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# INTERMEDIALITY AND MEMORY IN THE TOWER BLOCK – POST MORTEM PROJECT

ANDREAS BERGSLAND, BARBRO RØNNING<sup>1</sup>

## *Abstract*

This article discusses aspects of intermedial experiencing of the site-specific intermedial performance The Tower Block – Post Mortem and the preceding process of generating material for the performance through gathering and sharing memories from The Tower Block. The authors describe the gathering of memory material on the project's own blog, and how this process highlighted both properties of networked media and the phenomenology of remembrance. Subsequently, they discuss three different aspects of the performance, and how each of them relates to important issues in the discourse on intermediality in performance culture: 1) Intermedial elements in performance and their play with spatiality, temporality and their relationship to processes of remembrance; 2) Ritual and the transformative aesthetic of the performance and how it relates to the authenticity, and to interrelationships of the actual and the virtual; 3) Resonance and tension in trans-medial metaphors used in the performance.

*Keywords:* site-specific performance, audience participation, memories, large-scale multimedia, ritual, metaphors.

## **Introduction**

The Tower Block was the main building of the central hospital in Norway's fourth largest city, Trondheim, and for many years, it was one of the tallest buildings in the city. When this building with such a prominence in the cityscape was demolished during a period of eleven

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months between 2010 and 2011, this started a process of reflection around what this building had meant too many of the people using it over the years. Sure, it was a place with a clearly defined function – to fix people’s medical problems. Nevertheless, most citizens of Trondheim had their share of personal experiences from the building – experiences that were often highly charged with emotion and in many cases of an existential nature. For the second author, the loss of her parents during a few months, both after longer periods of hospitalization in The Tower Block, awoke a consciousness of how the Tower Block constituted an important personally and emotionally charged component of the farewell and sorrow processes. Taking this realization to a general level, she realized how The Tower Block, a building that most people in the city considered as an ugly piece of brutalist architecture in crude contrast with the classic beauty of the city’s Nidaros Cathedral, could be seen as an “emotional landmark” in the city, standing as a symbol of the countless births, deaths, crises and healing processes that had taken place there. The second author’s personal experiences subsequently matured into the artistic idea of creating a performance at the demolition site built around people’s memories from The Tower Block.

In this article, we will discuss aspects of experiencing of the site-specific intermedial performance that resulted from this artistic idea: *The Tower Block - Post Mortem* (TBPM). In the first part of the article we will focus on the initial phase of the project that consisted in gathering memories from the citizens of Trondheim on a blog, and how this process highlighted both properties of networked media and the phenomenology of remembrance. In the second part we would like to highlight three different aspects of the performance, and how each of them relates to important issues in the discourse on intermediality in performance culture: 1) Intermedial elements in performance and their play with spatiality, temporality and their relationship to processes of remembrance; 2) Ritual and the transformative aesthetic of the performance and how it relates to the authenticity, and to interrelationships of the actual and the virtual; 3) Resonance and tension in trans-medial metaphors used in the performance.

### Networked Communities in the Memory Blog

When the second author conceptualized the TBPM project in 2010 it was based on an ethos developed through her work as an artist and theatre scholar in the 1980s and early 90s within community arts practice.<sup>2</sup> The initial phase of this project focused on gathering the memories of the citizens of the city and the region from The Tower Block, and this was intended to make up the content around which the final part, a site-specific performance event, could be developed. Hence, the project was conceived as a form of *participatory art* with elements from *applied theatre* (Bishop 2012; Prentki and Preston 2013). A guiding idea for the second author when she conceptualized the project was that bringing personal memories to the fore by telling them, writing them or expressing them in other ways – especially ones highly charged with emotionality and existential meanings – would have an effect on how people related to the building, to each other and to the idea that the “death” of the building deserved to be marked and commemorated in a collective act. When Rønning put together the project team it was an important point that all of them each wrote down a personal memory from The Tower Block, including the authors; Rønning, whose role was project leader, dramaturge and director and Bergsland, who worked as sound designer, composer and project-team member.<sup>3</sup> This act created in all of us a strong personal connection to the project, perhaps more than what is usually the case for “hired workers” in artistic projects.

In the same way that writing personal memories created a relationship to The Tower Block for the project group, we hoped that by writing and sharing their memories, the city’s and region’s citizens

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<sup>2</sup> As Rønning 2016 points out, community based aspects of cultural practice from the bottom-up have a long tradition in the democratic cultural policy in Norway, with central keywords as cultural identity, non-hierarchical collaborative models and participatory action methods. She also contextualises the TBM project by pointing to the tradition of people’s theatre, from Roman Rolland up to today’s participatory theatre practices. Active audience inclusion and agency, and creating a theatre event with a common emotional and political purpose, is at the centre of this way of thinking.

<sup>3</sup> The project team members are presented at <http://hoyblokka.no/eng.php>.

would experience a connection to the core ideas of the project on a personal and emotional level as well as actively engage and participate in the project. To facilitate inscription as well as sharing and commenting memories we used a specially designed web site shaped like a blog or internet forum where users could share personal memories as text, video and/or sound, optionally accompanied by images. In accordance with most blog designs, each memory could also be given comments by any other user.

To make the memory blog known to the relevant group of people, it was promoted in regional TV, radio and newspapers, the hospital's own intranet news feed, and on the project's Facebook page. And, from the publication of the blog in September 2010 and until late January 2011 when the performance event took place, almost 200 entries were posted.<sup>4</sup> Before we go into issues of content of meaning for these posts, we would like to reflect on our role as facilitators setting the stage for interactive engagement through the design of graphics, structure, function and accessibility of the blog.

Rather than choosing a standard blog design and functionality we wanted to establish a platform with its own distinctive features, nevertheless partly within the frames and conventions of the complex and extensive intermedial digital cultures of blogs and social media. Using a simplistic "retro" type of design and functionality, we wanted to give the users associations to retrospection, remembrance and perhaps also nostalgia fitting the theme of the blog. The home page featured a stylized blue Tower Block where each of the 233 windows were linked to an entry on the blog, and hovering the mouse over a window would show either the title or of a text entry or a preview of an image entry (see *figure 1*). The entry page was dominated by a field for entering text and buttons for attaching sound, image files or a YouTube link to a video. And importantly, when a memory was entered, a window would turn yellow, seemingly "lighting up" a room in the virtual blue building, thus producing a simple and obvious visual metaphor for life and activity.

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<sup>4</sup> The blog is still available online in its original form at [www.hoyblokka.no/norsk.php](http://www.hoyblokka.no/norsk.php). In addition, an English version of the blog, showing some of the memories in translation together with images and video from the performance is available at [www.hoyblokka.no/eng.php](http://www.hoyblokka.no/eng.php).



Fig. 1. The Tower Block website

Simultaneously, it created a sense of interactive navigation in a virtual environment, albeit perhaps in a relatively abstract sense (cf. Klich and Scheer 2012, ch.8). All in all, the “datedness” in stylization and design of the web interface particularly afforded a focus on the interface itself, and thereby to some degree displaying traits of what Bolter and Grusin (2000) have labelled *hypermediacy* – something that “makes us aware of the medium [and] reminds us of our desire for immediacy” (34).

Despite the somewhat hypermedial surface, we hoped that the users’ experience of the blog would be more dominated by the logic of its conceptual opposite, *immediacy* – “the belief in some necessary contact between the medium and what it represents” (31). And eventually, the general impression was that the entries on the blog were not so much driven by platform-specific concerns and conventions than for example Facebook and Twitter, where short texts are favored/allowed and where certain types of entries are more strongly encouraged through “likes” and “re-tweets” and therefore tend to dominate the platform. If any, the impression was that of considerable variation with strong individual flavors, but with a seemingly weaker sense of projecting and performing identities compared to mainstream social media – maybe because there was simply no user “profile” to worry about. Overall, we could observe

a greater reliance on traditional verbal story-telling than for example Facebook and Twitter, and we also found that the entries were longer than the typical Facebook status and tweet, but still significantly shorter and less elaborate than a conventional blog post.<sup>5</sup> The very small scale of the networked community, the relatively low number of entries, the inherent emphasis on past events rather than present ones, and the “old school” aesthetic and functionality (no live feed of events) may all explain the seemingly mild platform- or media-specific effects we noted on the blog. In our experience, the effects of the blog lay less in its design and its other surface properties, and more in what was related to questions of emotionality and community, something we will discuss in the following sections.

At least in terms of structure and functionality, our intention with the blog was to tap into the culture of expressiveness, sharing and intimacy characteristic of social media and the blogosphere. This was also a way of bypassing the relatively restricted norms of social display of emotions in Norway, since the range of accepted emotional expressions in social media and the blogosphere seems to be less restrictive and allows for more intimacy than elsewhere in society.<sup>6</sup> There are several aspects of the seemingly sterile computer-to-computer interaction that can open up for greater emotional openness and intimacy.

First of all, the computer as an all-purpose interactive and intermedial platform dominantly affords solitary interaction since it generally receives input (mouse, keyboard) and produces output (screen, small speakers) configured to suit one single user at a time per computer.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the computer is largely a one-person medium, and just like the typewriter, the letter and the book, it will generally minimize social interaction taking place *in front of* media interfaces while focusing and heightening the interaction that is taking place *through* the media interfaces. This latter form of interaction will usually imply spatial

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<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.copypress.com/blog/4-statistics-every-blogger-should-know-about-content-word-count/> (retrieved 12.12.2014).

<sup>6</sup> The restrictions in emotional display in Norwegian culture has been made into a pertinent caricature by Julien S. Bourelle in his *The Social Guidebook to Norway* (Bourelle 2014).

<sup>7</sup> This is reflected in the term *Personal Computer* and in the historical Apple campaign using the slogan: “one person, one computer” (*Newsweek* nov./dec. 1984 cited in Jensen 1993, 342).

and/or temporal distancing depending on the nature of the software and the interfaces in use.<sup>8</sup> In addition, different software and interfaces will introduce media specific transformations and modifications that will affect the nature of the interaction and the engagement of the user. While this naturally will inhibit and shape the social aspects of the interchange, it will also potentially increase the expressive control compared to face-to-face communication. Whereas facial expressions and body language can involuntarily give away emotions and expressive intent, the non-real-time nature of posting on a blog – nobody monitors what you express in real-time and nobody awaits your immediate response – will give a user plenty of time to sculpt his/her expression and to decide the degree of emotional investment and display, at least until the “submit” button is pressed.

Secondly, in many types of social interchange on the web, users can decide the degree to which their virtual identities (avatars, aliases) are linked to their biographical persons. In the right conditions this can make the users’ interaction in the virtual environments less restricted, and was one reason why we chose to allow anonymous and partly anonymous (e.g. first name only) entries in our blog<sup>9</sup>. Such mechanisms have also been revealed by Christopherson (2007), who found that internet anonymity can enable individuals to exert boundary control upon other’s access to one’s self and to be without fear of being identified and socially evaluated. Thus, our blog prepared a social ground that could be felt socially safer and less demanding than real-life interaction, and one can see how despite the distancing of computer-mediated communication it can allow for the heightened intimacy we were aiming for. In this case, Bay-Cheng’s (2010) point about virtuality seems appropriate: “[...] virtuality suggests a distance from – as well as an engagement with – the actual, material, and physical world, real life (142).

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<sup>8</sup> There are, of course, several exceptions to this tendency, e.g. in communicating via Skype, live chat, IRC, watching live streaming of events, etc.

<sup>9</sup> However, one could also be worried about the negative aspects that anonymity could afford, such as hateful and inappropriate expressions, which the lack of social regulation mechanisms could lead to (Christopherson). Consequently, we chose to moderate our blog, even if negative or hateful expression eventually turned out never to be a problem.



While both design, structure and functionality were important factors in setting the stage for the gathering of memories invested with personal engagement and emotional depth, we still believed that the most important thing for us to do as facilitators was to establish the theme and the tone of the digital exchange on the blog. This approach acknowledged the fact that a great portion of online presence consists in so-called 'lurking', i.e. monitoring the contributions of others, something which Crawford (2009) suggests is an embedded part of networked engagement and a necessary corollary of having an online 'voice'. On those grounds, we chose to publish the blog with a set of 10-12 pre-produced posts – a few of these were from project team members, others were from people we invited – using a variety of media: text in the form of poems, short and long narratives, images, videos, some even with an artistic experimental character. Thus, we intended to give any visitors an idea of the wide range of expressions that could be posted on the memory blog. In terms of content and expressivity, however, there was less variation in the pre-produced material, in that we chose to focus on memories with strong emotional and existential qualities. We hoped that this could contribute in constituting the tone of voice in those "lurking" on our site, and that this would make it easier to open up intimate emotional landscapes. And, as we hoped, the memory blog seemed to open up a space for highly intimate and personal experiences, often portraying contributors or their close relatives in fragile, exposed or vulnerable states, either emotionally, bodily or both. For instance, one man wrote about the removal of his prostate gland, and how it involved situations where he felt that his manhood, bodily and mentally, was seriously threatened. In another entry, a woman told the story of when she woke up in the middle of her appendix surgery, feeling and hearing the doctors working, but not being able to speak or move a muscle. A third entry recounts the sudden shock and pain of seeing a close friend in a coma and hooked up to a respirator after a sudden cerebral hemorrhage. These and similar stories created a strong sense of respect and empathy in the project group, and contributed to a heightened awareness of the sensitive aspects of many memories and a feeling that this had to be reflected in the way in which such memories could be a part of the dramaturgy of the performance – a *dramaturgy of vulnerability*.

A crucial aspect of the memory gathering phase of the project seemed to be that it initiated processes that fed back on themselves: Blogposts could generate both comments<sup>10</sup> and new posts on the blog, new memories linking up to similar or different ones by association or contrast. The project group took an active part in reinforcing these feedback loops by authoring new posts and commenting old ones. In addition, we were continuously expanding feedback loops beyond the blog by remediating parts of it on our Facebook page, the hospital's and the local university's intranet sites, the local press and the regional broadcasting. Interestingly, we were able to monitor not only the blog entries and comments, but also the number of hits on each individual memory post. For instance, we could see how certain memories created momentary peaks of traffic, like the one about a grouse crashing fatally through one of the top floor windows, which had 117 readers in one day. Thus, some of the memories seemed to form rhizomatic nodes in the network of blog entries, generating surges of activation.

One important aspect of these feedback loops is that they entailed a sense of *community* for the participants. This might have originated in a feeling of being "together" in the same virtual Tower Block with the different windows lighting up as new memories "moved in". Thus, the metaphor of the virtual Tower Block as a "place" where memories, and thus by extension people, were co-localized, by definition constituted a form of community. The fact that the blog posts were all related to the actual Tower Block inflicted them with a common perspective and focus, something which extended this community beyond the virtual: The memories from The Tower Block were also something that people could discuss and feel related to in their physical lifeworlds and in face-to-face communication. This was indeed something the project group experienced when talking to people that had openly shared memories on the blog.

Another issue that might have reinforced a sense of community was that the blog inflicted all its contributors with the same participatory status: There were no features that highlighted or in other

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<sup>10</sup> Enabling comments to the blog posts was a natural choice, and of course one that was to a large extent inherent to the blog medium.

ways promoted certain memories before others.<sup>11</sup> The project group's own written memories were placed in between all the others thus giving them the same status and hoping to promote the idea of a single community without privileged positions.<sup>12</sup> Thus, in contrast to traditional art and theatre practices, the "audience" was hereby repositioned as co-producers or active participants (Bishop 2012, 2). Just as important for the sense of community, perhaps, was that the act of remembering, shaping a memory and sharing it in a common virtual space created a common ground on a deeper and more personal level. When thinking of all the memories expressing pain, loss, sorrow and feelings of being exposed or vulnerable, one can easily imagine that by sharing a memory with others in similar situations, people could experience consolation and comfort in feeling that one is not alone. And, we could indeed observe that there were blog posts and post comments showing how people experienced the act of remembering and/or sharing as something positive. Lastly, the redefinition of the meanings of The Tower Block and the common involvement in a process leading to the performance event announced on the blog were also contributing to the sense of community. We will go into more detail about these issues below.

All in all, we have seen how the memory blog of TBPM displayed many of the features of *networking* through intermediality as Wagner and Ernst (2010) have described it: It invited participation ("lurking" as well as sharing), initiated feedback loops, and contributed to a sense of community – of contribution, sharing and interaction (175). As these authors note, networking calls for a conceptual shift from rather static ideas of time, space and subjectivity toward dynamic ideas of formation of process (176). And it is exactly the dynamic, processual and performative nature of both subjective identities and the "places" they inhabit that we would like to address in the following section with a particular focus on the role memories can have in this process.

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<sup>11</sup> This is of course contrary to the way many of the social media operate, for instance by ranking, ordering or selecting posts based on e.g. "likes", "re-tweets" or "hits".

<sup>12</sup> In theory, having the power to remove unwanted posts and comments gave the project leader a more privileged role than other participants. In practice, however, no posts or comments were excluded.

### Transforming Meanings, Aestheticization and Politics

Along with the gathering of memories on the blog ran a transformational process of redefining the meaning of The Tower Block for the region's citizens. From being first and foremost a functional building with a negatively charged brutalist architecture it was gradually re-constituted through the project period into a site of meaningfulness and relevance, both personally, socially and aesthetically. This was something intended by us as facilitators from the outset: In project descriptions, both publically and those used to apply for funding, in newspaper chronicles, interviews with local media and in our Facebook page we were persistently referring to The Tower Block as an *emotional landmark*, thus explicitly initiating the process of redefining the meaning of the building.

Through the memory-gathering phase just discussed, with its numerous posts displaying a high degree of emotionality and intimacy, this redefinition became strongly reinforced. This process concretized some of the insights of social and cultural geography, namely that memories often form a central component in how we as humans relate to places; places can evoke memories when we return to them and memories are often crucial components in how we construct places in our minds (Casey 1996, 26ff). Moreover, as Osborne (2001) argues, such a process is highly interactive, involving places and people that continuously define and re-define each other in a performative process. This also involves *identity*, both on the social (Hoelscher & Alderman 2004) and personal levels (Crossley 2002), meaning that a change in the perception of a place can reflect back on both an individual and the community he/she is a part of. In our case, that could imply that telling or writing a memory would affect not only our own and others' conception of The Tower Block, but potentially also our conception of ourselves by incorporating it in the set of life stories that constitute who we are. As Crites sharply formulates it: "A self without a story contracts into the thinness of its personal pronoun"<sup>13</sup>. Finally, as Bondi, Davidson and Smith (2007) emphasize, *emotions* can play a key role in relating people to places. E.g. when we remember a certain place, it can evoke

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<sup>13</sup> Crites, cited in Crossley 2002.

the same emotions as we felt when we were there once before, so that memory, emotion and place converge into one entity. Thus, a sad or painful memory from being hospitalized in The Tower Block might be metonymically projected onto the building as a whole and thus define our relationship to it.

Through personal contact with many people writing on the blog, we got a clear impression that the act of giving shape to their memories, e.g. by writing or telling them, was highly performative and transformational, changing the way people thought, felt and communicated about the mental traces of the events, including where they took place. We experienced that the idea of The Tower Block as an emotional landmark very quickly resonated with many people's attitudes towards the building; that there was more to this building than mere function and external appearance, and its demolition was something that stirred them. By creating an atmosphere for empathetic interchange, support, respect and understanding through the memory blog, we as facilitators could make explicit and strengthen some of the feelings that the loss of this building evoked.

We like to think that the intermedial effects of the memory blog discussed above certainly also played a part in the transformational processes running through the preparatory phases of the project. Especially, we experienced that the particular networked and computer mediated aspect of *sharing* that the memory blog featured, promoting and projecting intimacy, intra- and intermedial feedback, added a therapeutic effect to the project. When thinking of all the memories expressing pain, loss, sorrow and feelings of being exposed or vulnerable, one can easily imagine that by sharing a memory with others in similar situations, people could experience consolation and comfort in feeling that one is not alone, and getting comments of understanding and/or empathy.<sup>14</sup>

The play between the physical building being gradually demolished and the virtual stylistic web representation of it "coming to life", with memories lighting up its windows, can also be seen as an intermedial effect. It was difficult, if not impossible, to consider the memories "inhabiting" the virtual rooms of the web Tower Block

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<sup>14</sup> Later, this was also an important component of the *ritual* element of the performance, which will be discussed further below.

without considering how the physical doubles of these rooms were simultaneously destroyed by demolition machines. Thus, the project set up a relationship between these two processes, with one constituting a positive anti-thesis to the other, and where the meaning of the virtual and actual were continuously affecting each other. To call this an effect of intermediality would require, however, that the demolition process was considered an artistic medium – a stage in which an integrated part of the performance took place. While the functional aspects of the demolition were certainly paramount, the project nevertheless clearly framed and redefined the demolition process as an integral part of the project with evident aesthetical value.

We began our work with the aestheticization of the demolition process already a few days after the hospital functions had been moved to the new building when we were allowed into the abandoned building. The emptiness of the building radically transformed it, changing both how the building looked and sounded inside. Visually, the acute absence of people accentuated the material and physical qualities of the building, with years of wear and tear becoming particularly evident. At the same time, the empty rooms evoked imagery of people and events that could have taken place there, especially where there were noticeable traces of people or activity – like a pair of shoes left on the floor or a note on the washing machine to keep it closed. Sonically, the absence of people and (most of the) furniture also drastically changed the soundscape of the hospital. Naturally, the buzz of voices and people in activity was absent, but perhaps the most striking was the accentuation of reverberation, with each utterance or footstep causing a long tail of it that you couldn't help noticing. This fact triggered us into producing a soundscape piece where Håkon, one of the project workers, presented the memory of his last meeting with his granddad in The Tower Block, sitting in a chair and telling it slowly to a sound recorder in the same room where it originally took place.<sup>15</sup> When the memory blog was published a few months later, and most of the interior surface materials and infrastructure

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<sup>15</sup> The piece is entitled *Memories from an empty room* (Norwegian: *Minner fra et tomt rom*): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pAf2we7acgE> (Accessed October 17, 2017). It is described and analysed in detail in Bergsland and Tiller (2013) and Bergsland (2016).

was removed, over twenty photographs from the recently abandoned hospital were posted along with the soundscape piece of Håkon. Even if these both types of expression got their aesthetical value through our active framing and mediation of parts or properties of the building, they nevertheless opened up for viewing the demolition process *in itself* as an integral part of the project and the performance.

This perspective was highly emphasized when the tearing down of the concrete structures began. The spectacle this generated almost invited itself into the project. Giant concrete chewing machines ate their way through the building, surrounded by clouds of dust and piles of debris, suggesting a mythological scene with atrocious dragons causing mayhem and destruction. Already after a few days of operation, we had published several photos of these machines in action, some of these color manipulated, to amplify the drama and mythological flavor (see *figure 2a*). A few weeks later the dragon-like appearance of the demolition machine had given the motif for the logo of the project (see *figure 2b*). The logo was put up on posters on the fences of the demolition site and printed on small flyers and handed out to people all over the city along with the web address of the memory blog. And with or without our help, the demolition process turned into a performance inextricably linked to and framed by the TBPM project, with many people stopping daily to watch the spectacle. Eventually, with the performance basically taking place right next to the semi-demolished building and piles of debris, and with one of the machines having a part in the performance, chewing off a bite of concrete in one of the final scenes, the aesthetical staging of the demolition process was complete. Thereby, the project's interplay between the physical and the virtual buildings was certainly a case of intermediality, playing out processes related to death and decay on one side, and life and creation on the other, against each other.

Considering how the TBPM project changed the conception of The Tower Block in the community through participation and aestheticization, it might be worth to briefly relate this to relevant theoretical discourses on politics and participatory art. In cultural geography, in which relationships between people and places are a central topic, there has been an interest in how commemoration to create or reinforce collective memories that support and strengthen themselves, e.g. through playing

on national identity (Osborne 2001, 8-9). Notably, governing elites often use monument- and museum-related activities to make or preserve historically inflicted urban landscapes “as a way to bolster a particular political order, and as a means to capital accumulation” (Hoelscher and Alderman 2004, 350). In such cases, sites and rituals of commemoration are often freighted with underlying political issues. In our case, however, the project seemed more to challenge than to support existing economic and political structures. After all, our project implied that ordinary citizens, their experiences and memories were given a say when demolishing a building – not only bureaucrats, economists and entrepreneurs.

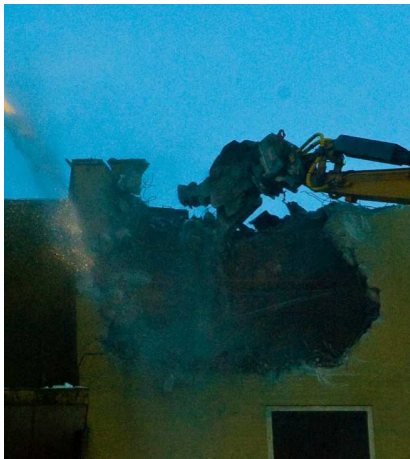


Fig. 2a. Demolition machine in action

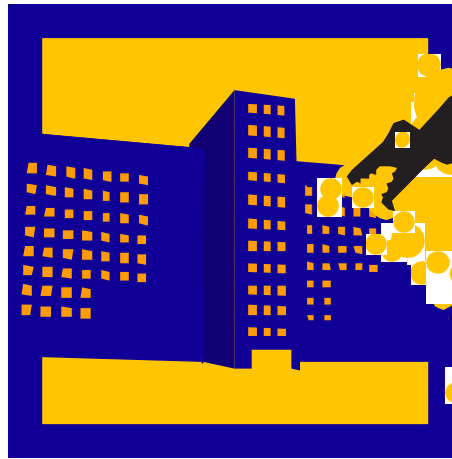


Fig. 2b. The Tower Block – Post Mortem logo

Taking this perspective of political opposition into consideration, Claire Bishop’s (2012) work on participatory art seems particularly relevant, presenting theories about a set of practices that clearly would embrace our project in that it “is often at pains to emphasize process over a definitive image, concept or object. It tends to value what is invisible: a group dynamic, a social situation, a change of energy, a raised consciousness” (6). In Bishop’s view, participation in art “rehumanizes a society rendered numb and fragmented by the repressive instrumentality of capitalist production” and also indicates a critical distance towards the neoliberal world order (11-12). Bishop, in turn, draws partly on Rancière, who sees aesthetics as confluent with politics, since both deals



with both a sharing and a dividing of how the world is experienced and made sense of – Rancière’s famous notion of *partage du sensible* (distributing/dividing the sensible) captures this duality: “The distribution of the sensible reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed” (Rancière 2004, 8). In our case, changing the way The Tower Block was conceived involved a certain way of experiencing or sensing that was distributed or shared in a community, and therefore was both political and aesthetical at the same time. While Bishop acknowledges that the weakness of this view is that all art, both progressive and reactionary, can be political, the coupling between aesthetics and politics seems to be appropriate for how we thought about and co-performed *participation* in the TBPM project.

As we have seen, the memory blog was from the beginning a part of the TBPM as participatory art and performance through transformation of meaning, aestheticization and politicization. Simultaneously, the memory blog produced material that subsequently could be selected, adapted and transformed into something that could be incorporated into the project’s performance event, which we now want to address in the remainder of this article.

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After five months of collecting memories on the blog, the TBPM performance event took place in front of and amidst the remnants of the then partly demolished Tower Block on January 30, 2011. Approximately 1000 spectators viewed the forty-five minute long event involving a multitude of media and elements: 5 non-actors performing their own memories, a small acoustic band, a group of dancers dressed in surgeon clothing and head lights, one female singer, one sign language performer/translator, two powerful projectors showing images and videos, one of them on the remaining façade of The Tower Block, a multi-channel sound system playing back evocative sound compositions, real-time ambiences and sound effects, a powerful lighting system bathing the ruins in blue and orange, and finally, a monstrously big demolition machine in operation (see *figure 3*). Through the links with the previous

memory gathering process on the project's web site and the concrete skeleton being the only material remnant of the Tower Block at the time, the performance can be located close to many of the conceptual nodes that according to Bay-Cheng and colleagues are central in the discourse on intermediality: dynamic conceptions of spatiality and temporality; interchanges between the actual and the virtual using presentations and re-presentations with different degrees of presence, transparency and hypermediacy (Bolter and Grusin 2000); and finally the expansion of the already established interactive relationship with the audience through new feedback loops (Bay-Cheng, Kattenbelt and Lavender 2012, 185-6). Furthermore, some of the central metaphors of the performance highlight the interplay of different media and the media-specific re-shaping of these, so that we might label them *mediaphors*, with Pluta's term (Pluta 2010, 192). We will now look into these aspects in turn.

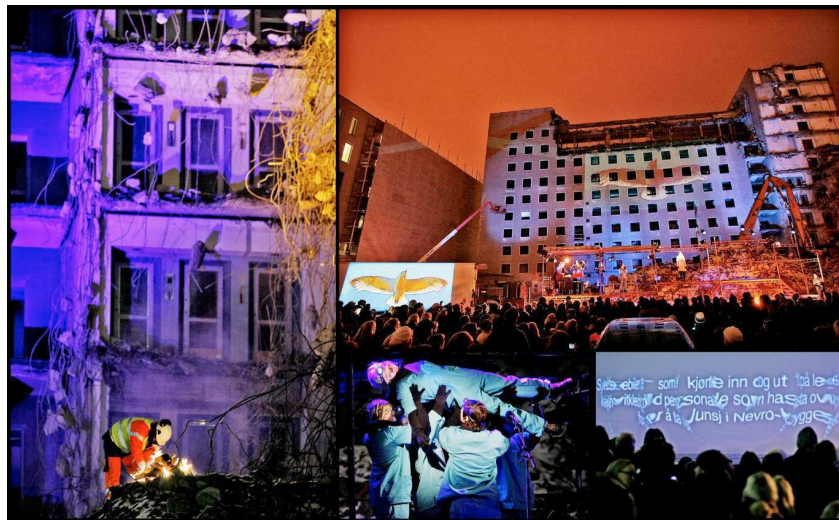


Fig. 3. Montage from The Tower Block – Post Mortem performance

### Intermediality, Spatiality and Temporality

In this section, we would like to take a look at how many of the elements of the performance engaged in intermedial relationships particularly

playing on space and time, and discuss how this sets some of the same processes into play as remembrance and memorization, as discussed above.

In many ways, time and space are two central underlying themes in the TBPM performance, both explicitly and implicitly. While the materially as well as the experientially and socially defined Tower Block constituted a *spatial* focus point around which the performance event circled, the preceding memory gathering phase of the project discussed above, along with its subtitle “minneforestilling” (memory performance), clearly pointed toward the past and the passing of *time*. By closing off the performance with an especially composed hymn using the well-known biblical text *A Time for Everything* (Ecclesiastes 3), repeating the word “time” 15 times, the concept was explicitly thematized and emphasized in the performance.

The performance event also combined and superimposed several layers of time: First of all, certain elements were non-representational and very much belonged to the *here and now* of the performance, in particular the acoustic band with the singer, the sign language performer, the demolition machine and the five performers reading their own memories aloud in front of the audience. Secondly, the memory-gathering phase preceding the performance and constituting an implicit part of it, made up a layer of a relatively immediate past. This layer was also represented by the narrators’ temporal point-of-view in the textually represented and read memories (projected on the Tower Block wall and on the side wall of a big truck at the site). Thirdly, the *content* of the memories, along with the seemingly more objective pasts represented by photos, video and sound from The Tower Block’s days as functional hospital, represented a multitude of different pasts, more or less precisely defined in time, but all clearly further removed from the present than the second layer. Note how media can conflate temporalities or accentuate them through the play with different framings – e.g. in the black and white images and the narrow band voices that both signal age and temporal distance.

At the same time, these layers of time coalesced and were actualized by the physical presence of the remaining parts of The Tower Block: It was actually *here* that all this happened. Michael Mayerfeld Bell (1997) calls the sense of presence of who and what is no longer

physically (t)here the *ghosts of place*, and sees them as a ubiquitous aspect of the phenomenology of place (813). These ghosts and the time layers they represent thereby constitute a parallel to and simultaneously a temporal transposition of Walter Benjamin's "prism of places" into a "prism of time-places" (Benjamin, cited in Bay-Cheng et al. 92). Here, the concept of place is also shown to be complicated, in that one place, in our case one building, is really shown to be a multitude of places, with different scales and different extensions – from the smallest corner of a room to the whole hospital area – allowing for different perspectives (inside/outside) and even trajectories – since some of the memories involve movement.

The prismatic character of the performance was particularly highlighted by the differently mediated representations of time-place. For instance, historical pictures of the Tower Block when newly built were projected onto the façade of the now gutted building, giving an almost uncanny feeling of dressing up a corpse in children's garbs. At the same time, one could hear the amplified voice of Dagfinn Gilde, appearing to come from the building itself, so that one almost started to look for his *Gestalt* in the ruins of the Block while he told the story of when he was one of the very first patients in the hospital. All this was accompanied by the ticking of several clocks at different speeds and with different musical pitches. This section of the performance, along with several others of a similar kind, was carried primarily by pre-produced audio-visual material, with only the modest stage presence of the sign language performer. These sections were deliberately made relatively sparse and open so that the audience could have generous amounts of time and room to sense, imagine and reflect around what they saw and heard. For instance, any verbal elements in the images or sound compositions were presented at a very slow pace and accompanied by minimal amounts of new material, to create expressions with relatively low information density. Thus, we hoped to evoke the audience's own memories, which would then mingle with their sensations and experiences (see *figure 4*). Reports from audience members and reviews from the local paper informed us that this actually happened: "there was a buzz around from people having worked there for 30 years, had their hip operated there, lost [their] mother there" (Adresseavisen January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2011).

Hence, the different layers of time would constantly and playfully comment and feedback on each other in an intermedial exchange, while at the same time blurring the boundaries between the individual and the prismatically projected collective memory.

This glimpse of the temporal *beginning* of the building also implicitly accentuated its *ending* – clearly present as the structure's immediate past and future through the partially demolished concrete skeleton under constant threat of the demolition machine. Thus, the performance challenged the brutalist edifice's sense of permanence with the ephemerality of memories inverting in the process their temporal connotations. Here, it seemed the building would soon vanish while the memories lived on, both on the Internet site and in people's minds. This aspect was closely related to the ritualization that was a central dimension of the TBPM performance.

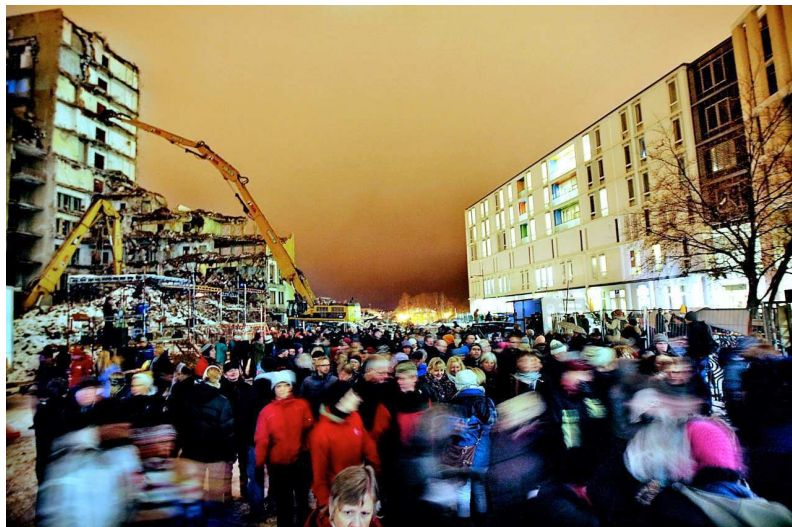


Fig. 4. View of audience and demolition machines in front of The Tower Block

### **Ritualization: Presence and Authenticity**

Implicit in establishing The Tower Block as an emotional landmark in Trondheim through the memory blog, was the need to demolish the

building in a dignified and respectful manner through a ritual that marked a good bye and permitted it to be put to rest through collective commemorative acts. The good bye and the putting to rest were acts rooted in a sense of great authenticity, which worked *through* and *in unison with*, if not against the hypermediated workings of both the memory blog and the performance event. On the one hand, the ritual was a corollary of the need to establish the emotional depth of the whole demolition process that the local media covered only from a distance (e.g. there was a time-lapse camera telescoping the progress of the demolition process). On the other hand, the ritualistic aspects of the performance created an acute sense of presence with universal strands, through the active participants' solemn entrance to the site with torches and accompanying brass band, the fire in the ruins, the concluding hymn, the memory readers, and the demolition machine that took a few "bites" of the building structure at the end as a parallel to the symbolic throwing of dirt on the funeral casket. This convoluted sense of presence shared across the divide of time invited comparison with the distance implied in the projections and the sound compositions, whose clearly constructed character resulted in a low degree of medial transparency. For instance, the gapingly empty windows bled through the projections on the façade and were very hard to ignore. In contrast to the amplified voices of the memory readers, the voices heard in some of the sound compositions were also clearly processed, thus accentuating their recorded and mediated nature.

Staging the performance as a kind of ritualistic goodbye to The Tower Block established a special kind of *authentic* relationship with the audience. Firstly, the ritual in many ways became something that was performed *on behalf of* the region's citizens, meaning that the performance served a need or a function for them, namely that of *shutting down*, *making complete* and marking a *transformation*, functions often present in funeral rituals. In a sense, the audience's role could be compared to that of the congregation at a funeral; they were participants, but with no other obligations than to be present, and to co-feel and co-memorate. Secondly, the *as if* characters, the representations normally present in the staging of plays, were almost completely lacking in our case, perhaps with the notable exception of the dancers dressed up in surgeons'

clothes. The memory readers were there as themselves, performing their own memories. They wore outdoor winter clothing just as the rest of the audience, and in that way showed that they were really their equals, even if they were more active.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, the event's site-specific character also underlined the authenticity of the performance event, as it took place at this demolition site and not in a theatre, where the fixed institutional conventions would not be activated as strongly as in a theatre auditorium. Admittedly, there is a segregation between the active performers and the passive audience, but this is much less marked than in a conventional theatre performance.

### **Intermedial Metaphors**

In the process of working out the TBPM project, the project team consisting of the dramaturge/director, a composer, two visual artists, a lighting designer, a priest, a researcher and an architect explored different concepts and guiding metaphors. One of the metaphors that became central was the *seagull*. In the earliest phases of the project we were made aware of how the seagull had special significations for the hospital, both as a part of its immediate natural environment and as a part of the hospital's interior aesthetic, each triggering opposite connotations. As for the latter, there were paintings of seagulls on many of the walls around the building, and even one in a subterranean tunnel beneath The Tower Block depicting a group of seagulls at sea. Judging by the way they were depicted and the context in which they were placed, the seagulls symbolized the freedom of flight, nature and beauty, often being a component a "snug" aesthetics, accompanied by artifacts signaling coziness, comfort and the relaxed social settings that had emerged at the hospital perhaps as a reaction to its cold and hard brutalist architecture and functionalist indoor environments. On the other hand, the seagulls represented the actuality of natural surroundings that were sometimes

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<sup>16</sup> Arntzen 2016 discuss the performance and calls this phenomenon a form of *new authenticity*.

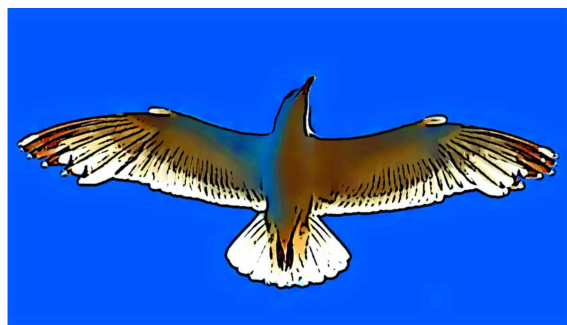
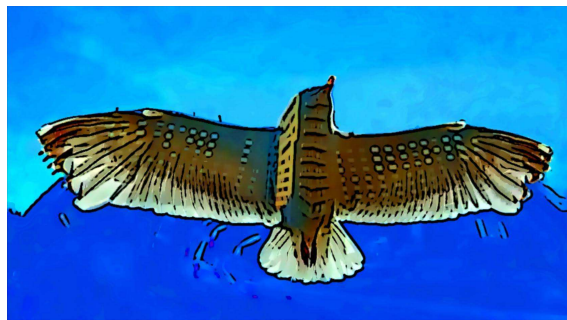
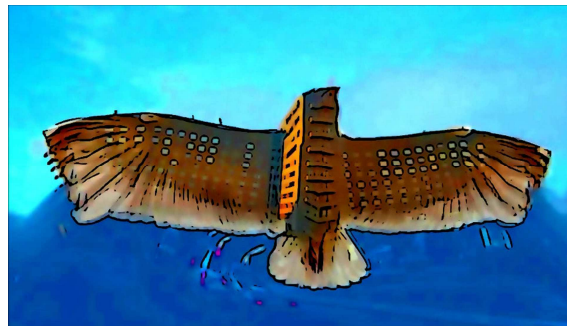
harsh and relentless. For instance, we noticed how the health personnel on the top floors were highly conscious of the dangers of leaving food on the roof of the hospital, since there was a small seagull colony hatching there during the summer months. The birds could definitely interfere with and cause problems for the different human doings at the hospital, by stealing food, making an unbearable noise or becoming aggressive to protect their offspring. E.g. we learned through several of the memories on the blog that the seagulls' constant signaling calls, especially when they were protecting their small ones, were experienced as exhausting and noisy by recovering patients.

The seagulls' highly protective behavior towards their young ones created a metonymical link to another active metaphor of the hospital world, that of white, winged creatures standing for nurturing and care. To be more precise, the health personnel at the hospital, and maybe the nurses in their white coats in particular, were often being described as nursing and caring "angels" in many of the entries on the memory blog. The link between these caring, winged creatures was even lifted to a meta-level when we realized that The Tower Block had the shape of a seagull, with one central "body" and two "wings", thus making the shape of the building itself into a many faceted metaphor embracing everything from the heartfelt care to a humane aesthetics to soften a harsh and efficient environment, as well the material "body" of the hospital, with its own "nature", idiosyncrasies, and problems.

The strongest expressions of this metaphor in the performance event were certainly the visual morphs projected onto the façade of The Tower Block at the beginning and end. The first one showed a seagull with its wings spread out gradually turning into The Tower Block, whereas the second one showed the morph in reverse (see *figure 5*). The morph therefore metonymically linked the seagull to The Tower Block through processes of gradual transformation, highlighting both the material aspect of the metaphor (the "body") and the more symbolic ones ("flight", "freedom", "nature"). In this particular context, where a ritual marking the transitoriness of the building was taking place, and especially at the last transformation from Tower Block to seagull, the metaphor's angelical strains came into play. At that point, when the image of the "living" building projected onto the "dying" actual one



gradually took the shape of a bird in flight, it was hard not to read religious connotations into it – and at least take the image as an expression of a transition from the material to the immaterial. It could for instance be taken as a metaphorical expression of the (immaterial) memories' continuing existence while the building disappeared. This interpretation was also supported by the poster for the event showing a bunch of polaroid pictures with faces on them flying out from The Tower Block on white wings. While the winged creatures allude perhaps more to the individuals behind the many memories than to the seagulls, the analogy between these two metaphorical expressions and the way they link the material building with something immaterial was nevertheless present. The seagulls were also present in other parts of the performance, as in sound bites and more occasional images, although the less pregnant presentation of these occurrences made their metaphorical force weaker. For instance, throughout the performance one could hear squeaking seagulls seemingly flying around the building, and the realism of these sounds could easily lead one to mistaking them for real seagulls. When mixed with other sounds, many of them recognizable hospital sounds, they created a set of metaphorical stubs that would perhaps highlight the "nature" and "snug" aesthetics of the painted seagulls more than the care and angelical aspects of the nurses. Nevertheless, these sounds linked up to the larger metaphorical thread running through the project, as well as to the concrete manifestations of seagulls present in the building, and to the virtual manifestations on the memory blog in the form of memories about seagulls. Together they created a rich metaphoric set transferring meaning between different media, between actuality and virtuality, and between different phases of the TBPM project so that when a commemoration stone later was put down on Olav Kyrre's Square, the site where The Tower Block once stood, the stone depicted a Tower Block with wings like a seagull.



*Fig. 5.* Visual morphs from Tower Block to seagull

## Conclusions

Based on the networked interactive engagement of a broad and largely non-theatre audience the TBPM project worked with interactions between individual memories and collective notions of place, and showed how these could be applied in a performance using what we have called *a dramaturgy of vulnerability*. The use of several different media with different degrees of presence/immediacy, the complex layering of spatiality and temporality, the interplay between actuality and virtuality, and the use of over-arching metaphors across media, highlighted the *intermediality* of the performance. With Kattenbelt's (2008) definition of *intermediality* in mind – “those co-relations between different media that result in a redefinition of the media that are influencing each other, which in turn leads to a fresh perception” (25) – we proposed that the *intermediality* in TBPM lets the audience and the actual world transcend the performance in addition to the different media applied there. In our case, all these constantly comment and re-define each other, affecting experience, memories and how they view themselves and the place that was The Tower Block.

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