**Editorial: On Air**

**Evelyn O'Malley and Chloe Kathleen Preedy**

Air is a fundamental aspect of existence. Its vital role in sustaining life is matched by its phenomenological significance, defining our relationship to the world. Respiration implicates humans and non-humans in ongoing exchanges that indirectly connect all breathing entities (Štuva 2013: 131; Neimanis and Walker 2014). Many of these breathing bodies will experience the atmosphere in sensory and tactile terms: Sara Ahmed for instance urges us to 'think of goose bumps, textures on the skin surface, as body traces of the coldness of the air' (2006: 9). As 'the very medium that makes interaction possible' (Ingold 2012: 77), air also shapes human modes of expression, including performance. Yet our reliance on air leaves us vulnerable to its influence, as long-standing concerns about air quality register. Today, as Eva Horn remarks, '[a]ir quality has moved from a local predicament to a global disruption, affecting not just local biotopes, landscapes, and settlements, but the entire life system of the planet' (2018: 7). Contemporary performances that render the air perceptible might in turn foreground urgent anxieties about our relationship with an element that remains virtually inescapable, regardless of how human actions alter the air's composition, movement or affects.

These concerns have taken on new significance in recent years. As the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was felt around the world, the related lockdowns imposed by governments were initially lauded for improving urban air quality (Rodríguez-Urrego and Rodríguez-Urrego 2020). Such gains were limited, with motoring organizations subsequently reporting pandemic-related growth in private car reliance (RAC 2020: 6--23), while medical researchers posited an

adverse correlation between air pollution and severe incidences of COVID-19 (Pei et al. 2021). More broadly, the collective experience of an airborne pandemic has forever deepened and complicated awareness of the air we breathe. At the height of the Delta strain's deadly surge in India, Arundhati Roy described its impact in terms of aerial combat: 'It's as if there's an invisible UFO parked in our skies, sucking the air out of our lungs. An air raid of a kind we've never known' (2021). Sadly, threats from the air have intensified since the air raids and gas attacks that defined the First and Second World Wars, with cities including Aleppo, Beirut and Sana'a subjected to severe bombardment since 2000. The violent use of airspace is escalating again: Russian airstrikes on Ukrainian cities have killed hundreds of civilians, with confirmed casualties expected to increase (OHCHR 2022). Those murdered include the approximately 300 civilians who died in Mariupol on 16 March 2022 while sheltering in the Donetsk Regional Drama Theatre, after a missile was launched from an aircraft despite the warning word, 'children', written outside. Meanwhile, polluting emissions remain a planetary threat: the latest report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change called for immediate reductions across all sectors, as anthropogenic climate change brings us ever nearer to irrevocable tipping points (2022). The consequences are not endured equally by all, though, with factors including disability, gender, race, socio-economic background and country of residence affecting individual exposure to diverse airborne risks. More concerningly still, such uneven experiences often reflect and perpetuate historical injustices.

There is no clearing the air. Whereas our title might in other contexts evoke the lightness and joyousness of walking on air, all feathers and gossamer, such pleasure feels far away when we confront how air shapes and is stifled by human actions. That consciousness pervades this issue, as many contributors interrogate air's

significance in light of urgent debates about environmental and social justice. At the same time, air's capacity to suggest an experience that is at least partially shared, or to evoke more positive forms of transformation, hints that this element might not only render perceptible the ethical consequences of human action, but also demonstrate its own agency in ways that connect human experience with the more-than-human. While to reflect on air requires us to register diverse aerial and atmospheric abuses, challenging prevalent assumptions that airy action is inherently frivolous or 'light', the resulting elemental consciousness might enable us to better weather their impact (Neimanis and Hamilton 2018).

When we imagined this issue and the works that might fill it, we were alert to the intangibility of the element -- air -- that pervades every aspect of our lives. Our initial concern was with how performance can make this oft-translucent medium visible or otherwise perceptible. This question drew us to familiar works through which we felt that air's presence might be experienced afresh: works such as Fujiko Nakaya's fog sculptures; Teac Damsa's touring production of Swan Lake/Loch na hEala (2016), during which thousands of white feathers danced on air currents; or the post-lockdown performance by a string quartet at the Gran Teatre del Liceu, Barcelona, who played Puccini's elegy 'I Crisantemi' ('The Chrysanthemums') to an audience of plants. Our eclectic exposure to performances in which the air might be perceptible resonated with new materialist efforts to decentre the human. We searched for encounters that attended to the materiality of air as air, rather than beginning with the human body. This was always a false conceit, but one that exemplified our environmentally concerned desire to eschew anthropocentricism and locate new aerial perspectives. Many of the contributors to this issue grapple with similar concerns, considering human presence within the vastness of the earth's

atmosphere. As Kate Soper has noted, the human lurks in posthumanism (2012), and the work we have had the pleasure of breathing with over these years of atmospheric crisis negotiates diverse approaches to performing on air. Overwhelmingly, though, these contributions reverberate with Achille Mbembe's crystalline call for 'The Universal Right to Breathe', which states that breath is 'an originary right to living on Earth, a right that belongs to the universal community of earthly inhabitants, human and other' (2021: 62, emphasis in original).

**Heeding Air**

As Mbembe reminds us, more than humans breathe; and, while not all air is breath, without air there is no life. Was it ever sufficient that performance might make this air apparent to the senses? Is it enough that performance can make air visible, audible, sapid or tangible? The air might become more palpable, but the potential gap between perception and response demands attention. In The Disposition of Nature, Jennifer Wenzel argues that the supposedly empathic pacifiers 'I see you' and 'I hear you' are often deflections of responsibility that engender no action (2020: 14), pointing us towards Rob Nixon's now familiar advocacy for the 'apprehension' of 'slow violence' (2011). For Nixon, apprehension is a 'crossover term that draws together the domains of perception, emotion, and action' (14). Wenzel proposes that 'the salient question is not whether environmental injustice can be seen, but under what conditions it can be read, understood, and apprehended' (2020: 15, emphasis in original).

In this context, perhaps an ethical performance or analysis might aspire to apprehend air. Like Nixon and Wenzel, we had hoped that such apprehension might

infer an arresting responsibility derived from unease, disquiet and fear. Yet apprehension began to make us feel apprehensive. The murder of George Floyd by an arresting US police officer and the murder of Sarah Everard by a member of the English Metropolitan police force highlighted the ongoing violences of institutional apprehension, reminding us that this term remains entwined with the same racist, misogynist and economic structures that are implicated in atmospheric pollution, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss and climate change. We therefore wish to resist the apprehension of air, with all the possessive overtones that this word might still carry, in favour of asking whether air could be something to heed. By heeding, we mean paying careful attention. Heeding implies more than simply noticing or observing. Heeding infers ethical care and responsibility, an imperative for action, more than a becoming aware of or attentive to something. It is this conscious care for the air we share and reply upon that we must proactively and attentively cultivate, as we heed the atmosphere(s) around us.

The articles, artists' pages and performance works in this issue heed air in different ways. They are responsive to air as matter and metaphor; to atmospheres 'meteorological and affective' (McCormack 2018: 4). They consider how performance might encourage more careful heeding of this life-sustaining element, giving voice to the diverse ways in which air is utilized, experienced and/or evoked within contemporary performance. They ask urgent questions about the unique relationship between air and performance, and about how performance studies can contribute to an enhanced care for aerial environments: from the local air we breathe, to the atmosphere of the planet.

This issue's call to heed air begins with Wood Roberdeau's 'Counterattacking Pollution in Three Aerial Acts', which offers a new materialist perspective on three

responses to urban air quality. Roberdeau starts with US-based artist Amy Balkin's Public Smog (2014--), relating Balkin's emphasis on the need for communal action to two projects, In the Air (2008) and Citizen Sense (2017), that sought to raise awareness of urban air pollution in Madrid and London. The relationship between community agency and eco-critical responsiveness receives further consideration in Sasha Engelmann's 'Performing Shared Atmospheres: Museo Aero Solar': an evocative piece that traces the shared atmospheres of this collectively fabricated floating sculpture across the world. As Engelmann demonstrates, Museo Aero Solar at once prompts attention to what it might mean to breathe 'in common' and registers the limits of such elemental commonality: resonating differently in the various locations of its performance, the uplifting atmosphere of this piece is something that can also be (perhaps literally) punctured.

Extending Engelmann's critical attention to air that is held 'in-common', Caterina Albano gives thoughtful form to the toxic and weaponized clouds that are created by state and corporate powers. Focusing on Forensic Architecture's video work Cloud Studies (2020), Albano analyses how a performance space that exposes the formation of toxic clouds produced by arson, chemical weapons, tear gas, methane from fracking, and herbicides offers the possibility that 'their affective dynamics can be understood and mobilized to reclaim the air we breathe' (PAGE). The prospect of a weaponized atmosphere similarly haunts Frances Williams's 'Love Is in the Air? Notes from North Wales on air vapour as atmospheric affect'. Beginning with the moment in 2018 when a Red Arrows military plane 'drew' a heart in the sky above the Welsh town of Llandudno, Williams's ethnographic account details the complex tensions between the military, belonging and non-belonging, and unease around borders and identity that were enacted on Armed Forces Day.

Questions about presence and belonging are also central to Meghan Moe Beitiks' and Kenya (Robinson)'s artists' piece, 'Breath^work'. Heeding the breath of microbes, soil, skin, trees, buildings and moments -- all living things, blowing air and ideas into the pages -- this work challenges readers to consider how individual performers and audience members might be attuned to spaces through the act of breathing. In the process, 'Breath^work' asks us to reflect on breathing 'entanglements' that begin with but move beyond the performance space. Maggie Inchley's '"This Is My Life": Managing breath in Kirsty Young and Cumbernauld Theatre's LipSync (2019) and the COVID-19 pandemic' takes a similar approach, contrasting voice training methods that aspire to the orderly management of breath with Young's powerful performance of disrupted and constricted breathing. Analysing Young's experience of living with cystic fibrosis, Inchley argues that, rather than simply taking pleasure from the apparent effortlessness of virtuosic singing, we should endeavour to recognize the labour of breath. The case for heeding what Stacy Alaimo (2016) terms 'performances of exposure' is also persuasively made by Megan Johnson, in her discussion of ethical spectatorship and Hanna Cormick's The Mermaid. Johnson demonstrates how, by attuning spectators to the transference of invisible airborne particles in the performance space, Cormick comments not only on 'her own corporeal vulnerability, but also on the ecological vulnerability of the planet' (PAGE), indirectly advocating 'collective responsibility and action around the ethics of sharing communal air/space' (PAGE).

Airborne particles are the subject too of Clare Nattress's 'Airpocalypse', which describes how Natress cycled coast-to-coast from Morecambe to Bridlington in a three-day performance investigating air pollution. By collecting pollution data as she travels, Natress situates her practice at the nexus between art and science: her

performance methods make air pollution data visible, graspable and tangible, while her physical exertion and creativity in the making of the work perform her own ethical response to heeding air. This combined attention to visual representation and corporeal embeddedness is likewise evident in Nik Wakefield's and Sandra Zellmer's 'Air Time', which documents a recent project to create ecological images 'that are not only necessary but approachably beautiful' (PAGE). The result is an alternative ethos of ameliorative, deinstrumentalized ecological action, which -- rather than claiming to 'fix' anthropogenic climate change -- aspires to nurture more pleasurable, less violently extractive responses to planetary losses.

The pleasure that can result from performative attunement to the aerial environment is elaborated further by Kate Holmes and Natalie Rowland, who share an interest in the aerial performer's relationship with that space. In 'Celestial Bodies in a Viscous Sky: Liquid Sky's reshaping of aerial space using lasers', Holmes considers a 2019 performance in Bristol by the air rope-artist Aedín Walsh. Analysing the techniques and embodied perspective of aerialists who move with and through air as a 'practiced place' (de Certeau 1984: 117), Holmes explores how introducing lasers to Liquid Sky both expanded the space and influenced the movements available to Walsh, with aerialist and lasers encountering the air as co-creating bodies. Rowland, too, highlights the partnership that develops in the moment when the aerial fabric dancer takes her practice into the air. Drawing on her own experience, Rowland characterizes the relationship between the dancer and air as a conversation in which the invisible partner can make their presence known in challenging or destabilizing ways. At the same time, she argues, such exchanges enrich our understanding of the medium with which bodies and fabrics interact; thus

by ‘consciously considering the air as a part of the human--fabric entanglement, we can generate new ways and buoyant ways of moving’ (PAGE).

Emmanuelle Waeckerlé and Will Montgomery offer a related perspective on the implications of moving through air as they jointly reflect on the experience of walking in south London on the same afternoon in January 2021. Juxtaposing their voices in conversation, ‘Walking in Air’ explores how COVID-related lockdowns affected their project of ‘thinking in movement’ about the walking body’s passage through air (Sheets-Johnstone 1999: 483--517; Ingold 2015: 49), as, while physically separated by the pandemic, they still sought to walk together. Edith Kollath also evokes a live interaction with the air that lends itself to ‘thinking in movement’, tracing how the intersections between breath, air and molten glass result in ‘an unexpected material transformation’ within her video installation ‘Addressable Volume’ (PAGE). Interweaving her narrative of this performance with attention to the material processes involved in glassblowing and analysis of Samuel Beckett’s Breath, Kollath asks what it might mean to render human breath visible through the medium of glass.

A similar interest in registering breath’s presence informs S. R. May’s ‘Choreographing Breath and Air in Object Performances’, which focuses on performances in which puppets are animated with human breath. May contrasts the continuing anthropocentric and anthropomorphic impulses of Handspring Puppet Company’s Or You Could Kiss Me (2010) and Phia Menard’s L’après-midi d’un foehn (2011) with Nenagh Watson’s 2015 call for an ‘ephemeral animation’ in which objects can be animated by the natural environment. Verónica Jimenez’s ‘On Air and in Breath: Atmospheric ethics of exposure’ also explores performances that foreground ‘interconnections between the human and the more-than-human’

(PAGE), beginning with an evocative account of navigating spiderwebs at Tomás Saraceno's 2018 exhibition, On Air. For Jimenez, Saraceno's work shares with Chantal Bilodeau's Sila (2014) and Ashley Fure's The Force of Things (2017) an affective and corporeal awareness of the ways in which breathing bodies might 'con-spire' (Choy 2016), inviting 'new forms of embodied human and non-human kinship, collective grief and even hope' (PAGE).

This desire to share 'space, time and the written page with non-human narrators' is centred in Alexandra R. Toland's, Harriet Rabe von Froreich's and Beate Körner's account of what lichen might teach us about caring for the atmosphere. In 'Signposting the Anthropocene: Air care, poleotolerance, and the queering of ecosystem services', they propose a new attentiveness to fluid, symbiotic relationships, which they pursue through practiced encounters with the lichen that literally live on air. Non-human respiration is again foregrounded within Amanda Couch's 'Becoming with Wheat: Photosynthesis/respiration collaborations'. Couch's photographs and diary entries document a collaborative performance from the UK lockdown of summer 2020, during which she co-breathed with Emmer wheat in a daily enactment of the reciprocal processes of photosynthesis and respiration. Inspired by Michael Marder's thought that plants are an intermediary 'between the living and the dead' (2013: 67), Couch's photographic record becomes a mediation on mortality, since 'to expire' -- 'to exhale' -- can also mean 'to die' (PAGE).

In contrast, Neville Gabie's Collective Breath (2014) attended to expiration by preserving and releasing breath collected from over 1,000 people attending the UK-based WOMAD festival. In this issue, Gabie and curator Jeni Walwin discuss Gabie's experience of creating the World of Art commission and evaluate the dynamics of staging collective aerial art, asserting the value of ephemeral

performances whose legacy rests in the memories of participants. Similar questions of legacy are important for Isabel Stowell-Kaplan. Her contribution, ‘Playing with Then and Now: The liveness of breath’, is concerned with how different performance forms draw attention to breath in ways that encourage us to consider the historical boundaries of live art. Within the three distinct works she considers, the performers’ laboured breathing is shown to have unravelled common distinctions between ‘live’ and ‘archive’, performance and memory, and so troubled the concept of ‘performance remains’ (PAGE).

Gabriella Daris’s ‘From an Atmospheric Point of View: Gustav Metzger in the context of the air war’ surveys another type of ‘performance remains’. Working in the aftermath of the Second World War, the German artist Metzger collected ‘fragments of ruin’ left behind by the air war to create kinetic aerial artworks that asserted an anti-capitalist, anti-war and pro-environmental position (PAGE). For Daris, this critique retains its urgency today, as we gasp in the shadow of atmoterrorism and aerial conflict. The possibility of breathing fresh life into a performance archive also connects Daris’s piece indirectly to Lotte Bode’s and Timothy De Laet’s ‘Breathing Air into the Archive: Preserving Otobong Nkanga’s performance art’. Discussing the Nigeria-born and Antwerp-based artist Otobong Nkanga’s desire to create a living afterlife for her performance art at the Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp, Bode and De Laet describe how Nkanga’s notion of a ‘breathing archive’ inspired them to consider whether linking archivization with air might help to reinvigorate the archivization of performance art and decolonize archival practices. Related questions about how aerial immersion and shared breathing might be experienced at a distance have become more vital, with many performers turning to digital platforms during pandemic lockdowns. The potential for digital technology to communicate

aerially infused experience is central to choreographer-researcher Leena Rouhiainen's account of The Air Journey: an internet-based audio-visual artwork produced in collaboration with videographer Riikka Theresa Innanen and sound designer Antti Nykyri. In 'On Processing the Texts in The Air Journey', Rouhiainen intersperses textual extracts from this work with reflections on the creative process, concluding that even indirect experiences of air can still evoke a sense of its all-pervasive yet perplexing presence, and so prompt us to heed our shared atmosphere.

**Exhale**

In 2020, Fintan Walsh observed that the collective intake of breath triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic led in turn to a desperate human longing to exhale (227). The production of this issue was likewise slowed first by a birth, and then the pandemic: a pandemic during which we -- Chloe, Evelyn, the contributing authors and artists, and the larger collective of scholars and performance makers whose work buoys our efforts -- have separately encountered many first and last breaths. Yet, while bringing this collection of airy thought and matter together, the generosity and patience of our contributors and co-editors at Performance Research have given us space to breathe. If the wind was never -- is never -- at everyone's back at once, we have nonetheless been revived by their more-than-collegial willingness to wait for others to catch their breath.

Mbembe alerts us to humanity's present task: a task, he argues, that is 'a matter of no less than reconstructing a habitable earth to give all of us the breath of life' (2021: 62). While the fulfilment of that necessary ambition will require the

cooperation of many within our shared atmosphere, the performances presented here seek to contribute an airy something to that endeavour. We exhale together, and aspire to clearer air.

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