

The Future is Decided [?]: ‘Playing the game’ in the practice of Third Angel

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Abstract

Contemporary performance company Third Angel sustained 28 years in action and, as such an ‘octovigintennial’ company, are a prime case study for survival in the ever-precarious UK arts sector. In their 28th year they began developing a programme of work entitled *The Future is Decided*. This article consists of a piece of performative writing that draws upon the author’s own research as a researcher-in-residence, uniquely positioned to reflect upon Third Angel’s longevity in the sector, and the making of *The Future is Decided*. Through this performative text Third Angel’s own creative signature is applied: a performance methodology closer to ‘research-as-practice’ (than the traditionally held ‘practice-as-research’). Their work often includes the use of recurring imagery and either cyclical or continuous projects that leave questions unanswered. A tendency towards detective-like research is drawn parallel to their preference for game-playing as both a creative and performative methodology.

Game-playing in Third Angel’s performance practice is examined as a positive approach to reframing the inherent risk-taking and now ubiquitous ‘precarity’ in the everyday. In part, this is both a feature of their audience appeal, and simultaneously a survival technique employed throughout their own company lifeline. Furthermore, their many open-ended projects instead exercise their own ‘previval’ (or acts of pre-emptive or anticipatory survival): acts of futurity that, in part, manifest the longevity of performance projects, and thereby, the performance company’s own continuation. Applying wider research from healthcare, economics and game theory, metaphorical con-

cepts are herein drawn parallel to observations of Third Angel's practice. This explorative provocation invites its reader to reflect upon the ways in which Third Angel's working notions of longevity and futurity dialogue with their processes, offering reflections on procedure, prediction, longevity and fictioning in relation to the challenge their current project poses, asking: is the future already decided?

Read Before You Play

Sheffield-based contemporary performance company Third Angel [1995-2023] exemplify longevity in the UK's arts sector, particularly as they are among a proportionately small number of contemporary performance companies having exceeded the 25-year milestone, joining the 'quadracentennial' club alongside comparable companies like Stan's Cafe, Unlimited Theatre and Gob Squad.

The demands on makers of small-scale theatre in the UK are overwhelming: companies must negotiate first, the challenge of survival in a climate marked by reliance on government subsidy and shifting socioeconomics; second, the impermanence of their medium: haunted by its ever-imminent 'disappearance'. These challenges, especially for smaller companies, demand the application of practices of resilience; for them, the future is most often uncertain.

As such, Third Angel are a prime case study for survival in the ever-precarious UK arts sector, as a small company that have consistently worked with external collaborators, extending their multivocal reach and impact beyond their apparent size. In their 28th year they began developing an artistic programme entitled *The Future is Decided*. My own work with the company has largely been focussed on the question of when-and-how longevity in collaborative arts practice is achievable. Despite arguments to the contrary (the 'old' should make way for the 'new'), I contend that longevity is a

good thing, as both an aspirational and optimal condition of continuance. Longevity, unlike 'survival' or 'resilience' doesn't just respond to immediate threats, but rather keeps one eye on the moving horizon.

I have spent three years as Third Angel's researcher-in-residence as part of a funded scholarship, working closely with their archive (a dusty lock-up in Sheffield's industrial quarter) and as a part-time fly-on-the-wall (at Third Angel HQ). I originally planned to reflect here on my observations of the making of *The Future is Decided*, ultimately questioning whether this title's statement is an invitation-to-challenge, or an unavoidable truth. However, in a fitting interruption to the project's own provocation, the 2022 Arts Council England (ACE) funding decisions for their National Portfolio (NPO) saw Third Angel's inclusion revoked. My response herein is instead to acknowledge the same spirit of creative risk-taking and adventure that has been key to Third Angel's success.

Having declared my scholarly interest, the main focus of this article is to explore Third Angel's particular brand of 'ludic' performance, and the game-playing tendencies that underpin their creative and research-centred methodology. This article itself becomes an extension of the company's own inclinations, as heavily informed by my adjacency to the company; I adopt a mode of game-like provocation inspired by the company's own generative principles. This article plays with the indeterminate space between research for performance and performance research. It is critically positioned within overlapping spheres of performance studies, game theory, and more broadly, socioeconomics. I draw wide-reaching links between the performativity of prediction in *The Future is Decided*, and the balance between longevity of practice and anticipated futures.

Longevity, as I have come to think of it, can be achieved through anticipatory acts embedded in practice, an ethos of futurity that shapes the creative present. I adopt a term from Coleman Nye who considers acts of

'previval', or pre-emptive survival, as acts that can change the course of the future (2012). In its simplest sense, a company's future plans (both in the present, and as they *have been* in the past) are integral to the shaping of their own longevity and legacy beyond. In terms of creative outputs, prediction *in* performance, or predictions performed, reveal a holistic methodological futurity behind Third Angel's longevity of practice.

Playing the Game

To, or by whom, is the future decided? As Cullen et al offer, 'the future is always in question, shaped by the reality of who has the power to dictate what will come to pass' (208). The future may be known to those with expert knowledge, but for the rest of us, the best we have is speculation and anticipation.

Despite Third Angel's longevity, and the questions of futurity they characteristically explore, the hard realities of decision-making power are exemplified in the incompleteness of *The Future is Decided*, as the company have opted to cease activity with the withdrawal of their NPO subsidy.

Reflecting on their debut performance, durational part-show-part-installation *Testcard* [1995], Third Angel explained 'we knew we were at the start of [a] journey, but we didn't have a clue where we were going, or how long it was going to take to get there' (*Testcard*).

This article circles back, imagining a set of rules for a longevity of artistic practice, drawn from my personal research. In this text, I use the term 'research' as 're-search'; a looking-again that implies a continual and cyclical process of finding, learning and reflection (Bauer et al. 167). As I apply it, to re-search may also be to look again at the anticipated future, to make adjustments based on present evidence, that might come to influence future outcomes, a form of previval.

Third Angel's practice, to which I incorporate a related analogy proposed by Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean (19), engages with the circular, oscillatory nature of the research-practice relationship (Fellman).

Rule Zero: Have Fun

The sections that follow are partly discrete, and partly interconnected. Some are associative, tangential, and digressional: a formal representation of the incompleteness of my own research, and an attempt to encapsulate my own sense of the company's practice. In their own words, 'sometimes we go back along a [creative] strand to the last junction and go off', in a different direction (in Stanier 118).

Depending on the game, a general agreed position is that Rule Zero is the prerequisite that over-rules all else. This may mean that the person with most authority, such as The Banker in Monopoly, has final say. It may also mean that collective decisions should be made to 'house rule' situations the rulebook doesn't quite explain. Rule Zero should protect the integrity of the game. Any reinterpretation of the 'rules' to follow is actively encouraged.

The 'rules' were written in their published order, though they are fragmentary in nature and variously interconnect, overlap and oscillate.

Rule Zero upholds the (modernist) perspective that 'the future appears as a rather vast canvas onto which to project [...] the full gamut of rational and poetic talents' (Wark 21) whilst also acknowledging that the most democratic systems, such as the collaborating theatre company, exist in relation to rules, economic contexts, audience preferences, funding criteria, and ultimately artistic direction or dramaturgical craft. For long-lasting companies like Third Angel, the aim is to be creative, yet to do so within administrative and organisational bounds or parameters.

Rule Zero in this article underpins its methodology, to respect dreams of the future, as possibilities and probabilities.

Rule One: The Future is Anywhere

'Anywhere Theatre', is Third Angel's self-termed ethos for a body of work that generates performance out of game systems, and that can be instigated anywhere (an initial idea was to produce a performance-game-in-a-box for a children's hospital, for instance). Anywhere Theatre is the concept that drives the development of *The Future Is Decided* programme, and at its heart, exposes the relationship between games and performance in Third Angel's oeuvre, embedding what game theorist Graeme Kirkpatrick calls 'ludic form' in their performance-making methodology (2018). Ludic form in gameplaying is located between a rules-mediated 'ludic structure' and a 'distinctive kind of storytelling', a term to describe the intermeshing of reality and representation, simultaneously 'pinned by power'. Ludic form, Kirkpatrick proposes, parses the attraction and appeal of mediated gameplaying into the dramaturgical infrastructure (327).

This *modus operandi* is also highlighted in Third Angel's open and active approach to mentoring and education, which perpetuates knowledge dissemination, as the 'rules of the game' are passed on. Whilst they are not unique in this, their contribution to the future of the sector at large far outweighs their apparent size (99 programme-based mentees, 20+ professional mentees, and youth theatre classes running for 7 years). I suggest that game-playing in performance contexts (particularly in collaborative and participatory settings) is also thereby pedagogical and is consequently a practice of legacy-making; the influence of the 'game' expands with each generation of newly inducted players.

Through Anywhere Theatre's proposal, the imagined world of art co-exists with the everyday. It is through the use of game-as-performance, or ludic form, that this is made possible. Third Angel explain:

We use gaming mechanics in a lot of our devising processes.

[...] Several shows are structured around the turn-taking mechanics of game play, too, such as *Story Map* [2010], *Inspiration Exchange* [2010] and *Homo Ludens* [2009]. (*The Distraction Agents Inspirations*)

Homo Ludens in particular was described by the company as ‘a piece of work that is at once a game and a performance’ (*Problem Solving*). Centrally, the audience navigated a human-sized gameboard, led by rolls of the dice. In a blog post from March 2009, titled ‘Playful Humans’, Third Angel explain:

Our process so far has involved the usual tools of show and tell [...] story telling, playing and deconstructing games, research (inventions and futurology) and writing up big lists. (*Playful Humans*)

Anywhere Theatre, as a term that encapsulates an array of imagined yet-to-be-made projects, makes evident Third Angel’s ludic sensibility, as that which is a distinct form of anticipatory legacy-making; their playful creativity plans for—and looks to—the future. The ethos of *Homo Ludens* in 2009 has clear echoes in 2023’s Anywhere Theatre.

Rule Two: Be Evergreen

By 2040, the number of people aged 50 and over is expected to increase 21% (Scott, *Economics of Longevity*)

In Economics, ‘derivatives’ is a term used to illuminate what is often referred to as the ‘performativity [...] of the market’ (Martin 67). It is through this analogy that I draw a thread between the precarity and performativity of both the arts and the socio-economic environment in which it must operate. Risk can bind groups of artists together and give value to risk-taking creativity, appraising the artistic choices in the studio, long before the economic

benefits are felt (as tickets are sold and spectators invited in). Game-playing and devised experimentation bridges both artistic and (eventual) economic value.

New 'financial instruments proliferate' out of risk, such as 'weather derivatives that make climate chaos itself profitable'. (Miéville 37). The 'Silver Economy' taps into the market for an increasing ageing population, profiting from products and services such as care homes, late-age pharmaceuticals, and home stairlifts. (*Burgeoning Silver Economy*)

Professor Andrew Scott is an economist who refers to a concept called the 'Longevity Dividend'. To paraphrase the logic of the 'dividend': longer working lives and more product spending are two ways to enhance the economy as a result of longer life expectancies. (Scott, 'Three-Dimensional Dividend')

Scott coined an alternative 'Evergreen Economy': the market for younger people that may value later life more than their predecessors, as the probability of their time alive is extended (such as preventative medicines and procedures, training courses for future career changes, and pension plans) (*The Economics of Longevity*).

Rachael Walton, one half of Third Angel's directorial team, uses the term 'evergreen' to describe shows that seem 'timeless', that outlive their original intentions and remain vital and relevant through time.

In the case of theatre and performance, moves toward online or hybrid works pre-empt the possibility of, say, future pandemic lockdowns, a pre-visual instinct, learning from the very recent past.

Embedding processes of research and self-reflection in work can also be an act of pre-visual. Third Angel often present their research as performance, implement facts, lists and quotes, allowing the limits of their knowledge to remain incomplete, with questions that remain unanswered. Furthermore, I recognise a fertilisation of their research with-and-through other disciplines,

like science and technology; this diversification, too, protects the work by elevating the 'art', crossing into a citational legacy-building of academic discourse (Brown).

In a short documentary about *Homo Ludens*, collaborator Lucy Ellinson explains how 'playing human' involves 'creative adventures', undertaken throughout people's 'lifetimes and beyond', 'through generations'. She cites the playful nature of 'ingenuity' and human capacity for 'inventions' (*artmetropol*). If, as Ellinson proposes, the playful nature of humanity generates invention, the rule-based function of game-playing acts as a fulcrum between art and science, between knowledge and the imaginary, and between risk and reward.

Conjoining the ludic form with their research-centred approach, Third Angel's pipeline project, *The Future Is Decided*, was the first (longer-term) planned contribution under the Anywhere Theatre banner. In this project, they aimed to examine the provocation: is the future, in fact, already decided? New capitalist instruments create value out of the future, making the future increasingly, and precariously, balanced upon the derivative decisions in the present.

Diedrich Diederichsen suggests that 'to dream is to bargain' (63).

I propose that ludic form reframes Third Angel's artistic enquiry (neither defined by the experts, nor fixed by the statement), which I playfully adopt: *can* the future be decided?

Rule Three: Ask the Experts

According to Swiss thinktank 'W.I.R.E' (Web for Interdisciplinary Research and Expertise) 1000 years from now, due to rapid language evolution, no words used in the present day will have survived.

The Arecibo message, sent into space in 1974, could reach its

extra-terrestrial target 25,000 years from now.

A response could be received in 50,000 years at the earliest.

(Future Is Ours 115)

By which time human language will have evolved 50x over.

Facts are ever-present in Third Angel's repertoire, from telling facts and stories about past classmates in research-performance *Class of '76* [2000-10], relating to space travel in performance-lecture *600 People* [2013-23], representing the vastness and complexity of globalisation in story-collage *What I Heard About the World* [2010-15], interview research about childbirth for verbatim-inspired *Partus* [2016], to embellish the mundanity of co-habiting relationships in *Presumption* [2006]; all of which engage with questions of futurity. Facts, when furnished with the imagination, can help anticipate the future.

Can the future ever be decided? Or at least pre-determined? The research and development process for *The Future is Decided* involved interviewing experts, to uncover any undisputable truths about the future, in their subject niches. I was present for one such interview, with astrophysicist Simon Goodwin. Whilst he didn't have any guarantees to impart, he was able to say to a certain degree of confidence that *there is a very high probability that alien life did-or-will exist, but as space and time are so vast the probability of us ever coinciding is miniscule. Even if we do encounter alien life, we may not recognise it by our own terms. The fact that human life exists at all, I paraphrase, is based on a similarly miniscule probability of the perfect set of conditions...* Yet, here we are.

In conversation, Goodwin also responded to the difference between his own approach to science and that of Third Angel's. I choose to interpret the two positions as the 'arty-science' versus the 'hard science'. Novelist Jane Goodall identifies how sometimes these seemingly oppositional positions elide, 'a kind of knowledge-based dreaming can take over and researched

elements start to lead the way', as facts also inspire the imagination (204). Is this also the line games tread, between imagination and probability? Rules-based dreaming?

Rule Four: Roll the Dice

On a roll of a dice the chance of a 6 is 16.7%, or 1/6.

Roll two dice and the chance of getting a 6 is 30.5%, **slightly less than** 2/6.

In a work-in-progress project, Third Angel's other co-artistic director Alex Kelly, in collaboration with filmmaker Chris Hall, charted the early development of an unmade short film titled *A Man Amid The Wreckage* [2008]. Part of the text draft reads:

"God does play dice
[...]
and I suspect that he cheats."
(Kelly and Hall)

Rule Five: Expect the Unexpected

I was recently looking through an ACE document from 2018 in which arts organisations voted 'natural disaster' as only 12% 'risky' on a scale of 'level-of-risk-to-the-sector', compared to 'financial risk' at 90%... Even back then when words like 'resilience' and 'sustainability' were already prevalent (Woodley et al. 16).

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, Third Angel were preparing for the

tour of *The Department of Distractions* [2018-21], which debuted in February 2018. Third Angel described the show as 'a conspiracy theory documentary-exposé detective story for the 21st century that asks: What aren't you looking at?' (*The Department of Distractions*). Its antagonists, The Department, are a 'clandestine organisation whose job it is to plant the seeds of stories out in the world'; drawing attention to the everyday distractions we encounter and challenge their coincidental nature (*The Department of Distractions*, 82). Third Angel explain:

As we spent some time developing this idea in 2016, it occurred to us that we had been tracking the work of The Department for years. Several of our enduring interests were arguably their work: urban legends, conspiracy theories, telephone boxes, [...] clues left in the street or buried in maps or letter pages or puzzles... (84)

The Department represent a fiction closely adjacent to the everyday world—claiming the credit for the ongoing distraction of, for instance, the Royal Family or the introduction of the Vegan Sausage Roll—an unreal organisation made real by virtue of their existence at a conceptual level (a sort of theatre-as-theology) (18). Artist-creator Mariana Valencia reminds that the Greek etymology of *fantasy* is 'to make visible'. By articulating a dream, its possibility runs adjacent to other potential futures: 'I often make lists of things I might never do'(215).

The Department's design is not to suspend disbelief as one might encounter on a naturalistic stage, not mimicking the real, but instead asking 'what if?'.

Rule Six: Stay Ahead of the Curve

Making last-minute changes to football score predictions in-

crease the probability of losing the bet (Singleton et al.).

In *The Department of Distractions* there is a fictional character, the Professor of Beauty and Truth, who is found (to the surprise of other characters) to be based in the Centre for Mathematics.

Much like the difference between the imaginative aspect of science, and the fact-driven 'hard' science, I relish the edge of my own knowledge, the point at which I cannot fully comprehend the statistics and have to employ imaginative approximations to complete the picture. The story behind the data, or its implications, becomes the crux. Graphs and formulas can be practices of pattern-making; as David McCandless proposes, 'information is beautiful' (2012).

Theorist Aubrey de Grey has proposed a (controversial) notional situation called 'longevity escape velocity'. This hypothetical occurrence is achievable if life expectancy improves at a faster rate than ageing (de Grey and Docksaï). For instance, if a person's life expectancy can be improved by *more than a year* for every year alive, it is theoretically possible to live forever. Mapping this onto a graph, showing 'life expectancy' versus 'natural ageing', the result of de Grey's optimal condition returns an upward-sweeping curve. 'Longevity escape velocity' therefore supposes that an optimum state of longevity is that in which longevity no longer exists, that its relation to the fatal 'end' is severed; if we could remove all threats (such as ageing in the case of gerontology) then we would have escaped the need to think of longevity at all. The future (for human life at least) could become a little less precarious.

Transposing this analogy to the activity of performance companies, to stay truly 'ahead of the curve' would require some form of 'arc-ing algorithm' that could combine factors into a single value of optimisation (Breiman). To combine economic value, with artistic values.

To predict, to a certain degree of accuracy, the potential outcomes of funding rounds.

To predict trends in audience behaviour.

To anticipate future crises.

Rule Seven: Respect Rule Zero

1 Million years from now, all glass (created to date) will have completely degraded. (W.I.R.E, Future Is Ours 115)

In March 2020, Third Angel held a crisis meeting. The planned tour of *The Department of Distractions* was cancelled as the pandemic closed theatre doors, causing companies and audiences alike to experiment with alternative formats. Third Angel had already been working on Anywhere Theatre, to which the pandemic prompted their first response; they opted to create 'a companion piece', a play-by-mail and 'virtual experience with real world challenges' to 'be enjoyed from home: part puzzle, part film, part game, part theatre, part real life' (*The Distraction Agents Inspirations*). The project was titled *The Distraction Agents* [2021-23].

This performance-game was self-led: a game package arrived through the letterbox. Third Angel provided pre-recorded video, through which actors gave the game's instructions, arriving via email, across a period of one week. The pack included a map-based treasure-hunt, a choose-your-adventure story, and observational memory tasks.

Upon opening the first envelope in the pack a player's handbook is revealed.

This book prompts its reader to enter a role as a budding member of The Department. The first exercise involves pictures and numbers for phone boxes. The player-reader must work out the phone box locations, using the area codes, or conversely, by phoning them.

The latter option is as if the player is performing a real-world version of Third Angel's early show *Hang Up*, a theatre piece in which the performers act out conversations with strangers in phone boxes...

Congratulations on completing your Induction. How have you done, and what does the future hold? (*Distraction Agents Game Correspondence*)

The 'Third Angel Phonebox' has longevity as a recurring image, marking a 'distinctively non-linear' digressive practice from *Hang Up* in 1999 to *Distraction Agents*, 22 years later. Kirkpatrick's study argues that there is 'a distinctive expansion of the space of representation' in ludic performance, in which 'ideas about space comport with the notion of a distinctively non-linear, expansive fictional space' (335-6). The legacy of *Hang Up* is transferred to the expansive fictional space connoted by the 'anywhere' of *Distraction Agents'* remote-play design.

Hannah Nicklin, a previous collaborator with the company, has echoed Third Angel's story-swapping performance game *Inspiration Exchange* [2010-23] in the format of her own *Games We Have Known and Loved* (Nicklin). Similarly, artist Raquel Castro performs *Turma de '95* [2019-], her own homage to Third Angel's *Class of '76* [2000-10]. Collaborator Gillian Lees performed *Tangent* [n.d.], acts of attempting to draw perfect circles, inspired by her collaboration on Third Angel's research-led *900 Billion Miles From Home* [2007-9] in which room-sized circles were drawn in talcum powder on the floor, using a rope-and-pulley system. These projects respect Rule Zero, taking inspiration from the formal structures and devising procedures of Third Angel's 'original' projects.

The connections between projects, in turn, reinforce the company's

own longevity, as a web-like supporting structure rather than a direct trajectory driving toward the future.

Rule Eight: The Future is Divided

1 Billion years from now, the Sun's luminosity will increase 10%, and the Earth's surface will reach 47C. All oceans will evaporate.

110 Trillion years from now, all stars will have died. (W.I.R.E, Future Is Ours 116-7)

Returning again to *A Man Amid The Wreckage*, a draft version of the prelude text reads:

According to all the best sources, primes are the building blocks of mathematics. The golden ratio appears to be an important building block in our universe - like a four by two lego brick - fundamental, ubiquitous, unavoidable.

It's the fibonacci sequence which gives us access to the golden ratio, which only has a minimal amount to do with primes...

[...]

So there are two sets of numbers that keep the architecture of the universe upright, those friendly with the primes and those friendly with the fibonacci's [sic].

[...]

Two sets.

Both infinite, but in different ways.

So, two different kinds of infinity.

(Kelly and Hall)

Rule Nine: ‘Longevity combines contradictory elements’

So this isn’t actually a rule, per se, but is ‘Hypothesis #2’ given by the W.I.R.E thinktank. They propose a series of ‘Paradoxes of Longevity’ (*Art of Longevity*). Parallel doxa, concepts pulling in different directions.

Annie Dorsen proposes an ‘algorithmic theatre’ that shifts the relationship between present tense and futurity in rules-based performance:

[...] the process of continuous live choosing amongst variables seems to call forth the future into the current moment; the choices made seem to arrive backwards, [...] the underlying rules of the program, the parameters of its functioning, evoke the past, where the real decisions have already been made[...]. This situation stages a paradoxical state of affairs [...] both closed and open, fundamentally pre-determined and simultaneously full of potential. (2012)

Like playing a game to win, by playing to the most successful probabilities, whilst still trying to maximise enjoyment and fulfilment.

Like an experimentation with games that fluctuates from the pole of improvisation (*paidia*) to that of the rule-bound (*ludus*) (Jensen).

Like creating artistic work against a backdrop of competitive funding, quantitative evaluations, and contractual obligations.

Paradoxes are not impossible to overcome, if parallel doxa are weaved together, as mutually supportive competitors, without which the rules of the game no longer serve a purpose.

Rule Ten: Look Again

Third Angel demonstrate how re-search can be playful, seeking the novel in the already known; The Department ask their audience to 'look again' at the world, the art inspired by the science, the stories inspired by the facts. The devising games employed by the company in the making of *Homo Ludens* and their wider oeuvre is indicative of this imaginative searching, of play as invention-oriented research.

Looking-again is not mimetic. Like postmodern performance (and surrealism that preceded it) 'the activation of the ludic principle, where theme and form converge' emancipates "tomorrow's player" from an endless desire for 100% repetition, which cannot ever be fully realised (as truly as the world spins) (Rapti and Parkinson 178).

Performance is a process of giving form to the conceptual, much as the 'discursive, logical' or 'scientific' give form to inquiries they address (Vaughan 169-70). In Johan Huizinga's 1944 sociological study *Homo Ludens*, he proposed that humankind 'plays this great processional order of existence in a sacred play', that through ritual, 'actualizes anew, or "recreates", the events represented and thus helps to maintain the cosmic order' (Huizinga 16).

As we play at nature, we perform science.

A perpetual motion between different registers of knowledge, knowledge-seeking and the imagined is, perhaps counterintuitively, an effective way to enhance longevity: oscillatory processes of 'evergreen' re-invention, re-search and re-vitalisation that loop around in order to propel forwards, staying 'ahead of the curve' by continually drawing out a spiral. As the curve of a lifeline overlays its past echo, a spiral turning over points recognisable from its last circumnavigation, those points are revitalised anew (Looser).

Third Angel describe returning to an old show, revisiting the characters and story six years apart: 'familiar', but 'different' (*On A Revival*).

The future may not yet be decided, though the anticipatory horizon-gazing that defines the 'playful human' demands present-day ethics of futurity. Like the derivatives in acts of performance-making that project the future value of an artwork, and the 'algorithmic theatre' whose rules underpin its apparent generative nature.

Preval is, in a sense, playful.

Huizinga believed withdrawing from play is worse than to cheat, as non-compliance reveals the fragility of the play-world, its precarity propped upon its rules and social contract; we must not rob game-play of its illusion (the root-word *illusio* literally means 'in-play') (Huizinga 11).

Building on Kirkpatrick's 'ludic form', the developing languages surrounding game theory are ripe for application in performance studies, to 'look again' at the realities both media come to reflect, and increasingly repositioning the liveness of the 'real-time' of the art event (game, theatre) as that which is a false present, in which the near-future may already be coded and rehearsed (Siu 54). However, the illusion of probability is that it is a fixed parameter. Probability helps explain uncertainties in the world, but changes with time and motion. The chance of an event's occurrence can increase with each failed attempt. The chance of rain reduces as a cloud shifts course.

In order to aim toward a longevity of creative practice, it is essential to 'play the game', balancing both the mediated landscape of sector funding and socioeconomics, whilst embracing the playful, ludic qualities of performance that dislocate illusory possibilities just outside of their inextricable survival in the present. Preval may demand a constant shifting of these anticipatory horizons, a respect for Rule Zero that keeps the game in full view. The future doesn't concern itself with probability, it is illusory, already in-play, it just requires that we continue to throw the dice.

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