

EDITORIAL

Hybrid Theatre Is a Dramaturgical Form, Not a Temporary Substitute

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Theatre institutions frequently describe streamed or hybrid performance through deficit: it is what audiences receive when they cannot be present. This account assumes that the live event is complete before mediation begins and that the camera merely carries a reduced copy elsewhere. Performance scholarship has long complicated such a hierarchy. Liveness is historically shaped by recording and broadcast technologies, while digital performance can generate distinct forms of presence, address, and spectatorship.

The practical consequence is that hybrid theatre should be conceived during dramaturgical development. Camera position, interface, latency, captioning, chat, sound mix, and audience visibility affect meaning. A remote spectator shown only a sequence of close-ups encounters bodies, space, and attention differently from a spectator who chooses where to look. Neither experience is automatically superior; each is constructed.

Hybrid events often promise a single community across physical and digital space. The promise can conceal unequal participation. In-room spectators may hear laughter, feel movement, and become visible to performers. Remote spectators may receive clearer views and contextual materials but experience delay, distraction, or isolation. Interactive invitations designed for one group can leave the other waiting.

Dramaturgy should make these differences purposeful. A production might allow remote spectators access to a performer's private camera, invite them to influence a transition, or give them a parallel sound perspective. It might also choose observation without interaction. The essential point is to state the relation: are audiences witnessing the same event, adjacent events, or mutually dependent

actions?

Design teams should test the work with both groups and include spectators who use captions, audio description, sign-language interpretation, screen readers, or low-bandwidth connections. Access features should enter rehearsal early because they shape rhythm and composition. A caption is not only information placed after performance; its timing, location, and description of sound participate in the event.

The desire for seamlessness can make technical labor disappear. Remote audiences may not know whether an apparent real-time choice is live, delayed, or pre-recorded. Performers may be asked to serve the room and the camera without adequate rehearsal. Camera operators, stream managers, captioners, moderators, and digital stage managers may be treated as support rather than creative contributors.

Transparency does not require explaining every mechanism in advance. It requires avoiding false claims and crediting the people who construct the mediated event. Programs should distinguish live, recorded, and interactive components where the distinction affects audience expectations. Institutions should publish privacy policies for audience images, chat, and recordings, and obtain consent for reuse.

Bay-Cheng and colleagues describe performance and media as an interconnected field rather than separate domains. Hybrid theatre makes that interconnection operational. The production's authorship model should reflect it.

Hybrid performance can reach people separated by geography, disability barriers, care responsibilities, cost, or scheduling. It can also exclude through devices, connectivity, payment systems,

time zones, or inaccessible platforms. Institutions should avoid claiming that online availability makes a production universally accessible.

An access plan should identify audiences, barriers, and alternatives. Low-bandwidth streams, downloadable programs, telephone access, recordings available for a defined period, flexible ticketing, and technical assistance may be more consequential than high-resolution production. At the same time, digital access should not become an excuse to neglect physical accessibility.

Pricing deserves careful thought. Remote tickets need not be automatically free, because digital performance involves labor. Tiered or pay-what-you-can models can recognize both labor and unequal ability to pay. Artists should know how digital revenue and additional rights will be handled.

Institutions commonly compare attendance and satisfaction across modes. Evaluation should also ask how spectators understood their role, when they felt addressed, how mediation altered interpretation, and whether interactions between audience groups were legible. Interviews, post-show discussions, interaction records collected with consent, and rehearsal observation can inform future work.

Hybrid theatre should no longer be justified as an imperfect replacement for co-presence. It is a form in which multiple spaces, interfaces, bodies, and temporalities are composed together. Its artistic credibility depends on designing these relations deliberately, and its ethical credibility depends on transparent mediation, accessible participation, privacy, and fair labor. The question is not how to make the remote audience forget the screen. It is what theatre can do when the screen becomes part of the stage.