveness to the space is crucial here as it's a common composition, a group show, where each is always aware of the bigger picture. A certain action can be repeated twice during one show, after which it is striked out. Actions can be mixed if they are in different media.

A non-trivial question is this: where does the technology end and where does the thematic work start? We feel that within Transmittance there's a strong flux between these two fields. Themes that we proposed as starting points for everyone involved

were: shame, co-existence, beside-ness, and online loneliness. Writings on shame by Silvan S. Tomkins via Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick⁴ were particularly influential. Kosofsky writes “BESIDE is an interesting proposition [...] because there is nothing dualistic about it; a number of elements may lie alongside one another, though not an infinity of them. [...] Beside comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivalling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, warping, and other relations.”

While there is an “equalised” relationship between all media - that is to say that body movements have no bigger priority than silent sound, for example - the work with camera seems to be the most inspirational and thought provoking. Following the idea that increasingly pervasive imaging technologies should be embraced and subverted in order to be observed on our own terms the camera is not seen as an invisible recording device of objective reality but as apparatus of active subjectification by the subject itself - in other words: “we are not shooting a documentary, but we are making a feature film”. Work with camera also involves experiments and questions of single versus multiple cameras. If performer is aware of single camera, it’s position and direction, it can work with it in creative way, using compositional techniques like out-of-frame and depth of the space - this way she can control the broadcast. Multiple cameras create much more difficult and complex interaction which needs more research and exploration.



⁴ Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Duke University Press, 2004.

In conclusion, it seems that for us to work within Transmittance framework means tapping into a special ambience, a feeling that connecting through these devices and bodies brings out expansion of subjective perspectives on individual and community. Or to quote Suzan Kozel⁵: *“The research and performance emerging from [telematics] reveal that, just like in life, relationships unfold in diverse directions: toward banality, detachment, control, play, generosity, secrecy, hesitation, exuberance. [Telematics] is extraordinarily rich for performance research precisely because they can let emerge latencies within us, levels of intuition and affect, that animate us as human beings. [...] With careful—even sensitive —design, future generations of these systems and devices can expand our social, physical, and emotional exchanges.”*

⁵ Kozel, Susan. *Closer*. Cambridge: MIT P (Leonardo Book Series), 2007.