

THEATRE AS TECHNOLOGY

Theatre does not merely use technology – it *is* a technology. In this paradigm-shifting study, W. B. Worthen shows how the dynamics of obsolescence and affective nostalgia that shape the passing of technologies into history also shape and reshape theatrical practice. Locating theatre *within* rather than *outside* the orbit of media studies, *Theatre as Technology* traces the theatre's absorption of, and absorption by, digital culture. Treating subjects as wide-ranging as pandemic-era Zoom theatre, on-stage video and sound technologies, and artificial intelligence, Worthen locates a moment of transformational change in the idea of the theatre, change prompted by the theatre's always-changing, and so always obsolescing, material technologies.

W. B. WORTHEN is Alice Brady Pels Professor in the Arts at Barnard College, Columbia University, and Professor of English and Comparative Literature and Professor in the School of the Arts at Columbia as well. A distinguished scholar and theorist of modern performance, his work on the intersection of ideology and materiality in modern drama and in modern Shakespeare performance takes in the practices of acting, dramatic writing, print and digital media, film and television, and the stage. He has held fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Guggenheim Foundation.

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Apparatus, Nostalgia, Obsolescence

W. B. WORTHEN

Barnard College, Columbia University



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W. B. Worthen

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Acknowledgments

Although I began thinking about this book well before the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in my neighborhood in March 2020, that crisis has colored much of my thinking since then – giving, it might be said, a more intimate delicacy to the feeling of obsolescence. But the kind of obsolescence I’m tracking here is less a personal sensibility than a technological one, having to do with the ways human temporality and identity are marked by our engagement with, and representation through, the technologies that we make, and that make us. Like most technologies, even those like AI that are exploding now, theatre is always performed under the sign of passing away.

I’ve been fortunate to be able to present some of this work in person at the Shakespeare Association of America and at the American Society for Theatre Research, and am thankful for the energetic response from interlocutors there. My sincere thanks to Elin Diamond, for inviting me to talk about The Wooster Group’s representation of technological change in the Department of English at Rutgers University, and for her always provocative, richly instructive engagement with my work. Thanks, too, to Elizabeth Hunter, of Washington University in St. Louis, for inviting me to participate in the Interpolations 2 conference in 2024, and for the bracing response to some of this work from Douglas Eacho, Christopher Grobe, and John Muse. Some parts of the book have appeared, in versions considerably revised since, in *Theatre Journal*, *TDR*, and *PAJ*, as well as in two edited collections, *Pirandello Today*, edited by Patricia Gaborik (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), and *Entangled Performance Histories: New Approaches to Theater Historiography*, edited by Erika Fischer-Lichte, Małgorzata Sugiera, Torsten Jost, Holger Hartung, and Omid Soltanil (London: Routledge, 2022). My thanks to the editors and publishers for allowing me to present that work here.

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