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Editorial

> 'The moments of magic ... are to be fully realized as bits of wonderful *theatrical* illusion—which means it's OK if the wires show, and maybe it's good that they do, but the magic should at the same time be thoroughly amazing.'

Magic in the theatre often presents itself as a negotiation between the miraculous and the technological. Whereas special effects in film ideally enable audiences' complete absorption in fantasy, the interest in theatrical magic tends to be less about whether a seamless evocation of the impossible is achieved. It is much more about the friction between the often readily apparent craftsmanship that facilitates live performance and the imperative to nevertheless produce illusions that are fantastic enough to enable audiences to suspend their disbelief in the action unfolding on stage. Tony Kushner's playwright's notes for *Angels in America*, quoted above, exemplify this. *Angels in America*'s theatrical magic provided an initial point of inspiration for this edition of *Platform*, since magic, as manifested in the imposing figure of Kushner's Angel of America, is the play's fulcrum, binding together its narrative, stagecraft, and philosophical force.

Much like stage technology, story, and theory intersect in Kushner's Angel, this issue of *Platform* is interested in how magic— though often regarded as straightforwardly fantastical or merely frivolous—can serve as a point of focus for academic inquiry. The contributions to this issue use the material appearance of magic in live performance as a springboard to explore aspects of philosophy (Corrieri, Manuel), ideology (Young, Solakidi), faith (Bloomfield), and history (Wetzler). As such, they demonstrate how the tension between stagecraft and wonder that theatrical magic provokes can prompt much wider and more far-reaching questions that get to the heart of how performance operates both in the theatre and outside of it.

In the opening provocation, Augusto Corrieri asks what we mean by 'magic' and questions why theatre and performance studies,

despite having devoted considerable attention to other forms of popular entertainment, has seldom engaged with the work of magicians and illusionists. Corrieri argues that sleight-of-hand magic is fundamentally about the tension between the audience's awareness that what they are witnessing is a trick and the nevertheless inexplicable magic taking place right in front their eyes. As such, for Corrieri, magic is a kind of 'meta-theatre' that prompts philosophical reflection on the nature of perception.

Martin Young's article, 'Abnormal Personages and Substantial Lumps: Theatre's Dialectic of Fairy Magic and Human Work', reflects on nineteenth-century antitheatricality as manifested in reviews of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. For Young, theatrical magic—and the figure of the fairy in all her 'sequinned, gauzy glory' in particular—serves to explore an ideological tension inherent in bourgeois thought. While reviewers have generally regarded *Midsummer*'s ethereal characters and pastoral setting as unstageable, they effusively praised Samuel Phelps's 1853 production at Sadler's Wells. Praise was heaped on this production not only because it rendered the work of stagehands in producing the magic on stage all but invisible, but because it successfully used gaslight and green gauze to soften even the appearance of the fairies. Young argues that the critics' enthusiasm for the creation of 'insubstantial illusion' on stage points to an unacknowledged anxiety about the bodily work of both stagehands and performers in the industrialised capitalist society; paradoxically, theatrical magic reveals this anxiety precisely when it is most successful in masking its own connection to human work.

The next article takes this focus on the material conditions that enable the production of magic in performance one step further. Eleanor Bloomfield's 'Sacred Staging: Dramatic Magic in the Medieval Mass' considers how the deliberate, dramatic staging of the late medieval Mass shaped the congregation's, or audience's, experience of the miraculous. While medieval passion plays served to commemorate Christ's crucifixion, Bloomfield argues that the Mass used similar dramatic elements as the plays, but to more magical ends: the Mass was the literal renewal of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary, not its mere remembrance. For Bloomfield, the material elements of theatrical performance—the architectural playing spaces of medieval churches, their scenographic arrangements of light and space, and treatises like the *Lay Folks Mass Book*, which directed audience participation—should be seen as of central importance in enabling the magic of faith that was at the centre of the medieval Mass.

In Sylvia Solakidi's article, the theme of magic is explored through the alchemical transformation enacted in the dance piece *Drugs Kept Me Alive* by the controversial Belgian choreographer Jan Fabre.[1] Performed by Antony Rizzi, to whom it is dedicated, Fabre's piece is a meditation on the biomedical politics of HIV-infection as well as on Rizzi's experience of confronting his own HIV-positive status. Solakidi's analysis focuses on the material elements present on stage— table, bubbles, hat, and pills—that facilitate Rizzi's transformation from the despair of diagnosis into the artist-warrior he eventually becomes. Arguing that *Drugs Kept Me Alive* should be interpreted as a statement on problematic and exclusionary aspects of HIV biomedical politics, this article also draws on Solakidi's personal experience of working in an HIV laboratory and reflects on the ways in which *Drugs Kept Me Alive* changed her perspective on the virus.

Opening the creative pieces section, Pedro Manuel takes the reader on a journey to discover invisibility and where and how it appears. His poetic text, 'If I Return Will You Remember', guides us from phantasmagorical performances, pantomime, and the traditional Japanese puppet theatre of Bunraku all the way to the idea of an 'Invisible Theatre' which Manuel is yet to discover. His performative writing directs the reader's attention to nonmaterial and nonhuman

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1 As of September 2018, Fabre has been accused by twenty of his former performers of bullying, misogyny, and sexual harassment. The accusations remain under investigation at the time of writing. (see the open letter: (Former) employees and apprentices at Troubleyn).

things that we might otherwise fail to notice. Manuel's key image is a block of marble; just as light only becomes visible when it is reflected in something, Manuel posits that marble only truly shifts into the visible realm once it embodies the shape of a figure.

'Sieving Wax with Oil', an experimental piece of speculative non-fiction by Graydon Wetzler, engages with the invention of kerosene in the nineteenth century. Drawing together discourses of experimental biology, colloidal suspension, industrial synthetics, and anthropology, Wetzler suggests that kerosene is of particular value for a theoretical investigation of performance magic because its invention poses questions concerning the ontology of materials and prompts us to ask whether history itself might be considered a magical material.

This issue of *Platform* also includes two performance responses. Emma Chapman playfully engages with Lauren Barri Holstein's *Notorious* at Birmingham Repertory Theatre, while Clio Unger's response to *Jack and the Beanstalk*, performed at the Lyric Hammersmith, provides an outsider's view of British panto, as Unger looks at the genre's tradition from the perspective of a German native. In the book review section, Linford Butler reflects on *Culture, Democracy and the Right to Make Art: The British Community Arts Movement* (edited by Alison Jeffers and Gerri Moriarty), Karen Morash reviews *New Playwriting at Shakespeare's Globe* (by Vera Cantoni), and Jemima Hubberstey examines *Twenty-First Century Drama: What Happens Now* (edited by Siân Adiseshiah and Louise LePage).

We are deeply grateful to the Department of Drama, Theatre and Dance at Royal Holloway, University of London for its continued financial and practical support of *Platform*. Thank you also to *Platform*'s editorial board members for their contributions and enthusiasm as well as to Bloomsbury Methuen Drama and Palgrave Macmillan for providing us with review copies. We would like to express a special note of appreciation for the peer reviewers, from whose time and effort this issue has benefited enormously. A final word of thanks and admiration is due to the authors in this edition whose thought-provoking reflections

on magic in diverse cultural performance spaces have made this edition of *Platform* what we hope to be an illuminating intervention on the magic of theatre and performance.

Lisa Moravec and Julia Peetz, Editors

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Eleanor Bloomfield is currently completing her doctorate at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. Writing on modern revivals and reinventions of the York mystery play cycle, she is passionate about academia's role in facilitating the wider community's engagement with medieval drama. She is also planning a book about her PhD adventures.

Linford Butler is an AHRC-funded PhD candidate in Drama at the University of Manchester, UK. His doctoral research investigates the influence of punk do-it-yourself cultures upon small-scale contemporary theatre and live art practices since the turn of the millennium, and particularly the implicit and explicit politics of DIY ethos, approaches, and aesthetics as they have begun to manifest within theatre work.

Emma Meade Chapman is a second year PhD practice-as-research student in the Department of Drama, Theatre and Dance at Royal Holloway, University of London. The nature of her research is primarily corporeal identity politics and radical embodiments, intersecting feminist, queer, and post-human theory, with a focus on performance art, live art, and documentation. Emma's current research enquiries extend to the cyborg and the alien, as well as speculative film, fiction, and fashion.

Augusto Corrieri is an artist, writer, and magician. His work focuses on expanding notions of performance to include non-human ecologies and processes. His first book is called *In Place of a Show: What Happens Inside Theatres When Nothing Is Happening*. Using the pseudonym Vincent Gambini, he has made two magic shows for theatre contexts. He lectures in Theatre & Performance at the University of Sussex.

Jemima Hubberstey is a DPhil student at the University of Oxford, researching the connection between literature and landscape in the eighteenth century. She previously did an MSt in Literature and Arts at the University of Oxford, and her wider (eclectic) academic interests include early modern drama, gender studies, and the English country house.

Pedro Manuel (1980) is a Lisbon-born and Amsterdam-based theatre maker, tutor, and writer. His research interests range between material culture, object-oriented philosophies, post-colonialism, and spectrality studies. He has been interested in how presence and absence are represented in the continuum between perception, imagination, and memory: how does making-appear entail make-believe?

Karen Morash is an academic and writer who graduated from Goldsmiths with a PhD focusing on playwrights who engage with devising methodology. She is currently Lead Academic Tutor on the Rose Bruford BA in Theatre Studies, and is dramaturg and founding member of Head for Heights Theatre Company.

Sylvia Solakidi has a background in visual and performing arts. Her AHRC TECHNE-funded PhD in Performance Philosophy, written at the University of Surrey, elaborates on the concept of contemporaneity in durational performance. She also holds a BSc in Biology. A paper on Jan Fabre's visual art is in print in *Antennae Journal*.

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Graydon Wetzler (PhD, MFA) is currently a visiting faculty member in UC San Diego's Department of Visual Arts. His forthcoming publications span algorithmic theatre, biomedia, and intra-active architectures.

Martin Young is a doctoral candidate and Teaching Associate at Queen Mary, University of London, where his research focuses on labour and political economy in the theatre industry. He also works as a freelance lighting designer and technician at a range of London venues.

'What Is This…': Introducing Magic and Theatre

By Augusto Corrieri

> *'A magician is an actor playing the part of a magician.'*
> Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin, 1868[1]

Magic—think playing cards, wands, and coins that inexplicably transform, levitate and multiply—is a very particular theatrical activity. That is, if it even passes for theatre. Barring a handful of recent exceptions, magic has received no attention from theatre scholars, despite the fact that the expanded field of theatre and performance studies prides itself on embracing marginalia and semi-forgotten practices.[2] This omission may have a lot to do with magic itself, whose secretive and inward-looking social milieu is closed off to 'laymen' (as magicians are fond of describing outsiders). Tourists wandering inside the enchanted citadel of magic are likely to face an attitude of deep mistrust. Conjurors tend to behave as a closed sect whose main role is to carefully guard unfathomable secrets (really a series of principles and ingenious applications); they are often extremely fearful of any changes or disruptions to the art form, yet blissfully unaware of or untroubled by magic's near-total lack of cultural capital. Add to this an appalling

lack of social diversity (the magician is still overwhelmingly a white male figure), and it is no surprise that scholars, or anyone else for that matter, might be put off by magic. And so, despite a few successful TV shows, conjuring is disregarded as a trivial pastime or children's entertainment.

Theatre and performance studies scholars have recuperated and reframed other forms of popular, mass, or 'trash' entertainment, often following the guiding light of critical debates around representation, bodies, gender, sexuality, forms of labour, etc. Magic, however, is apparently a reach too far, even for scholars of marginalia. It seems there is something about magicians *pretending* to make objects vanish, *acting* as though they can manipulate the laws of space and time, that fails to garner any serious consideration. A magic performance can be defined as the creation of the illusion of impossibility, in a simple paradox whereby that which *cannot* happen is seen to occur in the here and now. However, as US magician David Blaine put it in a recent interview, 'people know there is no such thing as a magician, so therefore it's a man [sic] pretending to be a magician, which is cheating' (qtd. in Kaino, Glenn & Delgaudio 216). If the conjuror's performance is *not real*, why waste time analysing such a charade?

My suspicion is that conjuring is deemed undeserving of 'serious' or critical attention to the extent that the magician's *pretence* and *acting* (such as pretending to possess magical powers) cannot be taken seriously. A kind of anti-theatrical prejudice is at work, whereby the unreal is regarded as unworthy, echoing Plato's dismissal of the arts (paintings, plays) as mere deceptive imitations of reality. We might also understand this disavowal of magic by shifting the gaze inward, towards academic and non-academic theatre communities. Disavowal, as Freud would have it, rests on a curiously self-reflexive dynamic, whereby we come to disavow what in fact matters to us; by dismissing magic—as unreal as it might be—, are theatre scholars and practitioners not engaging in a 'specific mode of defense', a refusal to recognise 'the reality of a traumatic perception' (Freud 141)? In other words, is theatre so nervous about its own insubstantiality—its potential frivolity, its

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1   Houdin, Robert [1877] (2011), *Secrets of Conjuring and Magic, or How To Become A Wizard* (New York: Cambridge University press), p. 40.
2   The field of magic remains vastly understudied and misunderstood, particularly within theatre studies. However, a number of valuable academic cultural studies have emerged over the last decade or so. These include: During, Simon (2004), *Modern Enchantments: The Cultural Power of Secular Magic* (Cambridge US: Harvard University Press); Mangan, Michael (2007), *Performing Dark Arts: A Cultural History of Conjuring* (Bristol: Intellect); Coppa, Hass & Peck eds. (2008), *Performing Magic on The Western Stage: From The Eighteenth Century to The Present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave); Goto-Jones, Chris (2016), *Conjuring Asia: Magic, Orientalism and The Making of the Modern World* (St Ives: Cambridge University press). On the relation between magic and cinema, see Beckman, Karen (2003), *Vanishing Women: Magic, Film and Feminism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press); Solomon, Matthew (2010), *Disappearing Tricks: Silent Film, Houdini, and The New Magic of The Twentieth Century* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press); Williamson, Colin (2015), *Hidden In Plain Sight: An Archaeology of Magic and The Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press). Last but not least is the University of Huddersfield's publication, the first *Journal of Performance Magic*.

uncertain cultural prestige, and the unshakable burden of pretence and fakery—that it needs to scapegoat and admonish fellow conjurors and wonder workers?

Perhaps as we turn to consider magic, we might experiment with two ideas or possibilities, as briefly rehearsed in this text: firstly, that magic *is* a form of theatre (what else could it have been?); secondly, and far more curiously, that magic's main function is to interrogate theatre: to question the illusory apparatus itself, as well as its evolving mechanics of belief/disbelief, appearance/disappearance, reality/fiction.

When Magic Became Theatre

The term 'magic' merits some historical framing, which helps us to understand when and how it metamorphosed into theatre. Secular magic, or 'white' magic (again think playing cards and vanishing handkerchiefs) is largely defined in opposition to forms of sorcery that lay claim to the supernatural ('black' magic, real magic, magick, dark arts, etc.). The distinction between secular and sacred magic can be dated back to 1584 and the publication of *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, by the Englishman Reginald Scot. Challenging the church's demonization of so-called wizards and witches, Scot set out to show that magic was no supernatural feat, but rather a phenomenon that could be analysed and understood: seemingly impossible feats, such as those performed by street mountebanks and charlatans, relied on clear and explainable methods.

The demystification or secularisation of magic, however, wouldn't happen overnight: for centuries performing magicians preferred to label their feats as *legerdemain*, juggling or dexterity, since the term magic was still linked, in the popular imagination, to grievous meddling with the supernatural and occult. It was only with the French conjuror Robert Houdin (1805-1871) that magic acquired something like a distinctly aesthetic status: donning the bourgeois top-hat and tails typical of the time (which have since become a cliché of the conjuror's attire), Robert Houdin sought to distance himself from street magicians and hustlers, framing magic as a distinguished indoor

entertainment, an emotional and intellectual presentation for dedicated theatre audiences. Houdin described conjuring as 'the art of *fictitious* magic' (42, my emphasis), and whilst some performers since his time have professed to present 'genuine' miracles, in the form of spiritualist séances or mind reading (a good example is the fraudulent Uri Geller, whose supernatural spoon-bending feats were, lo and behold, magic tricks), most conjurors in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have operated in the distinctly aesthetic, rational, and secular framework instituted by Robert Houdin. In his 1868 book, *Secrets of Conjuring and Magic, or How To Become a Wizard*, as well as detailing the methods and structures of his show, Houdin famously offered the first definition of this modern, secular miracle worker: the magician 'is an actor playing the part of a magician' (43).

By shaking magic free of superstition and dark beliefs, Houdin allowed conjurers to fully participate in the modern project of engaging with fiction *as fiction*. The magical appearance of doves and rabbits, or the unexplainable transformations of coins and cards, would no longer be viewed with fearful suspicion, but rather accepted as open artifice and aesthetic gesture. Whilst an echo of wizardry or 'real' magic remains, the theatrical frame guarantees that the magician's actions are understood—however impossibly, maddeningly, jaw-droppingly—as fully licensed deceptions.

Magic Goes Meta

Modern magic's aim however wasn't just to deceive or amaze: its motor was precisely a kind of theatrical double awareness, or cognitive dissonance, emerging in the late nineteenth century. Audiences at a magic show perform a double task: to know that everything they are witnessing is illusory and unreal, and to simultaneously allow themselves to be utterly amazed by the *impossible* feats taking place before their very eyes.[3] What is rehearsed with the advent of conjuring is a certain

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3   Simon During has worked closely on the link between modern magic and fiction: 'The rise of secular magic is closely tied to the increasing power, substantiality, and dissemination of fictionality. It's no surprise that the realist novel takes off as a genre

kind of ironic dis-belief, a paradox of detached immersion, whereby spectators are asked to experience true enchantment whilst remaining fully aware of the illusory construction underlying it (a construction that is, ideally, entirely elusive and undetectable). In a magic show, the infamous 'suspension of disbelief', in which a viewer or reader might consciously disregard the method for the sake of enjoying the fiction, is curiously upended: whereas in a stage production of *Peter Pan* the wires holding up the flying actor are mentally 'erased' by a willing spectator, in a conjuring show the illusionist's flight has to appear wholly real and impossible: no matter how much you try to figure out *how* the illusionist is capable of floating in mid-air, in the end you give up and concede that the only solution to the mystery is that which you know it cannot be: magic. As Teller (of the Las Vegas-based magic duo Penn & Teller) puts it, 'magic is about a fundamental conflict between what you see and what you know' (qtd. in Kaino & Delgaudio 201). What happens is not possible, yet it happens. We know this impossible event cannot happen, we even know that it's *not* happening, yet here it is, fully unfolding in real time and space, as though everything we knew about the world were suddenly open to question. As film theorist Karen Beckman writes, in her book *Vanishing Women*: 'Magic provokes critical spectatorship though its self-acknowledged performance of undisclosed activity' (190). Modern magic is fundamentally a form of meta-theatre: intensely and inherently self-reflexive, its *raison d'être* consists in spectators questioning the act itself, questioning the framework they are caught in, and questioning the scope and limits of their own questioning.

What the conjuring act truly conjures, more or less explicitly, is a reflection and an ontological interrogation of the very framework that sustains it: that is, the theatre. '*What is this?*' is the question audience members ask themselves when transcendent awe is coupled with an

unshakeable certainty in the purely rational nature of the theatrical exchange. What is this? What is it that is taking place before me? How can this simulated feat appear so real? More than just detectives seeking to solve a mystery or puzzle, audiences witnessing magical illusions are charged with the role of philosophers: to contemplate the nature of 'reality', as well as the peculiar situation that is the theatre, in which such presentations are possible.

Magic tricks, and the wonder and bafflement they can produce, are only a means to an end—that end being a self-reflexive interrogation of the status of the act itself. Magicians are truly purveyors of radical doubt, their acts capable of triggering a vertiginous series of open-ended questions: is this really happening? How can this impossible feat be fake if it has all the traits of being real? Why is there such a gap between my perception (I can *see* a human body suspended in mid-air) and my understanding of phenomenal reality (I *know* human bodies cannot be suspended in mid air)? Does my perception coincide with that of others? Am I really here, seeing this? Is the real secret the fact that the magician can actually *do* magic (but if so, why bother doing it in the theatre)? What distinguishes acts carried out in the theatre? And what is theatre anyway? In short: *what is this?*

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at the same time as an entertainment industry based on secular magic: they share a cultural logic. What they both require is the famous "willing suspension of disbelief", which … means that you believe and don't believe simultaneously.' (qtd. in Najafi, 93). Recently Peter Lamont has cast doubt on the historical view according to which conjuring was once synonymous with witchcraft before emerging as a distinct modern theatrical form.

Abnormal Personages and Substantial Lumps: Theatre's Dialectic of Fairy Magic and Human Work

By Martin Young

Abstract

This article treats the nineteenth-century theatrical fairy as a paradigmatic figure for considering the relationship between work and magic. It explores what I am referring to as 'the dialectic of fairy magic and human work', which is constitutive of theatre in industrialised capitalism, in order to expose an ideological tension in bourgeois thought. In nineteenth century scholarship, we see that the institution of the theatre was regarded as inferior to private reading because dramatic poetry was marred by the practical limitations of live performance. This attitude, most clearly articulated in relation to Shakespeare's fairy play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, has been termed 'Romantic antitheatricalism' and can be understood as an iteration of the bourgeois privileging of idealism over materialism. I read Romantic antitheatricalism in the context of Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre's 'Romantic anticapitalism', and I treat the distaste for theatre's materiality as an anxious response to the emergence of industrialised capitalist society. This anxiety, however, is most fully expressed as contempt for workers' bodies: the corporeality of performers and the visibility of stagehands. I frame these concerns around the reviews of Samuel Phelps' production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Sadler's Wells (1853).

> …and please make
> my curtain half-height, don't block the stage off.
> Leaning back, let the spectator
> notice the busy preparations being so
> ingeniously made for him
> …
> don't show him too much
> but show something. And let him observe
> that this is not magic but
> work, my friends.

What underpins Brecht's lines is the understanding that theatre is a point at which magic may become confused with work. Or, more accurately, a point at which work may be disguised as magic. This is the fundamental insight through which I am going to read a slightly bizarre theatre review, written by Douglas Jerrold, editor of *Lloyd's Weekly*, of a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* directed by Samuel Phelps at Sadler's Wells in October 1853. This review describes a quasi-transcendental reaction quite alien to my own experience of being in an audience, but which helps expose a familiar tension between idealism and materialism in relation to the theatre. This tension is internal to romanticism, a historically contingent ideological formation emerging from a specific moment of capitalist development, but the stakes of it are of enduring relevance to an understanding of theatre which continues to take place under industrialised capitalist conditions. It is this tension between the material and the ideal which theatre's cliché magic is able to illuminate.[1]

A Midsummer Night's Dream was not a magic show as such, and nor did it specifically incorporate the tricks and gimmicks of stage illusion into its dramatic action, as other theatrical performances of the period sometimes did. Nonetheless, it seems evidently to be part of what Simon During has called the 'magic assemblage', the 'motley of shows in the public spaces where magic was performed: theaters, fairs, streets, taverns, and so on' (66). In During's argument, these performances of 'secular magic', (that is, magic 'which stakes no serious claim to contact with the supernatural'), as a form of commercial entertainment, 'helped provide the terms and content of modern culture's understanding and judgement of itself' (1). Here, I am concerned with how the evocation of magic in the theatre helps to delineate (often by obscuring) the nature of work. It is able to do this because work itself preserves magic as a constitutive yet denigrated facet of its ontology. In Alfred Gell's analysis, 'Magic haunts technical activity like a shadow; or, rather, magic is the negative contour of work' (181). Gell argues that even in societies which have undergone a process of modernising disenchantment and flatter themselves that they are guided by rational principles, ideologies

of work are still contingent on what he terms 'the magic standard', the imagined possibility of effortless production, and that this enduring conception is essential to how work is valued: 'the relative efficacy of techniques is a function of the extent to which they converge towards the magic-standard of zero work for the same product' (180). For Gell, the magical aura of art objects stems from how they mediate their own processes of production. 'It is the way an art object is construed as having come into the world which is the source of the power such objects have over us - their becoming rather than their being' (166). Developing this theory, however, I suggest that owing to its liveness, theatre cannot be alienated from its production in the same way as art objects; the theatrical event is the product of immediate work, and that work is rendered legible in ways that are unique among artforms. What Francesca Coppa writes of magicians' assistants in this period is true also of theatrical spectacle: 'the essence of magic is the effacement—or perhaps more accurately, the displacement—of labor' (91). Theatre is consequently a key site at which to expose the obscure relationship between magic and work.

This article has, at its heart, an earnest consideration of the ideologies of labour in an industrialised capitalist society, a subject which I think is of urgent and enduring importance. Alongside this, it is largely about fairies, in all their sequinned, gauzy glory, which I also think is a sorely neglected area of thought. At one pole, sweated, proletarianised manual labour figures as irreducibly real and inescapably politicised. Fairies, by contrast, are insubstantial, trite, and gaudy, not only in comparison to hard work but even by the standards of other objects of theatrical representation. That is perhaps why these two elements are important to each other in my approach. Indeed, During is adamant that 'secular magic has been a powerful agent in the formation of modern culture precisely *because* it is trivial' (2). Trivial though the magic is, its presence helps to render the labour relations legible. A taut hemp line runs through my thinking here. From one end is suspended a Fairy Queen; glittering wand in hand, diaphanous wings fluttering, drifting gracefully through the hazy air as though floating on a beam

of light. At the other, men sweat in the gloom below, bracing their stout bodies against the rigging mechanism and bearing the weight of the enchantment in their sinews. Underpinning this article, then, is a desire to resolve the dialectic of fairy magic and human work which, to me, is internal to theatre. I will return to this image in a less idealised form later in this article, amid the discussion of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Jerrold's review. First though, there is another fairy I wish to consider.

In October 1863, the journal *All the Year Round* published 'A New Stage Stride', a report on the remodelling of the stage and backstage areas of the Lyceum theatre, which it championed as the unrivaled introduction of cutting edge technical innovation. At the heart of the unnamed journalist's conception of the new design is a curious image of fairy magic:

> The Spirit of Progress, a fairy, doubtless, properly attired in muslin and spangles, has descended ... and with one wave of her glittering wand has inaugurated a new system whose laws are dictated by Reason and Common Sense. (230)

The writer frames this as a moment of historical advance, guided by the capitalist values of efficiency and rationalised industry, and yet the agent of that progress is something ancient and folkloric—or at least familiar from the staid traditions of pantomime. The quaint and conventional magic with which theatre amuses its patrons has returned to transform the theatre itself.

Among the new additions were various forms of technical apparatus for the manipulation of scenery from offstage. Until the second half of the nineteenth-century, scene changes were undertaken in plain sight of the audience, that is, with no curtain drops or blackouts to obscure them (Southern 20). Audiences were, therefore, habituated to the sight of workers crossing the stage between scenes, carrying things on and off. The Lyceum's new system of winches, counterweights, and metal rails was an attempt to do away with this, much to the delight of the *All the Year Round* journalist:

The banishing from the boards of that abnormal personage, the stage-footman, with his red breeches and white stockings, is an improvement on which we cannot but congratulate the manager of the Lyceum Theatre. It was not pleasant to sit and watch the proceedings of these gentry during a pause in the drama … those footmen used to give one a shock, and bring one's imagination down to the realities of life whenever they appeared, and it is agreeable to think that in future their work will be accomplished by means of trap-doors and other simple contrivances. (233)

There is an evident disdain for the sight of workers here. Though it is by their labour that the theatrical image is put together, their presence in the theatrical frame registers as a shocking intrusion and the disconcerting reassertion of the realities of life: stagehands both produce and destroy theatre's magic. As Alice Rayner has commented far more recently, the work of stagehands contradicts theatre's ontological 'dubiousness' in that it is 'practical, necessary, and concrete' and 'has a kind of worldly reality' which is distinguished from 'the pretenses of bourgeois theatre's illusions' (536). This ontological problem of the theatre is to be remedied in the Lyceum by means of simple contrivances. However, while machinery might facilitate the elimination of signs of work from view, it is very clear that this is not technology which removes the need for labour; it merely conceals it more efficiently.

Though this technological innovation was reported as an epochal shift towards mechanisation, the changes were short lived and subsequent Lyceum managers, in harmony with the rest of the industry, returned their scene-shifting practice to, in the words of one nineteenth century chronicler, 'the rule of strong sinews'—the laborious effort of straining bodies, with people manually hauling scenery from place to place (Fitzgerald 28). This strikingly corporeal phrase repudiates the fantasy of effortless execution offered by the news report—a fantasy so divorced from the realities of life that even as it was being enthusiastically expressed it had to be ironised behind the image of the spangled, glittering fairy spirit.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

It was a widely repeated truism of nineteenth century criticism that an attempt to represent the fairy world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the theatre was, like the characters' own naive efforts to portray moonshine, doomed to failure. This owed much to an influential essay by William Hazlitt in 1817 which claimed that 'All that is finest in the play is lost in the representation. The spectacle was grand; but the spirit was evaporated' (133). Hazlitt, along with Charles Lamb and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, is one of the key articulators of what several critics have termed 'romantic antitheatricalism': a rejection of spectacle and sensation and a denial of theatre's capacity to do justice to dramatic writing (Barrish, Carlson, Pechter). This at is most positive turns on a celebration of the superiority of the reader's imagination over the limited efficacy of theatrical representation. The reader is able to hold subtle ideas in mind, to engage in interpretation; they are an intellectually, aesthetically, and morally active participant in the dramatist's art. As an audience member, though, Hazlitt is simultaneously over- and underwhelmed. The theatre confronts him with an 'unmanageable reality'—what Julie Stone Peters interprets as a 'sensory overload' in which too many elements vie for attention and cannot be ignored (298). Yet by comparison to the marvels which dramatic poetry excites in his imagination, the crushing mundanity of live performance leaves him dismayed. 'Thus Bottom's head in the play is a fantastic illusion, produced by magic spells: on the stage, it is an ass's head, and nothing more' (133). Theatrical representation is both too much and too little, too real and too artificial.

This fixation on interiority is paired with an aesthetic distaste for the gaudy and cumbersome adornment towards which theatrical practice was seen to be moving. The flat scenic decoration of the eighteenth century, backdrops and screens delicately painted by master craftsmen, was being displaced by the crude literalism of 'built up' three dimensional sets. The practical compromises required to achieve the sensational designs and spectacular effects were regarded by many as the subordination of dramatic poetry to crass entertainment. Into this

can further be read a disdain for the unrefined tastes of an increasingly socio-economically diverse theatre audience; 'even as a taste for spectacle developed into the determining factor for theatrical production, so a distaste for spectacle became the driving force behind Romantic antitheatricalism' (Pechter 160). These new heights of scenic elaboration required more and more heavy lifting in their nightly live execution and so introduced more and more of those breaches into the performance through which the realities of life awkwardly imposed themselves on the theatrical illusion in the shape of labouring stagehands.

The absolute privileging of private reading is rooted in a profound individualism. 'Romanticism,' writes Jonas Barrish in his long genealogy of antitheatrical prejudices, 'like Puritanism, leans toward inwardness, solitude, and spontaneity' (326). Perhaps unsurprisingly, given my materialist worldview, my professional life as a theatre technician, and my enthusiasm for fairies, I am presenting this antitheatricalism in a negative light, but there is a dimension to it that is worth pausing on. While it is undoubtedly a bourgeois perspective, it apparently owes some of its charge to unease around the development of capitalist society. This ambivalent and contradictory perspective has been theorised by Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre as 'romantic anticapitalism'.[2] My thesis here is that romantic antitheatricalism is a form of romantic anticapitalism, although it is still a decidedly conservative and idealist strain of it. The aspects of theatre to which romantic critics most forcefully object are those aspects which most directly represent or evoke capitalist modernity. The rejection of theatre's crude materiality and vulgar excess, therefore, may be a rejection of theatre's spectacularisation of mechanised industry and participation in deindividuated mass culture. For Löwy and Sayre, 'Romanticism issues from a revolt against a concrete, historical present' (*Romantic Anticapitalism* 54)—it is specifically a reaction to the emergent capitalist economy, and is a worldview specifically held by capitalist subjects. The

values of romanticism resented the spectre of homogeneity posed by the mass production of goods and the mass accumulation of people in the major cities, both of which were tangibly evoked by increasingly object-laden theatrical shows played before packed audiences. As Löwy and Sayre write, the individualism at romanticism's core is one that is ambivalently a product of capitalist development and simultaneously experiences itself as repressed by capitalist totality:

> Capitalism calls forth the independent individual to fulfill certain socio-economic functions; but … when it begins to want to freely exercise its powers of fantasy it comes up against the extreme mechanization and platitude of the world created by capitalist relations. Romanticism represents the revolt of the repressed, manipulated and deformed subjectivity, and of the "magic" of imagination banished from the capitalist world. (57)

The retreat to the vivid images mentally concocted by solitary reading rather than the clunking scrapes of bulky scenery at the theatre may signal a nostalgic desire to conserve a social experience that is innocent of industrial rationalisation. It is perhaps inevitable that this set of prejudices should form most concretely around Shakespeare, who is insistently constructed as a solitary poet, rather than a man engaged in collaborative theatrical production, and whose authorial genius is confirmed for romantic critics precisely in the fact that it is unrealisable in performance.[3]

As a play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, was particularly suited to these purposes. Its setting looks back not only to English folklore

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2   In more recent publications, Löwy and Sayre have abandoned the phrase on the grounds that, for them, 'Romanticism is anticapitalist by its very nature' (Romance Against the Tide of Modernity 15). I am retaining it here for the purposes of clarity.

3   This is not necessarily a new phenomenon; Stephen Greenblatt relates Lamb and Coleridge's preference for solitary reading to a tradition stretching back to Ben Jonson (127-8). The romantic ideal of a solitary writer (or its more recent successor, as defined by Montuori and Purser, the 'lone genius myth') has disintegrated in current Shakespeare scholarship with the rise of attribution studies. For a full discussion of this changing conception of authorship, see the Authorship Companion to the New Oxford Shakespeare edited by Gary Taylor and Gabriel Egan. See also Brian Vickers' Shakespeare, Co-Author. It is worth noting that the increased attention to collaborative authorship has coincided with increased scholarly concern for the practical and economic realities of producing for commercial theatre.

and forests unspoiled by industry but also to the precapitalist world of classical antiquity, which nineteenth century modernity encountered nostalgically as 'a lost world, whose difference defined the present' (Goldhill 161). This evoked for romantic critics a pastoral world which was irreconcilable with the industrial realm of theatre. Not only does the play feature a range of magic scenarios which are impossible to depict literally (invisibility, bodily transformation, the disproportionate physical size of the fairy and human characters), it also stages, through the clumsy amateurism of the 'rude mechanicals', an explicit meditation on theatre's capacities for representation. The critic Henry Morley was therefore confident in opening his review of Samuel Phelps' production at Sadler's Wells with the declaration that 'Every reader of Shakespeare is disposed to regard the 'Midsummer Night's Dream' as the most essentially unactable of all his plays', the characters being 'creatures of the poet's fancy that no flesh and blood can properly present' (66). Another reviewer surmised that the play had 'generally been considered so infinite in the ideal, that to place it upon the stage would destroy it' (B. W. W. 129). In spite of this consensus, the critics uniformly offer an enthusiastic view of the production, not because it challenged their antitheatrical romantic values but because, somewhat paradoxically, it affirmed them. Critics describe the action gliding from scene to scene without interruption for set changes and report that the appearance of the performers was softened by gaslight and gauze to create a visual dreaminess. I will return to these effects, but my interest here is not so much in the staging of the production itself (the precise details of which are, as a result of the vagueness of the reviews, difficult to determine) but rather in its appropriation by critics as a vehicle for their idealism.[4] In their description of an exceptional spectatorial experience which transcends the normal limitations of the form, they reify the general condemnation of theatre's unbending materiality.

For Douglas Jerrold, reviewing for *Lloyd's Weekly*, the idea that the play was 'a fairy creation that could only be acted by fairies' was

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4 A good account of the available details of the staging is given in Gary Jay Williams' Our Moonlight Revels (111-115).

'a favourite dogma, which commentators have thumped down upon the Shakespearean page with the might of a paviour's hammer' (131). Though he attempted to distance himself from that antitheatricalist orthodoxy, he did not do so by embracing theatre's materiality. Rather, he found in this theatrical production an ideal experience which transcended material limitation more effectively than private reading. For him, visiting Sadler's Wells on a mid-October night, some kind of theatrical spell was cast, some intoxicating magic was worked. 'Those critical opinions have all been blown away', he wrote, before offering the crucial qualification: 'And yet the beautiful dreaminess of the play is not in the least disturbed' (131). He describes being plunged into a prolonged atemporal reverie, and speculates that 'one-half the spectators are dreaming without knowing it, and that they only wake up when the curtain drops, and are surprised to find they have a play-bill in their hand'. Of his own experience, he reports

> All motion, all action, seems to be involuntarily suspended. … In this way, you dream quite unconsciously, lost one minute in a beautiful wood flooded with moonlight … and the next minute laughing over the courtship of Pyramus and Thisbe … (132)

Notably, this experience of spectatorship seems to obviate theatre's inherent communality and instead reproduces the solitary individualism of private reading; rows of independent dreamers side by side in theatre stalls. At last, 'the illusion is pulled, like a common cotton night-cap, from off your brow' and 'the ideal trance, in which you have been plunged for the last three hours' is over (132). Jerrold's response is exactly that scripted by Robin Goodfellow, Shakespeare's mischievous metatheatrical fairy, in the epilogue to the play, in which he reminds the audience that they 'have but slumbered here / while these visions did appear', the whole drama being a 'weak and idle theme / no more yielding but a dream'.

Here, I want to develop the account of romantic antitheatricalism as it has been theorised by the critics referenced above. Romantic

antitheatricalism has generally been assessed in more or less the terms set out by romantic writers themselves: individualism, aesthetic taste, and the primacy of the imagination, all of which amount to the privileging of idealism over materiality. What is absent from critiques which take romantic antitheatricalism on its own terms is an acknowledgement of one of the most significant material factors of industrial society—labour—which, though seldom mentioned, seems to subtextually animate much of the writing against theatre. The romantic antitheatricalists did not simply favour idealism over materialism in an abstract sense; indeed, to treat their view as such is itself an idealist approach. It was not a general, abstracted, or intellectual dissatisfaction with theatre's matter that they were motivated by; it was a disgust with the specific materiality with which theatre confronted them: human bodies at work.

Jerrold's spectatorial experience, in which familiar reality and the familiar passage of time are suspended and give way to something more effortlessly ideal, does not admit the labour on which it relies. So affected by the magic sensation of the show were all the reviewers that the practical means by which the effects were achieved can only be extrapolated from their dreamy descriptions. One of the fullest accounts of the staging comes from Henry Morley, who reports that for the entire duration of the forest scenes (the middle three acts of the play) 'a green gauze was placed between the actors and the audience', barely perceptible itself but allowing, through the precise use of gas lighting (newly installed at Sadler's Wells for this production), the visibility of the stage to be manipulated. The performers were denied the corporeality of their labouring bodies; the hazy gauze '[subdued] the flesh and blood of the actors into something more nearly resembling dream-figures' (67-68). Jerrold, too, was struck by fairies who danced and whirled across the stage with 'the appearance of flitting shadows more than of human beings' (132). At the same time, Charles Kean's rival production at the Princess's Theatre drew criticism for failing to disguise the fact that 'Titania's fairies were substantial lumps, not shadowless spirits' (B. W. W. 130).

The image with which I initially established the dialectical tension of this article, a Fairy Queen flying gracefully on a rope pulled by stocky stagehands, served not only to draw attention to the labour of theatre but to assert the mutually constitutive relationship between the illusions of bourgeois theatre and the work on which those illusions rely. Following Brecht, theatre's magic conceals theatre's work. However, if the two poles of my image have thus far been the ideal fairy and the material stagehands, the rope between them binds them far closer together, and brings them back down to the realities of life. The nameless journalist with whom I started reaches for a similar image in his praise for counterweight flying systems but adds that 'her majesty is less ethereal than the gauzy vapours that surround her' and that she is accompanied by 'a retinue of attendant sprites weighing their eight stone apiece into the bargain' (232)—the corporeal reality of the performer is held against the ideal image of the fairy.

The misogynist contours of antitheatrical writing are well established, building on the suspicion that theatre itself, as an insubstantial object of spectatorship, is somehow feminine or feminising.[5] Exceptional to this is the already counter-theatrical manual labour of the stagehands, which preserves its masculine coding precisely because it obstructs and resists the fairy magic of theatre. As Julie A. Carlson has demonstrated, in romantic criticism the perceptive imagination of the bourgeois subject in which the ideal was able to thrive was conceived as a masculine sphere from which women were largely excluded. In Carlson's account, romantic criticism 'treats actresses as bodies, not minds' (21), and the materiality of theatrical spectacle was understood as a feminine challenge to literary masculinity. The feminised ideal of the Fairy Queen, as she figured as a cultural trope, rhetorical device, newspaper illustration, or magical vision in a reader's imagination, was always reducible on the stage to the corporeal flesh of a human being, presented, draped in muslin and spangles, before the eyes of hundreds

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5   See, for example, Carlson and Barrish. The same antitheatrical suspicion applies to stage magicians, who 'may paradoxically be empowered by appearing to blur the distinction between masculine and feminine' (Schwartz 207).

of other human beings. On stage, where the ideal of the fairy appears in antagonism with the real woman who represents her, fairy magic asserts itself as a set of demands on the body of the performer. The fairy does not float on a beam of light, is not ethereal; if she moves gracefully it is only by straining her trained muscles against both gravity and exhaustion, a physical effort no less than that of the stagehands, though differently disguised from the view of the spectators who gaze up at her. The sight of stagehands is disruptive to theatre because they are so inescapably legible as labourers that they reveal theatre's industrial basis. The fairy performers, on the other hand, can function as the spectacularised objects of the audience's gaze only in as far as their activity is not legible as labour.

In Jerrold's reverent spectatorial fantasy, the fairy performer was reduced to an insubstantial illusion which 'puffed about […] like a cloud of silver dust' (132), their physical exertion registering only as ethereal wonderment. The other executors of the spectacle, including 'that abnormal personage, the stage-footman' disdainfully described above, were, as far as the audience was concerned, completely dispensed with. As Morley wrote, 'There is no ordinary scene-shifting; but, as in dreams, one scene is made to glide insensibly into another' (67). Whatever subtle magic of gaslight and misdirection was undertaken behind the translucent green gauze, it did not announce itself to the audience. The antitheatrical unease with materiality encompasses both the sardonic, even prurient attention to the corporeality of women's bodies and the desire that servile manual labourers should remain out of sight. A central tension of the bourgeois theatre is that as it subordinates the capabilities of industrial society to the production of spectacle and leisure for its privileged audiences, it inescapably confronts those audiences with the contradictions of that society. It is this which lurks behind much of the contempt for scenographic elaboration and dissatisfaction with the physical bodies of performers that is to be found in these writings, as Jerrold suggests:

> Give it living embodiment, and the fairies become
> heavy, coarse realities … The comedy was a poetical

dream, and if stage carpenters and painters laid their leaden fingers upon it they would only turn the dream into nothing better than a nightmare. (131)

The role of workers in mediating the dramatic text for performance is a contaminating intrusion, debasing something absolute by bringing it into contact with the mundane. It forces audiences to remember that what they have paid to see in the theatre is not magic, but work. If the romantic imaginary was a reaction against the disquieting traumas of a disenchanted capitalist world, the attempt to maintain its ideal visions as innocent of that world served only to reinscribe capital's own violent mystifications. For all their privileging of individual human subjectivity, the romantic anticapitalist was still susceptible to a bourgeois disdain for hired workers. More than simple hypocrisy, what is observable here is the idealist suspicion of the material culture of industrialised capitalist society manifesting as a resentment of the people who produce and work with capital's material content.

Epilogue
In April 1856, Karl Marx gave a speech to the editors and writers of the Chartist *People's Paper*. In the disordered and unnatural world that capitalism had produced, he asserted, 'The newfangled sources of wealth, by some strange weird spell, are turned into sources of want'. This contradictory sorcery subverts the incredible productive capacities of human labour into appalling conditions of exploitation, profit, and poverty. A Marxist materialism therefore represents the re-assertion of reality against illusion. This much is confirmed by Brecht's half-height curtain revealing the work taking place behind. However, in that same speech, there is one final instance of fairy magic with which I wish to close. This magic comes not from the theatre—in fact, that theatre might either foster or contain it is unlikely, though theatre has provided a useful model with which to introduce it. Unlike my image, this fairy does not descend from above but rather promises the revivification of a long dormant puckish spirit which will erupt from below. It resolves the petty dialectic of fairy magic and human work; labour is reunderstood

as the transformative force that, no longer concealed by the illusion of magic, lays claim to the power of magic.

> In the signs that bewilder the middle class, the aristocracy and the poor prophets of regression, we do recognise our brave friend, Robin Goodfellow, the old mole that can work in the earth so fast, that worthy pioneer—the Revolution.

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Sacred Staging: Dramatic Magic in the Medieval Mass

By Eleanor Bloomfield

Abstract

This essay explores the dramatic elements of the medieval Mass, examining how this ritual functioned as a staged performance deliberately intended to provoke a response in its congregation, which, in dramatic terms, can be considered as its audience. An ongoing concern throughout the Middle Ages was the involvement of the (primarily English-speaking) congregation in the (Latin) prayers and action of the Mass, as well as how the congregation's response to the mass might be shaped. In this essay, I investigate how the actions of the priest performing the Mass might be seen to have clear parallels with the performance of an actor, just as the Mass itself parallels the Passion sequence of the York mystery plays. Moving on to church architecture, which functioned as a 'playing space' for the Mass, I then explore how their its deliberately exploited the use of space, light, and sound to capture and hold the attention of an audience. Finally, I consider the significance of the Lay Folks Mass Book, a text designed to help medieval audiences navigate the action of the Mass by following visual and aural cues from the priest. As a whole, the essay elucidates how the medieval Mass functioned as a staged performance deliberately intended to provoke a response in its audience, and how it sought to shape the nature of that response.

'The liturgy lay at the heart of medieval religion, and the Mass lay at the heart of the liturgy' (Duffy 91). This is the Irish historian Eamon Duffy's succinct summary of the Mass's significance to medieval religious life. In the Middle Ages, as it still is today, the Mass was the central ritual of Catholicism. Celebrated daily and believed to be the unbloody repetition of Christ's suffering and death on the cross, the Mass was the very essence of medieval faith; all other devotions were secondary and subordinate to it. The physical spaces in which the Mass was enacted—the chapels, churches, and cathedrals—were consciously designed as suitably dramatic places in which to perform this most sacred of rituals. Anthony Masinton's PhD thesis, 'Sacred Space: Priorities, Perception, and the Presence of God in Late Medieval

Yorkshire Parish Churches', explores how the interior church space was exploited to provide the most dramatic setting for the Mass, focusing on how space, light, and sound were used to direct the congregation's attention. This essay follows on from Masinton's work, but with a narrower temporal focus of between c.1400 and 1500 and extending into a consideration of the performative elements of the Mass itself. These elements can be seen as quasi-magical in that they were designed to help medieval congregations understand what they could not see—the mystery of transubstantiation, whereby at the words of consecration Christ's body and blood were believed to become actually present on the altar under the appearances of bread and wine. After a discussion of how the medieval Mass can be considered as drama,[1] the essay will turn to exploring church architecture and its scenographic elements—space and light—arguing that this was deliberately designed to help elevate the ritualistic elements of the Mass to true drama.

The Mass as Drama

The medieval Mass was a prayer, a catechism, an act of offering, thanksgiving, and adoration, but first and foremost it was understood to be a re-enacted sacrifice. Duffy explains how, from a medieval perspective,

> [i]n the Mass the redemption of the world, wrought on Good Friday once and for all, was renewed and made fruitful for all who believed. Christ himself, immolated on the altar of the cross, became present on the altar of the parish church, body, soul and divinity, and his blood flowed once again … As kneeling congregations raised their eyes to see the Host held high above the

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1 Throughout this essay the word drama is used primarily in the sense of 'a series of actions or course of events having a unity like that of drama, and leading to a final catastrophe or consummation' (*OED Online*, 'Drama', n., 3) but also informed by its more usually recognised sense, '[a] composition in prose or verse, designed to be acted upon a stage, in which a story is related by means of dialogue and action, and is represented with accompanying gesture, costuming and scenery, as in real life; a play' (*OED Online*, 'Drama', n., 1.) In this it follows Clopper, who uses the term drama to mean 'an enacted script that contains … an entire narrative; that is, it is a text and a performance' (11).

priest's head at the sacring, they were transported[2] to Calvary itself, and gathered not only into the passion and resurrection of Christ, but into the full sweep of salvation history as a whole (91).

Medieval Catholic doctrine stated that the rite was the actual renewal of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary—not merely a commemoration, remembrance, or re-enactment. The Mass looked back to the ancient Calvary, yes, but the sacrifice of Calvary also re-occurred in present time as the priest, standing in the place of Christ (*in persona Christi*), said the words of consecration. But though the priest conducted the Mass, its active power—the renewal of Calvary—came from Christ alone, not from any virtue or action on the part of the priest, who was merely 'the instrument through which Christ acts' (Young 85). This concept of the priest standing in for Christ has led, naturally enough, to suggestions that the action of the Mass is a drama in which the priest is the chief actor. This proposition was offered as early as 1100 by Honorius of Autun:

> It is known that those who recited tragedies in theaters represented the actions of opponents by gestures before the people. In the same way our tragic author [sic; i.e., the celebrant] represents by his gestures in the theater of the Church before the Christian people the struggle of Christ. (qtd. in Latin in Young 83; trans. Clopper 51)

Here, Karl Young comments: '[t]he opening sentences of this passage clearly proclaim that in the Mass the celebrant genuinely impersonates Christ as the tragic actor does the persons represented in the profane theatre' (83). However, for Young, the parallels between the church and the theatre hold only on a very broad level. He is right to say that the Mass is not a drama in the sense of a stage play; the medieval priest was not an actor; he did not assume to be, or to take on the role of, God. But the distinction between drama and the dramatic element (i.e., Young's assertion that the Mass is not a drama, a stage play, with the priest an actor following a stage script; but it *can* be considered dramatic, to have elements of drama) is too sharp. This is especially so given that the word drama was unknown in the English lexicon until the sixteenth century;[3] the differentiation is therefore one that would never have occurred to the fifteenth-century citizen. Middle English had several words covering various activities with a theatrical, dramatic, or performative element, including spectacle, jape, ludus, and its literal translations, play or game.[4] Of these, 'play' is probably closest in meaning to the modern sense of drama (although it is not an exact synonym). It was also used as a verb. The OED Online gives one usage of the verb 'play' as '[t]o carry out or practise (an action); to perform or execute (a movement)' ('play, v.'). Theoretically, then, this sense of the word could be legitimately applied to the saying of the Mass. Because 'play' was also the word used for the performance of secular drama, it invites further questions about the relationship of the Mass to performance. Unfortunately, this interesting line of thought is stymied by a frustrating lack of evidence that the word was ever used in this way in direct reference to the Mass. Nevertheless, it is worth bearing in mind. Drama and the dramatic in the Middle Ages were not necessarily as distinct as Young suggests.

The form, structure and intention of the Mass may not be a drama in the modern recognised sense of a theatrical performance, but the rite certainly incorporates many deliberately dramatic elements. This has been widely recognised by scholars. Most influentially, O. B. Hardison and R.N. Swanson were among the first to suggest this. Worship was always the essential and primary purpose of the Mass, but as the rite developed over time it incorporated many instances of

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2   Duffy's word choice here is slightly problematic as medieval congregations were not, of course, physically 'transported' in time and place, although they were supposed to align themselves spiritually with the events of the original Calvary. Although Duffy does not pursue the matter, this invites an investigation of the dichotomy between literal and figurative medieval religious experience.

3   See Clopper 3-19. The *OED Online* gives ?1521 as the first recorded use of *drama*, in Alexander Barclay's *The Boke of Codrus and Mynalcas*. ('Drama, n.')
4   For a detailed discussion of these terms and their differing connotations and implications, see Clopper 3-19.

dramatic symbolism. By the late Middle Ages the actions of those at the altar (primarily the priest, but also any ministers assisting him) were deliberately intended to provoke a response in the congregation, just as contemporary drama intended to spark a reaction in its audience. In many respects the medieval Mass and medieval Passion drama, particularly the Passion sequence from York mystery play cycle,[5] were the dialectical antithesis of each other. Substantially the same as the sacrifice on Calvary, the Mass is accidentally different; the Passion plays are the reverse, imitating the accidents (suffering and death) of the original Calvary but in substance merely figurative. In other words, medieval Passion drama *appeared* to be the actual re-enactment of the original sacrifice on Calvary, but only the Mass actually *was*. Turning about the common lynchpin of faith, Mass and plays negotiated an irreconcilable paradox, forever opposite sides of the coin of medieval faith: the Mass was believed to be Calvary renewed, while the plays could only ever be Calvary remembered. Yet they were bound together by a complex, rich, and detailed network of cross-references. Both Mass and Passion plays display a pervasive concern with engaging an audience and directing their attention towards the suffering body of Christ. Thus, at the climax of the Mass—the Elevation of the Host— the congregation was expected to reflect, with the correct degree of awe, wonder and humility, on the suffering Christ:

> for þat is he that iudas salde,
> and sithen was scourged & don on rode,
> and for mankynd there shad his blood
>
> [for this is he that was sold by Judas,
> and then was scourged and placed on the cross,
> and for mankind there shed his blood.]
> (*Lay Folks Mass Book* B l.407-9)

This is recalled and echoed in the Crucifixion play of the York cycle by Christ's speech from the cross addressing 'Al men þat walkis by waye or strete' and urging them to 'Byholdes myn heede, myn handis, and my feete' (*Crucifixio Christi* l.254-5).

The Playing Spaces of the Mass: Church Architecture

Late medieval English parish churches varied widely in size and splendour according to the wealth of their parishioners and benefactors, but all adhered to the same basic plan. They were built with the high altar facing east, towards Jerusalem. The main door, at the west end, opened into the nave, which held the congregation. The altar was housed in the chancel, at the top of a set of broad steps, usually separated from the nave by the rood screen. Behind the altar was a large window, its stained glass forming a backdrop for the altar and the action that took place there. The main focal point of any church was the high altar, around which the action of the Mass centered. Visually and physically, this was separated from the rest of the church by the rood screen, through which the ordinary faithful were not permitted to pass. This immediately set the altar apart, marking as noteworthy both the people who were permitted to enter it (the priest and his acolytes) and the action that took place there. This division opens up the potential for the high altar to function in the manner of a playing space, setting up the dynamics of a player/spectator relationship between the priest and his congregation. The ordinary form of the Mass today has lost this dynamic, with the priest facing the congregation so that both are equal participants in the rite. But it is still visible today (see Figure 1) in Masses celebrated according to the Tridentine rite, which remains almost exactly the form of the Mass celebrated during the Middle Ages.

5　The York mystery play cycle is a collection of forty-seven short interconnected plays, or pageants, which together tell the story of Biblical salvation history from the Fall of the Angels to the Last Judgement, with the Passion and Crucifixion of Christ forming the natural climax of the cycle.

Fig. 1: The player/spectator relationship in the Tridentine Mass: the congregation observing the acts of the priest and his server. Photograph by David van Kroonenburg. Used with permission.

Electric lighting being unknown, medieval churches relied mainly on natural light for illumination. Candles were of course used as well but it would have taken a great many to light the shadowy interior of even a medium-sized parish church. They were used primarily on or near the altar for ritual purposes (as with the sanctuary lamp, for example, which was kept burning near the tabernacle to indicate Christ's presence), rather than illumination. Using the parish church of St Giles as a case study, Masinton shows that the altar was placed so as to receive the maximum possible amount of natural light through the east and west windows. The altar is most brightly lit during morning hours, which was when the majority of liturgical services, including the Mass, took place. The combined placing of windows and altar ensures that the nave was 'normally in darkness during the most important service times', therefore ensuring that 'the focus for attention … [was]

on the high altar where the priest instituted the (usually morning) miracle of the Eucharist' (Masinton 30).

Figure 2 shows the arrangement of altar, east window, rood screen and rood loft in a typical medieval parish church (Saint Michael and All Angels, Hubberholme, Yorkshire). A High Mass is the complete ceremonial form, requiring a deacon and subdeacon in addition to the priest, the use of incense, and parts of the Mass to be chanted or sung. A Low Mass is celebrated by a priest only, does not use incense, and is not sung. During a High Mass the altar was a major auditory focal point as well as a visual one, as it was from here that the priest and deacons sang or chanted the liturgy. In churches large enough to have a rood loft, this provided a secondary focal point, one that was both auditory and visual. The loft housed the choir and sometimes an organ as well; its elevated position ensured that the sound was distributed throughout the whole church as well as allowing the choir to 'observe the priest's ritual actions in the chancel [this was necessary, as the priest's actions provided the cues for the choir], and simultaneously be seen and heard by the parishioners in the nave' (Whiting 199). The loft was sometimes used by the priest for reading the Gospel (Durand, *Rationale Divinorum Officium I*, 167) and for singing the Passion on Good Friday (Whiting 200), presumably because this position, rather than the altar, provided both better visibility and audibility for the congregation in the nave below.

The predominant and most evocative sound of a church, however, was its bells. These were in constant daily use, their main function being

> to summon the parish to its communal worship. For this purpose they were rung—particularly at the canonical hours of prime, tierce, sext, nones, vespers and mattins [sic][6] —on Sundays, week days, saints' days and the

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6   William Durand, writing in the thirteenth century, says they were rung twelve times a day, marking each hour of the Divine Office (*Rationale Divinorum Officium I* 71). See Chapter IV of *Rationale Divinorum Officium I: The Symbolism of Churches* for Durand's explanation of the bells' symbolism, and the difference between ringing, chiming, pealing, and tolling.

major festivals: Easter …, Corpus Christi day, All Souls Day and All Hallow eve (Whiting 171).

Fig. 2: St. Michael and All Angels Parish Church (twelfth century), Hubberholme, England. East window, altar, rood screen and choir loft. Photograph by Sebastian Bloomfield. Used with permission.

During the Mass the church bell rang at the Sanctus, 'call[ing] men and women outside the church to bow' (Whiting 171); on the altar the small sacring bell was rung at the Consecration, reminding the congregation to look up and behold the Host. The bells were silent only once a year, for the three days before Easter, marking Christ's betrayal and Passion (Durand, *Rationale Divinorum Officium I* 182). Thus, at the very moment the Crucifixion was liturgically recalled, the necessity for it—man's alienation from God—was also being evoked or re-enacted.

It has been suggested that the religious functions of churches sometimes overlapped with secular pastimes, and that church property was not always used solely for worship:

> Not only did the medieval parish churches serve their communities through services and prayers; they were also the centres of community life. Barochial

[sic: Parochial?] festivities were held regularly during the summer, especially at Whitsun, Midsummer, Michaelmas or the patronal feast of the church; ale and food were sold and entertainment was provided … Such activities may originally have been held in the naves of the churches, uncluttered as these were by pews (Bettey 62).

Some parishes, especially in the south-east of England (specifically Kent: records survive from Rye, Romney, Lydd, and Winklesea[7]) even used the churches as playing spaces for secular drama. Even where this was not the custom—there is no evidence for it at York—the interiors of medieval churches were very much performance spaces, in a religious sense if not in a secular one. They were playing spaces for the religious activities that took place inside, primarily the Mass, but also processions and other liturgical events. Masinton has proved how carefully the churches were constructed, and how the architects deliberately brought together the use of light, sound, and space in order to maximise the impact of the Mass as a visual and aural event. This can be seen in Figure 3, showing the chancel and high altar of All Saints North Street in York. The East Window, rood screen and altar steps all align; this draws the focus to the high altar in the centre of the rood screen, beneath the crucifix—a visual representation of the bloody sacrifice on Calvary, which was mirrored each day on the altar in unbloody form.

Treatises as Guides to Mass-Drama

Throughout the Middle Ages several treatises on the Mass were produced in order to help the lay congregation identify its 'dramatic' moments and thereby follow the progression of the Mass. The most well-known of these is probably the Lay Folks Mass Book (hereafter abbreviated to *LFMB*).[8] Much of the book is taken up with

7 See Gibson, J.M., ed. *Kent: Diocese of Canterbury. The Records of Early English Drama 16*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002.
8 Most likely translated into English from French in the latter half of the twelfth century, there are four largely similar but subtly different texts of the *LFMB*, based on

identifying the priest's actions, which function as cues either for private meditation (usually on the Crucifixion) or for the saying of private prayers, which are conveniently provided.[9] Apart from the Elevation of the Host, numerous other occasions are identified where the action of the priest serves to guide the response of the congregation. The movement of the priest or deacon to the left-hand side of the altar for the reading of the Gospel was a signal for the congregation to 'speke … noght/bot thenk on him that dere the boght' [speak not, but think of him that dearly bought you] (B l.183-4); the priest's 'spred[ing] of his arms on-brade [in a cross]' (C l.242) recalled not only the Crucifixion but also signified the 'tyme to praye for the dede [dead]' (C l.244); the priest's *Pater Noster* indicated that the Kiss of Peace was approaching, when the congregation kissed the pax[10] handed round to them. Occasionally the reader is instructed to follow the prayers of the priest—at the Confiteor, Apostles' Creed and Pater Noster (the latter 'first in laten,/ and sithen [then] in englishe' [B l.494-5])—but never aloud, rather 'priuely' [privately] (C l.492). The only time the reader has the chance

to pray aloud, thereby becoming directly involved with the action of the Mass, is at the conclusion of the priest's Pater Noster: 'bot answere at temptacionem/set [sic] libera nos a malo, amen' [after the priest says *in tentationen*, answer *sed libera nos a malo, amen*] (C l.489). Even this was not necessarily always said aloud—the B and E texts are not specific, but the C and F texts both say 'answere hym, lowde [loudly] *or* stille [quietly]' (C l.274; F l.250, my emphasis).

Fig. 3: Chancel of All Saints North Street (fourteenth century), York, England. Stained glass east window; high altar and steps; rood screen (nineteenth-century replica). Photograph by Eleanor Bloomfield.

The *LFMB* is apt to become rather repetitive, as it reduces the continuous action of the Mass to specific, easily identifiable points

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four separate surviving manuscripts, labelled B, C, E and F. The Early English Text Society edition presents all four concurrently. Quotations from the *LFMB* are from the EETS edition, cited with the text label followed by line number.

9   The text also frequently directs the reader to say the Pater Noster (Lord's Prayer) and Ave [Maria] (Hail Mary). These are not always included in full, presumably because everyone was expected to know them by heart. Prayers are provided to ask that the offering of the Mass may be pleasing to God and to ask for His grace, for the Church Militant, the living (including 'Frendes, tenauntes, and vs seruynge,/Olde men, children, and wymmen,/Marchaunte, men of crafte, and tilmen./Riche men, poure, and smale' (F l.166-9), the dead, and for the priest.

10   This was 'a little plaque of metal, ivory, or wood, generally decorated with some pious carving and provided with a handle, which was first brought to the altar for the celebrant to kiss at the proper place in the Mass and then brought to each of the congregation in turn at the altar rails' ('Kiss'). Originally the Kiss of Peace was given literally among the members of the congregation, but, though church officials tried to guard against 'the abuses to which this form of salutation might lead' (ibid) by separating the congregation into men and women and stipulating that only members of the same sex could kiss, they were soon worried about a lack of decorum. Their solution to this was to introduce the pax instead, first mentioned in the 1248 statutes of the Archbishop of York. It is also clearly identified in the *LFMB*: 'Therefore þe prest whanne þe pax schal kysse' (F l.261).

in the liturgy. These serve as triggers for recalling the congregation to contemplation of Christ's Passion and its bloody sufferings, and as reminders for the people to say the appropriate prayer—nothing more. It does not encourage the people to progress beyond this basic level of response to the liturgy. More scholarly treatises on the Mass show a far greater awareness and understanding of the liturgy's dramatic symbolism; Durand's thirteenth-century *Rationale Divinorum Officium IV: On the Mass and Each Action Pertaining to It*, for example, is an incredibly and minutely detailed Latin text which does quite literally fulfil its title's promise of commenting on every single action throughout the Mass, revealing a much richer, denser, and more visually impressive ritual than that glimpsed through the *LFMB*. However, that the latter text exists at all, and in the vernacular English, does suggest that there was some expectation to involve the congregation with the Mass— to give them a role, albeit a private one, or, at the very least, a set of cues through which they could follow what was going on at the altar. The *LFMB*, and the fuss over the pax, prove that throughout the Middle Ages there was an ongoing concern over how to include the congregation—or audience—and how to shape their experience. These, of course, are issues of performance that also concern a playwright. The anonymous author of the *LFMB* thus arguably takes on this role, his intention being to shape and present the Mass as a recognisably dramatic event.

Conclusion

In conclusion, then, the dramatic elements of the late medieval Mass were an integral part of the ritual, inseparable from the renewal of sacrifice. Moreover, they were deliberately intended to work on and with their audiences, just as a modern-day stage play does. Though the drama of the liturgy was less obvious, more subtle, more 'magical,' than the secular drama of the mystery plays, it was equally deliberate. As this essay has shown, the hallmarks of dramatic performance are evident in the actions of the Mass-drama itself, the care taken to arrange the architectural playing space of the churches, and the evident concern

over audience involvement, engagement, and response expressed through the *LFMB* and other similar treatises. The late medieval Mass was sacred; but it was also staged, the magic of faith and the magic of theatrical performance combining to direct and shape the audience's experience.

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'I Am a Magician of Soap': Alchemical Transformations Affecting the Biomedical Politics of HIV-Infection in Jan Fabre's *Drugs Kept Me Alive*

By Sylvia Solakidi

Abstract

Drugs Kept Me Alive is a solo performance choreographed by Jan Fabre, devoted to a 'magician of soap', the HIV-seropositive performer Antony Rizzi. In this performance, survival, thanks to prescribed medication and illegal substances, is staged by the performer's interaction with soapy water, which demonstrates the alchemical marriage of opposites. I once worked as a biologist at an HIV-laboratory and, here, I approach the intertwining of the ill body and the dancing body of a dancer-alchemist as such an alchemical marriage and explore its transformative potential in disease politics through dancing alchemy around four objects: table, bubbles, hat, and pills. When Fabre's biography intertwines with Rizzi's on Fabre's worktable on stage, the politics of high-risk groups are transformed into inclusiveness. When Rizzi accepts his vulnerability, bubbles symbolising mortality are transformed into protective armour and the chronic temporality of illness is transformed into kairological temporality of opportunity. The dancer-mystic's hat turns Rizzi into an artist-warrior, who transforms the military metaphor for illness into an existential battle. Pills used by Fabre, partly reminiscent of Duchamp's readymades, become a pharmakon that *both* kills and cures, and transform submission of patients to medical chemistry into their agency. The essay concludes that the transformation of drugs into pharmakon corresponds to the 'philosopher's stone' of alchemy: not only does it keep Rizzi alive by 'saving' him from HIV morbidity, but it also becomes a source of corporeal knowledge that 'saves' seropositives and seronegatives from problematic aspects of HIV biomedical politics.

For A

A man wearing a large white hat, dressed in a black shirt and trousers, leans over a wooden table and makes a soap bubble in a bucket. The man sits at the front of the stage, behind glass bottles full of pills, and blows small soap bubbles. The man approaches soapy water and creates a huge bubble with a ring (Figure 1). The man hugs foam produced by a

machine. The man sits at the front of the stage again, while the stage is filled with pills and foam, and new bubbles are produced by machines. More than an hour later, he returns to the table and leans over it while his face is lit like a bubble. He speaks his last line: 'Homo bulla est' (Fabre, 'Drugs' 97).

The man, 'a magician of soap' (82), is the American performer

Fig. 1: Antony Rizzi performs *Drugs Kept Me Alive*. Photo by Wonge Bergmann. Used with permission.

Antony Rizzi. He performs the solo *Drugs Kept Me Alive* created by his long-time collaborator and friend, Belgian theatre director, choreographer, and visual artist Jan Fabre and dedicated to him. It premiered in Maribor, Slovenia, in 2012 (77). Rizzi himself is homosexual and has been HIV-seropositive since 1996 (ImPulsTanz). To write the text, Fabre asked for the inserts from Rizzi's medication, interviewed him about how he copes with side effects ('In Your Face'), and wrote a text they analysed and co-choreographed. In 1996, the introduction of successful anti-retroviral therapy changed the biomedical politics of HIV, by transforming the infection from a terrifying death

sentence into a chronic condition controlled by life-long dependence on prescribed medication (Delaney S1). Fabre's piece is about survival thanks to drugs—both prescribed medication and illegal substances.

An Alchemical Laboratory of Soap

A laboratory is created on stage, where the performer experiments with soapy water. It is the laboratory of an alchemist, since, for alchemy, water is one of the four main elements, a power to be transformed in physical processes and spiritual journeys (Fernando 13). For hermetic philosophers, 'everything has for its principal constituent a soapy water, meaning a compound with two substances' (Pernety qtd. in Moffitt 215). Alchemy is associated with magic and is concerned 'with understanding, as a means of healing a fractured cosmos' (Stratford xv), like the cosmos in which an ill body struggles to exist. Alchemy's *opus magnum* is the creation of the philosopher's stone—a substance capable of inducing transformation. The stone is used to purify 'whatever needs to be purified', and since it is a hydrolith, a waterstone, the aim of alchemy is to 'differentiate the opposites, express both sides in one breath and transform above the split' (Fernando 108, 127). This is the alchemical marriage of opposites, the idea of 'conjunctio' (Haeffner). This 'conjunctio' can be realised in soapy water. The question is whether it can also be realised in an ill and dancing body and in the use of drugs, both prescribed and illegal.

The alchemist in the piece trying to answer this question is a dancer. His art is alchemy because he interacts with soapy water and searches for a spiritual place by transforming his body in order to survive (Fabre, 'Drugs' 83). In the Flemish tradition to which Fabre connects, there is a strong relationship between oil painting and alchemy.[1] For alchemy, 'everything takes place within the body. The studio of the artist [and the laboratory of the alchemist] is not architecture but the inside of a body' (Elkins 1)—an alchemist's body, a painter's body, or a dancer's

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1 The connection between oil painting and alchemy is made both in the anecdotal narratives of Karel van Mander, who wrote biographies of artists in the 16th century (see Dupré viii), and in recent research (Dupré, Elkins).

body. It can even be a theatre director's body: *Troubleyn Laboratorium* is the name of Fabre's theatre studio in Antwerp. Having been influenced by alchemical texts (*Journal–II* 306), Fabre relates to alchemy through the concept of transformation as metamorphosis, which is central in his work ('In Your Face'). He has also organised his theatre company in 'three alchemical phases: doctrine, tradition, organization' (*Journal–II* 265). For Fabre, 'the body is an alchemist' (*Journal–II* 159) thanks to its transformative power. Since he choreographs on paper (see *Umbraculum* 84), his dance is directly related to drawing, his primary practice as a visual artist. As a result, his dance and theatre work also participates in the Flemish tradition of painting and alchemy, with his rehearsal room and stage being alchemical laboratories as well.

The stage, a place of artificiality and illusion, becomes the laboratory for an *opus magnum* carried out by Rizzi's alchemical body, attempting to reconcile illness and dance in the presence of an audience. By the time the stage and Rizzi's body are filled with pills and foam, the experiences of performer and audience will have been transformed into 'something else'. This is the aim Fabre sets to performers (see Roussel et al. 45). Instead of transforming himself into 'someone else', into a character, by using techniques of psychological acting, Rizzi explores this aim through transformations of his alchemical body. This essay seeks to discover this 'something else', which Fabre does not define but is in search of during his creative process. It follows the transformation through which Rizzi performs alchemy for survival and by adopting Fabre's concept of alchemical-theatrical transformation, it explores the effect of the 'something else', on the biomedical politics of illness, involving high-risk groups, the temporality of infection, the body invaded by a virus, and the virus control by medication. The essay departs from four key objects—Fabre's table, soap bubbles, Rizzi's hat, and pills—and draws from my own experience when I used to work as a biologist at an HIV-laboratory.

Table

When Rizzi was still a dance student practicing in front of a mirror, his body had already been alchemical, trying to reconcile the opposites, the subject and the object. His body was researching itself, as he saw its reflection in the mirror; his 'body became subject and object' (Fabre, 'Drugs' 82, Scene 2), a statement also used by Fabre for his experience as a performance artist (Adolphe et al. 365). This experience is offered to his performers through his training method of 'visceral physicality', which refers to using 'the complete body' for response to 'physical or imaginative impulses' (Cassiers et al. 275). Performers are trained to respond to external impulses (like low temperature) and internal impulses (like fatigue) not intellectually, but by feeling their effects on the organs of their bodies. The brain is included in this notion of the body, as the site of imagination, which triggers the performer's transformation into 'something else'. The aforementioned statement is one of the ways Fabre adds his own experience to Rizzi's biographical piece. He is even present on stage through a physical object, the wooden table, which is a replica of the table he made when he was eighteen years old and used as an experimentation bench for his art, as well as in the solo performance *Burglaries and Street Fights* (1978). Fabre also used to lie on the cool glass of the table's surface in order to get relief from the fever that was a symptom of a neurological illness (Fabre, *Journal–I* 81), which also caused insomnia treated with sleeping pills and panic attacks that made him feel as if he were on 'another planet where there is no oxygen' (Fabre, 'Drugs' 80). This table is the corpus of the artist, both his own body and his body of work (van den Dries, *Corpus*). It is Fabre's body that is offered to Rizzi's alchemical laboratory-stage both as a physical presence and in the form of his artistic principles: physical pain as a way to reach a 'spiritual place' (Fabre, 'Drugs' 82-3; *Journal–I* 45), sexuality as freedom and creativity (Fabre, 'Drugs' s 86-7; *Journal–I* 8), and acceptance of failure (Fabre, 'Drugs' 94), since 'winning is secondary' and 'the main objective is … to change the rules of the game' (Fabre, *Journal–II* 68).

Rizzi begins and ends his performance at the table-Fabre's corpus. His performance changes the rules of biography. He states that although the monologue is autobiographical, 'it is the way Fabre imagines I live my life and he is close' ('Las Drogas'). The result is a piece performed as an (auto)biography of/by a homosexual, HIV-seropositive performer, but written by a heterosexual, HIV-seronegative artist, who has included his own body of illness and art in the text, and his physical presence on stage in the form of his table. The table of the artist-alchemist becomes the site of transformation of the (auto) biographical experience. The table is the core of the laboratory, where the alchemist studies and combines substances, as shown, for instance, in a painting from the Flemish tradition, Pieter Brueghel the Elder's *The Alchemist* from 1558 (Figure 2). On this table, biographies intertwine, their temporality is expressed by Fabre as 'real time real action' and this temporality invades the stage, which is a laboratory of illusion. Repetitive, demanding tasks performed in Fabre's theatre are staged. But they result in real exhaustion and pain, challenging the artificiality of the stage and transforming it into 'something beyond it' (van den Dries, 'Introduction' 8). The rules of the stage are changed. Rizzi is not an illusionist performing harmless tricks; rather, he experiments with 'real time real action', achieved through physical interaction with Fabre's own table-corpus and the pills present on stage as physical objects.

Neither the causes of Rizzi's infection nor his art are explained biographically. Rizzi's HIV-seropositivity and Fabre's insomnia are rather a kind of 'text which nature and history gave [them] to decipher' (Merleau-Ponty, 'Cézanne's Doubt' 70), and therefore akin to how Maurice Merleau-Ponty approaches artists' biographies. These illnesses are the conditions that restrict and at the same time enable their freedom, since this 'situated freedom' (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 474) becomes a motive and not a cause, guiding their life and art by opening up to possibilities for transformation. Illnesses are conditions of existence. The 'something else', to which the transformation of the concept of (auto)biography leads, is an existential condition of inclusiveness that changes the rules of HIV-infection.

Fig. 2: *The Alchemist*, etching by Pieter Brueghel the Elder, 1558. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

On stage, then, there are two biographies, the one of the biographed and the one of the biographer, interacting as two bodies, the body of the dancer and the table/body/corpus of the choreographer, respectively. Another body also participates in the interaction: it is the body of the audience. Due to how the HIV virus is transmitted, health professionals analysing the body fluids of seropositives become members of the same high-risk group as their patients. So did I, when I worked at an HIV-laboratory. Fabre's table on stage and his ideas on art in the autobiographical text relate to my own biography, as a member of the audience, and invite me to 'see' this table as a body where biographies intertwine. The biomedical politics of stigmatised high-risk groups and their positioning in opposition to allegedly unaffected HIV-seronegatives are transformed, because this is not an HIV-biography, but an existential biography of both the seropositive and the seronegative.

Bubbles

In Scene 1, Rizzi has just received the diagnosis, he is on the planet of the ill where there is no oxygen and suddenly, 'an oval membrane' envelops him. Inside, there is oxygen, hope, acceptance of death as part of life: 'life is worth living even if that implies death' (Fabre, 'Drugs' 80), even if the HIV-infection is incurable. In Fabre's method, acceptance and exposure of physical vulnerability and mortality are crucial for performers' transformations into 'something else'. Liquids like sweat from exhaustion, blood (as in Fabre's theatre piece *I Am Blood* in 2001) and tears (as in Fabre's theatre piece *The History of Tears* in 2005), transform the physical body, since secretions are 'the energy of the body' (Fabre, *Journal-II* 290). Sweat, tears, sperm, and blood are abundant in *Drugs Kept Me Alive*, but Rizzi's 'liquid universe' (Fabre, 'Drugs' 93) consists mainly of soap bubbles, which feature as a 'symbol of being human' (96), and therefore mortal. The huge bubble that envelops his body like protective armour transforms his body into a 'dancing fountain' (79). The paradoxical transformation of the bubble into armour results from Fabre's approach to HIV as an opportunity for transformation, beginning with acceptance of vulnerability and mortality, which turns vulnerability into protective armour, made visible as a bubble.

This bubble is an armour of time. Biological time, directed from birth towards death, is linear and its inevitability makes the bubble a symbol of vanity. Performance artist and scholar Martin O'Brien, who is chronically ill, experiences the temporality of chronic illness as being related to the submission to a biomedical politics of the body's regulation; he refers to Chronos, the ancient Greek god of time. There is a distinction, though, between 'chronos', the measurable, successive time whose direction cannot be reversed, and 'kairos', the time that cannot be either measured or fixed (Honkanen 8). The temporal richness of 'kairos' is the 'time of opportunity'. By accepting illness as an opportunity for transformation, Rizzi's performance and life do not happen in chronological, but in kairological time, although he still obeys biomedical politics, for example by taking medication, in order

to survive. As the bubble is transformed into a vulnerable armour 'that may disappear in less than a second' (Fabre, 'Drugs' 93), vulnerability becomes armour, capable of influencing the biomedical politics of illness by changing its temporality into kairological time.

Bubbles could be the trick of a conjurer. The last scene of *Drugs Kept Me Alive* shows Rizzi's face lit like a perfect 'O'. It is the 'most perfect form of nature', that of a bubble (Fabre, 'Drugs' 84), which is also the alchemical symbol for perfection (Fernando 120). This bubble-armour is fecund, as it is transformed into a womb where temporal transformation as new life in kairos can take place. Indeed, the alchemist's symbol for water is the reversed triangle of the womb (Stratford 90) and the soapy water is the 'principle constituent of everything' (Pernety qtd. in Moffitt 215). Fabre's alchemical concept of the horizontal body, explored in his piece *I Am Blood*, refers to a body that cannot be injured because it is only liquid without flesh, and to liquids becoming armour and womb. The 'something else', the 'dancing fountain' into which Rizzi is transformed, expresses the transformation of the inevitability of mortality into a life worth living. My own experience of interaction with HIV-seropositives is awakened by the visual expression of vulnerability through the bubble. Fabre's piece makes me recall their stories and invites me to 'see' the temporal aspect of this bubble, which is at odds with the linear progress of the disease through the different stages recorded in their medical records. Thanks to vulnerability as protection, HIV-seropositives do not bear the stigma of the death sentenced, but live life not as a problem to be solved by medical causality, but as a fecund opportunity to be celebrated kairologically.

Hat

What does the diagnosis of an incurable disease mean? At the beginning of most scenes, Rizzi asks himself, 'am I sick?'. The answer always begins with: 'I am an incurable … '. Having a bubble for armour, Rizzi struggles to transform the incurability of his illness into 'something else'. He does not feel sick, the virus does not cause symptoms, because

it is latent, also protected by an armour in the form of 'a small bubble' or 'cell' (Fabre, 'Drugs' 95). The two armoured fighters are on the battlefield.

In Fabre's oeuvre, one of the personae related to battle is the 'knight of despair', with despair being a fecund condition when nothing comes for free and the priority is survival ('Fabre: Chevalier du désespoir'). In this condition Rizzi, the dancer, realises he 'cannot live without dancing' (Fabre, 'Drugs' 82). He demonstrates this through his hat. It is reminiscent of the hat of a dervish, a dancer-mystic, who searches for a spiritual place like Rizzi (83). When the knight acquires the bubble-armour, he is ready to fight. But 'in which war?' (92) It seems that the first battle concerns the definition of incurability and Rizzi becomes an 'artist-warrior' (88), performing the answer as a dancer wearing the dervish's hat, who 'reinvents ancient dances … and rituals of war' (81).

Rizzi refers to 'biological war in [his] body' (Fabre, 'Drugs' 94), while sounds of sirens and bombs are heard when he interacts with foam. In *AIDS and Its Metaphors,* Susan Sontag shows how the military metaphor for AIDS, which identifies the body with a fortress under attack, leads to the stigmatisation of patients as members of high-risk groups, who threaten humanity's health. She attempts to counter this, arguing, 'we are not being invaded', 'the body is not a battlefield' (95). Fabre's notion that 'my body is a battlefield' (*Journal–I* 45), though, is the exact opposite. It is not the metaphor of a body under attack, but 'the body as a laboratory' of experimentation, a notion extended to the alchemical laboratory and Fabre's table which are both bodies (*Journal–I* 86). Fabre's metaphor enacts what Sontag asks for: the application of the 'strategy against interpretation … to the body' (14). The alchemical marriage of opposites is such a strategy: the 'conjunctio' is not a metaphor for invasion. Moreover, Rizzi performs the 'conjunctio' of despair from incurability and hope for a life without symptoms by transforming himself into an artist-warrior, in a battle through which human vulnerability is creatively defended on the stage (Fabre, *Journal–I* 87; 'Drugs' 96).

Rizzi's way of coping with illness involves the creation of new definitions, which define the body not as fortress but as a sexual and spiritual being, similarly to how Fabre creatively defines his own neurological issues (see *Journal–I* 177-79). Rizzi, the artist-warrior, becomes 'something else' than an HIV-seropositive. The virus is never mentioned in the piece. Rizzi is an incurable lover of life, romantic, seducer, visionary, adventurer, lover of failure (Fabre, 'Drugs' 81, 83, 85, 88, 92, 94). Rizzi is a dancer. Rizzi is alive. The repeated 'am I sick?' awakens my experience of seropositives asking the same thing at the HIV-laboratory where I worked. The answer that contained war metaphors makes me 'hear' the sirens in the piece as alarms against prejudice: it is not a battle against an enemy, but a 'ritual of war' fought as a rite of passage towards an incurable love for life.

Fig. 3: Antony Rizzi performs *Drugs Kept Me Alive.* Photo by Wonge Bergmann. Used with permission.

Pills

Unsettling music is heard. Rizzi is on the floor with his shirt wet and open, grabbing and opening one glass bottle after the other and emptying the contents in his mouth. Pills fill his mouth and are stuck

on his body (Figure 3). Rizzi enacts the large number of pills required during the early years of anti-retroviral therapy, when the condensation of active ingredients was difficult. In scene 5, this 'dancing pharmacy' is incurably addicted to 'movement and dance and all legal and illegal drugs' (Fabre, 'Drugs' 89, 81). What is the meaning of 'drugs' and 'pharmacy' for this dancer-alchemist?

In Fabre's method, action begins from a physical impulse, which affects the performers' physicality and triggers their active response (see Cassiers et al. 277). Fabre has experimented with his sleeping pills in solo performances by using drugs as a physical stimulus towards transformation into 'something else' (*Journal-I* 315). For Rizzi, the 'something else' is a dancing body. Pills are the 'readymade of the twenty-first century' (Fabre, 'Drugs' 88), HAART (Highly-Active Anti-Retroviral Therapy) transformed into 'art'. This is a form of art partly reminiscent of Marcel Duchamp's readymades, since it is a gesture: choosing, transforming, and giving a title to an object ultimately recontextualises it (Duchamp 209). It is also the art of alchemy. Duchamp has been called 'the alchemist of the avant-garde' (Moffitt), and has profoundly influenced Fabre, who even used his name by translating its French syllables (mar-cel-du-champ) into the English language as *Sea Salt of the Fields* for his 1980 performance.

In the art of alchemy, 'the elixir of life … is treated as ambivalent, as both healing and poisonous' (Haeffner). In this 'conjunctio' of iatrochemistry[2] Rizzi 'differentiates the opposites', namely prescribed medication and illegal drugs, 'expresses both sides in one breath', by using the ambiguous word 'drugs', and 'transforms above the split' (Fernando 127).

Duchamp's work involves medication. *Pharmacie*, for instance, is a painting readymade of 1914. It is a print of a winter landscape with a water pond and two added drops of red and green colour, which correspond to the colours of glass bottles in French pharmacies. The piece has been approached through alchemy as a way of signalling

with colours the beginning and the end of *opus magnum* (Moffitt 244-45). This is the bodily *work* carried out on Rizzi's stage-laboratory: a performance of pills and soapy water with a beginning and an end (Fabre, 'Drugs' 96).

By interacting with pills as physical objects, Rizzi negotiates legal and illegal chemistry through alchemy. Alchemy is not the opposite of chemistry, but it gave birth to it and is another way of coping with the world (Levere 13). Rizzi decides about the way he combines anti-retroviral treatment with other substances (Fabre, 'Drugs' 89). He is no longer unwillingly submitted to medical chemistry and transforms medication into 'something else', a 'dancing pharmacy'. My memory of a poster with printed anti-retroviral pills in the HIV-laboratory is awakened by the pills stuck on Rizzi's body, and gives way to another memory, that of Duchamp's *Pharmacie*. As a result, I 'see' Rizzi's movements as an attempt to choose, transform, and give a name to his pills, the same as Duchamp did with readymades, instead of just swallowing them, following pre-set instructions.

The transformation of anti-retroviral medication into art is also the art of theatre. For Fabre, 'becoming metamorphosed by self-poisoning' results in giving birth 'to a new life on stage' (*Journal-I* 186). This art is a 'pharmakon', a drug that is both poison and medicine, a medium that highlights their oppositional nature (see Derrida 97, 127). This is the kind of theatre that Fabre wishes to do: 'Art cures. Art poisons' (*Journal-II* 266). Rizzi's vulnerability, summarised in his attempt to 'save [him]self by poisoning [him]self' (Fabre, 'Drugs' 96), becomes the pharmakon offered to the audience. It is the 'philosopher's stone', the outcome of the *opus magnum* resulting from the alchemical 'conjunctio' of the opposites of poison and cure, as well as of the body of medicine and the body of desire, in Rizzi's body.

In the final scene, acceptance of mortality is related to 'intensity of existence' and to illness 'as a source of knowledge and pleasure' (Fabre, 'Drugs' 96). This is the way the 'stone' is used to whatever 'needs to be purified', in this case, the audience. The exploration of the intertwining of the ill and dancing body through the guidelines of

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2 Iatrochemistry is a form of alchemy devoted to medicinal purposes.

Fabre's method, weaved around his table, soap bubbles, Rizzi's hat and pills, has demonstrated that the transformation of drugs into pharmakon not only keeps Rizzi alive by 'saving' him from HIV morbidity, but becomes also a source of corporeal knowledge 'saving' seropositives and seronegatives from problematic aspects of HIV biomedical politics.

Postscript

On 19 March 2016, a former biologist who used to carry out blood tests for monitoring HIV-seropositives was in the audience of the performance at the Théâtre de la Bastille in Paris. The pharmakon of the dancer-alchemist awakened latent memories of her laboratorium work that were protected by a bubble of time. Biological fluids were for her samples to analyse and patients corresponded to four-digit codes. Memories were transformed into the point of view on the piece offered in this essay. This is the craft of the 'magician of soap', who transforms alienating experience through the vulnerable power of the body. He is not a four-digit code. The magician's name is Tony. The magician's name is Jan. Their pharmakon keeps *us* alive.

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Translations from French and Italian sources have been made by the author.

If I Return Will You Remember

By Pedro Manuel

(On stage, there is a table and chair on the left side, facing the audience and, to the right side, there is an area on the floor, delimitated with silver tape in the shape of a rectangle with the same size as the tabletop.

On the table there is a book, a pen, a stack of sheets of paper, as well as a webcam attached from the side and pointed downwards at the top of the table. There is also a bottle of water and a glass, turned upside down. The glass is filled with smoke. Behind the table and the rectangle, hangs a screen, where the video feed from the webcam will be projected.

When the audience enters I'm sitting at the table. I am wearing an all black outfit, except for the head and hands. When the audience is seated, I turn the glass upwards and the smoke rises and dissipates in the air.

Blackout. Then, stage lights fading on. I address the audience.)

During a magic act, the gaze of the audience is drawn to one of the hands of the magician while, in fact, the trick is happening in the other. The visible appears complete, but there are invisible things happening that one is not seeing, because one is distracted by the visible. The visible looks complete, but visibility is not complete until the invisible appears. Here, I will make invisible things become visible on stage, and I will also show how to see them as invisible.

In showing the invisible, there will be an obvious relation with the apparition of ghosts, because ghosts are said to be invisible. Ghosts can appear on stage through different techniques. In the nineteenth-century, for example, there were live performances, called *Phantasmagoria*, that combined optical effects and theatre, projecting dreadful images onto screens and, sometimes, onto smoke.
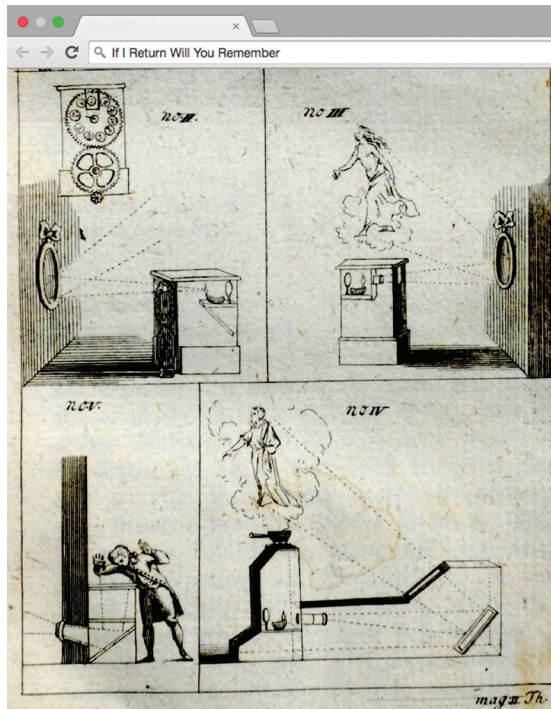
Fig. 1: Magic Lantern, illustration by Karl von Eckartshausen in 'Aufschlüsse zur Magie aus geprüften Erfahrungen über verborgene philosophische Wissenschaften und seltne Geheimnisse der Natur' (Munich: Pflüger, 1923).

Appearances of ghosts and skeletons were projected onto smoke, which made their apparition a mixture of a projected image and of a supernatural cloud or fog, embodying the presence of ghosts as diaphanous and ethereal.

Another form of staging a ghost in the nineteenth-century was a special effect called *Pepper's Ghost*. A large glass was installed in the proscenium, with its upper part slightly inclined towards the audience. Underneath the stage, actors were illuminated and, through reflection, their image appeared on the glass. From the perspective of the audience, however, the reflection would look to be standing onstage, alongside the living actors.
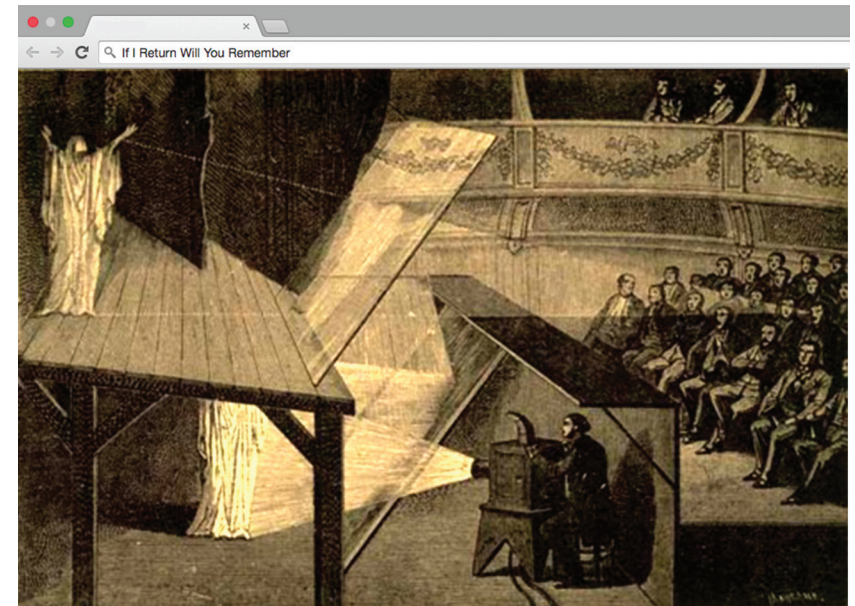
Fig. 2: Pepper's Ghost effect, illustration by Alfredo Molteni in 'Instructions Pratique sur l'emploi des Appareils de Projection' (Paris: Gauthier-Villars, ca. 1881).

I particularly like the depiction of the *Pepper's Ghost* effect that I am showing here. The drawing shows how the reflection is made to appear on stage through a light game, but it also shows how a spectator in the audience sees it. A triangle opens from his eyes towards the stage, indicating that his gaze is the perspectival point from which the ghost can be seen through the glass and, to me, it also suggests that his gaze is the very beamer—as in a light, or video projector—of the apparition of the ghost.

In this schematic, there are two invisible presences being represented, the ghost on stage and the gaze of the onlooker. The gaze is outlined by a dashed line. Dashed lines are one of the most common ways to make the invisible appear. If, instead of a straight line, I draw a dashed line—a line made by dashes—this line becomes softer: a border line that you can crossover. Instead of showing what is there, a dashed line shows what can be there. Allow me to demonstrate.

(I draw the outline of my open hand on a sheet of paper, drawing around all the fingers except the little finger.)

This drawing traces the contour of my hand. But there are invisible things in it that can be made visible, or rather, which can be made invisible. A dashed line can present:

– what may have been here in the past, but that now its absent: like this finger that was lost *(drawing a little finger with a dashed line)*

– what may be here in the present, but that is invisible to our eyes: like this bone inside of the arm *(drawing a bone inside of the arm)*

– what can potentially happen in a future, even if it is not yet here: like this thumb, moving up and down *(drawing an arrow between the thumb and the hand, suggesting movement)*
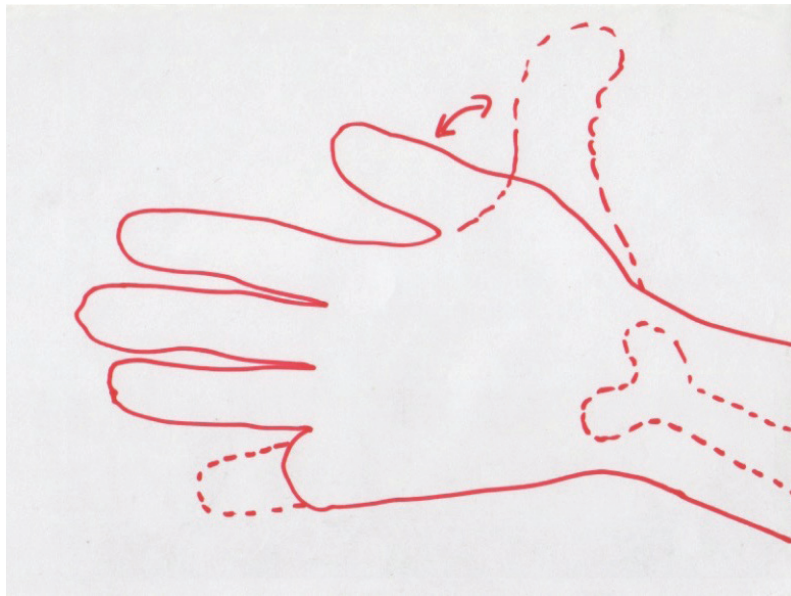
Fig. 3: Dashed lines, illustration by Pedro Manuel.

Something shown with a dashed line can be happening now, come to happen in the future, or have already happened. Maybe that is the reason why in the field of engineering, a dashed line is also called 'phantom line'. It shows something that is simultaneously past and present, that it is there, and not there, but remains as a potential.

In theatre, a classic way of showing things that are there and not there is pantomime. *(putting on white gloves)* Pantomime allows you to show things that are not just invisible, but that are simply not there. In pantomime, objects are given to see when actors mimic their shape and, particularly, their function. *(pausing, looking at the hands)* Half of this job is in the gloves. They are for the hand what the mask is for the face. In order to hand the invisible, one must wear gloves. For example, *(pointing to the rectangle on the floor)* there is a block of marble, one of those massive blocks of marble that sculptors use to create a statue. I will show you.

(I pantomime the surface, edges, and corners of a block of marble with the hands, while describing my actions.)

Another key element in pantomime are the eyes. If an actor shows to be seeing an object, such object becomes visible. If, on the contrary, the eyes of the performer are not seen, then it is the performer who becomes invisible. Like when children become invisible because they cover their eyes. This is what happens in the traditional puppet theatre of Bunraku, in Japan, where the puppeteers perform dressed in black suits that covers their body entirely. It is as if they were not there. They may be visible but they are not to be seen.

Another aspect that renders the Bunraku puppeteer invisible is being fully dressed in black against a dark backdrop. They dissolve and disappear in the dark. They become invisible by blending in, by camouflaging into the environment of the stage.
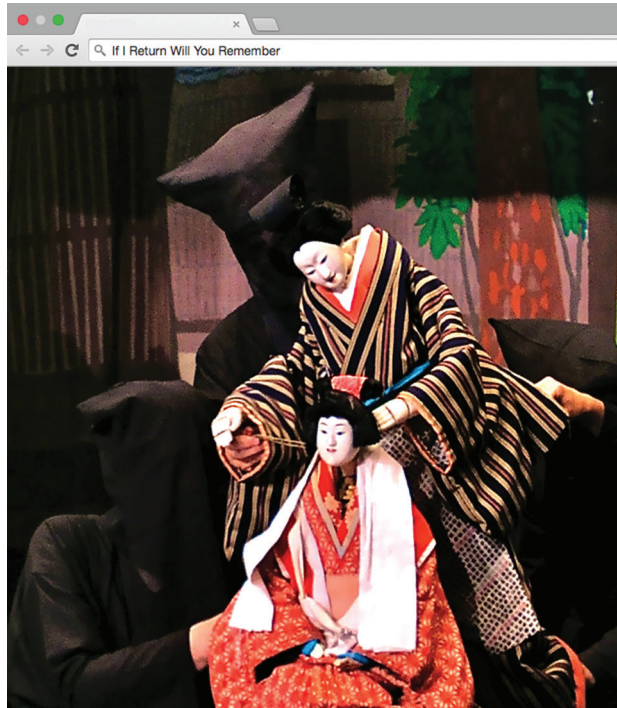
Fig. 4: Puppeteers in 'Keisei Awa no Naruto' by the Bunraku Bay Puppet Troupe.

One other example of theatre where actors camouflage in their environment is a technique proposed by Brazilian director Augusto Boal, which he called *Invisible Theatre*. For Boal, *Invisible Theatre* referred to a situation which was rehearsed by actors but that was presented in a real life setting without any notice that it was a rehearsed performance. The audience was not aware that they were *the* audience because the actors didn't present themselves *as* actors. Such pieces aim at igniting a public debate and at raising awareness about social and political issues. When the discussion triggered by the actors generates enough opinions, or arrives at a conclusion, the actors uncover the situation and disclose it as being rehearsed. Only then, looking back, the participating audience becomes able to reflect on the events.

I have looked for images of *Invisible Theatre* but I am afraid I haven't found any. There was no image where I could distinguish an invisible theatre performance from either an image of a real theatre play, or an image of real people having a discussion. I couldn't tell the difference.

Camouflage is the ultimate invisibility. It is not the same as hiding. When things are camouflaged, they may be in plain sight but they are not visible. One can be looking at an image of a forest and see nothing but trees until someone says, look at that owl, can you see the wolf, behind the bushes, there, it's a soldier pointing a gun.

Other times, there is nothing in the forest and the simple mentioning of something as present makes it present, even if it is not seen. This is the case when images are generated mentally through visualization. Like dashed lines, visualisation can be a strategy for making invisible things appear. For example, *(pointing to the rectangle delimited with silver tape)* I can see that there is a statue inside that block of marble. Let's have a look at it.

(Lights are dimmed, a pre-recorded track of my voice speaking plays in the dark.)

Close your eyes. You see a big block of stone. As you come closer you see it is made of white marble, with grey and pink veins. It is a block of marble ready to be shaped by a sculptor. *(pause)* Now, look inside the marble. At first, it is difficult to perceive what is inside, but then you are able to distinguish the shape of a pair of legs. The legs are crossed onto each other and wrapped in a robe. On the lap of the crossed legs, there are arms and hands resting, with the palms of the hands facing up. Now you follow the arms upwards and the torso of a person appears, also dressed in a robe. And then a head with long ears, eyes closed. Is it sleeping? It seems to be awake, but deeply focused in thoughts, maybe meditating. *(pause)* Now you walk around the

block of marble, while looking at the statue. You realise that the figure inside of the block is a hole, a hole inside the marble, sculpted in the shape of a man meditating. *(pause)* Is the statue meditating on its hollowness inside the marble, or is the marble meditating on its shape as a statue?

(End of pre-recorded track, lights return to normal.)

Did you see what I saw? I hope you see what I mean. For something to be visualised it has to hold the possibility of being real, but remaining only as a sight of that possibility.

In the same way, in order for something to be invisible, it must be within the scope of visibility but, simply, not seen. Things are in sight but unseen. To look for the invisible is not a way of seeing better, or of not-seeing, it is a way of unseeing. It is not about something being absent but a different way of being present.

See light. Light is invisible, unless it reflects onto something. It travels in the universe untouched, and it travels through this room unnoticed. If there is nothing to be lighted—be it a cloud of smoke, or an actor off-stage—light is not seen.

Light makes itself visible by making things visible, but the condition of visibility is, in itself, invisible. From here one can, perhaps, deduct the more general rule that things can only be seen when they reflect something invisible. Maybe this is something to be looked at.

(I am wearing the white pantomime gloves, walking to the rectangle, covering my eyes with the hands. Blackout, end.)

Contextual Note

The lecture-performance *If I Return Will You Remember* follows a series of pieces that I call 'play-essays', and through which I explored ideas about presence and absence on stage. In this case the aim was to show how 'invisibility' is represented in mediums such as drawing, photography, design, and theatre. Particularly, I was interested in showing 'how the invisible appears', that is, how it is 'made to appear' but also what its appearance is.

The piece was written and performed by myself, and it was created alongside my doctoral research on the subject of 'theatre without actors' (Utrecht University). The performance was co-produced by Frascati Theater (Amsterdam), while other versions were also presented at FLAM and Het Huis Utrecht.

The text above is a short version adapted from the stage text. In this version, I aimed at presenting some of the key ideas, while keeping a sense of how the piece was enacted and demonstrations performed. Except for the drawing of the hand, the images shown were printed on a book of images used during the performance and designed by Barbara Alves. The design simulated the display of the images on a web browser in order to show how the images were found and collected online.

Sieving Wax with Oil

By Graydon Wetzler

The text below is an excerpt from a larger creative research experiment that brings together sets of normally reclusive discourses to render a speculative constellation generated by defining the gifted biologist Hilde Proescholdt (1898-1924, later known under her married name Mangold) and Abraham Gesner (1797-1864)—a Nova Scotia-born physician, geologist, inventor, and an obscure father of the petroleum industry—as a disinclinating locus. The encompassing research project within which the current text is situated first germinated a decade ago in a required PhD course, 'Performance Studies Methods', which I took at New York University. I endeavored to contribute to developing ecology-oriented exchanges across artistic research, performance studies, object-oriented ontology, new materialism, and science and technology studies. If I am offering a new vision for performance studies methodologies in these exchanges today, it is to speciate plausible chimeras by collecting and distinguishing between—or 'sieving'—extant historicities. Put differently, I aim to adapt Pinar Yoldas's (Visual Arts Professor, UC San Diego) impetus for speculative biology as a 'Fabula Rasa' that is in the service not of 'flights of fancy, but alternate realities with disruptive power' and to induce a kind of a/biotic magic, 'where the sky is the color of a television turned to a dead channel' (35-36).

Hilde Proescholdt's 1921 laboratory studies on newt embryos were foundational in that they originated the current view of embryonic development as chemically induced cell-cell communication that occurs within morphogenetic fields over long distances and self-regulates in response to experimental perturbations. Recognition would elide Proescholdt, however, as she tragically died in 1924 from burns suffered after a kerosene stove exploded while she was heating up milk for her newborn baby. In 1846, Abraham Gesner was the first to distill liquid fuel from coal, bitumen, and oil shale, which he named kerosene. Gesner's technical innovations spurred the petroleum industry, but he also never received wide-scale recognition, as the development of large-scale commercial petroleum mining in the 1850s and '60s caused the value of illuminating oil to plummet.

A complex historical and semantic field emerges when Proescholdt and Gesner are placed along a speculative continuum. Rather than kerosene itself, attention should be devoted the word's Greek conjoint *keroselaion*, meaning 'wax-oil'. Setting loose this complex sum revealed a constellation of historical tableaux, materialities, and marginalia that spans the South East/North East Canadian/U.S. border(s) and Atlantic/New England triangular trade dissonance. To give form to this research, I look to Wyatt MacGaffey's extensive anthropological and sociological studies of *minkisi* (*minkisi* is the plural form of *nkisi*)—West African containers comprised of animal, vegetable, and mineral materials that the Belgian filmmaker and anthropologist Luc De Heusch famously called vessels for the 'spirits of the dead metonymically caught in a metaphorical trap' (qtd. in MacGaffey, 'Complexity' 190). MacGaffey characterised *minkisi* as irreducible complexes of material, medicinal, and performative dimensions whose principal structure is that of a multitudinous rebus operating through combinations of displacements initiated through homology, pun, metonymy, and other associative devices ('African Objects'). Concurrent to much of MacGaffey's work on the *minkisi*, William Pietz published a series of extensive genealogies of how the idea of *fetish* came to modulate and install a key semantic field that enabled the West to self-identify with a rationalized colonialism that stood in contrast to the irrational attribution of causal relations to random associations through efficacious magic. *Minkisi* lie at the heart of Pietz's negative dialectics of the fetish, because, for Pietz, the fetish 'as an idea and a problem, and as a novel object not proper to any prior discrete society, originated in the cross-cultural spaces of the coast of

West Africa during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' (5). Pietz observes that the scholarship of the fetish in the eighteenth century provided 'the image and conception of fetishes on which Enlightenment intellectuals based their elaboration of the notion into a general theory of primitive religion' against a false attribution of value based on the 'historicization, territorialization, reification, and personalisation' of matter (5, 12).

Elsewhere (Wetzler 2019), I emphasize the chemical links of the above conjuncture. As a contribution to Platform's issue 'On Magic', the excerpt below follows some of this research's magical threads through techniques spanning experimental biology, colloidal suspension, industrial synthetics, and anthropology. My hope is to give form to this speculative non-fiction, of science and of fire, in the spirit of Pietz's negative field of the fetish, MacGaffey's explication of *minkisi* as complex performative assemblages ('African Objects'), and the *minkisi's* efficacious conceptual trouble-making for Western perspectives of social relations, material value, and non-human agency. The question then is whether, here, history is a magician, or whether history is a magical material?

Coup en Bias

1892. The Sootless Kerosene Stove is patented to a Swede. With coveted burner design, the stove takes doubles worldwide: in the U.S. as the 'Coleman', the 'Metace' in Australia, 'Hipolito' in Portugal, the Czechoslovakian 'Meva', and the German 'Petromax'. Shortly after Proescholdt transplanted living substance, a French designer, Madeleine Vionnett, introduced her 'coup en bias' in 1924, traversing warp and weft, cutting along 'bias grain' giving fluidity (to fabric) through distaste (for corsets). Vionnett's *cuts* challenged conventions of corsets and stays—dresses notoriously difficult to remove quickly (such as in the case of catching fire) (see Mahe).
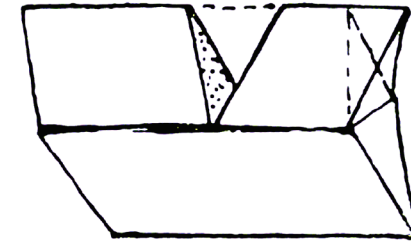
Fig. 1: Calcite twinning generated by a re-entrant angle caused through reversal of portion. Adapted by the author from Przibram.

In protostome, blastopore becomes mouth. In deuterostome, blastopore becomes anus.

A Lock of Natural Fibre

A consummate *bricoleur* fastens a lasso from a tress of his offspring's hair, binding noose on jelly around a specimen's first fold, tightening until a distinction is manifest, and obtains two complete embryos. Under more attenuated constrictions, fused embryos emerge. Dorsal planar manipulations terminate in a piece of belly, while ventral repertoires yield skin, undifferentiated mesenchyme, kidney tubules; but none participate in corporeal axis.
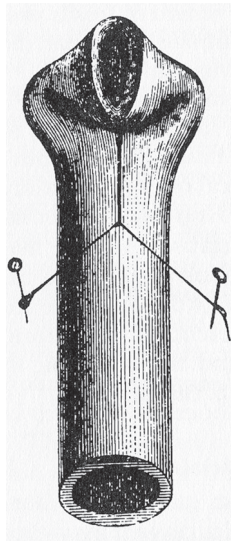

Fig. 2: Wilhelm His, Sr., 'Chick Brain Compared to Folded Rubber Tube' (in Gould). Public domain, modified by the author.

Locks of Synthetic Fibre

1912. Vinyl chloride (VCM) is a chemical intermediate: a colorless gas in liquid form susceptible to flash evaporation and a carcinogenic with mildly sweet odor. Polymerized VCM yields polyvinyl chloride fibers (PVC)—a composite storing negative electricity when rubbed and enabling undergarments said to relieve rheumatism. PVC resists chemical residue and water absorption, providing both thermal and electrical insulation.

1935. Nylon is a thermoplastic with compact modularity robust to melting. Synthesized with petrochemicals, nylon became the preferable base for women's stockings and during WWII replaced Japanese silk in manufacturing parachutes. It is considered ideal as substrate for printing U.S. currency.

1953. DuPont Corp's Textile Engineering Lab uses condensation polymerization to spin a burn resistant synthetic with aromatic base structure, annealed to bond a crystalline, 'honeycomb' skein, and commercialized through amide solvents.

Convolve/Divine
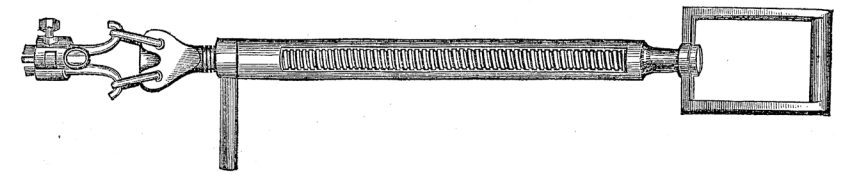
Fig. 3: 'Temper Screw', adapted by author from Gesner (*A Treatise*, 30).

1921, University of Freiburg. Hilde Proescholdt is unable to repeat Tremley's inside-out Hydra. Proescholdt's advisor, and eminent experimental biologist, Hans Spemann challenges her to reveal the handedness of an 'organizing centre' via heteroplastic manipulation. Proescholdt concatenated five acts to carry the matter in. Her induced morphologies and exquisite hand drawn histological sections would tunnel into the postscript of her advisor's Nobel-earning 1921 paper demonstrating the inductive power of an organizing center.

Mineral Manipulation

Fig. 4: 'Lazy Tongs', adapted by author from Gesner (*A Treatise*, 30).

1824, Nova Scotia. After two shipwrecks between his birthplace and the West Indies and in debt from a failed horse-trading venture, Abraham Gesner concedes to his father-in-law's directive to become a surgeon. Returning home as country doctor, Gesner feeds a habit with saddlebags full of crystall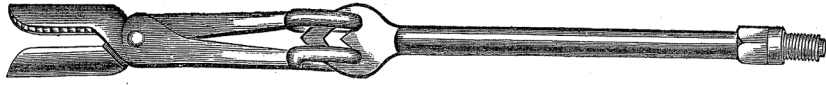ised rock, publishing a first monograph, *Remarks on the Geology and Mineralogy of Nova Scotia*, and is named Provincial Geologist of New Brunswick with funds flowing from a burgeoning extraction industry. 1843 marks Abraham's return to Nova Scotia where he sets to work on the manufacture of an artificial lamp oil.
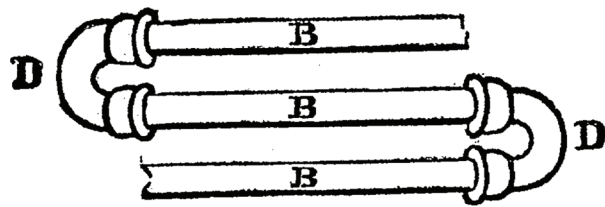
Matter Out of Place

Fig. 5: 'Superheated Steam Apparatus', adapted from Gesner (*A Treatise*, 86).

Sir Frazer makes the following remarks concerning Contagious Magic: 'is a material medium of some sort which, like the ether of modern physics, is assumed to unite distant objects and to convey impressions from one to the other' (43). The spell of contagion assumes doublings of person and severed limb, as well as twinning of newborn with navel-string and placenta, the two continuing to influence the one as a distant unity. Frazer is unequivocal: `magic is a spurious system of natural law, as well as a fallacious guide of contact' (13), presupposing material affect 'through a space which appears to be empty' (14).

The migrating tissue seduces the passive, indifferent materiality of a host to become fate, an affective double to its potential effect, to yield worked matter. Spemann conjectures his student to have revealed one of multiple centers—each signaling an interstitial fate through catalyzing centers and diffusing margins, like witchery, operating rules of contagion and antithetical action at a distance.

Extract, Crack, Sieve

1818, West Indies. Gesner collects a sample of bitumen from Trinidad's 'Pitch Lake', and cooks the first batch of a novel illuminating oil. It is impractical to come by, and emits an offensive odor when burned.

1852, Albert County, New Brunswick. Gesner visits a vertically injected vein along the Petitcodiac drawing an unidentified bituminous mineral environed by 'rock neither roof, floor, under clay, nor stratum of *stigmata*' distinguishing coal. Dubbed 'Albert coal', this vein of asphaltum would elude Abraham as the sole provenance of the Crown.

1854, New York, NY. Eagle Hazard, a shipping corporation established by operating a line for cotton trade between New York and Mobile, Alabama, issues a circular announcing a patent for a new material dubbed 'Asphalte Rock', an 'entirely new article of commerce … found in Inexhaustible quantities in the Province of New Brunswick', having conchoidal fracture, leaving fingers unsoiled and void those properties known to constitute coal. The document alludes to

a 'peculiar' method for extracting fluids from a 'full and constant supply of the Rock', and 'requiring few hands and no complex machinery'. The patent's balance was given to careful description of a distilling and treating processes. The fluid is first induced through dry distillation, and always in a closed retort. It is then further cut with sulfuric acid to sieve undesirable content, and again purified now with freshly calcified lime for absorbing residual water and neutralizing its acid. Depending on method of distillation, Abraham's rock will educe a solvent for India rubber, petroleum substrate for transportation, engine grease, and above all, an illuminating oil that is both smokeless and odorless and enables an incandescence of unmatched hue.

1857, Trinidad. The Earl of Dundonald secures rights for Pitch Lake's entire surround and draws a line in 'Trinidad Oil' linking Nova Scotia to Boston, with a distillate known as kerosene and extending that line to England.

Copy/Substance/Contagion

'I, Abraham Gesner […] have invented and discovered a new and useful manufacture of composition of matter, being a new liquid hydrocarbon, which I denominate Kerosene.' ('Improvements in Kerosene Burning Fluids')

'I transplanted a young optic vesicle beneath some belly ectoderm.' (Richard M. Eakin performing Hans Spemann in *Great Scientists Speak Again*, 1975)

'It is not the wax that I am scorching [but] the liver, heart, and spleen of So-and-so that I scorch.' (Taussig 253).
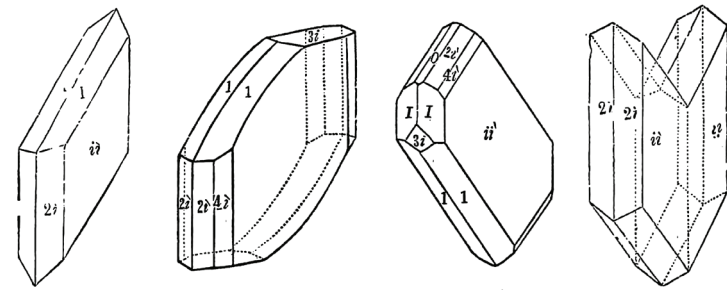
Fig. 6: Cleavage and twinning in common gypsum. Adapted by author from Dana (370).

In magical *res*, an act in absence, sympathetic to historicity, as well as, to hysteresis—an intermediate between affective and causal law. Little is known about Proescholdt's life outside the laboratory. She married the most senior student in Spemann's lab, a suspected Nazi and only recognized co-author on Spemann's published 1921 study. Proescholdt, now Mangold, bore a child with the former. She read Rilke, attended Husserl's lectures, and decorated her flat with Expressionist prints.

Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert tell us that '[i]t is the image of the thing to be displaced that runs along the sympathetic chain'. Hilde ignites a chain of synthetic history and natural magic by displacing matter betwixt unformed newts. The *now* migrated organizer enacts the host as substance and yield a double void/mass. Spemann the *bricoleur* conduces theoretical induction to matter, and is awarded the Nobel Prize in 1934. Gesner the *alchemist* urges matter and reads flame, cooking substance *anew*, yielding a novel *naptha* that migrates into the 'Petromax'.

Frazer summoned Hegel to unravel 'tangled skein' of thing and idea. The philosopher's task is to dispel theoretical magic as spurious

science and 'bastard art', and become mind reader, thereon upon resistant things, even if from a distance of *theory as ether*. False magic doesn't necessarily make for bad theory: diffusing abstract principle in worked matter sometimes yields *theory magic*.

Sartre exposes as much in a-certain kind of *Existential Magic* where the to and fro of raw matter and worked matter transplants interiority into exteriority. Materiality 'is indissolubly linked to the meanings engraved in it by praxis' (180). Matter is, therefore, always *synthetic*. But we need neutralize Sartre's words elsewhere in a retort when after drawing a negative horizon, 'If he (man) could encounter pure matter in experience, he would have to be either a god or a stone', he detracts a sentence earlier, 'Man lives in a universe where the future is a thing, where the idea is an object and where the violence of matter is the midwife of History' (181–182). For the incantation to 'produce the effect' *(theory magic)*, one need only cut Sartre (one meter) short, cutting the matter down. One need not be a stone to experience twice-worked matter as pure matter. Our encounter with Hilde *illates* this. Lest we forget the cut we began, besides the natural doubling of first and second mouths (with Deuteronomy the fifth mouth of the Law) is the portmanteau, *a mouth for eating and speaking*—an ingress inducing a closed circle into an open torus.

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Performance Responses

Notorious

By The Famous Lauren Barri Holstein.
Created by The Famous Lauren Barri Holstein with collaborators Krista Vuori and Brogan Davison. Commissioned by Fierce and Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts. World Premiere performed at The Studio, Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Birmingham, 20-21 October 2017.

By Emma Meade Chapman

Fig. 1: Photo by Tim Fluck, The Famous Lauren Barri Holstein, *Notorious*, 2017

Shrouded in long, course, matted, white hair, three pendulous bodies are silhouetted against the black walls of the studio. Floating, as if by some supernatural force, these bodies assume a creaturely existence, swaying back and forth in the silent, stasis of the performance space. Slowly, and from an unmarked moment, small sounds become audible; sharp and high pitched, low and murmured, a progressive symphony of celestial sounds bring these soft, sweeping bodies to life. The glimpse of a thigh, the flash of an elbow, the glance of a bare torso; a beginning, a coming to life, a resurrection. The Famous Lauren Barri Holstein has arrived, and together with her two loyal (and aptly titled) 'witch

bitch[es]', she is ready to make one hell of a mess (Fig. 1).

Commissioned and performed as part of Fierce Festival (2017), *Notorious* is an episodic performance of explicit, excremental rituals, a spectacle of monstrous self(ie)s. Shaped by pop-feminist culture, social media and consumerism, *Notorious* interrogates the (s)exploitative victimology and duplicitous aesthetic standards of the displayed female body, as the artist aptly remarks of her performance: 'I'll be ressurecDEAD as your ultimate fantasy - a sexy, dead virgin'. This is an unapologetic action of resistance, and a forcefully visceral reminder of the powerful agency of the uncontoured female body.

There is no denying that at times Barri Holstein's performance can be difficult to watch. It is intimate and abject, messy and grotesque. From nude 'twerking' to Nicki Minaj, to mid air urination, the gradual disembodiment of a dead octopus, and the insertion and expulsion of confectionery into and from Barri Holstein's vagina, this is an unrepentant and relentless deconstruction of the myth of the monstrous feminine. It is a loud and defiant refusal to settle in a social and symbolic order which privileges the cis-gendered, white male body above all others. It is a provocative, corporeal exploration and exorcism of heterocentric narratives of monstrousness, victimhood, and shame. Barri Holstein, in her persistent and chaotic search for her 'true self', re-appropriates and reclaims the image of the female monster, there is magic in her mess.

Presenting her audience with a series of corporeal defilements, Barri Holstein's work depicts images of consumption and violation, a nod perhaps to second-wave feminist artists such as Karen Finley and Carloee Schneemann, who have undoubtedly influenced Barri Holstein's practice. Throughout the performance, Barri Holstein explicitly reminds us of her bodily borders, her orifices and fluidities. Hers is a body that devours and secretes, pleasures and repulses, exerts and retreats. Barri Holstein is all of and none of the creatures she enfleshes: she is mutable and transgressive, a liminal body who doesn't fit neatly into any one of the identities society has offered her. Just like the bodies of the witches before her, Barri Holstein's leakiness and

unfixedness signifies a frightening and problematic corporeal ambiguity for a culture which positions the hermetically sealed female body as the heteronormative ideal. Yet it is through this divergence and difference that this witch finds her power: she is productivity and potential. She does not seek to replicate and embody normative narratives of femininity, she is neither the Madonna or the whore, but an identity positioned beyond the boundaries of heterosexist fantasy and capitalist hegemony. Barri Holstein's body labours, it works, it (visibly) tires; and through this exertion and exhaustion her agency takes shape.

Manipulating Laura Mulvey's concept of erotic spectacle, Barri Holstein trades glossy, sexy, pop iconography for messy materiality, abandoning and subverting the artifice of hetero-feminine glamour and seduction. Confessing to her audience that this show will disappoint those who came to see the hanging of a witch, a virgin birth or a redemptive slut, Barri Holstein forges a multiplicity of selves which forcefully and irreverently challenge and reclaim the cultural and political power and symbolism of the female whore. Resisting pornographic spectacle, Barri Holstein's highly intimate and corporeal acts direct us to her humanness, to the facets of her 'failed' femininity, and in so doing to her body as an emblem of resistance and autonomy. Through her embodiment of the 'monstrous' facets of femaleness, her deliberate and irreverent "witch-bitch" rituals shamelessly deny the objectified female body's historical experiences of shame and victimhood.

Notorious pushes Barri Holstein's body to its limits, and in so doing creates a critical space in which personal and collective transformation becomes possible. Often visibly overwhelmed with confusion and distress, the Notorious audience wince, laugh and cover their eyes as Barri Holstein acts out her rituals of fecundity and defilement. From the 'birthing' of an eyeball jelly sweet from the artist's vagina, to self-flagellation with a dead octopus which only moments before adorned her head like a crown, Barri Holstein captivates her audience, creating moments in which dichotomous metamorphosis appears to be underway: both performer(s) and audience are altered.

Barri Holstein's work boldly threatens heteronormative stability, actively dismantling historical, mythological and contemporary representations of both female subjectivity and objectivity. *Notorious* enacts difference, defilement and disintegration, provoking the audience to ask; who is the 'real' Lauren Barri Holstein, and how is she defined and consumed by us, her public?

This performance is a re-(t)werking of the monstrous female body. A chaotic, interdisciplinary mess, the debris of which is left on stage at the end of the performance; urine, sweat, regurgitated, disembodied sweets, the remnants of a once living sea creature, and the exhausted, naked bodies of the performers. But beyond this apparent disarray and anarchy is a carefully constructed critique of female identity and representation in a post-feminist capitalist culture, where, whilst dancing provocatively to the words of Miley Cyrus, The Famous Lauren Barri Holstein reminds us, 'it's our party we can do what we want, it's our party we can say what we want'.

Jack and the Beanstalk

Written by Joel Horwood. Lyric Hammersmith. London. 20 December 2017.

By Clio Unger

German Christmas is a solemn affair. While the pre-holiday season has Christmas markets and Glühwein and Lebkuchen (a version of ginger bread far superior to the British variety), the actual festivities are not known for their frivolity and whimsy. The 'celebration', a family only event, runs for three days and is not marked by excessive sociability: the music is festive, yet sombre; the food is rich, though adequately portioned; and there's drink, but never too much. Considering all the real candles that decorate the tree the latter would certainly border on recklessness. As far as theatrical entertainment goes, the only Christmas specific traditions are the nativities staged at local churches and primary schools, along with the 'Weihnachtsmärchen', the obligatory children's seasonal production staged at communal theatres across Germany, often based on popular children's novels or films. Adults, in the mood for some holiday cheer, usually revert movies from the Anglo-America market; amongst my group of friends *Love Actually* remains unsurpassed as the go-to Christmas comedy.

This is all to say that there's no German equivalent of the Christmas pantomime, no form with such a deeply rooted performance history. The Weihnachtsmärchen might fit the same bill as a theatrical occasion designed largely to make children feel comfortable going to the theatre, but a panto, an event that manages to captivate all age groups, it is not. Consequently, when I saw *Jack and the Beanstalk* at the Lyric Hammersmith in December 2017, it was my second panto experience, and considering that most spectators were under the age of ten, I had quite some catching up to do.

My first panto encounter, *Mother Goose* at Wilton's Music Hall, which I saw the previous year shortly after moving to the UK, had already succeeded in making me realise that Christmas in the UK had a different vibe than in Germany. But it was *Jack and the Beanstalk* and

its effortless merging of traditional performance style with present-day looks and contemporary message that made me appreciate pantomime as a contemporary form.

In a way, *Jack and the Beanstalk* has it all: blindingly bright colours, crazily inventive sets, cheerful costumes that make Dame Lotte Trottalot (Kraig Thornier), the infamous pantomime dame, steal the show, an ethnically diverse cast, music that is largely current pop-song adaptations, a woke political message, an abundance of garden vegetable puns, and, for good measure, a sprinkling of Caryl Churchill references and other theatrical in-jokes.

Written by Joel Horwood and directed by Jude Christian and Sean Holmes, *Jack and the Beanstalk* tells the story of Jack, casually gender-swapped and delightfully played by Faith Omole, her mother, Lotte Trottalot, and their cow Daisy (Kayla Meikle). These three try to comply with villain Squire Fleshcreep's rising demands in rent money, a sentiment that struck a chord with the local audience. Even though Jack has been able to grow three (!) carrots in Ye Olde Hammersmith this year, Fleshcreep's cunning and her soft heart soon leave her without any resources to pay their farm's yearly rent. Fleshcreep, played by the fantastically villainous Vikki Stone, is a thinly veiled allegory for shameless opportunism and gentrification, and his gleeful rendition of 'I´m in love with your money'—an apt cover of Ed Sheeran's 'Shape of You' is topped only by his scene-stealing woodwind solos.

The counterbalance to Jack's assertive optimism is brought by Fleshcreep's son Jill (Daniel Fraser). Having grown-up in an overly sheltered environment, Jill is ignorant of his father's exploits and harbours a pretentious ambition to become a thespian. He falls for Jack when she comes to the mansion to ask his father for a payment extension. His dramatic declamations and emotional fragility are beautifully complemented by his teddy bear jacket. Sewn together from at least thirty stuffed toys, this safety blanket come fashion statement is the ultimate parody of millennial sensitivities. In what I understand is a good panto tradition, these two are made for each other. But, refreshingly, when Jack eventually climbs the beanstalk, she does not

need him to be her saviour, and when he finally revolts against his father, he doesn't need her to fight his battle for him.

Of course, Fleshcreep declines the extension and Jack and Lotte Trottalott have no choice but to resort to milking Daisy the Cow. Daisy does not like to be milked, and who can blame her given the monstrous machine she needs to be strapped into for the process. Of course, the scene results in all three (and the first row of the audience) being soaked in 'milk' splashing across the stage in a perfect slosh scene.

After the unsuccessful milking, Jack has no choice but to sell Daisy. On the way to the market, she is inevitably tricked by Fleshcreep exchanging Daisy for three magic beans. A believer in the impossible, Jack places all her hopes in her haul. As is well known, she plants the beans, climbs up the enormous stalk, meets and eventually defeats the giant and his golden-egg laying duck. Order is restored, Fleshcreep has a moral epiphany and they all live happily ever after.

It is remarkable that this panto does not fall into the traps of casual sexism that the genre can be so vulnerable to. When Dame Trottalott presents sexual innuendo, it's done slyly and not in the usual over-the top panto style, which deserves a nod. The 'white knight saves the day' narrative is cleverly hinted to but ultimately abandoned: the white middle-aged man plucked from the audience is not there to slay the giant but to play the reformed (and shrunken) titan, and it falls to a child to save the cast by cutting down the beanstalk.

The Lyric's pantomime is magical, but the magic it prompts us to believe in is not in the special effects, though those are brilliantly done. It is in the community of theatre. This begins with the interactions between the audience and the actors, the multiple opportunities for sing-alongs, the throwing of sweets, and well-worn audience call and response gestures, but it extends beyond that. The ensemble is chosen from the Lyric's youth ensemble, who go to great lengths to keep the energy up throughout the evening, and the profits from the donations go to local youth initiatives within the theatre. There's a decidedly homegrown and warmly inclusive spirit to this panto, which above all celebrates Hammersmith itself. Theatrical magic, the production

suggests, emerges out of collaboration, and even a panto-novice like me can get behind that.

Breaking the norms of silent spectatorship might be a challenge for the rule-abiding nation of Germany at first, but the overt jokes, the slapstick humour, and the well-known stories might just make panto the export alternative to marmalade and digestive biscuits Theresa May has been looking for. After all, it is about time the English reciprocated for the tradition of the Christmas tree.

Book Reviews

***Culture, Democracy and the Right to Make Art: The British Community Arts Movement* by Alison Jeffers and Gerri Moriarty (eds.)**
London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017, 263 pp. (hardback)
By Linford Butler

Culture, Democracy and the Right to Make Art is a vital history and critique of the unorthodox and unusual, collective and non-hierarchical artistic activities which energised and sought to emancipate communities across the UK between 1968 and 1986. The editors Alison Jeffers and Gerri Moriarty offer a volume which is both entertaining and incisive. Drawing together contributions from a range of community artists active during the period, who act as interlocutors and informants, this text contributes a remarkably complete historical account of a broad and varied range of community arts practices and assorts fascinating theoretical perspectives on the role, purpose, successes and failures of the community arts movement. The book offers an impassioned argument in favour of arts practices which enable alternative modes of living and acting in the world and promote that creative expression is a right and opportunity belonging to all.

The book is split into two parts. The first half offers a potted history of community arts in the period under examination from Jeffers, followed by four views from each of the UK's constituent countries, in which each author (Gerri Moriarty on England and Northern Ireland, Andrew Crummy on Scotland and Nick Clements on Wales) offers insightful and evocative anecdotes of their work in community arts in each national context. The authors' enthusiastic recollection of festivals, protest marches, parades, heated exchanges, and a range of diverse artistic projects are illustrative and thereby importantly situate the geographical, socio-political and historical terrains of their studies. The second part of the book concentrates upon developing a theoretical critical position on the movement in retrospect. Jeffers identifies that the emphasis on the pragmatics needed to 'get the job done' have historically dominated community arts, to the detriment of 'reflecting on and theorising the work' (139). The second half of the book address this lacuna, through six chapters which offer a range of diverse theoretical concerns and positions, each making a distinct and valuable contribution to the developing discourse on community arts' struggle to empower communities across the UK to access culture and to create art.

On the whole, the essays tell the story of community arts' naissance, its growth and emboldening as it became more widespread, and the collective solidarity developed through shared values and common methodologies which cemented a sense of community arts as representing a collective movement in art-activism. The book however also traces the challenges and pressures the community arts movement experienced: the policy and funding pressures imposed by government and the Arts Council, disquiet within the movement as fundamental values came into conflict with desire for practicality and expediency, and community arts' slow decline as it struggled to respond to a society which was rapidly changing—in particular with the rise of Thatcher and neoliberal state policy from 1975 onwards. Ultimately, the book tells the story of the erosion of community arts as committed cultural activism and mourns its total transmutation by the mid-1980s into a professionalised and structuralised mode of cultural employment. Nick Clements establishes how the introduction of subsidy for community arts in Wales during the 1980s radically changed community arts practices, with practitioners suddenly rendered as professional grant-seekers; he explains that the need for increased managerialism, formalised accountability and formal legal and financial structuralisation within community arts collectives inevitably restricted innovation and creativity. Owen Kelly theorises that community arts' original anti-hierarchical and therefore collectivist ethos was effective as it permitted dividuality: the development of each individual within a group. The notion of the radical monopoly, Kelley theorises that the figure of the professionalised 'community artist' effectively precluded the non-hierarchical arrangements which

were seen as vital early in the development of community arts, instead privileging the professional artist as visionary and leader, rather than merely as facilitator of communities' own creative ideas and instincts. Janet Hetherington and Mark Webster consider how the rapid expansion of community arts practices combined with the professionalisation effect caused by subsidy and structuralisation gave rise to formalised education and training courses in community arts. They argue that some of these reinforced the notion of the "qualified" community artist, accelerating the reconstitution of community arts as an institutionalised profession rather than as grassroots activism. These examples act only to briefly highlight *Culture, Democracy and the Right to Make Art* theoretical project, which valuably foregrounds the risk posed by professionalisation and structuralisation to the efficacy of any practice, seeking to develop cultural democracy. The implicit message of the book is that professionalisation ultimately rendered community arts politically impotent, resultantly unable to deliver its vision of a radical cultural democracy in which all cultural activity was equally valued and supported, and universally accessible.

The complex tensions which the book illuminates between the distinct figures of the politically oppositional, socially-engaged activist-artist on one hand, and the professionalised, propositional, sector-engaged career-artist on the other, ensure the book is not merely a nostalgic historical account of a single niche art movement. Instead, its critique of the concurrent professionalisation and decline of the community arts movement played out upon a backdrop of rich first-hand accounts and insightful theorisation of the politics and praxis of the movement, ensures *Culture, Democracy and the Right to Make Art* has implications for both a broader range of artistic work, and offers valuable lessons for artists making original work today. The book begs important questions for any researcher or practitioner engaging with historical or current socially-turned or politically-engaged practices: what is the role of education and training? How should 'doing' and 'thinking' be balanced against one another? To what extent should we view artistic production as a calling or as a career choice? How does one

remain committed to their values and politics in the face of external pressures? And, finally and perhaps most importantly, who does and who should have access and agency to contribute within our society?

Platform's postgraduate and early-career readers will find much value in *Culture, Democracy and the Right to Make Art* for its fulsome education in the history of and lessons learned from the community arts movement, for its powerful, sometimes provocative political conviction, and finally, for its exploration of the formidable potential of art activism in precarious times like ours. There is perhaps a lack of maintained reflexive critique to interrogate the basic political and ethical assumptions upon which community arts were predicated. The book's focus is instead put upon the practices that emerged and on how they agitated against what community artists believed was an inherently inequitable society. Altogether the book is an entertaining and fascinating read, and reminds of the potential and power of art as a vehicle for reimagining a radical reconstitution of our social and political relations.

New Playwriting at Shakespeare's Globe by Vera Cantoni
London: Methuen Drama, 2018, 238 pp. (hardback)
By Jemima Hubberstey

Vera Cantoni seeks to add to the existing body of scholarship on Shakespeare's Globe by exploring how far the theatre's assumed cultural history informs modern plays that have been written specifically for the Globe. While scholars such as Andrew Gurr, J. R. Mulryne, and Margaret Shewring in *Rebuilding Shakespeare's Globe* and *Shakespeare's Globe Rebuilt* have played an important role in setting the stage for considering Shakespeare's Globe in terms of how it enables a better practical understanding of early modern performances, Cantoni's book offers a fresh outlook on theatre history and considers how a modern audience regards the cultural paradox of having a modern theatre pertaining to an early modern past. Indeed, scholars often refer

to the Shakespeare's Globe as 'rebuilt' and thus placing emphasis on the importance of the original. Cantoni however makes it clear that this book is also concerned with 'new' playwriting, creating an open dialogue between the past and the present that is not simply recreating the past, but creating new plays that will add to our cultural heritage in the present.

The first chapter, 'Something Old, Something New' considers previous scholarship on Shakespeare's Globe that establishes the playhouse as a 'test tube,' to use Andrew Gurr's term, for theatrical experimentation. Cantoni considers a range of arguments about how the playhouse should be defined in relation to its cultural heritage, remarking that it is neither a copy, imitation or replica, but rather a practical model that offers an insight into the possibilities of performance. Using what she describes as a 'production analysis' methodology, she then examines a wide range of contemporary plays to probe deeper into the peculiarities of the unique space, which she argues allows playwrights to tap into a nexus of historical interpretations and assumptions.

'Presenting the Past' explores the theoretical frameworks around the theatre to explore how Shakespeare's Globe fits into our contemporary cultural network. Cantoni's interpretation of the Globe offers a careful insight into how the theatre bridges the gap between unauthentic architecture and the audience's expectations for historical authenticity by allowing the audience to accept anachronisms and appreciate the art of what they see over historical authenticity. This is a daring stance against the body of criticism that has grounded plays at Shakespeare's Globe in terms of their historical relevance, and it asks a pertinent question about the value of contemporary performances and what they suggest about the audiences of today.

Cantoni's chapter on 'The Spectacle of Spectators' draws on her practical experience of theatre and considers the realities of performance for spectators: who they are, what they expect, and how they view the plays. Going against theatre historians who initially presumed that an audience of backpack tourists is largely uninformed, Cantoni makes the point that the historical locus in fact draws in an educated audience;

made evident in their engagement with early modern jokes and references. This is an important part of understanding what a modern audience expects and how they are likely to be conditioned to view the new repertoire of plays.

In 'The Weight of the Past' Cantoni makes the point that modern writers have sought to use the audience's historical expectations of Shakespeare's Globe in order to ask further questions about historiography and dramaturgy. This is particularly strong in her discussion of Howard Brenton's plays, which demonstrate how far the relation between playwright and theatre can work, in a similar vein to how Shakespeare may have once deliberately written his plays to be in dialogue with his theatrical performance spaces. Her discussion on 'historiographic metatheatre' further highlights how modern playwrights are able to employ the medium of performance as a means of self consciously presenting their plays in dialogue with past performances and different versions of history.

Finally in 'Playing to the Crowd', Cantoni considers the means by which modern playwrights seek to engage the audience, and to what purpose this serves. She argues that Howard Brenton in particular makes careful use of comedy, romance and music to gain and maintain the audience's attention. She examines how the protagonists in *In Extremis* and *Anne Boleyn* establish a dialogue with the audience that capitalises on dramatic irony and metatheatre to play with the viewers' knowledge of history. However, such devices, she argues, are intended to provoke active thought from an audience, so that by engaging the viewers, the playwright it able to admonish them gently and highlight ongoing societal issues, especially the 'prurient curiosity for the sordid details.' Highlighting the moral responsibility of playwriting adds an interesting dimension to the discussion, showing the importance that the audience is asked to reflect on its own dialogue with history and whether past mistakes are, or could be, repeated.

While Cantoni's study pioneers a new insight into Shakespeare's Globe, to her own admission, Cantoni deliberately considers modern playwrights as a heterogeneous group that is unified by the context in

which their plays are produced. For students wishing to make more direct comparisons to Shakespeare's plays, there is perhaps further scope to consider the plays on an individual basis and to tease out further differences between them. Historically, Shakespeare's own plays were performed in a variety of places, and so one might ask whether these plays would be viewed differently without the shadow of Shakespeare silently hovering over them. Moreover, instead of focusing on the playwrights' use of linguistic devices and allusions, she offers a practical outlook by keeping her focus on the Shakespeare's Globe as a performance space.

Overall, Cantoni offers a meticulously researched book that pioneers a new way of thinking for theatre historians and scholars. While there is scope for further avenues of exploration, she brings scholars' theoretical expectations of the early modern playhouse to the contemporary age and asks important questions about the value of history and the meaning of performance in the modern age. The question that Cantoni addresses is to decipher what modern playwrights seek to show their audiences today. By not allowing the shadow of Shakespeare's reputation and historical importance to define his eponymous theatre, Cantoni opens up new discussions about the purposes of performance and offers a new perspective on Shakespeare's Globe: not a relic of the past, but a means of understanding the relationship between the past and the present in order to inform the future of performance.

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***Twenty-First Century Drama: What Happens Now,* by Siân Adiseshiah and Louise LePage (eds.)**
London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 348 pp. (hardback)
By Karen Morash

We have not quite reached the end of the second decade new millennium, yet we already have a full-length study of (predominantly English-language) twenty-first century theatre. Siân Adiseshiah and Louise LePage, editors of *Twenty-First Century Drama: What Happens Now*, justify the text's publication by stating 'there is still no full-length study of specifically twenty-first drama' (1). Although the book is in dialogue with other texts exploring issues and trends in contemporary drama, including *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary British Playwrights* and Dan Rebellato's *Modern British Playwriting, 2000–2009*, it is the only one focusing specifically on the years 2000-2016.

The clocks' ticking over to mark the new millennium certainly infected popular imagination and culture, particularly with worries over technological meltdown. However, this did not mark a radical shift in the attentions of theatre and performance makers, and none of the text's authors argue that the years denoted by the title signify a significant rift with twentieth-century theatre praxis. The volume is organised into sections which point to particular areas of focus for twenty-first century theatre makers, suggesting changes which have come about gradually and pointing to approaches which may mark the beginning of new areas of interest. By taking a collective overview of the chapters, one can pinpoint certain trends that have arisen in the last two decades. These include: the audience being seen/treated as a dramaturgical element; a turning away from postmodern concerns; the theories of Jacques Ranciére; and gender.

Part I, 'Beyond Postmodernism: Changing Perspectives on Drama' suggests that theatre and performance in the first decades of the twenty-first century has not yet formed a defined identity, but, fascinatingly, involves a backward glance to historical forms which may be revitalised andrenewed for contemporary purposes. Of particular

note, Elaine Aston's chapter, 'Room for Realism?' makes an insightful argument that, despite the academic disregard for realism, it is still a popular form. Through her analysis of Fiona Evans' *Scarborough* (2008), *NSFW* (2012) by Lucy Kirkwood, and *Free Outgoing* by Anupama Chandrasekhar (2007), Aston makes a case for its continuing importance, particularly in the work feminist playwrights who challenge the twentieth-century performative conventions of social realism. In another compelling chapter, Stephen Bottoms uses Ranciére's theories on the 'stultifying' effects of education in a refreshing way to examine radical approaches to Shakespeare in Tim Crouch's *I, Cinna (the Poet)* (2012) and Toneelgroep Amsterdam's *The Roman Tragedies* (2008). Arguing for an 'emancipated' attitude towards Shakespeare, he identifies problematic tendencies within many Anglophone productions of Shakespeare's work, such as the assumption that audiences 'need help in approaching the plays' (64), which can result in directors creating performance frameworks focused on teaching rather than storytelling. Rather, theatre makers should be approaching Shakespearean texts with the assumption that audiences are not only intelligent, but capable of forming their own interpretations of the words and action.

Parts II and III look at issues of austerity and class, and race and national identity respectively, with a fair amount of overlap, as these issues are inextricably intertwined. Highlights of these two sections include Mark O'Thomas' 'Translating Austerity: Theatrical Responses to the Financial Crisis', a welcome interjection into the general dialogue about austerity, commenting on initiatives such as Theatre Uncut and the PIIGS project at the Royal Court which, in their usage of plays in translation, provide a timely reminder that non-English playwrights are crafting work that provides significant insight into our contemporary world. Equally timely is Siân Adiseshiah's chapter, which uses Simon Stephens' *Port* (2013), *Jerusalem* (2009) by Jez Butterworth, and Gillian Slovo's *The Riots* (2011) to argue that, whilst the working-class experience has returned as a theme of interest for playwrights, it can be problematised by depictions of powerlessness and the 'violent potential of the middle-class gaze' (166). In Part III, Nadine Holdsworth also

responds to *Jerusalem*. Her investigation, in contrast, focuses on the often overlooked characters of English travellers and gypsies. She points out that Johnny 'Rooster' Byron, Butterworth's captivating anti-hero, is emblematic of an 'uncomfortable irony' (181) that, whilst audiences celebrate his rebellious and anti-social tendencies, in reality he symbolises the marginalised groups—including travellers—whom many English people view as a threat to their way of life.

Part IV departs from previous sections in its focus on the future, examining the beginnings of certain types of conceptual dramaturgical exploration, including the implications of genetic science in Mary Luckhurst's chapter on Caryl Churchill's *Far Away* (2000) and *A Number* (2004). Marie Kelly writes on an underserved topic in theatre discourse – casting – using cognitive approaches in a fascinating investigation of director Katie Mitchell's work. Finally, Una Chaudhuri's 'Anthropo-Scenes: Staging Climate Chaos in the Drama of Bad Ideas', placed as a deliberate closure to the volume, examines two plays portraying dystopic futures: Churchill's *Far Away* and Wallace Shawn's *Grasses of a Thousand Colors* (2009). Chaudhuri argues that these two plays identify a movement into the era of the Anthropocene—an acknowledgement of the scale of ecological change wrought by human activity. As such, these are not plays of 'ideas', but work which faces up to the enormity of the destructive forces human society have put in motion.

Although a number of chapters refer to Hans Thies Lehmann's theories of the postdramatic, and/or cover work which might fall into this category, the editors make no reference to it in their introduction, nor do they explore the implications of the titular word 'Drama' (which has been problematized by Lehmann's theories). In addition, given its current prominence in the media and academic debate, and its regular appearance as a theme in many of the book's chapters, one could query why gender does not warrant a section in its own right.

Many chapters avoid saying anything definitive about early twenty-first century theatre making, and perhaps, as suggested by the subtitle's quasi-question 'What Happens Now', this is the point. Rather, the focus is on the documentation of dramatic work (both that

which has been deemed important by the critics, and that which may eventually be deemed canonical), and the societal forces which shape the plays. There is a palpable sense of energy and revitalisation within the text, not just in terms of the artistic work covered, but also in the perceptive efforts of many of the book's authors to use interdisciplinary approaches to argue for theatre's increasing significance in the effort to understand the time and space we inhabit.

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